



Consolidating Democratic Values

GA4



Empowering Future Generations: Cultivating Global
Literacy and Enlightenment



Forum: GA4

Issue: Consolidating Democratic values

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Introduction

Democracy is a core value of the United Nations. The UN supports democracy by promoting human rights, development, peace and security. Democracy provides an environment that respects human rights and fundamental freedoms, and in which the freely expressed will of people is exercised. However, democracy deficits, weak institutions and poor governance impose persistent challenges. The rapid growth of disinformation has started posing a threat to the preservation of democratic values. Concerns are being raised about the undermining of democratic principles such as but not limited to equality, inclusion and solidarity, while noting the increasing decline of press freedom.

Definition of Key Terms

Democracy

Democracy can be defined as the government by the people or form of government in which the supreme power is vested in the people and exercised directly by them or by their elected agents under a free electoral system.

Human Rights

Human rights are rights we have simply because we exist as human beings - they are not granted by any state. These universal rights are inherent to us all, regardless of nationality, sex, national or ethnic origin, colour, religion, language, or any other status. Human rights include the right to life and liberty, freedom from slavery and torture, freedom of opinion and expression, the right to work and education, and many more.¹

Rule of Law

¹ <https://www.un.org/en/global-issues/human-rights#:~:text=Human%20rights%20are%20rights%20inherent,and%20education%2C%20and%20many%20more.>



The rule of law is a durable system of laws, institutions, norms, and community commitment that delivers four universal principles: accountability, just law, open government, and accessible and impartial justice. The government as well as private actors are accountable under the law.

Pluralism

Pluralism, in political science, is the view that in liberal democracies power is (or should be) dispersed among a variety of economic and ideological pressure groups and is not (or should not be) held by a single elite or group of elites.

Freedom of the Press

Freedom of the press or freedom of the media is the fundamental principle that communication and expression through various media, including printed and electronic media, especially published materials, should be considered a right to be exercised freely.

General Overview

Democracy

The UN does not advocate for a specific model of government but promotes democratic governance as a set of values and principles that should be followed for greater participation, equality, security and human development. Democracy provides an environment that respects human rights and fundamental freedoms, and in which the freely expressed will of people is exercised. People have a say in decisions and can hold decision-makers to account. Women and men have equal rights, and all people are free from discrimination. This utopian world is of course not always guaranteed. Many democracies face some kind of corruption and discrimination can counterintuitively be promoted within democracies, as they generally favour majorities due to their utilitarian structure.

In conclusion, although democracy might not be perfect, there are those who think it is the best form of government. Churchill famously said: "Democracy is the worst form of government except for all those other forms that have been tried". The purpose of this report is to set apart the positive and negative aspects of democracy, the issues that come with the decline of democratic values around the world and the solutions the United Nations can try to tackle these issues.



The State of Democracy

Global Democracy Index rates, by country/territory (2022)*

Full democracies

● 9.00-10.00

● 8.00-8.99

Flawed democracies

● 7.00-7.99

● 6.00-6.99

Hybrid regimes

● 5.00-5.99

● 4.00-4.99

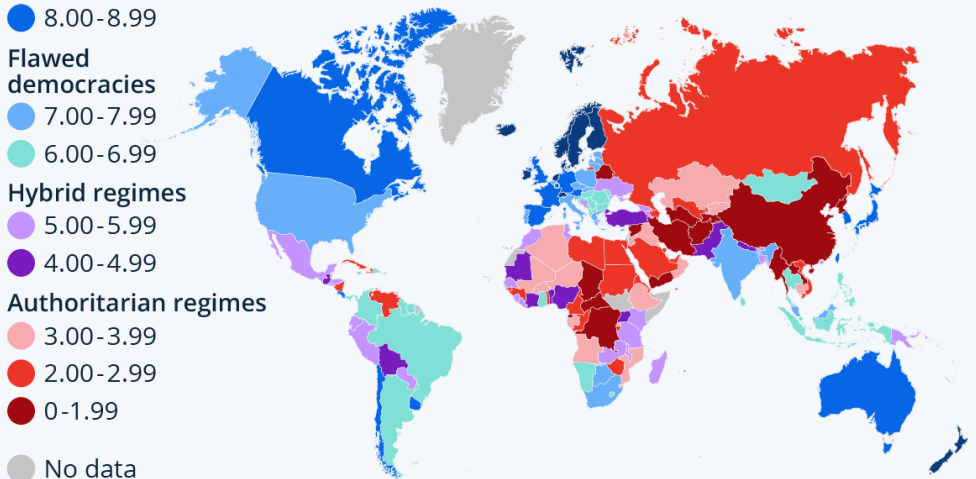
Authoritarian regimes

● 3.00-3.99

● 2.00-2.99

● 0-1.99

● No data



* takes into account electoral process and pluralism, civil liberties, the functioning of government, political participation and political culture
Source: The Economist Intelligence Unit



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Democracy and Human Rights

The values of freedom, respect for human rights and the principle of holding periodic and genuine elections by universal suffrage are essential elements of democracy. In turn, democracy provides an environment for the protection and effective realization of human rights.

For several years, the UN General Assembly and the Commission on Human Rights endeavoured to draw on international human rights instruments to promote a common understanding of the principles and values of democracy. As a result, in 2000, the Commission recommended a series of legislative, institutional and practical measures to consolidate democracy. Moreover, in 2002, the Commission declared the essential elements of democracy as stated hereunder. There are of course practical limitations and exceptions to every freedom. These are often caused by freedoms clashing with each other: the freedom of expression is limited by the right to be treated equally.

Respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. This mostly includes freedoms as stated in documents such as the Geneva Convention or the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. We will elaborate on a few of the most prominent rights.



Freedom of association. This implies the right to form organisations freely, without interference from the state on political or religious grounds.

Freedom of expression and opinion. The state may not limit your thinking and expression. If you, for example, wish to see a smaller state, you can freely express your idea.

Access to power and its exercise in accordance with the rule of law. Every person is allowed to participate in the democracy: as a voter, but also as a politician.

The holding of periodic free and fair elections by universal suffrage and by secret ballot as the expression of the will of the people. Every citizen is allowed to vote and does not have to let anybody know who they voted on, to ensure fair elections. The secrecy aspect is lost in numerous countries, minimising the democratic process of the fair vote.

A pluralistic system of political parties and organizations. It is generally considered that a functioning state has a Trias Politica system and multiple parties participating in the elections. The largest clash is between efficiency and democracy: the fewer parties participate, the less democratic and less representative a system becomes, while the efficiency might improve.

The separation of powers. The judicial, legislative and executive power must function separately. This is oftentimes not the case. In the Netherlands, for example, the ministers are both part of the legislative and the executive powers. And in the USA the judicial power is mostly driven by either democratic or republican principles.

Transparency and accountability in public administration. If one of the powers makes mistakes, the others have the right to actively inquire what went wrong, why, and take measures to fix the mistake or prevent future mistakes. The public also has the right to ask questions and see parts of important documents related to the issue.

Free, independent and pluralistic media. Media is one of the most important aspects of a democracy, as it engages the public. Nowadays media becomes more and more polarizing. Far right movements have been known to collude via media such as Telegram, and governments (for example the French) have taken active measures to prevent this.

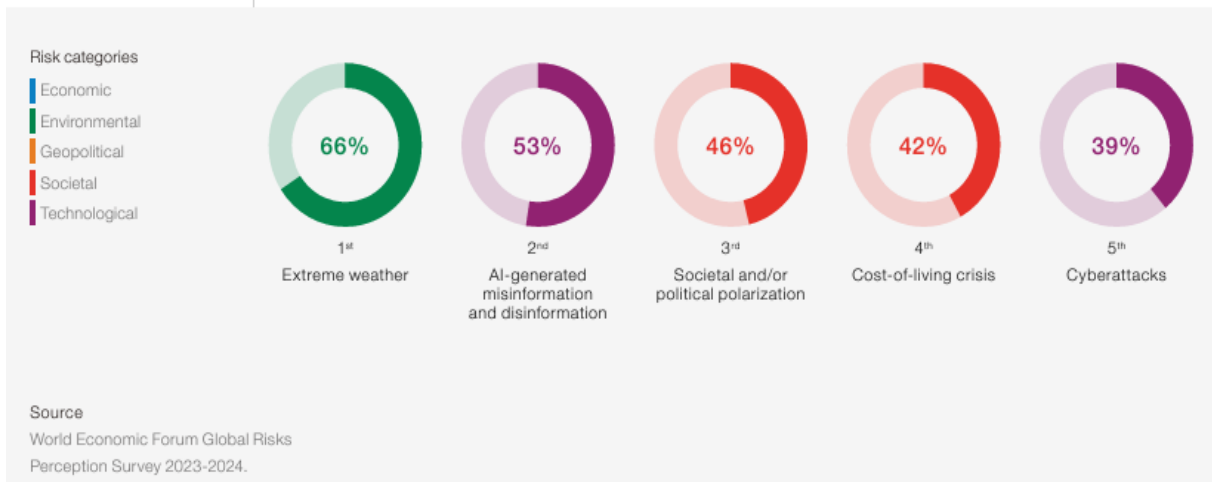
The General Threat

Concerns are mounting regarding the erosion of democratic principles such as equality, inclusion, and solidarity, alongside a worrying trend of diminishing press freedom. This alarming decline raises significant questions about the integrity of democratic systems and the ability of societies to uphold fundamental rights. The marginalization of these core values threatens to weaken the collective fabric of democracies, making it critical to address these challenges to safeguard the principles of justice, transparency, and equal representation.



FIGURE B | Current risk landscape

"Please select up to five risks that you believe are most likely to present a material crisis on a global scale in 2024."



The Threat of Press Freedom

According to the UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), over the past five years, 85 percent of the world's population has experienced a decline in press freedom.

The UN agency elaborated that in attempts to hamper their work, media globally are increasingly facing attacks, online and offline.

They are being targeted with increasing detention; the use of defamation laws; cybersecurity or hate speech laws to curb online expression; and growing surveillance technologies.

The COVID-19 crisis has also shown how it has become more critical than ever for media to gather and evaluate facts and fight disinformation. Equally critical is ensuring online safety and security.

Women journalists are particularly impacted. UNESCO and the International Centre for Journalists found that 73 per cent of 714 women journalists from 125 countries have reported experiencing online violence in the course of their work.

Moreover, attempts to silence journalists are growing more brazen by the day and they often pay the ultimate price.

From 2016 to the end of 2021, UNESCO recorded the killings of 455 journalists, who either died for their work or while on the job.

Polarization

While some partisan polarization is healthy for democracy, one of the key drivers of democratic decay in new and established democracies is intense polarization, where political opponents begin to regard each other as existential enemies, allowing incumbents to justify abuses of democratic norms to restrain the opposition, and encouraging the opposition to use "any means necessary" to (re)gain power.



Polarization has grown all around the world, due to far-right movements and parties gaining more support. The AFD (Alternatives for Germany) is a prominent example. Although the party has been compared with National Socialist movements in the second world war, the party is still gaining popularity. There are people who think they polarize the nation and because of their large sphere of influence, this leads to tensions within Germany.

The United States also know a lot of polarization, due to their two-party system. The elections are more a show than interesting and informative debate, because voters care less about actual stances on important issues, but rather about defeating the other party. This again leads to tensions within society.

Multiethnic democracies

The challenge of sustaining multiethnic democracies is one of the most significant challenges facing democracies of all types today. The politics of redistribution has also been notoriously complicated by ethnic diversity, but the growing ethnic diversity of both new and old democracies, driven in part by immigration, have generated different forms of right-wing populist backlash and has exacerbated political polarization. This poses dilemmas for parties of the right and left. For parties of the right, there are temptations to exploit issues of cultural diversity to gain power, which also may lead to restrictions and unequal representation of ethnic minorities, diminishing the quality of democracy. For parties of the left, this same politics has stimulated much discussion in recent years of whether the welfare state is compatible with ethnic diversity. In fact, many on the left have argued that the left needs to reopen debates about immigration to diminish the appeals of the populist right.

Globalization, economic inequality, and democratic discontent

A major theme is the threat economic inequality, often driven by global economic forces, poses to the survival and viability of democracy. We explore the pernicious and indirect ways in which unequal economic resources diminish the quality of democracy, through voting, institutional design, campaign spending, and media.



FIGURE C

Global risks ranked by severity over the short and long term

Please estimate the likely impact (severity) of the following risks over a 2-year and 10-year period.



Threats to Election Integrity

Disinformation and misinformation

Disinformation is false information deliberately spread to mislead voters. Misinformation is false information shared by someone who does not know it is false. Learning to spot disinformation and misinformation helps protect election integrity by limiting the spread of false information about elections. These are some recognisable aspects of disinformation and misinformation.

- Provoking a strong emotional response
- Making a bold statement or extraordinary claim
- Seeming too good to be true
- Containing clickbait (such as "You won't believe this video!")
- Uses small pieces of valid information that are exaggerated, distorted or without nuance.
- Has been shared widely on platforms with a track record of spreading disinformation

These signs do not prove that content contains false information, but they are indicators that you should carefully consider the accuracy of the content before sharing it with others.

Foreign interference

Foreign interference is when a foreign state or someone acting for that state tries to influence an election in a deceptive way. Foreign interference can include:



- Making illegal political contributions. This can span all the way from financial donations, to influence the elections by using bots on social media platforms, to hacking users for information on voting behaviour.
- Sponsoring prohibited election advertising
- Disinformation campaigns (via social media)

Foreign interference activities are usually clandestine to avoid detection, but foreign interference activity can be mitigated. Western democracies have shown to mitigate this to a certain extent (though far from perfect). The bigger issue are LEDCs under the sphere of influence of big global powers such as Russia and China.

Any threat to election workers, technology or processes is also a threat to election integrity. This includes any attempt to:

- Intimidate or threaten election workers
- Disrupt election processes at voting places
- Suppress voting or illegally influence voters (e.g. vote buying)
- Commit voter fraud
- Compromise election technology

Sadly, these are all common phenomena in many nations with weak democracies.

FIGURE 3. INDICATORS OF CLEAN ELECTIONS DECLINING, 2000–2023

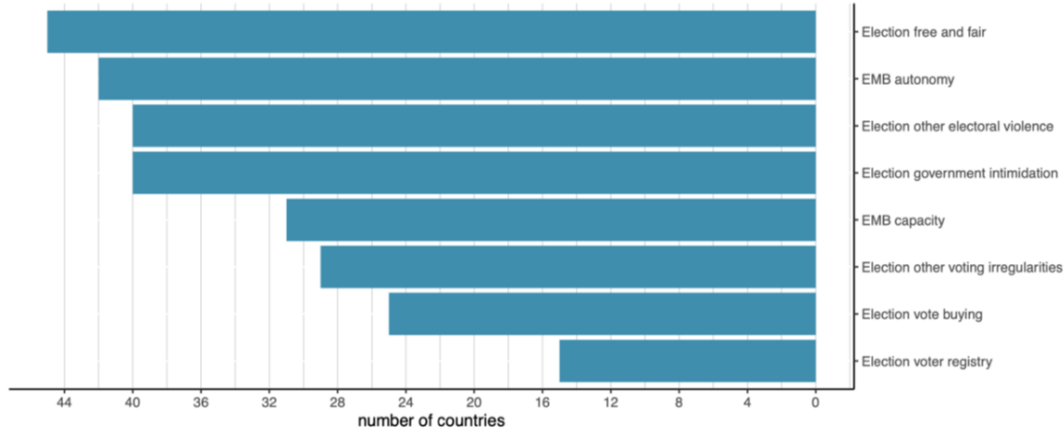


Figure 3 plots the number of countries declining statistically significantly on the indicators of the Clean Elections Index. An indicator is declining statistically significantly if its 2023 values is smaller than its maximum value between 2000 and 2022, and the confidence intervals do not overlap.

¹ See Nord., M. et al. 2024. [Democracy Report 2024: Democracy Winning and Losing at the Ballot](#), V-Dem Institute.



Major parties

European Union

The EU actively promotes democratic values within its member states and globally through its external policies. Its membership criteria, such as adherence to democracy, rule of law, and human rights, incentivize countries to strengthen democratic systems. The EU also funds democracy-support programs worldwide, such as election monitoring and civil society strengthening. Internally, it addresses democratic backsliding within member states, ensuring compliance with fundamental democratic principles.

United States of America

The USA plays a significant role in consolidating democratic values as a leading advocate for democracy globally. Through its foreign policy, it supports democratization efforts by providing financial and technical aid to pro-democracy groups and institutions. Initiatives like the National Endowment for Democracy (NED) focus on building civil society, free media, and accountable governance. The USA often conditions its foreign aid on democratic reforms, leveraging its influence to promote democratic transitions.

International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance

International IDEA is a global intergovernmental organization dedicated to supporting sustainable democracy worldwide. It provides research, tools, and expertise to strengthen democratic institutions, processes, and norms, focusing on electoral systems, constitution-building, and political participation. The organization works closely with governments, civil society, and international bodies to foster inclusive and resilient democratic practices. By offering impartial guidance and facilitating dialogue, International IDEA helps countries navigate challenges like political polarization, institutional reform, and democratic backsliding. Its evidence-based approach and global reach make it a critical player in consolidating democratic values.



Previous solutions

The Marshall Plan

The Marshall Plan, led by the United States, aimed to rebuild post WW2 Europe while fostering democratic governance. It provided economic aid to European countries on the condition that they uphold democratic systems and free markets. This initiative helped establish stable democracies in Western Europe, laying the foundation for long-term democratic consolidation. Although this is not a recent example, it is still worth mentioning as it is the most prominent one in world history.

The European Union's Copenhagen Criteria

The Copenhagen Criteria outlined the requirements for countries seeking EU membership, including a commitment to democracy, rule of law, human rights, and minority protection. This framework has led to many countries improving their democracies in order to join the European Union.

United Nations Electoral Assistance Division Programs

UNEAD has been a leading promoter of free and fair elections in over 100 countries for many years. It has assisted technologically, has organised electoral observer missions and capacity-building programs.

Possible solutions

Education

Children are the future and should be educated accordingly. This means teaching children about the importance of democracy and democratic values. Not only will more of them vote, and have interest in politics, they will start value democracy more and try to preserve it.

Support for independent Media

Supporting independent and diverse media outlets is crucial for safeguarding democratic values. Journalism is a gigantic force in our society, often exposing scandals. However, due to this, journalists face threats and feel uncomfortable. The government should support and protect these journalists in various ways.

Inclusive Electoral Processes



Governments and international bodies can work to make electoral systems more inclusive and representative. A simple way to do this is to lower the barrier of votes needed to join the senate. In the Netherlands, for example, it is 1/150th of the votes. In Germany, on the other hand, only 5 parties are allowed. This makes the Dutch democracy more representative.

Useful Documents

- Universal Declaration of Human Rights
- The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights
- The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women.
- 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development
- Resolution 28/14 (Forum on Human Rights, Democracy and the Rule of Law)

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