

# **Govt 4**

# **Politics of the World**

Fall 2023

Rockefeller 003

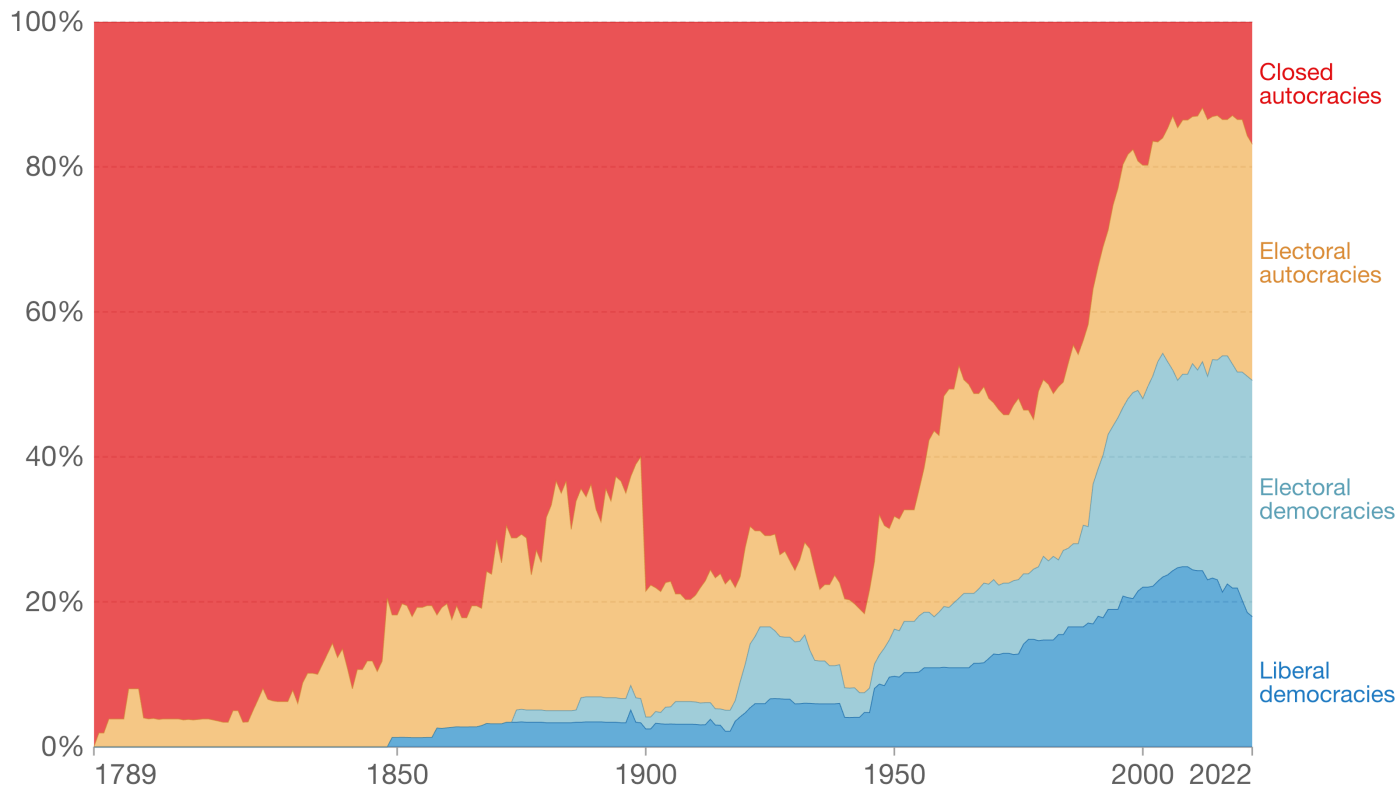
Professor **Yang-Yang Zhou**

Week 5.1: Understanding Democratic Erosion

# Historical trends of regime change

## Countries that are democracies and autocracies, World

Political regimes based on the criteria of the classification by Lührmann et al. (2018) and the assessment by V-Dem<sup>1</sup>'s experts.



Source: OWID based on Lührmann et al. (2018); V-Dem (v13)

[OurWorldInData.org/democracy](https://OurWorldInData.org/democracy) • CC BY

Note: The share of closed autocracies increases a lot in 1900 because V-Dem covers many more countries since then, often colonies.

# Week 4 Reflection

Based on your research of democratizing and democratic backsliding (“autocratizing”) countries in the past two weeks, do you think that the world is now experiencing a third wave of democratic erosion? Why or why not?

Respond on [pollev.com/govt4](https://pollev.com/govt4)

# What we covered in Week 4:

1. Core Elements of Autocracies
  - Totalitarianism vs. Authoritarianism
2. Types of Autocracies based on Selectorate
  - Monarchies, Military Dictatorships, Civilian Dictatorships
3. Selectorate Theory
4. How Autocrats Stay in Power
  - Group Exercise
  - Dictator's Dilemma
5. Your Background Research on an Autocratizing Country

# Plan for today:

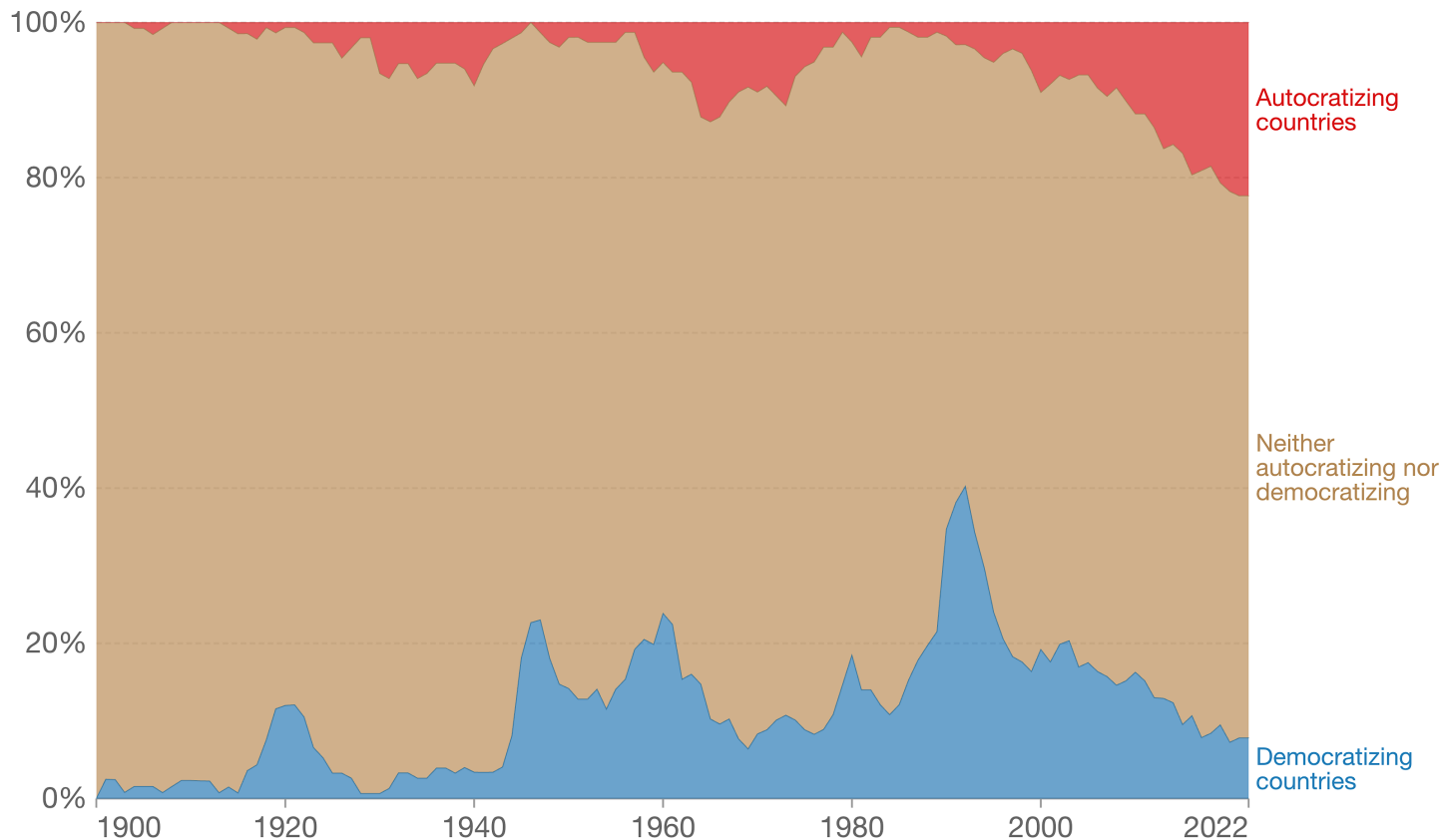
1. Exploring Trends in Democratic Erosion
2. Defining Democratic Erosion
3. Three Changing Techniques of Democratic Erosion
  - Bermeo 2016

# Historical trends of regime change

## Countries that are democratizing and autocratizing, World

Political regimes based on the criteria of the classification by Episodes of Regime Transformation and the assessment by V-Dem<sup>1</sup> 's experts.

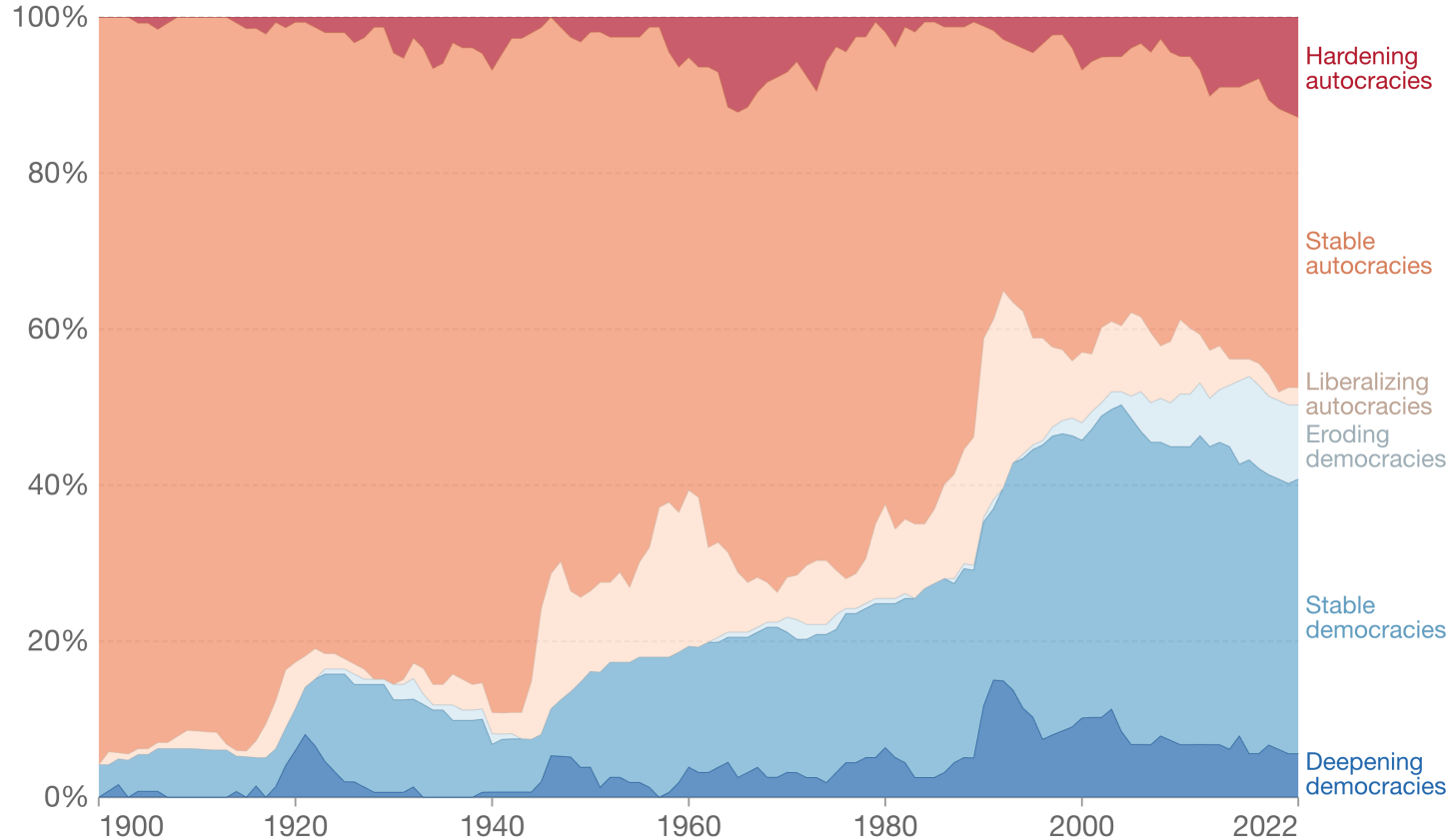
Our World  
in Data



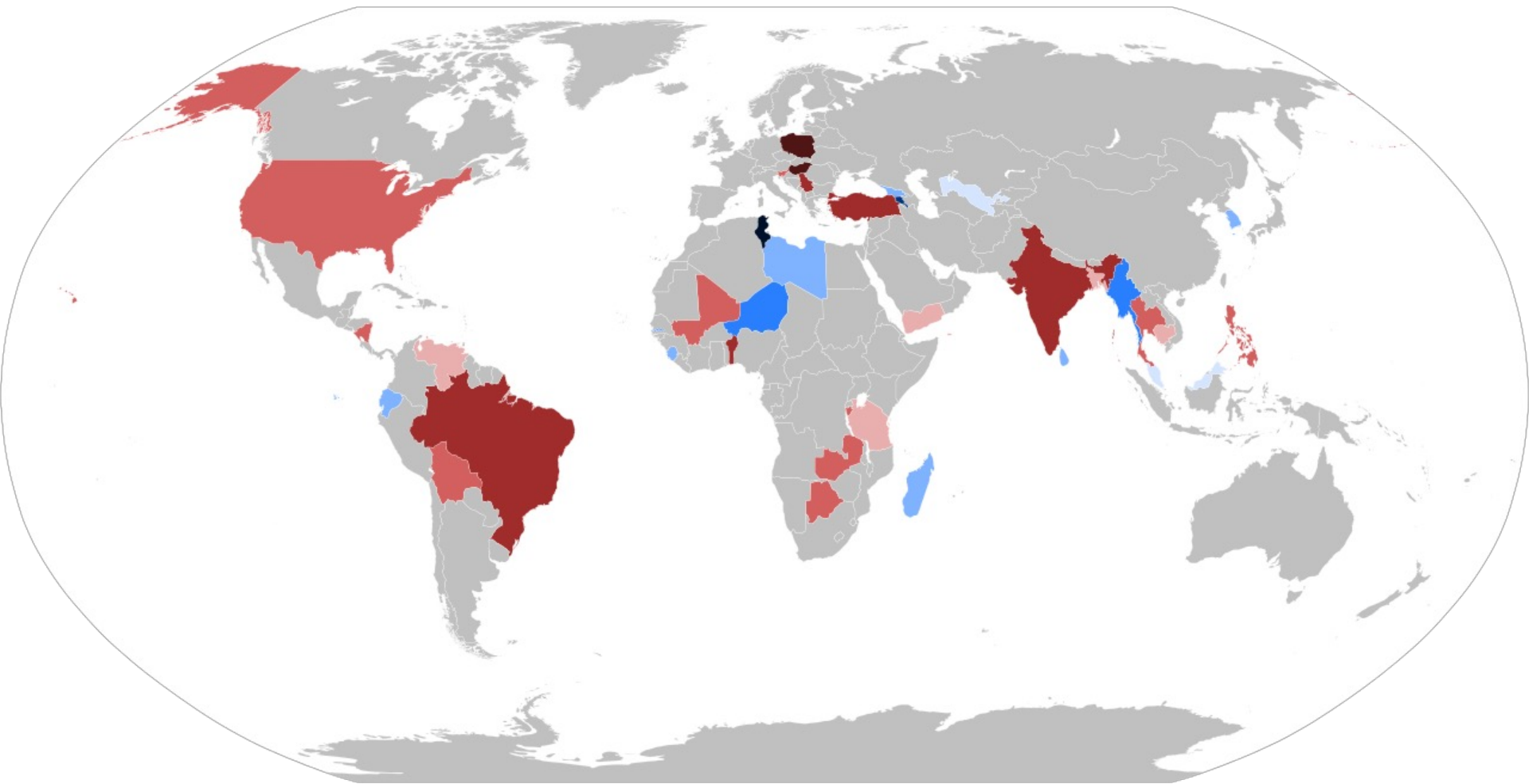
# Democracies are eroding & Autocracies are hardening

## Countries that are democratizing and autocratizing, World

Political regimes based on the criteria of the classification by Episodes of Regime Transformation and the assessment by V-Dem<sup>1</sup>'s experts.



# Map of regime change from 2010-2020



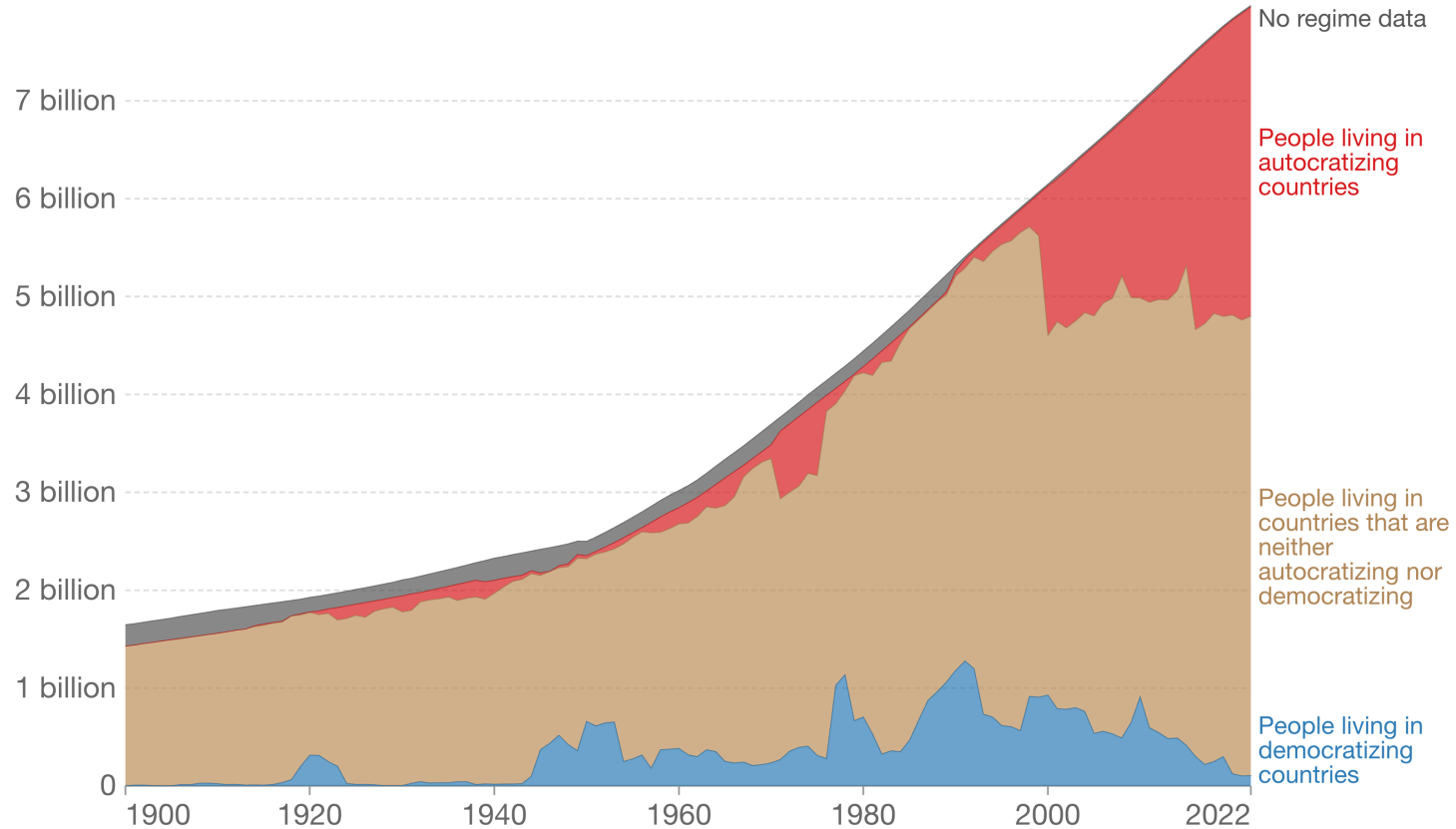


# More and more people are experiencing autocratization

## People living in democratizing and autocratizing countries, World



Political regimes based on the criteria of the classification by Episodes of Regime Transformation and the assessment by V-Dem<sup>1</sup>'s experts.

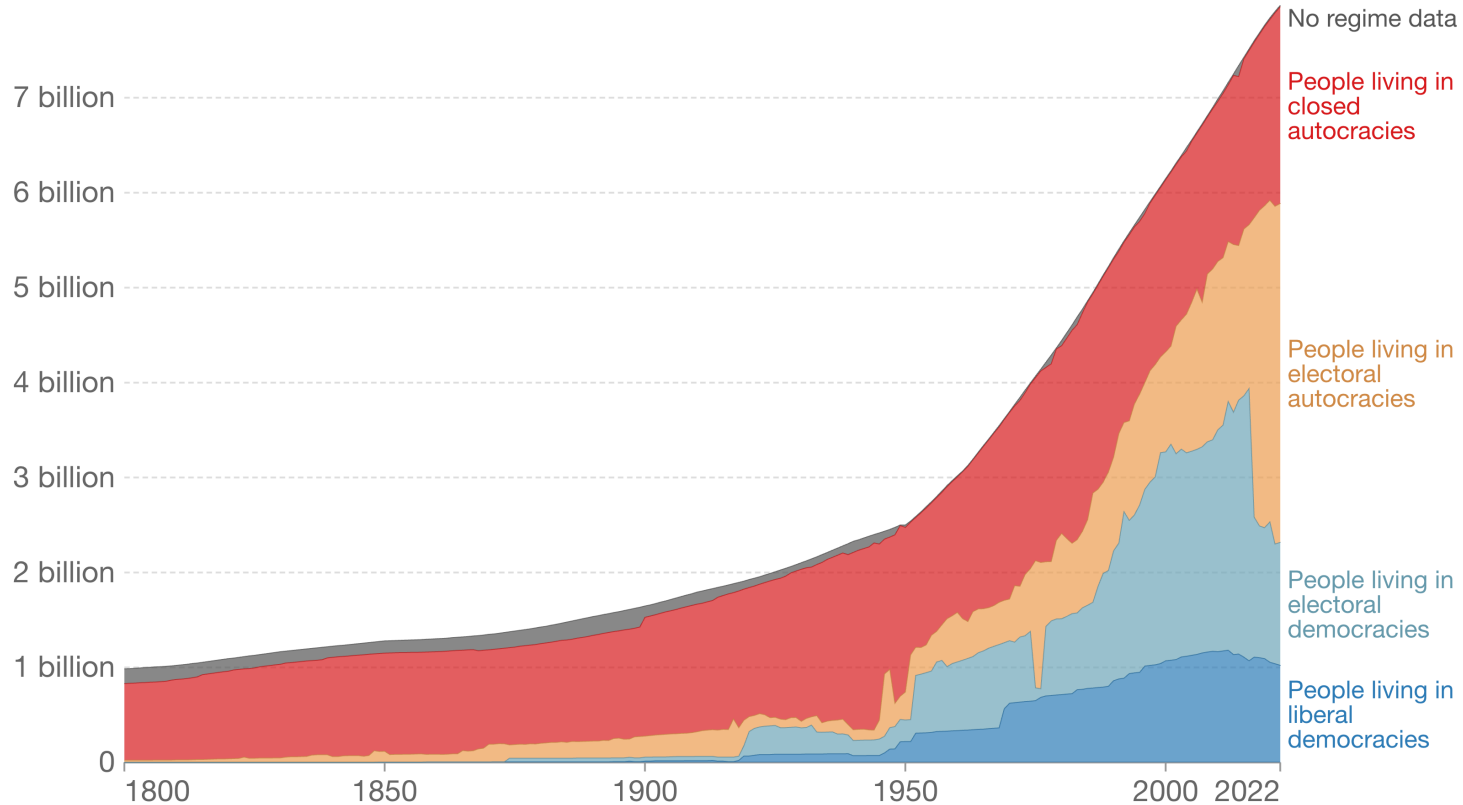


# Most people live in autocracies

## People living in democracies and autocracies, World

Political regimes are based on the criteria of the classification by Lührmann et al. (2018) and the assessment by V-Dem<sup>1</sup> 's experts.

Our World  
in Data



Source: OWID based on Lührmann et al. (2018); V-Dem (v13); Gapminder (2022); HYDE (2017); UN (2022)

OurWorldInData.org/democracy • CC BY

# Current trends in regime change (Freedom House)

Year	Free	Partly Free	Not Free
1973	29%	25%	46%
1987	35%	35%	31%
1997	42%	32%	27%
2007	47%	31%	22%
2017	45%	30%	25%
2023	43%	30%	27%

**Source:** Freedom House, “Democracy in Crisis: Freedom in the World 2023.”

# Defining Democratic Erosion / Backsliding / Decline

# Our definition of democracy

**Modern political democracy:** institutional arrangement for arriving at political decisions in which individuals acquire the power to decide by means of a **competitive struggle for the people's vote** (Schumpeter 1942)

a system of governance in which **rulers are held accountable for their actions in the public realm by citizens**, acting indirectly through the competition and cooperation of their elected representatives (Schmitter and Karl 1991)

**Core Elements of Democracy are:**  
*Accountability, Participation, Contestation*

# Our definition of **autocracy**

**Modern political autocracy:** institutional arrangement in which individuals and groups in society **are subject to the hierarchical authority of the state without opportunity for free participation**

a system of governance in which **rulers are NOT held accountable for their actions in the public realm by citizens**

**Core Elements of Autocracies are:**  
*Hierarchy, Selectorate*

# Then what is democratic backsliding?

**Democratic backsliding:** **state-led** debilitation or elimination of any of the political institutions that sustain a democracy

- Changes that negatively affect competitive accountability, participation, and contestation

# How do we recognize democratic backsliding?

If you are an expert hired by V-Dem or Freedom House, what what you look for to identify democratic backsliding in a country?

How do you know what you're observing is not just regular politics?

(Discuss with a partner)



# How do we recognize democratic backsliding?

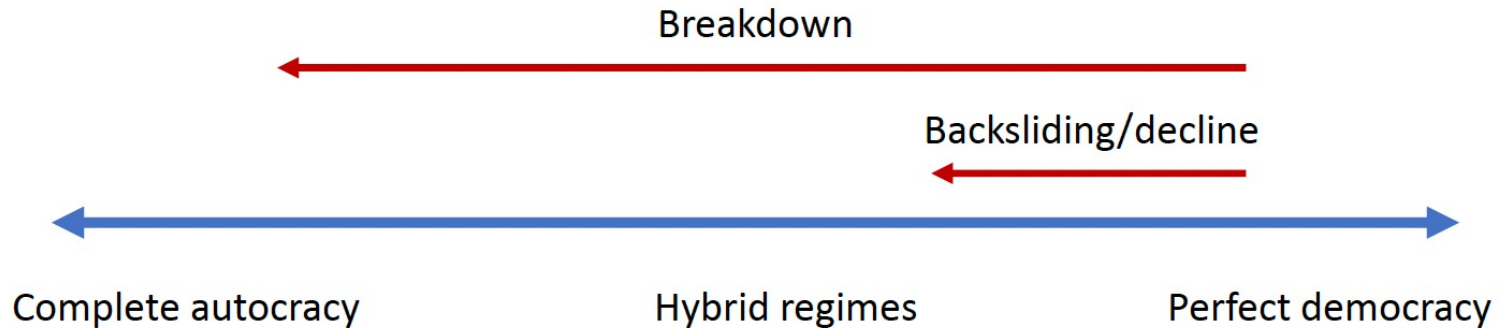
**Democratic backsliding:** state-led debilitation or elimination of any of the political institutions that sustain a democracy

- Changes that negatively affect competitive accountability, participation, and contestation
- **Examine changes in institutions and procedures**
- There are a variety of policies and political outcomes that might have anti-democratic overtones but that should not be considered democratic backsliding.

# Democratic backsliding vs. breakdown

**Democratic backsliding:** **state-led** debilitation or elimination of any of the political institutions that sustain a democracy

**Democratic breakdown:** reversion from democracy to authoritarianism; extreme case of democratic decline



How the Techniques of Democratic Erosion  
have changed over time

“Some of the most blatant forms of backsliding are now *less common*; and more vexing forms of backsliding are becoming *more common*.

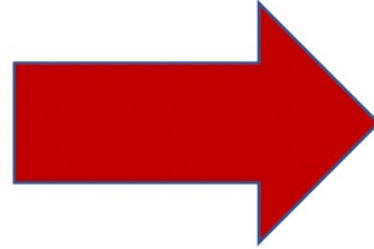
Ironically, we now face forms of democratic backsliding that are legitimated through the very institutions that democracy promoters have prioritized.”

*(Bermeo 2016)*



# 1. Coups are Rebranded

**Classic coups d'état:** illegal attempts by military or other state elites to oust a sitting executive

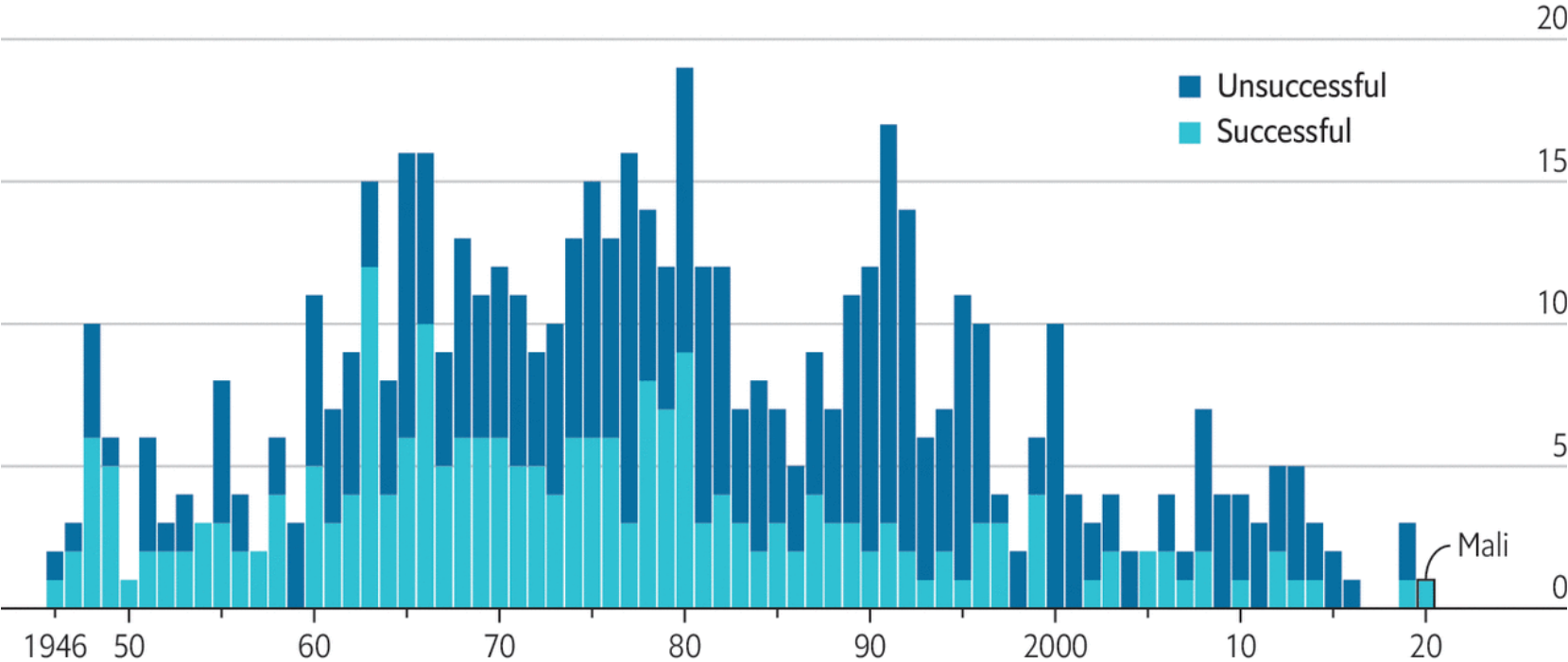


**Promissory coups:** Coup framed as a defense of democracy

# Decline of Classic Coups

## Flying the coup

Number of coups attempted worldwide, 1946-2020



Sources: Centre for Systemic Peace; press reports

# Rise of Promissory Coups

## Why Does Thailand Have So Many Coups?

May 22, 2014 · 12:58 PM ET



Greg Myre



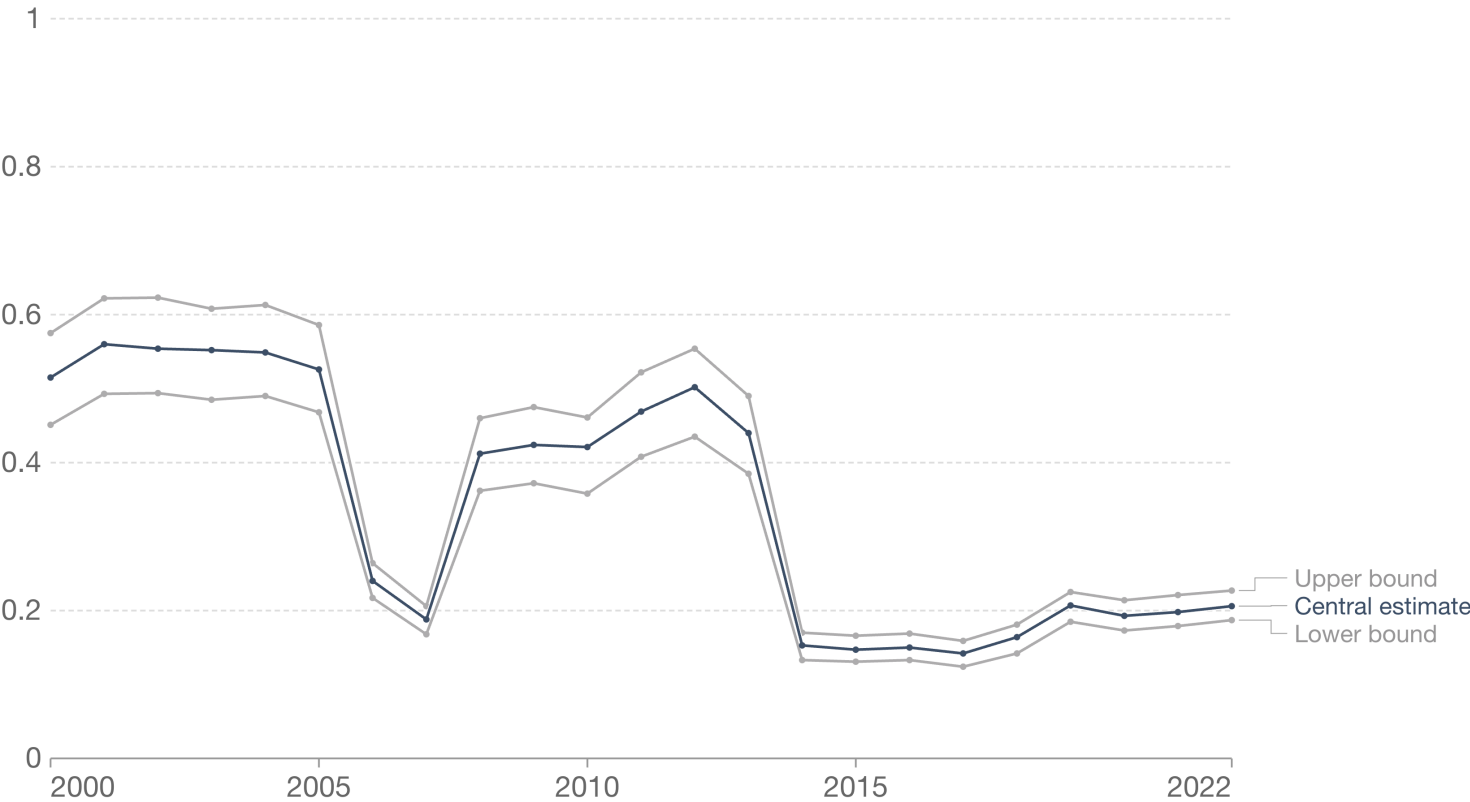
Thai soldiers move in on a pro-government demonstration on the outskirts of Bangkok on Thursday. Thailand's army chief Gen. Prayuth Chan-Ocha has announced a military takeover of the government, saying the coup was necessary to restore stability after six months of political turmoil.

# Rise of Promissory Coups

## Electoral democracy index, Thailand, 2000 to 2022



Based on the expert assessments and index by V-Dem<sup>1</sup>. It captures to which extent political leaders are elected under comprehensive voting rights in free and fair elections, and freedoms of association and expression are guaranteed. It ranges from 0 to 1 (most democratic).




Source: OWID based on V-Dem (v13)



# Rise of Promissory Coups

## *Mali Coup Leaders Pledge Democracy After Deposing President*

The plotters appealed to Malians and foreign powers in a televised address to the nation, and said that new elections would be held to replace the detained president, who had been democratically elected.

 Share full article



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# Rise of Promissory Coups

## When Will Sudan's Promissory Coup End? Interview with Ruling General Provides Little Clarity for the Country's Future

posted on October 12, 2022 by Taylor Davis

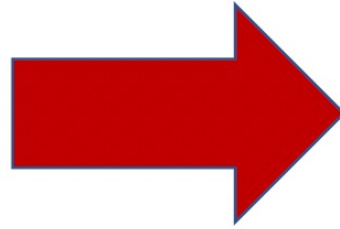
[Ohio State University](#)



In the past three years, Sudan has experienced two promissory coups, plunging the country into ongoing political turmoil. Although outwardly intended to foster democratization, these coups often lead to a prolonged period of transitional or autocratic rule, ultimately failing to substantially increase the quality of the country's democratic institutions. Looking at recent comments by Sudan's top ruling general, it is unclear how much longer citizens will have to wait to vote and the future of the country's political leadership.

## 2. Gradual Executive Takeover

**Executive coups  
(autogolpe):**  
elected chief  
executive  
suspends the  
constitution  
outright



**Executive  
aggrandizement:**  
elected  
executive  
weakens checks  
on executive  
power



# **Autogolpe** of Alberto Fujimori, 1992 Peru

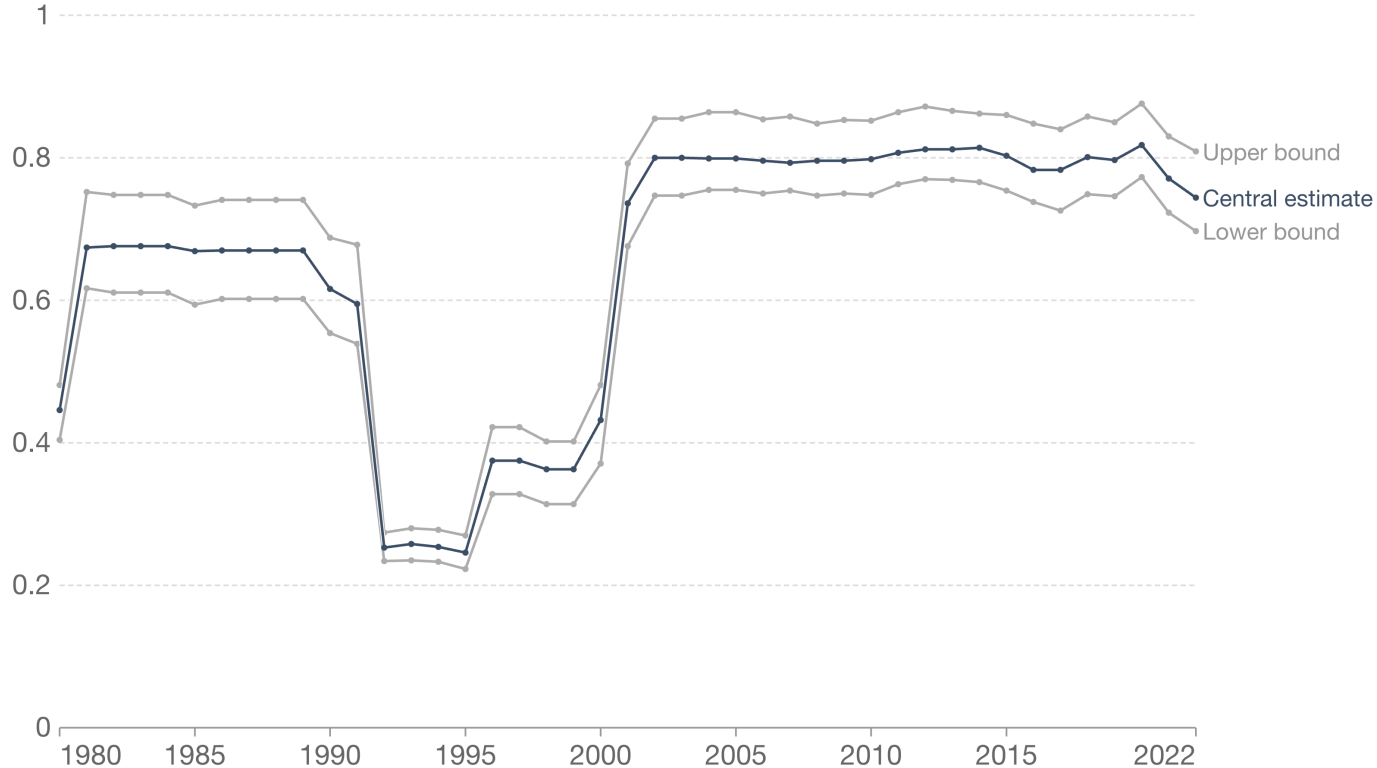


# Autogolpe of Alberto Fujimori, 1992 Peru

## Electoral democracy index, Peru, 1980 to 2022



Based on the expert assessments and index by V-Dem<sup>1</sup>. It captures to which extent political leaders are elected under comprehensive voting rights in free and fair elections, and freedoms of association and expression are guaranteed. It ranges from 0 to 1 (most democratic).



# Executive Aggrandizement under Orbán, Hungary 2012

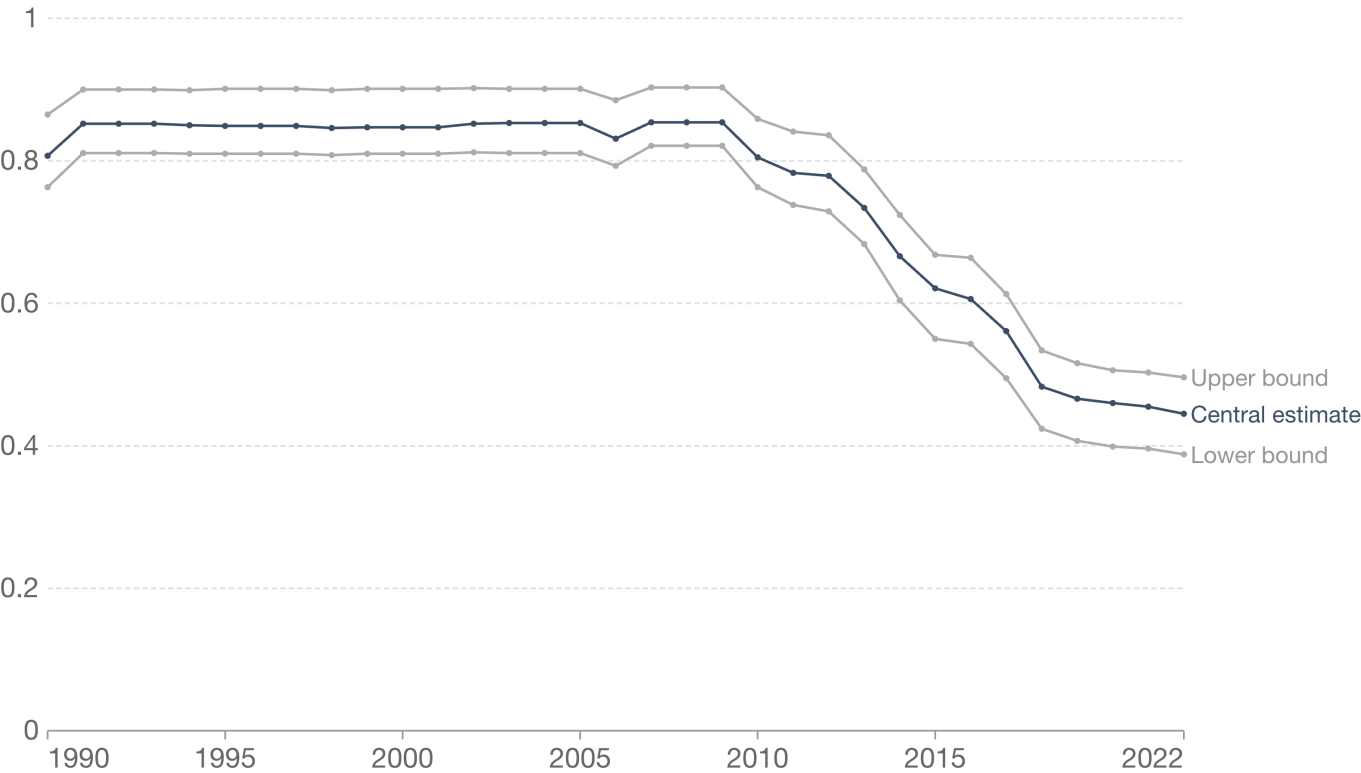


# Executive Aggrandizement under Orbán, Hungary 2012

## Electoral democracy index, Hungary, 1990 to 2022



Based on the expert assessments and index by V-Dem<sup>1</sup>. It captures to which extent political leaders are elected under comprehensive voting rights in free and fair elections, and freedoms of association and expression are guaranteed. It ranges from 0 to 1 (most democratic).



Source: OWID based on V-Dem (v13)

# Overriding Term Limits in Africa



AFRICA CENTER  
FOR STRATEGIC STUDIES

## Constitutional Term Limits for African Leaders

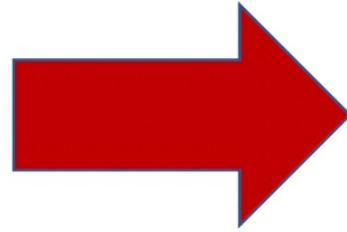


Updated May 2021



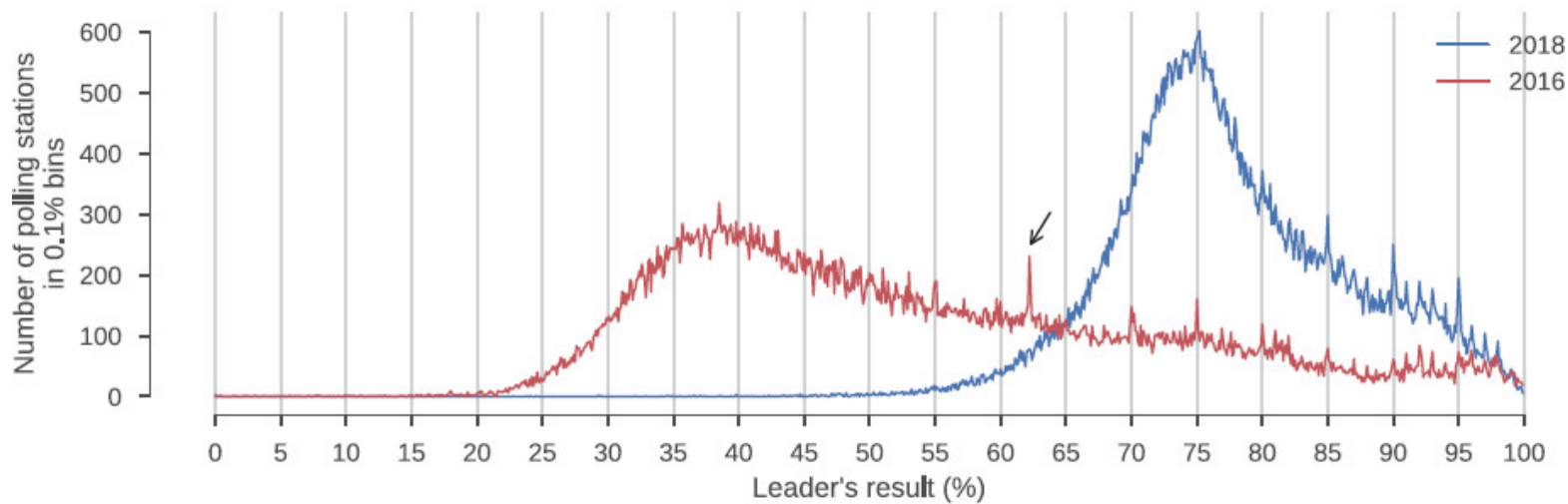
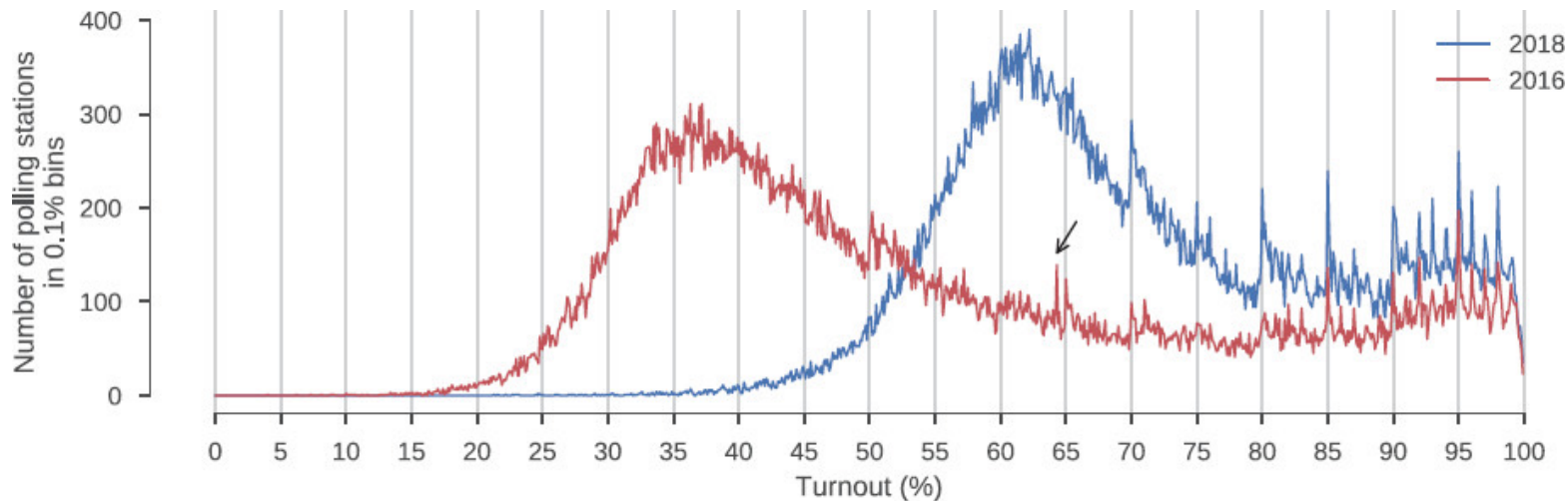
### 3. Pre-Election Vote Manipulation

**Election-day vote fraud:** open fraud on election day (count falsification, ballot-stuffing, ballot-box fraud)



**Strategic election manipulation:** tilting the playing field in favor of incumbents (hampering media, using state funds for campaigns, hampering voter registration, harassing opponents)

# Election Day Vote Fraud in Russia





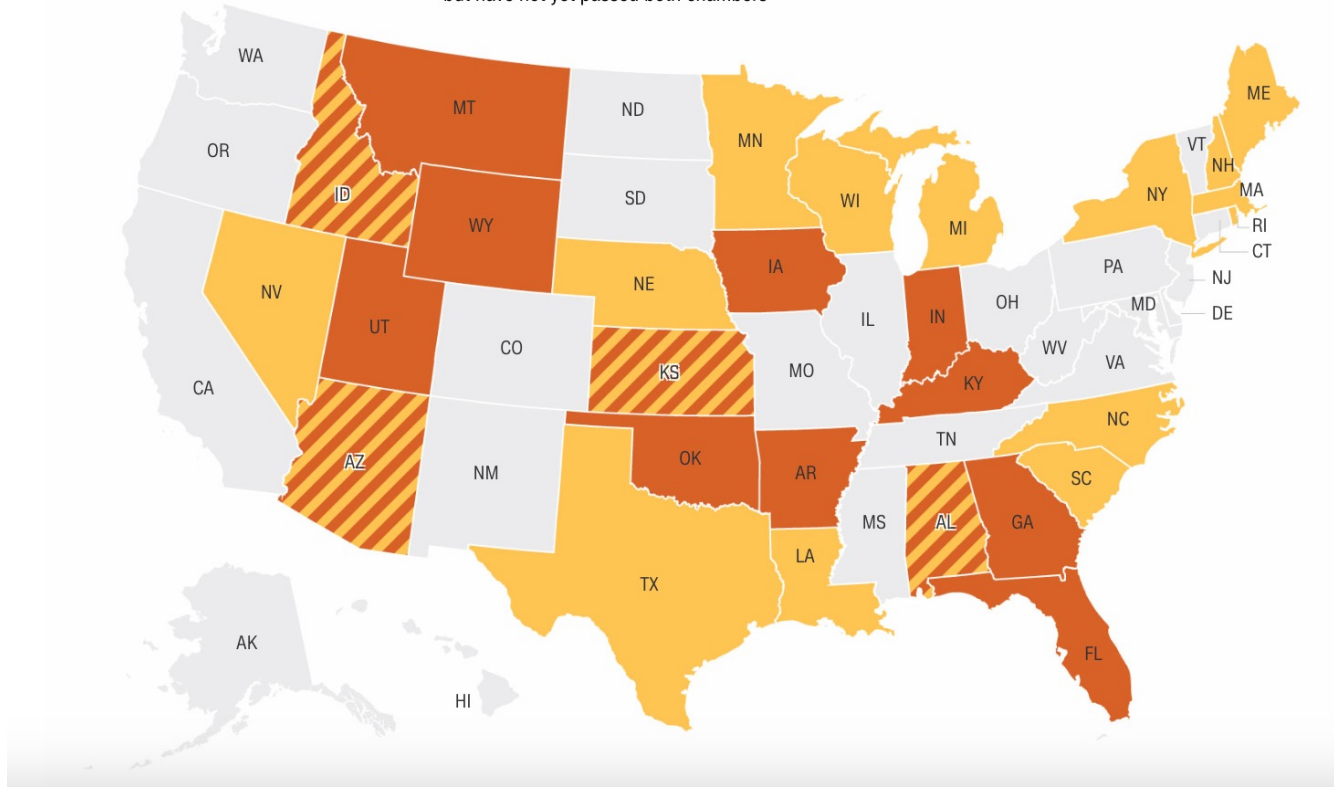
# Strategic Election Manipulation in the US

**Fourteen states have enacted 22 new laws making it harder to vote**

In addition to the 22 new laws, an additional 61 bills were advancing through legislatures in 18 states. Advancing bills include those that have either passed in at least one chamber or have otherwise made progress at the committee level.

**States that have enacted or advanced bills that would make it harder to vote since the 2020 election**

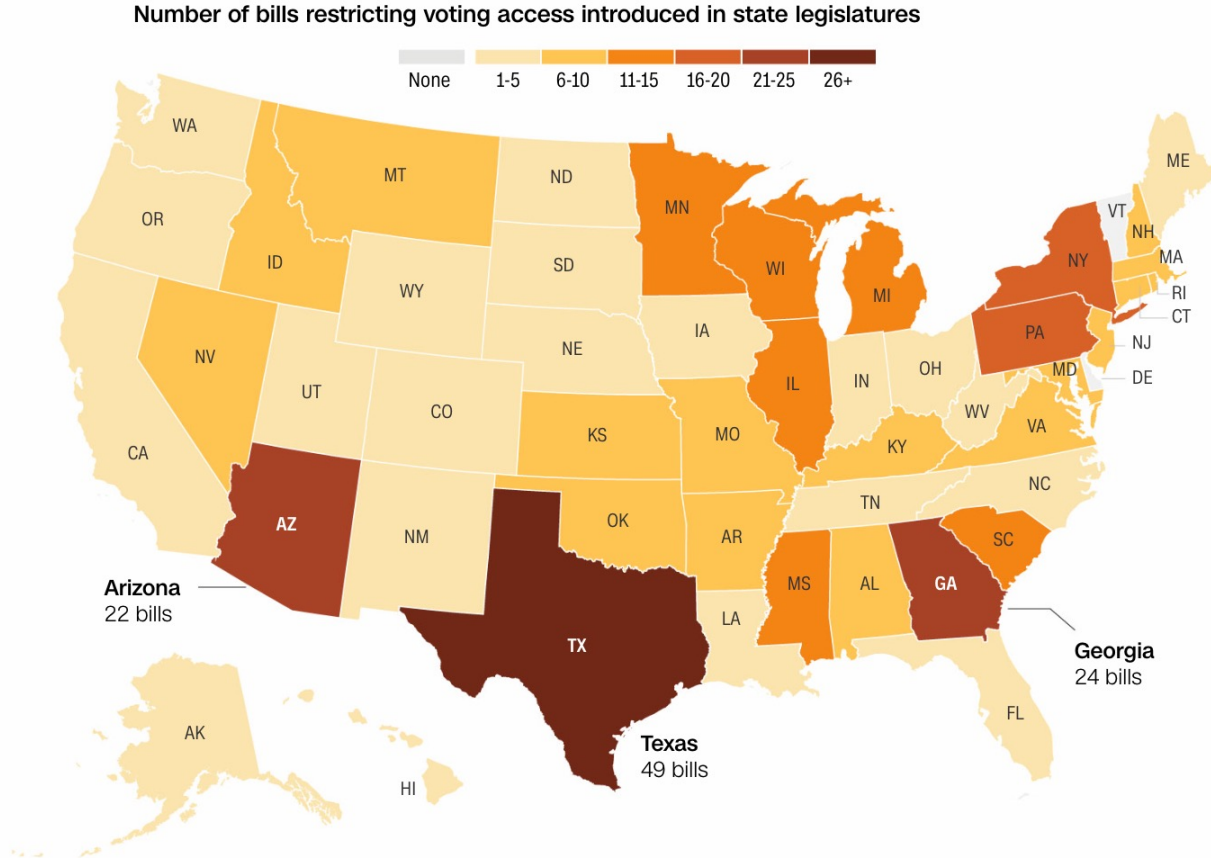
-  States where restrictive voting bills have been enacted into law
-  States where restrictive voting bills have advanced in the legislature but have not yet passed both chambers



# Strategic Election Manipulation in the US

## Bills aiming to curb voting rights introduced in almost every state

State lawmakers have introduced at least 389 bills in 48 states that would make it harder for their residents to vote in upcoming elections. The state legislatures with the highest number of restrictive bills were Texas, Georgia and Arizona.



Note: Data as of May 14, 2021. Bills introduced include those pre-filed and those that were re-introduced from the previous legislative session.