



First Democracy Summit

Why in News

Recently, the **Summit for Democracy was hosted by the United States** "to renew democracy at home and confront autocracies abroad".

- The **US President also announced the establishment of the Presidential Initiative for Democratic Renewal** that will provide foreign assistance initiatives.
 - The initiative will be powered by \$424.4 million and will be aimed to support free media, fight corruption, strengthen democratic reforms, for use of technology for democracy and for defence of free and fair elections.

Key Points

▪ About:

- It aims **to show how open, rights-respecting societies can work together** to effectively tackle the challenges of present time, such as the [Covid-19 pandemic](#), the [climate crisis](#), and [inequality](#).
- The Summit was centered around three principal themes:
 - Defending against **authoritarianism**
 - Addressing and fighting **corruption**
 - Advancing respect for **human rights**

▪ India's Stand:

- **Democracies should jointly deal with social media and [crypto currencies](#)**, so that they are used to empower democracy, not to undermine it.
- India is the **largest democracy in the world** which has 2,500-year-old democratic traditions and **proposes to share India's democratic experience** through digital solutions.
 - Referred to the **civilisational tradition of democracy in India** citing the ancient city states under the Lichhavis and other people that flourished in India during the late Vedic and Buddhist period and continued to the early medieval period.
- **Democracy has taken various shapes across the world** and there is a need to work on the **democratic practices and symptoms**.
- It is needed to constantly **improve the democratic practices and systems** and to continuously enhance inclusion, transparency, human dignity, responsive grievance redressal and decentralisation of power.

Democracy

▪ About:

- Democracy is a **system of government** in which the citizens exercise power directly or

elect representatives from among themselves to form a governing body, such as a parliament.

- It is also referred to as **“rule of the majority”**. Here the power can’t be inherited. People elect their leaders.
- Representatives stand in an election and the citizens vote for their representative. The representative with the most number of votes gets the power.

▪ **Brief History:**

- **India is the world’s largest democracy.** India became a democratic nation post its **independence in the year 1947**. Thereafter, the citizens of India were given the right to vote and elect their leaders.

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THE 25 OLDEST DEMOCRACIES IN THE WORLD

OLDER YOUNGER

They define a country as democratic if they meet the following conditions:



The executive is directly or indirectly elected in popular elections and is responsible either directly to voters or to a legislature.

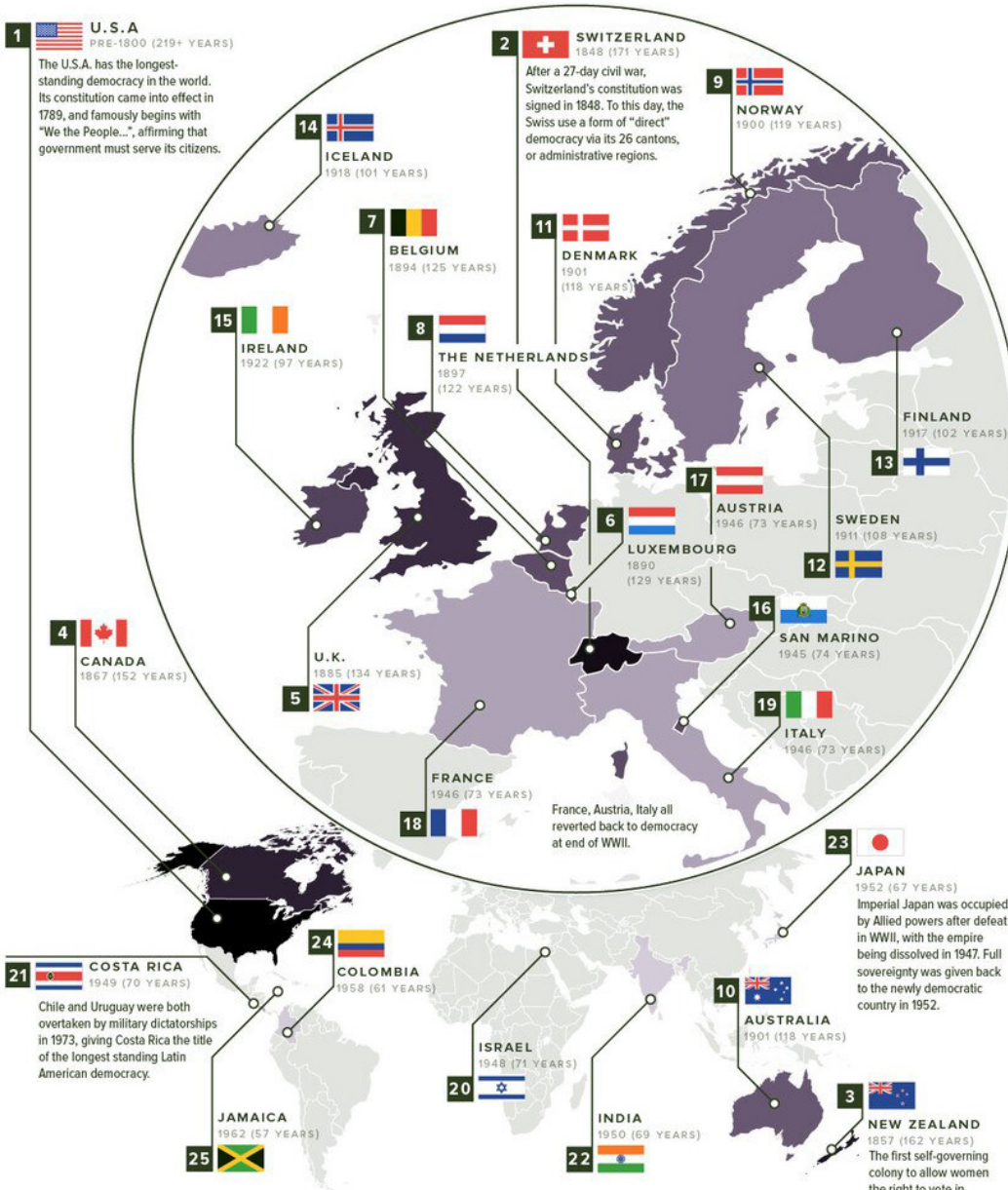


The legislature (or the executive if elected directly) is chosen in free and fair elections.



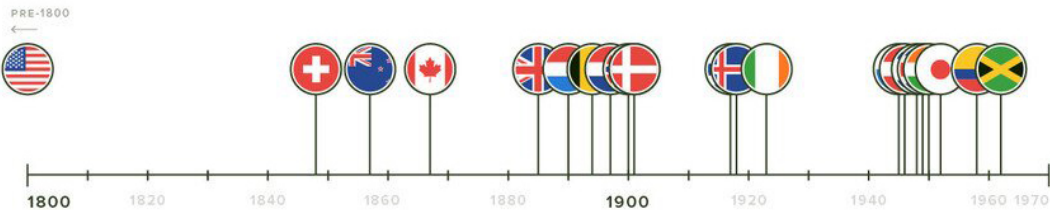
A majority of adult men has the right to vote.

Universal suffrage came later. In the U.S., for example, all women could not vote until 1920.



TIMELINE VIEW

In the grand scheme of human history, democracy is still a relatively new concept. In fact, the vast majority of the world's current democratic regimes are less than 50 years old.



▪ India's Role in Strengthening Democracy:

◦ Around the World:

• Capacity Building:

- Beyond demonstrating the [Election Commission](#) (EC)'s enviable record in conducting free and fair elections, India **has given training to the thousands of electoral officials** from Asia, Africa, and other regions of the world in election management and parliamentary affairs for several decades.

• Developmental Partnership Administration (DPA):

- India has created a Developmental Partnership Administration (DPA) within the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) to **offer critical development assistance projects** for many developing and new democracies across geographies.
- **Examples:** The building of the Afghan Parliament, providing support to Myanmar for upgrading its administrative and judicial capabilities, amongst others.

• Funding to Democracy Watch Dogs:

- Together with the US, India was instrumental in the creation of the UN Democracy Fund (UNDEF) and the Community of Democracies to support democracy at international levels.
- Incidentally, **India is one of the largest contributors to UNDEF** that supports 66 NGO-led projects in South Asia.

• United Nations Democracy Caucus:

- India also helped to form the **United Nations Democracy Caucus**, the only body within the UN system to **convene democratic states** based on shared values.

◦ In India:

• Breaking Racial Discrimination:

- India has **given representation to a Dalit woman** to rise to the highest office (as Chief Minister).

• Right to Information Act, 2005:

- The act, a **totally civil society driven grassroot movement** has truly democratised information spaces for ordinary citizens.

• Democratic Decentralisation:

- Twin **constitutional amendments (73rd and 74th) in 1992** to create third-tier governments (rural and urban local bodies), has taken deep ground in the last three decades.
- With 3 million representatives at **various levels** ([Gram Sabha](#), [Panchayat Samiti](#), and [Zilla Parishad](#)), this is by far the largest democratic exercise anywhere in the world.

▪ Concerns Related to Democracy:

◦ World:

• Decline in Political Rights and Civil Liberties:

- Democracies across the world—rich and established, developing and newly established ones—are grappling with serious crises on many key parameters.
- According to the reports of leading democracy watchdogs, democracy is witnessing an alarming decline.
- According to [Democracy Index 2020](#), as low as **9% of the world population live in a “full” democracy.**
 - The recent **military coups in Myanmar, Tunisia, and Sudan** are testimonies to the steady rise of anti-democratic forces and the failure of the global democracy collective to do anything meaningful to stem the rot.
- **Rising Authoritarian:**
 - Rising threats stemming from the steady rise of **authoritarian powers, particularly China** is a major concern.
 - At a time when the West, particularly the US and rich European countries, have considerably ceded their global commitment to democratic values, **China has set its eyes on re-defining global human rights and democracy norms.**
 - **Examples:**
 - China has **marshalled the military and diplomatic means to threaten Taiwan**, forced territorial claims in the disputed [South China Sea](#), thrown millions of [Uyghur Muslims](#) in internment camps, curbed political freedoms in [Hong Kong](#), and launched influence operations across many geographies.
- **India’s:**
 - The [Freedom House 2021 report](#) put India as only **“partly free”**, the V-Dem report went a step ahead to call it an **“electoral autocracy”**.
 - According to the Global [State of Democracy 2021](#) report, India was amongst the **10 most backsliding democracies**—a more severe and deliberate kind of democratic erosion.

Way Forward

- The institutionalization of constitutional democracy has helped the people of India realize the importance of democracy and inculcate democratic sensibilities among them.
- At the same time, it is **important that all the government organs work in harmony** to uphold the trust people of the country have held in them and ensure objectives of true democracy.
- The Government **should hear criticism rather than rejecting it outrightly.** Suggestions on eroding democratic values need a thoughtful, and respectful response.
- The press and the judiciary, which are **considered the pillars of India’s Democracy, require it to be independent of any executive interference** to enable auditing of the work of the executive.

Source: [TH](#)