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## Introduction

The Democracy Index, which began in 2006, provides a snapshot of the state of democracy worldwide 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). 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 then 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 records how global democracy fared in 2021. The results reflect the continuing negative impact of the covid-19 pandemic on democracy and freedom around the world for a second successive year. The pandemic has resulted in an unprecedented withdrawal of civil liberties among developed democracies and authoritarian regimes alike, through the imposition of lockdowns and restrictions on travelling and, increasingly, the introduction of “green passes” requiring proof of vaccination against covid-19 for participation in public life. It has led to the normalisation of emergency powers, which have tended to stay on the statute books, and accustomed citizens to a huge extension of state power over large areas of public and personal life.

### **Covid-19 pandemic has compounded existing negative trends**

The global public health crisis has compounded many pre-pandemic trends such as an increasingly technocratic approach to managing society in Western democracies, and a tendency in many non-consolidated democracies or authoritarian regimes to resort to coercion. In many countries, the pandemic has entrenched divisions between those who favour the precautionary principle and expert-driven decision-making (and have tended to support government lockdowns, green passes and vaccine mandates), and, on the other hand, those who favour a less prescriptive approach and more freedom from state interference (and have been more hostile to what they see as the curtailment of individual freedoms). The pandemic has had a negative impact on the quality of democracy in every region of the world, but some regions have fared far worse than others, with Latin America having suffered especially badly. The results by region are analysed in greater detail in the third section of the report, “Democracy around the regions in 2021” (see page 37).

*The China challenge* is the title of this year's Democracy Index report and the focus of the second section, starting on page 17. How much of a challenge does China pose to democracy, the model of governance to which most people in the world have aspired for the past century? The potency of this political challenge is inextricably linked to China's incredible economic success over the past three decades. The Chinese economy has grown at almost triple the pace of the US economy in nominal GDP terms since 1990, turning China from a poor developing country into an economic superpower with the second largest GDP in the world. China's rulers have become more confident about promulgating the alleged superiority of their system over that of the West, and the covid-19 pandemic has accentuated this trend. Blithely ignoring the origins of the pandemic in Wuhan in Hubei

province, and the failure of their authorities to warn the world of the unfolding disaster, China's leaders cite the pandemic as proof that their political system is superior to the liberal democratic model. While continuing to lock down millions of citizens in pursuit of a zero-covid policy into the third year of the pandemic, Chinese politicians accused Western governments of having mismanaged the public health emergency at the cost of hundreds of thousands of lives. Do these claims stand up and what advantages, if any, does China's governance system confer on its citizens compared with those residing in a democracy?

**Table 1.**  
**Democracy Index 2021, by regime type**

	No. of countries	% of countries	% of world population
Full democracies	21	12.6	6.4
Flawed democracies	53	31.7	39.3
Hybrid regimes	34	20.4	17.2
Authoritarian regimes	59	35.3	37.1

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 our measure of democracy, less than half (45.7%) of the world's population now live in a democracy of some sort, a significant decline from 2020 (49.4%). Even fewer (6.4%) reside in a "full democracy"; this level is down from 8.4% in 2020, after two countries (Chile and Spain) were downgraded to "flawed democracies". Substantially more than a third of the world's population (37.1%) live under authoritarian rule, with a large share being in China.

In the 2021 Democracy Index, 74 of the 167 countries and territories covered by the model, or 44.3% of the total, are considered to be democracies. The number of "full democracies" fell to 21 in 2021, down from 23 in 2020. The number of "flawed democracies" increased by one, to 53. Of the remaining 93 countries in our index, 59 are "authoritarian regimes", up from 57 in 2020, and 34 are classified as "hybrid regimes", down from 35 in 2020. (For a full explanation of the index methodology and categories, see page 65.)

### **The global average score takes a big hit for a second consecutive year**

As recorded in the Democracy Index in recent years, democracy has not been in robust health for some time. In 2021, as in 2020, its resilience was further tested by the coronavirus pandemic. The average global score in the 2021 Democracy Index fell from 5.37 in 2020 to 5.28, representing a bigger year-on-year decline than the previous year and setting another dismal record for the worst global score since the index was first produced in 2006.

The 2021 result is striking given that it followed a significant deterioration in the first year of the pandemic in 2020, when the global average score sank as a result largely—but not solely—of government-imposed restrictions on individual freedoms and civil liberties that occurred across the globe in response to the public health emergency. Anybody who thought at the end of 2020 that things could not get worse has been proved wrong. In fact, the decline in the global average score of 0.09 has been equalled only once before—in 2010, in the aftermath of the global financial crisis, which led to major setbacks for democracy, some of which have persisted ever since.

## **Authoritarian pandemic responses are undermining democracy**

Two years after the world first heard about covid-19, the coronavirus pandemic has led to a huge extension of state power over people's lives and the erosion of individual freedoms. In the 2020 Democracy Index report, *In sickness and in health*, we pointed to the risk that the unprecedented peacetime adoption of emergency powers and withdrawal of civil liberties in response to the pandemic would persist into 2021. At the end of 2021, it was clear that this state of affairs had become normalised. The creeping authoritarianism that has accompanied the pandemic raises questions about whether, in what circumstances and for how long, governments and citizens are prepared to undermine democratic rights in the cause of public health.

There was a convincing case for lockdowns and social-distancing measures in the first year of the pandemic, given the high mortality rate and the absence of vaccines. However, a successful rollout of vaccines, the development of more effective treatments, and a dramatic decline in serious illness and death during the most recent pandemic wave in late 2021 coincided with the introduction of more intrusive and coercive government measures.

## **Governments have introduced a panoply of intrusive and coercive measures**

Alongside the rollout of vaccines in much of the world in 2021, many governments imposed more lockdowns and institutionalised travel restrictions. They also embraced a panoply of approaches to testing, tracking, monitoring and, in some cases, controlling citizens. These included the introduction of mass test-and-trace systems; the use of "passenger locator forms" and

vaccine "passports"; the requirement to show a vaccination "green pass" to visit indoor public places, including workplaces in some countries; and the introduction of vaccine mandates for some or all citizens. The Austrian government made vaccination mandatory for all adults from February 2022. Greece did the same for the over-60s from mid-January 2022 and Italy has done so for the over-50s. Other governments are considering adopting similar measures.

The rapid development of effective vaccines to combat covid-19 was an incredibly positive step forward in protecting humanity against the new virus. The vaccines provide the best defence against serious illness, hospitalisation and death for those most at risk from the disease. The majority of citizens who have been offered a vaccine have chosen to take it, though the rollout of vaccines in 2021 was disproportionately concentrated in the world's richest nations. Nevertheless, by the end of 2021 an estimated 9.4bn doses had been given, according to Our World in Data, and 3.9bn people, or 50.3% of the world's population, had been fully vaccinated. Vaccination rates ranged from less than 2% in some African countries to around 70-80% in more developed economies in Asia, western Europe, Latin America and North America. There had been an estimated 300m cases of covid-19 and 5.5m deaths by the end of 2021, based on official data, although The Economist estimates that the true death toll is more than 3.5 times the official figure, at more than 19m, based on the data for excess deaths. Without the vaccines, the death toll would be far higher.

Yet in many countries a significant minority of people have decided not to get vaccinated for a variety of reasons. Genuine medical exemptions are extremely rare. The only medical contraindication to an mRNA covid-19 vaccination (Pfizer or Moderna) is a previous history of major

anaphylactic reaction to a previous covid-19 vaccination. Individuals at risk of vaccine-induced thrombocytopenia and thrombosis (clotting problems associated with the AstraZeneca vaccine), or with a previous history of the same, can have an mRNA vaccine. Those refusing a vaccine do so for a variety of reasons: some cite concerns about the long-term effects of the vaccines; others spout conspiracy theories, such as one purporting that microchips are being implanted into humans using the vaccine. The former objection may be susceptible to reasoned argument based on the scientific evidence that the vaccines are safe; the latter is irrational and its proponents are probably impervious to reasoned argument. Vaccine scepticism is higher in some countries than in others, often reflecting low levels of public trust in the state, with many countries in eastern Europe being notable outliers. Efforts to compel refuseniks to get vaccinated are likely to be counter-productive, entrenching resistance and fostering suspicion of officialdom.

### **Penalising the unvaccinated**

Yet some governments in developed democracies are singling out vaccine refusers for punitive treatment—fining them for not being vaccinated and denying them access to social and public places, including cafes, bars, restaurants, cinemas, theatres and public transport. Some of these measures may be imposed for a limited duration, but they nevertheless set a precedent in terms of redefining the rights of free citizens to participate equally in society.

The French president Emmanuel Macron told *Le Parisien* newspaper that he intended to make the life of unvaccinated people as hard as he possibly could—probably in an attempt to rally the

majority of French people, who have chosen the vaccine, behind him ahead of the April presidential poll. This election gambit may pay off for the presidential incumbent, but it will demonise the minority of the unvaccinated, sow division and undermine social cohesion in France.

The imposition of green cards and vaccine mandates calls into question the right of individuals to participate freely in public life if they are unvaccinated. The concept of equal rights for all, which is the moral bedrock of democracy, appears to be in danger.

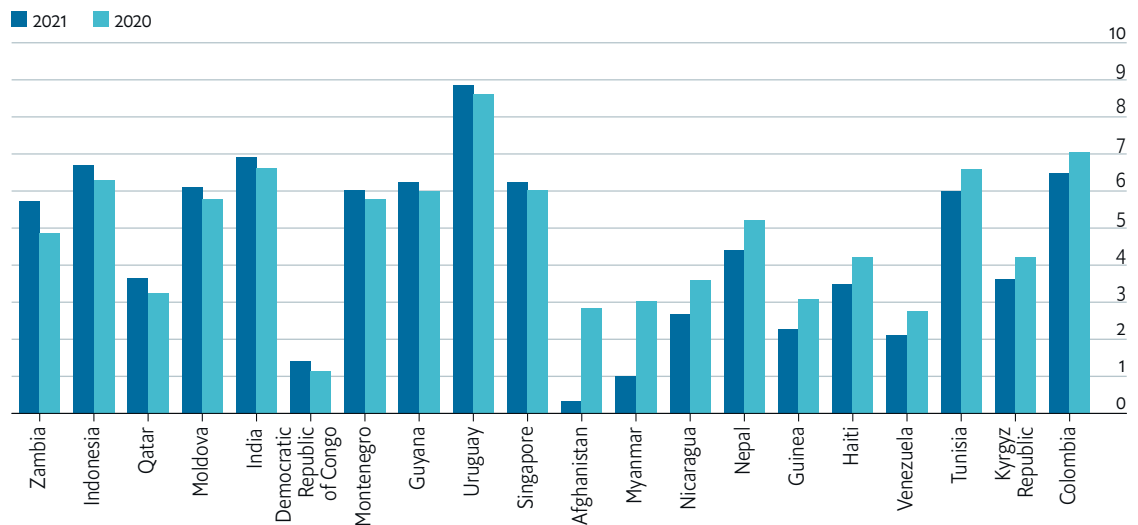
### **Maintenance of restrictions will generate resistance**

There has been a remarkable acceptance of the extraordinary restrictions on individual freedoms imposed by governments during the pandemic. Especially in the first year of the pandemic, most people saw these measures as being necessary to prevent a much greater death toll in the absence of effective treatments or vaccinations. The majority were willing to sacrifice personal freedoms in the cause of the greater good. Even during the second year of the pandemic the public in most countries accepted continuing limitations on their individual freedoms, largely without question.

However, following the mass rollout of vaccines, the development of better medical treatments and a decline in the severity of infection associated with the most recent Omicron variant, this widespread acceptance of state-imposed restrictions may dissipate. Government lockdowns and restrictions sparked protests in many countries around the world in 2020-21. In 2022 the imposition of new containment measures, green passes and vaccine mandates is likely to meet pandemic fatigue and protests.

The deterioration in the global score in 2021 was driven by a decline in the average regional score everywhere in the world except for eastern Europe, whose score stagnated at a low level. There were especially large falls in Latin America (-0.26), North America (-0.22), and Asia and Australasia (-0.16). Western Europe recorded a modest fall in its average regional score, of 0.07, continuing the region’s steady decline over the course of the past decade. The regional average score for the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) fell marginally, by 0.03, and that for Sub-Saharan Africa by 0.04, but both suffered big declines in 2020 and so both deteriorated in 2021 from a low base. Eastern Europe was the only region not to regress compared with 2020, keeping the same regional average score of 5.36, but the stability of the score masks divergent experiences across the region.

**Top 10 best and worst performers**  
 (Index score out of 10, 10 being best)



Source: EIU.

The majority of countries registered a deterioration in their average score or stagnated in 2021, with only 47 (28.1%) recording an improvement. Some 74 of a total of 167 (44.3%) recorded a decline in their total score compared with 2020. This was not as catastrophic a performance as in 2020, when well over half (117) recorded a decline in their score, but it was a poor outcome given the scale of the downgrades in 2020. The other 46 (27.5%) stagnated, with their scores remaining unchanged compared with 2020.

There were a few improvements and some dramatic declines (as discussed in the “Highlights” section), with Moldova and Indonesia registering the biggest improvements, measured by the change in their overall scores, and Afghanistan, Myanmar and Tunisia the biggest declines. Latin America deserves a mention because a large number of countries in the region recorded big falls in their overall scores.

There were 13 changes of regime category, nine negative and four positive. Two countries, Chile and Spain, were downgraded from “full democracies” to “flawed democracies”. Three countries improved their status from “hybrid regimes” to “flawed democracies”, all three being in eastern Europe: Moldova, Montenegro and North Macedonia. Ecuador, Mexico, Paraguay and Tunisia were all relegated

from “flawed democracies” to “hybrid regimes”. Mauritania was promoted from the “authoritarian” classification to that of “hybrid regime”. Meanwhile, the Kyrgyz Republic slipped eight places and moved from the “hybrid regime” category into the “authoritarian” classification. Haiti followed the same path, as did Lebanon.



## Democracy Index 2021 highlights

### **Top and bottom: Afghanistan displaces North Korea, and Norway remains in first place**

At the bottom of the rankings, there was a dramatic change, with Afghanistan and Myanmar displacing North Korea to take the bottom two places. Two war-torn African countries, the Democratic Republic of Congo and the Central African Republic sit above North Korea to fill the bottom five slots. Syria, Turkmenistan, Chad, Laos and Equatorial Guinea make up the others in the bottom ten. The Nordics (Norway, Finland, Sweden, Iceland, Denmark) dominate the top tier of the Democracy Index rankings, and Norway is number one once again, thanks to its very high scores for *electoral process and pluralism*, *political participation*, and *civil liberties*. Countries in western Europe account for seven of the top ten places in the global democracy rankings and 12 of the 21 nations classified as “full democracies”.

### **Latin America records the biggest downgrade of any region since the start of the index**

Latin America suffered a big setback in 2021. The change in the region’s score in 2021 was the biggest year-on-year decline experienced by any region since the start of the Democracy Index in 2006. It was accompanied by five country downgrades in terms of regime types (one from “full” to “flawed”, three from “flawed” to “hybrid” and one from “hybrid” to “authoritarian”). The region also set an unenviable record in 2021 of having the greatest number of countries to have recorded double-digit downgrades, with seven countries falling down the rankings by between ten and 20 places, and several others declining by eight places. The region’s score across all categories of the index worsened in 2021, led by a sharp decline in the *political culture* score. This reflects public disaffection with governments’ handling of the coronavirus pandemic, which amplified a pre-existing trend of growing scepticism about the ability of democratic governments to address the region’s problems and of growing tolerance for authoritarian governance. Latin America’s increasingly weak commitment to a democratic political culture has given room for the growth of illiberal populists, such as Jair Bolsonaro in Brazil, Andrés Manuel López Obrador in Mexico and Nayib Bukele in El Salvador, as well as fostering authoritarian regimes in Nicaragua and Venezuela. One country, Guyana, was an exception to the regional rule, improving its score by 0.24 points and rising ten places in the rankings to 65th place (out of 167).

### **The “most improved” countries are not always the best**

The ten most improved countries in the Democracy Index, as measured by the size of the improvement in their overall score, are Zambia, Indonesia, Qatar, Moldova, India, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Montenegro, Guyana, Uruguay, and, in joint tenth place, the UAE and Singapore. The modest size of the improvements for these best-performers (totalling 3.50 points for all ten) is overshadowed by the scale of the deterioration for the ten worst performers (totalling 10.21). The improvements are also open to different interpretations, some more positive than others. The DRC is the sixth best performer in terms of its overall score, but when the starting point for improvement is 1.13 points (on a 0-10 scale) in 2020, its 0.27-point improvement in 2021 does not look that impressive.

Qatar's improvement of 0.41 points was similarly from a low base. Caution is also merited for a higher-ranked country, India, whose score improved by 0.30: this follows a cumulative 1.20 decline between 2016 and 2020, reflecting a serious deterioration in the quality of democracy under leader Narendra Modi, whose Hindu-nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) has presided over increased intolerance and sectarianism towards Muslims and other religious minorities. That said, some improvements were more impressive, that of Uruguay most of all, in the sense that this Latin American country has bucked the regional trend and maintained a steady upwards trajectory since 2006, when we began the Democracy Index. Other positive changes, including in Moldova and Montenegro, which are now classified as "flawed democracies", and those in Indonesia and Zambia, appear more provisional and need to be consolidated.

### **Spain is downgraded to a "flawed democracy"**

A deterioration of 0.18 points in Spain's score was sufficient to relegate the country from the "full democracy" classification to that of a "flawed democracy". Spain came close to being reclassified as a "flawed democracy" after its score fell in 2017 in the aftermath of the Catalan crisis, which led to the central government in Madrid taking legal measures against pro-independence Catalan politicians for acting unconstitutionally. Spain's relegation in 2021 is the result mainly of a downgrade in its score for judicial independence, related to political divisions over the appointment of new magistrates to the General Council of the Judiciary, the body that oversees the judicial system and is intended to guarantee its independence. At present, the council is operating on a caretaker basis, as its term of office expired in 2018, and there has been no agreement about the appointment of new judges (which need a three-fifths majority in parliament). More broadly, Spain is suffering from increased parliamentary fragmentation, a litany of corruption scandals and rising regional nationalism in Catalonia posing challenges to governance.

### **Asia's forward march of democracy halted?**

The year 2020 was a good one for the Asia region despite the pandemic, because it gained three "full democracies" (Japan, South Korea and Taiwan). However, 2021 brought a reversal of fortunes, not for any of the "full democracies", but because of two stunning country downgrades at the other end of the rankings. The overall regional average score fell from 5.62 in 2020 to 5.46, with two countries accounting for much of the decline. Afghanistan's total score fell from an already very low 2.85 in 2020 to 0.32 in 2021 and the country fell 28 places to the bottom of the rankings, displacing North Korea. It was joined at the bottom by Myanmar, whose score also declined precipitously from 3.04 in 2020 to 1.02, resulting in a fall of 31 places down the rankings from 135th to 166th place. Of course, this does not tell the whole story: only eight of the region's 28 countries recorded a decline in their total score and some, such as Indonesia, made impressive gains. Nevertheless, Asia has struggled to sustain the upwards momentum that it had established up to 2016: its average score of 5.46 is only just above the 5.44 recorded in 2006, and it is 0.30 below the highpoint of 5.74 recorded in 2015 and 2016.

### **Sub-Saharan Africa: return of the coup**

A notable development of 2021 was the number of coups on the African continent, particularly in west Africa. In 2021 the military seized power in Mali and Guinea, and a coup was also attempted by elements of the military in Niger (it was defeated by the presidential guard). There was also a coup in

Sudan. Africa has made progress since 2000 in moving away from the region's previous "coup culture". The decline in the incidence of coups and attempted coups in recent decades had been supported by Nigeria's transition from military to civilian rule in 1999. However, Nigeria is increasingly unable to act as a regional power broker, owing in large part to the multiple security issues that it faces. Indeed, for many countries in its vicinity, Nigeria has become a source of instability. In addition, the spread of jihadist groups throughout west Africa has led to increased tensions between governments and militaries, creating the conditions for increased factionalisation among competing elites.

### **Some good news from eastern Europe**

Having been one of the worst-performing regions during the lifetime of the Democracy Index, eastern Europe out-performed all other regions in 2021 by avoiding a decline in its regional average score. Three countries (Moldova, Montenegro, North Macedonia) improved their scores sufficiently to be upgraded from "hybrid regimes" to "flawed democracies". Meanwhile, the Kyrgyz Republic fell eight places in the rankings and is now designated an "authoritarian regime" rather than a "hybrid regime". Several other countries struggled in 2021: Ukraine's score declined from 5.81 in 2020 to 5.57 in 2021, taking it further below the threshold of 6.00, above which countries are classified as a "flawed democracy". Russia's score, already a lowly 3.31 in 2020, fell further to 3.24 in 2021 as the regime of Vladimir Putin moved to crack down further on the opposition, the media and independent organisations. The scores for Hungary and Poland, both in dispute with the EU over issues related to rule of law, declined moderately in 2021. Eastern Europe as a whole continues to be held back by a weak political culture, difficulties in creating institutions aimed at safeguarding the rule of law and persistent issues with corruption.

### **Tunisia is demoted to "hybrid regime" status**

Tunisia was the main casualty in the MENA region in 2021, recording a 0.60-point decline in its total score, from 6.59 to 5.99, falling 21 places in the rankings and being re-classified as a "hybrid regime" rather than a "flawed democracy". Hopes that the country's transition to democracy that began with the pro-democracy "Arab Spring" movement of 2010 would be sustained have been dashed. The MENA region has only one country that is classified as a democracy: with an improved score of 7.97, Israel remains a "flawed democracy". Morocco is the only other country, along with Tunisia, to be designated as a "hybrid regime". The other 17 countries that belong to the MENA region are all classified as "authoritarian regimes". The regional score has fallen in almost every year since 2012, when the advances that followed the "Arab Spring" began to be reversed. The region suffers from a concentration of absolute monarchies, authoritarian regimes and war-torn countries, and it is the lowest ranked of all the regions covered in the Democracy Index, with an average score of 3.41.

### **Is Canada becoming more like America?**

The sharp decline in the North America average score in 2021 was driven mainly by a deterioration in Canada, whose score fell by 0.37 points to 8.87. New survey data show a worrying trend of disaffection among Canada's citizens with traditional democratic institutions and increased levels of support for non-democratic alternatives, such as rule by experts or the military. Canada's citizens feel that they have little control over their lives, a sentiment that has been compounded by pandemic-related restrictions on individual freedoms. Canada's worsening score raises questions about whether it might begin to suffer from some of the same afflictions as its US neighbour, such as extremely low levels of

# DEMOCRACY INDEX 2021

## THE CHINA CHALLENGE

public trust in political parties and government institutions. The US score declined further as its new president Joe Biden, struggled to arrest the democratic decline that has occurred over the past few decades. At the end of 2021, Mr Biden hosted the first of two Summits for Democracy, whose aim is to revive democracy globally. Given the tarnishing of America's democratic credentials in recent years, the initiative elicited cynicism in many parts of the world.

**Table 2.**  
**Democracy Index 2021**

	Overall score	Rank	I Electoral process and pluralism	II Functioning of government	III Political participation	IV Political culture	V Civil liberties
Full democracy							
Norway	9.75	1	10.00	9.64	10.00	10.00	9.12
New Zealand	9.37	2	10.00	8.93	9.44	8.75	9.71
Finland	9.27	3	10.00	9.29	8.89	8.75	9.41
Sweden	9.26	4	9.58	9.29	8.33	10.00	9.12
Iceland	9.18	5	10.00	8.21	8.89	9.38	9.41
Denmark	9.09	6	10.00	8.93	8.33	9.38	8.82
Ireland	9.00	7	10.00	7.86	8.33	9.38	9.41
Taiwan	8.99	8	10.00	9.64	7.78	8.13	9.41
Australia	8.90	9=	10.00	8.57	7.78	8.75	9.41
Switzerland	8.90	9=	9.58	8.93	7.78	9.38	8.82
Netherlands	8.88	11	9.58	8.93	8.33	8.75	8.82
Canada	8.87	12	10.00	8.21	8.89	8.13	9.12
Uruguay	8.85	13	10.00	8.57	7.22	8.75	9.71
Luxembourg	8.68	14	10.00	8.57	6.67	8.75	9.41
Germany	8.67	15	9.58	8.21	8.33	8.13	9.12
South Korea	8.16	16	9.58	8.57	7.22	7.50	7.94
Japan	8.15	17	9.17	8.57	6.67	8.13	8.24
United Kingdom	8.10	18	9.58	7.50	8.33	6.25	8.82
Mauritius	8.08	19	9.17	7.86	6.11	8.75	8.53
Austria	8.07	20=	9.58	6.79	8.89	6.88	8.24
Costa Rica	8.07	20=	9.58	6.43	7.78	6.88	9.71
Flawed democracy							
France	7.99	22	9.58	7.50	7.78	6.88	8.24
Israel	7.97	23	9.58	7.50	10.00	6.88	5.88
Spain	7.94	24	9.58	7.14	7.22	7.50	8.24
Chile	7.92	25	9.58	7.86	5.56	7.50	9.12
United States of America	7.85	26	9.17	6.43	8.89	6.25	8.53
Estonia	7.84	27	9.58	7.86	6.67	6.88	8.24
Portugal	7.82	28	9.58	7.14	6.67	6.88	8.82

# DEMOCRACY INDEX 2021

## THE CHINA CHALLENGE

**Table 2.**  
**Democracy Index 2021**

	Overall score	Rank	I Electoral process and pluralism	II Functioning of government	III Political participation	IV Political culture	V Civil liberties
Czech Republic	7.74	29	9.58	6.43	6.67	7.50	8.53
Botswana	7.73	30	9.17	6.79	6.67	7.50	8.53
Italy	7.68	31	9.58	6.43	7.22	7.50	7.65
Cabo Verde	7.65	32	9.17	7.00	6.67	6.88	8.53
Malta	7.57	33	9.17	6.79	5.56	8.13	8.24
Greece	7.56	34	9.58	6.07	6.11	7.50	8.53
Slovenia	7.54	35	9.58	6.43	7.22	6.25	8.24
Belgium	7.51	36	9.58	7.86	5.00	6.88	8.24
Cyprus	7.43	37	9.17	5.36	7.22	6.88	8.53
Latvia	7.31	38	9.58	6.07	6.11	6.25	8.53
Malaysia	7.24	39	9.58	7.86	7.22	6.25	5.29
Lithuania	7.18	40	9.58	6.07	6.11	5.63	8.53
Trinidad and Tobago	7.16	41	9.58	7.14	6.11	5.63	7.35
Jamaica	7.13	42	8.75	7.14	5.00	6.25	8.53
Timor-Leste	7.06	43	9.58	5.93	5.56	6.88	7.35
South Africa	7.05	44	7.42	7.14	8.33	5.00	7.35
Slovakia	7.03	45	9.58	6.43	5.56	5.63	7.94
India	6.91	46	8.67	7.50	7.22	5.00	6.18
Brazil	6.86	47	9.58	5.36	6.11	5.63	7.65
Panama	6.85	48	9.58	6.07	7.22	3.75	7.65
Suriname	6.82	49	9.58	6.07	6.11	5.00	7.35
Argentina	6.81	50	9.17	5.00	7.22	5.00	7.65
Poland	6.80	51	9.17	6.07	6.67	5.63	6.47
Indonesia	6.71	52	7.92	7.86	7.22	4.38	6.18
Bulgaria	6.64	53	9.17	5.36	7.22	4.38	7.06
Philippines	6.62	54	9.17	5.00	7.78	4.38	6.76
Namibia	6.52	55	7.00	5.36	6.67	5.63	7.94
Croatia	6.50	56=	9.17	6.07	6.11	4.38	6.76
Ghana	6.50	56=	8.33	5.36	6.67	6.25	5.88
Hungary	6.50	56=	8.33	6.43	5.00	6.25	6.47
Colombia	6.48	59	9.17	5.71	6.11	3.75	7.65
Dominican Republic	6.45	60	9.17	5.00	6.67	4.38	7.06
Romania	6.43	61	9.17	6.07	6.11	3.75	7.06
Mongolia	6.42	62	8.75	5.71	6.11	5.63	5.88
Serbia	6.36	63	8.25	6.07	6.67	3.75	7.06
Lesotho	6.30	64	9.17	4.14	6.11	5.63	6.47
Guyana	6.25	65	6.92	6.07	5.56	5.63	7.06

# DEMOCRACY INDEX 2021

## THE CHINA CHALLENGE

**Table 2.**  
**Democracy Index 2021**

	Overall score	Rank	I Electoral process and pluralism	II Functioning of government	III Political participation	IV Political culture	V Civil liberties
Singapore	6.23	66	4.83	8.21	4.44	7.50	6.18
Sri Lanka	6.14	67	7.00	5.71	5.56	6.25	6.18
Albania	6.11	68	7.00	6.43	4.44	5.63	7.06
Moldova	6.10	69=	7.00	5.71	6.67	4.38	6.76
Papua New Guinea	6.10	69=	6.92	6.07	3.89	6.25	7.35
Peru	6.09	71	8.75	5.36	5.56	3.75	7.06
Thailand	6.04	72	7.00	5.00	6.67	6.25	5.29
North Macedonia	6.03	73	7.42	6.43	6.11	3.13	7.06
Montenegro	6.02	74	7.42	6.43	6.67	3.13	6.47
Hybrid regime							
Bangladesh	5.99	75=	7.42	6.07	5.56	5.63	5.29
Tunisia	5.99	75=	7.50	4.64	7.22	5.00	5.59
Paraguay	5.86	77	8.75	5.36	5.00	3.13	7.06
Malawi	5.74	78	7.00	4.29	5.00	6.25	6.18
El Salvador	5.72	79=	9.17	3.93	5.56	3.75	6.18
Zambia	5.72	79=	7.50	3.64	5.00	6.88	5.59
Bhutan	5.71	81=	8.75	6.79	3.33	5.00	4.71
Ecuador	5.71	81=	8.75	5.00	6.11	2.50	6.18
Madagascar	5.70	83	7.92	3.57	6.67	5.63	4.71
Fiji	5.61	84	6.58	5.00	5.56	5.63	5.29
Hong Kong	5.60	85	2.75	3.64	5.56	7.50	8.53
Mexico	5.57	86=	6.92	5.00	7.22	3.13	5.59
Ukraine	5.57	86=	8.25	2.36	6.67	5.00	5.59
Senegal	5.53	88	5.67	5.71	4.44	6.25	5.59
Armenia	5.49	89	7.50	5.71	6.11	3.13	5.00
Liberia	5.43	90	7.42	2.71	6.11	5.63	5.29
Georgia	5.12	91	7.42	3.57	5.56	3.75	5.29
Honduras	5.10	92=	8.75	3.93	4.44	2.50	5.88
Tanzania	5.10	92=	4.83	5.00	5.00	6.25	4.41
Kenya	5.05	94	3.50	5.36	6.67	5.63	4.12
Bosnia and Hercegovina	5.04	95=	7.00	3.29	5.56	3.75	5.59
Morocco	5.04	95=	5.25	4.64	5.56	5.63	4.12
Sierra Leone	4.97	97	6.58	2.86	3.89	6.25	5.29
Bolivia	4.65	98	4.75	4.29	6.11	2.50	5.59
Guatemala	4.62	99	6.92	3.93	3.89	2.50	5.88
Uganda	4.48	100	3.42	3.21	3.89	6.88	5.00
Gambia	4.41	101=	3.58	4.29	4.44	5.63	4.12

# DEMOCRACY INDEX 2021

## THE CHINA CHALLENGE

**Table 2.**  
**Democracy Index 2021**

	Overall score	Rank	I Electoral process and pluralism	II Functioning of government	III Political participation	IV Political culture	V Civil liberties
Nepal	4.41	101=	4.83	5.00	4.44	2.50	5.29
Turkey	4.35	103	3.50	5.00	5.56	5.63	2.06
Pakistan	4.31	104	5.67	5.36	3.33	2.50	4.71
Côte d'Ivoire	4.22	105	4.33	2.86	4.44	5.63	3.82
Benin	4.19	106	1.67	5.36	3.89	5.63	4.41
Nigeria	4.11	107	5.17	3.93	3.89	3.75	3.82
Mauritania	4.03	108	3.50	3.57	5.56	3.13	4.41
Authoritarian							
Palestine	3.94	109	3.33	0.14	8.33	4.38	3.53
Kuwait	3.91	110	3.58	3.93	4.44	4.38	3.24
Burkina Faso	3.84	111=	3.00	2.36	5.00	5.00	3.82
Lebanon	3.84	111=	3.50	1.14	6.67	3.75	4.12
Algeria	3.77	113	3.08	2.50	4.44	5.00	3.82
Qatar	3.65	114	1.50	4.29	3.33	5.63	3.53
Kyrgyz Republic	3.62	115	4.33	1.50	4.44	3.13	4.71
Iraq	3.51	116=	5.25	0.00	6.11	5.00	1.18
Mozambique	3.51	116=	2.58	1.43	5.00	5.00	3.53
Jordan	3.49	118	2.67	3.93	3.89	3.75	3.24
Haiti	3.48	119=	3.08	0.00	2.78	6.25	5.29
Mali	3.48	119=	2.42	0.00	5.56	5.63	3.82
Gabon	3.40	121	2.17	1.86	4.44	5.00	3.53
Angola	3.37	122	1.33	2.86	5.00	5.00	2.65
Ethiopia	3.30	123	0.42	3.21	6.11	5.00	1.76
Russia	3.24	124	1.75	2.14	4.44	3.75	4.12
Niger	3.22	125	2.00	1.14	3.89	4.38	4.71
Comoros	3.20	126	2.08	2.21	4.44	3.75	3.53
Rwanda	3.10	127	1.42	4.29	2.78	4.38	2.65
Eswatini	3.08	128=	0.92	2.86	2.78	5.63	3.24
Kazakhstan	3.08	128=	0.50	3.21	5.00	3.75	2.94
Oman	3.00	130	0.08	3.93	2.78	4.38	3.82
Vietnam	2.94	131	0.00	2.86	3.89	5.63	2.35
Egypt	2.93	132	1.33	3.21	3.33	5.00	1.76
Zimbabwe	2.92	133	0.00	2.50	3.89	5.00	3.24
Cambodia	2.90	134=	0.00	3.21	3.89	5.63	1.76
United Arab Emirates	2.90	134=	0.00	4.29	2.22	5.63	2.35
Togo	2.80	136	0.92	1.79	3.33	5.00	2.94
Congo (Brazzaville)	2.79	137	0.00	2.50	4.44	3.75	3.24

# DEMOCRACY INDEX 2021

## THE CHINA CHALLENGE

**Table 2.**  
**Democracy Index 2021**

	Overall score	Rank	I Electoral process and pluralism	II Functioning of government	III Political participation	IV Political culture	V Civil liberties
Guinea-Bissau	2.75	138	4.92	0.00	3.33	3.13	2.35
Djibouti	2.74	139	0.00	1.29	4.44	5.63	2.35
Nicaragua	2.69	140	0.00	2.50	3.33	4.38	3.24
Azerbaijan	2.68	141	0.50	2.50	2.78	5.00	2.65
Cuba	2.59	142	0.00	3.21	3.33	3.75	2.65
Cameroon	2.56	143	0.33	2.14	3.89	4.38	2.06
Bahrain	2.52	144	0.42	2.71	3.33	4.38	1.76
Sudan	2.47	145	0.00	1.43	4.44	5.00	1.47
Belarus	2.41	146	0.00	2.00	3.89	4.38	1.76
Guinea	2.28	147	1.25	0.43	3.33	3.75	2.65
China	2.21	148	0.00	4.29	2.78	3.13	0.88
Burundi	2.13	149	0.00	0.00	3.89	5.00	1.76
Uzbekistan	2.12	150	0.08	1.86	2.78	5.00	0.88
Venezuela	2.11	151	0.00	1.79	3.89	2.50	2.35
Saudi Arabia	2.08	152	0.00	3.57	2.22	3.13	1.47
Eritrea	2.03	153	0.00	2.14	0.56	6.88	0.59
Libya	1.95	154=	0.00	0.00	3.33	3.75	2.65
Iran	1.95	154=	0.00	2.50	3.89	1.88	1.47
Yemen	1.95	154=	0.00	0.00	3.89	5.00	0.88
Tajikistan	1.94	157	0.00	2.21	2.22	4.38	0.88
Equatorial Guinea	1.92	158	0.00	0.43	3.33	4.38	1.47
Laos	1.77	159	0.00	2.86	1.67	3.75	0.59
Chad	1.67	160	0.00	0.00	2.22	3.75	2.35
Turkmenistan	1.66	161	0.00	0.79	2.22	5.00	0.29
Syria	1.43	162=	0.00	0.00	2.78	4.38	0.00
Central African Republic	1.43	162=	1.25	0.00	1.67	1.88	2.35
Democratic Republic of Congo	1.40	164	0.75	0.00	2.22	3.13	0.88
North Korea	1.08	165	0.00	2.50	1.67	1.25	0.00
Myanmar	1.02	166	0.00	0.00	1.67	3.13	0.29
Afghanistan	0.32	167	0.00	0.07	0.00	1.25	0.29

Source: EIU.



## The China challenge

The Chinese economic miracle of the past 40 years has created a formidable competitor to the US, whose position as global hegemon is increasingly being called into question by China's growing economic might and geopolitical clout. As a result, a consensus has emerged that the Western democratic capitalist model faces a challenge from China that is at least comparable to that posed by the Soviet Union during the 20th century.

A judgement about the superiority of one political system over another is ultimately a moral one. Any system must be judged by the degree to which it maximises humankind's ability to live "the good life". Definitions of what constitutes "the good life" differ, but most people would probably agree that it rests on the following: freedom from want and the satisfaction of material needs; political and religious freedom; democratic rights and equal treatment for all citizens; equality of opportunity and the avoidance of stark economic and social inequalities. Missing from this list is the more intangible spiritual dimension of human existence, the striving for individual fulfilment that finds affirmation in the pursuit of non-material ends such as community, justice and virtue.

Whether one political and social order facilitates these goals more than another is of some consequence. If China's ascendancy were to result in the spread of authoritarian rule and a rollback of democracy globally, would this bring about an improvement or otherwise in the lives of millions of ordinary people? Equally, we may ask to what extent the world's democracies are succeeding in meeting these aspirations for a better life for all. Of course, China's political model is also likely to change in the course of time, but whether it will do so in a manner that advances human progress is unclear.

The question of what sort of challenge China poses for the world's democracies is what this essay sets out to answer, seeking to avoid the tendency to present China in adversarial terms, or to presume that the Western way is the natural order of things. The real challenge for the West may not be to prevent China from one day becoming the dominant global power, which seems to be, if not inevitable, at least highly likely—but to manage that process in such a way as to avoid war and preserve democracy and the best of the Western enlightenment legacy.

This implies that the US and its Western allies should focus their energies on rejuvenating their political systems so that they can provide a desirable alternative model to that of China. Far better that the US and the world's democracies demonstrate the advantages of their system of government by re-democratising their politics, rather than by trying to isolate or contain China. That old adage, "Physician, heal thyself" may be the best advice that they could follow if they wish to prove the superiority of the democratic way of life.

### **Economic powerhouse: China's state-led capitalist "model"**

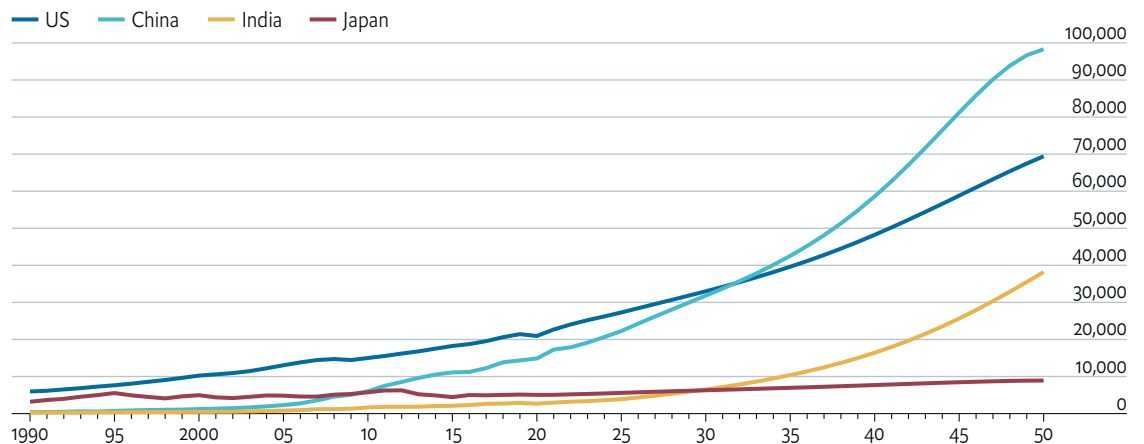
Is it appropriate to argue that China offers an alternative "model" to Western capitalist democracy? By definition a "model" is something that others want to copy, follow or imitate because of its intrinsic merit and because it is a superior version of its type. Below we look at China's economic and political

system to determine whether the claims of China’s leaders for the superiority of their governance model are justified.

China’s economy is a capitalist economy, and unlike that of the former Soviet Union, does not present a systemic alternative to capitalism. This has not prevented the US and the EU from calling China a “systemic rival”. China’s capitalist economic model is certainly distinctive, but it is still capitalist, even if the ruling Communist Party of China (CCP) still makes reference to socialism. It has been described as “state capitalist” (*The Economist*) and “political capitalism” (Branko Milanovic, in his book *Capitalism Alone: the future of the system that rules the world*). The important thing to establish is that it is capitalist, but its success over the past 40 years owes much to its unique political model, which we investigate later.

China’s challenge to the Western model is mainly based on the country’s remarkable economic success in recent decades. Since Deng Xiaoping’s “reform and opening” at the end of the 1970s, following the death of Mao Zedong, China has experienced four decades of unprecedented catch-up growth through adopting liberal economic reforms. China’s economy has grown at an average of about 8% per year since then, enabling it to narrow the gap with the West. By 2011, China had surpassed Japan as the world’s second-largest economy, and it is likely to overtake the US within a decade.

**China will become the world’s largest economy in the early 2030s**  
(nominal GDP, US\$ bn at market-exchange rates)



\*Data from 2021 onwards are forecasts.  
Source: EIU.

Since the collapse of the Soviet bloc and the apparent triumph of Western capitalism, the Chinese economy has grown at almost triple the pace of the US economy in nominal GDP terms, turning China from a poor developing country into an economic superpower. China has already overtaken the US in terms of GDP measured in US dollars at purchasing power parity (PPP), but remains in second place behind the US when GDP is measured in nominal US-dollar terms. Based on EIU long-term forecasts, China will overtake the US as the world’s largest economy in 2031 (measured at market exchange rates), with income per head approaching the US’s current (2021) levels in 2050 (in per capita terms, China’s GDP is still a quarter of the US level).

The 21st century will be the Asian century: in 1950 the developed world accounted for more than 60% of global GDP. Asia now accounts for more than a third. Over the next few decades there will be a stunning shift in the distribution of global GDP and economic power. The share of world GDP (at PPP) accounted for by North America and Western Europe will fall to about 20% in 2050, when China's share alone will account for more than 20%. China will be the most important economic power by far in 2050. This assumes that it does not suffer a major political and economic reversal in the coming years, the risks of which are discussed later.

The main difference between the Chinese capitalist system and the Western model is the dominant role of the state, backed by the CCP. And while China's economic system is emphatically capitalist, its state-led, authoritarian political system has arguably played a major role in integrating the Chinese economy into the global capitalist system. Below we examine the attributes, good and bad, of China's political model.

#### **China's political system: authoritarian meritocracy?**

China has confounded the expectations of many Western analysts and governments who believed that it would become more democratic as it became richer. On the contrary, it has become less free. China is classified as an "authoritarian regime" in the Democracy Index. It has a total score of 2.21 (on a 0 to 10 scale), down from 2.97 in 2006, and sits in 148th position (out of 167), close to the bottom of the global rankings. It has a score of 0.00 for *electoral process and pluralism*, one of the five categories across which our model measures the quality of democracy in every country. China eschews electoral democracy: it does not have free elections or universal suffrage or a multiparty system. It has a score of 0.88 for *civil liberties*: there is no free print, broadcast or social media, no freedom of expression and there are restrictions on the internet. There are no free trade unions, no independent judiciary and no real equality before the law. The state does not practice religious tolerance and routinely uses torture. Property rights are not guaranteed: in 2021 a state crackdown on entrepreneurs under the "Common Prosperity" campaign led to a downgrade in this score. The only civil liberties that Chinese citizens enjoy are those of "basic security" and freedom to study, work and travel (though these can be circumscribed by the state).

China's best score in the five categories of our index is for "*functioning of government*", for which it has a score of 4.29 (on a 0-10 scale). This compares with a score of 6.43 in the same category for the US, one of the more dysfunctional leading democracies when it comes to the quality of governance. The average score in this category for the democracies that make up the G7 group of major economies (Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, the UK and the US) is 7.55. China lags behind the major Western powers in this rubric of our index not because its bureaucracy is inefficient: on the contrary, by any measure of state continuity and competence the Chinese state must be judged among the best in the world. It is the absence of any mechanisms of accountability, checks and balances, or transparency—the key features of democratic governance—that account for its lower score compared with the US and Europe.

The main claim of the Chinese system over its Western counterpart—that it facilitates fast and efficient decision-making as well as long-term planning to maximise economic returns, stability and security—depends on the elimination of any mechanism of democratic accountability. Chinese leaders

say that the Western electoral democracy model produces inferior leaders, time-wasting deliberations and a lot of gridlock. It is true that the democratic governance model does not always work that well, but at its best it can work very well and produce excellent results. The average global score for the functioning of government category in our index has been declining for many years, but this masks considerable variation between high-performing and poor-performing countries.

### **A state that stands above the people**

A distinctive feature of the Chinese polity is the unique character of the state, both in terms of its historical continuity and its ability to stand above the people and avoid any form of democratic accountability. Neither in its imperial nor its post-1949 communist form has the state ever been obliged to be accountable to the people. Instead of any mechanism of accountability, there is a de facto social contract between the state and the people, in which the state is expected to deliver economic growth and raise living standards. The state is seen as the guarantor of the country's stability and is a source of pride: in our index, China achieves the maximum score for indicators related to public confidence in state institutions.

As opposed to the Western governance model, which is based on electoral democracy and representative political parties, China repudiates popular sovereignty in favour of a combination of political authoritarianism and technocracy. In his 2015 book, *The China model: political meritocracy and the limits of democracy*, Canadian scholar Daniel A Bell extols the virtues of what he labels China's "political meritocracy". The aim is to select and promote public officials with above-average ability, a sort of super-technocracy, through a rigorous process of selection via exams and performance evaluations. They are tested in various roles at lower levels of government in the provinces over many years. Those who get results at regional level—and, more importantly, demonstrate political loyalty—are given opportunities at the centre.

### **Inherent problems of the China model**

Mr Bell acknowledges that there are flaws in the system, but the very concept of "political meritocracy" is a contentious one and there must be some doubt as to how meritocratic the system really is. Mr Bell contends that at the lower levels of government the system is compatible with most democratic values and practices. However, this is certainly not the case at the highest levels of government, where the same methods are not employed as a means of selecting top political officials. Having a base, building associations and belonging to a faction are key to advancement. In addition, in the current politburo, the president, Xi Jinping, and, in the past, other so-called "princelings" in the highest echelons of the Chinese leadership have often been the offspring or descendants of former high-ranking communist officials.

Another feature of China's system which would seem incompatible with a meritocracy is corruption. Insulated from the public, China's elites are often self-serving, and abuse of power is not uncommon. A lack of democratic scrutiny or accountability has allowed corruption to flourish. There have been some stunning examples of egregious corruption among Chinese officials in recent years, such as the case of Xu Caihou, a former vice-chairman of the Central Military Commission; when he was arrested in 2014 the authorities discovered cash weighing more than a tonne stacked up in the 20 square metre basement of his house. Corruption in China is not an aberration; it is embedded in the

system. Corruption is endemic because of the discretionary powers granted to the bureaucracy and because there is no systematic rule of law. Mr Xi's anti-corruption campaign implies recognition of the seriousness of this problem, but he claims that only the party can clean up the problem.

While presiding over levels of corruption that are extremely high by global standards, China's "political meritocracy" has also failed to arrest the growth of huge economic inequalities. Income inequality in China has increased since the reforms and reopening of the 1980s, even if the regime is seeking to redress this now. The level of inequality in China, which Mr Milanovic estimates at almost 50 Gini points in the 2010s, significantly exceeds levels of inequality in the US (the Gini Index measures equality on a scale of 0-100, with 100 representing total inequality). Disposable income inequality in the US rose by about 4 Gini points between the mid-1980s and 2013, whereas in China it increased by almost 20 Gini points over the same period.

These regressive features of the Chinese system create contradictions and potential problems of legitimacy. A system that encourages corruption on a large scale will eventually cast doubt on the virtue of its leaders. And if corruption runs out of control, the ability of the bureaucracy to foster economic growth will also be compromised. Similarly, a system that presides over massive income and social inequalities is eventually likely to breed discontent. Mr Milanovic notes that the benefits of the system and its inherent contradictions are always in a "precarious equilibrium". Mr Bell ponders what these problems mean for the future legitimacy of the Chinese system. There may come a time when the system begins to come under strain, especially if growth slows, corruption remains rampant and stark inequalities persist. At such a point, the regime may have no choice but to introduce new forms of rule that include elements of popular sovereignty.

### **The future of the China "model"**

The Chinese model of governance has survived all predictions of its demise. It does not appear to face a serious political challenge and, while there are economic difficulties, these do not yet seem to pose an existential threat. The implicit social contract between the CCP-led regime and the Chinese people, which depends on the former delivering continuing improvements in living standards, has held firm for three decades since the Tiananmen Square protests of 1989. Those anti-regime, pro-democracy protests coincided with the fall of the Berlin Wall, but while the latter led inexorably to the collapse of all the eastern bloc communist regimes, the CCP-led Chinese regime has survived and prospered.

The popularity of Mr Xi and the regime that he leads is difficult to judge, but the majority of Chinese people appear to be favourably disposed towards their rulers. Chinese citizens seem to appreciate Mr Xi's success in containing the covid-19 pandemic, and state media portrayals of the toll inflicted by the disease on the US and Europe have reinforced popular support for the government. Mr Xi's anti-corruption drive, his anti-poverty policies and the "common prosperity" campaign, which aim to improve the earnings of low- and middle-income groups, have played well with a domestic audience. The CCP will seek to retain public support by emphasising improvements to people's livelihoods, maintaining a stable economic environment and cracking down on cases of corruption.

Risks to domestic political stability appear to be low, and the position of Mr Xi, who heads the CCP and the military, seems secure. He has sidelined potential political rivals, installed high-ranking loyalists in the military and controls the powerful CCP anti-corruption apparatus. In November 2022 Mr Xi

will have served ten years as supreme leader. The removal in 2018 of constitutional term limits on the presidency signalled his intention to remain in power beyond 2022. At the CCP's 20th party congress, to be held around the time of his ten-year anniversary, Mr Xi is likely to break with a recent tradition of once-a-decade transfers of power and confirm his intention to remain in power for five or more years.

The risks to China's political system will increase the longer that Mr Xi remains in office. His doing so may encourage rivals and factionalism, and more political purges. The centralisation of authority will also inhibit institution-building. China's rise to global hegemony over the next ten years is likely to generate pressure to reform the power structures and political system. It is hard to predict the direction of change: the system will not necessarily move in the direction of greater transparency and accountability.

Other risks to the future of the China model are economic. China's catch-up growth still has some way to run, even assuming a slowdown in average real GDP growth rates in the next two decades, from 4.4% per year in 2021-2030 to 2.1% per year in 2030-50, according to EIU forecasts. China retains the "X factor", or growth intangible, associated with its tradition of independent statehood, along with a sense of purpose of its elites, a strong national identity, and a unified country. It also has big advantages in human capital, which is key to reaping the rewards of innovation and technological development. However, China's growth model will start to run into problems in coming years, and it will not be able to rely on the same factors that have driven growth in recent decades. Demographic headwinds will constrain economic growth rates. China's working-age population is contracting, and the labour force will follow suit. China's fertility rate has collapsed (to 1.3 in 2020), falling below Japan's and above only that of South Korea's as the lowest in the world. The total population is projected to peak at 1.41bn in 2026, and by 2050 the proportion of the population aged 65 or older is forecast to stand at 28.4%, close to Japan's share today.

China's changing demography will have significant economic and social implications. Worker shortages will put upward pressure on wages, which will need to be matched by concomitant gains in productivity to preserve China's comparative advantage in the global economy. The authorities plan to increase incentives for innovation and the use of technology, such as the automation of production. However, success in innovation is not guaranteed, and the subsidy-led approach could lead to wastage of state funds. The government has outlined a goal to maintain the share of manufacturing in GDP (at about one fifth), as it considers manufacturing to be vital in creating jobs and keeping supply chains in China. The government will seek to reduce dependence on Western supply chains for strategic goods by increasing national production and diversifying import sources.

Reducing China's dependence on the global economy has been a strategic goal since 2005, when the regime embraced import substitution as a means to increase the share of domestic content in output to 30% in 11 key sectors by 2020. In 2015 the Chinese government launched its Made in China 2025 (MIC 2025) strategy, with the aim of achieving 70% domestic content by 2025 in ten sectors, including AI, aerospace, information technology, robotics, and medical equipment and medicines, among others. MIC 2025 also demanded that Chinese producers achieve dominant market shares in key sectors such as energy equipment and electric vehicles. In 2020 Mr Xi unveiled his China Standards 2035 plan, which aims to make China the global leader in setting standards for the industries of the future, such as AI, 5G and the internet of things. China will face fierce competition from the US, and success is not a given.

Finally, dealing with China's huge debt mountain is a major challenge for the regime in coming decades. A large fiscal stimulus package in the 2010s resulted in significant investment in infrastructure. This supported growth but exacerbated high levels of debt and overcapacity in the industrial sector. China's debt load is already substantial and there is not a lot of room to expand it further without zombifying the country's economy. To tackle structural issues such as these, in 2015 Mr Xi began to focus on debt deleveraging, overcapacity reduction and risk management under an initiative called the supply-side structural reform (SSSR). Risk prevention (especially in finance and property) will be prioritised over rapid economic growth. This is likely to create social and political strains.

### **Winning friends and influence?**

So unique is the Chinese system of governance that it cannot be described as a "model". China's state and its communist, one-party political system are not replicable, having evolved over centuries in specific historical, social and cultural conditions. "We do not 'import (*shuru*)' foreign models, nor do we 'export (*shuchu*)' the Chinese model; we cannot demand other countries to reproduce (*fuzhi*) the Chinese way of doing things," said Mr Xi in December 2017, speaking at the Dialogue with World Political Parties. If the model's owners insist that it is the unique product of Chinese history and culture and that they do not wish to export it, even if they could, then surely we should take them at their word? A China that is convinced of the superiority of its own civilisation is unlikely to believe that its system could be transplanted somewhere else.

Author Martin Jacques has suggested that proselytising is not the Chinese way: he says that the Chinese "have never sought to impose themselves in the manner of the West" (*The Economist*, June 14th 2018). This is a dubious claim: China was an imperial if not a colonial power and it certainly subjected others to its rule, either through formal incorporation, as in Tibet, or through the tributary system. Mr Bell also notes that China avoids using moralising political rhetoric to promote its political system abroad. It is true that China feigns disinterest in the domestic politics of the countries with which it does business. However, it is touchy about the positions that these countries take on issues such as China's human rights record in Tibet or Xinjiang or its policies on Taiwan and Hong Kong, and has been known to retaliate against any country that dares to criticise its policies. China has also become more concerned about political developments in places where its economic interests are at stake. Worried about mounting instability in the Horn of Africa, China has for example announced that it will send a special peace envoy there in 2022. China already trains 10,000 public officials a year in Africa, the region where it has gained most influence. This does not seem to fit with a country that is disinterested in spreading its influence abroad.

Regardless of whether or not it has an exportable model, China will be the leading economic power in the world within a decade and developing countries will look to it for leadership. China has already done a lot to expand its influence globally, primarily through using economic and financial tools and institutions. For instance, the creation in 2015 of the Asian Infrastructure and Investment Bank, an equivalent of the World Bank, was an attempt to set up an alternative to Western-led international financial institutions. The Belt and Road Initiative, launched in 2013, is another example of China seeking to expand its global reach. It is the largest programme of economic diplomacy since the US-led Marshall Plan, incorporating more than 60 countries in a vast network of Chinese-financed



infrastructure. During the covid-19 pandemic, China's vaccine diplomacy campaign has enabled it to deepen ties with countries and regions in which it had little influence previously. It has also stepped up its cultural outreach efforts in recent years, establishing Chinese cultural and language centres in cities all over the world, though some of these have been closed down in the West. Meanwhile, a Chinese tech giant, Huawei, has exported its "safe cities" project to enhance China's technological reach in emerging markets, and, along with TikTok, is a good example of China's expanding commercial footprint.

Despite his protestations about exporting the Chinese "model", Mr Xi is ambitious about expanding China's influence globally, a notable theme of his 19th party congress speech. For decades China refrained from boasting about the superiority of its system. It never claimed that it represented an alternative to the Western system. However, lately it has increasingly challenged the West's claims about the exclusive legitimacy of its system. The refusal to accommodate China on equal terms within global power structures, and the culture war that the US in particular is conducting against China, is forcing the CCP to engage in a battle of ideas with the West. At the very least, Mr Xi sees an opportunity in the pandemic to delegitimise liberal democracy globally. Given the inherently unattractive features of the Chinese political system, how much success Mr Xi has in that endeavour will depend a great deal on the ability of the West to revitalise its own democratic model.

### **Will the China challenge lead to democratic renewal in the West?**

China's increasingly vocal claims about the superiority of its governance model are putting Western leaders on the defensive. The US president, Joe Biden, is so worried about the threat of autocracy to Western democracies that in December 2021 he convened the first of two summits of world leaders to establish an agenda for democratic renewal. Surveys by the US-based Pew Research Centre show that democracy remains popular globally, but non-democratic alternatives have been gaining ground in recent years. We discuss why democracy is struggling and whether democratic leaders will be able to revitalise their political systems and revive popular support for democracy.

### **Is it true that we are living through a "democratic recession"?**

In 2015 US democracy scholar Larry Diamond coined the phrase "democratic recession" to describe the retreat of democracy globally since 2006 (*Journal of Democracy*, Vol 26, Issue 1, January 2015). Mr Diamond's diagnosis has been confirmed by the results of EIU's Democracy Index over the past 15 years, during which time 108 of the 167 countries (65%) covered have recorded a decline in their total index score or have stagnated. Furthermore, every region in the world has failed to improve its average score since 2006. Perhaps it will come as a surprise to some readers to discover that the worst-performing regions, measured by the size of the decline in their average score between 2006 and 2021, are North America and western Europe, home to the oldest and most developed democracies.

The retreat of democracy has not been universal, but insofar as progress has occurred it has been in emerging-market regions. Of the 59 countries (35% of the total) covered by our index that improved their score between 2006 and 2021, most are in developing regions, with the largest number of improvements recorded in Sub-Saharan Africa (23), Asia and Australasia (13), the Middle East and North Africa (9), and Latin America (8). Some of these improvements have been small and from a low base, but some countries have made steady and consequential progress. Eastern Europe is an outlier

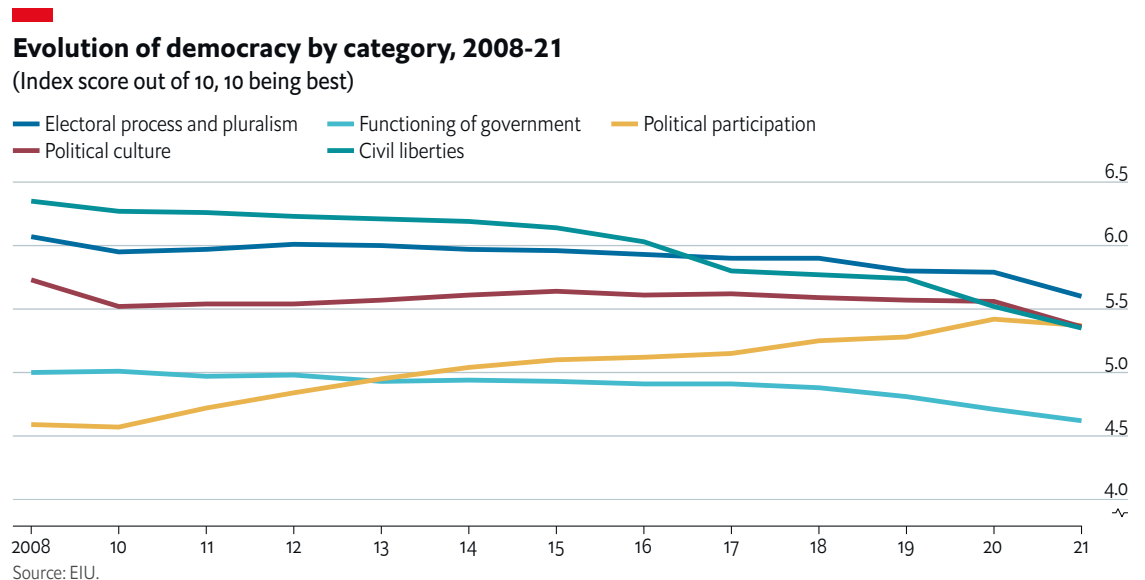


in terms of emerging-market regions, with only four countries having improved their total score in that period. The worst-performing regions are the most developed: both Canada and the US have regressed since 2006, and 19 out of the 21 countries in western Europe have registered declines in their scores. Despite the progress achieved in a minority of countries, overall it seems clear that most democracies, whether classified as “full democracies” or “flawed democracies” in our index, are struggling on a number of fronts.

**Diagnosing democracy’s shortcomings**

The results of our index reveal the areas in which democracy is struggling across the world. Our model is a “thick” measure of democracy, meaning that it assesses the quality of a country’s democracy across a wide range of categories (five in total). It looks not only at *electoral process and pluralism* and *civil liberties*, the two categories assessed in most thinner measures such as that by Freedom House. The Democracy Index also looks in detail at the quality of democratic governance (*functioning of government*) and at *political participation*, assigning importance to the degree of popular sovereignty exercised. It assesses the *political culture* prevailing in every country, looking at popular attitudes to democracy and non-democratic alternatives. The Democracy Index is limited in its remit only in the sense that it is a measure of **political democracy** and nothing else. It does not set out to measure economic freedom or social equality as other indexes, such as V-Dem’s, seek to do. However, our index does pay attention to how people in different parts of the world regard democracy’s role in supporting economic performance.

In the chart below, we show what has happened to the average global score across these five categories of the index between 2008—before the global financial crisis—and 2021. The categories that have recorded the biggest deterioration in global terms are *civil liberties* (-1.00 on a 0-10 scale) and *electoral process and pluralism* (-0.47). Suggesting a possible correlation, *functioning of government* and *political culture* both recorded a very similar decline in their average global scores (-0.38 and -0.37 respectively).



The clear and positive outlier is the *political participation* category, which is the only one to have recorded an improvement, of a cumulative 0.78 since 2008. The improvement has been especially notable in the period after 2016, reflecting an upsurge of popular engagement in politics in developed democracies and waves of political protests in the developing world. This striking result provides a counterpoint to the argument about democratic decline.

In academic and media discussions, some have argued that increased popular participation in politics, as reflected in the rise of populist parties and anti-government protests, has been bad for democracy. However, the unequivocal assessment of our index is that the trend of increased political participation since 2010 is positive for democracy. We interpret this increased popular engagement in politics as being a reaction to the shortcomings of democratic governance and as a demand for more representation and accountability. This has recently spurred increased competition among old and new parties, and opened up the political arena to more debate and contestation over ideas and policies.

By tracking the areas in which democratic systems and values have been eroded over the past decade, the Democracy Index model helps us to understand the causes of popular disaffection with the status quo. Our annual reports have identified some salient trends based on an analysis of the changes in the 60 underlying indicator scores in the model. We are aided in this interpretative endeavour by global survey data and reports from organisations such as the World Values Survey (WVS) and the Pew Research Centre, and by regional survey data from Eurobarometer, Latinobarometer and others. We have identified the following main trends:

### **Civil liberties are being eroded**

There has been a precipitous decline in individual freedoms during the past two years as governments have responded to the coronavirus pandemic with an unprecedented withdrawal of civil liberties. A big part of the 1.00-point decline in the global score for this category of the index was recorded in 2019-21 (-0.39). However, a 0.61-point regression had occurred over the previous decade and preceded the onset of the covid-19 pandemic. This decline was recorded across all regions of the world and was related especially to infringements of free speech and religious freedom. 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, and in developed democracies as well as under authoritarian regimes.

### **Basic democratic rights are being rolled back**

Having free and fair elections, based on universal suffrage and a multiparty system, are the *sine qua non* of democracy. This is how the maximum number of people can play a role in electing a government and exercising leverage over it. A system of fixed-term elections is designed to encourage governing parties to deliver on their election promises because they will have to return to the people to renew their mandate at the next election. In countries classified as “authoritarian regimes” in our index, concentrated in the Middle East and North Africa and Sub-Saharan Africa, these basic elements of democracy do not exist. In “hybrid regimes” only some elements are present. In “flawed democracies”, the formal processes and conditions of pluralism operate imperfectly; “full democracies” score close to full marks in this category. Most of the setbacks to electoral democracy and political pluralism have occurred in the developing world over the past decade among unconsolidated or “flawed

democracies". However, "full democracies" have also lost ground too, with party financing being a common problem.

### **Trust in government and parties has plummeted**

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. Citizens increasingly feel that they do not have control over their governments or their lives. These trends have been reflected in the scores in the *functioning of government* category of the index, which is the lowest-scoring category overall, at 4.62 in 2021, down from 5.00 in 2008. There have been big falls in the average regional scores in this category in Asia, Latin America, and eastern Europe. However, the developed democracies of the US and Europe have not performed well in this category either: institutional dysfunction, corruption and an increasingly unrepresentative political party system have led to a crisis of trust. This provides ammunition for leaders in China, for instance, to boast of the comparative efficiency and popularity of their own system.

### **An upsurge of popular participation and protest**

After many years in which political abstention seemed to have become a feature of modern democratic systems, voters began to make their presence felt again. The shortcomings of democratic political systems in the developing and developed world led to a build-up of frustration with the status quo among people who wanted their interests to be taken into account. These factors led to the election of Donald Trump as US president and the vote for Brexit, both in 2016. They fuelled a wider populist backlash in the developed world, with populist parties in many countries increasing their vote share and, in some places, coming to power. Meanwhile, in the developing world, a rising tide of popular protest in 2017-19 shook regimes run by despots and democrats alike in Asia, Latin America, the Middle East and North Africa, and Sub-Saharan Africa. Millions of people took to the streets to express their opposition to government failures, economic crises, curtailments of civil liberties, unjust laws and corruption. The improvement in the average index score for *political participation* over the past decade is in our view correlated with the parallel deterioration in the scores for *civil liberties*, *electoral process and pluralism*, and *functioning of government*.

### **People's attachment to democracy is weakening**

On the downside, popular frustration with the functioning of democracy has also led increasing numbers of people to embrace non-democratic alternatives, whether in the form of technocratic governance or rule by strongmen. Many people no longer believe that governments will act in the interests of those who elected them, and many have become cynical about representative democracy. There has been a trend towards more technocratic, non-accountable forms of governance in the advanced democracies over the past two decades. Governments have sought to insulate themselves from public pressure by outsourcing decision-making to non-elected bodies. At the same time, the traditional political parties have become more professionalised and lost touch with ordinary people. The convergence of conservative/Christian democratic and social democratic/labour parties towards the centre in recent decades also deprived voters of a genuine choice between clear alternatives. When the political arena becomes uncompetitive and politics is devoid of contestation, people tend either to

abstain or, eventually, to demand representation elsewhere. As they have become more disillusioned with the political system, people have also started to lose confidence in democracy and their attachment to democratic institutions has weakened. They have become more open to considering non-democratic alternatives. These symptoms of democratic malaise are reflected in the decline in the average global score for the *political culture* category of the Democracy Index between 2008 and 2021, from 5.73 to 5.36, mirroring the decline in the *functioning of government* score.

These findings of the Democracy Index over the past decade have been echoed in many global attitudes surveys, notably those from the WVS, which is one of the most authoritative and widely-used cross-national surveys in the social sciences, and from the Pew Research Center. Their surveys have confirmed that democracy retains almost universal appeal, especially among citizens who are denied it by authoritarian regimes. In a large survey by Pew in 2017, a median of 78% of people across 38 countries polled said that representative democracy was a good way to govern. In addition, the survey found considerable support for direct democracy. Across the 38 countries polled, a median of 66% said “a democratic system where citizens, not elected officials, vote directly on major national issues to decide what becomes law” is a very or somewhat good way to govern their country. Pew observed that the appeal of direct democracy “speaks to the demand many citizens express for more public involvement in politics.”

At the same time, surveys by Pew, WVS, the Voter Study Group and others also suggest that in many countries, dissatisfaction with democracy is growing and popular attitudes towards democracy are changing. Growing support for non-democratic forms of governance, whether rule by experts or strong leaders, expresses frustration with “actually existing democracy”. In Pew’s 2017 survey, for example, a median of 49% believed that a system in which “experts, not elected officials, make decisions according to what they think is best for the country” would be good. Support for autocracy was lower, but was nevertheless popular among a large share of the public in many nations. A median of 26% considered “a system in which a strong leader can make decisions without interference from parliament or the courts” a good way to govern. Similarly, a median of 24% said “a system in which the military rules the country” would be good. In Vietnam, Indonesia, India, South Africa and Nigeria, more than 50% expressed this opinion, as did at least 40% in another six nations. Even developed democracies had their share of fans of military rule: 17% in the US, Italy and France believed that military rule could be a good way to run the country.

### **Democracy is not delivering for many people**

A survey by Pew, published in October 2021, showed that popular dissatisfaction with democratic political systems is driving support for political reform as well as a search for alternatives to democratic governance. The survey revealed that a median of 56% of those interviewed across 17 advanced economies believed that their political system needed to be completely reformed or required major changes. The percentages were much higher in some countries, including in Italy (89%), Spain (86%), the US (85%), South Korea (84%), Greece (80%), France (73%) and Belgium (72%). The results also revealed that people have little confidence that the system will be reformed.

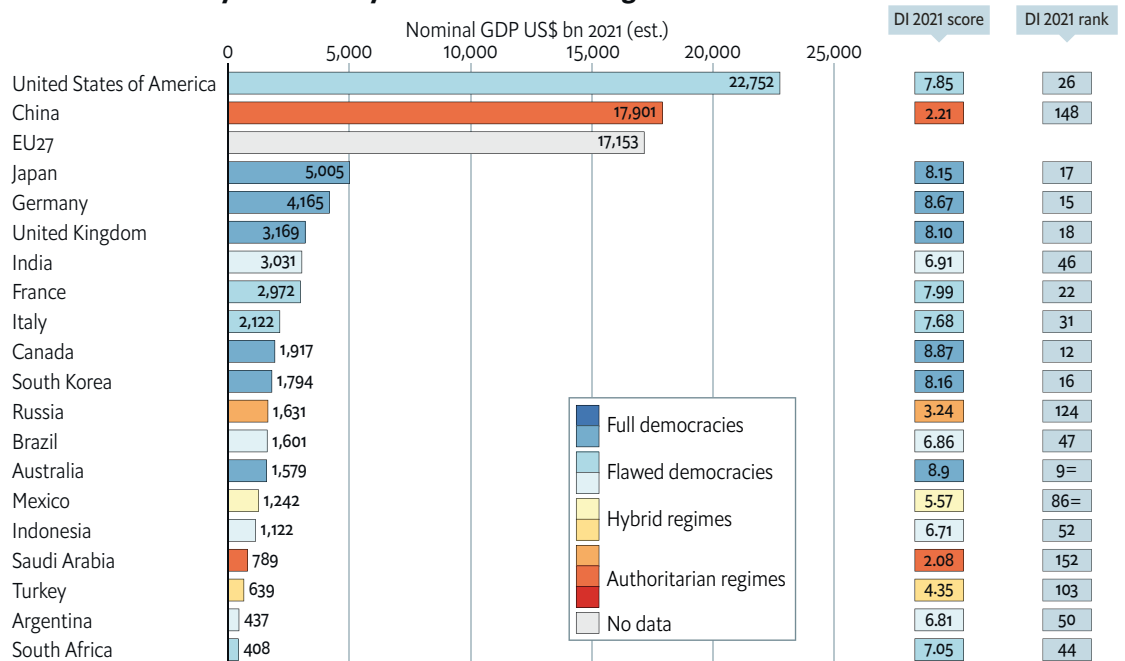
There are many reasons for the rise in popular disaffection with democratic systems, but the main drivers are dissatisfaction with economic performance, disappointment with the lack of equality and

fairness in politics and economics, cynicism about the commitment of political elites to represent voter interests, frustration with not being consulted about the issues that affect their lives, and anger about corruption and vested interests. Over time, the persistence of these problems leads to a pervasive cynicism about politics and a weaker attachment to democratic values and institutions.

**Economic drivers of discontent**

People’s sense of dissatisfaction with the economy is closely correlated with political disaffection in global opinion surveys. The advanced Western capitalist economies are still the richest in the world, despite the marked shift in the economic balance of power towards developing economies in Asia. However, developed economies have experienced several decades of slow real GDP growth compared with the immediate post-1945 decades, punctuated by deep recessions such as those that followed the global financial crash of 2007-08 and the outbreak of the coronavirus pandemic in 2020. The former crisis in particular punctured the claims of Western capitalist leaders, advanced in the aftermath of the Soviet bloc’s collapse, that their model was the best possible economic system. As Branko Milanovic, an economist, has pointed out, China’s runaway growth rates in recent decades have stood in stark contrast to those of the more mature capitalist economies and undermined the West’s claim that there is a necessary link between capitalist success and liberal democracy (*Capitalism alone: the future of the system that rules the world*).

**G20 economies by GDP and by DI score and ranking**



Source: EIU.

Survey data also show that people are concerned not only with economic growth, but also with economic and social equality, and with the prospects for future generations. The growth in the most recent globalisation era of income and social inequality, as documented by Mr Milanovic, as well as

Daron Acemoglu, Thomas Piketty and Emmanuel Saez among others, has accentuated divisions between governing and professional elites on the one hand and the mass of ordinary people on the other. The political, business and professional elites have been the main beneficiaries of globalisation, but large sections of the population living in a democracy have not been so lucky. Some researchers have argued that the political class in many advanced democracies have come to resemble an oligarchy rather than democratic leaders acting in the interests of the nation as a whole.

### **The growing appeal of non-democratic ideas**

Globalisation has fuelled political discontent with economic outcomes, but economic disparities are not the only source of popular disaffection with the status quo. During the past 30 years, many people feel that the Western democratic model has become less responsive to the needs of ordinary people, surveys by Pew and other polling agencies show.

Contrary to the received wisdom, the populists are not the only ones to embrace non-democratic alternatives on occasion. Western elites have themselves moved in this direction in recent decades, embracing more technocratic form of governance. The Western political model has moved away from participatory democracy and now incorporates more decision-making by non-elected, opaque bodies. In the process, Western democracies have removed many important issues from the political domain and excluded the public from playing a full role in democratic life. The trend towards technocracy has emptied mainstream politics of meaning and led many to turn away from politics altogether or to seek alternatives to the mainstream.

The embrace of technocratic methods of governance by Western politicians in recent decades has fuelled a popular demand for more political accountability, and reversed a prior trend of electoral abstention and political disengagement. Some observers see a threat in the increased popular mobilisation of recent years. They have suggested that the main threat to democracy is the rise of populism and the rise to power of illiberal political leaders, especially in non-consolidated democracies in Asia, eastern Europe and Latin America, but also in the US and Europe. After the Brexit vote and the election of Mr Trump in 2016, some academics and media pundits suggested that Trump and Brexit voters were not capable of making rational decisions and some wondered whether they should even be allowed to vote.

These two inter-connected trends—elitist prejudice about the capabilities of ordinary people and an increasing embrace of expert rule—have become more visible in recent years, and the covid-19 pandemic has amplified both. Based on survey data from the past two years, including WVS data, the pandemic appears to have led many people to express a preference for rule by experts over rule by elected representatives (and implicitly, the electorate). Governments in many countries have encouraged this preference by deferring to scientists and epidemiologists when deciding on policy responses. Taking advice from scientists on complex matters makes sense, but scientists should only advise and not rule. A reluctance by politicians to take responsibility for making decisions that have had a major impact on people's lives has been a hallmark of the pandemic; but this pattern of behaviour is a continuation of a trend that has been apparent for some time.

### **A crisis of confidence and of ideas?**

Elected politicians have often preferred to insulate themselves from public criticism on controversial issues by outsourcing decision-making to others, whether a national expert body or a supra-national organisation. This reluctance of politicians to lead and to put themselves on the line in front of the electorate seems to have become more pronounced since the 1990s. It appears to express a crisis of confidence among democratic leaders and parties that few anticipated after the collapse of communism after 1989.

The end of the Cold War accelerated changes in democratic politics that had been in train since the late 1970s: a growing convergence of left and right on economic policies; a decline in membership of political parties; an increasing disconnect between social democratic, socialist and labour parties—which moved closer to the state—and their traditional working-class base; the removal of issues of contention from the political arena; the growing role of unelected institutions in decision-making; and a widening gap between elites and electorates. These developments eventually resulted in a popular backlash and a demand for representation in the form of a populist insurgency.

### **Technocracy or democracy**

There is a danger that the top-down style of often non-accountable governance that has become the norm in Western democracies will carry on. Yet the steady downward trend in the global democracy score this century suggests that radical change is needed if democracy is to prevail in the face of non-democratic alternatives. The one positive trend of recent years has been the rise in popular participation. This uptick in voter activism followed a long period of abstention and apathy, which reflected the alienation of voters from the traditional parties of right and left.

Surveys show us that democracy as a value retains wide appeal. The retreat from democracy need not be permanent. Increased popular engagement in politics points to the potential for democratic renewal. Lacking are vehicles for representing and channelling popular aspirations for better democratic governance. The revival of representative democracy is a must, and this presupposes a revival of politics and a return to genuine political contestation between competing political parties.

# DEMOCRACY INDEX 2021

## THE CHINA CHALLENGE

**Table 3.**  
**Democracy Index 2006-21**

	2021	2020	2019	2018	2017	2016	2015	2014	2013	2012	2011	2010	2008	2006
Canada	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	7.92	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	8.36	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	8.07	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	7.51	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	7.43	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	9.09	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	9.27	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	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	8.67	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	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	9.18	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	9.00	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	7.68	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	8.68	8.68	8.81	8.81	8.81	8.81	8.88	8.88	8.88	8.88	8.88	8.88	9.10	9.10
Malta	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	8.88	8.96	9.01	8.89	8.89	8.80	8.92	8.92	8.84	8.99	8.99	8.99	9.53	9.66
Norway	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	7.82	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	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	9.26	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	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	4.35	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	8.10	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	8.22	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	6.11	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	5.49	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	2.68	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	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 Hercegovina	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	6.64	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	6.57	6.57	6.63	6.75	6.93	6.93	6.93	6.93	6.73	6.81	7.04	7.04
Czech Republic	7.74	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	7.84	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	5.12	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	6.50	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	3.14	2.94	2.94	3.06	3.06	3.06	3.17	3.06	2.95	3.24	3.30	3.45	3.62



# DEMOCRACY INDEX 2021

## THE CHINA CHALLENGE

**Table 3.**  
**Democracy Index 2006-21**

	2021	2020	2019	2018	2017	2016	2015	2014	2013	2012	2011	2010	2008	2006
Kyrgyz Republic	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	7.31	7.24	7.49	7.38	7.25	7.31	7.37	7.48	7.05	7.05	7.05	7.05	7.23	7.37
Lithuania	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	6.10	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	6.02	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	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	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	6.43	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	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	6.36	6.22	6.41	6.41	6.41	6.57	6.71	6.71	6.67	6.33	6.33	6.33	6.49	6.62
Slovakia	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	7.54	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	1.93	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	1.72	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	5.57	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	2.01	2.01	1.95	1.95	1.95	2.45	1.72	1.72	1.74	1.74	1.74	1.85
average	5.36	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
Argentina	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	4.65	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	6.86	6.92	6.86	6.97	6.86	6.90	6.96	7.38	7.12	7.12	7.12	7.12	7.38	7.38
Chile	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	6.48	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	8.07	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	2.59	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	6.45	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	5.71	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	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	4.62	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	6.25	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	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	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	7.13	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	5.57	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	2.69	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	6.85	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	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	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	6.82	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

# DEMOCRACY INDEX 2021

## THE CHINA CHALLENGE

**Table 3.**  
**Democracy Index 2006-21**

	2021	2020	2019	2018	2017	2016	2015	2014	2013	2012	2011	2010	2008	2006
Trinidad and Tobago	7.16	7.16	7.16	7.16	7.04	7.10	7.10	6.99	6.99	6.99	7.16	7.16	7.21	7.18
Uruguay	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	2.11	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	5.83	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	0.32	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	8.90	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	5.99	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	5.71	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	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	2.21	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	5.61	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	5.60	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	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	6.71	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	8.15	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	1.77	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	7.24	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
Mongolia	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	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	4.41	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	9.37	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	0.86	1.03
Pakistan	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	6.10	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	6.62	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	6.23	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	8.16	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	6.14	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	8.99	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	6.04	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	7.19	7.19	7.19	7.24	7.24	7.24	7.24	7.16	7.22	7.22	7.22	6.41
Vietnam	2.94	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	5.46	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	3.77	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	2.49	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	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	1.95	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

# DEMOCRACY INDEX 2021

## THE CHINA CHALLENGE

**Table 3.**  
**Democracy Index 2006-21**

	2021	2020	2019	2018	2017	2016	2015	2014	2013	2012	2011	2010	2008	2006
Iraq	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	7.97	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	3.49	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	3.91	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	3.84	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	1.95	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	5.10	4.99	4.87	4.77	4.66	4.00	4.07	4.07	3.83	3.79	3.88	3.90
Oman	3.00	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	3.94	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	3.24	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	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	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	1.74	1.86	1.63	1.99	2.31	2.18	2.36
Tunisia	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	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	2.07	2.07	2.24	2.79	2.79	3.12	2.57	2.64	2.95	2.98
average	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
Angola	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	4.19	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	7.62	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	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	2.14	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	7.78	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	2.77	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	1.43	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	1.55	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	3.20	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	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	4.11	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	1.40	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	2.74	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	1.81	1.70	1.77	1.66	1.77	1.83	1.77	1.84	2.19	2.09
Eritrea	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	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	3.30	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	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	4.41	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	6.50	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

# DEMOCRACY INDEX 2021

## THE CHINA CHALLENGE

**Table 3.**  
**Democracy Index 2006-21**

	2021	2020	2019	2018	2017	2016	2015	2014	2013	2012	2011	2010	2008	2006
Guinea	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	2.75	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	5.18	5.11	5.11	5.33	5.33	5.13	5.13	4.71	4.71	4.71	4.79	5.08
Lesotho	6.30	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	5.43	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	5.70	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	5.74	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	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	4.03	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	8.08	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	3.65	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	6.43	6.25	6.31	6.31	6.31	6.24	6.24	6.24	6.24	6.23	6.48	6.54
Niger	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	4.11	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	3.10	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	5.53	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	4.97	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	7.24	7.24	7.24	7.41	7.56	7.82	7.90	7.79	7.79	7.79	7.91	7.91
Tanzania	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	2.80	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	4.48	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	5.72	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	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	4.12	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	5.28	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.

## Democracy around the regions in 2021

### Introduction

In 2021 the average global score fell from 5.37 (on a 0-10 scale) in 2020 to 5.28, driven by regressions across all regions except for eastern Europe, which stagnated. The democratic decline was especially pronounced in Latin America, with reversals being spread across many countries. The average regional scores for both North America and Asia and Australasia also fell sharply, but these were driven by particularly sharp declines in one country in the former case (Canada) and two countries in the latter (Afghanistan and Myanmar). The covid-19 pandemic continued to be a major constraint on democracy, exacerbating existing negative trends and weaknesses, and presenting new challenges for democratic and non-democratic regimes alike.

**Table 4.**  
**Democracy across the regions**

	No. of countries	Democracy index average	Full democracies	Flawed democracies	Hybrid regimes	Authoritarian regimes
North America						
2021	2	8.36	1	1	0	0
2020	2	8.58	1	1	0	0
Western Europe						
2021	21	8.22	12	8	1	0
2020	21	8.29	13	7	1	0
Eastern Europe						
2021	28	5.36	0	16	4	8
2020	28	5.36	0	13	8	7
Latin America & the Caribbean						
2021	24	5.83	2	11	7	4
2020	24	6.09	3	13	5	3
Asia & Australasia						
2021	28	5.46	5	10	6	7
2020	28	5.62	5	10	6	7
Middle East & North Africa						
2021	20	3.41	0	1	2	17
2020	20	3.44	0	2	2	16
Sub-Saharan Africa						
2021	44	4.12	1	6	14	23
2020	44	4.16	1	6	13	24
Total						
2021	167	5.28	21	53	34	59
2020	167	5.37	23	52	35	57

Source: EIU..

The developed countries of western Europe continue to dominate among the world's "full democracies", accounting for 12 of the total of 21 in 2021. Asia and Australasia 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), down from three in 2020, as is one African country (Mauritius). The predominance of OECD countries among those ranked as "full democracies" suggests that the level of economic development can be a significant, if not binding, constraint on democratic development.

"Flawed democracies" are concentrated in eastern Europe (16, up from 13 in 2020), Latin America (11, down from 13) and Asia (10). Western Europe has eight and Sub-Saharan Africa six. Eastern Europe does not have a single "full democracy", despite the preponderance of upper-middle-income countries in the region. Estonia (7.84), the Czech Republic (7.74) and Slovenia (7.54), ranked 27th, 28th and 35th in the global rankings, come closest to qualifying as a "full democracy" (with a score above 8.00).

The absence of a single "full democracy" in eastern Europe is striking 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. Eastern Europe managed to avoid a further decline in 2021, but it has recorded a significant decrease of 0.40 points in its overall score since the Democracy Index was established in 2006. The region continues to struggle with core weaknesses in institutions and political culture.

Significant democratic regressions have also occurred in western Europe, whose average score has fallen by 0.38 since 2006, indicating that the democratic malaise of the past decade has permeated some of the most developed democracies in the world. North America has also recorded a big decline in its overall score during the lifetime of the Democracy Index, totalling 0.28 points, with the US's score falling by 0.37 points and that for Canada declining by 0.20 points, more or less in line with the deterioration recorded on average in western Europe over the same period. This is one of the most striking findings of the Democracy Index: contrary to the usual focus on democratic problems in the developing world, the results of our index over the past 15 years show that the most alarming regression has occurred in the advanced democracies.

### **In 2021 the biggest regression occurred in Latin America**

After experiencing a large number of democratic setbacks in 2021, Latin America has now recorded the biggest democratic recession of any region since the launch of the Democracy Index, with its average regional score falling from 6.37 in 2006 to 5.83 in 2021, a decline of 0.54 points, considerably worse than that for eastern Europe. The fall in the region's average score in 2021, of 0.26 points, was the worst of any region and also the worst annual decline of any region during the lifetime of the index. The causes of this striking regression are discussed in detail from page 47.

Asia remains the only region whose average score in 2021 remained above that of 2006, but only just, following a sharp fall of 0.16 points. The region had recorded a significant improvement between 2006 and 2015, albeit from a low base, to reach a high point in its average regional score of 5.74 (which it replicated in 2016). Over the past five years, and in 2021 in particular, this improvement has been all but lost. Cataclysmic events in Afghanistan and Myanmar account for a large part of the deterioration in the average regional score in 2021.

The average score for Sub-Saharan Africa fell by a modest 0.04 points between 2020 and 2021, to 4.12. Democracy has been in retreat in the region over the past three years. The decline started before the onset of the covid-19 pandemic, but there is no doubt that the pandemic has had a negative impact on democracy in the region, particularly in 2020. The region’s average score is now well below the 4.24 recorded in 2006 and the highpoint of 4.38 recorded in 2015.

The Middle East and North Africa recorded a small deterioration in its average regional score in 2021, of 0.03, having registered a bigger decline in 2020 (of 0.09). The region’s overall score is now below what it was in 2010, before the start of the Arab Spring, when it scored 3.43 in the Democracy Index. For a few years it appeared that the Arab Spring, which began at the end of 2010, might herald a period of political transformation analogous to that in eastern Europe in the 1990s. Only Tunisia managed to consolidate any democratic gains, becoming a “flawed democracy” in 2014, a classification that it lost in 2021 when it was downgraded to a “hybrid regime”, falling 21 places in the global rankings.

**Table 5.**  
**Democracy Index 2006-21 by region**

	2021	2020	2019	2018	2017	2016	2015	2014	2013	2012	2011	2010	2008	2006
Asia & Australasia	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	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	5.83	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	3.41	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	8.36	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	8.22	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	4.12	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	5.28	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.

## Asia and Australasia

In 2021 Asia and Australasia’s average regional score in the Democracy Index fell from 5.62 in 2020 to 5.46. This marks a second consecutive year of decline. It is also the region’s lowest score since 2006, when the index was first published, and is only marginally above the score of 5.44 recorded that year. During the past five years, the region has lost almost all the gains in its overall score, having achieved a high of 5.74 in 2015 and 2016. The pandemic accounts for some of the deterioration of the past two years, but events in Afghanistan and Myanmar had by far the biggest negative impact on the region’s average score in 2021. Of the region’s 28 countries assessed in the index, ten improved their scores, ten registered no change and the scores for eight declined. However, the improvements for the ten were modest, totalling 1.34 points, while the combined decline in the scores for Afghanistan and Myanmar was enormous, at 4.55.

The Asia and Australia region boasts five “full democracies” (New Zealand, Taiwan, Australia, South Korea and Japan), the most of any region after western Europe. However, it also includes some of the least democratic countries in the world, including the bottom three in the index (Afghanistan, Myanmar and North Korea). The region is home to four other “authoritarian” regimes too: Laos, China,

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Cambodia and Vietnam. Overall, the region has more countries that are classified as democracies than not, as it also has ten “flawed democracies” and six “hybrid regimes”.

No change in country classification by regime type was recorded in the region. The countries that recorded the largest decreases in their scores were already classified as “authoritarian” (Myanmar, Afghanistan). Myanmar’s score fell from 3.04 in 2020 to 1.02 and it fell 31 places in the rankings. Afghanistan’s score fell from 2.85 in 2020 to 0.32 in 2021 and it fell 28 places in the rankings. Nepal also experienced a big regression: its score fell from 5.22 in 2020 to 4.41 and it dropped nine places in the rankings. The biggest negative changes in the average regional score for the index categories were for

**Table 6.**  
**Asia and Australasia 2021**

	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
New Zealand	9.37	2	1	10.00	8.93	9.44	8.75	9.71	Full democracy
Taiwan	8.99	8	2	10.00	9.64	7.78	8.13	9.41	Full democracy
Australia	8.90	9=	3	10.00	8.57	7.78	8.75	9.41	Full democracy
South Korea	8.16	16	4	9.58	8.57	7.22	7.50	7.94	Full democracy
Japan	8.15	17	5	9.17	8.57	6.67	8.13	8.24	Full democracy
Malaysia	7.24	39	6	9.58	7.86	7.22	6.25	5.29	Flawed democracy
Timor-Leste	7.06	43	7	9.58	5.93	5.56	6.88	7.35	Flawed democracy
India	6.91	46	8	8.67	7.50	7.22	5.00	6.18	Flawed democracy
Indonesia	6.71	52	9	7.92	7.86	7.22	4.38	6.18	Flawed democracy
Philippines	6.62	54	10	9.17	5.00	7.78	4.38	6.76	Flawed democracy
Mongolia	6.42	62	11	8.75	5.71	6.11	5.63	5.88	Flawed democracy
Singapore	6.23	66	12	4.83	8.21	4.44	7.50	6.18	Flawed democracy
Sri Lanka	6.14	67	13	7.00	5.71	5.56	6.25	6.18	Flawed democracy
Papua New Guinea	6.10	69=	14	6.92	6.07	3.89	6.25	7.35	Flawed democracy
Thailand	6.04	72	15	7.00	5.00	6.67	6.25	5.29	Flawed democracy
Bangladesh	5.99	75=	16	7.42	6.07	5.56	5.63	5.29	Hybrid regime
Bhutan	5.71	81=	17	8.75	6.79	3.33	5.00	4.71	Hybrid regime
Fiji	5.61	84	18	6.58	5.00	5.56	5.63	5.29	Hybrid regime
Hong Kong	5.60	85	19	2.75	3.64	5.56	7.50	8.53	Hybrid regime
Nepal	4.41	101=	20	4.83	5.00	4.44	2.50	5.29	Hybrid regime
Pakistan	4.31	104	21	5.67	5.36	3.33	2.50	4.71	Hybrid regime
Vietnam	2.94	131	22	0.00	2.86	3.89	5.63	2.35	Authoritarian
Cambodia	2.90	134=	23	0.00	3.21	3.89	5.63	1.76	Authoritarian
China	2.21	148	24	0.00	4.29	2.78	3.13	0.88	Authoritarian
Laos	1.77	159	25	0.00	2.86	1.67	3.75	0.59	Authoritarian
North Korea	1.08	165	26	0.00	2.50	1.67	1.25	0.00	Authoritarian
Myanmar	1.02	166	27	0.00	0.00	1.67	3.13	0.29	Authoritarian
Afghanistan	0.32	167	28	0.00	0.07	0.00	1.25	0.29	Authoritarian
Regional score	5.46			5.86	5.60	5.14	5.45	5.26	

Source: EIU.



*civil liberties and electoral process and pluralism*, which declined by 0.27 and 0.17 respectively.

The Taliban takeover in Afghanistan, which followed the collapse of an elected government, and the coup d'état and comeback of the junta in Myanmar, were the two most prominent cases of democratic regression in 2021. Elsewhere in the region, governments took advantage of the covid-19 pandemic to curb freedom of movement, association and speech, using the crisis as an excuse to contain dissent and clamp down on the opposition.

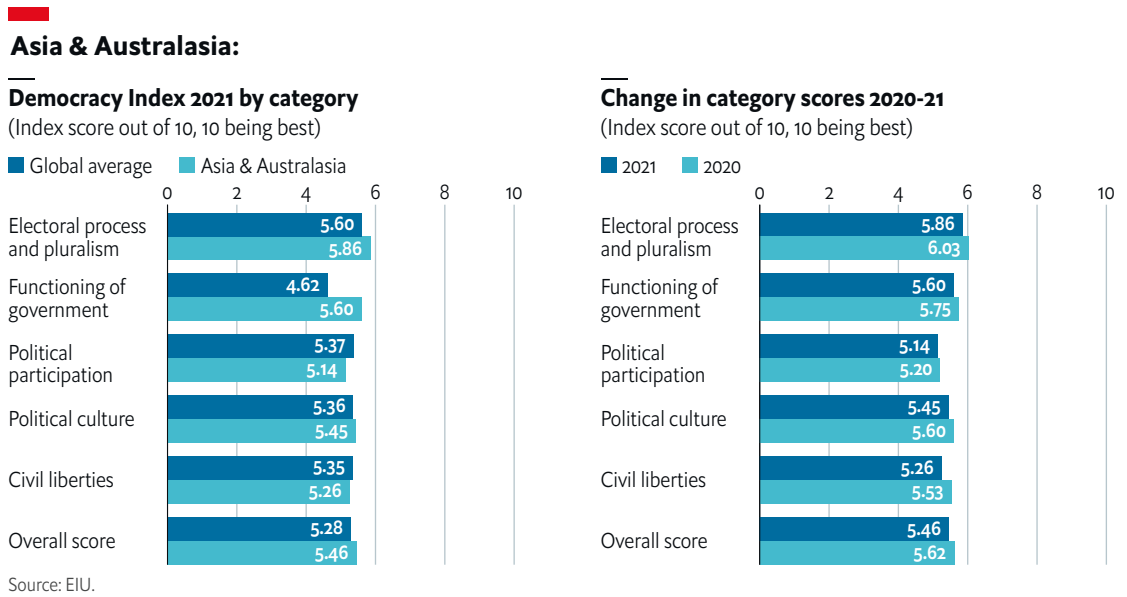
### **Big setbacks in Afghanistan and Myanmar**

Afghanistan was hardly an advert for democracy even before the takeover of the Taliban, a militant Islamic fundamentalist organisation, in 2021, though there had been limited progress in introducing civil rights and improving institutions since a transfer of political power in 2014. Certain groups, including some local leaders who had worked with the previous Taliban regime, were excluded from the political process, but universal suffrage had been granted and election results were acknowledged. The government had introduced greater political freedoms and rights for women and religious minorities. Yet after the Taliban took back control of the country in August 2021, following the collapse of the US-backed government and the hasty withdrawal of US troops, elections were banned and civil rights severely curtailed. The Taliban's extremist interpretation of Sharia law means that women are excluded from political participation and sex segregation is strictly enforced.

The experience of Afghanistan over the past 20 years illustrates the problems and contradictions inherent in the democracy-promotion agenda of foreign powers such as the US. Meanwhile, the military coup in Myanmar shows that, in the absence of strong democratic institutions and stable social conditions, a democratically elected government with widespread popular support can be vulnerable to hostile political forces and sudden reversals. We warned in the 2020 Democracy Index that though the election that year had returned the National League for Democracy (NLD) with a resounding majority and inflicted a defeat on the military-aligned Union Solidarity and Development Party, political stability remained fragile given the military's continued influence over government operations and the legislative process. In February 2021 the military deposed the NLD government in a coup d'état following months of claims of large-scale electoral fraud. The military regime subsequently announced a state of emergency that would last for one year and arrested many high-level officials from the previous NLD government. In the face of widespread pro-democracy protests, the junta has used violence and draconian laws to institute a crackdown on the political opposition, civilian organisations and independent media. More than a thousand civilians died in 2021 amid the violent suppression of protests, and armed conflicts between the military and ethnic militias intensified.

### **With greater restrictions comes growing public dissatisfaction**

The quality of governance elsewhere in the Asia region was undermined by continued restrictions on individual freedoms as a result of the pandemic. In some places this has undermined public trust in institutions and weakened motivation for political participation. In Japan the authorities twice imposed a state of emergency in 2021, entailing stringent restrictions on mobility and business operations to ensure that the Tokyo Olympic and Paralympic Games could take place safely. A nationwide state of emergency was also declared in Malaysia from January to August to curb the spread of covid-19. This led to the suspension of parliament and delayed the collapse of the government headed by the



then prime minister, Muhyiddin Yassin, who at the time faced a vote of no confidence. Cambodia also imposed a nationwide lockdown with tight restrictions on mobility for the first time since the pandemic began. The government followed up by cracking down on former leaders of the main opposition party and journalists who expressed critical views of official policies.

Public surveys revealed that in many Asian countries people felt that they had fewer choices and less control over their lives as a result of pandemic-related restrictions. Respondents in Cambodia, Mongolia and Nepal also expressed low levels of trust in their national leaders and political institutions. Amid broad discontent with the ruling party and fragmented political opposition, voter turnout in Mongolia's presidential election in June dropped to a record low of less than 60%, with nearly 6% of all votes cast being blank.

Meanwhile, in Hong Kong, the Chinese authorities continued to curtail civil liberties. Large numbers of opposition candidates and parties were banned from participating in local elections by a newly introduced screening system. Under pressure from the Chinese government, the authorities moved against several media outlets and independent groups advocating greater autonomy for the territory. In mainland China, increased government involvement in private corporate decision-making protection resulted in a weakening of private property rights and China's index score declined.

Despite the overall decline in the region's average democracy score in 2021, ten countries recorded an improvement in their total score in the latest index. Indonesia and India both reversed a recent trend of deterioration in the quality of their democracies. Indonesia's constitutional court ruled in November that the Omnibus Law on Job Creation, an ambitious package of labour market reforms proposed by the government, was unconstitutional and ordered it to be revised. The court ruling demonstrated a strong degree of judicial independence from government intervention. The decision by the president, Joko Widodo, to accommodate a wide range of political groups, including members of smaller political parties, former military personnel and religious figures, in his cabinet was also conducive to consensus building and compromise between political forces. In India, year-long protests by farmers eventually

forced the government to repeal the farm laws that it had introduced in 2020. The victory of the protesters, as well as some election defeats for the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party, showed that there are mechanisms and institutions in place to allow government accountability to the electorate between national elections. However, the government's failure to crack down on the persecution of religious and other minorities by Hindu nationalists continues to weigh on India's democracy score, which has declined significantly in recent years.

## Eastern Europe

Eastern Europe's average regional score in the Democracy Index stood at 5.36 in 2021. This is unchanged from 2020 and the region is the only one not to have recorded a decline in its score. However, the current score is well down on the 5.76 average recorded in 2006, when the index was first published, and the state of democracy in eastern Europe is currently worse than in all other regions except Sub-Saharan Africa and the Middle East and North Africa. With the exception of the "authoritarian regimes" in the CIS region, eastern European countries generally score well in terms of *electoral process and pluralism*, having competitive political systems and elections that are free and fair. However, formal democratic mechanisms co-exist with a poor functioning of government: corruption and lack of transparency are common across the region, and trust in governments tends to be low. Another marked deficiency is consistently poor scores for *political culture*: data from the latest wave of the World Values Survey indicate that many citizens in eastern Europe have low confidence in democracy as a form of government and believe that democratic governance leads to poor economic performance. The region's average score of 4.73 for this category of the index compares with a global average of 5.37 and an average score of 8.04 for western Europe.

A total of 13 countries in eastern Europe improved their score in the Democracy Index in 2021, with Moldova and Montenegro registering the biggest improvements. Eleven countries suffered a deterioration in their score, with the Kyrgyz Republic facing the largest decline. There are still no "full democracies" in the region: out of the 28 countries, there are 16 "flawed democracies" (comprising EU eastern member states and most of the western Balkans), four "hybrid regimes" (Armenia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Georgia, and Ukraine), and eight "authoritarian regimes" (Azerbaijan, Belarus, Russia and all Central Asian states).

### **"Flawed democracies": Moldova, Montenegro and North Macedonia join the ranks**

In 2021, the average score of the east European countries classified as "flawed democracies" rose to 6.76, up from 6.70 in 2020. The main improvements came—from a low base—in the *functioning of government* and *political culture* categories, the two weakest categories for the region. The impact of the coronavirus pandemic continued to be felt in 2021, but levels of trust in government rose modestly in several countries in the western Balkans, according to data from the Balkan Barometer, an annual survey of business sentiment and public opinion in six Balkan states. This was despite many governments extending the exercise of emergency powers and restrictions on freedom of movement for part of the year.

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**Table 7.**  
**Eastern Europe 2021**

	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
Estonia	7.84	27	1	9.58	7.86	6.67	6.88	8.24	Flawed democracy
Czech Republic	7.74	29	2	9.58	6.43	6.67	7.50	8.53	Flawed democracy
Slovenia	7.54	35	3	9.58	6.43	7.22	6.25	8.24	Flawed democracy
Latvia	7.31	38	4	9.58	6.07	6.11	6.25	8.53	Flawed democracy
Lithuania	7.18	40	5	9.58	6.07	6.11	5.63	8.53	Flawed democracy
Slovakia	7.03	45	6	9.58	6.43	5.56	5.63	7.94	Flawed democracy
Poland	6.80	51	7	9.17	6.07	6.67	5.63	6.47	Flawed democracy
Bulgaria	6.64	53	8	9.17	5.36	7.22	4.38	7.06	Flawed democracy
Croatia	6.50	56=	9	9.17	6.07	6.11	4.38	6.76	Flawed democracy
Hungary	6.50	56=	10	8.33	6.43	5.00	6.25	6.47	Flawed democracy
Romania	6.43	61	11	9.17	6.07	6.11	3.75	7.06	Flawed democracy
Serbia	6.36	63	12	8.25	6.07	6.67	3.75	7.06	Flawed democracy
Albania	6.11	68	13	7.00	6.43	4.44	5.63	7.06	Flawed democracy
Moldova	6.10	69=	14	7.00	5.71	6.67	4.38	6.76	Flawed democracy
North Macedonia	6.03	73	15	7.42	6.43	6.11	3.13	7.06	Flawed democracy
Montenegro	6.02	74	16	7.42	6.43	6.67	3.13	6.47	Flawed democracy
Ukraine	5.57	86=	17	8.25	2.36	6.67	5.00	5.59	Hybrid regime
Armenia	5.49	89	18	7.50	5.71	6.11	3.13	5.00	Hybrid regime
Georgia	5.12	91	19	7.42	3.57	5.56	3.75	5.29	Hybrid regime
Bosnia and Hercegovina	5.04	95=	20	7.00	3.29	5.56	3.75	5.59	Hybrid regime
Kyrgyz Republic	3.62	115	21	4.33	1.50	4.44	3.13	4.71	Authoritarian
Russia	3.24	124	22	1.75	2.14	4.44	3.75	4.12	Authoritarian
Kazakhstan	3.08	128=	23	0.50	3.21	5.00	3.75	2.94	Authoritarian
Azerbaijan	2.68	141	24	0.50	2.50	2.78	5.00	2.65	Authoritarian
Belarus	2.41	146	25	0.00	2.00	3.89	4.38	1.76	Authoritarian
Uzbekistan	2.12	150	26	0.08	1.86	2.78	5.00	0.88	Authoritarian
Tajikistan	1.94	157	27	0.00	2.21	2.22	4.38	0.88	Authoritarian
Turkmenistan	1.66	161	28	0.00	0.79	2.22	5.00	0.29	Authoritarian
Regional score	5.36			6.32	4.70	5.42	4.73	5.64	

Source: EIU.

Three countries registered significant improvement and were upgraded from “hybrid regimes” to “flawed democracies”. Moldova rose to 69th place in the global ranking, up from 80th in 2020, following an improvement in its total score from 5.78 in 2020 to 6.10 in 2021. This was due to improvements in the *functioning of government* and in *political participation*. Moldova held a snap parliamentary election on July 11th that resulted in an overwhelming victory for the reformist and pro-EU Party of Action and Solidarity (PAS), heralding an improvement in the outlook for reform and political stability. The elections were marked by high voter turnout, suggesting improved confidence in the political system.

The decisive victory of PAS shows that the new government, for the time being, enjoys wide popular support.

Montenegro also registered improvements in the same categories of *functioning of government* and *political participation*. A parliamentary election held in August 2020 led to the defeat of the Democratic Party of Socialists (DPS), which had monopolised political power in the country during the previous three decades. The new government, headed by For the Future of Montenegro, is committed to rooting out widespread corruption, which had flourished under the DPS, and to reforming state institutions, and has taken steps to improve government accountability. However, it faces considerable obstacles, given the entrenched influence of the DPS in state institutions and political polarisation.

North Macedonia, which was also upgraded to “flawed democracy” status, recorded modest improvements in the functioning of government. In October 2021 the country held competitive municipal elections. In response to his party’s defeat in the elections, the prime minister and leader of the ruling party, Zoran Zaev, said that he would take responsibility and step down from both of his positions. Confidence in political parties, which remains abysmally low, improved marginally in 2021 compared with 2020, according to the Balkan Barometer.

The scores for Bulgaria, Hungary and Poland declined slightly. Bulgaria suffered a decline in the *functioning of government* category in 2021, as the country held three parliamentary elections to overcome political paralysis and was governed primarily by unelected officials. Hungary, whose democracy score has steadily eroded since the first Democracy Index in 2006, adopted new constitutional amendments in December 2020 concerning various issues, such as marriage and children’s education. The amendments were adopted without public consultation and while the country was in a state of emergency. In September 2021, Poland declared its first state of emergency since communist times to contain illegal border crossings from Belarus, establishing an exclusion zone to contain migrants while restricting access to journalists and humanitarian NGOs.

### **“Hybrid regimes”: Georgia and Ukraine continue their recent downward trend**

The average score for the region’s “hybrid regimes” declined marginally in 2021, with two countries—Armenia, and Bosnia and Hercegovina—registering an improvement, while the remaining two—Georgia and Ukraine—recorded worsened scores.

Ukraine’s score registered the steepest decline among the four east European countries in this category, and Ukraine now shares 86th place with Mexico in our global ranking, down from 79th place in 2020. Ukraine’s score declined in part as a result of increased tensions with Russia. Government functioning under a direct military threat usually restricts democratic processes in favour of the centralisation of power in the hands of the executive and the security or military apparatus with the aim of guaranteeing public safety. In Ukraine, the military played a more prominent role in 2021 and exerted more influence over political decision-making; government policy also became less transparent. The approval rating of Volodymyr Zelenskyi, the Ukrainian president, declined from 42% in December 2020 to 38% at the end of 2021 as confidence in his ability to implement reforms and address threats from Russia declined.

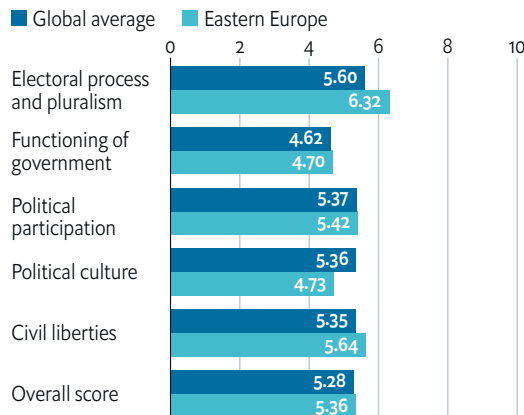
Georgia’s score also declined in 2021. The country retained 91st spot in our global ranking, sandwiched between Liberia and Honduras, but its score fell from 5.31 in 2020 to 5.12 in 2021. Social

cohesion suffered and several turbulent events hindered democratic processes. The tensions between the ruling Georgian Dream-Democratic Georgia party and the opposition United National Movement (UNM) culminated in the arrest of ex-president and ex-UNM leader, Mikheil Saakashvili. The local elections, during which Mr Saakashvili returned to the country and was detained, were marred by irregularities, according to international observers. The ruling party benefits from significant financial and operational advantages, thus hindering electoral competition and transparency. Social divisions deepened as a result of heightened political tension.

Armenia registered an improvement of 0.14 points compared with 2020 to take its total score to 5.49 in 2021. Armenia ranks 89th in our global ranking (the same as in 2020), two spots above neighbouring Georgia. A snap parliamentary election held in July 2021 gave the prime minister, Nikol Pashinian, a strong public mandate following a period of turbulence and discontent. The sweeping victory of Mr Pashinian and his Civil Contract party brought a degree of stability following the 2020 recession and war with Azerbaijan. This allowed the government to continue its democratic reform programme. However, despite the improvement in the score, concerns about Armenia’s democracy remain. The independence of the judiciary is still in question and the opposition is marginalised.

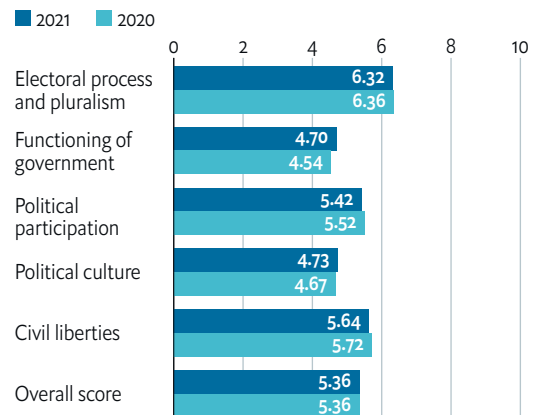
**Eastern Europe:**

**Democracy Index 2021 by category**  
 (Index score out of 10, 10 being best)



Source: EIU.

**Change in category scores 2020-21**  
 (Index score out of 10, 10 being best)



**“Authoritarian regimes”: The Kyrgyz Republic joins other Central Asian autocracies**

The average score for the region’s “authoritarian regimes” declined, falling from 2.71 in 2020 to 2.59 in 2021. The majority of the countries in this category registered declines in their scores and no country registered an improvement. The scores for Azerbaijan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan remained the same as last year. Public discontent increased in 2021 and the countries’ regimes responded with repressive policies. This led to the further entrenchment of undemocratic practices and the suppression of any form of dissent.

In Russia, parliament further restricted political pluralism and curtailed media independence. The lower house of parliament (the State Duma) passed a law in December 2020 that tightened restrictions

on the opposition and political protests. The effects of the law became particularly evident in 2021. The arrest in early 2021 of Alexei Navalny, a prominent opposition figure, led to a wave of protests, which met with a harsh police crackdown. Furthermore, the government expanded its list of “foreign agents”, which severely restricted the operation of independent media and human rights organisations. In line with the “foreign agent” legislation, a court decision in December 2021 led to the closure of a well-regarded civil rights organisation, International Memorial, in another move against dissenting voices in the country.

The Kyrgyz Republic, after several consecutive years of decline, was downgraded from a “hybrid regime” to an “authoritarian regime”. The country’s score declined by 0.59 points and the Kyrgyz Republic fell by eight places in the global rank to 115th place, one place below Qatar and one place above Iraq and Mozambique. In January 2021 the country elected Sadyr Japarov as president and approved the transition to a presidential system in a vote with record-low turnout. The transition from a parliamentary to a presidential system continued over the course of the year, placing significant powers in the hands of the president. In addition to becoming the main figure of executive power, the president gained greater influence over the legislature and the judiciary, effectively eliminating the separation of powers.

## Latin America and the Caribbean

Latin America’s average regional score fell for a sixth consecutive year, from 6.09 in 2020 to 5.83 in 2021. This was not only the steepest decline recorded in the index by any region of the world in 2021, it was the biggest downgrade recorded by any region since we launched the Democracy Index.

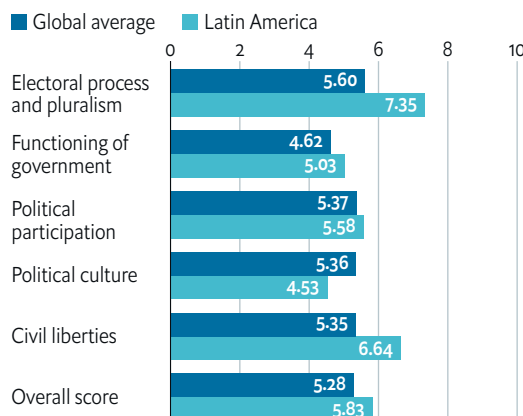
The region’s score across all categories of the index worsened in 2021, led by a sharp decline in the *political culture* score. This reflects public disaffection with governments’ handling of the coronavirus pandemic, which amplified some pre-pandemic trends, including growing scepticism about the ability of democratic governments to address the region’s problems and increasing tolerance of authoritarian



### Latin America:

#### Democracy Index 2021 by category

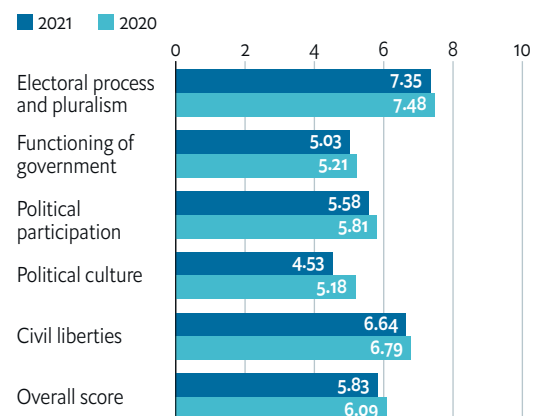
(Index score out of 10, 10 being best)



Source: EIU.

#### Change in category scores 2020-21

(Index score out of 10, 10 being best)





governance. Latin America’s increasingly weak commitment to a democratic political culture has allowed illiberal populists, such as Jair Bolsonaro in Brazil, Andrés Manuel López Obrador in Mexico and Nayib Bukele in El Salvador, to thrive. This trend has also fostered authoritarian regimes in Nicaragua and Venezuela.

Outside of western Europe and North America, Latin America is the region with the highest average democracy score, but its lead over both Asia and Australia and eastern Europe has now narrowed. Some 80% of the region’s population lives under democratic regimes, but only 1.3% of the region’s population lives in a “full democracy” (in Costa Rica and Uruguay).

Latin America experienced the largest number of changes in regime type of any region in 2021. Five countries were downgraded: Chile, which became a “full democracy” in 2019 before the pandemic struck, was relegated to a “flawed democracy” once again; Ecuador, Mexico and Paraguay all lost their status as “flawed democracies” and are now designated as “hybrid regimes”; and Haiti’s status changed from “hybrid regime” to “authoritarian regime”. Nicaragua’s score fell sharply following a sham presidential election held in November 2021, and the country fell 20 places in the global rankings, to 140th. An even worse outcome for the region was prevented by modest improvements in the performance of the Dominican Republic (+0.13), Guyana (+0.24) and Uruguay (+0.24), the only countries whose scores improved. Three countries (Jamaica, Suriname, and Trinidad and Tobago) retained the same overall scores as in 2020.

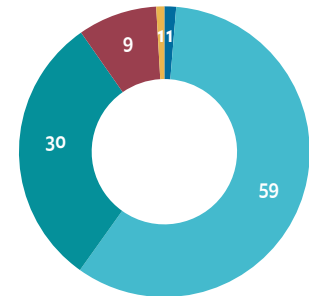
**Recent elections highlight deepening political polarisation**

Latin America had a busy electoral year in 2021, with voters in Ecuador, Chile, Peru and Honduras casting their ballots in free and fair presidential elections. In each election, voters were presented with candidates who represented vastly different policy agendas, highlighting the collapse of the political centre and the increased polarisation of Latin American politics. The most emblematic example of this dynamic was Peru’s election, which was the most polarised since the return to democracy in 2000. A political outsider and far-left candidate, Pedro Castillo, defeated the three-time, right-wing presidential candidate, Keiko Fujimori, by less than 1% of the vote. Ms Fujimori initially rejected the results, having alleged electoral fraud without evidence, which heightened political tensions for almost two months. Ms Fujimori eventually relented and Mr Castillo was sworn in as president, but the tumultuous transition weakened Mr Castillo’s fragile presidency.

Ecuador’s presidential election was also highly polarised. After a prolonged election count, conservative Guillermo Lasso narrowly edged ahead of Yaku Pérez of an indigenous party to go up against Andrés Arauz, an acolyte of the former left-wing, illiberal populist president, Rafael Correa, in a second-round vote in April. The election pitted Mr Lasso’s pro-market policies against the statist

**A growing number of Latin Americans live in weakening democracies**  
 (% of the population)

- Full democracies
- Flawed democracies
- Hybrid regimes
- Authoritarian regimes
- Countries not categorised



Source: EIU.



# DEMOCRACY INDEX 2021

## THE CHINA CHALLENGE

**Table 8.**  
**Latin America 2021**

	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
Uruguay	8.85	13	1	10.00	8.57	7.22	8.75	9.71	Full democracy
Costa Rica	8.07	20=	2	9.58	6.43	7.78	6.88	9.71	Full democracy
Chile	7.92	25	3	9.58	7.86	5.56	7.50	9.12	Flawed democracy
Trinidad and Tobago	7.16	41	4	9.58	7.14	6.11	5.63	7.35	Flawed democracy
Jamaica	7.13	42	5	8.75	7.14	5.00	6.25	8.53	Flawed democracy
Brazil	6.86	47	6	9.58	5.36	6.11	5.63	7.65	Flawed democracy
Panama	6.85	48	7	9.58	6.07	7.22	3.75	7.65	Flawed democracy
Suriname	6.82	49	8	9.58	6.07	6.11	5.00	7.35	Flawed democracy
Argentina	6.81	50	9	9.17	5.00	7.22	5.00	7.65	Flawed democracy
Colombia	6.48	59	10	9.17	5.71	6.11	3.75	7.65	Flawed democracy
Dominican Republic	6.45	60	11	9.17	5.00	6.67	4.38	7.06	Flawed democracy
Guyana	6.25	65	12	6.92	6.07	5.56	5.63	7.06	Flawed democracy
Peru	6.09	71	13	8.75	5.36	5.56	3.75	7.06	Flawed democracy
Paraguay	5.86	77	14	8.75	5.36	5.00	3.13	7.06	Hybrid regime
El Salvador	5.72	79=	15	9.17	3.93	5.56	3.75	6.18	Hybrid regime
Ecuador	5.71	81=	16	8.75	5.00	6.11	2.50	6.18	Hybrid regime
Mexico	5.57	86=	17	6.92	5.00	7.22	3.13	5.59	Hybrid regime
Honduras	5.10	92=	18	8.75	3.93	4.44	2.50	5.88	Hybrid regime
Bolivia	4.65	98	19	4.75	4.29	6.11	2.50	5.59	Hybrid regime
Guatemala	4.62	99	20	6.92	3.93	3.89	2.50	5.88	Hybrid regime
Haiti	3.48	119=	21	3.08	0.00	2.78	6.25	5.29	Authoritarian
Nicaragua	2.69	140	22	0.00	2.50	3.33	4.38	3.24	Authoritarian
Cuba	2.59	142	23	0.00	3.21	3.33	3.75	2.65	Authoritarian
Venezuela	2.11	151	24	0.00	1.79	3.89	2.50	2.35	Authoritarian
Regional score	5.83			7.35	5.03	5.58	4.53	6.64	

Source: EIU.

populism of Mr Arauz, but Mr Lasso won by consolidating the anti-Correa vote. Despite the hard-fought election, Ecuador is now categorised as a “hybrid regime”, largely owing to a decline in its political culture score due to increased popular support for strong or authoritarian leaders. This shift is related to extreme party fragmentation, chronic corruption and Ecuador having experienced one of the worst coronavirus outbreaks in the world. This has led to a further decline in trust for government and an increased preference for strong leaders among the population. Ecuador’s regime categorisation may improve if confidence in democratic institutions improves under a Lasso administration. A rapid vaccine rollout under Mr Lasso bodes well for increased trust in government.

Chile’s downgrade from a “full democracy” to a “flawed democracy” was a consequence of low levels of confidence in the government, low voter turnout in recent elections and deepening political polarisation. The collapse of centrist parties and bouts of social unrest following large-scale protests

in October 2019 were illustrative of growing political polarisation. This was also evident in the first-round presidential election held in November 2021, in which traditionally powerful centrist coalitions collapsed, leaving the far-right José Antonio Kast and left-wing Gabriel Boric to compete in a second-round runoff election in December (Mr Boric ended up winning the presidency). The election was highly polarised, as Mr Kast and Mr Boric held diametrically opposed views on the economy and social policy. Chile is also seeing a surge in violence in the south of the country by radical members of the Mapuche indigenous community, resulting in a state of emergency being declared in the most affected regions. On a positive note, Chile started a constitutional rewriting process in July 2021, with a constituent assembly having achieved gender parity and guaranteeing indigenous representation; however, the assembly is dominated by left-of-centre representatives and this could encourage further polarisation of Chilean politics in 2022.

The Honduran presidential and legislative elections were a rare bright spot in the region. The election of a left-wing candidate, Xiomara Castro, was free and fair, and the outgoing ruling party, which also lost the national election, did not contest the results. This was despite the outgoing governing party having cemented corrupt practices while in office and increased authoritarian control over state institutions since taking power following a 2009 coup against the then-president (and Ms Castro's husband), Manuel Zelaya (2006-09). This led to an improvement in the country's *electoral process and pluralism* score, but this was offset by lower scores for *functioning of government* and *political culture*. Honduras is well positioned to record an improvement in its Democracy Index score, but this will depend on whether the democratic transition is as smooth as the election.

There was a significant deterioration in the democracy scores for Nicaragua and Haiti in 2021. Nicaragua held sham presidential elections in November. The president, Daniel Ortega, won the election, but had jailed dozens of political opponents, stripped the main opposition party of legal standing and stuffed the electoral commission with loyalists. This further cemented Nicaragua's status as an "authoritarian" regime, a category that it entered in 2018. In Haiti, the assassination of the president, Jovenel Moïse, led to a prolonged political crisis that has no end in sight. The political vacuum has been filled to a degree by non-state actors, leading to a further erosion of the state's territorial control. A presidential election has been postponed four times and no date has yet been scheduled. Haiti is now categorised as an "authoritarian" regime, making it the fourth country in the region to be categorised as such (alongside Cuba, Nicaragua and Venezuela).

### **Populist attacks on democratic institutions increase in 2021**

Illiberal populists in the region continued to erode the institutions of democracy in 2021. Brazil's president, Jair Bolsonaro, demanded the resignation of two members of the Supreme Court following an investigation into allegations that pro-Bolsonaro groups were spreading "fake news". He has also questioned the integrity of Brazil's electronic voting system, despite there being no evidence of electoral fraud. Mr Bolsonaro even went so far as to say that he would ignore the results of the 2022 presidential and legislative elections—comments that he later retracted. Mr Bolsonaro is likely to continue his attacks on democratic institutions and undermine confidence in electoral integrity ahead of the October 2022 elections, especially as polls show that he currently trails behind a leftist former president, Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva (2003-10).

Mexico's president, Andrés Manuel López Obrador, continued his efforts to concentrate power in the executive branch. In August Mr López Obrador said that he would seek wholesale reform of the country's electoral authorities, as he believes that they are biased against his government and said that they are "at the service of anti-democracy". Mr López Obrador also ramped-up his attacks on the media and became increasingly intolerant of critics, including among his allies. High levels of cartel violence had an impact on the June mid-terms and pose growing risks to Mexican democracy. Despite Mr López Obrador's persistently high approval ratings, Mexicans express low levels of confidence in government. Mexico is now categorised as a "hybrid regime" rather than a "flawed democracy", and the trends discussed above suggest that a further erosion of Mexico's democracy is likely as the presidential election in 2024 moves closer.

### **Democratic deficits lead to large-scale social unrest in 2021**

Frustration with the inability of governments of any stripe to adequately address long-standing social and economic problems was made worse with the coronavirus pandemic. As in years past, in 2021 the region experienced large-scale protests that put governability at risk. In March, Paraguayans took to the streets to protest the government's inadequate coronavirus response as the healthcare system became quickly overburdened. The president, Mario Abdo Benítez, narrowly survived an impeachment attempt. Paraguayans' frustration with poor public services explain the low level of confidence in government and high levels of support for strong leaders and even for military rule. Owing to this, Paraguay was downgraded to a "hybrid regime" instead of a "flawed democracy".

In April Colombians participated in massive nation-wide rallies against a tax reform proposed by the administration of the president, Iván Duque. The protests were a continuation of 2019 protests that were halted by the onset of the coronavirus pandemic. The 2021 protests were successful in scuppering the tax reform, but allegations of human rights abuses plague the government. In July the largest protests in almost 30 years occurred in Cuba, the region's only one-party dictatorship, as the population chafed under worsening economic conditions related to coronavirus restrictions. Large-scale protests are likely to continue in 2022 as the economic and social impact of the pandemic continues to reverberate.

## **The Middle East and North Africa**

The Middle East and North Africa region remains the lowest ranked of all the regions covered in the Democracy Index, with five countries of the 20 in the region featuring in the bottom 20 in our global ranking. The region's low average score (3.41 for 2021 compared to a global average of 5.28) continues to be weighed down by conflict in several countries such as Syria and Yemen. Even from such a low base, the average regional score declined further in 2021 (from 3.44 in 2020). The regression in 2021 came mostly as a result of sharp deteriorations for Tunisia and Lebanon—two of the higher scorers in the region—with both countries' political systems in turmoil. Tunisia's resulting downgrade in category from "flawed democracy" to "hybrid regime" leaves the region with only one "flawed democracy", Israel, and no "full democracies". Meanwhile, Lebanon's downgrade from "hybrid regime" to "authoritarian regime" means that 17 of the region's 20 countries are now classified as "authoritarian".

That said, the picture is not uniformly negative across the region, owing to positive trends in Israel, where an Arab party is in government for the first time as a minor player in a wide-ranging coalition,

and in some of the Gulf countries such as the UAE and Qatar, which made small steps towards liberalisation.

**Table 9.**  
**Middle East 2021**

	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
Israel	7.97	23	1	9.58	7.50	10.00	6.88	5.88	Flawed democracy
Tunisia	5.99	75=	2	7.50	4.64	7.22	5.00	5.59	Hybrid regime
Morocco	5.04	95=	3	5.25	4.64	5.56	5.63	4.12	Hybrid regime
Palestine	3.94	109	4	3.33	0.14	8.33	4.38	3.53	Authoritarian
Kuwait	3.91	110	5	3.58	3.93	4.44	4.38	3.24	Authoritarian
Lebanon	3.84	111=	6	3.50	1.14	6.67	3.75	4.12	Authoritarian
Algeria	3.77	113	7	3.08	2.50	4.44	5.00	3.82	Authoritarian
Qatar	3.65	114	8	1.50	4.29	3.33	5.63	3.53	Authoritarian
Iraq	3.51	116=	9	5.25	0.00	6.11	5.00	1.18	Authoritarian
Jordan	3.49	118	10	2.67	3.93	3.89	3.75	3.24	Authoritarian
Oman	3.00	130	11	0.08	3.93	2.78	4.38	3.82	Authoritarian
Egypt	2.93	132	12	1.33	3.21	3.33	5.00	1.76	Authoritarian
United Arab Emirates	2.90	134=	13	0.00	4.29	2.22	5.63	2.35	Authoritarian
Bahrain	2.52	144	14	0.42	2.71	3.33	4.38	1.76	Authoritarian
Sudan	2.47	145	15	0.00	1.43	4.44	5.00	1.47	Authoritarian
Saudi Arabia	2.08	152	16	0.00	3.57	2.22	3.13	1.47	Authoritarian
Yemen	1.95	154=	17	0.00	0.00	3.89	5.00	0.88	Authoritarian
Iran	1.95	154=	18	0.00	2.50	3.89	1.88	1.47	Authoritarian
Libya	1.95	154=	19	0.00	0.00	3.33	3.75	2.65	Authoritarian
Syria	1.43	162=	20	0.00	0.00	2.78	4.38	0.00	Authoritarian
Regional score	3.41			2.35	2.72	4.61	4.59	2.79	

Source: EIU.

### **Power grab in Tunisia compounds retreat from the Arab Spring**

Tunisia was the first country in the region to witness the mass protests that came to be known as the Arab Spring (2010-11). But of the countries at the forefront of that initial movement (Egypt, Tunisia, Yemen, Libya and Syria), only Tunisia's struggle resulted in the formation of a democratic government. Later protest movements in Algeria, Sudan, Iran, Iraq and Lebanon have failed to bring about meaningful democratic change. Tunisia's downgrade to a "hybrid regime" is another setback for all those who believed that the Arab Spring could usher in meaningful democratic change.

The Tunisian authorities came under pressure following a devastating wave of the pandemic in June. Following mass protests over poor economic prospects and the perceived corruption of many of the country's politicians, the president, Kais Saied, seized power on July 25th. He suspended parliament indefinitely and sacked the government, taking sole control. Although this was done under auspices of article 80 of Tunisia's constitution, which allows for the president to take emergency measures, the

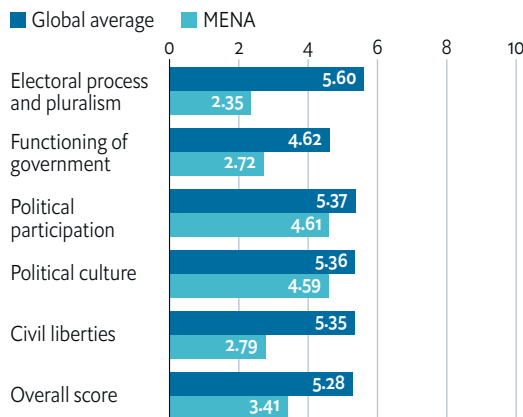
situation remained unresolved for the rest of 2021. Mr Saied maintained the suspension of parliament, appointed his own government and, in September, ditched most of the constitution.

The president’s manoeuvres remain popular with most Tunisians, according to domestic polling, and this led to a score improvement for Tunisia’s “confidence in government” indicator. However, in the absence of any real checks and balances on the president’s power and with parliament disbanded, Tunisia’s score for the *functioning of government* category worsened significantly. Uncertainty over future transfers of power and the role of current political parties in elections resulted in a decline in the country’s score in the *electoral process and pluralism* category, from 9.17 in 2020 to 7.50 in 2021. Mr Saied has laid out a loose roadmap for political reform in 2022, so there is a chance that Tunisia’s democracy will be restored. But more likely is that it will be altered in a referendum to cement and constitutionalise some of the changes made by Mr Saied in 2021.

Elsewhere in the region, a military coup in Sudan in October removed all checks and balances and halted a democratic transition. This led to a worsening of the score for *functioning of government*. Meanwhile, Lebanon experienced a notable deterioration in its score, partly as the power of interest groups related to Lebanon’s sectarian political system continued to grow. Indeed, as the country’s economy deteriorated further, and fuel shortages worsened the cost of living crisis, sectarian and local allegiances became more entrenched.

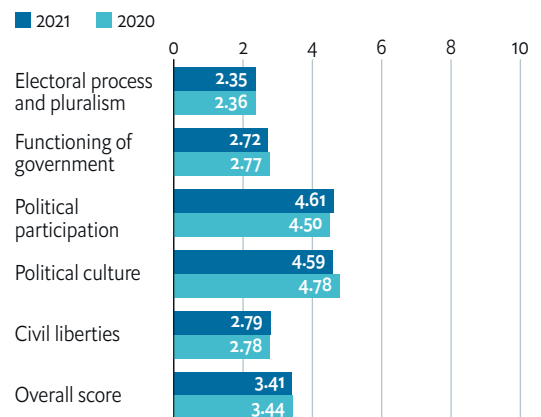
**Middle East and North Africa:**

**Democracy Index 2021 by category**  
 (Index score out of 10, 10 being best)



Source: EIU.

**Change in category scores 2020-21**  
 (Index score out of 10, 10 being best)



Lebanon’s scores also deteriorated as a result of the worsening perceptions of democracy and rising support for military rule. That shift fits part of a broader regional trend. A similar trend drove a worsening of the score for Iran, reflecting the fact that the current political system is not delivering sufficient economic and social benefits. Israel, which remains at the higher end of our global rankings, and whose score rose by 0.13 points overall in 2021, recorded a decline in its score for the *political culture* category. Rising support for strong leadership that bypasses parliament has increased during the pandemic. The result is that the region’s average score for the *political culture* category fell more by than any other category in 2021, by 0.19 points, to 4.59.

### **Gradual liberalisation in the Gulf continues**

Israel continued to buck the regional trend in 2021. The inclusion of Ra’am, an Arab political party, in the broad-reaching coalition that came to power in June represents the first time that an Arab party has been part of government in Israel. This led to an improvement in the *electoral process and pluralism* and *functioning of government* categories. As well as Israel, the Gulf states made progress up the rankings in 2021, but from a low base. All six Gulf states—Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Oman, Qatar, Kuwait and Bahrain—have absolute monarchies and are classed by EIU as “authoritarian”. They have some of the lowest scores in the world for *electoral process and pluralism* and *civil liberties*. Nevertheless, the trend of improvement in 2021 contrasted with much of the of the region. At an average of 3.01, the score across the Gulf states is low, but it is higher now than the pre-pandemic level (2.89 in 2019), despite many covid-related curbs on civil liberties remaining in place throughout much of 2021. The main drivers of this trend in 2021 were Qatar, where the successful holding of the country’s first legislative elections in October supported an improvement in the *electoral process and pluralism* category, and the UAE, where the *functioning of government* score improved as a result of measures to bolster transparency at ministry level.

### **North America**

In 2021 North America, comprising only two countries, retained its place as the top-ranked region in the Democracy Index. With a score of 8.36, it continues to outrank western Europe, which has an average score of 8.22. However, North America’s score dropped considerably compared with 2020, when it stood at 8.58. The change was driven by a poorer performance from Canada in 2021; the country’s average score slid to 8.87 in 2021, down from 9.24 in 2020, while it fell seven spots in the global ranking, to 12th. Nevertheless, Canada maintains its standing in the “full democracy” category. The US continues to trail Canada, with a score of 7.85 in 2021, compared with 7.92 in 2020. The US slipped one spot in our global ranking, to 26th position, and remains in the “flawed democracy” category, where it has stood since 2016.

**Table 10.**  
**North America 2021**

	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	8.87	12	1	10.00	8.21	8.89	8.13	9.12	Full democracy
United States of America	7.85	26	2	9.17	6.43	8.89	6.25	8.53	Flawed democracy
Regional score	8.36			9.58	7.32	8.89	7.19	8.82	

Source: EIU.

### **US democratic institutions remain resilient (for now)**

The US continues to perform well across a number of categories. The US score for *political participation* remains among the highest worldwide (at 8.89, alongside Canada) and stands at its highest level since the Democracy Index first launched in 2006. Americans have become much more engaged in politics in recent years. According to the 2017-20 World Values Survey (WVS), reflecting data

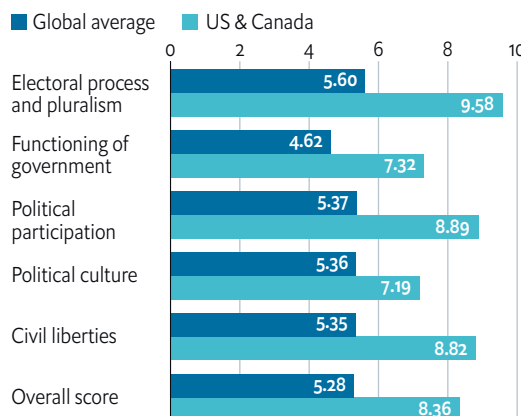
collected in 2017, nearly two-thirds of US respondents were either “very” (21.1%) or “somewhat” (43%) interested in politics. A series of high-impact events in 2020—including a politicised pandemic and a presidential election that the two main political parties framed in existential terms—boosted political engagement and participation. The November 2020 presidential election attracted the highest voter turnout since 1900, with over 66% of the voting-eligible population casting ballots. Two months later, a record number of voters participated in the consequential Georgia run-off election that determined which party would control the Senate (the upper house).

The US also scores highly for *civil liberties* (8.53) and for *electoral process and pluralism* (9.17). The past year has underscored the resilience of the country’s democratic institutions. The run-up to the change of administrations in late January 2021 was uncharacteristically tumultuous, marked by a riot at the US Capitol and attempts by the outgoing president, Donald Trump, and several Republican lawmakers to overturn the election results. However, the inauguration of the new president, Joe Biden, a Democrat, proceeded smoothly, and the first year of his presidency has not faced significant disruptions.

Looking ahead, new threats could emerge and undermine the country’s political institutions. According to the Brennan Center for Justice, a non-partisan think tank, at least 19 states passed laws in 2021 that restrict voting access. “Gerrymandering”, whereby voting district boundaries are intentionally drawn along partisan lines, poses an additional risk to increasing the US’s democratic deficit. Following the August 2021 publication of the 2020 US census results, state legislatures are now undertaking this once-in-a-decade process.

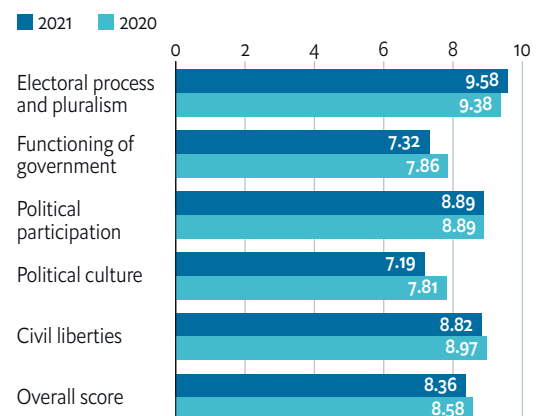
**US & Canada:**

**Democracy Index 2021 by category**  
 (Index score out of 10, 10 being best)



Source: EIU.

**Change in category scores 2020-21**  
 (Index score out of 10, 10 being best)



**Polarisation is the biggest threat to US democracy**

The US’s overall score in the Democracy Index remains weighed down by the country’s intense levels of political and cultural polarisation. Pluralism and competing alternatives are essential for a functioning democracy, but differences of opinion in the US have hardened into political sectarianism



and institutional gridlock. This trend has long compromised the *functioning of government*, and the US score for this category fell to a new low of 6.43 in 2021, down from 6.79 in 2020. The current Congress is divided, with Democrats holding only wafer-thin majorities in both the House of Representatives (the lower house) and the Senate. This has further crippled the legislative process, particularly as Democrats contend with widening divisions between their moderate and hard-line members. Obstruction will worsen ahead of the November 2022 mid-term elections—which could flip the majorities in both houses of Congress—as neither party will want to appear to be ceding ground to the other.

*Political culture* remains the weakest category for the US, with a score of 6.25 in 2021, unchanged from 2020. Social cohesion has collapsed and consensus has evaporated on fundamental issues, such as election outcomes and public health practices. According to an Axios-Momentive poll conducted in early January 2022, only 55% of Americans believe that Mr Biden legitimately won the 2020 election, despite no evidence of widespread voter fraud. Meanwhile, coronavirus vaccines have become a new battleground in the country's culture wars, with over a quarter of the US adult population still yet to receive a full course of vaccination. In 2021 reproductive rights re-emerged as an additional flashpoint, with nearly 20 states enacting more than 100 new abortion restrictions. A highly politicised media, including the main network TV channels, continue to foment and amplify these divides.

The US score for our "citizens control" indicator (gauging the degree to which citizens feel they have control over their lives) continued to fall in 2021, following a trend that emerged in 2020 amid the onset of the coronavirus pandemic. Much of this decline reflected pandemic fatigue and growing resistance to coronavirus restrictions after previous measures were rolled back earlier in 2021. For example, a Morning Consult poll conducted in late November 2021 found that only 44% of American adults supported closing businesses and government facilities to combat the Omicron variant of the coronavirus, while more than 70% supported less restrictive measures, such as social distancing and mask wearing.

### **Canada tumbles amid the Covid-19 pandemic**

Canada continues to score highly in our Democracy Index, thanks to the country's history of stable, democratic government. However, Canada's performance was considerably lower in 2021 compared with 2020, largely reflecting the release of the country's 2017-20 WVS results in July 2021. The data, which were collected in October 2020, captured a souring of public sentiment amid the coronavirus pandemic, particularly as the country grappled with a second wave of infections during that month. The results also reflected frustration concerning the reimposition of pandemic containment measures, after these were rolled back during the summer months, as well as reported difficulties accessing the federal government's coronavirus relief benefits.

The impact of the new WVS data was particularly concentrated in the *functioning of government* and *political culture* categories of the Democracy Index; both scores fell steeply for Canada in 2021 (to 8.21 and 8.13, respectively) compared with previous years. According to the WVS, a mere 10.4% of Canadians felt that they had "a great deal" of freedom of choice and control, while only 23.5% had "a great deal" or "quite a lot" of confidence in political parties. As many as 13.5% of Canadians expressed a preference for military rule, and more than 55% felt that rule by experts or a technocratic government was "very good" or "fairly good".



Canada remains a top performer in *electoral process and pluralism* (10.00) and *political participation* (8.89). Although voter turnout fell in the September 2021 parliamentary elections (to 62.3%) compared with the previous poll in 2019 (67.7%), it remained well above the 50% threshold—meaning that Canada comfortably avoided a downgrade on this indicator. Canada continues to outperform the US in *civil liberties* (9.12). However, Canada’s score fell slightly compared with 2020, owing to an April 2021 ruling by the Québec Superior Court to uphold the province’s recent ban on wearing religious symbols in certain public-services jobs.

## Sub-Saharan Africa

Many of the nations in Sub-Saharan Africa are concentrated at the bottom of the Democracy Index rankings. The continent has only one “full democracy”—Mauritius—and six “flawed democracies” in 2021, unchanged from the 2020 index. The number of countries classed as “hybrid regimes”, at 14, is one more than in the 2020 index, as Mauritania’s score improved sufficiently to lift it out of the “authoritarian regimes” category, following improvements such as increased female representation in its parliament. Authoritarian forms of government continued to dominate, with 23 countries still classified as such.

**Table 11.**  
**Sub-Saharan Africa 2021**

	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
Mauritius	8.08	19	1	9.17	7.86	6.11	8.75	8.53	Full democracy
Botswana	7.73	30	2	9.17	6.79	6.67	7.50	8.53	Flawed democracy
Cabo Verde	7.65	32	3	9.17	7.00	6.67	6.88	8.53	Flawed democracy
South Africa	7.05	44	4	7.42	7.14	8.33	5.00	7.35	Flawed democracy
Namibia	6.52	55	5	7.00	5.36	6.67	5.63	7.94	Flawed democracy
Ghana	6.50	56=	6	8.33	5.36	6.67	6.25	5.88	Flawed democracy
Lesotho	6.30	64	7	9.17	4.14	6.11	5.63	6.47	Flawed democracy
Malawi	5.74	78	8	7.00	4.29	5.00	6.25	6.18	Hybrid regime
Zambia	5.72	79=	9	7.50	3.64	5.00	6.88	5.59	Hybrid regime
Madagascar	5.70	83	10	7.92	3.57	6.67	5.63	4.71	Hybrid regime
Senegal	5.53	88	11	5.67	5.71	4.44	6.25	5.59	Hybrid regime
Liberia	5.43	90	12	7.42	2.71	6.11	5.63	5.29	Hybrid regime
Tanzania	5.10	92=	13	4.83	5.00	5.00	6.25	4.41	Hybrid regime
Kenya	5.05	94	14	3.50	5.36	6.67	5.63	4.12	Hybrid regime
Sierra Leone	4.97	97	15	6.58	2.86	3.89	6.25	5.29	Hybrid regime
Uganda	4.48	100	16	3.42	3.21	3.89	6.88	5.00	Hybrid regime
Gambia	4.41	101=	17	3.58	4.29	4.44	5.63	4.12	Hybrid regime
Côte d’Ivoire	4.22	105	18	4.33	2.86	4.44	5.63	3.82	Hybrid regime
Benin	4.19	106	19	1.67	5.36	3.89	5.63	4.41	Hybrid regime
Nigeria	4.11	107	20	5.17	3.93	3.89	3.75	3.82	Hybrid regime
Mauritania	4.03	108	21	3.50	3.57	5.56	3.13	4.41	Hybrid regime

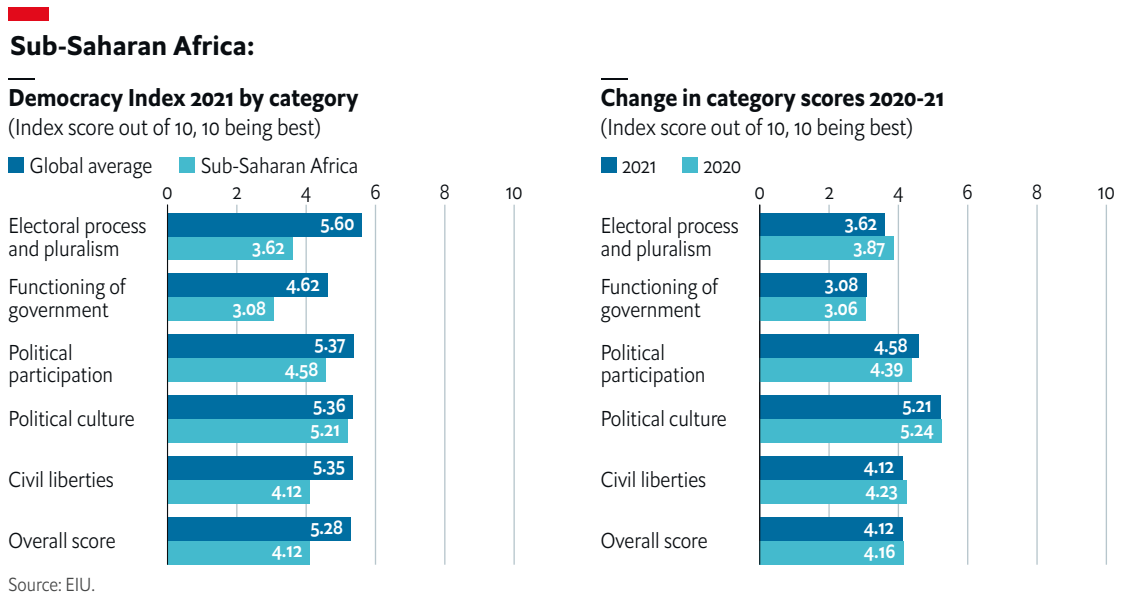
**Table 11.**  
**Sub-Saharan Africa 2021**

	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
Burkina Faso	3.84	111=	22	3.00	2.36	5.00	5.00	3.82	Authoritarian
Mozambique	3.51	116=	23	2.58	1.43	5.00	5.00	3.53	Authoritarian
Mali	3.48	119=	24	2.42	0.00	5.56	5.63	3.82	Authoritarian
Gabon	3.40	121	25	2.17	1.86	4.44	5.00	3.53	Authoritarian
Angola	3.37	122	26	1.33	2.86	5.00	5.00	2.65	Authoritarian
Ethiopia	3.30	123	27	0.42	3.21	6.11	5.00	1.76	Authoritarian
Niger	3.22	125	28	2.00	1.14	3.89	4.38	4.71	Authoritarian
Comoros	3.20	126	29	2.08	2.21	4.44	3.75	3.53	Authoritarian
Rwanda	3.10	127	30	1.42	4.29	2.78	4.38	2.65	Authoritarian
Eswatini	3.08	128=	31	0.92	2.86	2.78	5.63	3.24	Authoritarian
Zimbabwe	2.92	133	32	0.00	2.50	3.89	5.00	3.24	Authoritarian
Togo	2.80	136	33	0.92	1.79	3.33	5.00	2.94	Authoritarian
Congo (Brazzaville)	2.79	137	34	0.00	2.50	4.44	3.75	3.24	Authoritarian
Guinea-Bissau	2.75	138	35	4.92	0.00	3.33	3.13	2.35	Authoritarian
Djibouti	2.74	139	36	0.00	1.29	4.44	5.63	2.35	Authoritarian
Cameroon	2.56	143	37	0.33	2.14	3.89	4.38	2.06	Authoritarian
Guinea	2.28	147	38	1.25	0.43	3.33	3.75	2.65	Authoritarian
Burundi	2.13	149	39	0.00	0.00	3.89	5.00	1.76	Authoritarian
Eritrea	2.03	153	40	0.00	2.14	0.56	6.88	0.59	Authoritarian
Equatorial Guinea	1.92	158	41	0.00	0.43	3.33	4.38	1.47	Authoritarian
Chad	1.67	160	42	0.00	0.00	2.22	3.75	2.35	Authoritarian
Central African Republic	1.43	162=	43	1.25	0.00	1.67	1.88	2.35	Authoritarian
Democratic Republic of Congo	1.40	164	44	0.75	0.00	2.22	3.13	0.88	Authoritarian
Regional score	4.12			3.62	3.08	4.58	5.21	4.12	

Source: EIU.

The overall average regional score fell marginally in 2021, to 4.12, down from an already low 4.16 in 2020, continuing a long-running democratic recession. The modest gains made in the first decade after the index began in 2006 (when the average regional score rose from 4.24 to a highpoint of 4.38 in 2015) have since dissipated and the region's score has been falling ever since. A total of 16 of the region's 44 countries registered a decline in their score, with the most precipitous being in Guinea (-0.80), Mali (-0.45), Benin (-0.39), Congo (Brazzaville, -0.32) and Angola (-0.29). Some 14 countries stagnated, with their total scores remaining the same as in 2020. This left 14 countries that recorded improvements in their scores, most of which were modest, with the exception being Zambia, which recorded a 0.86-point improvement in its score to take its total score to 5.72.

The decline in the average regional score was driven by a deterioration in the scores in three out of the five categories of the Democracy Index—*electoral process and pluralism*, *civil liberties*, and *political culture*, which declined by 0.26, 0.11 and 0.03 respectively. The region's average score for *political*



*participation* increased by 0.19 points and that for *functioning of government* rose by a marginal 0.02 points.

### Return of the coup

A notable development of 2021 was the high number of coups on the continent, particularly in west Africa. There was a decline in the incidence of coups and attempted coups in the first two decades of the 21st century; by contrast there were about 20 coups per decade in the 1960-2000 period. In 2021 the military seized power in Mali and Guinea, and a coup was also attempted by elements of the military in Niger (it was defeated by the presidential guard).

Governments across the region have made efforts to move away from the previous “coup culture”. These efforts were given a boost by Nigeria’s transition from military to civilian rule in 1999. However, Nigeria is increasingly unable to act as a regional power broker, owing in large part to the multiple security issues that it faces. Indeed, for many countries in the vicinity, Nigeria has become a source of instability. In addition, the spread of jihadist groups throughout west Africa has led to increased tension between governments and militaries, creating the conditions for increased factionalisation among competing elites and an increase in coups.

Mali was downgraded from a “hybrid regime” to an “authoritarian regime” in 2020, following the overthrow of the civilian government there. This position has been cemented following the military’s subsequent overthrow of the initial post-coup transitional government in May 2021. The junta’s leader, Colonel Assimi Goïta, was then appointed as Mali’s interim president. Mali’s score fell by 0.45 points to 3.48, and it fell down the rankings to 119th position (out of 167). In Guinea, meanwhile, the country’s increasingly authoritarian president, Alpha Condé, was overthrown. In 2020 Mr Condé altered the country’s constitution to allow himself a third term in office, and his rule had become increasingly pernicious and violent as he cracked down on protests, leaving hundreds dead. Guinea’s score fell by 0.80 points in 2021, to 2.28, and the country fell 14 places in the rankings, to 147th place.

Elsewhere, other negative trends continued to weigh on the democratic credentials of many Sub-Saharan governments. These included increasingly dubious elections, such as that in Benin, where the president, Patrice Talon, used the justice system and his control of parliament to exclude credible challengers from the 2021 presidential election. Continued external involvement in many countries' government institutions, including in many former French colonies in the Sahel sub-region, reflects the weakness of the state in the region and an inability to assert independent statehood free from external support. The Sahel continues to be wracked by jihadist insurgencies linked to transnational terrorist networks. In recent years, most governments in the sub-region have become dependent for their survival on the support of France and, increasingly, other European countries.

An exception to both these trends was Zambia, whose increasingly autocratic leader, Edgar Lungu, was ousted in a democratic transition of power. President Lungu and his Patriotic Front (PF) party had presided over a steep rise in public debt, much of it owed to Chinese lenders, and had become increasingly unpopular. Despite efforts by Mr Lungu and the PF to rig the presidential and parliamentary elections in August, the scale of the opposition victory for the United Party for National Development and its leader, Hakainde Hichilema, led to a peaceful transition of power. Zambia remains classified as a "hybrid regime", but its score improved the most out of any Sub-Saharan country in the 2021 index, rising by 0.86 points to 5.72.

Overall, there are common factors contributing to democratic weakness in the region, as expressed in the low average regional scores for *electoral process and pluralism*, *functioning of government* and *civil liberties*, compared with the global average. The gap between the regional and global average (-2.02) is especially pronounced for the *electoral process and pluralism* category, an essential precondition for any democracy. The deficiencies in this area are closely connected to the regional shortfall in terms of civil liberties, where the gap between Sub-Saharan Africa's average score and the average global score is 1.26 points (the gap with other developing regions such as Latin America is even greater, at 2.52, and with developed democracies such as western Europe and north America greater still, at 4.31).

This democratic divide between the region and the rest of the world was demonstrated in 2021 in many countries. For example, in countries such as Eritrea and Rwanda, the ruling party continued to exercise absolute control over all aspects of political life. Eritrea's score for political pluralism has remained 0 since the start of the Democracy Index in 2006—despite the political pluralism that is enshrined in its constitution, the country has never held an election. Paul Kagame has served as president of Rwanda since 2000, and opposition parties in the country struggle to make any impact. Meanwhile, the Ethiopian government used heavy-handed tactics to scupper the opposition ahead of the much-awaited 2021 parliamentary elections. Ethiopia's score for the civil liberties category suffered a further blow in 2021 as the government cited security concerns as a reason for digital repression and maintained a complete internet blackout in certain parts of the country for most of the year. Nigeria, a major African economy and "hybrid regime", scores very poorly on civil liberties and its score for this category slipped further in 2021 (to 3.82) after it banned the use of Twitter for a time.

The region's average score for the *functioning of government* category rose by a tiny amount in 2021 compared with 2020 (by 0.02 points). Persistent deficiencies in governance, together with pandemic-induced increased economic hardship, compounded already high poverty rates and

public dissatisfaction with ruling elites. Burundi, the Central African Republic, Chad, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Guinea Bissau and Mali score zero in this category, reflecting a lack of government accountability, weaknesses in public institutions such as the judiciary, endemic corruption, an absence of transparency and persistent delays in paying public-sector wages.

Amid this bleak democratic landscape, there were a few positive developments. The score for voter turnout increased in 10 countries across the continent, confirming that the African public's engagement with politics remained generally strong across the continent. In addition, women's participation in parliament—as measured by the proportion of women represented in the legislature—improved considerably in the region: 13 countries registered an improvement in their score for this indicator.

## Western Europe

The average regional score for western Europe declined from 8.29 in 2020 to 8.22 in 2021. Out of the 21 countries in the region, 13 registered a decline in their scores, five were stable and just three posted an improvement. Across the region as a whole, the most significant downwards score changes were in the category of political culture, for which the aggregate score fell from 8.21 to 8.04, and in the civil liberties category, where the average regional score declined from 8.53 to 8.43. In terms of political culture, perceptions of democracy—and of the benefits that democratic governance can bring—remain strong, but there has been some slippage in other areas, including increased support for “strong” leaders and for technocratic governance or expert rule.

### **Pandemic continues to constrain civil liberties**

The region's average score in the *civil liberties* category fell sharply in 2020 as lockdown measures used to combat the coronavirus pandemic curtailed freedom of movement and association. The score downgrades related to pandemic restrictions largely remained in place in 2021 as governments retained the right to re-impose restrictions in the face of fresh waves of the pandemic. There was a further deterioration in the *civil liberties* category in 2021, from an average of 8.53 in 2020 to 8.43, but these reflected a variety of country-specific developments in a range of different areas, including judicial independence, diversity of media coverage and equality. The average regional score for *electoral process and pluralism* fell marginally, to 9.37 (compared with 9.39 in 2020), while that for *functioning of government* also slipped slightly, from 7.71 in 2020 to 7.69. The average regional score for *political participation* was the weakest of the five categories comprising the overall Democracy Index, remaining unchanged at 7.59.

Despite this slippage, western Europe continues to rank highly in the Democracy Index. The region has the second-highest average overall score, after North America, and boasts the largest number of “full democracies” (12 out of a total of 21). The majority 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”: seven of the eight score more than 7.50 (the “flawed democracy” ranking represents countries scoring above 6.00 and up to 8.00). With an unchanged score of 7.99, France is closest to an upgrade.

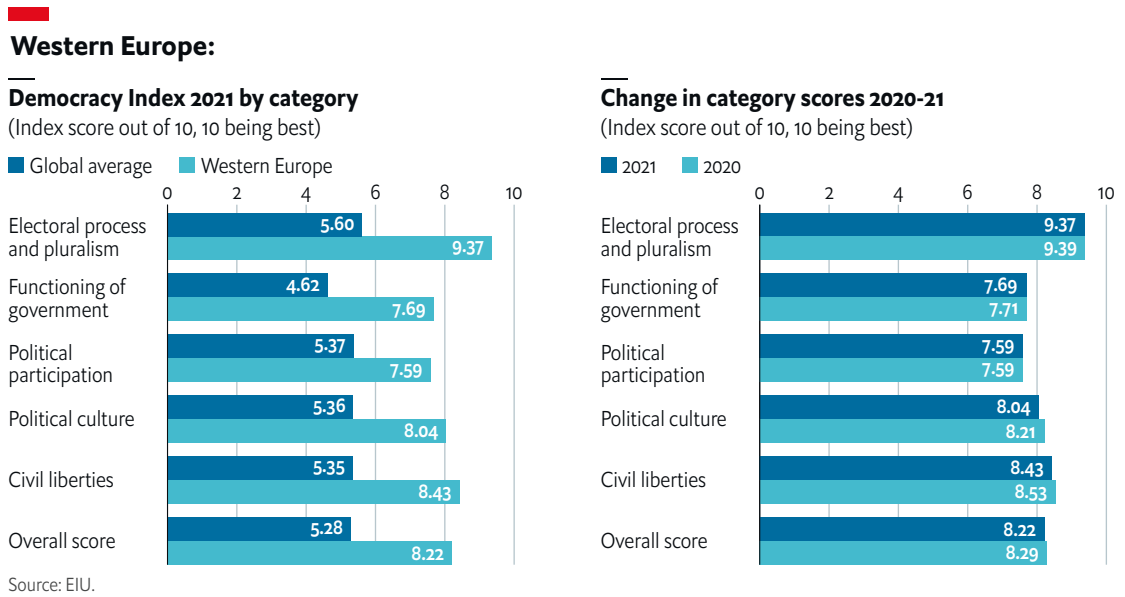
**Table 12.**  
**Western Europe 2021**

	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
Norway	9.75	1	1	10.00	9.64	10.00	10.00	9.12	Full democracy
Finland	9.27	3	2	10.00	9.29	8.89	8.75	9.41	Full democracy
Sweden	9.26	4	3	9.58	9.29	8.33	10.00	9.12	Full democracy
Iceland	9.18	5	4	10.00	8.21	8.89	9.38	9.41	Full democracy
Denmark	9.09	6	5	10.00	8.93	8.33	9.38	8.82	Full democracy
Ireland	9.00	7	6	10.00	7.86	8.33	9.38	9.41	Full democracy
Switzerland	8.90	9=	7	9.58	8.93	7.78	9.38	8.82	Full democracy
Netherlands	8.88	11	8	9.58	8.93	8.33	8.75	8.82	Full democracy
Luxembourg	8.68	14	9	10.00	8.57	6.67	8.75	9.41	Full democracy
Germany	8.67	15	10	9.58	8.21	8.33	8.13	9.12	Full democracy
United Kingdom	8.10	18	11	9.58	7.50	8.33	6.25	8.82	Full democracy
Austria	8.07	20=	12	9.58	6.79	8.89	6.88	8.24	Full democracy
France	7.99	22	13	9.58	7.50	7.78	6.88	8.24	Flawed democracy
Spain	7.94	24	14	9.58	7.14	7.22	7.50	8.24	Flawed democracy
Portugal	7.82	28	15	9.58	7.14	6.67	6.88	8.82	Flawed democracy
Italy	7.68	31	16	9.58	6.43	7.22	7.50	7.65	Flawed democracy
Malta	7.57	33	17	9.17	6.79	5.56	8.13	8.24	Flawed democracy
Greece	7.56	34	18	9.58	6.07	6.11	7.50	8.53	Flawed democracy
Belgium	7.51	36	19	9.58	7.86	5.00	6.88	8.24	Flawed democracy
Cyprus	7.43	37	20	9.17	5.36	7.22	6.88	8.53	Flawed democracy
Turkey	4.35	103	21	3.50	5.00	5.56	5.63	2.06	Hybrid regime
Regional score	8.22			9.37	7.69	7.59	8.04	8.43	

Source: EIU.

### **Spain slips from “full democracy” to “flawed democracy”**

The number of “full democracies” fell from 13 in 2020 to 12 in 2021, with Spain slipping into the ranks of “flawed democracies”. Spain’s previous score of 8.12 meant that it classified as a “full democracy” only by a narrow margin. A small deterioration in its score this year, to 7.94, was sufficient to result in a category downgrade. The deterioration relates mainly to a weaker score for judicial independence, following ongoing political divisions over the appointment of new magistrates to the General Council of the Judiciary, the body that oversees the judicial system and is intended to guarantee its independence. At present, the council is operating on a caretaker basis, as its term of office expired in 2018, and there has been no agreement about the appointment of new judges (which need a three-fifths majority in parliament). The longer the situation drags on, the greater the risk of the Council being undermined and vulnerable to politicisation. More broadly, Spain’s political scene has become increasingly unsettled in recent years, with parliamentary fragmentation, a litany of political graft scandals and rising regional nationalism in Catalonia posing challenges to governance.



**Political fragmentation accelerates**

Spain was the only country in the region to be downgraded by regime type in 2021, but the majority of countries registered minor slippage in their scores, reflecting the prolonged political fallout from the coronavirus pandemic. Many administrations are struggling to address social problems that have been exacerbated by the pandemic, which in turn is undermining trust in government and institutions. In the UK, this has combined with a growing perception about a lack of transparency, with a scandal about party financing and a string of controversies undermining confidence in government. A Brexit-related take-up of party membership and political activism has waned, with weaker citizen engagement with politics. These developments led to a decline in the UK’s score, from 8.54 in 2020 to 8.10.

Meanwhile, populist parties continued to focus on public concerns about immigration, but they also broadened their scope to attract voters frustrated with the imposition of pandemic restrictions. Vaccine-sceptic parties enjoyed substantial electoral gains in Austria and Italy in 2021, and protests broke out in a range of countries (including the Netherlands and France) over vaccination mandates. Public frustration has risen over government efforts to move towards mandatory vaccinations, either through a direct legal requirement (as in Austria, Greece and Italy) or through indirect measures that block unvaccinated people from workplaces and public spaces (as in France). With the vast majority of people getting vaccinated, this represents a minority view in all countries in western Europe, but it is one that attracts sufficient support to generate some social unrest.

Rather than fostering a greater sense of unity, the pandemic has exacerbated a trend towards political fragmentation. Some countries have found it more difficult to form governments, with the four parties that comprised the previous ruling coalition in the Netherlands taking a record 299 days to renew their agreement after the March 2021 election. Others comprise an unusually large number of parties (seven, in Belgium’s case). In Germany’s case, a coalition agreement was reached earlier than expected—60 days after the September 2021 election—but it comprises the country’s first ever three-party alliance. Other countries that held elections in 2021, including Norway and Cyprus, have failed

to form majority coalitions and are led by parties that need to negotiate support for legislation on a bill-by-bill basis.

### **Nordics remain top-scoring**

The Nordics stand out as particularly high-scoring, occupying five of the top six positions in the global rankings. These countries boast high scores across all categories, but particularly in functioning of government and civil liberties. Ireland and Switzerland also rank among the top ten countries in the index; the latter was one of only three countries to register an increase in their underlying scores this year. Of the other countries to register improvements, Greece's increased score reflects a reduction in the extent to which external factors influence government functions and policies (part of the *functioning of government* category). While Greece remains subject to a post-bailout monitoring programme and demanding fiscal-deficit targets, the government has progressively taken ownership of this programme.

### **Turkey is an outlier**

Turkey is the only "hybrid regime" in the region and has recorded a big decline in its total score over the past decade, roughly mirroring the increasingly autocratic rule of its strongman president, Recep Tayyip Erdogan. From a highpoint of 5.76 points in 2012, Turkey's average score has declined by 1.41 points. Its score slipped again in 2021, falling from 4.48 in 2020 to 4.35, owing to weakening public confidence in government. Hard-won improvements in macroeconomic stability (on which the ruling Justice and Development Party had based its previous electoral success) were undermined as a result of rising prices, policy mistakes and a depreciating local currency. Public frustration with widespread corruption has also damaged confidence in the government.



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## 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.

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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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