



Grammar of Democracy

Part 1: Democracy in decline



K.C. Suri
Department of Political Science
University of Hyderabad

MCR HRD Institute, Hyderabad
24 February 2022

DEMOCRACY EXPANSION

The story of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries is a story of the spread of ideas of democracy and socialism and their practice. Yearning for freedom, equality, and well-being is the road for social democracy.

Expansion of democracy in waves: 1900s, 1940s and 50s, 1980 and 1990s. Decolonization and advance of democracy in the post-colonial nations in the past five or six decades. A majority of the nations in the world are now democracies.

Numbers of autocracies and democracies

Shown is the number of a given political regime in the world over time. Democracies are defined as the combination of both liberal and elected democracies; autocracies are the sum of closed and elected autocracies.

Our World
in Data



Source: Varieties of Democracy Project (2019, version 9)

CC BY

DEMOCRACIES AND AUTOCRACIES

Type of regime	Number of countries	World population
Democracies	64 (44.3%)	45.7%
Hybrid regimes	34 (20.4%)	17.2%
Authoritarian regimes	59 (35.3%)	37.1%

Source: EIU, *Democracy Index 2021*

Year	Democracies	Autocracies
1950	25	130
1975	38	118
2000	87	89
2018	99	80

Source: *Varieties of Democracy project*

DEMOCRACY IN DECLINE

The dominant narrative about the democracy of our times:

Democracy is in decline, in peril, in crisis. Democracy backsliding, Degeneration of democracy. Regression, Erosion, Recession, Deficits, Reversal of democracy – not only in developing countries of East Europe, Asia, Africa, and Latin America but also in the so-called industrialized and established democracies of the world.

Reversing democracy expansion: 1920s and 1930s, 1960s and 1970s, and 2010s.



Crowds supporting President Trump storm capitol building in Washington DC, January 2021

In the early days of 2021, thousands of people stormed the Capitol building and temporarily disrupted Congress's final certification of the vote.



"Breaking Point: the EU failed us all". Anti-immigrant poster unveiled by UKIP leader Nigel Farage during Brexit campaign stoking fear of illegal immigrants into Britain

COMPLEX MEANING OF THE WORD DEMOCRACY

Ancient Greece. Significance of the name democracy – Rule by demos.
dēmokratia "popular government," from dēmos "common people," + kratos "rule, strength". This was in contrast to aristocracy (aristokratía), meaning "rule of an elite".

Sanskrit:	sarvaprajādhīpatyam, sarvavarṇaprabhutvam, prajāprabhutvam, prajāpālītam rājyam. (M. Monier-Williams, English-Sanskrit Dictionary) prajāprabhutvam, prajāśattātmakam rājyam, prajātantram. (Apte, English-Sanskrit Dictionary)
Bengali	Ganatantra
Gujarati	Lōkaśāhī
Punjabi	Lōkatantara
Marathi	Lōkaśāhī
Hindi	Janatantr, Loktantr, Prajatantr
Urdu	Jamhoriat
Kannada	Prajāprabhutva
Malayalam	Janādhipatyaṁ
Tamil	Jaṇanāyakam
Telugu	Prajāsvāmyaṁ

EVOLUTION OF DEMOCRACY

Modern democracy: Reinvention of democracy in Europe and Americas after more than 2000 years; Development of capitalism; Justification for popular sovereignty and civil rights. Expansion of democracy in Asia, Africa, and Latin America

Difference between the ancient and modern democracies: expansion of citizenship and political participation; expansion of civil, political, and economic rights. All modern democracies are representative democracies. Here lies the problem of reconciling democracy as a self-rule of equal and free citizens and as rule by representatives.

Rule by representatives was itself an innovation to overcome the dangers of the rule by ordinary people. Increasing levels of education, political awareness, and new value systems are all posing challenges to the dominant political elites everywhere.

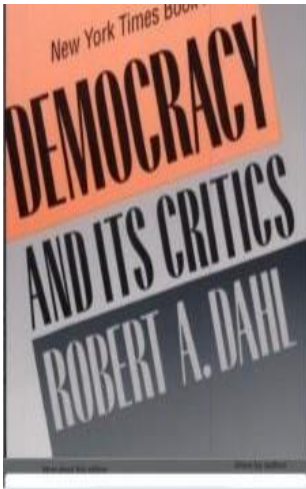
TWO CONCEPTIONS OF DEMOCRACY

1. Procedural/Thin/Minimalist conception of democracy: democracy is a system in which rulers are selected through competitive elections – Joseph Schumpeter and Adam Przeworski. Emphasis on procedures in choosing governments. Citizens cannot and should not rule because on most issues they have no clear views or their views are not well-founded.
2. Substantive/Thick perspectives: Democracy as a substantive ideal, not merely procedural. Citizen participation in public affairs can check powerful elites: having a voice in deciding collective matters that affect one's life. Emphasis on outcomes. Egalitarianism. Political and civil liberties. Social democracy

Are these two approaches mutually exclusive or two dimensions of the concept?

POLITICAL INSTITUTIONS OF AN IDEAL DEMOCRACY

Six necessary political institutions to democracy that make any polity a democracy and can be distinguished from its opposite non-democracy.



1. **Elected officials:** Control over government decisions about policy is constitutionally vested in elected officials/representatives
2. **Free, fair, and periodical elections:** Elected officials are chosen in frequent and fairly conducted elections, in which coercion is comparatively uncommon
3. **Freedom of expression:** Citizens have a right to express themselves without the danger of severe punishment on political matters, including criticism of officials, government policies, the socioeconomic order, and political ideologies.
4. **Alternative information:** Citizens have a right to seek out alternative sources of information. Alternative sources of information exist and are protected by laws.
5. **Associational autonomy:** To achieve their rights, citizens have a right to form relatively independent associations or organizations, including independent political parties and pressure groups.
6. **Inclusive citizenship:** Practically all adults have the right to vote in the election of officials. No citizen can be denied the rights that are available to others and are necessary to the five political institutions listed above.

Robert Dahl in *Democracy and Its Critics*

MEASURING DEMOCRACY: FREEDOM HOUSE

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.

Whether these political institutions and processes are present or absent? What extent each of these institutions is present in a realistic or actual sense?

- If they are present more or less fully, call them “full” democracies
- If they are present partially or intermittently, they are “partial” or semi democracies
- If these institutions and processes are extremely weak or absent they are non-democracies or authoritarian states



Freedom in the World 2021 by Freedom House

DEMOCRACY EROSION: INTERNATIONAL IDEA

Rejects assessing democracy in a country from a full or nil perspective or grouping nations into a three or four categories. Sees democratization as a process and measures the quality of democracy on a continuum.

Democracy is at risk:

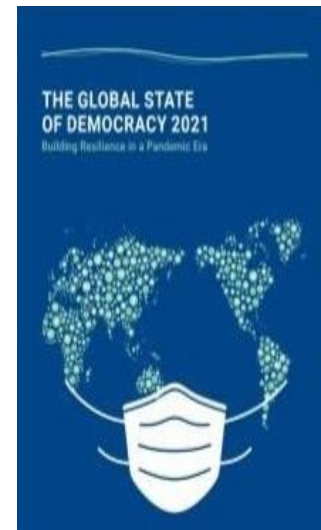
The Global State of Democracy 2021 shows that “more countries than ever are suffering from ‘democratic erosion’ (decline in democratic quality), including in established democracies. The number of countries undergoing ‘democratic backsliding’ (a more severe and deliberate kind of democratic erosion) has never been as high as in the last decade, and includes regional geopolitical and economic powers such as Brazil, India and the United States”.

Yet, democracy is resilient.

Protest and civic action are alive and well. Pro-democracy movements have braved repression around the world, and global social movements for tackling climate change and fighting racial inequalities have emerged. In spite of restrictions, more than three-quarters of countries have experienced protests during the pandemic.

Many democracies have proved resilient to the pandemic, introducing or expanding democratic innovations and adapting their practices and institutions in record time. Countries around the world rapidly activated Special Voting Arrangements to allow citizens to continue to hold elections in exceedingly difficult conditions.

Source: *The Global State of Democracy 2021*, International IDEA



VARIETIES OF DEMOCRACY: REGIME CLASSIFICATION

- **Closed autocracies**, citizens do not have the right to choose either the chief executive of the government or the legislature through multi-party elections.
- **Electoral autocracies**, citizens have the right to choose the chief executive and the legislature through multi-party elections; but they lack some freedoms, such as the freedoms of association or expression, that make the elections meaningful, free, and fair.
- **Electoral democracies**, citizens have the right to participate in meaningful, free and fair, and multi-party elections.
- **Liberal democracies**, citizens have further individual and minority rights, are equal before the law, and the actions of the executive are constrained by the legislature and the courts.



Varieties of Democracy Institute, 2021

DEMOCRACY INDEX: EIU

1. The Democracy Index is based on 60 indicators, grouped into five categories: *electoral process and pluralism, civil liberties, functioning of government, political participation and political culture*: “thick” measure of democracy
2. Countries are given a rating on a zero to ten scale, and the overall index is the average of the five total category scores.
3. Each country is then grouped into four types of regime, based on their average score: full democracies, flawed democracies, hybrid regimes and authoritarian regimes.

Democracy Index 2019
A year of democratic setbacks and popular protest
Report by The Economist Intelligence Unit



Democracy Index 2021, by regime type

Type of regime	Score	Countries	Countries (%)	World population (%)
Full democracies	8.01–10	21	12.6%	6.4%
Flawed democracies	6.01–8.00	53	31.7%	39.3%
Hybrid regimes	4.01–6.00	34	20.4%	17.2%
Authoritarian regimes	0–4.00	59	35.3%	37.1%

Source: EIU, *Democracy Index 2021*

DEMOCRACY “BACKSLIDING”

- ❖ Anger and helplessness among citizens. Declining citizen’s feeling of efficacy
- ❖ Populism, personalistic power; excessive power of the executive
- ❖ Racism/xenophobia
- ❖ Corruption, Criminality, clientelism of the political class
- ❖ Curtailment of civil and political freedoms and rights by the state

Is democracy in decline a correct assessment?

Aristotelian element in the assessment of democracy by scholars and agencies that advocate democracy. A wrong diagnosis as democracy gets democratized? Need to look at the trajectory of democracy and its present character from a different perspective.