

## World politics: Democracy in retreat

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FROM THE ECONOMIST INTELLIGENCE UNIT

**There has been a decline in democracy across the world since 2008, according to the 2010 edition of the Economist Intelligence Unit's Democracy Index. The index ranks countries from most democratic to least democratic, reflecting factors from civil liberties to the level of political participation. Norway tops the latest rankings, while North Korea, in 167th place, rates as the world's most repressive state. As significant as any single country's ranking is the global pattern, which is worrying. The financial crisis that started in 2008 accentuated existing negative trends in political development. The decades-long global trend in democratisation had previously come to a halt; now democracy is in retreat.**

The dominant pattern in all regions over the past two years has been backsliding on previously attained progress in democratisation. In all regions, the average democracy score for 2010 is lower than in 2008, when the previous edition of the index was compiled. Moreover, the democracy scores for 91 individual countries are lower in 2010 than in 2008, although in the majority of these cases the deterioration has been modest. Scores have increased, at least marginally, in 48 of the 167 countries covered by the index. Scores have stayed the same in 28 countries.

Developments since 2008 have led us to reclassify the political regimes of 13 countries; sadly, 11 of them have become less democratic. For example, France, Italy, Greece and Slovenia have dropped from the category of "full democracies" to "flawed democracies". Negative political trends in France in recent years include low public confidence in political institutions, reflected in unusually weak support for democracy by developed-country standards. Only Ghana and Mali have been upgraded in both cases from "hybrid regimes" to "flawed democracies".

Although almost one-half of the world's countries can be considered to be democracies, in our index the number of "full democracies" remains low, at only 26 countries; 53 countries are rated as "flawed democracies". Of the remaining 88 countries in our index, 33 are considered to be "hybrid regimes" and 55 are authoritarian. One-half of the world's population lives in a democracy of some sort, although only 12% of people reside in full democracies. Some 2.5bn people, more than one-third of the world's population, still live under authoritarian rule (with a large share being, of course, in China).

### Problems everywhere

Disappointments abound across many of the world's regions. Authoritarian trends have become more entrenched in the Middle East and much of the former Soviet Union. Democratisation in Sub-Saharan Africa is grinding to a halt, and in some cases going into reverse. A political malaise in east-central Europe has led to disappointment and questioning of the strength of the region's democratic transition. Media freedoms are being eroded across Latin America, and populist forces with dubious democratic credentials have come to the fore in a few countries in the region. In the developed West, a precipitous decline in political participation, weaknesses in the functioning of government and security-related curbs on civil liberties are having a corrosive effect on some long-established democracies.

Reversals in democracy and disenchantment with the results of some political liberalisations appear to have a variety of causes. The pace of democratisation was bound to slow after the "easy cases" eager-to-liberalise east-central Europe after the fall of the Berlin Wall, and African regimes susceptible to outside pressure for political change. "Hard cases" such as China and Middle East autocracies were always going to be a more difficult proposition. Autocrats have also learned how better to protect themselves; many of them preside over energy-rich states and have been strengthened by sustained high oil prices.

A key factor is the delegitimation of much of the democracy-promotion agenda, which has been associated with military intervention and unpopular wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. A combination of double standards in foreign policy (autocrats can be good friends as well as foes) and growing infringements of civil liberties has led to charges of hypocrisy against Western states. Problems in the functioning of democracy in leading Western states make efforts to promote democracy elsewhere less credible. The US and UK are in the lower half of the "full democracy" category in our index. In both countries there has been some erosion of civil liberties related to the fight against terrorism. Problems in the functioning of government have become more prominent in the US. In the UK, there is an exceptionally low level of political participation across all

dimensions including voter turnout, membership of political parties and willingness to engage in political activity.

### Blame the economy

The economic and financial crisis has adversely affected democracy in a number of ways. There has been a decline in some aspects of governance, political participation and media freedoms, and a clear deterioration in attitudes associated with, or conducive to, democracy in many countries. The financial and economic crisis has increased the attractiveness of the Chinese model of authoritarian capitalism for some emerging markets. Many non-consolidated democracies are fragile, and socioeconomic stress has led to backsliding in many countries. The underlying shallowness of democratic cultures in many countries has come to the fore.

The impact of the financial crisis on political trends has been most marked in Europe, both east and west. Although extremist political forces in Europe have not profited from the economic crisis as much as might have been feared, populism and anti-immigrant sentiment have nevertheless risen. Confidence in national public institutions in western Europe already low before 2008 in many countries has declined further since the onset of the crisis. Less than one-fifth of west Europeans trust political parties and only about one-third trust their governments and parliaments. Levels of public trust are exceptionally low in the eastern Europe-12 (the 10 new EU member states and EU candidate countries Croatia and Macedonia). Less than 10% of people in this subregion trust political parties and less than one-fifth trust their governments and their parliaments.

### Declines in media freedoms

One notable trend is a decline in media freedoms. This has affected mainly electronic media, which are often under state control or heavy state influence although repression and infringements of the freedom of expression have also extended to the print media. Our rankings show a deterioration in scores for media freedom in 36 countries between 2008 and 2010. These include three countries in western Europe; eight in eastern Europe; nine in Latin America; four in the Middle East and North Africa; four in Asia & Australasia; and eight in Sub-Saharan Africa.

The reasons for this decline are complex and varied. Underlying negative trends appear to have been exacerbated by the post-2008 economic crisis. Many governments have felt increasingly vulnerable, and have reacted by intensifying their efforts to control the media. Increasing unemployment and job insecurity have fostered a climate of fear and self-censorship among journalists in many countries. The concentration of media ownership has tended to increase, which has had a negative impact on the diversity of views and the freedom of expression.

Advanced nations have become more inward-looking. This makes them less interested in, and less capable of, pressurising emerging-market governments to ensure freedom of the press. In authoritarian regimes, many of which have become stronger and more confident, state control and repression of any independent media have, if anything, tended to get worse, with increasing attacks on independent journalists.

### About the Democracy Index

The third edition of the Economist Intelligence Unit's Democracy Index portrays the situation as of November 2010; the first edition measured the situation in September 2006, and the second as of late 2008. The index 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. The index also places countries within one of four types of regimes: full democracies; flawed democracies; hybrid regimes; and authoritarian regimes.

One of the assumptions underpinning our index is that while free and fair elections and civil liberties are necessary conditions for democracy, these alone are unlikely to be sufficient for a full and consolidated democracy if unaccompanied by transparent and at least minimally efficient government, sufficient political participation and a supportive democratic political culture. Hence, for example, Greece's ranking as a flawed democracy. The country scores highly for civil liberties, but poorly for the functioning of government. The conclusion to be drawn from the index as a whole is that it is not easy to build a sturdy democracy. Even in long-established ones, democracy can corrode if it is not nurtured and protected.

### Democracy Index 2010

Full democracies	Overall score	Rank
Norway	9.80	1
Iceland	9.65	2
Denmark	9.52	3
Sweden	9.50	4
New Zealand	9.26	5
Australia	9.22	6
Finland	9.19	7
Switzerland	9.09	8
Canada	9.08	9
Netherlands	8.99	10

Luxembourg	8.88	11
Ireland	8.79	12
Austria	8.49	13
Germany	8.38	14
Malta	8.28	15
Czech Republic	8.19	16
US	8.18	17
Spain	8.16	18
UK	8.16	19
South Korea	8.11	20
Uruguay	8.10	21
Japan	8.08	22
Belgium	8.05	23
Mauritius	8.04	24
Costa Rica	8.04	=24
Portugal	8.02	26
<b>Flawed democracies</b>	<b>Overall score</b>	<b>Rank</b>
Cape Verde	7.94	27
Greece	7.92	28
Italy	7.83	29
South Africa	7.79	30
France	7.77	31
Slovenia	7.69	32
Estonia	7.68	33
Chile	7.67	34
Botswana	7.63	35
Taiwan	7.52	36
Israel	7.48	37
Slovakia	7.35	38
Cyprus	7.29	39
India	7.28	40
Lithuania	7.24	41
Timor-Leste	7.22	42
Hungary	7.21	43
Jamaica	7.21	=43
Trinidad and Tobago	7.16	45
Panama	7.15	46
Brazil	7.12	47
Poland	7.05	48
Latvia	7.05	=48
Mexico	6.93	50
Argentina	6.84	51
Bulgaria	6.84	=51
Croatia	6.81	53
Suriname	6.65	54
Sri Lanka	6.64	55
Romania	6.60	56
Colombia	6.55	57
Thailand	6.55	=57
Papua New Guinea	6.54	59
Indonesia	6.53	60
El Salvador	6.47	61
Paraguay	6.40	62
Peru	6.40	=62
Mongolia	6.36	64
Serbia	6.33	65
Moldova	6.33	=65
Ukraine	6.30	67
Montenegro	6.27	68
Namibia	6.23	69
Dominican Republic	6.20	70
Malaysia	6.19	71
Benin	6.17	72
Macedonia	6.16	73
Philippines	6.12	74
Guyana	6.05	75
Guatemala	6.05	=75
Lesotho	6.02	77
Ghana	6.02	=77
Mali	6.01	79
<b>Hybrid regimes</b>	<b>Overall score</b>	<b>Rank</b>
Hong Kong	5.92	80
Bolivia	5.92	=80
Singapore	5.89	82
Bangladesh	5.87	83
Albania	5.86	84
Malawi	5.84	85
Lebanon	5.82	86
Ecuador	5.77	87
Honduras	5.76	88
Turkey	5.73	89
Nicaragua	5.73	=89
Zambia	5.68	91
Tanzania	5.64	92
Palestine	5.44	93
Bosnia and Hercegovina	5.32	94
Senegal	5.27	95
Venezuela	5.18	96

Liberia	5.07	97
Uganda	5.05	98
Mozambique	4.90	99
Cambodia	4.87	100
Kenya	4.71	101
Bhutan	4.68	102
Georgia	4.59	103
Pakistan	4.55	104
Sierra Leone	4.51	105
Kyrgyz Republic	4.31	106
Russia	4.26	107
Nepal	4.24	108
Armenia	4.09	109
Burundi	4.01	110
Haiti	4.00	111
Iraq	4.00	=111
<b>Authoritarian regimes</b>	<b>Overall score</b>	<b>Rank</b>
Madagascar	3.94	113
Kuwait	3.88	114
Mauritania	3.86	115
Morocco	3.79	116
Jordan	3.74	117
Ethiopia	3.68	118
Fiji	3.62	119
Burkina Faso	3.59	120
Cuba	3.52	121
Bahrain	3.49	122
Nigeria	3.47	123
Togo	3.45	124
Algeria	3.44	125
Cameroon	3.41	126
Comoros	3.41	=126
Niger	3.38	128
Gambia	3.38	=128
Belarus	3.34	130
Angola	3.32	131
Kazakhstan	3.30	132
Gabon	3.29	133
Rwanda	3.25	134
Azerbaijan	3.15	135
China	3.14	136
Qatar	3.09	137
Egypt	3.07	138
Côte d'Ivoire	3.02	139
Vietnam	2.94	140
Swaziland	2.90	141
Congo (Brazzaville)	2.89	142
Oman	2.86	143
Guinea	2.79	144
Tunisia	2.79	=144
Zimbabwe	2.64	146
Yemen	2.64	=146
United Arab Emirates	2.52	148
Tajikistan	2.51	149
Afghanistan	2.48	150
Sudan	2.42	151
Eritrea	2.31	152
Syria	2.31	=152
Djibouti	2.20	154
Democratic Republic of Congo	2.15	155
Laos	2.10	156
Guinea-Bissau	1.99	157
Libya	1.94	158
Iran	1.94	=158
Equatorial Guinea	1.84	160
Saudi Arabia	1.84	=160
Central African Republic	1.82	162
Myanmar	1.77	163
Uzbekistan	1.74	164
Turkmenistan	1.72	165
Chad	1.52	166
North Korea	1.08	167

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