



The  
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# DEMOCRACY INDEX 2019

## *SUMMARY OF IMPORTANT REPORTS*

This is a summary of the report from which we have selected only the most relevant and important parts. It is part of our endeavour to help aspirants grasp the central theme of any report without devoting excess time and energy to it. In case of doubts, kindly comment or send us a message.

- The Economist Intelligence Unit's Democracy Index 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).
- In the 2019 Democracy Index the average global score for democracy fell from 5.48 in 2018 to 5.44 (on a scale of 0-10). This is the worst average global score since the index was first produced in 2006.

### **What lies behind the global democratic regression?**

A regression and/or stagnation of democracy has been reflected in the declining average scores for the advanced democracies of the US and Europe over many years. In our view, the main manifestations of this democracy recession include:

1. an increasing emphasis on elite/expert governance rather than popular participatory democracy;
2. a growing influence of unelected, unaccountable institutions and expert bodies;
3. the removal of substantive issues of national importance from the political arena to be decided by politicians, experts or supranational bodies behind closed doors;
4. a widening gap between political elites and parties on the one hand and national electorates on the other; and
5. a decline in civil liberties, including media freedom and freedom of speech.

- Popular disappointment with the functioning of democracy across the developed and developing world can be explained by the worsening in the average global score across all but one of the **five categories of the Democracy Index** in recent years, a trend that continued in 2019.
- The **five categories across which all countries are assessed are:** electoral process and pluralism; the functioning of government; political participation; political culture; and civil liberties.

**The average global scores for all categories of the Democracy Index with the exception of political participation have fallen almost sequentially since 2012.**

Compared with 2008, the first year for which comparable data are available, the average category scores have fallen significantly.

1. **The biggest decline has been for civil liberties**, the score for which fell from 6.35 in 2008 to 5.74 in 2019. This decline was recorded across all regions of the world, without exception, with the biggest being recorded in Latin America whose average score fell by 0.75 points between 2011 and 2019. In the past decade, in fact, no scores in the Democracy Index have deteriorated as much as those related to freedom of expression and media freedom.
2. **The second-worst-performing category over the past decade has been electoral process and pluralism, continuing years of steady decline.** The average global score for this category has fallen from 6.07 in 2008 to 5.80 in 2019, with most of the regression being concentrated in developing regions such as Asia, eastern Europe, Latin America and Sub-Saharan Africa.

3. **The functioning of government category is the lowest-scoring category in the Democracy Index**, with an average global score of 4.81 in 2019, down from 5.00 in 2008. Asia (5.81), Latin America (5.40) and eastern Europe (4.54) have struggled to improve their performance in this category. It is in the functioning of government category that the advanced democracies have also struggled in recent years and registered regressions in their scores. Government dysfunction, insufficient transparency and a lack of accountability help to explain the relatively low scores for the mature democracies in this category.
4. **There has been a decline in the average global score for the political culture category between 2008 and 2019, from 5.73 to 5.57, a smaller regression compared with other categories.** Disillusionment with traditional political parties which have failed to address weaknesses in the practice of democracy has undermined confidence in democracy itself. In our Democracy Index the score for popular perceptions of democracy has fallen in recent years. There has also been a notable decline in the score relating to the degree of societal consensus and cohesion necessary to support democracy.
5. **The one category which has recorded a steady and significant upward trajectory is political participation**, for which the average global score has risen from 4.59 in 2008 to 5.28 in 2019. The failures of “actually existing democracy” in the developing and developed world have inspired millions of people who aspire to have a better version of democracy, to become engaged, and to demand change. The willingness of populations to take to the streets to express their opposition to the established order, to protest against official measures, unjust laws and corruption and to demand change resulted in improved scores for political participation in many countries and across the regions.

**Defining 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.

**Measuring democracy:**

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.

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### Countries can be placed into our types of regimes:

1. **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.
2. **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.
3. **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.
4. **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.