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Democracy Index 2020

In sickness and in health?

A report by The Economist Intelligence Unit



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Contents

List of tables and charts	2
Introduction	3
Democracy Index 2020 highlights	6
Democracy: in sickness and in health?	14
Democracy around the regions in 2020	26
Asia and Australasia	28
Eastern Europe	32
Latin America	36
Middle East and North Africa	40
North America	42
Sub-Saharan Africa	47
Western Europe	50
Appendix	54
Defining and measuring democracy	54
Methodology	56
The Economist Intelligence Unit model	59
References and bibliography	69

List of tables and charts

Table 1. Democracy Index 2020, by regime type

Chart 1. Democracy Index 2020, global map by regime type

Table 2. Democracy Index 2020

Chart 2. Downgrades to Q57: "Extent to which citizens enjoy personal freedoms"

Chart 3. Downgrades to Q24: "Perceptions of the extent to which citizens have free choice and control over their lives"

Chart 4. Evolution of democracy by category, 2008-20

Table 3. Democracy Index 2006-20

Table 4. Democracy across the regions

Table 5. Democracy Index 2006-20 by region

Table 6. Asia & Australasia 2020

Chart 5. Asia & Australasia: Democracy Index 2020 by category

Table 7. Eastern Europe 2020

Chart 6. Eastern Europe: Democracy Index 2020 by category

Chart 7. Latin America: Democracy Index 2020 by category

Table 8. Latin America and the Caribbean 2020

Chart 8. Middle East and North Africa: Democracy Index 2020 by category

Table 9. Middle East and North Africa 2020

Table 10. North America 2020

Chart 9. US & Canada: Democracy Index 2020 by category

Chart 10. Sub-Saharan Africa: Democracy Index 2020 by category

Table 11. Sub-Saharan Africa 2020

Table 12. Western Europe 2020

Chart 11. Western Europe: Democracy Index 2020 by category

Introduction

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). The Democracy Index is based on five categories: *electoral process and pluralism*, *the 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 itself 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 is the 13th edition of the Democracy Index, which began in 2006, and it records how global democracy fared in 2020. The main focus of the report is the impact of the coronavirus (Covid-19) pandemic on democracy and freedom around the world. It looks at how the pandemic resulted in the withdrawal of civil liberties on a massive scale and fuelled an existing trend of intolerance and censorship of dissenting opinion (see page 14). The report also examines the state of US democracy after a tumultuous year dominated by the coronavirus pandemic, the Black Lives Matter movement and a hotly contested presidential election (see page 42). The results by region are analysed in greater detail in the section entitled "Democracy around the regions in 2020" (see page 26).

Table 1.
Democracy Index 2020, by regime type

	No. of countries	% of countries	% of world population
Full democracies	23	13.8	8.4
Flawed democracies	52	31.1	41.0
Hybrid regimes	35	21.0	15.0
Authoritarian regimes	57	34.1	35.6

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: The Economist Intelligence Unit.

According to our measure of democracy, only about half (49.4%) of the world's population live in a democracy of some sort, and even fewer (8.4%) reside in a "full democracy"; this level is up from 5.7% in 2019, as several Asian countries have been upgraded. More than one-third of the world's population live under authoritarian rule, with a large share being in China.

In the 2020 Democracy Index, 75 of the 167 countries and territories covered by the model, or 44.9% of the total, are considered to be democracies. The number of "full democracies" increased to 23 in 2020, up from 22 in 2019. The number of "flawed democracies" fell by two, to 52. Of the remaining 92 countries in our index, 57 are "authoritarian regimes", up from 54 in 2019, and 35 are classified as "hybrid regimes", down from 37 in 2019. (For a full explanation of the index methodology and categories, see page 56.)

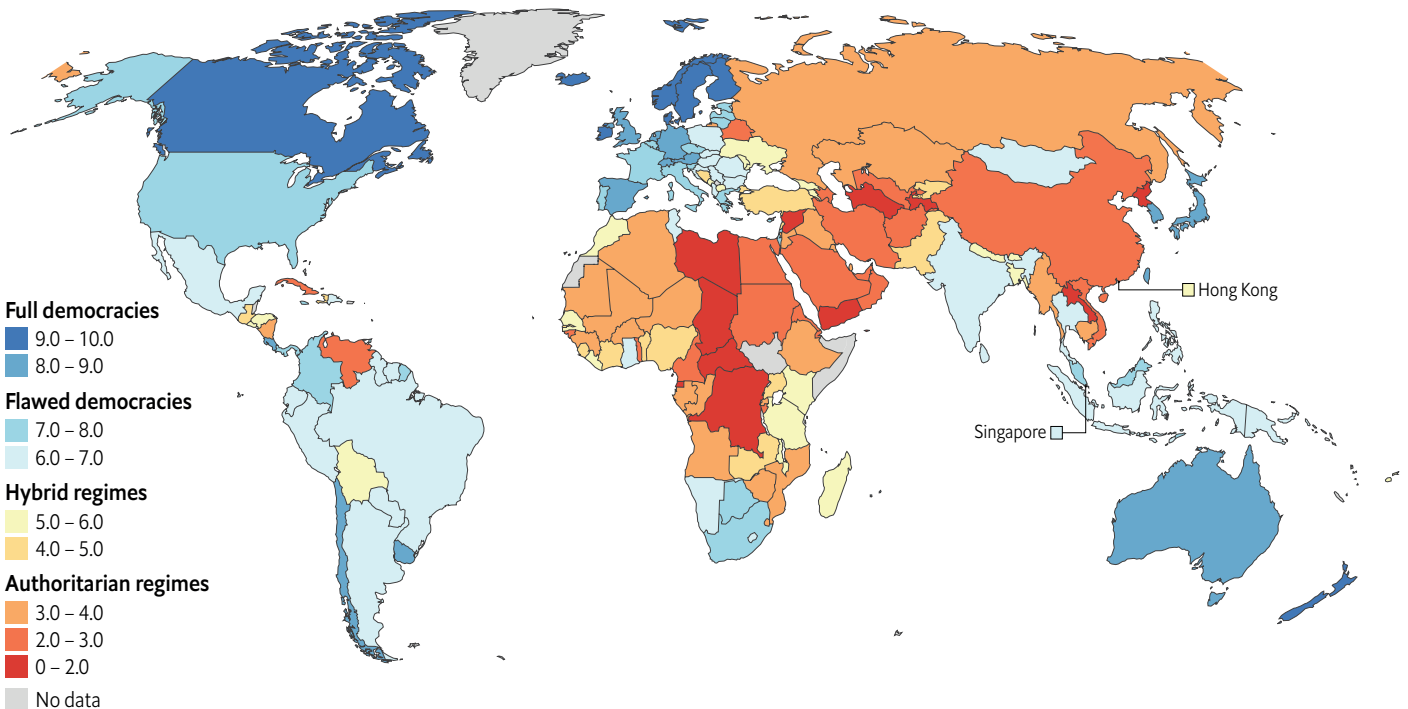
DEMOCRACY INDEX 2020

IN SICKNESS AND IN HEALTH?

The global average score hit an all-time low

As recorded in the Democracy Index in recent years, democracy has not been in robust health for some time. In 2020 its strength was further tested by the outbreak of the coronavirus (Covid-19) pandemic. The average global score in the 2020 Democracy Index fell from 5.44 in 2019 to 5.37. This is by far the worst global score since the index was first produced in 2006. The 2020 result represents a significant deterioration and came about largely—but not solely—because of government-imposed restrictions on individual freedoms and civil liberties that occurred across the globe in response to the coronavirus pandemic.

Chart 1. Democracy Index 2020, global map by regime type



Source: The Economist Intelligence Unit.

The deterioration in the global score in 2020 was driven by a decline in the average regional score everywhere in the world, but by especially large falls in the “authoritarian regime”-dominated regions of Sub-Saharan Africa and the Middle East and North Africa. Their scores declined by 0.10 and 0.09, respectively, between 2019 and 2020. Western Europe and eastern Europe both recorded a fall in their average regional scores of 0.06. The score for Asia and Australasia, the region which has made the most democratic progress during the lifetime of the Democracy Index, fell by 0.05. Latin America’s average score declined by 0.04 in 2020, marking the fifth consecutive year of regression for the region. The average score for North America fell by only 0.01, but a bigger decline of 0.04 in the US score was masked by an improvement in Canada’s score.

DEMOCRACY INDEX 2020

IN SICKNESS AND IN HEALTH?

In 2020 a large majority of countries, 116 of a total of 167 (almost 70%), recorded a decline in their total score compared with 2019. Only 38 (22.6%) recorded an improvement and the other 13 stagnated, with their scores remaining unchanged compared with 2019. There were some impressive improvements and some dramatic declines, as discussed in the “Highlights” section, with Taiwan registering the biggest improvement and Mali the biggest decline. There were 11 changes of regime category, seven negative and four positive. Three countries (Japan, South Korea and Taiwan) moved from the “flawed democracy” category to be classified as “full democracies” and one country, Albania, was upgraded to a “flawed democracy” from a “hybrid regime” previously. France and Portugal experienced a reversal, losing the “full democracy” status they had regained in 2019, re-joining the ranks of “flawed democracies”. El Salvador and Hong Kong were relegated from the “flawed democracy” classification to that of “hybrid regime”. Further down the ranking, Algeria, Burkina Faso and Mali lost their status as “hybrid regimes” and are now designated as “authoritarian regimes”.

Democracy Index 2020 highlights

Pandemic dilemmas: life, death, lockdowns and liberty

Across the world in 2020, citizens experienced the biggest rollback of individual freedoms ever undertaken by governments during peacetime (and perhaps even in wartime). The willing surrender of fundamental freedoms by millions of people was perhaps one of the most remarkable occurrences in an extraordinary year (see *Democracy: in sickness and in health?*, page 14 onwards). Most people concluded, on the basis of the evidence about a new, deadly disease, that preventing a catastrophic loss of life justified a temporary loss of freedom. Many critics of the lockdown approach accepted that some form of social distancing was necessary to contain the spread of the disease, but they failed to put forward convincing alternatives to the policy of enforced lockdowns, and the question of how many deaths would be acceptable as the price of freedom was one that few lockdown sceptics were prepared to answer. That does not mean that governments and media should have censored lockdown sceptics: attempts to curb freedom of expression are antithetical to democratic principles. The withdrawal of civil liberties, attacks on freedom of expression and the failures of democratic accountability that occurred as a result of the pandemic are grave matters. This is why the scores for many questions in the *civil liberties* category and the *functioning of government* category of the Democracy Index were downgraded across multiple countries in 2020.

Asia rising: a shift eastwards in the global balance of power

The symbolism of Asia gaining three new “full democracies” (Japan, South Korea and Taiwan) in 2020 and western Europe losing two (France and Portugal) was apt, as the novel coronavirus (Covid-19) pandemic has accelerated the shift in the global balance of power from the West to the East. Asia lags behind the West in democratic terms, having only five “full democracies”, compared with western Europe’s 13, and the region also has seven “authoritarian regimes” while western Europe has none. Yet the Asia region has, so far, handled the pandemic much better than virtually any other, with lower infection and mortality rates and a fast economic rebound. Having learned from the experience of SARS, Asian governments reacted decisively (albeit deploying coercive powers in some cases), benefited from well-organised health systems and retained the confidence of their populations. By contrast, European governments were slow to act, some health systems came close to collapse and public trust in government declined. Europe’s handling of the pandemic was not a good advert for democracy, something that authoritarian China did not fail to point out. The pandemic has highlighted the widening gap between a dynamic East and a declining West and is likely to further accelerate the shift in the global balance of power towards Asia.

US democracy under pressure from rising polarisation and declining social cohesion

The US’s performance across several indicators changed in 2020, both for better and worse. However, the negatives outweighed the positives, and the US retained its “flawed democracy” status (see page 42). Increased political participation was the main positive: Americans have become much more engaged in politics in recent years, and several factors fuelled the continuation of this trend in 2020,

including the politicisation of the coronavirus pandemic, movements to address police violence and racial injustice, and elections that attracted record voter turnout. The negatives include extremely low levels of trust in institutions and political parties, deep dysfunction in the functioning of government, increasing threats to freedom of expression, and a degree of societal polarisation that makes consensus almost impossible to achieve. Social cohesion has collapsed, and consensus has evaporated on fundamental issues—even the date of the country’s founding. The new president, Joe Biden, faces a huge challenge in bringing together a country that is deeply divided over core values.

Taiwan: the year’s biggest winner

The star-performer in this year’s Democracy Index, measured by the change in both its score and rank, is Taiwan, which was upgraded from a “flawed democracy” to a “full democracy”, after rising 20 places in the global ranking from 31st place to 11th (see box on page 32). In a year notable for having few winners, Taiwan’s performance was spectacular. The country’s score rose by more than any other country in the 2020 index. Taiwan went to the polls in January 2020, and the national elections demonstrated the resilience of its democracy at a time when electoral processes, parliamentary oversight and civil liberties have been backsliding globally. There was a strong voter turnout, including among the younger generation, to elect the president and members of the Legislative Yuan (parliament). Overall, the country seems to have concluded that a well-functioning democracy represents the best means of safeguarding its future.

Mali and Togo the big losers in a dire year for African democracy

Measured by the decline in its score, Mali, in west Africa, was the worst-performing country in the 2020 Democracy Index, being downgraded from a “hybrid regime” to an “authoritarian regime”. Mali does not have full control over its territory, and rampant insecurity precipitated a coup in August 2020 by military officers aggrieved by a lack of progress against jihadist insurgents. A military junta has since established a transitional government, nullifying the outcome of parliamentary elections held in March 2020, which were broadly free and fair. Because of this, Mali has dropped 11 places globally, the second-biggest fall in rank in Sub-Saharan Africa behind Togo, which fell 15 places, further down the ranks of “authoritarian regimes”. Overall it was a terrible year for democracy in Sub-Saharan Africa, where 31 countries were downgraded, eight stagnated and only five improved their scores (see page 47). Burkina Faso, which, like Mali, faces a jihadist insurgency and does not have full control of its territory, was also downgraded from a “hybrid regime” to an “authoritarian regime”.

Western Europe loses two “full democracies”

In 2020 two west European countries—France and Portugal—moved from the “full democracy” category to the “flawed democracy” one (see page 50). Thirteen countries in the region are now classed as “full democracies” (down from 15 in 2019) and seven as “flawed democracies”, up from five in 2019. Only three countries improved their scores in 2020 (Italy, Turkey and the UK) and 18 recorded a decline. The most significant downwards score changes were in the category of *civil liberties*, for which the aggregate score fell sharply, and in the *functioning of government* category. No country recorded an increase in its overall *civil liberties* score, as lockdown and social-distancing measures used to combat the coronavirus pandemic curtailed individual freedoms. Nevertheless, countries in western Europe account for seven of the top ten places in the global democracy rankings, including the top three spots,

DEMOCRACY INDEX 2020 IN SICKNESS AND IN HEALTH?

occupied by Norway, Iceland and Sweden. The Nordics are kings of the rankings, with Finland and Denmark sitting in sixth and seventh place.

A tale of two regions: democratic backsliding continues under cover of Covid-19 in eastern Europe and Latin America

It is hard to say whether the recent democratic backsliding recorded in eastern Europe and Latin America would have continued without the coronavirus pandemic. What is certain is that the public health emergency provided cover for abuses of power that have become familiar in recent years. These two regions contain only three “full democracies” (all in Latin America), but they share half the world’s flawed democracies (26 out of 52). Eastern Europe has always lagged behind Latin America in the Democracy Index, but both regions suffer from similar flaws. A weak political culture, difficulties in creating institutions aimed at safeguarding the rule of law and persistent issues with corruption create a difficult habitat for democracy. The deterioration in both regions in 2020 revealed the fragility of democracy in times of crisis and the willingness of governments to sacrifice civil liberties and exercise unchecked authority in an emergency situation.

The Middle East and North Africa retains the lowest score

After Sub-Saharan Africa, the Middle East and North Africa region recorded the second-biggest reduction in regional average score in 2020 (see page 40), mainly because of the impact of coronavirus-related restrictions on civil liberties. That score has declined every year since 2012, when the advances that followed the onset of the pro-democracy “Arab Spring” uprising in December 2010 began to be reversed. The region suffers from a concentration of absolute monarchies, authoritarian regimes and the prevalence of military conflicts, and it is the lowest ranked of all the regions covered in the Democracy Index, with seven countries of the 20 in the region featuring in the bottom 20 in our global ranking. The few bright spots included increased political participation in Israel, as shown by the high turnout in the election in 2020, despite it being the third one in two years, and tiny moves towards political inclusion and transparency in the Gulf states, where authoritarianism nonetheless remains entrenched.

Table 2.
Democracy Index 2020

	Overall score	Rank	I Electoral process and pluralism	II Functioning of government	III Political participation	IV Political culture	V Civil liberties
			Full democracy				
Norway	9.81	1	10.00	9.64	10.00	10.00	9.41
Iceland	9.37	2	10.00	8.57	8.89	10.00	9.41
Sweden	9.26	3	9.58	9.29	8.33	10.00	9.12
New Zealand	9.25	4	10.00	8.93	8.89	8.75	9.71
Canada	9.24	5	9.58	8.93	8.89	9.38	9.41
Finland	9.20	6	10.00	8.93	8.89	8.75	9.41
Denmark	9.15	7	10.00	8.93	8.33	9.38	9.12

DEMOCRACY INDEX 2020

IN SICKNESS AND IN HEALTH?

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	Overall score	Rank	I Electoral process and pluralism	II Functioning of government	III Political participation	IV Political culture	V Civil liberties
Ireland	9.05	8	10.00	7.86	8.33	9.38	9.71
Australia	8.96	9=	10.00	8.57	7.78	8.75	9.71
Netherlands	8.96	9=	9.58	9.29	8.33	8.75	8.82
Taiwan	8.94	11	10.00	9.64	7.22	8.13	9.71
Switzerland	8.83	12	9.58	8.57	7.78	9.38	8.82
Luxembourg	8.68	13	10.00	8.57	6.67	8.75	9.41
Germany	8.67	14	9.58	8.21	8.33	8.13	9.12
Uruguay	8.61	15	10.00	8.57	6.67	8.13	9.71
United Kingdom	8.54	16	10.00	7.50	8.89	7.50	8.82
Chile	8.28	17	9.58	8.21	6.67	8.13	8.82
Austria	8.16	18=	9.58	7.50	8.33	6.88	8.53
Costa Rica	8.16	18=	9.58	6.79	7.22	7.50	9.71
Mauritius	8.14	20	9.17	7.86	6.11	8.75	8.82
Japan	8.13	21	8.75	8.57	6.67	8.13	8.53
Spain	8.12	22	9.58	7.14	7.22	8.13	8.53
South Korea	8.01	23	9.17	8.21	7.22	7.50	7.94
Flawed democracy							
France	7.99	24	9.58	7.50	7.78	6.88	8.24
United States of America	7.92	25	9.17	6.79	8.89	6.25	8.53
Portugal	7.90	26	9.58	7.50	6.11	7.50	8.82
Estonia	7.84	27=	9.58	7.86	6.67	6.88	8.24
Israel	7.84	27=	9.17	7.50	9.44	7.50	5.59
Italy	7.74	29	9.58	6.43	7.22	7.50	7.94
Malta	7.68	30	9.17	6.79	6.11	8.13	8.24
Czech Republic	7.67	31	9.58	6.07	6.67	7.50	8.53
Cabo Verde	7.65	32	9.17	7.00	6.67	6.88	8.53
Botswana	7.62	33	9.17	6.79	6.11	7.50	8.53
Cyprus	7.56	34	9.17	5.36	7.22	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
Greece	7.39	37	9.58	5.21	6.11	7.50	8.53
Latvia	7.24	38	9.58	6.07	6.67	5.63	8.24
Malaysia	7.19	39	9.58	7.86	6.67	6.25	5.59
Panama	7.18	40	9.58	6.43	7.22	5.00	7.65
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
Lithuania	7.13	42=	9.58	6.07	5.56	5.63	8.82

DEMOCRACY INDEX 2020

IN SICKNESS AND IN HEALTH?

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	Overall score	Rank	I Electoral process and pluralism	II Functioning of government	III Political participation	IV Political culture	V Civil liberties
Timor-Leste	7.06	44	9.58	5.93	5.56	6.88	7.35
South Africa	7.05	45	7.42	7.14	8.33	5.00	7.35
Colombia	7.04	46	9.17	6.43	6.67	5.00	7.94
Slovakia	6.97	47	9.58	6.43	5.56	5.63	7.65
Argentina	6.95	48	9.17	5.36	6.67	5.63	7.94
Brazil	6.92	49	9.58	5.36	6.11	5.63	7.94
Poland	6.85	50	9.17	5.71	6.67	5.63	7.06
Suriname	6.82	51	9.58	6.07	6.11	5.00	7.35
Bulgaria	6.71	52	9.17	5.71	7.22	4.38	7.06
India	6.61	53	8.67	7.14	6.67	5.00	5.59
Tunisia	6.59	54	9.17	5.36	7.22	5.63	5.59
Philippines	6.56	55=	9.17	5.00	7.78	4.38	6.47
Hungary	6.56	55=	8.33	6.43	5.00	6.25	6.76
Peru	6.53	57	8.75	5.36	5.56	5.63	7.35
Namibia	6.52	58	7.00	5.36	6.67	5.63	7.94
Croatia	6.50	59=	9.17	6.07	6.11	4.38	6.76
Ghana	6.50	59=	8.33	5.36	6.67	6.25	5.88
Mongolia	6.48	61	8.75	5.71	5.56	5.63	6.76
Romania	6.40	62	9.17	5.36	6.67	3.75	7.06
Dominican Republic	6.32	63	9.17	4.29	6.11	5.00	7.06
Lesotho	6.30	64=	9.17	4.14	6.11	5.63	6.47
Indonesia	6.30	64=	7.92	7.50	6.11	4.38	5.59
Serbia	6.22	66	8.25	5.36	6.67	3.75	7.06
Paraguay	6.18	67	8.75	5.71	5.00	4.38	7.06
Sri Lanka	6.14	68	7.00	5.71	5.56	6.25	6.18
Ecuador	6.13	69	8.75	5.00	6.67	3.75	6.47
Papua New Guinea	6.10	70	6.92	6.07	3.33	6.25	7.94
Albania	6.08	71	7.00	5.36	4.44	6.25	7.35
Mexico	6.07	72	7.83	5.71	7.78	3.13	5.88
Thailand	6.04	73	7.00	5.00	6.67	6.25	5.29
Singapore	6.03	74	4.83	7.86	4.44	6.25	6.76
Guyana	6.01	75	6.50	5.36	6.11	5.00	7.06
Hybrid regime							
Bangladesh	5.99	76	7.42	6.07	6.11	5.63	4.71
El Salvador	5.90	77	9.17	4.29	6.11	3.75	6.18
North Macedonia	5.89	78	7.42	5.71	6.11	3.13	7.06
Ukraine	5.81	79	8.25	2.71	7.22	5.00	5.88

DEMOCRACY INDEX 2020

IN SICKNESS AND IN HEALTH?

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	Overall score	Rank	I Electoral process and pluralism	II Functioning of government	III Political participation	IV Political culture	V Civil liberties
Moldova	5.78	80	7.00	4.64	6.11	4.38	6.76
Montenegro	5.77	81	7.42	5.71	6.11	3.13	6.47
Malawi	5.74	82	7.00	4.29	5.00	6.25	6.18
Fiji	5.72	83	6.58	5.00	6.11	5.63	5.29
Bhutan	5.71	84	8.75	6.79	3.33	5.00	4.71
Madagascar	5.70	85	7.92	3.57	6.67	5.63	4.71
Senegal	5.67	86	6.08	5.71	4.44	6.25	5.88
Hong Kong	5.57	87	3.17	3.64	5.00	7.50	8.53
Honduras	5.36	88	7.83	4.29	4.44	4.38	5.88
Armenia	5.35	89	7.50	5.00	6.11	3.13	5.00
Liberia	5.32	90	7.42	2.71	5.56	5.63	5.29
Georgia	5.31	91	7.83	3.57	6.11	3.75	5.29
Nepal	5.22	92	4.83	5.36	5.00	5.63	5.29
Tanzania	5.10	93	4.83	5.00	5.00	6.25	4.41
Bolivia	5.08	94	6.08	3.57	6.11	3.75	5.88
Kenya	5.05	95	3.50	5.36	6.67	5.63	4.12
Morocco	5.04	96	5.25	4.64	5.56	5.63	4.12
Guatemala	4.97	97	6.92	3.93	5.00	3.13	5.88
Uganda	4.94	98	4.33	3.21	5.00	6.88	5.29
Zambia	4.86	99=	4.75	2.93	3.89	6.88	5.88
Sierra Leone	4.86	99=	6.58	2.86	3.33	6.25	5.29
Bosnia and Hercegovina	4.84	101	7.00	2.93	5.56	3.13	5.59
Benin	4.58	102	3.33	5.36	3.89	5.63	4.71
Gambia	4.49	103	4.00	4.29	4.44	5.63	4.12
Turkey	4.48	104	3.50	5.36	5.56	5.63	2.35
Pakistan	4.31	105	5.67	5.36	3.33	2.50	4.71
Haiti	4.22	106	4.75	1.71	2.78	6.25	5.59
Kyrgyz Republic	4.21	107	4.75	2.93	5.56	3.13	4.71
Lebanon	4.16	108	3.50	1.50	6.67	5.00	4.12
Côte d'Ivoire	4.11	109	4.33	2.86	3.89	5.63	3.82
Nigeria	4.10	110	5.17	3.57	3.89	3.75	4.12
Authoritarian							
Mali	3.93	111	5.17	0.00	4.44	5.63	4.41
Mauritania	3.92	112	3.50	3.57	5.00	3.13	4.41
Palestine	3.83	113	3.33	0.14	7.78	4.38	3.53
Kuwait	3.80	114	3.58	3.93	3.89	4.38	3.24
Algeria	3.77	115	3.08	2.50	4.44	5.00	3.82

DEMOCRACY INDEX 2020

IN SICKNESS AND IN HEALTH?

Table 2.
Democracy Index 2020

	Overall score	Rank	I Electoral process and pluralism	II Functioning of government	III Political participation	IV Political culture	V Civil liberties
Burkina Faso	3.73	116	3.00	2.36	4.44	5.00	3.82
Angola	3.66	117	2.25	2.86	5.56	5.00	2.65
Iraq	3.62	118=	5.25	0.00	6.67	5.00	1.18
Jordan	3.62	118=	2.67	3.93	3.89	4.38	3.24
Nicaragua	3.60	120	0.42	2.86	5.00	5.63	4.12
Gabon	3.54	121	2.58	1.86	4.44	5.00	3.82
Mozambique	3.51	122	2.58	1.43	5.00	5.00	3.53
Ethiopia	3.38	123	0.42	3.57	5.56	5.00	2.35
Russia	3.31	124	2.17	2.14	5.00	3.13	4.12
Niger	3.29	125	2.92	1.14	3.33	4.38	4.71
Qatar	3.24	126	0.00	4.29	2.78	5.63	3.53
Zimbabwe	3.16	127	0.00	2.50	4.44	5.63	3.24
Kazakhstan	3.14	128	0.50	3.21	5.00	3.75	3.24
Congo (Brazzaville)	3.11	129	2.17	2.50	3.89	3.75	3.24
Cambodia	3.10	130=	0.00	3.93	3.89	5.63	2.06
Rwanda	3.10	130=	1.42	4.29	2.78	4.38	2.65
Comoros	3.09	132	2.08	2.21	3.89	3.75	3.53
eSwatini	3.08	133=	0.92	2.86	2.78	5.63	3.24
Guinea	3.08	133=	3.50	0.43	4.44	4.38	2.65
Myanmar	3.04	135	1.75	3.93	2.78	4.38	2.35
Oman	3.00	136	0.08	3.93	2.78	4.38	3.82
Vietnam	2.94	137	0.00	2.86	3.89	5.63	2.35
Egypt	2.93	138	1.33	3.21	3.33	5.00	1.76
Afghanistan	2.85	139	3.42	0.64	3.89	2.50	3.82
Cuba	2.84	140	0.00	3.57	3.33	4.38	2.94
Togo	2.80	141	0.92	1.79	3.33	5.00	2.94
Cameroon	2.77	142	1.67	2.14	3.33	4.38	2.35
Venezuela	2.76	143	0.00	1.79	5.00	4.38	2.65
Djibouti	2.71	144	0.42	1.29	3.89	5.63	2.35
United Arab Emirates	2.70	145	0.00	3.93	2.22	5.00	2.35
Azerbaijan	2.68	146	0.50	2.86	3.33	3.75	2.94
Guinea-Bissau	2.63	147	4.92	0.00	2.78	3.13	2.35
Belarus	2.59	148	0.00	2.00	3.89	5.00	2.06
Sudan	2.54	149	0.00	1.79	4.44	5.00	1.47
Bahrain	2.49	150	0.83	2.71	2.78	4.38	1.76
China	2.27	151	0.00	4.29	2.78	3.13	1.18
Iran	2.20	152	0.00	2.50	3.89	3.13	1.47

DEMOCRACY INDEX 2020

IN SICKNESS AND IN HEALTH?

Table 2.
Democracy Index 2020

	Overall score	Rank	I Electoral process and pluralism	II Functioning of government	III Political participation	IV Political culture	V Civil liberties
Eritrea	2.15	153	0.00	2.14	0.56	6.88	1.18
Burundi	2.14	154	0.00	0.00	3.33	5.00	2.35
Uzbekistan	2.12	155	0.08	1.86	2.78	5.00	0.88
Saudi Arabia	2.08	156	0.00	3.57	2.22	3.13	1.47
Libya	1.95	157=	0.00	0.00	3.33	3.75	2.65
Yemen	1.95	157=	0.00	0.00	3.89	5.00	0.88
Tajikistan	1.94	159	0.00	2.21	2.22	4.38	0.88
Equatorial Guinea	1.92	160	0.00	0.43	3.33	4.38	1.47
Laos	1.77	161	0.00	2.86	1.67	3.75	0.59
Turkmenistan	1.72	162	0.00	0.79	2.22	5.00	0.59
Chad	1.55	163	0.00	0.00	1.67	3.75	2.35
Syria	1.43	164	0.00	0.00	2.78	4.38	0.00
Central African Republic	1.32	165	1.25	0.00	1.11	1.88	2.35
Democratic Republic of Congo	1.13	166	0.00	0.00	1.67	3.13	0.88
North Korea	1.08	167	0.00	2.50	1.67	1.25	0.00

Source: The Economist Intelligence Unit.

Democracy: in sickness and in health?

In 2020, for the first time since 2010, the average regional scores in The Economist Intelligence Unit's Democracy Index worsened in every single region of the world. A decade ago the cause of a similar democratic recession was disaffection with governments and a collapse of trust in institutions following the global economic and financial crisis. By contrast, the 2020 worldwide democratic regression was largely the result of the measures taken by governments to address the public health emergency caused by the novel coronavirus (Covid-19) pandemic, which has entailed the suspension of the civil liberties of entire populations for prolonged periods. Across the world in 2020, citizens experienced the biggest rollback of individual freedoms ever undertaken by governments during peacetime (and perhaps even in wartime). The willing surrender of fundamental freedoms by millions of people was perhaps one of the most remarkable occurrences in an extraordinary year.

“Wuhan could never happen here”—but it did

The main policy response of governments to the pandemic, whether they were authoritarian or democratic, was to impose social distancing, quarantines and lockdown measures of greater or lesser severity and of longer or shorter duration. By the end of 2020, many Western countries were entering their third lockdowns as cases of the coronavirus surged again as a result of the spread of new, more infectious strains. Only one year before, when the Chinese authorities locked down the city of Wuhan in Hubei province in central China, the rest of the world looked on incredulously, and people said that it could “never happen here”.

The entire population of Wuhan, home to more than 11m people, was confined to their homes and the transport network was shut down. Soon, 56m people in Hubei province were placed under one of the most stringent quarantine regimes in the world. As the virus spread across China's 26 provinces, the authorities imposed increasingly draconian restrictions on population movement: at the height of the epidemic in China an estimated 760m people (more than half the total population) were confined to their homes. The lockdown in Wuhan lasted 76 days and is widely seen to have been effective in controlling transmission of the virus and preventing a much greater infection tally and death toll: early Chinese modelling suggested that without containment measures the novel coronavirus could have infected up to 500m people in China (or more than 35% of the Chinese population).

The subsequent course of the disease in China made it difficult to dispute the success of China's lockdown experiment. Yet when it began, few people outside of China thought that this draconian approach could be replicated anywhere else. The consensus among the world's democracies was that systemic and cultural differences between an authoritarian system such as China's and their own democratic systems made lockdowns unthinkable. The Chinese regime, which routinely enforces obedience and curbs on individual freedoms, had no qualms about exercising absolute control over its population. By contrast, established democracies in Europe, Latin America and North America, whose political systems are based on the principles of government by consent, individual freedom and civil liberties, had serious misgivings about embracing such a draconian approach to combating the coronavirus.

How the free world suspended freedom

Yet within months, countries around the world were following the Chinese template of lockdowns, albeit without employing the same repressive techniques as China to contain what had by then become a global pandemic. Political and cultural differences—and, in some cases, an initial belief that the pandemic was a hoax—led some democracies to resist the policy of lockdowns. In the US in particular, a strong culture of anti-statism and commitment to individual rights resulted in high levels of popular resistance to the public health measures taken by state authorities to contain the spread of the coronavirus. Yet these were differences mainly of degree rather than substance, and social distancing and lockdowns became the standard approach to dealing with the public health emergency across the developed world. In many emerging markets and poorer countries, lockdowns tended to be shorter (but more coercive) and social distancing less restrictive, given the dependence of so many on the informal economy and the state's inability to provide a social safety net for long, if at all.

Across the world the pandemic led governments to take away their citizens' freedoms and suspend civil liberties. Freedom of movement was taken away as a result of border closures, international travel bans, and restrictions on domestic travel and the use of public transport. Governments invoked emergency powers or imposed states of emergency; dispensed with parliamentary oversight and checks and balances; introduced compulsory social distancing, lockdowns, curfews and mask wearing; confined people to their homes, except for limited activities; closed educational and cultural establishments; cancelled or postponed elections; prohibited public protests; censured dissenting voices and curtailed freedom of expression; and used the full force of the law to punish those who disobeyed. This list may sound dystopian, yet this was the experience of most people in 2020.

Questions of life, death and liberty in a pandemic

Liberty, alongside equality, is essential in a democracy. The loss of liberty should not be taken lightly. Even if a temporary withdrawal of freedoms is a price worth paying to save lives, liberties should not be surrendered unthinkingly, and they should be restored as soon as possible. Many democratic politicians were stunned by how easy it was to take away people's liberty in 2020. The UK prime minister, Boris Johnson, remarked upon the willingness of the population to surrender the "rights of freeborn Englishmen" without protest.

Governments had expected that imposing broad restrictions would be much more difficult and feared that they would face a backlash, but nothing of the sort happened in the UK or anywhere else. There were some limited protests against the lockdowns, but these remained a minority pursuit. Most people accepted their governments' decisions to take away their rights and freedoms, even if they did not like it and suffered greatly as a consequence. Should we conclude that people do not value liberty or that it did not occur to them what was at stake?

It would be patronising to assume that people did not reflect on what they were giving up when they accepted lockdown measures. They certainly had a long time to think about it during the first year of the pandemic. Nor should we assume from the high level of public compliance with lockdown measures that most people do not place a high value on freedom. Most people simply concluded, on the basis of the evidence about a new, deadly disease, that preventing a catastrophic loss of life justified a temporary loss of freedom. While dealing with the impact of lockdowns on their own personal liberty,

most were well aware of the other collateral damage inflicted by government lockdown policies, on livelihoods, health and education.

Lockdowns and their critics

The coronavirus that spread around the world from late 2019 proved to be highly infectious. Contrary, to some initial, misguided opinion, it also proved to be much more lethal than seasonal flu. Covid-19 attacks the lungs and other bodily organs, causing in the worst cases pneumonia and organ failure, often culminating in either death or long-term illness. Without social-distancing measures, the coronavirus has an estimated reproduction rate (R rate) of three, meaning that every infected person transmits the virus to three others. Transmission of the virus even by people who are asymptomatic means that it is difficult to contain the spread of the disease. In its first pandemic year, Covid-19 killed an estimated 0.5-1% of those infected in developed Western countries (death rates varied across continents). Deaths were concentrated disproportionately among the over-80s, for whom the mortality rate was much higher (at up to 20%). Those with underlying health conditions, including diabetes or high blood pressure, were much more at risk of death.

Until the rollout of effective vaccines at the start of 2021, the only means of preventing transmission of the novel coronavirus were handwashing, social distancing, quarantines (combined with testing and tracking systems) and lockdowns. Governments all over the world deployed these techniques to control the spread of the disease, stop health systems from being overwhelmed and prevent a much greater loss of life from Covid-19 (which had killed more than 2m people by mid-January 2021).

Most critics of the lockdown approach accepted that some form of social distancing was necessary to contain the spread of the disease. There were a few efforts to put forward alternatives to the policy of enforced lockdowns, but none was convincing enough to persuade any government to change course. Even the Swedish authorities, who tried to pursue a different model for much of 2020, eventually admitted that voluntary social distancing had not been effective and began to adopt more coercive measures. The question of how many deaths would be acceptable as the price of freedom was one that few lockdown sceptics were prepared to answer. Assuming that no social-distancing measures were imposed, and that the virus would have infected 60% of the population, in Europe the death toll could have reached more than 4m.

That the course of the pandemic has proved lockdown sceptics wrong does not mean that they should have been prevented from expressing their views, however erroneous some proved to be. Many questions raised by lockdown sceptics were legitimate and worthy of debate, of which we should have had much more. This is what is meant to happen in a democracy: we are supposed to debate the pros and cons of government policies, especially ones which have such far-reaching impacts on our lives. The inclination of many to want to silence discussion is unhealthy for democracy, which thrives on the exchange of ideas and the clash of opinion. The eagerness with which politicians and media in democracies, not to mention authoritarian states, sought to stifle debate and censor critics of lockdown policies was disturbing. Calls for more policing of social media to banish such sceptics were legion. These attempts to curb freedom of expression and, also in many countries, freedom of protest, were antithetical to democratic principles. They are also likely to be counter-productive, giving succour

DEMOCRACY INDEX 2020

IN SICKNESS AND IN HEALTH?

to the arguments of libertarian critics of lockdown and the mounting numbers of conspiracy theorists that their governments were turning authoritarian.

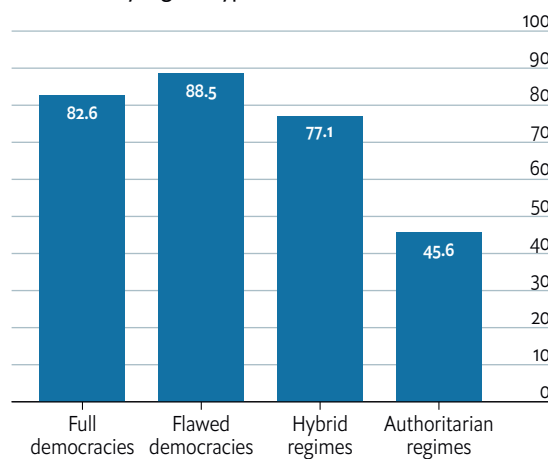
Big downgrades of Index scores for *civil liberties* and *functioning of government*

The withdrawal of civil liberties, attacks on freedom of expression and the failures of democratic accountability that occurred as a result of the pandemic in 2020 are grave matters. This is why the scores for many questions in the civil liberties category and the functioning of government category of the Democracy Index were downgraded across multiple countries in 2020.¹ Regardless of whether there was public support for the government measures, countries that withdrew civil liberties or failed to allow proper scrutiny of new emergency powers were penalised.

The unprecedented suspension of individual freedoms, at least in countries where liberty prevailed before the pandemic, accounts for the sharp democratic regression recorded in the 2020 Democracy Index. Government restrictions on citizens' civil liberties led to scoring downgrades for several Democracy Index questions for almost every country in the world. In particular, the score for Q57 ("extent to which citizens enjoy personal freedoms") was downgraded almost across the board. Some 118 countries, or 71% of the 167 countries and territories covered by the Democracy Index, had their scores downgraded for Q57. Almost all the world's democracies were penalised for curbing their citizens' freedoms: 19 out of 23 "full democracies" and 46 out of 52 "flawed democracies" had their scores downgraded for Q57. Some 27 of 35 countries classified as "hybrid regimes" also recorded a downgrade in their score for this question. By contrast, less than half of all "authoritarian regimes", where individual freedoms are already greatly circumscribed, were downgraded. In 26 out of 57 such regimes, official measures led to the withdrawal of citizens' rights.

Scores for other questions in the civil liberties category of the Democracy Index were downgraded

Chart 2. Downgrades to Q57: "Extent to which citizens enjoy personal freedoms"
(% of total by regime type)



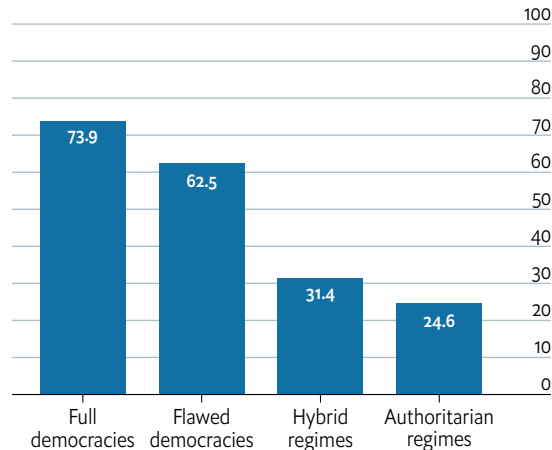
Source: The Economist Intelligence Unit.

as a result of government infringements of other democratic rights, including Q46 covering freedom of expression and protest. A total of 47 countries had their scores downgraded on this indicator—30 democracies and 17 "hybrid" and "authoritarian regimes". Even in the developed democracies there was a tendency to close down dissenting voices, especially those who challenged or raised concerns about lockdowns and their negative impact on society. In more authoritarian countries, rulers took advantage of the pandemic emergency to crack down even harder on their critics and opponents: 33 countries had their scores downgraded for Q47 ("Is media coverage robust?"; "Is there a free and open discussion of public issues, with a reasonable diversity of opinions?").

¹ 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.

Chart 3. Downgrades to Q24: “Perceptions of the extent to which citizens have free choice and control over their lives”

(% of total by regime type)



Source: The Economist Intelligence Unit.

The scores for several questions in the *functioning of government* category were also downgraded as a result of governments' handling of the pandemic. In particular, the score for Q24 (“popular perceptions of the extent to which citizens have free choice and control over their lives”) changed for the worse in many countries. This score was already at 0.5 or 0 rather than 1 for many countries, but in the 2020 Index it was downgraded for 74 countries. The majority of these downgrades occurred in democratic countries: 17 “full democracies” and 32 “flawed democracies” were affected. In addition, 11 “hybrid regimes” and 14 “authoritarian regimes” were penalised on this indicator.

The scoring of other questions, including Q15 (“Is there an effective system of checks and balances on the exercise of government authority?”) and Q21 (“Is the functioning of government open and transparent, with sufficient public access to information?”) was also affected by the way in which governments responded to the pandemic. In many countries, including developed Western democracies, the normal system of checks and balances was cast aside at the start of the crisis as governments rushed through emergency legislation to give themselves extraordinary powers to regulate and police society. In many cases, the drafting and passage of emergency legislation was done so quickly that parliaments and other oversight bodies had little time to scrutinise it. Opposition parties often failed to hold governments to account.

Trust in government took a hit, despite public support for lockdowns

Finally, the scores for some questions in the *electoral process and pluralism* category were affected by government measures in a number of countries, especially those where elections were cancelled or postponed. Q5 (“security of voters”) usually pertains to the issue of intimidation and violence but acquired a new meaning during the pandemic. In some cases, where elections did go ahead, including when the public health situation was not good, a perceived lack of security and safety prevented a large turnout and may have had an impact on the election result. The scoring of Q25 (“confidence in government”) was also influenced by the public’s perception of governments’ handling of the coronavirus pandemic. In large measure, electorates in most democracies were prepared to give their governments the benefit of the doubt, and there was a rally-around-the-flag effect. However, as the crisis unfolded over many months, people tended to become more critical of their governments, even as they continued to endorse social-distancing and lockdown policies.

The widespread downgrades of the scores for Q57 (“personal freedoms”), and to a lesser extent Q46 and Q47 (“freedom of expression and protest and diversity of opinion”), resulted in a sharp decline in the average score for the *civil liberties* category of the Democracy Index (see chart 4). The score for

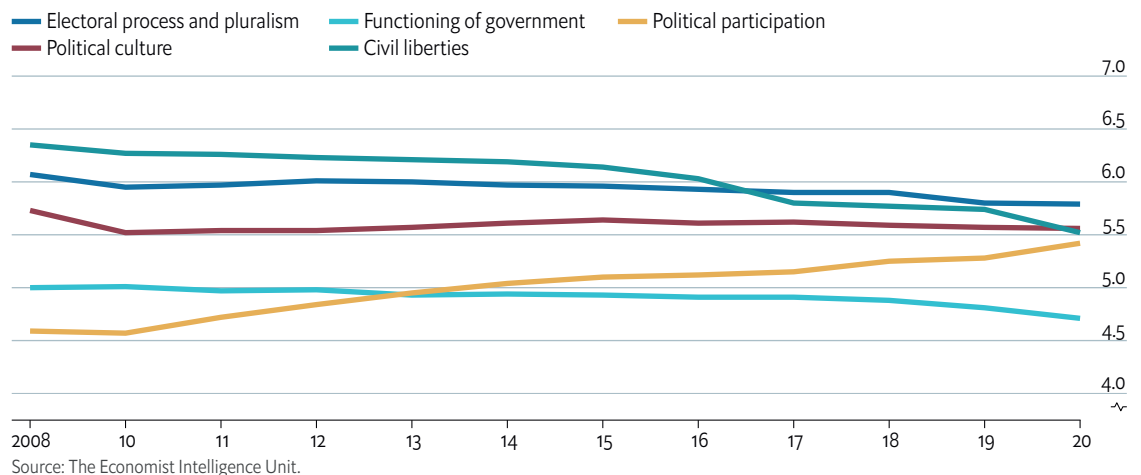
this indicator fell from 5.74 in 2019 to 5.52 in 2020. Likewise, the extensive downgrades of the score for Q24 (“citizens’ perceptions of control”), and to a lesser extent Q15 (“checks and balances”) and Q21 (“openness and transparency”), resulted in a fall in the average score for the *functioning of government* category. This declined from 4.81 in 2019 to 4.71 in 2020. By contrast, there was hardly any decline in the overall scores for *electoral process and pluralism* or *political culture*.

Meanwhile, continuing the trend of recent years, there was another increase in the overall global score for *political participation*, from 5.28 in 2019 to 5.42 in 2020. This may seem counter-intuitive, given that normal political life was suspended for much of the pandemic. However, despite or perhaps because of the issues raised by lockdowns, popular engagement with politics edged up. Popular participation in elections varied around the world, but in some cases, most notably the US, there was a huge voter turnout, facilitated by the more widespread use of mail-in ballots as a result of the pandemic. Elsewhere, especially in emerging-market regions and authoritarian states, there were numerous protests against pandemic-related repressive measures and in response to other economic and political issues. These were not on the scale of the protest wave of 2018-19, which was interrupted by the pandemic in 2020, but they confirmed that the appetite for change and more democracy has not abated (see Democracy around the regions in 2020, page 26 onwards).

Who rules, and how? The measure of a healthy democracy

That people reluctantly accepted social distancing and lockdowns as the best means of combating the coronavirus and saving lives does not mean that governments should not be criticised for their democratic failings. The pandemic tells us a lot about the nature of governance in 21st century democracies and, in particular, about the relationship between governments and the people. It did not need a pandemic to expose the ailing health of our democracies. However, it drew attention to some of the democratic deficits that have existed for a long time. The way in which many rulers chose to respond to the pandemic and manage the public health emergency says a lot about where power resides and how it is exercised in democracies today.

Chart 4. Evolution of democracy by category, 2008-20
 (Index score out of 10, 10 being best)



In keeping with the style of governance that has become the norm in most democracies, “full” and “flawed” alike, governments made little serious effort to involve the public in a national discussion of how to deal with the pandemic, despite it being a public health emergency. Instead, the approach was a top-down imposition of extraordinary measures, justified on the basis of “the science”. Governments communicated these decisions through (sometimes daily) press conferences but did not invite the public to express its opinion. In each country there were attempts to rally the nation around the idea that its citizens were all in it together and must make sacrifices for the common good.

Was there another way? There was no obvious alternative to the social distancing, quarantining and lockdown policies pursued by governments and, in itself, this did not signal a turn towards authoritarianism in the world’s democracies. However, governments’ approach to the management of the pandemic did reveal a dismissive attitude towards the idea of popular participation and engagement with the single most important issue of the day. Even though they were pressed for time while tackling an urgent public health catastrophe, governments could have treated the public like grown-ups and asked for their consent and involvement in combating the coronavirus epidemic.

Democracy is ultimately about an attitude towards people. Democratic systems are supposed to be attuned to the needs of people through the existence of representative political parties and a culture of robust debate about the issues that matter to people. The populist revolt of recent years, discussed at length in recent editions of the Democracy Index, confirms that democratic institutions and the rule of law alone are not enough to sustain a thriving democracy. The involvement of people in democratic and accountable decision-making is a prerequisite of a truly vibrant democracy, whose ultimate goal should be the creation of a community of active citizens. This demands in the first instance that the people be consulted and that questions of the first order are referred to them for consideration and debate. For this to happen, democracies need leadership, representative political organisations and clear alternatives to choose from. If the political enterprise atrophies and becomes non-competitive, as has arguably been the case in many Western democracies in recent decades, popular sovereignty will mean nothing.

The question of how power is exercised in a democracy is a crucial one for our time. It is one that has already been highlighted by the populist upsurge of the past five years. The pandemic has simply shone a spotlight on it.

“The coronavirus pandemic of 2020 posed the question of whether the public should, temporarily, surrender democratic freedoms to save lives. Through their actions the majority of people answered in the affirmative. The problem was they were never really invited to consider it. The quality of any democracy can be measured by the questions it puts to the public for decision or guidance. The pandemic confirmed that many rulers have become used to excluding the public from discussion of the pressing issues of the day and showed how elite governance, not popular participation, has become the norm.”

Joan Hoey, Editor, The Democracy Index

DEMOCRACY INDEX 2020 IN SICKNESS AND IN HEALTH?

Table 3.
Democracy Index 2006-20

	2020	2019	2018	2017	2016	2015	2014	2013	2012	2011	2010	2008	2006
Canada	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	7.92	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	8.58	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	8.16	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	7.64	7.78	7.78	7.77	7.93	7.93	8.05	8.05	8.05	8.05	8.16	8.15
Cyprus	7.56	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	9.15	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	9.20	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	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	8.68	8.68	8.61	8.63	8.64	8.64	8.31	8.34	8.34	8.38	8.82	8.82
Greece	7.39	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	9.37	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	9.05	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	7.74	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	8.81	8.81	8.81	8.81	8.88	8.88	8.88	8.88	8.88	8.88	9.10	9.10
Malta	7.68	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	8.96	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	9.81	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	7.90	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	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	9.39	9.39	9.39	9.39	9.45	9.73	9.73	9.73	9.50	9.50	9.88	9.88
Switzerland	8.83	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	4.48	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	8.54	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	8.29	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	6.08	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	5.35	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	2.75	2.65	2.65	2.65	2.71	2.83	3.06	3.15	3.15	3.15	3.19	3.31
Belarus	2.59	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	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	6.71	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	6.57	6.57	6.63	6.75	6.93	6.93	6.93	6.93	6.73	6.81	7.04	7.04
Czech Republic	7.67	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	7.90	7.97	7.79	7.85	7.85	7.74	7.61	7.61	7.61	7.68	7.68	7.74
Georgia	5.31	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	6.56	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	3.14	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 2020

IN SICKNESS AND IN HEALTH?

Table 3.
Democracy Index 2006-20

	2020	2019	2018	2017	2016	2015	2014	2013	2012	2011	2010	2008	2006
Kyrgyz Republic	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	7.24	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	7.13	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	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	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	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	6.85	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	6.40	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	3.31	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	6.22	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	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	7.50	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	1.93	1.93	1.93	1.89	1.95	2.37	2.51	2.51	2.51	2.51	2.45	2.45
Turkmenistan	1.72	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	5.81	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	2.01	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	5.42	5.42	5.40	5.43	5.55	5.58	5.53	5.51	5.50	5.55	5.67	5.76
Argentina	6.95	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	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	6.92	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	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	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	8.16	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	2.84	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	6.32	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	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	5.90	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	4.97	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	6.01	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	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	5.36	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	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	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	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	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	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	6.53	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	6.98	6.98	6.76	6.77	6.77	6.77	6.77	6.65	6.65	6.65	6.58	6.52

DEMOCRACY INDEX 2020 IN SICKNESS AND IN HEALTH?

Table 3.
Democracy Index 2006-20

	2020	2019	2018	2017	2016	2015	2014	2013	2012	2011	2010	2008	2006
Trinidad and Tobago	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	8.61	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	2.76	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	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	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	8.96	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	5.88	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	5.30	5.30	5.08	4.93	4.93	4.87	4.82	4.65	4.57	4.68	4.30	2.62
Cambodia	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	2.27	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	5.72	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	5.57	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	6.61	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	6.30	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	8.13	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	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	7.19	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	6.48	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	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	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	9.25	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	0.86	1.03
Pakistan	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	6.03	6.03	6.03	6.03	6.03	6.03	6.36	6.32	6.32	6.54	6.54	6.54
Philippines	6.56	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	6.03	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	8.01	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	6.27	6.19	6.48	6.48	6.42	5.69	5.69	5.75	6.58	6.64	6.61	6.58
Taiwan	8.94	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	6.32	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	7.19	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	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	5.62	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	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	2.49	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	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	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 2020

IN SICKNESS AND IN HEALTH?

Table 3.
Democracy Index 2006-20

	2020	2019	2018	2017	2016	2015	2014	2013	2012	2011	2010	2008	2006
Iraq	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	7.84	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	3.62	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	3.80	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	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	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	5.10	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	3.06	3.04	3.04	3.04	3.04	3.15	3.26	3.26	3.26	2.86	2.98	2.77
Palestine	3.83	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	3.24	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	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	2.54	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	1.74	1.86	1.63	1.99	2.31	2.18	2.36
Tunisia	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	2.70	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	2.07	2.07	2.24	2.79	2.79	3.12	2.57	2.64	2.95	2.98
average	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	3.66	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	4.58	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	7.62	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	3.73	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	2.14	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	7.78	7.88	7.88	7.94	7.81	7.81	7.92	7.92	7.92	7.94	7.81	7.43
Cameroon	2.77	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	1.32	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	1.55	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	3.09	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)	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	4.11	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	1.13	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	2.71	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	1.81	1.70	1.77	1.66	1.77	1.83	1.77	1.84	2.19	2.09
Eritrea	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	3.14	3.03	3.03	3.03	3.09	3.09	3.20	3.20	3.26	2.90	3.04	2.93
Ethiopia	3.38	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	3.54	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	4.49	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	6.63	6.63	6.69	6.75	6.86	6.33	6.33	6.02	6.02	6.02	5.35	5.35

DEMOCRACY INDEX 2020 IN SICKNESS AND IN HEALTH?

Table 3.
Democracy Index 2006-20

	2020	2019	2018	2017	2016	2015	2014	2013	2012	2011	2010	2008	2006
Guinea	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	2.63	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	5.18	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	6.54	6.64	6.64	6.59	6.59	6.66	6.66	6.66	6.33	6.02	6.29	6.48
Liberia	5.32	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	5.64	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	5.50	5.49	5.49	5.55	5.55	5.66	6.00	6.08	5.84	5.84	5.13	4.97
Mali	3.93	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	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	8.14	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	3.65	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	6.43	6.25	6.31	6.31	6.31	6.24	6.24	6.24	6.24	6.23	6.48	6.54
Niger	3.29	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	4.10	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	3.16	3.35	3.19	3.07	3.07	3.25	3.38	3.36	3.25	3.25	3.71	3.82
Senegal	5.67	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	4.86	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	7.24	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	5.16	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	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	4.94	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	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	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	4.16	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	5.37	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: The Economist Intelligence Unit.

Democracy around the regions in 2020

In 2020 the average global score fell from 5.44 in 2019 to 5.37 (on a 0-10 scale), driven by regressions across all regions, and especially large ones in Sub-Saharan Africa and the Middle East and North Africa. For the first time since 2010, in the aftermath of the global economic and financial crisis, every single region recorded a deterioration in its average score. A large part of the explanation for this worldwide democratic regression is to be found in the measures taken by governments to address the public health emergency caused by the coronavirus pandemic. This will be explored in detail in relation to all seven regions covered by the Democracy Index.

The developed countries of Europe and North America continue to dominate among the world's "full democracies", accounting for 14 of the total of 23 in 2020, or about 61%. Asia and Australasia

Table 4.
Democracy across the regions

	No. of countries	Democracy index average	Full democracies	Flawed democracies	Hybrid regimes	Authoritarian regimes
North America						
2020	2	8.58	1	1	0	0
2019	2	8.59	1	1	0	0
Western Europe						
2020	21	8.29	13	7	1	0
2019	21	8.35	15	5	1	0
Eastern Europe						
2020	28	5.36	0	13	8	7
2019	28	5.42	0	12	9	7
Latin America & the Caribbean						
2020	24	6.09	3	13	5	3
2019	24	6.13	3	14	4	3
Asia & Australasia						
2020	28	5.62	5	10	6	7
2019	28	5.67	2	14	5	7
Middle East & North Africa						
2020	20	3.44	0	2	2	16
2019	20	3.53	0	2	3	15
Sub-Saharan Africa						
2020	44	4.16	1	6	13	24
2019	44	4.26	1	6	15	22
Total						
2020	167	5.37	23	52	35	57
2019	167	5.44	22	54	37	54

Source: The Economist Intelligence Unit.

now has five “full democracies”, up from two in 2019, including three Asian ones (Japan, South Korea and Taiwan) and the two Australasian countries. Three Latin American countries are classed as “full democracies” (Chile, Costa Rica and Uruguay), as is one African country (Mauritius). The predominance of OECD countries among those ranked as “full democracies” suggests that the level of economic development is a significant, if not binding, constraint on democratic development.

“Flawed democracies” are concentrated in eastern Europe (13), Latin America (13) and Asia (10). Western Europe has seven 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. The absence of a single “full democracy” in eastern Europe demands an explanation that takes account of the region’s unique history in the 20th century under the domination of the former Soviet Union, as well as of its transition to capitalism after 1989. Eastern Europe is also the region whose overall score has deteriorated the most since the Democracy Index was established in 2006, recording a decline in its average score of 0.40, pointing to core weaknesses in its institutions and political culture.

Significant democratic regressions have also occurred in western Europe, whose average score has fallen by 0.31 since 2006, indicating that the democratic malaise of the past decade has been felt most keenly in some of the most developed democracies in the world. North America has experienced the smallest regression of all regions since we began producing the Democracy Index, but this is solely thanks to a steady improvement in the score for Canada. By contrast, the score for the US has declined by 0.30 since 2006, only slightly less than the deterioration recorded on average in western Europe. There has also been a notable decline in Latin America since the index was first introduced, and this became more pronounced in 2019-20. In fact, only Asia has registered a significant improvement since 2006, albeit from a low base, as fledgling democracies have consolidated.

In 2020 the biggest regressions occurred in authoritarian regions

In recent years the downturn in democracy has been particularly concentrated in the world’s more developed democracies, but in 2020 the biggest regressions occurred in the most authoritarian countries in the world. These regimes took advantage of the global health emergency caused by the coronavirus pandemic to persecute and crack down on dissenters and political opponents. The average score for Sub-Saharan Africa fell by 0.1 between 2019 and 2020, to 4.16. This is by far the worst score recorded by the region since the start of the index in 2006, when it recorded an average score of 4.24. In 2020 the number of “authoritarian regimes” in the region increased to 24, more than half (55%) of the 44 countries in the region that are covered by the index. After experiencing two consecutive years of significant setbacks, democracy in Africa appears to be in a perilous state.

The Middle East and North Africa recorded the second biggest regional decline globally in 2020, with a decline in the average score of 0.09, to 3.44. The region is essentially back to where 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. However, only Tunisia has consolidated any democratic gains, graduating into a “flawed democracy” in 2014 with an increase in its score from 3.06 in 2006 to 6.59 in 2020 (down from 6.72 in 2019). Disillusion has set in and stasis has been the defining characteristic of the region in recent years. Yet, as widespread protests in 2019

DEMOCRACY INDEX 2020

IN SICKNESS AND IN HEALTH?

Table 5.
Democracy Index 2006-20 by region

	2020	2019	2018	2017	2016	2015	2014	2013	2012	2011	2010	2008	2006
Asia & Australasia	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	5.42	5.42	5.40	5.43	5.55	5.58	5.53	5.51	5.50	5.55	5.67	5.76
Latin America	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	3.44	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	8.58	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	8.29	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	4.16	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	5.37	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: The Economist Intelligence Unit.

showed, disaffection is also feeding anger and frustration, especially among the region's marginalised youth, which could erupt once again in protests demanding democratic change.

Asia and Australasia

Since we began producing the Democracy Index in 2006, the Asia and Australasia region has made more progress in improving its standing in our global rankings than any other region. However, with an average regional score of 5.62 in 2020, it continues to lag behind North America (8.58), western Europe (8.29) and Latin America (6.09). The region made rapid progress in the decade up to 2016, and its average score peaked at 5.74 that year. However, the average regional score declined significantly in 2017 and remained stagnant at 5.67 in 2018-19.

In 2020 the regional score deteriorated to its lowest level since 2013 as official measures taken to combat the coronavirus pandemic led to some of the most severe constraints on individual freedoms and civil liberties in the world. China, Singapore, South Korea and others went much further than the rest of the world in tracking and policing their citizens and locking them down in response to the Covid-19 pandemic. As a result, more than half of the countries in the region recorded a fall in their total score. However, the biggest country downgrades, for Myanmar and Hong Kong, were driven by other factors, including mass voter suppression in the former and a crackdown by the authorities on dissent in the latter; these factors led the two countries to fall down the global rankings by 13 and 12 positions respectively.

Asia and Australasia is the region with the biggest divergence in scores: it includes top-scoring New Zealand (9.25), which retained its 4th position in the global ranking (out of 167 countries), while persistent laggard North Korea (1.08) is at the bottom of the global ranking in 167th place. The region's overall score fell in 2020, but Asia and Australasia now has five countries that are rated as "full democracies", three more (Japan, South Korea and Taiwan) than in 2019. New Zealand and Australia have always enjoyed this status, although their scores fell marginally during the year. Japan and South Korea both returned to the "full democracy" fold for the first time since 2014, while Taiwan attained "full democracy" status for the first time following a spectacular jump up the rankings (see Box, page 32). The region has ten "flawed democracies", six "hybrid regimes" and seven "authoritarian regimes".

DEMOCRACY INDEX 2020

IN SICKNESS AND IN HEALTH?

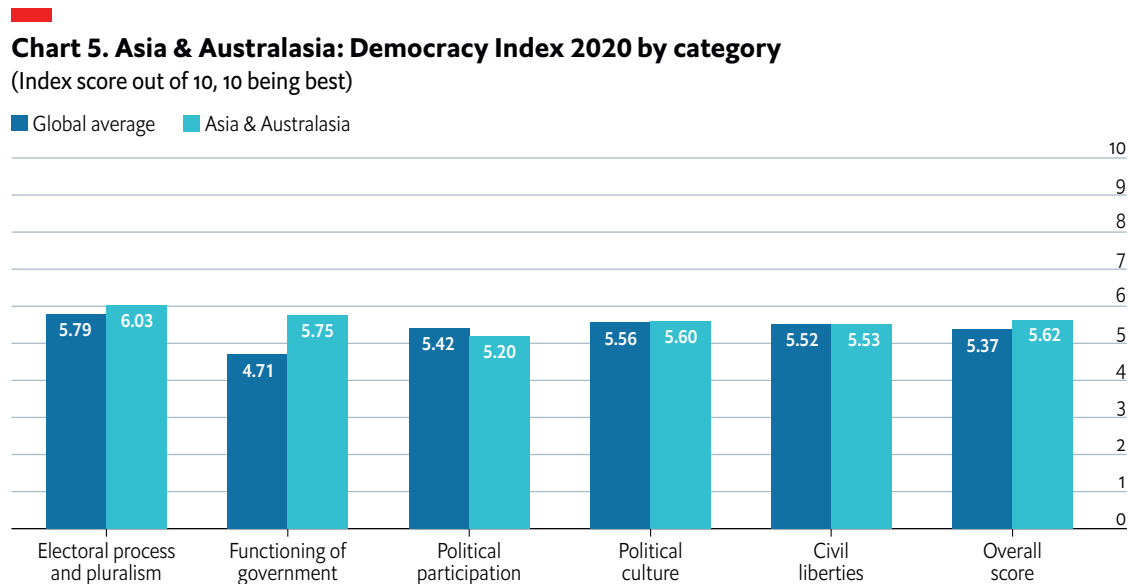
Table 6.
Asia and Australasia 2020

	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	9.25	4	1	10.00	8.93	8.89	8.75	9.71	Full democracy
Australia	8.96	9=	2	10.00	8.57	7.78	8.75	9.71	Full democracy
Taiwan	8.94	11	3	10.00	9.64	7.22	8.13	9.71	Full democracy
Japan	8.13	21	4	8.75	8.57	6.67	8.13	8.53	Full democracy
South Korea	8.01	23	5	9.17	8.21	7.22	7.50	7.94	Full democracy
Malaysia	7.19	39	6	9.58	7.86	6.67	6.25	5.59	Flawed democracy
Timor-Leste	7.06	44	7	9.58	5.93	5.56	6.88	7.35	Flawed democracy
India	6.61	53	8	8.67	7.14	6.67	5.00	5.59	Flawed democracy
Philippines	6.56	55=	9	9.17	5.00	7.78	4.38	6.47	Flawed democracy
Mongolia	6.48	61	10	8.75	5.71	5.56	5.63	6.76	Flawed democracy
Indonesia	6.30	64=	11	7.92	7.50	6.11	4.38	5.59	Flawed democracy
Sri Lanka	6.14	68	12	7.00	5.71	5.56	6.25	6.18	Flawed democracy
Papua New Guinea	6.10	70	13	6.92	6.07	3.33	6.25	7.94	Flawed democracy
Thailand	6.04	73	14	7.00	5.00	6.67	6.25	5.29	Flawed democracy
Singapore	6.03	74	15	4.83	7.86	4.44	6.25	6.76	Flawed democracy
Bangladesh	5.99	76	16	7.42	6.07	6.11	5.63	4.71	Hybrid regime
Fiji	5.72	83	17	6.58	5.00	6.11	5.63	5.29	Hybrid regime
Bhutan	5.71	84	18	8.75	6.79	3.33	5.00	4.71	Hybrid regime
Hong Kong	5.57	87	19	3.17	3.64	5.00	7.50	8.53	Hybrid regime
Nepal	5.22	92	20	4.83	5.36	5.00	5.63	5.29	Hybrid regime
Pakistan	4.31	105	21	5.67	5.36	3.33	2.50	4.71	Hybrid regime
Cambodia	3.10	130=	22	0.00	3.93	3.89	5.63	2.06	Authoritarian
Myanmar	3.04	135	23	1.75	3.93	2.78	4.38	2.35	Authoritarian
Vietnam	2.94	137	24	0.00	2.86	3.89	5.63	2.35	Authoritarian
Afghanistan	2.85	139	25	3.42	0.64	3.89	2.50	3.82	Authoritarian
China	2.27	151	26	0.00	4.29	2.78	3.13	1.18	Authoritarian
Laos	1.77	161	27	0.00	2.86	1.67	3.75	0.59	Authoritarian
North Korea	1.08	167	28	0.00	2.50	1.67	1.25	0.00	Authoritarian

Source: The Economist Intelligence Unit.

Hong Kong becomes a “hybrid regime” in the face of China’s intensified political clampdown

It was a tumultuous year for democracy in Asia. The pandemic led to a tightening of controls over the media and more restraints on civil liberties in China, including via greater online censorship and the expansion of population surveillance methods to control the spread of the coronavirus. Diplomatic tensions with Australia and the US resulted in the expulsion of several foreign journalists from the country. Concerns about human rights abuses in Xinjiang persisted. Conditions in Hong Kong worsened for the second consecutive year and, as a result, the territory lost its status as a “flawed democracy” and is now categorised as a “hybrid regime”. Suppression of debate on political reform through the



Source: The Economist Intelligence Unit.

extensive application of legal tools continued unabated in 2020. A national security law that curtails Hong Kong’s political freedoms and undermines its judicial independence was passed in June. Over the course of the year, pro-democracy activists were arrested, and several hundred protesters were imprisoned. Crackdown on opposition also continued—the central government sees no role in Hong Kong for parties that support greater local political autonomy for the territory.

Meanwhile, in Myanmar the ruling National League for Democracy (NLD) returned for a second term in November 2020 as Aung San Suu Kyi, Myanmar’s state counsellor and de facto leader, led her party to a resounding victory in the national election. However, the country is no closer to becoming a tolerant and inclusive democracy than it was five years ago. The Union Election Commission (UEC) restricted voting in the Rakhine state, where heavy fighting between ethnic rebels and the army continues, and only around one-quarter of eligible voters were able to cast ballots. The election commission announced the cancellation of the election in nine of the state’s 17 townships, citing security concerns because of the continued fighting. However, while it cancelled the vote in seven constituencies held by the opposition Arakan National party, the UEC allowed the poll to go ahead in three of the four Rakhine constituencies held by the NLD. As a result, more than 1m ethnic-minority voters in Rakhine state were disenfranchised. Despite a ceasefire being agreed after the election had taken place, the UEC and the government did not allow elections to be held subsequently. Both the military and the NLD government also resorted to use of the expansive online defamation law to deter those opposing the government.

Amid a tumultuous year, the Asia Pacific region recorded some positive developments for democracy, too. Despite the Covid-19 pandemic, national elections took place peacefully in Mongolia, New Zealand, Singapore, South Korea, Sri Lanka and Taiwan. For South Korea, a tiny improvement of 0.1 points was enough for the country to regain the status of “full democracy”, having languished as a “flawed democracy” on 8.00 points for the previous three years. A deterioration in the country’s score for civil liberties was offset by an improvement in its score for *functioning of government* as the

public's confidence in the government improved. Japan's score improved from 7.99 in 2019 to 8.13 in 2020, putting it in 21st place globally and returning it to the status of a "full democracy". The change was driven by an improvement in public confidence in the government. In addition, World Values Survey data show that fewer Japanese now prefer rule by technocrats to rule by elected representatives.

Singapore remains a "flawed democracy", albeit close to dropping below the threshold of 6.00 for classification as a "hybrid regime", despite a very small improvement in its total score in 2020. Restrictions on the political process remain in place, but, in a positive development for political contestation, the ruling People's Action Party lost a number of seats in the election, and the opposition Worker's Party was formally recognised as an opposition grouping in parliament.

Democratic regression in South and Southeast Asia

In Southeast Asia, Thailand's score regressed in 2020. The country was upgraded from a "hybrid regime" to a "flawed democracy" in 2019, after finally holding an election, the first since a military coup d'état in May 2014. However, several of Thailand's scores deteriorated in 2020, including those related to the treatment of the opposition and to curbs on freedom of expression. In line with its history of ruling against the opposition, in February 2020 Thailand's Constitutional Court ordered the dissolution of the second-largest opposition party, the Future Forward Party (FFP), after finding it guilty of violating the campaign finance law in relation to the general election in 2019. It banned the party's leaders from holding political office for ten years. The FFP was known for its vocal anti-military stance and had emerged as the third-largest party on the back of support from young and urban voters. Anti-government protests returned as student protesters demanded the dissolution of parliament, respect for freedom of speech and assembly, and a new, more democratic constitution. The government responded by arresting protesters and placing additional curbs on foreign and domestic media.

By contrast, political stability in Malaysia has deteriorated since the departure of Mahathir Mohamad as prime minister in March 2020. However, improvements in *electoral process and pluralism* have resulted in more democratic political institutions.

In India, democratic norms have been under pressure since 2015. India's score fell from a peak of 7.92 in 2014 to 6.61 in 2020 and its global ranking slipped from 27th to 53rd as a result of democratic backsliding under the leadership of Narendra Modi, a member of the Hindu-nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), who became prime minister in 2014 and was re-elected for a second term in 2019. The increasing influence of religion under the Modi premiership, whose policies have fomented anti-Muslim feeling and religious strife, has damaged the political fabric of the country. The enactment in December 2019 of the Citizenship (Amendment) Act 2019 continued to fuel riots in 2020, with several left dead following clashes in February in the capital city, New Delhi. The Act introduces a religious element to the conceptualisation of Indian citizenship, a step that many critics see as undermining the secular basis of the Indian state.

In August Mr Modi participated in a ground-breaking ceremony for a Hindu temple on the site of a 16th-century mosque in Ayodhya, Uttar Pradesh. The mosque was destroyed by a Hindu nationalist mob in 1992 and building a temple on the site has been a rallying cry for Hindu nationalist groups ever since, featuring in the BJP's general election manifestos in 2014 and 2019. The temple's construction will further endear Mr Modi to his Hindu nationalist base. On top of these issues, the authorities' handling of the coronavirus pandemic has also led to a further erosion of civil liberties in 2020. By contrast, the

Taiwan: a beacon of democracy in Asia

Taiwan rose up the Democracy Index rankings by 20 places in 2020, to 11th place globally, from 31st in 2019. To a degree, this spectacular rise reflects a consolidation of positive political and legal developments over recent years. The transparency of the financing of political parties has improved and legislative reforms have more explicitly affirmed the judiciary's independence from government influence.

Other major developments underpin our positive assessment of the status of democracy in Taiwan. The January 2020 national elections demonstrated the resilience of Taiwan's democracy in the face of Chinese threats, and at a time when electoral processes, parliamentary oversight and civil liberties have been backsliding globally. There was a strong voter turnout, including among the younger generation, to elect the president and members of the Legislative Yuan (parliament). These factors outweighed free speech concerns related to the maintenance of controversial legislative efforts to combat disinformation in 2020.

Strengthening democracy: the best defence against external threats

Taiwan's leaders and citizens seem to have concluded that active engagement in the

democratic process represents the best strategy to secure its future. Taiwan's staunch commitment to upholding democracy was undoubtedly influenced by the political turbulence in Hong Kong and the erosion of democratic freedoms in that territory.

Finally, Taiwan's successful handling of the Covid-19 pandemic, and the strong response of the president, Tsai Ing-wen, has helped to maintain public confidence in the government. Taiwan avoided sweeping lockdowns and restrictions on internal movement. In turn, the Taiwanese public demonstrated a great willingness to cooperate with healthcare authorities in complying voluntarily with quarantine and social-distancing restrictions, including stringent track-and-trace requirements.

Ironically, Taiwan's success in avoiding a domestic lockdown prevented a broader discussion about data privacy concerns taking off in 2020. However, serious deficiencies remain in this area. Taiwan lacks a central regulatory agency to oversee data collection and protection, for instance. This stands in contrast to the practices of other high-scoring democracies in the region, such as Australia and New Zealand, which have used established agencies dedicated to protecting personal privacy. How Taiwanese officials handle these issues will remain an important area to watch in 2021.

scores for some of India's regional neighbours, such as Bangladesh, Bhutan and Pakistan, improved marginally in 2020.

Eastern Europe

In 2020 eastern Europe's average regional score in the Democracy Index declined to 5.36, compared with 5.42 in 2019. This is markedly below the region's score of 5.76 in 2006, when the index was first published. Only a handful of countries, such as Poland, registered a significant improvement in their scores, while many more experienced steep declines in their scores, most notably the Kyrgyz Republic. In total, the scores of ten countries rose in 2020, while 17 fell and one stagnated. This clear trend of deterioration across the region indicates the fragility of democracy in times of crisis and the willingness

DEMOCRACY INDEX 2020

IN SICKNESS AND IN HEALTH?

Table 7.
Eastern Europe 2020

	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	7.67	31	2	9.58	6.07	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	7.24	38	4	9.58	6.07	6.67	5.63	8.24	Flawed democracy
Lithuania	7.13	42=	5	9.58	6.07	5.56	5.63	8.82	Flawed democracy
Slovakia	6.97	47	6	9.58	6.43	5.56	5.63	7.65	Flawed democracy
Poland	6.85	50	7	9.17	5.71	6.67	5.63	7.06	Flawed democracy
Bulgaria	6.71	52	8	9.17	5.71	7.22	4.38	7.06	Flawed democracy
Hungary	6.56	55=	9	8.33	6.43	5.00	6.25	6.76	Flawed democracy
Croatia	6.50	59=	10	9.17	6.07	6.11	4.38	6.76	Flawed democracy
Romania	6.40	62	11	9.17	5.36	6.67	3.75	7.06	Flawed democracy
Serbia	6.22	66	12	8.25	5.36	6.67	3.75	7.06	Flawed democracy
Albania	6.08	71	13	7.00	5.36	4.44	6.25	7.35	Flawed democracy
North Macedonia	5.89	78	14	7.42	5.71	6.11	3.13	7.06	Hybrid regime
Ukraine	5.81	79	15	8.25	2.71	7.22	5.00	5.88	Hybrid regime
Moldova	5.78	80	16	7.00	4.64	6.11	4.38	6.76	Hybrid regime
Montenegro	5.77	81	17	7.42	5.71	6.11	3.13	6.47	Hybrid regime
Armenia	5.35	89	18	7.50	5.00	6.11	3.13	5.00	Hybrid regime
Georgia	5.31	91	19	7.83	3.57	6.11	3.75	5.29	Hybrid regime
Bosnia and Hercegovina	4.84	101	20	7.00	2.93	5.56	3.13	5.59	Hybrid regime
Kyrgyz Republic	4.21	107	21	4.75	2.93	5.56	3.13	4.71	Hybrid regime
Russia	3.31	124	22	2.17	2.14	5.00	3.13	4.12	Authoritarian
Kazakhstan	3.14	128	23	0.50	3.21	5.00	3.75	3.24	Authoritarian
Azerbaijan	2.68	146	24	0.50	2.86	3.33	3.75	2.94	Authoritarian
Belarus	2.59	148	25	0.00	2.00	3.89	5.00	2.06	Authoritarian
Uzbekistan	2.12	155	26	0.08	1.86	2.78	5.00	0.88	Authoritarian
Tajikistan	1.94	159	27	0.00	2.21	2.22	4.38	0.88	Authoritarian
Turkmenistan	1.72	162	28	0.00	0.79	2.22	5.00	0.59	Authoritarian

Source: The Economist Intelligence Unit.

of governments to sacrifice civil liberties and exercise unchecked authority in an emergency situation. The pandemic also served to highlight persistent problems in the region, such as poorly functioning institutions and a weak political culture. Eastern Europe's low average score for political culture (4.67) is the worst of any region and reflects a worrying decline in support for democracy—a symptom of a deep democratic malaise and popular disenchantment with the political status quo in the region—and increasing support for military rule and strongman leaders.

In 2020 there are still no “full democracies” in the region, and only Albania changed its category, improving to a “flawed democracy” from a “hybrid regime”. Thirteen countries are now classed as

“flawed democracies”, including all of the region’s 11 EU member states plus Serbia and Albania; eight are classed as “hybrid regimes” (the remaining western Balkan states plus Ukraine, Moldova, Armenia, Georgia and the Kyrgyz Republic). The rest, including Belarus, Kazakhstan and Russia, are “authoritarian regimes”.

“Flawed democracies”: enter Albania

The scores for all but three countries in the “flawed democracy” category worsened in 2020. The sharpest declines were in the Baltics, as popular support for military rule has increased significantly in Latvia. There has been a similar trend in Lithuania, where low confidence in government and institutions and an increasing appetite for strongman leadership led to a decline in the country’s score. Estonia remained the highest-ranking country in eastern Europe, with a score of 7.84, retaining its global ranking of 27th.

In central Europe the gap between the highest-scoring countries—the Czech Republic and Slovenia—and the rest of the region has become even more pronounced. Poland was the exception. The country’s score improved as support for democracy and readiness to participate in lawful demonstrations increased, as illustrated by a wave of anti-government protests in the second half of the year, while support for strong leaders decreased. However, Poland still remains significantly behind the Czech Republic and Slovenia, but has now overtaken Hungary, where the prime minister, Viktor Orban, wielded even more unchecked executive power in response to the pandemic.

Similarly, Bulgaria registered a decline in its score and has now moved into the bottom half of the “flawed democracy” category owing to concerns about the independence of the judiciary and media freedom, as highlighted by the September 2020 Rule of Law Report of the European Commission. The appointment of a prosecutor general with alleged links to the government caused widespread anti-government protests across the country.

Finally, Albania has moved into the “flawed democracy” category with a score of 6.08, having previously ranked as a “hybrid regime”; the country sits below Serbia (6.22) in the regional ranking. Albania’s upgrade was driven by several factors, including an increase in public support for democracy. The government also undertook a series of electoral reforms that seek to bring Albania’s election laws in line with EU standards as the country prepares for the start of EU accession talks. However, it remains unclear whether the reforms will result in completely free and fair elections.

“Hybrid regimes”: elections lead to improvement in Montenegro, deterioration in the Kyrgyz Republic

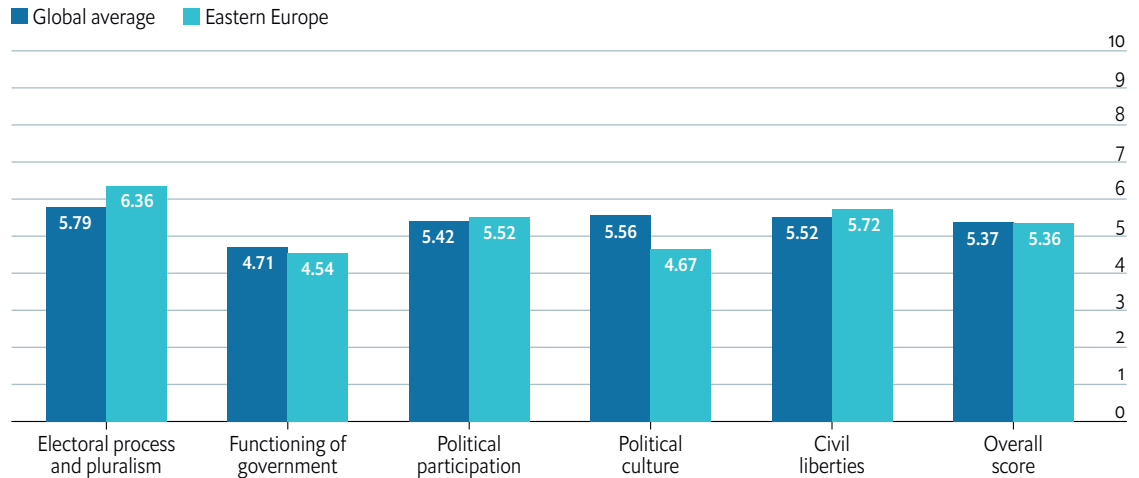
The average score for the countries in the “hybrid regime” category declined in 2020 with only two countries—Moldova and Montenegro—registering an improvement.

Montenegro is an outlier in the “hybrid regime” category after the Democratic Party of Socialists (DPS), led by the country’s long-standing leader, Milo Djukanovic, lost its government mandate to a united opposition coalition in a free parliamentary election in July. The DPS has been the leading party in Montenegrin politics since its creation in 1991, and the election marked the first transition of power in the country’s history.

In contrast, in the Kyrgyz Republic a failed parliamentary election in October further exacerbated the steady erosion of democratic principles in the country. Despite being the only non-authoritarian

Chart 6. Eastern Europe: Democracy Index 2020 by category

(Index score out of 10, 10 being best)



Source: The Economist Intelligence Unit.

state in Central Asia, the Kyrgyz Republic is now moving closer to authoritarianism and registered the steepest score decline in eastern Europe in 2020, replacing Bosnia and Hercegovina as the lowest-scoring country in the “hybrid regime” category. The conduct of the parliamentary election was flawed which led to violent public unrest and the subsequent annulment of the results. After the annulment, the outgoing parliament approved the extension of its own term and appointed a prime minister who then used pressure to consolidate his power and assume the role of interim president. Unelected officials were allowed to operate without a proper system of checks and balances in place.

Unlike the Kyrgyz Republic, most countries classed as “hybrid regimes” registered improvements in *electoral processes and pluralism*. Elections in Moldova, North Macedonia and Ukraine showed a trend of improving electoral standards and more fairness and transparency of elections. However, these positive developments were offset by infringements of civil liberties as a result of the coronavirus pandemic and, in some cases, a decline in several scores for *political culture*.

Armenia’s score declined significantly in 2020, after the country had bucked the regional trend and registered significant improvement in 2018-19. As a result of the armed conflict with Azerbaijan over the breakaway region of Nagorny Karabakh, the Armenian government imposed martial law which significantly limited citizens’ freedoms, including freedom of expression. Martial law continued even after the fighting was ended via a ceasefire and was used as a pretext to disperse anti-government protests and detain opposition leaders.

“Authoritarian regimes”: political culture improvement in Belarus drives the score up

The average score for the countries in the “authoritarian regimes” category improved modestly from 2019, from a uniformly low base. However, long-term progress on democratic reform was still not achieved and all countries within the category are unlikely to improve significantly in the coming years. Russia’s score remains the highest out of the seven, at 3.31 (ranked 124th worldwide, out of 167

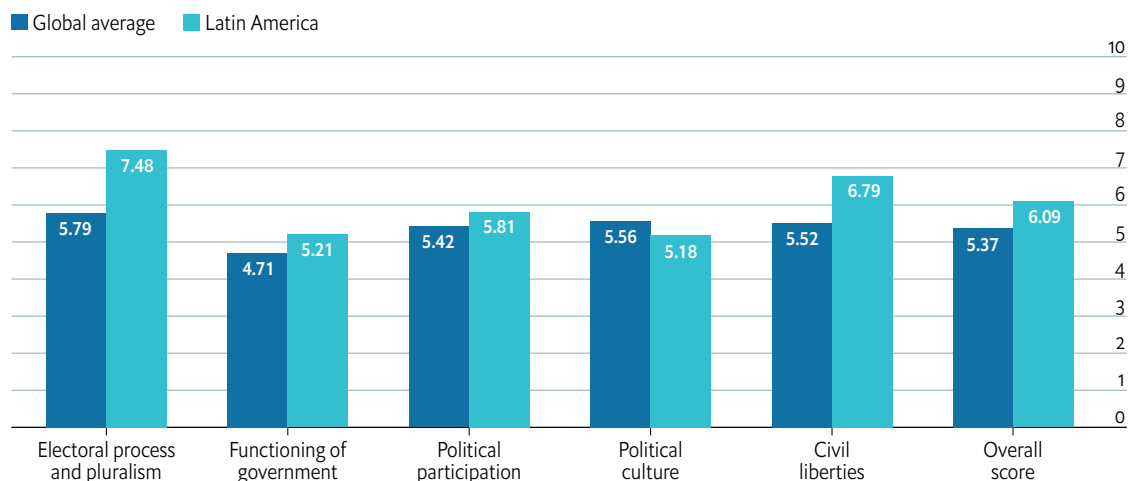
countries), and Turkmenistan’s the lowest, at just 1.72. Belarus, Azerbaijan and four Central Asian states (Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan) remain dictatorships, the leaders of which have sometimes stayed in place for decades. In most of these countries, the score upgrades were led by a rising confidence in governments and political parties. However, the lack of any viable political alternatives, as well as repressive state apparatus that clamps down on dissenting voices, may result in exaggerated support for political elites in public opinion surveys.

In Belarus, another unfree and unfair presidential election in Month 2020 caused a wave of peaceful demonstrations that demanded the resignation of the president, Alyksandar Lukashenka. Although Mr Lukashenka remained in power in the face of the months-long protests, the election improved the political culture of the country by increasing public interest in and engagement in politics and undermining public trust in strong leaders. Meanwhile, Russia’s president, Vladimir Putin, has sought to consolidate his hold on power by implementing constitutional reforms allowing him to stay in power for another two six-year terms after his current term expires in 2024. These developments indicate that democratisation in Russia is still far away.

Latin America

Latin America’s overall average score fell for a fifth consecutive year, from 6.13 in 2019 to 6.09 in 2020. The regional decline in 2020 was driven chiefly by the curbing of civil liberties in response to the coronavirus pandemic. However, democratic regressions in El Salvador, Guatemala and Haiti also had a negative impact on the average regional score. The only change in country classification by regime type in the region in the 2020 Democracy Index was the downgrading of El Salvador from a “flawed democracy” to a “hybrid regime” (see Box, page 39). This is in line with a trend of democratic backsliding in the region over the past decade, from increasing anti-democratic practices in Bolivia and Central America to growing authoritarianism in Venezuela and Nicaragua. Despite the recent deterioration, Latin America remains the most democratic emerging-market region in the world—scoring below only

Chart 7. Latin America: Democracy Index 2020 by category
 (Index score out of 10, 10 being best)



Source: The Economist Intelligence Unit.

DEMOCRACY INDEX 2020

IN SICKNESS AND IN HEALTH?

Table 8.
Latin America and the Caribbean 2020

	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	8.61	15	1	10.00	8.57	6.67	8.13	9.71	Full democracy
Chile	8.28	17	2	9.58	8.21	6.67	8.13	8.82	Full democracy
Costa Rica	8.16	18=	3	9.58	6.79	7.22	7.50	9.71	Full democracy
Panama	7.18	40	4	9.58	6.43	7.22	5.00	7.65	Flawed democracy
Trinidad and Tobago	7.16	41	5	9.58	7.14	6.11	5.63	7.35	Flawed democracy
Jamaica	7.13	42=	6	8.75	7.14	5.00	6.25	8.53	Flawed democracy
Colombia	7.04	46	7	9.17	6.43	6.67	5.00	7.94	Flawed democracy
Argentina	6.95	48	8	9.17	5.36	6.67	5.63	7.94	Flawed democracy
Brazil	6.92	49	9	9.58	5.36	6.11	5.63	7.94	Flawed democracy
Suriname	6.82	51	10	9.58	6.07	6.11	5.00	7.35	Flawed democracy
Peru	6.53	57	11	8.75	5.36	5.56	5.63	7.35	Flawed democracy
Dominican Republic	6.32	63	12	9.17	4.29	6.11	5.00	7.06	Flawed democracy
Paraguay	6.18	67	13	8.75	5.71	5.00	4.38	7.06	Flawed democracy
Ecuador	6.13	69	14	8.75	5.00	6.67	3.75	6.47	Flawed democracy
Mexico	6.07	72	15	7.83	5.71	7.78	3.13	5.88	Flawed democracy
Guyana	6.01	75	16	6.50	5.36	6.11	5.00	7.06	Flawed democracy
El Salvador	5.90	77	17	9.17	4.29	6.11	3.75	6.18	Hybrid regime
Honduras	5.36	88	18	7.83	4.29	4.44	4.38	5.88	Hybrid regime
Bolivia	5.08	94	19	6.08	3.57	6.11	3.75	5.88	Hybrid regime
Guatemala	4.97	97	20	6.92	3.93	5.00	3.13	5.88	Hybrid regime
Haiti	4.22	106	21	4.75	1.71	2.78	6.25	5.59	Hybrid regime
Nicaragua	3.60	120	22	0.42	2.86	5.00	5.63	4.12	Authoritarian
Cuba	2.84	140	23	0.00	3.57	3.33	4.38	2.94	Authoritarian
Venezuela	2.76	143	24	0.00	1.79	5.00	4.38	2.65	Authoritarian

Source: The Economist Intelligence Unit.

Western Europe and North America—with more than 80% of its population living under democratic regimes.

The decline in Latin America's overall score in the Democracy Index in recent years has been driven mainly by a deterioration in two categories of the index: *electoral process and pluralism* and *civil liberties*—the two categories in which the region outperforms the global average. Latin America's performance in terms of the functioning of government category has also been poor, as the region has struggled to tackle high levels of corruption and violence. Ineffective governance has increased popular dissatisfaction, undermining confidence in political institutions and perceptions of democracy.

The perceived failure of governments and political systems to address voter concerns has led to an increase in political participation across the region. In 2019 tens of thousands took to the streets to demand change; the coronavirus pandemic resulted in fewer protests in 2020, but the extraordinary measures taken by governments to manage the public health crisis confirmed the importance of

political engagement for many citizens who felt the impact directly. However, improvements in the *political participation* and *political culture* categories of the index have offset only partially the deterioration in the overall score.

The big disruptor

As elsewhere, the coronavirus pandemic disrupted all aspects of political and economic life in Latin America. The region recorded more than a quarter of all coronavirus-related deaths in 2020, despite accounting for a much lower share of the global population. Replicating measures taken in Asia and Europe, countries ordered border closures and curfews and mandatory confinements. A number of governments used the crisis to circumvent traditional checks and balances on the exercise of power. “Authoritarian” and “hybrid” regimes, in particular, took advantage of the public health emergency to enhance their powers and strengthen their positions.

For example, in late 2020, Nicaragua’s National Assembly approved a modification to the electoral law seeking to bar opposition members from participating in the 2021 general election. The bill prohibits anyone arbitrarily labelled as disloyal or a threat to the country by the regime of the president, Daniel Ortega, from seeking public office. Other changes included those requiring many NGOs to register as “foreign agents” and allowing the governing Frente Sandinista de Liberación Nacional to penalise what it classifies as misinformation. These developments do not bode well for the prospect of a free and fair election in November 2021.

In Venezuela, quarantine measures served as cover, and an excuse, for cracking down on members of the opposition and critics of the president, Nicolás Maduro. Curfews were used to curb social unrest, which has dogged the Maduro regime in recent years. Venezuela’s overall score in the Democracy Index, of 2.76, is the lowest in the region, and the country is one of only three “authoritarian regimes” in Latin America, alongside Nicaragua and Cuba.

Meanwhile, in Haiti, the president, Jovenel Moïse, has been ruling by decree since January 2020, when parliament was dissolved. In El Salvador, allegations of corruption under the government led by the president, Nayib Bukele, proliferated during the course of the year.

It is difficult to say whether these abuses of power would have occurred in the absence of a global pandemic. However, the public health emergency enabled them to some degree, given that in normal times the scope for popular protest would have been that much greater. However, the pandemic did not put an end to political unrest, as shown by events in Guatemala and Peru (see below), and neither did it stop elections from being held in several countries.

Heading to the polls amid the pandemic

Key elections went ahead in Bolivia, Chile, the Dominican Republic and Guyana in 2020. After a dramatic upsurge of social unrest in late 2019, the Chilean government, led by Sebastián Piñera, agreed to hold a vote on whether to change the constitution, dating from the dictatorship of Augusto Pinochet (1973-90). In a referendum held on October 25th, with an above average turnout, Chileans voted overwhelmingly to change the constitution. In April 2021 Chileans will return to the polls to elect the members of the constituent assembly that will be tasked to write a new magna carta. Chile is one of the three “full democracies” in Latin America, together with Costa Rica and Uruguay.

Bolivia experienced a political crisis in October 2019, when Evo Morales of the left-wing Movimiento al Socialismo (MAS) resigned after pressure from opposition parties and protesters who alleged that

the election was fraudulent. Mr Morales fled the country and Jeanine Añez, a right-wing senator, took over on an interim basis and called for new elections in March 2020. Nevertheless, the Añez government postponed the polls until the fourth quarter of 2020, citing concerns over Covid-19, a move which bred mistrust in her administration. However, a free and fair election went ahead in October 2020, and Luis Arce of the MAS was elected president. Bolivia's overall score rose from 4.84 in 2019 to 5.08 in 2020.

Social unrest resurfaces

Pandemic-related restrictions put an end to the wave of unrest that spread through Latin America in 2019, but protests erupted in a few countries in late 2020. In Guatemala, social unrest broke out in November as Congress rushed through an unpopular budget bill for 2021. Under popular pressure, Congress did not send the bill to the president, Alejandro Giammattei, to be promulgated and it did not become law. Guatemala's overall score fell from 5.26 in 2019 to 4.97 in 2020.

In Peru, a political crisis exploded in November after Congress voted to impeach the then-president Martín Vizcarra (2018-20) over alleged corruption charges, which Mr Vizcarra strongly rejects; Manuel Merino replaced Mr Vizcarra. The move was perceived as a power grab by the legislature, and protests erupted across the country. After a few days in office, Mr Merino stepped down and was replaced by

Authoritarianism in El Salvador: a dictator in the making?

No other country in Latin America tilted more towards authoritarianism in 2020 than El Salvador. Nayib Bukele, a young and popular politician (his approval ratings are consistently above 85%), broke the stranglehold of the country's entrenched and unpopular traditional parties to become president in 2019. Mr Bukele's rise is the result of years of neglect, mismanagement and corruption under previous governments, and his election was no surprise. As a political outsider, he has railed against the country's tarnished traditional political class but has also appeared to disregard checks and balances on his government.

A concentration of power in the executive gathered pace in 2020 as Mr Bukele exploited his popularity and the exceptional circumstances of the pandemic to amass political influence. In April 2020 he disobeyed several Supreme Court rulings

calling on him to respect human rights while enforcing quarantine rules, after security forces had arbitrarily detained people in containment centres. Before that, in February 2020, he surrounded the Legislative Assembly with military and police officers to pressure the legislature to approve a US\$100m loan. He is also a vocal critic of the media, which has in recent months been investigating allegations of irregularities in pandemic-related procurement and spending (allegations that the government denies).

Corruption allegations seem unlikely to dent the president's popularity in the short term: in elections due in February 2021, Mr Bukele will most likely obtain control of the legislature. With this control, checks on the president's power will be even weaker, and the risk of more attacks on the government's opponents, in the media and elsewhere, will rise. If the president goes down this path, there is ultimately a risk of permanent scars on Salvadoran democracy.

Francisco Sagasti. One of the main challenges to the new interim president is to maintain socio-political stability until the general election in April 2021.

Although protests have been largely on hold across the region in 2020, demonstrations and unrest are likely to make a comeback in 2021 as a result of the economic fallout from the pandemic, namely rising unemployment, falling living standards and increased poverty.

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 seven countries of the 20 in the region featuring in the bottom 20 in our global ranking. The global trend in recent years has been of a slow decline in democracy, but the state of democracy in the region has to a great extent been defined by stasis, with the average regional score falling by just 0.05 points in the 2015-19 period. However, the average regional score fell much more sharply in 2020, with the regional average dropping from 3.53 to 3.44. This is primarily the result of the Covid-19 pandemic, with the scores for 19 out of 20 countries worsening as a result of coronavirus-induced restrictions imposed on civil liberties.

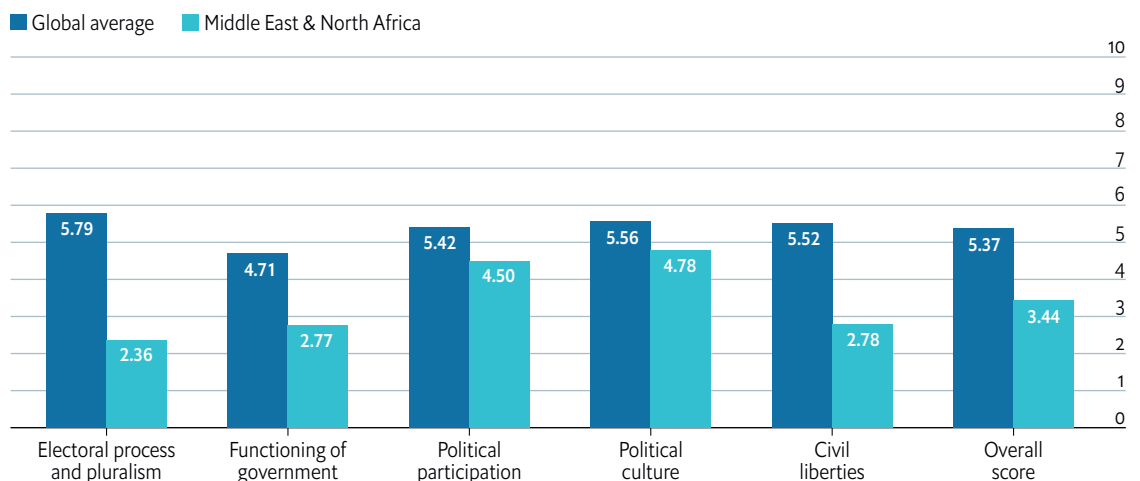
There was a decline across the whole region in the civil liberties category as a result of the impact of lockdowns and restrictions on personal freedoms, such as free movement. Similarly, the functioning of government category deteriorated as a result of downgrades for the question pertaining to citizens' perceived loss of control—an indicator for which the region already scored poorly. At the same time, war continued in Libya, Syria and Yemen.

A reversal in Algeria, and a wider trend towards disillusion and apathy

The Middle East and North Africa is dominated by “authoritarian regimes”, with 16 of the 20 countries covered in the index categorised as authoritarian and only two states categorised above “hybrid regimes”—Tunisia and Israel, which are both “flawed democracies”. After a brief upgrade to “hybrid regime” in 2019, Algeria returned to the “authoritarian regime” category in 2020. The upgrade of 2019

Chart 8. Middle East and North Africa: Democracy Index 2020 by category

(Index score out of 10, 10 being best)



Source: The Economist Intelligence Unit.

DEMOCRACY INDEX 2020

IN SICKNESS AND IN HEALTH?

Table 9.
Middle East and North Africa 2020

	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	7.84	27=	1	9.17	7.50	9.44	7.50	5.59	Flawed democracy
Tunisia	6.59	54	2	9.17	5.36	7.22	5.63	5.59	Flawed democracy
Morocco	5.04	96	3	5.25	4.64	5.56	5.63	4.12	Hybrid regime
Lebanon	4.16	108	4	3.50	1.50	6.67	5.00	4.12	Hybrid regime
Palestine	3.83	113	5	3.33	0.14	7.78	4.38	3.53	Authoritarian
Kuwait	3.80	114	6	3.58	3.93	3.89	4.38	3.24	Authoritarian
Algeria	3.77	115	7	3.08	2.50	4.44	5.00	3.82	Authoritarian
Iraq	3.62	118=	8=	5.25	0.00	6.67	5.00	1.18	Authoritarian
Jordan	3.62	118=	8=	2.67	3.93	3.89	4.38	3.24	Authoritarian
Qatar	3.24	126	10	0.00	4.29	2.78	5.63	3.53	Authoritarian
Oman	3.00	136	11	0.08	3.93	2.78	4.38	3.82	Authoritarian
Egypt	2.93	138	12	1.33	3.21	3.33	5.00	1.76	Authoritarian
United Arab Emirates	2.70	145	13	0.00	3.93	2.22	5.00	2.35	Authoritarian
Sudan	2.54	149	14	0.00	1.79	4.44	5.00	1.47	Authoritarian
Bahrain	2.49	150	15	0.83	2.71	2.78	4.38	1.76	Authoritarian
Iran	2.20	152	16	0.00	2.50	3.89	3.13	1.47	Authoritarian
Saudi Arabia	2.08	156	17	0.00	3.57	2.22	3.13	1.47	Authoritarian
Libya	1.95	157=	18=	0.00	0.00	3.33	3.75	2.65	Authoritarian
Yemen	1.95	157=	18=	0.00	0.00	3.89	5.00	0.88	Authoritarian
Syria	1.43	164	20	0.00	0.00	2.78	4.38	0.00	Authoritarian

Source: The Economist Intelligence Unit.

was a direct result of the Hirak protest movement, which called for an overhaul of Algeria's opaque and elitist political system and led to the peaceful removal of the long-standing president, Abdelaziz Bouteflika. However, with another regime insider, Abdelmadjid Tebboune, winning the December 2019 presidential election, and activists continuing to be detained by the authorities in 2020, deep-seated disillusionment with the very limited change being offered by Mr Tebboune's government is rife.

As a result, a November 2020 referendum on a new constitution was notable for a record low national turnout of 23.7%. Together with paralysis in policymaking during the president's two-month absence for coronavirus treatment in October-December, the low turnout highlighted declining confidence in the government and a worsening of the political participation score. Algeria's overall score consequently fell from 4.01 to 3.77, putting it back into the "authoritarian regime" category, although its overall score is higher than it was in 2018.

Several elections elsewhere in 2020 also illustrated a growing region-wide trend of voter apathy, brought about by popular disappointment with a perceived lack of change over many years. Parliamentary elections in Iran in February saw voter turnout of just 42.6%, the lowest in the Islamic Republic's 41-year history, reflecting a shift away from hard-line versus reformist divisions, and towards disillusionment with the political establishment as a whole. Meanwhile, parliamentary elections in

Jordan registered turnout of just 29.9%, continuing a long-term decline. Both countries registered a greater decline in their overall scores than the regional average, with Iran falling by one place, and Jordan by four, in the global ranking.

In addition to Algeria and Iran, a number of other countries that had experienced protests calling for economic and political change in 2019 recorded setbacks in democratic processes. In Lebanon, which finds itself in the midst of an economic and political crisis, there was an increase in the intimidation of civil rights activists and a rise in the number of disappearances of individuals opposing the government as the political elite looked to maintain its hold on power in the face of widespread popular anger. Meanwhile, in Egypt, the regime made it increasingly hard for opposition candidates to stand in elections, as the uncompetitive nature of parliamentary elections in 2020 showed. Across the region, the damaging impact of Covid-19 on economic prospects and personal freedoms had the effect of limiting open opposition to the authorities in 2020. However, given restive populations and increasing economic strains, sooner or later there is likely to be an eruption of greater social and political instability on a possibly bigger scale than in 2019.

Hyper participation in Israel and small changes afoot in the Gulf

Israel—the highest scoring country in the region—largely maintained its score (dropping only marginally from 7.86 to 7.84) as the negative impact of lockdowns on *civil liberties* was offset by a rise in the *political participation score*. Unlike other countries in the region, voter turnout is trending up in Israel; average turnout of around 65% over the past decade was surpassed by turnout of around 70% for two parliamentary elections in 2019. Even after indecisive results in the two 2019 polls and consequent political deadlock that required another parliamentary election in March 2020, voter turnout continued to rise, reaching 72%, confirming popular investment in the political process.

One further positive trend started to emerge in the Gulf in 2020. The combination of the economic fallout from the Covid-19 pandemic and the crash in global oil prices in 2020 has devastated the oil-dependent economies of the Gulf states. As a result, Gulf state rulers have been focused on attracting foreign investment to speed up economic diversification and protect against further oil price volatility. With the aim of improving their attractiveness to Western investors, many Gulf countries have taken modest steps to broaden political inclusion, improve transparency and increase civil rights. For example, Qatar announced that long-touted Advisory Council elections will be held in October 2021.

Meanwhile, the introduction of new anti-corruption regulations and the establishment of Nazaha, an oversight and anti-corruption authority, have improved Saudi Arabia's *functioning of government* score. However, the kingdom remains a deeply repressive authoritarian state that denies almost all civil liberties and political rights and discriminates systematically against women and religious minorities. All of the six Gulf states ranks firmly in the "authoritarian" category, with some of lowest scores in the world—for example, their average score for *electoral process and pluralism* is 0.7.

North America

In 2020 North America retained its place as the top-ranked region in the world in the Democracy Index. With a score of 8.58, North America continues to outrank western Europe, which has an average score of 8.29. However, North America's score declined marginally compared with 2019, when it stood at 8.59. As has been the case since the first edition of the Democracy Index in 2006, Canada is the region's

DEMOCRACY INDEX 2020

IN SICKNESS AND IN HEALTH?

Table 10.
North America 2020

	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	9.24	5	1	9.58	8.93	8.89	9.38	9.41	Full democracy
United States of America	7.92	25	2	9.17	6.79	8.89	6.25	8.53	Flawed democracy

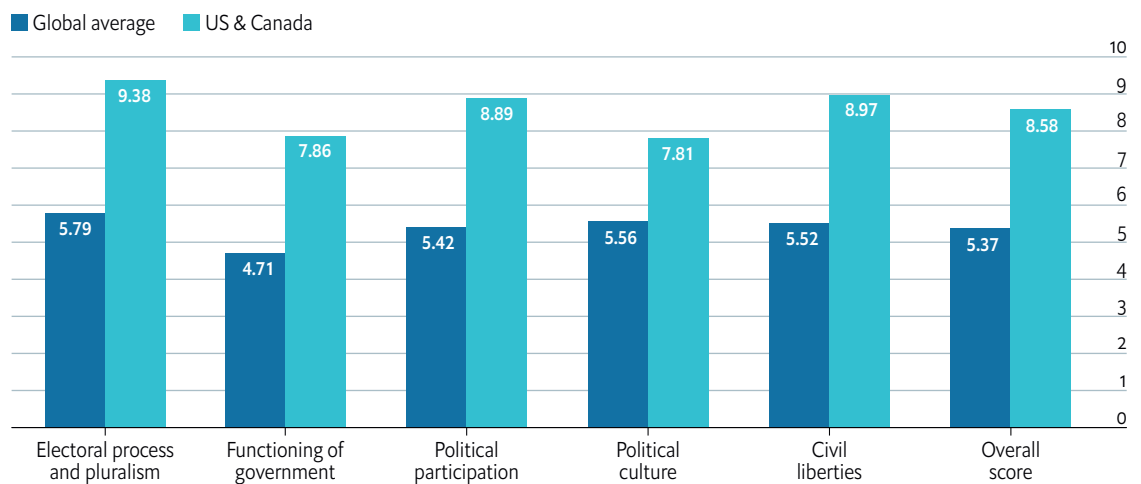
Source: The Economist Intelligence Unit.

top performer, climbing two spots to fifth position in the global ranking. Its average score improved modestly, from 9.22 in 2019 to 9.24 in 2020. There has been a reversal of fortunes in the region over the past five years, with Canada improving its standing and the US experiencing a decline. Another decline in the US score in 2020 means that the US (25th worldwide) now trails well behind Canada. Canada and the US both performed better in the political participation category in 2020. However, in line with global trends, both countries did worse in the “citizens control” and “personal freedom” indicators, owing in part to the introduction of coronavirus-related restrictions.

Political engagement and participation increased in the US

At first glance, little seems to have changed for the US in the 2020 Democracy Index compared with the previous year. The US’s average score is marginally lower, and its global ranking is unchanged. The US also remains in the “flawed democracy” category, having fallen out of the “full democracy” division in 2016, owing to a further erosion of public trust in the country’s institutions—a development that preceded the election of Donald Trump as president that year, and helped to propel him to the presidency. However, the seemingly stable overall score and position of the US is deceptive. The US’s performance across a handful of indicators changed substantially in 2020, both for better and worse. The country exhibits a number of democratic deficits that could result in a further deterioration in its score and ranking in the near future.

Chart 9. US & Canada: Democracy Index 2020 by category
(Index score out of 10, 10 being best)



Source: The Economist Intelligence Unit.

The most significant improvements were in political engagement and political participation. The US score in the *political participation* category climbed to 8.89 in 2020, its highest level since the Democracy Index first launched in 2006, and the joint-highest score globally (with Canada, among others) for this category of the index.

As reflected in the extensive data collected by the 2017-20 World Values Survey (WVS), Americans have become much more engaged in politics in recent years. According to the WVS, nearly two-thirds of US respondents were either “very” (21.1%) or “somewhat” (43%) interested in politics. Over half of respondents also said that they searched for political news in social or traditional media.

A series of high-impact national events further boosted political engagement and participation in 2020. These included the politicisation of the coronavirus pandemic, large-scale movements to address police violence and racial injustice, and presidential and legislative elections that the two main political parties framed in existential terms. More Americans voted in the November 2020 presidential election than in any other since 1900. Two months later, a record number of voters cast their ballots in the consequential Georgia run-off election that determined which party would control the Senate (the upper house).

The US also improved its score modestly in the civil liberties category, with a score of 8.53 in 2020, compared with 8.24 in 2019. This corresponds to an embedding of national legislation passed in 2015, banning the use of torture techniques used by the US government during the “war on terror” in the early 2000s. Mr Trump and some of his appointees had at times been supportive of the use of torture, including practices such as waterboarding. However, the Trump administration did not reinstate harsh interrogation methods during its four-year term (at least officially), meriting an improvement in the US score for this indicator.

Social cohesion collapses in the face of the culture wars and political polarisation

Despite these positive developments, the US's overall performance is held back by a number of weaknesses, including extremely low levels of trust in institutions and political parties; deep dysfunction in the *functioning of government*; increasing threats to freedom of expression; and a degree of societal polarisation that makes consensus on any issue almost impossible to achieve. The Democratic Party candidate, Joe Biden, received a record number of votes in the presidential election, defeating Mr Trump in the popular vote by a comfortable 7m votes. However, Mr Biden's victory in the Electoral College came through a string of narrow wins in key battleground states. The election also delivered his party a smaller majority in the House of Representatives (the lower house) than it had before. The Senate is now split evenly between Democrats and Republicans, with Mr Biden's vice-president, Kamala Harris, holding the tie-breaking vote. While pluralism and competing alternatives are essential for a functioning democracy, 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 6.79 in 2020.

More worrying, public trust in the democratic process was dealt a further blow in 2020 by the refusal of the outgoing president to accept the election result. Mr Trump and his allies continued to allege voter fraud long after the election was over, without producing reasonable evidence to substantiate

their claims and in the face of court rulings finding against them. Through his unfounded allegations and intemperate language, Mr Trump called into question the reliability of the democratic process and further undermined public faith in democracy. Weeks before Mr Biden's inauguration, a cohort of Republican lawmakers used Mr Trump's arguments in a failed attempt to block certification of the election results. The legislature's efforts to certify the results were interrupted when pro-Trump rioters stormed the US Capitol Building.

There has been an increasing tendency in the US, as well as other countries, to challenge the result of elections and referendums, and to seek to discredit the outcome by alleging external interference and giving credence to conspiracy theories. This occurred after the election of Mr Trump in 2016, with mass demonstrations by protesters repudiating the result, and a concerted campaign by Democrats to blame the outcome of the election on Russian interference. The Democratic Party spent four years, starting in 2017, seeking to delegitimise the Trump administration and to impeach the president. In 2020, Mr Trump and his allies in the Republican Party went further, in their refusal to concede defeat and in their attempts to challenge the certification process itself.

The consequence of the long-running culture wars in the US and the heightened political polarisation of recent years is that social cohesion has collapsed and consensus has evaporated on fundamental issues, such as election outcomes, public health practices and even the date of the country's founding; the controversial 1619 Project sought to change the latter from the 1776 adoption of the Declaration of Independence, as traditionally observed. An article published by the Pew Research Centre in November 2020 examined the nature of polarisation in the US ("America is exceptional in the nature of its political divide", November 13th 2020). The authors pointed out, based on Pew's survey data, that supporters of Biden and Trump see the differences between them as being about "core American values" and not just about politics and policies. As a result of this deepening divide over values, *political culture* has become the weakest category for the US, with its score plummeting to 6.25 in 2020, down from 7.50 in 2019. As Americans increasingly occupy two distinct and conflicting realities, prospects for a short-term improvement in this score seem to be dwindling. The proliferation of conspiracy theories in recent years, and the readiness of both sides of the political spectrum to indulge them, is an especially worrying trend. At least a dozen candidates in the congressional elections had expressed some level of support for QAnon, a far-right conspiracy theory, with one candidate ultimately winning a House seat.

The cleavage in US politics has long been amplified by the mainstream media, including the main network TV channels which make no pretence of impartiality, but in 2020 social media companies intervened in a way that is likely to reinforce the divisions in American society. The coronavirus pandemic encouraged the big tech giants to go further than they had previously in policing content that they deemed to be unacceptable. In particular, the social media platforms took steps to filter, remove and censor content that questioned the lockdown policies pursued by governments or that expressed scepticism about vaccines. However, the most astonishing intervention came before and after the US election, when Twitter attached fact checks to president Trump's tweets, and ultimately (in January 2021) shut down his account. Facebook soon followed suit. That unelected, unaccountable big tech CEOs can ban the sitting president of the US from their platforms should concern everyone who believes in freedom of expression.

Personal freedoms also declined in 2020. This was partially a result of the introduction of stay-at-home orders and other measures to contain the spread of the novel coronavirus. However, it also reflects a rise of militarised tactics by the authorities to suppress non-violent demonstrations. One example was the aggressive clearing of Lafayette Square near the White House in June 2020, when the National Guard used chemical agents and other riot-control techniques to disperse a crowd before the announced curfew. The demonstrators were peacefully protesting against police brutality and the killing of George Floyd, an unarmed black man.

The resilience of the constitution

A number of other indicators remained notably unchanged in 2020. Despite concerns about potential voter intimidation and safety amid the pandemic, the presidential election was held securely, largely owing to the widespread use of mail-in ballots (which also fuelled a welcome increase in voter turnout). Mr Trump's rushed appointment of a Supreme Court justice ahead of the election cast doubts on the integrity of the US's checks and balances system. Yet, the Supreme Court also rejected a lawsuit that sought to reverse Mr Trump's losses in key battleground states. Finally, despite efforts by a handful of lawmakers, Congress certified Mr Biden's election victory, paving the way for an orderly and constitutionally mandated transfer of power. All this underlined the resilience of the US's democratic institutions. However, these events also raise questions about how much strain US institutions can endure.

Corruption dulls the shine of Canada's democracy

Canada continues to score highly in the 2020 Democracy Index, thanks to the country's history of stable, democratic government. Canada's *political participation* score rose to its highest level ever in 2020, of 8.89, up from 7.78 in 2019, propelling Canada into the top five countries in the global ranking for the first time.

Growing political engagement in Canada closely mirrored developments in the US. Over three-quarters of Canadians were either "very" (38%) or "somewhat" (39%) interested in the November 2020 US presidential election, according to a survey conducted that month by Leger, a local polling firm, and the Association for Canadian Studies, a non-profit. This built on relatively firm levels of political interest in Canada. In September 2019 the Environics Institute, a market research company, reported that a total of 65% of Canadians had either "a lot of" or "some" interest in politics. A poll commissioned by the Canadian Journalism Foundation earlier that year found that 79% of Canadians follow the news "very" or "somewhat" closely.

Coronavirus restrictions led to a deterioration in the *functioning of government* score in Canada, which fell to 8.93 in 2020, down from 9.64 in 2019, also reflecting a decline in the country's score for corruption. Canada has slid down the rankings in Transparency International's annual *Corruption Perceptions Index*, losing its position among the world's ten least corrupt countries. In 2020 the Canadian federal government faced pressure over its decision to award a lucrative contract to the WE Charity, which had ties to the families of the prime minister, Justin Trudeau, and the finance minister, Bill Morneau; Mr Morneau resigned shortly after the scandal broke. The matter was investigated by parliament's ethics commissioner, who already had twice reprimanded Mr Trudeau for separate issues.

Canada's scores for *electoral process and pluralism* (9.58) and *political culture* (9.38) were unchanged

from 2019. Although the *civil liberties* score declined slightly, reflecting coronavirus restrictions, it remained above the US score (8.53). Holocaust denial, hate speech and libel laws continue to impair Canada’s tradition of supporting freedom of speech.

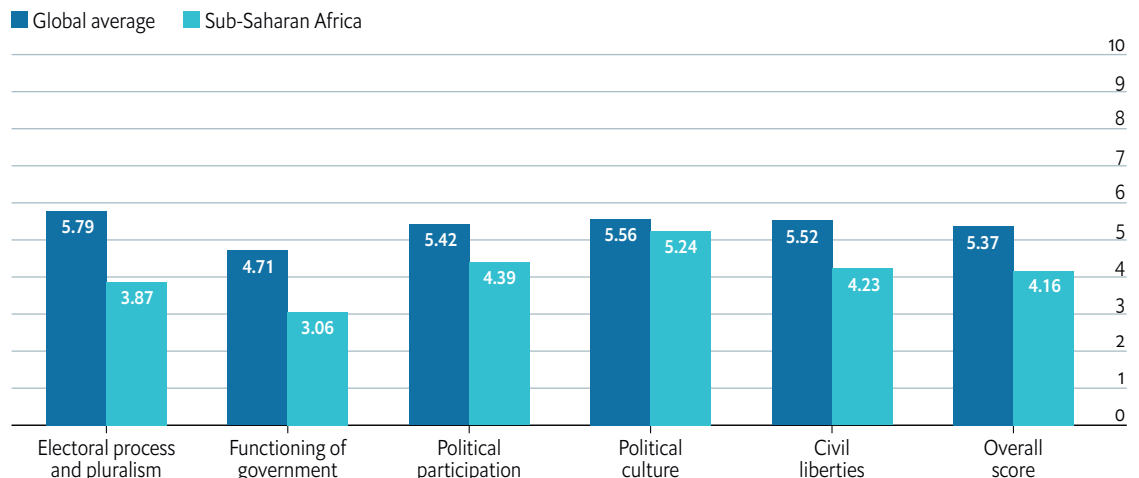
Sub-Saharan Africa

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”. The number of countries classed as “hybrid regimes”, at 13, is two less than in the 2019 index, as Burkina Faso and Mali slipped down the ranking to become “authoritarian regimes”, alongside 22 other African states. The overall average regional score fell to 4.16 in 2020, down from 4.26 in 2019—by far the lowest score for the continent since the index began in 2006.

The rise of jihadism is a major threat to democracy in West Africa

In recent years a trend of increasing external involvement in government institutions has weighed on the democratic credentials of former French colonies in the Sahel region of west Africa. There, governments are locked in a fierce (and in some cases losing) battle with jihadist groups. Since 2014 the French military has been intervening directly to address the problem, and the mission has been

Chart 10. Sub-Saharan Africa: Democracy Index 2020 by category
 (Index score out of 10, 10 being best)



Source: The Economist Intelligence Unit.

expanding to a point where the former metropole has taken charge of critical state security functions. This has resulted in downgrades to relevant indicators for several countries in the *functioning of government* category. French military intervention has succeeded in preventing a total takeover by jihadist groups in places such as Burkina Faso and Mali, but the willingness of these countries to surrender elements of statehood to a foreign power illustrates serious problems with state capacity and the functioning of democracy.

DEMOCRACY INDEX 2020

IN SICKNESS AND IN HEALTH?

Table 11.
Sub-Saharan Africa 2020

	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	8.14	20	1	9.17	7.86	6.11	8.75	8.82	Full democracy
Cabo Verde	7.65	32	2	9.17	7.00	6.67	6.88	8.53	Flawed democracy
Botswana	7.62	33	3	9.17	6.79	6.11	7.50	8.53	Flawed democracy
South Africa	7.05	45	4	7.42	7.14	8.33	5.00	7.35	Flawed democracy
Namibia	6.52	58	5	7.00	5.36	6.67	5.63	7.94	Flawed democracy
Ghana	6.50	59=	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	82	8	7.00	4.29	5.00	6.25	6.18	Hybrid regime
Madagascar	5.70	85	9	7.92	3.57	6.67	5.63	4.71	Hybrid regime
Senegal	5.67	86	10	6.08	5.71	4.44	6.25	5.88	Hybrid regime
Liberia	5.32	90	11	7.42	2.71	5.56	5.63	5.29	Hybrid regime
Tanzania	5.10	93	12	4.83	5.00	5.00	6.25	4.41	Hybrid regime
Kenya	5.05	95	13	3.50	5.36	6.67	5.63	4.12	Hybrid regime
Uganda	4.94	98	14	4.33	3.21	5.00	6.88	5.29	Hybrid regime
Zambia	4.86	99=	15=	4.75	2.93	3.89	6.88	5.88	Hybrid regime
Sierra Leone	4.86	99=	15=	6.58	2.86	3.33	6.25	5.29	Hybrid regime
Benin	4.58	102	17	3.33	5.36	3.89	5.63	4.71	Hybrid regime
Gambia	4.49	103	18	4.00	4.29	4.44	5.63	4.12	Hybrid regime
Côte d'Ivoire	4.11	109	19	4.33	2.86	3.89	5.63	3.82	Hybrid regime
Nigeria	4.10	110	20	5.17	3.57	3.89	3.75	4.12	Hybrid regime
Mali	3.93	111	21	5.17	0.00	4.44	5.63	4.41	Authoritarian
Mauritania	3.92	112	22	3.50	3.57	5.00	3.13	4.41	Authoritarian
Burkina Faso	3.73	116	23	3.00	2.36	4.44	5.00	3.82	Authoritarian
Angola	3.66	117	24	2.25	2.86	5.56	5.00	2.65	Authoritarian
Gabon	3.54	121	25	2.58	1.86	4.44	5.00	3.82	Authoritarian
Mozambique	3.51	122	26	2.58	1.43	5.00	5.00	3.53	Authoritarian
Ethiopia	3.38	123	27	0.42	3.57	5.56	5.00	2.35	Authoritarian
Niger	3.29	125	28	2.92	1.14	3.33	4.38	4.71	Authoritarian
Zimbabwe	3.16	127	29	0.00	2.50	4.44	5.63	3.24	Authoritarian
Congo (Brazzaville)	3.11	129	30	2.17	2.50	3.89	3.75	3.24	Authoritarian
Rwanda	3.10	130=	31	1.42	4.29	2.78	4.38	2.65	Authoritarian
Comoros	3.09	132	32	2.08	2.21	3.89	3.75	3.53	Authoritarian
eSwatini	3.08	133=	33=	0.92	2.86	2.78	5.63	3.24	Authoritarian
Guinea	3.08	133=	33=	3.50	0.43	4.44	4.38	2.65	Authoritarian
Togo	2.80	141	35	0.92	1.79	3.33	5.00	2.94	Authoritarian
Cameroon	2.77	142	36	1.67	2.14	3.33	4.38	2.35	Authoritarian
Djibouti	2.71	144	37	0.42	1.29	3.89	5.63	2.35	Authoritarian
Guinea-Bissau	2.63	147	38	4.92	0.00	2.78	3.13	2.35	Authoritarian

DEMOCRACY INDEX 2020

IN SICKNESS AND IN HEALTH?

Table 11.
Sub-Saharan Africa 2020

	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
Eritrea	2.15	153	39	0.00	2.14	0.56	6.88	1.18	Authoritarian
Burundi	2.14	154	40	0.00	0.00	3.33	5.00	2.35	Authoritarian
Equatorial Guinea	1.92	160	41	0.00	0.43	3.33	4.38	1.47	Authoritarian
Chad	1.55	163	42	0.00	0.00	1.67	3.75	2.35	Authoritarian
Central African Republic	1.32	165	43	1.25	0.00	1.11	1.88	2.35	Authoritarian
Democratic Republic of Congo	1.13	166	44	0.00	0.00	1.67	3.13	0.88	Authoritarian

Source: The Economist Intelligence Unit.

The expansion in 2020 of the bloody activities of jihadist groups such as Boko Haram, Islamic State, and al-Qaeda offshoots, such as Jihad in West Africa, Movement for Oneness and Support Group for Islam and Muslims, which are fighting to establish a regional caliphate, is a major challenge for those fighting for democracy in the region. Jihadism is being fuelled by several factors, some external and some specific to west Africa. The latter include power vacuums; a loss of faith in civilian authorities and democratic institutions; and a sense of marginalisation, especially in remote, impoverished regions. These factors are relevant across much of Sub-Saharan Africa, but jihadism has taken off particularly in the Sahel. Partly this is because of the region's proximity to Libya, which has been in a state of conflict since 2014. African migrants are trafficked up to Libya's Mediterranean coast and weapons travel back in routes criss-crossing the Sahel.

Burkina Faso and Mali were both downgraded from "hybrid regimes" to "authoritarian regimes" in 2020. Neither government has full control over its territory (most of Burkina Faso has become a no-go zone), and rampant insecurity in Mali precipitated a coup in August 2020 by military officers aggrieved by a lack of progress against insurgents. A military junta has since established a transitional government in Mali, nullifying the outcome of parliamentary elections held in March 2020, which were broadly free and fair. Because of this, Mali has dropped 11 places globally, the second-worst performance in Sub-Saharan Africa behind Togo, which fell 15 places as a result of a deeply flawed election and subsequent crackdown on the opposition.

Elections good and bad, and ill-managed lockdowns

Regional deterioration was also a consequence of declining scores for many countries in the category of *electoral process and pluralism*, with the average regional category score falling to 3.87 in 2020 (down from 4.01 in 2019). Disputed elections in Tanzania and Guinea led to both countries being marked down in the index for polling irregularities. However, there was a bright spot: Malawi's constitutional court overturned a presidential election held in 2019 that was widely decried as being unfair. A rerun was held in June 2020 and an opposition candidate won, marking a major step forward in the electoral process that pushed Malawi five places upwards in the global ranking.

The decline in Africa's low overall democracy score in 2020 was also driven by coronavirus-related lockdowns, which had a negative bearing on the *civil liberties* category (the region's score dropped from 4.46 in 2019 to 4.23 in 2020). Typically, the strategy in Africa was to make lockdowns as short as possible, which meant that they were enforced ruthlessly by the police. During the early weeks of a

DEMOCRACY INDEX 2020

IN SICKNESS AND IN HEALTH?

local lockdown, more Nigerians died at the hands of police than from coronavirus. Heavy-handedness in several countries, such as Kenya and Senegal, is common, but reached new highs in places where curfews were ordered. The measures stripped citizens of their freedom to assemble and travel, causing severe interruption to livelihoods.

The harshness of the restrictions led people to disregard them, and there were protests and riots in some countries, including in some with a history of only limited political participation, such as Uganda and Angola. Constraints placed on political activity—applied disproportionately for the opposition—ahead of January 2021 elections in Uganda illustrated how autocrats use the excuse of new threats such as coronavirus to crack down on the opposition and hold on to power during a time of crisis. Even where restrictions were not especially strict, such as in Malawi, they were oppressive enough to prompt protests and force the government to abandon the policy of a lockdown altogether. In Angola, unrest was also connected to the postponement of local elections.

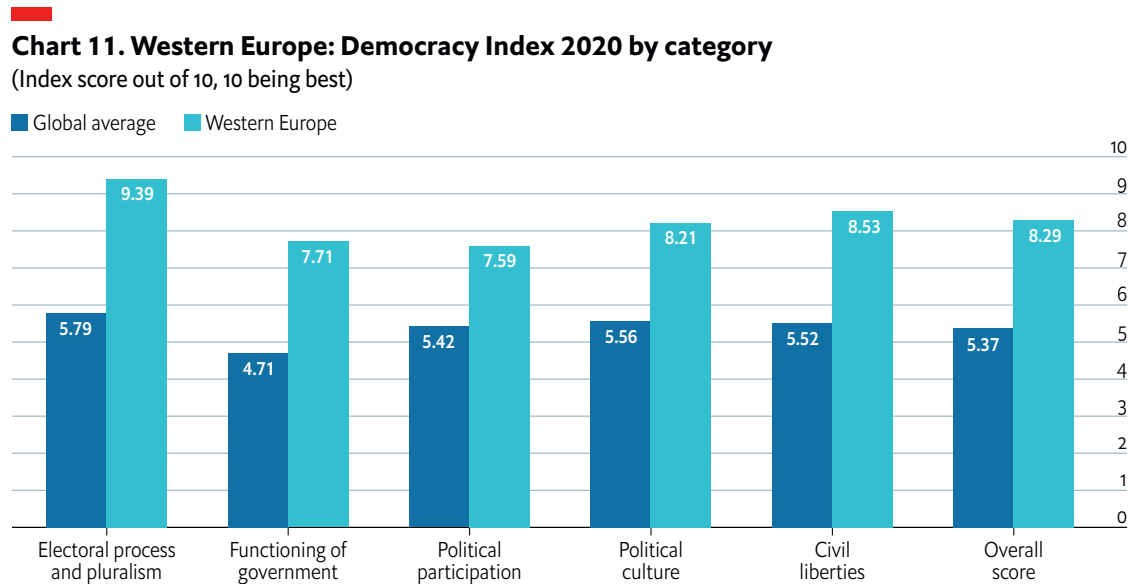
Western Europe

The average regional score for Western Europe declined from 8.35 in 2019 to 8.29. Across the region as a whole, the most significant downwards score changes were in the category of civil liberties, for

Table 12.
Western Europe 2020

	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	9.81	1	1	10.00	9.64	10.00	10.00	9.41	Full democracy
Iceland	9.37	2	2	10.00	8.57	8.89	10.00	9.41	Full democracy
Sweden	9.26	3	3	9.58	9.29	8.33	10.00	9.12	Full democracy
Finland	9.20	6	4	10.00	8.93	8.89	8.75	9.41	Full democracy
Denmark	9.15	7	5	10.00	8.93	8.33	9.38	9.12	Full democracy
Ireland	9.05	8	6	10.00	7.86	8.33	9.38	9.71	Full democracy
Netherlands	8.96	9=	7	9.58	9.29	8.33	8.75	8.82	Full democracy
Switzerland	8.83	12	8	9.58	8.57	7.78	9.38	8.82	Full democracy
Luxembourg	8.68	13	9	10.00	8.57	6.67	8.75	9.41	Full democracy
Germany	8.67	14	10	9.58	8.21	8.33	8.13	9.12	Full democracy
United Kingdom	8.54	16	11	10.00	7.50	8.89	7.50	8.82	Full democracy
Austria	8.16	18=	12	9.58	7.50	8.33	6.88	8.53	Full democracy
Spain	8.12	22	13	9.58	7.14	7.22	8.13	8.53	Full democracy
France	7.99	24	14	9.58	7.50	7.78	6.88	8.24	Flawed democracy
Portugal	7.90	26	15	9.58	7.50	6.11	7.50	8.82	Flawed democracy
Italy	7.74	29	16	9.58	6.43	7.22	7.50	7.94	Flawed democracy
Malta	7.68	30	17	9.17	6.79	6.11	8.13	8.24	Flawed democracy
Cyprus	7.56	34	18	9.17	5.36	7.22	7.50	8.53	Flawed democracy
Belgium	7.51	36	19	9.58	7.86	5.00	6.88	8.24	Flawed democracy
Greece	7.39	37	20	9.58	5.21	6.11	7.50	8.53	Flawed democracy
Turkey	4.48	104	21	3.50	5.36	5.56	5.63	2.35	Hybrid regime

Source: The Economist Intelligence Unit.



Source: The Economist Intelligence Unit.

which the aggregate score fell from 8.78 to 8.53, and in the *functioning of government* category, where the average regional score declined from 7.95 to 7.71. No country recorded an increase in its overall civil liberties score, as lockdown and social-distancing measures used to combat the coronavirus pandemic curtailed the freedom of individuals to travel and gather as they pleased, even under the lightest restrictions that were implemented. The pandemic also led to a decline in public trust in government, as many citizens doubted the effectiveness of governments’ management of the pandemic and their responsiveness to individual concerns. These factors, as well as a decline in the score for citizens’ control, underpinned the deterioration in the *functioning of government* scores in many countries. The average regional score for *electoral process and pluralism* increased slightly, to 9.39 (compared with 9.35 in 2019), while that for *political participation*, remained the same as in 2019, at 7.59.

The pandemic has not put a stop to rising levels of political engagement

The coronavirus outbreak has not halted the striking trend of recent years towards greater citizen engagement with and participation in politics, and this led to an increase in the overall regional score for *political culture*, from 8.10 in 2019 to 8.21 in 2020. This trend predates the coronavirus pandemic, as discussed in recent editions of the Democracy Index. Popular dissatisfaction with established political parties and a desire for greater representation have fuelled the rise of populist movements and increased political engagement across the region over the past five years. The pandemic may have curtailed political activities, but it has also confirmed to many people that politics has a major impact on their everyday lives, with the tangible impact of policy interventions on people’s liberties and livelihoods being felt intensely.

Western Europe has the second-highest average overall score in the Democracy Index (after North America) and boasts the most “full democracies” (13 out of 21 countries). However, as well as registering a decline in its overall score in 2020, the region is two “full democracies” fewer, after France and Portugal joined the ranks of “flawed democracies”. The score for France fell to 7.99 from 8.12 in 2019, owing to the

restrictions on freedom of movement, including multiple lockdowns and, most recently, early national curfews. In Portugal, the frequency of parliamentary debates (through which the prime minister is held accountable) was reduced during the pandemic. This, coupled with the lack of transparency around the appointment of the president of the auditing court, led to a deterioration in the checks and balances score. These developments, alongside the impact of restrictions on the freedom of movement, caused a decline in the overall score for Portugal from 8.03 previously to 7.90.

At the outset of the pandemic in early 2020, most leaders and governments enjoyed a brief surge in popularity. However, as the crisis wore on, public disapproval of governments steadily increased over the course of the year. The relationship between public approval of governments and effectiveness of governments' response to the pandemic does not appear to be strictly correlated (many other factors can influence the degree of popular support for a government). For example, high approval rates endured for government effectiveness in both Greece, which was perceived to have had a strong response and performed well, and the Netherlands, where the official response has generally been regarded as less effective than in many other countries.

Apart from Ireland, which held an election in February 2020, no country in the region held a general election, and the crisis nature of the pandemic probably caused coalitions that may have otherwise been at risk of collapse, including those in Ireland, Italy and elsewhere, to endure for longer. This has had mixed effects. Polling in Italy in particular showed an increase in support for the institutions of government, leading to an increase in its overall score. However, it is unlikely that political peace will last through 2021, given the political and economic strains that have intensified as a result of the pandemic.

Seven of the ten top-rated countries globally in the Democracy Index are in western Europe, and the Nordics hold five of those positions (Norway is the highest-ranked country globally). However, the swift imposition of restrictions on freedom of movement owing to the Covid-19 pandemic contributed to a decline in a number of scores for Nordic countries, albeit from a high base. The average score for the Nordic countries declined to 9.36 in 2020, down from 9.44 in 2019. The decline in scores was driven by a worsening of scores in the *civil liberties* and *functioning of government* categories, similar to the broader trend observed in Europe. Nevertheless, the Nordics still have the highest scores across all categories, especially in *functioning of government* and *civil liberties*. The average score for the former declined to 9.20 (from 9.37), while that of the latter fell to 9.26 from 9.48.

Sweden was an outlier, but trust in government declined

The Swedish approach to the Covid-19 pandemic stood out in the European and Nordic context, as the country did not opt for a nationwide lockdown (unlike Denmark, Norway and Finland). However, public confidence in the government and health authorities gradually declined in Sweden amid a second wave of the pandemic, and as death and infection rates per capita remained high.

Much like the Nordics, Switzerland and Ireland retained their positions among the top ten countries in the index but also saw similar declines in scores for the *functioning of government* and *civil liberties* categories owing to nationwide lockdowns imposed during the first wave and other restrictions aimed at containing the spread of the virus. Elsewhere in Europe, scores remained broadly stable.

The score for Germany deteriorated slightly, to 8.67, down from 8.68, as pandemic lockdowns and restrictions contributed to a fall in several scores. However, these were partially offset by an increase

in the score for *political culture* as a lower proportion of citizens expressed the desire to be ruled by technocrats or experts instead of elected government representatives. Meanwhile, protests against restrictions have been a prominent feature of the political landscape in 2020. The rise of disinformation, conspiracy theories and extremist activism in Germany has come—counterintuitively—at a time when the mainstream parties are doing well and the far-right Alternative for Germany is struggling.

Despite continued Brexit-related uncertainty and persistently high levels of polarisation around the outcome of the referendum, the UK's score remained stable. The return of a stable majority government able to implement its mandate following two years of paralysis improved the *electoral process and pluralism* score, which counteracted declines in the *civil liberties* and *functioning of government* scores brought about by the strict lockdowns and short notice given to parliament for their enactment. Overall, the UK's score remained virtually identical, moving from 8.52 to 8.54.

Turkey recorded the biggest jump in its ranking in the region, as its global rank rose to 104th, up from 110th in 2019, on the back of a substantial rise in its overall score. The improvement was broad based. The score for *electoral process and pluralism* rose to 3.50 (up from 3.08 in 2019), stemming from a stronger performance of the main opposition Republican People's Party in opinion polls following a strong showing in local elections in 2019. Survey data suggested an increased willingness of citizens to participate in demonstrations and improved confidence in political parties. However, the *civil liberties* score for Turkey, at just 2.35, remains the lowest in Western Europe by a significant margin and the country is the only "hybrid regime" in the region.

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.

-
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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DEMOCRACY INDEX 2020

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