

Democratic Backsliding or Stabilization? The Role of Democracy Indices in Differing Interpretations

Hakan Sönmez

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.22151/politikon.46.3>

Hakan Sönmez, 29, from Ghent (Belgium), is a research fellow at Thinkout. He holds a Bachelor of Arts degree in Marketing from the University College of Ghent, and a Master of Science degree in Political Science from the Free University of Brussels. His research focuses on democratization and autocratization processes as well as in civil disobedience and civil resistance. He frequently presents his policy recommendations at international conferences of the UN and the OSCE. E-mail: hakansonmez@live.be & hsonmez@thinkout.be.

Abstract

There is a great deal of disagreement about the nature and extent of the alleged democratic backsliding. In order to understand the connection between the conflicting assessments of the democratization process and democracy indices (Freedom House, Polity, V-Dem, and Economist Intelligence Unit), this article investigates the various methods of measuring democracy. The question arises whether the studies outlining a process of democratic backsliding are backed by adequate data. The comparison of indices shows that the pessimistic authors are in minority. Although the conceptualization, coding and aggregation rules in the indices are not always applied perfectly, they determine the level of democracy accurately. This article also reveals that there is only a consensus on a first reverse wave of democratization. The second and third reverse waves cannot be distinguished based on the latest democracy data, so it is also possible to call these trends ‘periods of stabilization.’

Keywords

Autocratization; backsliding; breakdown; democracy indices; democratization; hybrid regimes; regression; quality of democracy

Introduction¹

During the “third wave of democratization” (Huntington 1991), the research agenda was strongly dominated by research on the democratization processes of political regimes (Vanhanen 1990; Arat 1991; Hadenius 1992; Alvarez et al. 1996; Zakaria 1997; Diamond 1999). One of the most important findings in this research field is that the number of democracies worldwide—especially after the fall of the Soviet Union—has substantially increased. During this cyclical upturn—and the blind optimism that goes with it—little attention has been paid to the processes of democratic backsliding (Erdmann 2011).

Yet, since the turn of the millennium, we have experienced a rise in research on democratic backsliding. There is a turning point in the evolution of the quality of democracy, both in newly formed democracies as well as in established democracies (see data from Freedom House 2019; Coppedge et al. 2019; Polity IV 2016; EIU 2019). Numerous works have been published with titles such as *The Rise of Illiberal Democracy* (Zakaria 1997), *How Democracies Die* (Levitsky and Ziblatt 2018), *Is Democracy in Decline?* (Plattner 2016), *The People vs. Democracy* (Haynes 2018), and *Authoritarianism Goes Global* (Diamond, Plattner and Walker 2016). Although these titles suggest that democracy as an idea and as a political system is under pressure all over the world, there is no consensus in the literature about the nature and extent of this shift.

The debate is still open. On the one hand, there are political scientists who state that there is a period of stabilization. Steven Levitsky and Lucan Way (2015), for example, find no evidence for democratic backsliding, and Philippe C. Schmitter (2015) claims that the evidence of the recent “democracy crisis” is based on selective inferences from qualitative case studies. On the other hand, there are political scientists who claim that democracy is actually on the decline. Authors such as Valeriya Mechkova, Anna Lührmann and Staffan I. Lindberg (2017) are representatives of this camp. In addition, Thomas Carothers (2004) attributes a major role to the US in promoting democracy considering the insufficient support for the democratic credo in various authoritarian countries.

The question therefore arises as to which of the two camps can present the strongest cards, and why the disagreement between the ‘optimistic’ and ‘pessimistic’ camp exists. One of the research avenues that has been neglected so far is that the different interpretations may be due to the different conceptualizations and measurements of democracy reflected by the use democracy

¹ I would like to express my sincere gratitude to Didier Caluwaerts, Assistant Professor of Public Policy at Free University of Brussels, for his comments on an earlier version of this manuscript, although any errors are my own and should not tarnish the reputation of this esteemed person. I am also immensely grateful to three anonymous reviewers for their insights that greatly improved the manuscript.

indices. A small difference in the conceptualization of what a democracy is supposed to be can entail large variations for mapping the democratization process.

A scrutiny of the literature makes it clear that measuring democracy is not always done clearly. The greatest uncertainty arises from the issue that there is no consensus about how democracy should be empirically measured. However, before researchers define democracy empirically, they must make clear how they define it theoretically. The term democracy is one of the most controversial terms in political science. Shortly after the mid-1950s, the Norwegian philosopher Arne Næss and his co-authors found no less than 311 different definitions of democracy (Næss et al. 1956).

In order to understand the connection between the democracy indices and the conflicting assessments of the democratization process, this article investigates the various methods of measuring democracy and the different sources of data of the democracy indices. Hence, this article examines whether the research studies outlining a process of democratic backsliding are backed by adequate data. To put it differently, to what extent have the conflicting findings about the alleged democratic backsliding resulted from the use of differing democracy indices?

Theory of democratic backsliding

This article is not going to deal with the process of democratic consolidation or the transition to a democracy, but rather with the reverse evolution. Bermeo (2016, 2) defines democratic backsliding as “the state-led debilitation or elimination of any of the political institutions sustaining an existing democracy,” and Lust and Waldner (2015, 3) call it a “change that negatively affects competitive elections, liberties, and accountability” (Tomini and Wagemann, 2017).

Tomini and Wagemann (*ibid.*) found the literature to be empirically, theoretically and methodologically too fragmented, so they opted for a pluralistic understanding of democracy in a Dahlian perspective as a starting point for the conceptualizations of this downward evolution. According to Tomini and Wagemann (*ibid.*) the process of democratic backsliding comprises two separate conceptual phenomena. On the one hand, there is the ‘democratic breakdown.’ By this we mean the transition from a democratic regime to a nondemocratic regime, being either a hybrid² or an authoritarian regime. On the other hand, there is ‘democratic regression,’ which indicates the transition within a political regime due to the loss of quality (see Tomini and Wagemann 2017 who have built on the work of Erdmann (2011)). Terms such as ‘rollback,’ ‘revert,’ ‘crisis,’ ‘recession,’

² Leonardo Morlino (2009, 276) proposes that “an adequate conceptualization of the ‘hybrid regime’ must start with a definition of both the noun and the adjective ‘trapped’ between a nondemocratic (above all, traditional, authoritarian, and post-totalitarian) and a democratic set-up.”

‘erosion,’ ‘deficit,’ and ‘deconsolidation’ are still used interchangeably, so it becomes confusing what political scientists actually mean. Larry Diamond (2015), for example, indicates that there has been a “democratic recession” in recent decades, but he goes on to say that we are not experiencing a “third reverse wave.” These types of propositions make the author’s exact meaning unclear. In this article—following in the footsteps of Tomini and Wagemann—the terms ‘breakdown’ and ‘regression’ will clearly frame these phenomena.

Dichotomous model vs. continuum model

A number of researchers, including Huntington (1991), Alvarez et al. (1996), Przeworski et al. (1996), and Cheibub et al. (2010), view democracy as a dichotomous phenomenon, whereas others such as Arat (1991), Bollen (1990), Hadenius (1992), and Vanhanen (1990) view democracy as a continuum (Högström 2013). Both groups have legitimate arguments to justify their choice. Högström (2013) believes that we can deal with that choice in a pragmatic way: studies investigating the transition from autocracy to democracy (and vice versa) can work with dichotomous categorization; and if the level of democracy is used as a dependent variable, it is recommended to make use of a continuum categorization. However, there is a lot of information lost in the dichotomous model due to the lack of nuance (Hadenius and Teorell 2005; Elkins 2000). It can even provide us with a biased view, creating great expectations for the future of democracies, as it was in the 1980s and 90s. In a continuum model, contrarily, the variations can be unambiguously presented through the use of polychotomous measurement and a gradual scale of democracy. The indices in this study are presenting the democracy in a continuum model: Freedom House/Polity IV with a trichotomous categorization, and V-Dem/EIU with a four-degree measure.

Democratic breakdown

The first conceptual phenomenon is ‘democratic breakdown’ (Erdmann 2011; Tomini and Wagemann 2017). Erdmann outlined the transition from a democracy to a hybrid regime as ‘hybridization,’ and the transition from a democratic regime or a hybrid regime to an authoritarian regime as ‘democratic breakdown’.

Hungary is an illustrative example of hybridization. Hungary was classified as a ‘free country’ by Freedom House until 2018. Since then, democracy in the country has been under pressure for some time. In 2018 the status of Hungary was changed to a ‘partly free country.’ A direct breakdown from a ‘free country’ to a ‘not free country’ is rare. The latter happens mainly through rapid military interventions or *autogolpes*, steady encroachment of present elites, external interventions or mass mobilizations (Lust and Waldner 2015). The study by Erdmann (2011)

showed that only five of the 52 cases of democratic backsliding were direct transitions from a democratic regime to an authoritarian regime, and four of them took place before 1989.

There are two reasons the term hybridization has not become popular in transitology studies: 1) ‘hybridization’ can be used in two directions, both for the transition from a democracy to a hybrid regime, but also for the transition from an autocracy to a hybrid regime; and 2) even though the term ‘hybrid regime’ was preferred to ‘mixed regime’ (Morlino 2009), it is still a vague term and can therefore cause confusion in empirical studies that work with multiple regime categories. Tomini and Wagemann (2017) have consequently simplified the theory by omitting the term hybridization and calling any form of autocratic transition a ‘breakdown.’

Democratic regression

The second conceptual phenomenon is ‘democratic regression’ (Erdmann 2011; Tomini and Wagemann 2017). When we talk about a democratic regression, we do not mean the transition from a democratic regime to an autocratic regime, but rather the loss of quality of democracy within the same regime. Case in point, the US had a Freedom House score of 94 in 2009, while this score dropped to 86 in 2019. With this score, the US remains a ‘free country’ or a ‘liberal democracy,’ but the democratic regression is remarkable. The same phenomenon can also happen within a ‘not free country’ or a ‘closed autocracy.’³ In this regard, we could call a hypothetical deterioration in North Korea, which is already a closed autocracy, a democratic regression because the imagined decrease happened within the same regime category.

Methodology

Since it is almost impossible to compare all existing democracy indices, this article will limit itself to four major indices: Freedom House, Polity IV, V-Dem and EIU. These indices were selected on the basis of two reasons. The first factor is that it is important for this study to measure democracy in a continuum model (i.e., more than two categories for different regime types) instead of a dichotomous model (i.e., democracy vs. nondemocracy) in order to provide the different graduations and transitions between the multiple regime categories. The second factor is that the chosen indices do not count the Schumpeterian minimalist ‘democracies’⁴ as democracies, since the Schumpeterian definition does not support modern democracies in view of the fact that it reduces the democracy to the electoral process; instead, the chosen indices follow the Dahlian (1971) threshold: once a regime meets the requirements of ‘polyarchy,’ it can be considered as an

³ If there exists no election with a minimum level of competition for the chief executive, then the country is a closed autocracy.

⁴ Joseph Schumpeter (1992 [1942], 269) defined “the democratic method is that 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.”

electoral democracy. There is even a counterfactual conditional: when Schumpeterian minimalist ‘democracies’ are included in the group of electoral and liberal democracies, then we obtain a more optimistic picture of the reality.

In the first phase, an overview and comparison of the four democracy indices will be provided. The sources of this phase incorporate the methodology papers and coding guidelines published by the democracy indices, the articles of political scientists who investigate the method factors of these data sets, and the data sets themselves.

In the second phase, the repercussions of the use of democracy indices and the different interpretations that result from them will be investigated. There is also additional evidence presented by exposing pronounced optimistic or pessimistic opinions on the transitions of democracies in the past 20 years.

Comparison of the democracy indices

Every data set project measures democracy differently and applies its own methodology. The four major democracy indices in this study are also not uniformly composed. Measuring a concept as disputed as democracy is always onerous, and some obstacles of conceptualization and measurement can never be definitively solved (Collier and Levitsky 1997; Coppedge et al. 2015), as will be demonstrated in the next section.

In recent years, large data set projects such as Freedom House and Polity IV have made some efforts to improve their methodology, and notable data set projects such as V-Dem and EIU have been set up. These indices rely heavily on expert coding, which is only reliable if there are clear coding criteria, but this is not always the case (Coppedge et al. 2011). The problems identified in the coding process cannot be easily solved. It is not possible for the democracy indices to change methodologies from one day to the next (which will be further elaborated below) because that can have a major impact on the time series data. It is also time-intensive to conduct tests on intercoder reliability in view of the fact that it requires an intense practical training before the coders achieve an acceptable level of coding accuracy (ibid., 251). Polity used to conduct intercoder reliability checks and training exercises in the year 2000, but after the fine-tuning of the guidelines, no intercoder reliability tests were carried out anymore. Polity records that the analysts have reached a high degree of coding convergence after the initial tests (Marshall et al. 2016), but there is a concurrent risk that intercoder reliability is actually analysts accepting other analysts’ judgements.

Freedom House

The first and most frequently used data set was developed by the NGO Freedom House and currently covers 195 countries (Freedom House 2019). This data set measures variables that are not necessarily components of democracy, including corruption, civilian police control, violent

crimes, willingness to grant political asylum, and the right to buy and sell land (Coppedge et al. 2011). In fact, Freedom House is rather a conceptualization of the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*. The weighting coefficient of civil rights is greater than political rights, which is the main reason that the allocation of scores corresponds to the *Declaration*.

Freedom House analysts relate the total scores to a Freedom Rating: 1.0 to 2.5 for ‘free countries,’ 3.0 to 5.0 for ‘partly free countries,’ and 5.5 to 7.0 for ‘not free countries.’ For Coppedge et al. (ibid.), there are questions about this aggregation technique because the country coders have a general idea of the extent to which a country is democratic, and they could reflect their personal point of view across the different indicators. This ambiguous coding process is precisely the point where the subjectivity bias of the analysts becomes relevant. Bollen and Paxton (2000, 77) have found an ideological bias in the scores of Freedom House for the reason that it has systematically underquoted countries such as Cuba, Yugoslavia, and Romania, especially in the first years of its measurements back in the 1970s. Steiner (2014) has also discovered that the US and its allies achieved better scores in the Freedom House index than in other data sets.

Freedom House considers the political regimes as electoral democracies if they achieve an overall score of 20 or higher for political rights, and a score of 30 or higher for civil liberties (the threshold for civil liberties was added in 2016-17) (Freedom House 2019). Additionally, electoral democracies have to achieve a score of seven or better for the electoral process, which is a subcategory of political rights. Freedom House states that most free countries are considered liberal democracies in the *Freedom in the World Project*. This also means that some free countries can still be electoral democracies. Morlino (2009, 278) reflects on this issue as follows:

In the application of the term by Freedom House, all democracies are ‘electoral democracies’ but not all are liberal. Therefore, even those regimes that do not have a maximum score in the indicators for elections continue to be considered electoral democracies. More specifically, a score equal to or above seven, out of a maximum of 12, is sufficient for partially free nations to be classified as electoral democracies. Thus, in both uses of the term, an ‘electoral democracy’ could only be a specific model of a hybrid regime, but not a minimal democracy.

On top of the coding and aggregation rules, the collection of primary data is also a relevant process. Freedom House relies on expert survey data in which the country experts provide an evaluation based on their case-specific knowledge; previously, in the 1970s and 80s, Freedom House depended heavily on secondary sources such as ‘The New York Times and Keesing’s Contemporary Archives (ibid., 250). Freedom House reduces data collection problems by not using representative survey data (which is the main source of EIU). However, the switch from one source to another—linked to some possible changes in the coding procedures—have jeopardized the

continuity of the time series data (ibid.). There have been no attempts to revise the previous scores, so that they are consistent with current coding criteria (Coppedge et al. 2011 who asked Gerardo Munck during a personal communication in 2010). In 2016-17, Freedom House made another review in its methodology to measure the indicators more accurately, such as adding the civil liberties threshold of a score of 30 or higher for electoral democracies. Although this was not a fundamental change in methodology, it does raise again questions about the integrity of the previous measurements.

Polity IV

The second data set is the Polity IV of the NGO Center for Systemic Peace, which comprises 167 countries and measures indicators from the beginning of the 20th century. The Polity Project (Polity IV 2016) has a less robust method: we cannot clearly distinguish the individual indicators from each other and the distances between the categories on the measuring scale are not always the same⁵ (Braml and Lauth 2011), which reduces the reliability and validity of the results. Moreover, unlike the three other data sets, Polity does not take civil rights into account. Democracy is therefore viewed from the point of view of the rulers (Munck and Verkuilen 2002). For example, Polity considered the United States to be a fully democratic country during the 20th century and a large part of the 19th century, even though neither women nor African Americans were allowed to vote until 1920 and 1964 respectively (Paxton 2000). This misinterpretation was caused due to the fact that democracy was viewed from a minimalist perspective. Polity analysts employ in-house coded indicators—which is a form of expert judgement-based data—based on an assessment of country-specific information in reports, academic works, newspapers, and archive material. Polity reduces data collection problems by not using representative survey data (which is the main source of EIU).

The disaggregated data from Polity has been made public but is challenging to interpret, which makes it hard to assess the data and coding criteria (Coppedge et al. 2011). The Polity analysts cannot explain precisely how the various components are coded in certain cases, or how the aggregation elements lead to a total score for a certain country in a certain year (Munck and Verkuilen 2002). Even in disaggregated form, Polity is highly abstract, and, on that account, susceptible to divergent interpretations (Gates et al. 2006). Polity combines six underlying factors, and the country's score is the product of the sub-score of these six factors (plus the weighting system applied to these factors) (Coppedge et al. 2011, 249). Hence, two countries can have

⁵ It is dubious whether these indices are properly regarded as interval scales (see Treier and Jackman 2008). There is no easy solution to this complication, yet, Pemstein, Meserve, and Melton (2010) offer some intriguing ideas.

different sub-scores on the components, but the same general score. Such lack of clarity yields a distorted image about the quality of democracy in those countries.

In the Polity data set, there are three standard categories: ‘democracies’ that have a Polity score from +6 to +10, ‘anocracies’ that have a Polity score from +5 to -5 (including three special categories -66, -77 and -88), and ‘autocracies’ that have a Polity score from -6 to -10.

Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem)

The third data set, V-Dem (Coppedge et al. 2019), started with democracy measurements in 2014. V-Dem analysts retroactively measure indicators until 1900 (for some indicators back to 1789), and contains 179 countries. The V-Dem Institute makes use of a multidimensional approach to measure democracy, with no less than 450 specific indicators, thereby creating the largest data set to evaluate democracies. There are seven different components included in the conceptualization of democracy: electoral, liberal, participative, majority, consensual, deliberative, and egalitarian.

In order to classify a regime as an electoral democracy, periodic elections must be free and competitive and receive the support of a broad electorate, and there must be freedom of association and access to alternative sources of information (Lindberg et al. 2014, 161). In fact, V-Dem’s electoral democracy corresponds to Robert Dahl’s concept of polyarchy. V-Dem identifies a liberal democracy by first looking for electoral democracy, plus four additional indicators, which are: protected civil liberties, strong rule of law, independent judiciary, and effective checks and balances.

V-Dem collects information from various primary sources including in-house coded data, expert survey data, and observational data⁶. V-Dem reduces data collection problems by not using representative survey data (which is the main source of EIU).

V-Dem divides political regimes into four categories: ‘liberal democracies,’ ‘electoral democracies,’ ‘electoral autocracies,’ and ‘closed autocracies.’

Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU)

Finally, we have the Democracy Index project (EIU 2019). This data set has been measuring political regimes since 2006 and contains 165 countries (it excludes the micro-states, just like Polity IV). The smaller sample size does not affect the representativeness of the data in view of the fact that the entire world population is virtually represented in those 165 countries. This index has an equal distribution of the components, which consists of civil rights, electoral regime, horizontal accountability, and political rights. The EIU distinguishes between four regime

⁶ Observational data refers to the data gathered through directly observable facts, such as the voter turnout rates, and the presence or absence of formal political institutions.

categories: 'full democracies' (scores of 8 to 10), 'flawed democracies' (scores of 6 to 7.9), 'hybrid regimes' (scores of 4 to 5.9), and 'authoritarian regimes' (scores below 4).

This index is subject to the problem of comparability since the aggregated scores are the product of underlying components (just like Polity IV) (Coppedge et al. 2011), which means that two countries can have different sub-scores on the components, but the same general score.

The EIU makes use of data collection methods such as expert survey data, observational data, and representative survey data, but it is highly dependent on the latter source of data that is collected in a non-comparable manner for the most countries (*ibid.*), since it is almost impossible to draw exactly the same samples for the 165 countries. Moreover, the answers of the respondents have to be traced back by the country experts of the EIU, but the procedures used for this method have not been made public. This data collection method is weak due to limited empirical support for the idea that respondents can assess their own regimes in a cross-nationally comparable way or that they tend to live under regimes that are compatible with their own values:

While surveys of the general public are important for ascertaining the attitudes of citizens, the problem is that systematic surveys of relevant topics are not available for every country in the world, and in no country are they available on an annual basis. Moreover, use of such surveys severely limits the historical reach of any democracy index, since the origin of systematic surveying stretches back only a half-century (in the US and parts of Europe) and is much more recent in most countries (*ibid.*, 250).

The EIU considers compulsory voting to be a negative element for the quality of democracy, given that the EIU analysts believe that this obligation violates individual rights. On the other hand, compulsory voting improves turnout in the elections and, therefore, the quality of representation, and can, subsequently, be regarded as essential part of democracy (*ibid.*, 249).

Even though there are evident advantages for the disaggregation of the five indicators in the EIU data set, and specific questions contribute to the independence and accuracy of the five indicators (*ibid.*, 251), it is regrettable that EIU does not disclose the data for the sixty sub-questions, which makes it impossible to assess whether the components of a questionnaire are independently coded.

This data set has a stricter rating for 'full democracies' than other indices and does not classify many countries as full democracies. Even Belgium, which is considered a full democracy in any other data set, has been, according to EIU, a so-called 'flawed democracy' since 2016.

In the end, the discussion has shown that no data collection type is superior to any other when it comes to measuring the aspects of democratic rights (Skaaning 2018). Even the directly observable fact-based data (e.g., voter turnout) are not superior to judgment-based data that is

grounded on experience, knowledge and perception. This statement is also supported by Schedler (2012, 33): “If we truly had expelled judgment from data development, quantitative research on political regimes could not have blossomed as it has over the past decades.”

Repercussions of indices on the assessment of democracy

As the comparison of the data sets shows, the democracy indicators differ greatly. Not only are there different concepts of democracy used, but also the technical processing of the data often turns out to be a tricky issue. The question therefore arises to what extent these different conceptualizations and measurements have an impact on the research results concerning the alleged democratic backsliding.

Case-based evaluations often reveal interesting differences between various measures, especially when it comes to hybrid regimes (Hegre 2012). The assessment of the level of democracy in these intermediate regimes is sensitive to the incorporated indicators, and the weighting coefficient (ibid.). An example of this classification challenge is shown in Table 1. Freedom House allocated much higher scores in 2009 for countries such as Kuwait, Qatar and Morocco than Polity; whereas Polity allocated much higher scores to Congo-Kinshasa, Kosovo, Nicaragua and Russia than Freedom House (Högström 2013).

Table 1: Deviations in the assessments of countries between democracy indices

2009	Kuwait	Qatar	Morocco	Congo-Kinshasa	Kosovo	Nicaragua	Russia
Freedom House	Partly free (4.0)	Not free (5.5)	Partly free (4.5)	Not free (6.0)	Not free (5.5)	Partly free (3.5)	Not free (5.5)
Polity IV	Autocracy (-7)	Autocracy (-10)	Autocracy (-6)	Anocracy (-4)	Democracy (+8)	Democracy (+9)	Anocracy (+4)
V-Dem	Closed autocracy (0)	Closed autocracy (0)	Closed autocracy (0)	Electoral autocracy (1)	Electoral autocracy (1)	Electoral democracy (2)	Electoral autocracy (1)
EIU	The Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU) did not collect any data in 2009.						

Source: Author

When we carry out a tripartite comparison, by adding the data of V-Dem, there is a greater correspondence between the data from V-Dem and Polity, than between Freedom House and Polity or Freedom House and V-Dem. For Kosovo, the discrepancy is significant: in Freedom House, Kosovo is classified as an autocracy, in Polity as a democracy, and in V-Dem as a hybrid regime. This, apparently, proves that different conceptualizations and measurements of democracy sometimes have a major impact on classifications. What are the justifications of democracy indices concerning Kosovo’s classification? Kosovo is struggling with issues related to ethnic minorities and women’s rights, which caused Freedom House to give the country worse scores for civil liberties. V-Dem does not consider the civil liberties in Kosovo as problematic as in Ethiopia, Rwanda or Sudan, so that Kosovo was classified as a hybrid regime. Nevertheless, the parliamentary elections in 2007 are considered free and fair, which is the reason that Polity analysts

have given Kosovo better scores for its electoral process. As a result, if countries are not fully democratic or fully autocratic, they pose a major challenge for analysts to properly classify them, and the nuances of the data sets are considerably different when it comes to measurement of the Kosovar regime.

Democratization episodes

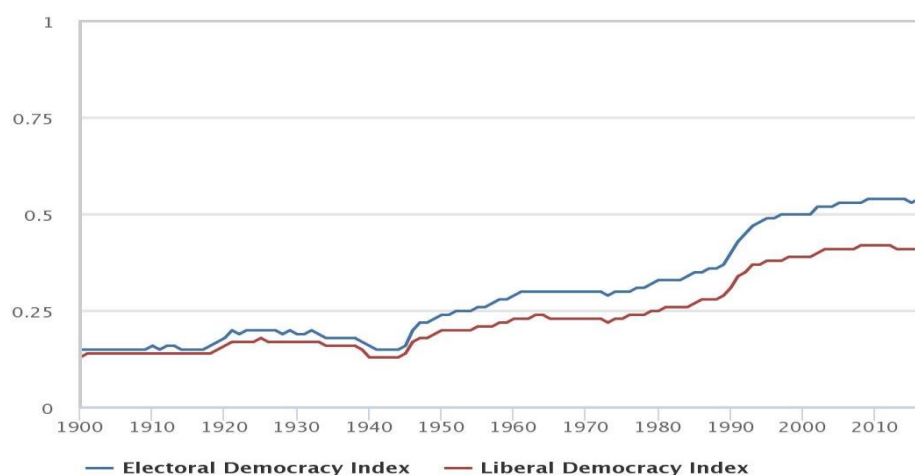
A large number of electoral democracies and the optimistic expectations for the future in the last two decades of the 20th century were based on a minimalist concept of democracy (Merkel 2010). *Democracy's Third Wave* by Samuel P. Huntington (1991) was perhaps a perspective-shifting study, but at the same time, it was massively criticized on the grounds that its empirical data was based on a simple way of classifying democracy, in which minimalist democracies were grouped with electoral and liberal democracies.

First reverse wave

Huntington (ibid.) identified three democratization waves and two reverse waves. However, when we stick to the same theoretical framework as Huntington, based on V-Dem data (instead of modified Freedom House data that was used by Huntington), then there is only a consensus about a first reverse wave in the eve of the Second World War (see Graph 1). The second and third reverse waves cannot be detected on the line graph of V-Dem. Nevertheless, there is still a division in the literature on this matter: on the one hand Lührmann and Lindberg (2019) follow Huntington's discourse by calling the three phenomena the "three waves of autocratization", and on the other hand, Levitsky and Way (2015) refer to a period of "nondemocratization". Doorenspleet (2000) prefers the term "trendless fluctuations", as well as Diamond (2015, 142) who calls it a "period of equilibrium", where freedom and democracy have not grown further but also have not experienced net declines.

Graph 1: Evolution of 'electoral' and 'liberal democracies' in V-Dem

*World



Source: Author, based on V-Dem Online Variable Graph

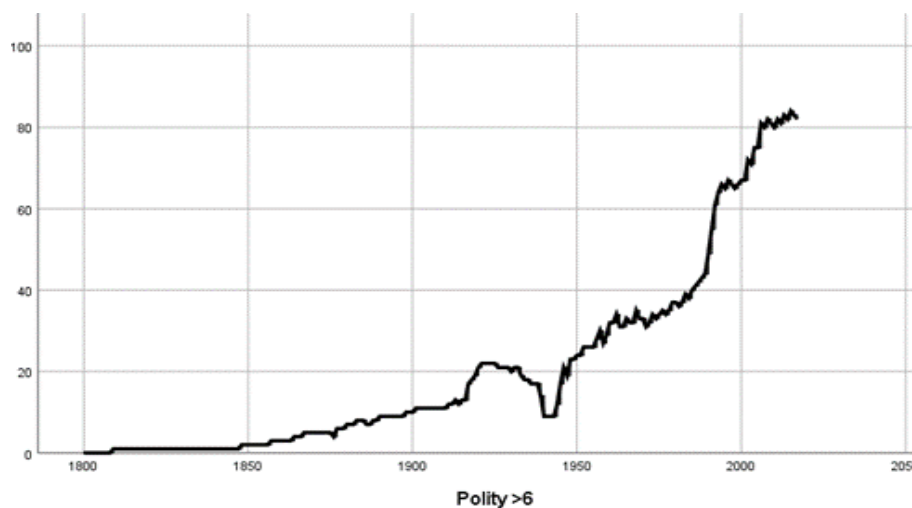
According to Huntington (*ibid.*), the first reverse wave took place between 1926 and 1942 with the number of democracies declining from 29 to 12, while the decline based on V-Dem began in 1933 and ended in 1944. Both studies show that the first reverse wave approximately began with the emergence of (fascist and communist) totalitarian regimes, ending when the end of the Second World War was in sight. What is striking, is that the first reverse wave, based on V-Dem data, drops less sharply than Huntington's assertion.

Second reverse wave

According to Huntington, during the second reverse wave (1960-1975), the number of democracies declined from 36 to 30, but the data of V-Dem contradict this. Based on the data of V-Dem, the second reverse wave (1961-1977) shows that there is no democratic backsliding but rather a stabilization regarding the fact that the number of democracies has remained very much equal during this period.

The Polity data—that follows a relatively different methodology than V-Dem—also shows a constant democratization process between 1800 and the present, except during the rise of totalitarian states and the Second World War. During this period, there was a significant decline in the number of democracies in the world. Such a decline did not occur later. The development line of democracy, based on Polity data, is shown in Graph 2.

Graph 2: Evolution of democracies (≥ 6) in Polity IV



Source: Author, based on Polity IV

Third reverse wave

Huntington was in no position to provide a reliable answer to the question about a possible third reverse wave (since this trend started about a decade after his publication); however, Huntington (1991, 12) called it the “third reverse wave,” but immediately admitted that the political scientists were unable to provide answers to the questions about the post-third wave era. V-Dem

shows that the number of democracies has fluctuated for a while, and then triumphed in 2018. Based on V-Dem, we cannot identify a third reverse wave.

Optimistic studies

Larry Diamond (1999, 34) was the first author to note that after the third wave of democratization, a reverse wave would not follow, but rather, possibly, a period of stabilization:

It is theoretically possible for a wave of democratic expansion to be followed not by a reverse wave but by a period of stagnation or stability, in which overall number of democracies in the world neither increases nor decreases significantly for some time and in which gains for democracy are more or less offset by losses. It is precisely such a period of stasis we seem to have entered.

Similarly, Steven Levitsky and Lucan Way (2015) reiterate that there is a period of stabilization. In Table 2 and 3, the evolution of democracies is presented, using the same empirical framework as Levitsky and Way, but extending the time period (1980-2018 instead of 1990-2013), changing the Bertelsmann Index for V-Dem, and making some small corrections to the Levitsky and Way's basic miscalculations.

If we take the absolute numbers of democracies as a reference point, the number of democracies even peaked in 2012 based on Freedom House index, in 2016 in Polity index and in 2018 V-Dem index. Incidentally, it is remarkable that the number of democracies, based on EIU, is at a low point. It has declined from 82 in 2006 to 75 in 2018. The systematic decline in EIU data was also seen in the analyses of Levitsky and Way, but they did not emphasize it.

	1980	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003
Freedom House	31% 51	39% 65	42% 76	40% 75	38% 72	40% 76	40% 76	42% 79	42% 81	46% 88	44% 85	45% 86	45% 86*	46% 89	46% 88
Polity IV	31% 41	38% 56	42% 67	46% 75	46% 76	48% 78	47% 76	47% 77	48% 78	47% 77	48% 78	49% 80	50% 82*	52% 89	51% 84
V-Dem	25% 39	32% 54	36% 62	41% 70	43% 74	45% 77	47% 82	48% 83	50% 86	49% 86	49% 85	49% 85	49% 86	52% 91	53% 94

*Small correction to the miscalculation of Levitsky and Way (2015)

Source: Author

Levitsky and Way (2015) indicate that between 2005 and 2013, according to Freedom House data, more countries have democratized (10), than countries broke down (8). These authors also claim that the most significant democratic backslidings did not occur in democracies, but in regimes that were already authoritarian, such as the Central African Republic, Gambia, Guinea-Bissau, and Jordan. Between 1990 and 2000, in addition to the Eastern European countries, several other important countries have democratized, including Ghana, Indonesia, Mexico, Slovakia, South Africa and Taiwan (ibid.). According to Levitsky and Way, the overall picture of the past decade is one of stability. It is certainly possible for these authors to identify some cases of

democratic breakdown, but they find that the number of cases that have remained stable or made progress, falsifies any notion of democratic backsliding.

Table 3: Absolute numbers and percentages of democracies in the world 2004-2018

	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
Freedom House	46%	46%	47%	47%	46%	46%	45%	45%	46%	45%	46%	44%	45%	45%	44%
	89	89	90	90	89	89	87	87	90	88	89	86	87	88	87
Polity IV	55%	57%	57%	56%	57%	55%	56%	57%	56%	56%	56%	57%	58%	57%	
	90	93	95	92	95	92*	93	96	94	94	94	96	97	96	
V-Dem	53%	52%	51%	53%	51%	55%	55%	55%	54%	55%	54%	54%	54%	53%	55%
	93	91	90	93	91	98	97	98	97	98	97	97	96	95	99
EIU			49%		48%		47%	47%	47%	47%	46%	47%	46%	46%	45%
			82		80		79	78	79	79*	76	79	76	76	75

*Small correction to the miscalculation of Levitsky and Way (2015)

Source: Author

The fact that Huntington (1991) counted the minimalist Schumpeterian democracies together with liberal democracies resulted in a loss of a large amount of information. In this regard, the democratic backsliding of Russia—presumably after 2000—was not really a democratic breakdown, but a change from an oligarchic kleptocracy in the Yeltsin era to an authoritarian recentralization of the state under Putin (Merkel 2010), which is rather a democratic regression. The empirical study of Larry Diamond (1999) classified 118 of 191 countries in the year 1996 as democracies. His list included Yeltsin’s oligarchic kleptocracy, the corrupt regime in Georgia in the early 1990s, the nepotistic Philippines, the anarchic Bangladesh, and Sierra Leone with the death struggle during the civil war (Merkel 2010). These countries—that still contain illiberal elements—were classified together with outspoken liberal democracies.

Furthermore, Wolfgang Merkel (ibid.) is also one of the political scientists who assumes that there is a stabilization. Merkel (ibid.) states that if the hypothesis of “return of autocratic rule” was correct, we would not only expect a significant number of democracies and hybrid regimes tend to move towards authoritarian regimes (or in other words, would have a democratic breakdown), but we would also expect autocracies to have sufficient stability and ensure their autocratic regime survival. However, this hypothesis is falsified, partly thanks to the work of Barbara Geddes (1999) who investigated the stability and respective life expectancy of authoritarian regimes. Military regimes—controlled by a group of officers—have the shortest duration of existence, which is nine years on average; the monarchic dictatorships or personalistic regimes—where access to the administration depends on an individual leader—have an average

lifespan of 15 years; and finally there are the dominant-party regimes—where policy access and control depend on one political party—that have an average life of 23 years (ibid.). What is more important than these statistical life expectancies is the logic of these authoritarian dominions. Geddes (ibid.) indicates that the short existence of military regimes is mainly due to the lack of legitimacy and institutionalization; the medium-term existence of personalistic regimes is related to the fact that these regimes often end with the death of the leader; but the dominant-party regimes are somewhat stable autocracies due to relatively robust institutionalization, repression, systemic control over resources, and their ideology, such as Stalinist North Korea and state-capitalist China where the Leninist-Maoist ideology is maintained (Merkel 2010). However, the oscillations remain within the same group of authoritarian regimes, just as there are countries that make a transition from one hybrid regime to another. That is why Merkel (ibid.) falsifies the hypothesis of the return of autocratic rule.

Levitsky and Way (2015) point out that the regime landscape nowadays looks darkened because most of the observations in the post-Cold War period were over-optimistic. Particularly, Francis Fukuyama's (1989) famous *End of History* theory had a major influence on the over-optimistic spirit of the time. The number of democracies made a huge leap from 1980 to '90; depending on data set, 14 to 15 nondemocratic regimes joined the category of democratic regimes in this period. A year later, in 1991, the world became another 11 to 12 democracies richer. Such an increase had never been seen before. This resulted in a teleological reasoning in which political scientists thought that democracy became the ultimate endpoint for all nondemocratic regimes elsewhere in the world. As soon as the fluctuations started in the democratization process early 2000s, the political climate also darkened. Although the image is not as disastrous as it is presented, pessimistic authors can still draw gloomy conclusions from selective case studies (Schmitter 2015), which leads to a *pars pro toto* fallacy.

According to the aforementioned authors, we may judge that there is no third reverse wave going on, albeit a scenario of the new wave of democratization seems even more unlikely (Merkel 2010). The system appears to be frozen at the moment. In Table 4, there is provided an overview of cross-national studies that have a strong optimistic opinion about the transitions of democracies in the last 20 years. It is striking that the optimistic studies make use of multiple data sets to substantiate their results with empirical evidence.

Pessimistic studies

Hypothetically, the reverse wave could start with a democratic regression, which is not limited to young democracies, but also to old democracies (Erdmann 2011). Nevertheless, democratic regression is far too little taken into account by optimistic authors. The analysts at

Freedom House (2019) found a significant decrease in the aggregated scores of political regimes in the last 13 years while the increase was much smaller (see Graph 3). The falling aggregated scores do not necessarily mean that there is a transition from a democratic regime to a nondemocratic regime, but rather indicate a loss of quality of a democracy within the same regime category.

Table 4: Overview of optimistic studies and data sets used

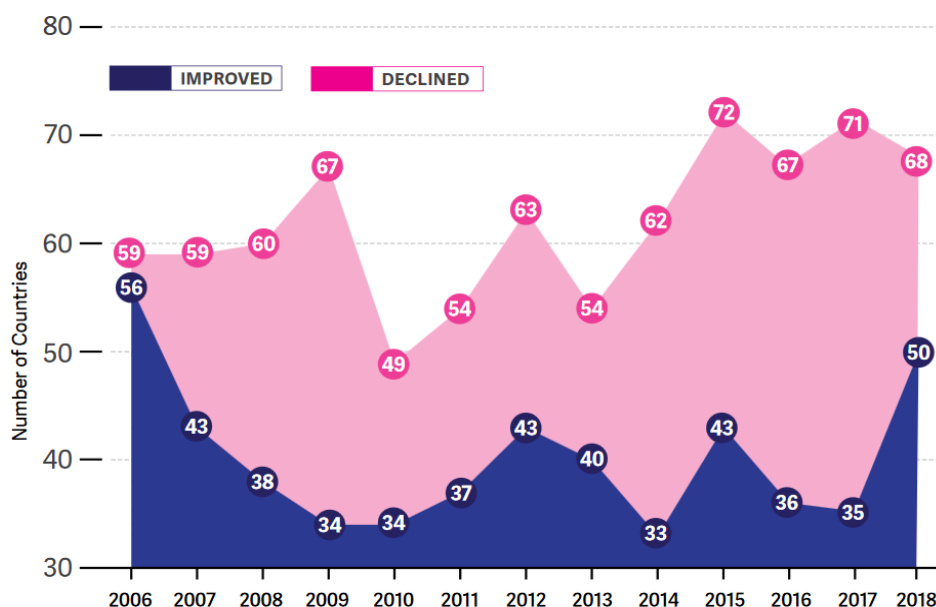
Articles	Used data sets	Other sources
Levitsky and Way (2015): The Myth of Democratic Recession	Freedom House Polity IV EIU	Bertelsmann Stiftung's Transformation Index
Levitsky and Way (2002): The Rise of Competitive Authoritarianism	Freedom House and own analyses of the authors	
Merkel (2010): Are Dictatorships Returning? Revisiting the 'Democratic Rollback' Hypothesis	Freedom House Larry Diamond Index (1997) and own analyses of the author	
Bermeo (2016): On Democratic Backsliding	Polity IV Polity IV modified by Kristian Skrede Gleditsch	NELDA Project
Diamond (2008): The Democratic Rollback: The Resurgence of the Predatory State	Freedom House	
Diamond (2015): Facing up to the Democratic Recession	Freedom House and own analyses of the author	
Treisman (2018): Is Democracy in Danger? A Quick Look at the Data	Freedom House Polity IV V-Dem Boix-Miller-Rosato (BMR)	Maddison Project Database SWIID V6.2
Jakli, Fish and Wittenberg (2018): A Decade of Democratic Decline and Stagnation	Freedom House V-Dem	
Hadenius and Teorell (2007): Pathways from Authoritarianism	Freedom House Polity IV	
Møller and Skaaning (2013): The Third Wave: Inside the Numbers	Freedom House and own analyses of the authors	World Bank: Database of Political Institutions
Giley (2010): Democratic Triumph, Scholarly Pessimism	Freedom House and own analyses of the author	

Source: Author

A number of reasons explain these falling aggregated scores: 1) the changes in electoral regulations in some countries—for example, the extension of the election period of the head of state: over the past thirteen years, leaders in 34 countries have tried to change the re-election period, and in 31 of them they have succeeded, especially in Africa, Latin America and post-Soviet states (Freedom House 2019); 2) the assaults on freedom of thought and expression, which could take place inside but also outside the national borders, such as the murder of Jamal Khashoggi in the Saudi consulate in Istanbul; 3) the more effective and repressive form of digital governance

such as China's use of surveillance and face recognition technologies to suppress national minorities; and 4) the violation of the rights of migrants and refugees in various parts of the world by political leaders as party campaigns to marginalize internal political dissidents.

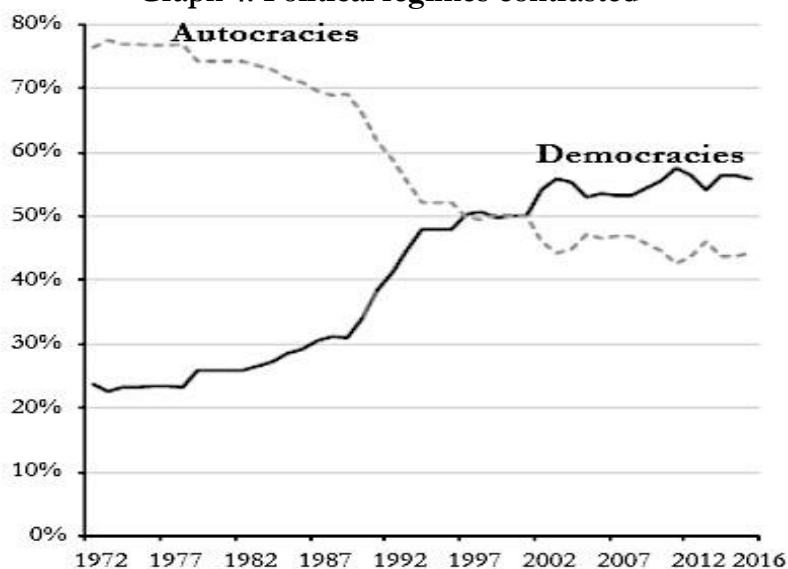
Graph 3: Regimes with progression and regression in the past 13 years



Source: Freedom House (2019)

Mechkova et al. (2017), accordingly, find the optimistic studies objectionable. These authors, whose study is based on V-Dem, identify a downward trend. In particular, they consider the decline in the number of democracies between 2013 and 2017 to be a blow in the process of democratization. However, these authors mainly choose a limited period to offer a pessimistic explanation for the democratization process.

Graph 4: Political regimes contrasted



Source: Mechkova, Lührmann & Lindberg (2017)

In Graph 4, Mechkova et al. (ibid., 163) demonstrate the evolution of democracies and autocracies, albeit in a dichotomous way. The development line starts in 1972 and shows a constant rise in democracies, but there has been a slight decline in the last five years. The question remains whether we should regard this as a harbinger of a new trend or as fluctuations in a period of stabilization, because, at the same time, the authors indicate that considerable progress has been made between 2006 and 2016, with 16 countries making a transition from an autocracy to a democracy.

Mechkova et al. (ibid.) also note that, in 2013, nine countries went from democracy to autocracy, and only five countries went the other way. The volatility of the past five years suggests a considerable degree of uncertainty about how robust the democratic achievements of the past decades actually are (ibid., 163).

The other two V-Dem analysts, Anna Lührmann and Staffan Lindberg (2019), have retained the same discourse in a more recent article. On the one hand, they see a reasonableness in the optimistic literature, but on the other hand, they maintain the pessimistic undertone: “While the literature thus agrees that the process of autocratization has changed, it does not yet offer a systematic way of measuring the new mode of autocratization,” (ibid., 3). In a similar fashion as Huntington, Lührmann and Lindberg also speak about “three autocratization waves.” Even though their study relies on V-Dem, this data set does not support the so-called second and third autocratization waves.

Table 5: Overview of pessimistic studies and data sets used

Articles	Used data sets	Other sources
Mechkova et al. (2017): How Much Democratic Backsliding?	▪ V-Dem	-
Lührmann and Lindberg (2019): A third wave of autocratization is here: what is new about it?	▪ V-Dem	-
Carothers (2004): Democracy’s Sobering State	▪ Freedom House and own analyses of the author	-

Source: Author

The most important finding of Lührmann and Lindberg (ibid.) is that about 68% of all contemporary autocratization episodes—which start as democracies—are caused in a clandestine way by contemporary, democratically elected autocratizers, while the ‘old’ autocratizers of the 20th century often immediately enacted a new undemocratic constitution. This explains why we do not have rapidly evolving periods of nondemocratization this century, but this could give the first signs of a major democratic breakdown in the long-term. In Table 5, there is provided an overview of cross-national studies that have a pronounced pessimistic opinion on the transitions of democracies in the last 20 years. The most remarkable finding is that these studies are clearly in minority. It is a different picture from what many suspect. After all, the pessimistic studies also

make use of fewer data sets to substantiate their results, while the optimistic studies employ much more data sources.

Conclusion

The first assumption of this article was that the titles of works in this research field give rise to suspicions that democracy is breaking down worldwide. The article revealed, on the contrary, that the pessimistic authors are actually in the minority (which does not mean that a momentum has arisen for further democratization in the near future). Furthermore, little empirical evidence in favour of the expectation that the conflicting findings about the alleged democratic backsliding results from the use of differing democracy indices. Although the conceptualization, coding and aggregation rules are not always perfectly applied in these democracy indices, they nevertheless give a clear picture of reality. This is also supported by the statistical analyses of Högström (2013) and Elff and Ziaja (2018) who found a high correlation between the data sets. Only the EIU index gives a slight decrease in the number of democracies, but there is no study yielding a pessimistic conclusion based on EIU data. In addition, the conflicting assessments have little to do with the precision or reliability of the data indices, which is a corroborating evidence:

[T]he precision or reliability of all indices is too low to justify confidence that a country with a score a few points higher is actually more democratic. Note that most extant indices are bounded to some degree, and therefore constrained: there is no way to distinguish the quality of democracy among countries that have perfect negative or positive scores. This is acceptable so long as there really is no difference in the quality of democracy among these countries (Coppedge et al. 2011, 249).

Although several subjectivity biases have been discovered – mainly in the Freedom House index (Bollen and Paxton 2000; Steiner 2014) – these biases play a minor role in the classification of the vast majority of political regimes. Especially, in quantitative studies, we will not quickly notice the flawed classifications of a few countries, but in qualitative case studies, it could have a confusing effect, as we have noticed the divergent categorizations of Kosovo in the year 2009.

One could say that continuum data sets with a defective methodology⁷ paint a simplistic picture of reality because they include the Schumpeterian minimalist democracies in the category of electoral and liberal democracies, but Lührmann and Lindberg (2019), using a modern continuum data set, also note, in terms drawn from a similar vocabulary as Huntington, “three autocratization waves.” On the other side, there are both optimistic and pessimistic authors making use of the same modern continuum data sets. But one thing is certain: the historical perspective and the latest democracy data urge us to be prudent in our conclusions. Indeed,

⁷ See Huntington (1991) and Diamond (1999).

Lührmann and Lindberg (ibid.) note that, “As it was premature to announce the ‘end of history’ in 1992, it is premature to proclaim the ‘end of democracy’ now.”

In conclusion, the research into alleged democratic backsliding over the past twenty years does not seem to be manipulated by data. In order to find the *vera causa* of the division between the optimistic and pessimistic camp, future research could continue to explore the evolution of democratic regression in democracies, hybrid regimes, and autocracies. Democratic regression is an important indicator for monitoring the underlying volatility in regime trends. If democratic regression is not reported, many nuances can be missed in the process of democratization.

References

- Alvarez, Mike, José Antonio Cheibub, Fernando Limongi, and Adam Przeworski. 1996. “Classifying Political Regimes.” *Studies in Comparative International Development* 31 (2): 3–36. <http://doi.org/10.1007/BF02719326>.
- Arat, Zehra F.. 1991. *Democracy and Human Rights in Developing Countries*. Boulder and London: Lynne Rienner Publishers.
- Bermeo, Nancy. 2016. “On Democratic Backsliding.” *Journal of Democracy* 27 (1): 5-19. <http://doi.org/10.1353/jod.2016.0012>.
- Bollen, Kenneth A. 1990. “Political Democracy: Conceptual and Measurement Traps.” *Studies in Comparative International Development* 25 (1): 7-24. <http://doi.org/10.1007/BF02716903>.
- Bollen, Kenneth A. and Pamela Paxton. 2000. “Subjective Measures of Liberal Democracy.” *Comparative Political Studies* 33 (1): 58-86. <http://doi.org/10.1177/0010414000033001003>.
- Braml, Josef, and Hans-Joachim Lauth. 2011. “The United States of America - a Deficient Democracy.” In *Regression of democracy?*, edited by Gero Erdmann and Marianne Kneuer, 103-32. Wiesbaden: VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften. http://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-531-93302-3_5.
- Carothers, Thomas. 2004. “Democracy’s Sobering State.” *Current History* 103 (677): 412-16. <http://doi.org/10.1525/curh.2004.103.677.412>.
- Cheibub, José Antonio, Jennifer Gandhi, and James Raymond Vreeland. 2010. “Democracy and Dictatorship Revisited.” *Public Choice* 143 (1-2): 67-101. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11127-009-9491-2>.
- Collier, David and Steven Levitsky. 1997. “Democracy with Adjectives: Conceptual Innovation in Comparative Research.” *World Politics* 49 (3): 430-451. <http://doi.org/10.1353/wp.1997.0009>.
- Coppedge, Michael, John Gerring, David Altman, Michael Bernhard, M. Steven Fish, Allen Hicken, Matthew Kroenig, Staffan I. Lindberg, Kelly M. McMann, Pamela Paxton, Holli A. Semetko, Svend-Erik Skaaning, Jeffrey Statin, and Jan Teorell. 2011. “Conceptualizing and Measuring Democracy: A New Approach.” *Perspectives on Politics* 9 (2): 247-67. <http://doi.org/10.1017/S1537592711000880>.

- Coppedge, Michael, John Gerring, Staffan I. Lindberg, Svend-Erik Skaaning, and Jan Teorell. 2015. *V-Dem Comparisons and Contrasts with Other Measurement Projects*. Gothenburg: V-Dem Institute. <http://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.2951014>.
- Coppedge, Michael, John Gerring, Carl Henrik Knutsen, Staffan I. Lindberg, Jan Teorell, David Altman, Michael Bernhard, M. Steven Fish, Adam Glynn, Allen Hicken, Anna Lührmann, Kyle L. Marquardt, Kelly McMann, Pamela Paxton, Daniel Pemstein, Brigitte Seim, Rachel Sigman, Svend-Erik Skaaning, Jeffrey Staton, Agnes Cornell, Lisa Gastaldi, Haakon Gjerløw, Valeriya Mechkova, Johannes von Römer, Aksel Sundström, Eitan Tzelgov, Luca Uberti, Yi-ting Wang, Tore Wig, and Daniel Ziblatt. 2019. "V-Dem [Country-Year/Country-Date] Dataset v8." Accessed January 10, 2019. <http://www.v-dem.net/en/data/data-version-9>.
- Dahl, Robert A. 1971. *Polyarchy: Participation and Opposition*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Diamond, Larry. 1997. "The end of the third wave and the global future of democracy." *Political Science Series*, 45. Vienna: Institute for Advance Studies. Accessed January 20, 2019. http://irihs.ihs.ac.at/id/eprint/1000/1/pw_45.pdf.
- Diamond, Larry. 1999. *Developing democracy: Toward consolidation*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Diamond, Larry. 2008. "The Democratic Rollback: The Resurgence of the Predatory State." *Foreign Affairs (Council on Foreign Relations)* 87 (2): 36-48. Accessed February 10, 2019. <http://www.foreignaffairs.com/issues/2008/87/2>.
- Diamond, Larry. 2015. "Facing up to the Democratic Recession." *Journal of Democracy* 26 (1): 141-55. <http://doi.org/10.1353/jod.2015.0009>.
- Diamond, Larry, Marc F. Plattner, and Christopher Walker (eds.). 2016. *Authoritarianism Goes Global*. Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press.
- Doorenspleet, Renske. 2000. "Reassessing the Three Waves of Democratization." *World Politics* 52 (3): 384-406. <http://doi.org/10.1017/S0043887100016580>.
- EIU (Economist Intelligence Unit). 2019. "Democracy Index 2018." Accessed January 10, 2019. http://www.eiu.com/public/topical_report.aspx?campaignid=Democracy2018.
- Elkins, Zachary. 2000. "Gradations of Democracy? Empirical Tests of Alternative Conceptualizations." *American Journal of Political Science* 44 (2): 293-300. <http://dx.doi.org/10.2307/2669311>.
- Elff, Martin, and Sebastian Ziaja. 2018. "Method Factors in Democracy Indicators." *Politics and Governance* 6 (1): 92-104. <http://dx.doi.org/10.17645/pag.v6i1.1235>.
- Erdmann, Gero. 2011. "Decline of democracy: Loss of quality, hybridisation and breakdown of democracy." In *Regression of democracy?*, edited by Gero Erdmann and Marianne Kneuer, 21-50. Wiesbaden: VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften. http://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-531-93302-3_5.
- Freedom House. 2019. "Freedom in the World 2019." Accessed January 5, 2019. <http://www.freedomhouse.org/content/freedom-world-data-and-resources>.

- Fukuyama, Francis. 1989. "The End of History?" *The National Interest* 16: 3-18. http://doi.org/10.1057/9781137529008_8.
- Gates, Scott, Håvard Hegre, Mark P. Jones, and Håvard Strand. 2006. "Institutional Inconsistency and Political Instability: Polity Duration, 1800-2000." *American Journal of Political Science* 50 (4): 893-908. <http://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-5907.2006.00222.x>.
- Geddes, Barbara. 1999. "What do we know about democratization after twenty years?" *Annual Review of Political Science* 2: 115-144. <http://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.polisci.2.1.115>.
- Giley, Bruce. 2010. "Democratic Triumph, Scholarly Pessimism." *Journal of Democracy* 21 (1): 160-67. <http://doi.org/10.1353/jod.0.0134>.
- Hadenius, Axel. 1992. *Democracy and Development*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Hadenius, Axel, and Jan Teorell. 2005. *Assessing Alternative Indices of Democracy*. Working Paper. Accessed February 2, 2019. <http://www.concepts-methods.org/Files/WorkingPaper/PC%20%20Hadenius%20Teorell.pdf>.
- Hadenius, Axel, and Jan Teorell. 2007. "Pathways from Authoritarianism." *Journal of Democracy* 18 (1): 143-56. <http://doi.org/10.1353/jod.2007.0009>.
- Haynes, Jeffrey. 2018. "The people vs. democracy: Why our freedom is in danger and how to save it, by Yascha Mounk." *Democratization* 26 (1): 161-172. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13510347.2018.1456532>.
- Hegre, Håvard. 2012. "Conceptualization and Measurement of Democracy." Project Description. <http://folk.uio.no/hahegre/Papers/ProjectDescriptionNFR2010.pdf>.
- Högström, John. 2013. "Does the Choice of Democracy Measure Matter? Comparisons between the Two Leading Democracy Indices, Freedom House and Polity IV." *Government and Opposition* 48 (2): 201-21. <http://doi.org/10.1017/gov.2012.10>.
- Huntington, Samuel P. 1991. "Democracy's Third Wave." *Journal of Democracy* 2 (2): 12-34. <http://doi.org/10.1353/jod.1991.0016>.
- Jakli, Laura, M. Steven Fish, and Jason Wittenberg. 2018. "A Decade of Democratic Decline and Stagnation." In *Democratization*, edited by Christian Haerpfer, Ronald F. Inglehart, and Christian Welzel, 268-84. Oxford: Oxford University Press. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1093/hepl/9780198732280.003.0018>.
- Levitsky, Steven, and Lucan A. Way. 2002. "Elections Without Democracy: The Rise of Competitive Authoritarianism." *Journal of Democracy* 13 (2): 51-66. <http://doi.org/10.1353/jod.2002.0026>.
- Levitsky, Steven, and Lucan A. Way. 2015. "The Myth of Democratic Recession." *Journal of Democracy* 26 (1): 45-58. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1353/jod.2015.0007>.
- Levitsky, Steven, and Daniel Ziblatt. 2018. *How Democracies Die*. New York: Crown.

- Lindberg, Staffan I., Michael Coppedge, John Gerring, and Jan Teorell. 2014. "V-Dem: A New Way to Measure Democracy." *Journal of Democracy* 25 (3): 159-69. <http://doi.org/10.1353/jod.2014.0040>.
- Lührmann, Anna, and Staffan I. Lindberg. 2019. "A third wave of autocratization is here: what is new about it?" *Democratization* 26 (7): 1095-1113. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13510347.2019.1582029>.
- Lust, Ellen, and David Waldner. 2015. "Unwelcome Change: Understanding, Evaluating and Extending Theories of Democratic Backsliding." *Annual Review of Political Science* 21 (1): 92-113. <http://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-polisci-050517-114628>.
- Marshall, Monty, Gurr, T., and Jaggers, K. 2016. "Polity IV Project: Political Regime Characteristics and Transitions, 1800-2015 Dataset Users' Manual." Vienna: Center for Systematic Peace. Accessed January 10, 2019. <http://www.systemicpeace.org/inscr/p4manualv2016.pdf>.
- Mechkova, Valeriya, Anna Lührmann, and Staffan I. Lindberg. 2017. "How Much Democratic Backsliding?" *Journal of Democracy* 28 (4): 162-69. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1353/jod.2017.0075>.
- Merkel, Wolfgang. 2010. "Are Dictatorships Returning? Revisiting the 'Democratic Rollback' Hypothesis." *Contemporary Politics* 16 (1): 17-31. <http://doi.org/10.1080/13569771003593839>.
- Møller, Jørgen, and Svend-Erik Skaaning. 2013. "The Third Wave: Inside the Numbers." *Journal of Democracy* 24 (4): 97-109. <http://doi.org/10.1353/jod.2013.0057>.
- Morlino, Leonardo. 2009. "Are there hybrid regimes? Or are they just an optical illusion?" *European Political Science Review* 1 (2): 273-296. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1017/S1755773909000198>.
- Munck, Gerardo L., and Jay Verkuilen. 2002. "Conceptualizing and Measuring Democracy: Evaluating Alternative Indices." *Comparative Political Studies* 35 (5): 4-34. <http://doi.org/10.1177/001041400203500101>.
- Næss, Arne, Jens A. Christophersen, and Kjell Kvalø. 1956. *Democracy, Ideology, and Objectivity*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell.
- Paxton, Pamela. 2000. "Women's Suffrage in the Measurement of Democracy: Problems of Operationalization." *Studies in Comparative International Development* 35 (3): 92-110. <http://doi.org/10.1007/BF02699767>.
- Pemstein, Daniel, Stephen Meserve, and James Melton. 2010. "Democratic Compromise: A Latent Variable Analysis of Ten Measures of Regime Type." *Political Analysis* 18 (4): 426-449. <http://doi.org/10.1093/pan/mpq020>.
- Plattner, Marc F. 2016. "Is Democracy in Decline?" *Democracy & Society* 13 (1): 1-28. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1353/jod.2015.0014>.
- Polity IV. 2016. "Polity IV Project: Political Regime Characteristics and Transitions, 1800-2015." Accessed January 7, 2019. <https://www.systemicpeace.org/polity/polity4x.htm>

- Przeworski, Adam, Mike Alvarez, José Antonio Cheibub, and Fernando Limongi. 1996. "What Makes Democracies Endure?" *Journal of Democracy* 7 (1): 39-55. <http://doi.org/10.1353/jod.1996.0016>.
- Schedler, Andreas. 2012. "Judgment and measurement in political science." *Perspectives on Politics* 10 (1): 21-36. <http://doi.org/10.1017/S1537592711004889>.
- Schmitter, Philippe C. 2015. "Crisis and Transition, but Not Decline." In *Democracy in Decline?*, edited by Larry Diamond, Marc F. Plattner, and Christopher Walker, 39-57. Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1353/jod.2015.0004>.
- Schumpeter, Joseph A. 1992 [1942]. *Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy*. London & New York: Routledge.
- Skaaning, Svend-Erik. 2018. "Different Types of Data and the Validity of Democracy Measures." *Politics and Governance* 6 (1): 105-16. <http://dx.doi.org/10.17645/pag.v6i1.1183>.
- Steiner, Nils D. 2014. "Comparing Freedom House Democracy Scores to Alternative Indices and Testing for Political Bias: Are US Allies Rated as More Democratic by Freedom House?" *Journal of Comparative Policy Analysis: Research and Practice* 18 (4): 329-49. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/13876988.2013.877676>.
- Treier, Shawn, and Simon Jackman. 2008. "Democracy as a Latent Variable." *American Journal of Political Science* 52 (1): 201-17. <http://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-5907.2007.00308.x>.
- Tomini, Luca, and Claudius Wagemann. 2017. "Varieties of contemporary democratic breakdown and regression: A comparative analysis." *European Journal of Political Research* 57 (3): 687-716. <http://doi.org/10.1111/1475-6765.12244>.
- Treisman, Daniel. 2018. "Is Democracy in Danger? A Quick Look at the Data." (Unpublished manuscript). Accessed January 10, 2019. <http://static1.squarespace.com/static/5a4d2512a803bb1a5d9aca35/t/5b19d7450e2e727770fa15f5/1528420167336/draft+june+7.pdf>.
- Vanhanen, Tatu. 1990. *The Process of Democratization: A Comparative Study of 147 States, 1980-88*. New York: Crane Russak.
- Zakaria, Fareed. 1997. "The Rise of Illiberal Democracy." *Foreign Affairs* 76 (6): 22-43. <http://dx.doi.org/10.2307/20048274>