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Democracy Index 2017

Free speech under attack

A report by The Economist Intelligence Unit



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Introduction

The Economist Intelligence Unit's Democracy Index 2017

The Economist Intelligence Unit's Democracy Index provides a snapshot of the state of democracy worldwide for 165 independent states and two territories. This covers almost the entire population of the world and the vast majority of the world's states (microstates are excluded). The Democracy Index is based on five categories: *electoral process and pluralism*; *civil liberties*; *the functioning of government*; *political participation*; and *political culture*. Based on its scores on a range of indicators within these categories, each country is then itself classified as one of four types of regime: "full democracy"; "flawed democracy"; "hybrid regime"; and "authoritarian regime". A full methodology and explanations can be found in the Appendix.

This is the tenth edition of the Democracy Index, which began in 2006. It records how global democracy fared in 2017. The results are discussed in this introduction and in greater detail in the review of the regions that follows. A special focus of this year's report is the state of media freedom around the world and the challenges facing freedom of speech. In this part of the report, we present our Media Freedom Index and global ranking. The report discusses the importance of free speech for advancing and strengthening democracy and examines the constraints on exercising freedom of expression around the world. We look at how media freedom and freedom of expression are faring in every region.

Democracy Index 2017, by regime type

	No. of countries	% of countries	% of world population
Full democracies	19	11.4	4.5
Flawed democracies	57	34.1	44.8
Hybrid regimes	39	23.4	16.7
Authoritarian regimes	52	31.1	34.0

Note. "World" population refers to the total population of the 167 countries covered by the Index. Since this excludes only micro states, this is nearly equal to the entire estimated world population.

Source: The Economist Intelligence Unit.

2017: the global average score slides once more

In the 2017 Democracy Index the average global score fell from 5.52 in 2016 to 5.48 (on a scale of 0 to 10). Some 89 countries experienced a decline in their total score compared with 2016, more than three times as many as the countries that recorded an improvement (27), the worst performance since 2010-11 in the aftermath of the global economic and financial crisis. The other 51 countries stagnated, as their scores remained unchanged compared with 2016.

In the 2017 Democracy Index not a single region recorded an improvement in its average score compared with 2016. The average regional score for North America (Canada and the US) remained the same. All the other six regions experienced a regression, as signified by a decline in their regional average score. In a reversal of recent trends, Asia and Australasia was the worst-performing region in 2017. The star performer of recent years experienced a decline in its regional average score for the first time since 2010-11, when it also regressed in the aftermath of the global economic and financial crisis.

Almost one-half (49.3%) of the world's population lives in a democracy of some sort, although only 4.5% reside in a "full democracy", down from 8.9% in 2015 as a result of the US being demoted from a "full democracy" to a "flawed democracy" in 2016 (see Democracy Index 2017 by regime type, page 2). Around one-third of the world's population lives under authoritarian rule, with a large share being in China.

According to the 2017 Democracy Index, 76 of the 167 countries covered by the model, or 45.5% of all countries, can be considered to be democracies. The number of "full democracies" has remained at 19 in 2017, the same as in 2016, when the total declined from 20 in 2015 as the US fell into the "flawed democracy" category. The score for the US fell to 7.98 in 2016, reflecting a sharp fall in popular confidence in the functioning of public institutions, a trend that predated—and aided—the election of Donald Trump. Of the remaining 91 countries in our index, 52 are "authoritarian" and 39 are classified as "hybrid regimes" (for a full explanation of our methodology, see page 63).

Disappointment with "actually existing democracy"

A decline in media freedoms and curbs on freedom of speech, which we discuss in the second part of this report, are only one aspect of a broad-based deterioration in the practice of democracy in recent years. Larry Diamond, one of the world's leading democracy scholars, says that we have been going through a "democracy recession", and this trend of stagnation and/or regression has been reflected in our annual Democracy Index since its launch in 2006. Strikingly, this has been most apparent in some of the oldest democracies in the world, in western Europe—whose regression since 2006 is almost as bad as that in the eastern half of the continent—and in the US. The main manifestations of this democracy recession include:

- declining popular participation in elections and politics
- weaknesses in the functioning of government
- declining trust in institutions
- dwindling appeal of mainstream representative parties
- growing influence of unelected, unaccountable institutions and expert bodies
- widening gap between political elites and electorates
- decline in media freedoms
- erosion of civil liberties, including curbs on free speech.

A survey by Pew Research Centre on global attitudes towards democracy, published in October 2017, revealed a disjuncture between still generally high levels of public support for democracy across the globe and deep popular disappointment with the functioning of democracy and systems of political representation. This disappointment is particularly pronounced in the developed world and helps to explain the popular revolt against mainstream parties and establishment elites that was the subject of the 2016 Democracy Index report, *Revenge of the “deplorables”*. The UK’s vote in June 2016 to leave the EU (Brexit) and the election of Donald Trump as US president were both expressions of deep popular dissatisfaction with the status quo and of a hankering for change.

If 2016 was notable for the populist insurgency against mainstream political parties and politicians in the developed democracies of Europe and North America, 2017 was defined by a backlash against populism, including campaigns to reverse the Brexit result and unseat President Trump. The reaction of some academics, journalists and politicians to the events of 2016 has been to argue that Western liberal democracy is under threat from the rise of “illiberal democracy” and the “new authoritarianism”.

In the UK, an assortment of pro-European lawyers, politicians, journalists and educational professionals fought a rear-guard action in the courts, the House of Commons and the House of Lords to delay, amend or stymie government legislation aimed at implementing the referendum vote to leave the EU. In the US there was a similar refusal to accept the outcome of the 2016 presidential election by Democratic Party activists, sections of the media, university professors and students, amid demands that the president be impeached on the grounds that he was unfit for the highest office.

A deepening divide between the people and the experts

The reaction to the populist insurgency has revealed the prevalence of prejudices about the average voter in some political, academic and media circles. In his book *The Retreat of Western Liberalism*, Edward Luce observed that “oikophobia is real” and that “the elites have become progressively more sceptical of democracy since the fall of the Berlin Wall”. Some blamed popular ignorance and xenophobia for the Brexit and Trump results and argued that those who voted for them were political illiterates who had been duped by “post-truth politics” or worse, bigots with xenophobic views. In this way, some opponents of Brexit and Trump have presented voters (and supporters of populist parties in general) as the threat to democracy today. The popular reaction to an economic and political system which many voters feel has left them behind is presented as the cause of democracy’s ailments rather than a consequence of them.

According to Luce (2017), the crux of the West’s democratic crisis is that “our societies are split between the will of the people and the rule of the experts—the tyranny of the majority versus the club of self-serving insiders; Britain versus Brussels; West Virginia versus Washington. It follows that the election of Trump and Britain’s exit from the EU are a reassertion of the popular will.” The split that Luce observes is one of deepening polarisation between the political class and alienated voters in the West. This has been the most striking trend in the Western democracies in 2017.

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Democracy Index 2017

	Rank	Overall score	Electoral process and pluralism	Functioning of government	Political participation	Political culture	Civil liberties
Full democracies							
Norway	1	9.87	10.00	9.64	10.00	10.00	9.71
Iceland	2	9.58	10.00	9.29	8.89	10.00	9.71
Sweden	3	9.39	9.58	9.64	8.33	10.00	9.41
New Zealand	4	9.26	10.00	9.29	8.89	8.13	10.00
Denmark	5	9.22	10.00	9.29	8.33	9.38	9.12
Ireland	=6	9.15	9.58	7.86	8.33	10.00	10.00
Canada	=6	9.15	9.58	9.64	7.78	8.75	10.00
Australia	8	9.09	10.00	8.93	7.78	8.75	10.00
Finland	=9	9.03	10.00	8.93	7.78	8.75	9.71
Switzerland	=9	9.03	9.58	9.29	7.78	9.38	9.12
Netherlands	11	8.89	9.58	9.29	8.33	8.13	9.12
Luxembourg	12	8.81	10.00	8.93	6.67	8.75	9.71
Germany	13	8.61	9.58	8.21	8.33	7.50	9.41
United Kingdom	14	8.53	9.58	7.50	8.33	8.13	9.12
Austria	15	8.42	9.58	8.21	8.33	6.88	9.12
Mauritius	16	8.22	9.17	8.21	5.56	8.75	9.41
Malta	17	8.15	9.17	8.21	6.11	8.75	8.53
Uruguay	18	8.12	10.00	8.93	4.44	7.50	9.71
Spain	19	8.08	9.17	7.14	7.78	7.50	8.82
Flawed democracies							
South Korea	20	8.00	9.17	7.86	7.22	7.50	8.24
United States of America	=21	7.98	9.17	7.14	7.22	8.13	8.24
Italy	=21	7.98	9.58	6.43	7.22	8.13	8.53
Japan	=23	7.88	8.75	8.21	6.11	7.50	8.82
Cabo Verde	=23	7.88	9.17	7.86	6.67	6.88	8.82
Costa Rica	=23	7.88	9.58	7.14	6.67	6.88	9.12
Chile	=26	7.84	9.58	8.57	4.44	7.50	9.12
Portugal	=26	7.84	9.58	7.50	6.11	6.88	9.12
Botswana	28	7.81	9.17	7.14	6.11	7.50	9.12
France	29	7.80	9.58	7.50	7.78	5.63	8.53
Estonia	=30	7.79	9.58	7.86	6.11	6.88	8.53
Israel	=30	7.79	9.17	7.50	8.89	7.50	5.88
Belgium	32	7.78	9.58	8.93	5.00	6.88	8.53
Taiwan	33	7.73	9.58	8.21	6.11	5.63	9.12
Czech Republic	34	7.62	9.58	6.43	6.67	6.88	8.53
Cyprus	35	7.59	9.17	6.43	6.67	6.88	8.82
Slovenia	36	7.50	9.58	6.79	6.67	6.25	8.24

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	Rank	Overall score	Electoral process and pluralism	Functioning of government	Political participation	Political culture	Civil liberties
Lithuania	37	7.41	9.58	5.71	6.11	6.25	9.41
Greece	=38	7.29	9.58	5.36	6.11	6.88	8.53
Jamaica	=38	7.29	9.17	7.14	4.44	6.88	8.82
Latvia	40	7.25	9.58	5.71	5.56	6.88	8.53
South Africa	41	7.24	7.42	7.50	8.33	5.00	7.94
India	42	7.23	9.17	6.79	7.22	5.63	7.35
Timor-Leste	43	7.19	9.08	6.79	5.56	6.88	7.65
Slovakia	44	7.16	9.58	6.79	5.56	5.63	8.24
Panama	45	7.08	9.58	6.79	6.11	5.00	7.94
Trinidad and Tobago	46	7.04	9.58	7.14	5.56	5.00	7.94
Bulgaria	47	7.03	9.17	6.43	7.22	4.38	7.94
Argentina	48	6.96	9.17	5.00	6.11	6.88	7.65
Brazil	49	6.86	9.58	5.36	6.11	5.00	8.24
Suriname	50	6.76	9.17	6.43	5.56	5.00	7.65
Philippines	51	6.71	9.17	5.71	7.22	4.38	7.06
Ghana	52	6.69	8.33	5.71	6.67	6.25	6.47
Poland	=53	6.67	9.17	6.07	6.11	4.38	7.65
Colombia	=53	6.67	9.17	6.79	4.44	5.00	7.94
Dominican Republic	55	6.66	9.17	5.36	6.11	5.63	7.06
Lesotho	=56	6.64	9.17	5.00	6.67	5.63	6.76
Hungary	=56	6.64	8.75	6.07	4.44	6.88	7.06
Croatia	58	6.63	9.17	6.07	5.56	5.00	7.35
Malaysia	59	6.54	6.92	7.86	6.11	6.25	5.59
Mongolia	60	6.50	9.17	5.71	5.56	5.00	7.06
Peru	61	6.49	9.17	5.36	5.56	5.00	7.35
Sri Lanka	62	6.48	7.83	7.14	5.00	6.25	6.18
Guyana	63	6.46	8.75	5.71	6.11	4.38	7.35
Romania	64	6.44	9.17	5.71	5.00	4.38	7.94
El Salvador	65	6.43	9.17	5.36	5.56	5.00	7.06
Serbia	=66	6.41	8.25	5.36	6.11	5.00	7.35
Mexico	=66	6.41	7.83	6.43	7.22	4.38	6.18
Indonesia	68	6.39	6.92	7.14	6.67	5.63	5.59
Tunisia	=69	6.32	6.00	5.71	7.78	6.25	5.88
Singapore	=69	6.32	4.33	7.86	6.11	6.25	7.06
Hong Kong	=71	6.31	3.92	6.07	5.56	7.50	8.53
Namibia	=71	6.31	5.67	5.36	6.67	5.63	8.24
Paraguay	=71	6.31	8.75	6.07	5.00	4.38	7.35
Senegal	74	6.15	7.50	6.07	4.44	6.25	6.47

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	Rank	Overall score	Electoral process and pluralism	Functioning of government	Political participation	Political culture	Civil liberties
Papua New Guinea	75	6.03	6.92	6.07	3.89	5.63	7.65
Ecuador	76	6.02	8.75	4.64	5.56	4.38	6.76
Hybrid regime							
Albania	77	5.98	7.00	4.71	5.56	5.00	7.65
Moldova	78	5.94	7.50	4.64	6.11	4.38	7.06
Georgia	79	5.93	8.67	4.29	6.11	5.00	5.59
Guatemala	80	5.86	7.92	5.71	3.89	5.00	6.76
Fiji	81	5.85	6.58	5.36	6.11	5.63	5.59
Honduras	82	5.72	8.25	5.36	4.44	4.38	6.18
Ukraine	=83	5.69	6.17	3.21	6.67	6.25	6.18
Montenegro	=83	5.69	6.08	5.36	5.56	4.38	7.06
Zambia	85	5.68	6.17	5.00	3.89	6.88	6.47
Mali	86	5.64	7.42	3.93	4.44	6.25	6.18
Benin	87	5.61	6.50	5.36	5.00	5.63	5.59
Macedonia	88	5.57	6.50	5.00	5.56	3.75	7.06
Bolivia	=89	5.49	7.00	4.64	5.00	3.75	7.06
Malawi	=89	5.49	6.58	4.29	4.44	6.25	5.88
Tanzania	91	5.47	7.00	5.00	5.00	5.63	4.71
Bangladesh	92	5.43	7.42	5.07	5.00	4.38	5.29
Liberia	93	5.23	7.42	2.57	5.56	5.00	5.59
Nepal	94	5.18	4.33	5.36	5.00	5.63	5.59
Kenya	=95	5.11	3.50	5.36	6.67	5.63	4.41
Kyrgyz Republic	=95	5.11	6.58	2.93	6.67	4.38	5.00
Madagascar	=95	5.11	6.08	3.57	5.56	5.63	4.71
Uganda	98	5.09	5.25	3.57	3.89	6.88	5.88
Bhutan	99	5.08	8.33	6.07	2.78	4.38	3.82
Turkey	100	4.88	5.33	6.07	5.00	5.63	2.35
Morocco	=101	4.87	5.25	4.64	4.44	5.63	4.41
Bosnia and Hercegovina	=101	4.87	6.50	2.93	5.00	3.75	6.18
Burkina Faso	103	4.75	4.42	4.29	4.44	5.63	5.00
Lebanon	104	4.72	3.50	2.57	7.22	5.63	4.71
Sierra Leone	=105	4.66	6.58	1.86	3.33	6.25	5.29
Nicaragua	=105	4.66	3.42	3.29	3.89	5.63	7.06
Thailand	107	4.63	3.00	4.29	5.00	5.00	5.88
Palestine	108	4.46	3.83	2.50	7.78	4.38	3.82
Nigeria	109	4.44	6.08	4.64	3.33	3.75	4.41
Pakistan	110	4.26	6.50	5.36	2.22	2.50	4.71
Armenia	111	4.11	5.25	2.86	5.00	1.88	5.59

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Democracy Index 2017

	Rank	Overall score	Electoral process and pluralism	Functioning of government	Political participation	Political culture	Civil liberties
Iraq	112	4.09	4.33	0.07	7.22	5.00	3.82
Gambia	113	4.06	4.48	3.93	3.33	5.63	2.94
Haiti	114	4.03	5.17	2.21	2.22	4.38	6.18
Mozambique	115	4.02	4.42	2.14	5.00	5.00	3.53
Authoritarian							
Côte d'Ivoire	116	3.93	4.42	2.14	3.33	5.63	4.12
Jordan	=117	3.87	3.58	4.29	3.89	4.38	3.24
Venezuela	=117	3.87	2.17	2.86	6.11	4.38	3.82
Kuwait	119	3.85	3.17	4.29	3.89	4.38	3.53
Myanmar	120	3.83	3.67	3.93	3.89	5.63	2.06
Mauritania	121	3.82	3.00	3.57	5.00	3.13	4.41
Niger	122	3.76	5.25	1.14	3.33	4.38	4.71
Comoros	123	3.71	4.33	2.21	4.44	3.75	3.82
Cambodia	124	3.63	1.33	5.71	2.22	5.63	3.24
Angola	125	3.62	1.75	2.86	5.56	5.00	2.94
Gabon	=126	3.61	2.58	2.21	4.44	5.00	3.82
Cameroon	=126	3.61	4.00	2.86	3.89	4.38	2.94
Algeria	128	3.56	2.58	2.21	3.89	5.00	4.12
Ethiopia	129	3.42	0.00	3.57	5.56	5.63	2.35
Egypt	130	3.36	3.58	3.21	3.33	3.75	2.94
Cuba	131	3.31	1.33	4.29	3.89	4.38	2.65
Congo (Brazzaville)	132	3.25	3.17	2.50	3.89	3.75	2.94
Qatar	=133	3.19	0.00	4.29	2.22	5.63	3.82
Rwanda	=133	3.19	0.83	5.00	2.78	4.38	2.94
Russia	135	3.17	2.17	1.79	5.00	2.50	4.41
Zimbabwe	136	3.16	0.50	2.00	4.44	5.63	3.24
Guinea	137	3.14	3.50	0.43	4.44	4.38	2.94
Belarus	138	3.13	0.92	2.86	3.89	5.63	2.35
China	139	3.10	0.00	5.00	2.78	6.25	1.47
Vietnam	140	3.08	0.00	3.21	3.89	5.63	2.65
Kazakhstan	141	3.06	0.50	2.14	4.44	4.38	3.82
Togo	142	3.05	3.17	0.79	2.78	5.00	3.53
Oman	143	3.04	0.00	3.93	2.78	4.38	4.12
Swaziland	144	3.03	0.92	2.86	2.22	5.63	3.53
Djibouti	145	2.76	0.42	1.79	3.33	5.63	2.65
Bahrain	146	2.71	0.83	3.21	2.78	4.38	2.35
United Arab Emirates	147	2.69	0.00	3.57	2.22	5.00	2.65
Azerbaijan	148	2.65	0.50	2.14	3.33	3.75	3.53

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	Rank	Overall score	Electoral process and pluralism	Functioning of government	Political participation	Political culture	Civil liberties
Afghanistan	149	2.55	2.50	1.14	2.78	2.50	3.82
Iran	150	2.45	0.00	3.21	4.44	3.13	1.47
Eritrea	=151	2.37	0.00	2.14	1.67	6.88	1.18
Laos	=151	2.37	0.83	2.86	1.67	5.00	1.47
Burundi	153	2.33	0.00	0.43	3.89	5.00	2.35
Libya	154	2.32	1.00	0.36	1.67	5.63	2.94
Sudan	155	2.15	0.00	1.79	2.78	5.00	1.18
Yemen	156	2.07	0.00	0.00	4.44	5.00	0.88
Guinea-Bissau	157	1.98	1.67	0.00	2.78	3.13	2.35
Uzbekistan	158	1.95	0.08	1.86	2.22	5.00	0.59
Saudi Arabia	=159	1.93	0.00	2.86	2.22	3.13	1.47
Tajikistan	=159	1.93	0.08	0.79	1.67	6.25	0.88
Equatorial Guinea	161	1.81	0.00	0.43	2.78	4.38	1.47
Turkmenistan	162	1.72	0.00	0.79	2.22	5.00	0.59
Democratic Republic of Congo	163	1.61	0.50	0.71	2.22	3.75	0.88
Central African Republic	164	1.52	2.25	0.00	1.11	1.88	2.35
Chad	165	1.50	0.00	0.00	1.11	3.75	2.65
Syria	166	1.43	0.00	0.00	2.78	4.38	0.00
North Korea	167	1.08	0.00	2.50	1.67	1.25	0.00

Source: The Economist Intelligence Unit.

Democracy Index 2017 highlights

Democracy's champions and authoritarians

Norway once again tops the Democracy Index global ranking in 2017. The Nordics occupy the top three spots, with Iceland and Sweden taking second and third place. New Zealand comes in fourth place and Denmark in fifth. Finland is not far behind, in ninth place with a total score above 9. At the other end of the rankings North Korea, with a total score of 1.08, remains firmly ensconced in last place. Syria, Chad, the Central African Republic (CAR) and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) also bring up the rear, occupying the four slots above North Korea. The scores for Syria and Chad did not change in 2017 compared with 2016, but the scores for CAR and the DRC both declined in 2017.

The year's winners and losers

The star performer in this year's Democracy Index, in terms of movement up the rankings, is The Gambia, which was upgraded from an "authoritarian regime" to a "hybrid regime". It rose rapidly up the rankings from a lowly 143rd to 113th place, after its score improved from 2.91 to 4.06, the biggest improvement of the year. In 2017 The Gambia witnessed its first ever democratic transfer of power, putting an end to 22 years of rule by Yahya Jammeh, a dictator who suppressed political freedoms, centralised powers within his ethnic group and relied heavily on the military to instil fear in the population. Indonesia was the worst-performing country in 2017, falling by 20 places in the global rankings from 48th to 68th position, after its score declined from 6.97 to 6.39. Guyana rose ten places in the rankings, from 73rd to 63rd position. India fell ten places in the rankings, from 32nd to 42nd to place, after its score deteriorated by 0.58 points.

Spain's democratic credentials suffer

In 2017 the steepest score declines in western Europe were recorded by Malta (-0.24), Spain (-0.22), Turkey, (-0.16) and France (-0.12). At 8.08, Spain's score remains just above the threshold for full democracies. However, the national government's attempt to stop by force Catalonia's illegal referendum on independence on October 1st and its repressive treatment of pro-independence politicians have put it at risk of becoming a "flawed democracy". After a unilateral declaration of independence by the regional parliament, the national government temporarily suspended Catalan home rule. Several pro-independence leaders have been jailed on remand and face serious criminal charges and 30-year prison sentences if found guilty.

Venezuela becomes an "authoritarian regime"

Latin America's average score declined from 6.33 in 2016 to 6.26 in 2017, although the region remains the most democratic in the developing world. Most countries recorded minor changes in their overall scores in 2017. However, two countries in the region shifted categories. Ecuador improved from a "hybrid regime" to a "flawed democracy". Venezuela, by contrast, moved from a "hybrid regime" to an "authoritarian regime", joining Cuba in that category. The latter change reflects Venezuela's continued slide towards dictatorship.

Asia's year of regression

Asian democracies had a tumultuous year. A region that had made rapid progress up the rankings in recent years experienced the biggest decline of all regions between 2016 and our latest assessment for 2017. Scoring 5.63, Asia lagged behind North America (8.56), western Europe (8.38) and Latin America (6.26). It also remained the region with the biggest deviation in scores among its countries. Top-scoring New Zealand (9.26) ranked 4th in the global index (out of 167 countries), while persistent laggard North Korea (1.08) ranked 167th. Australia and New Zealand remained the only two “full democracies” in the region as a whole. Asia's two largest emerging democracies, India and Indonesia, suffered significant declines in their scores and fell down the rankings in our latest assessment.

Democratic backsliding continues in eastern Europe

Eastern Europe has traditionally recorded low scores in the Democracy Index. A weak political culture, a chaotic transition, difficulties in creating institutions aimed at safeguarding the rule of law and persistent issues with corruption create a difficult habitat for democracy. In some countries the population favours conservative policies and strong leaders. In 2017 the majority of the countries in the region (17 out of 28) experienced a regression in their scores. Five countries stagnated and six countries improved, albeit often from a low base. The regional average score fell to its lowest ever level, at 5.40 (compared with 5.43 in 2016 and 5.76 in 2006, when the index was first constructed).

The MENA region retains the lowest score

The average regional score for the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region has declined every year since 2012, when the advances that followed the onset of the pro-democracy “Arab Spring” uprising in December 2010 began to dissipate. The region, which suffered another small deterioration in its score in 2017, is characterised by a concentration of absolute monarchies, authoritarian regimes and the prevalence of military conflicts. Five of the 15 lowest-ranked countries are located in the region.

A “golden age” or a “gilded cage” for free speech?

The wonders of the internet and social media mean that in many ways we are living “in a golden age for free speech”. However, despite the enormous expansion of the possibilities of free speech, in practice freedom of expression is increasingly restricted. According to our media freedom ranking, in 2017 less than one-half of the global population had access to a free or partially free media and enjoyed the right to speak freely. Moreover, in many of those countries media freedom and freedom of expression were being eroded. Censorship is no longer the prerogative of authoritarian regimes; it is being deployed increasingly in the world's democracies as well.

“Fully free” or “partly free” speech is enjoyed only by the lucky 45%

According to our Media Freedom Index, only 30 countries out of the 167 covered by the Democracy Index—representing 11% of the world's population—are classified as “fully free”. Another 40 countries, representing 34.2% of the world's population, are classified as “partly free”. Some 97 countries in our Media Freedom Index are rated as “unfree” or “largely unfree”. This means that more than one-half

of the world's population does not have access to free or partially free media and is prevented from exercising free speech.

Freedom of expression faces a threefold threat

The state in many countries plays a prominent role in curtailing freedom of the media and of expression. Governments, in democratic as well as authoritarian countries, are deploying defamation laws, prevention of terrorism laws, blasphemy and "hate speech" laws to curb freedom of expression and stymie media freedom. Non-state actors, including militant Islamists, criminal gangs and vested interests also pose a growing threat to free speech, using intimidation, threats, violence and murder. Freedom of expression is also under threat from those who claim the right not to be offended. This is leading to growing calls for "safe spaces", "trigger warnings", "hate speech" laws, no-platforming, tabloid newspaper bans and the policing of the internet to cleanse it of "offensive" content.

DEMOCRACY INDEX 2017

FREE SPEECH UNDER ATTACK

Democracy Index 2006-17

	2017	2016	2015	2014	2013	2012	2011	2010	2008	2006
Canada	9.15	9.15	9.08	9.08	9.08	9.08	9.08	9.08	9.07	9.07
United States of America	7.98	7.98	8.05	8.11	8.11	8.11	8.11	8.18	8.22	8.22
Average	8.56	8.56	8.56	8.59	8.59	8.59	8.59	8.63	8.64	8.64
Austria	8.42	8.41	8.54	8.54	8.48	8.62	8.49	8.49	8.49	8.69
Belgium	7.78	7.77	7.93	7.93	8.05	8.05	8.05	8.05	8.16	8.15
Cyprus	7.59	7.65	7.53	7.40	7.29	7.29	7.29	7.29	7.70	7.60
Denmark	9.22	9.20	9.11	9.11	9.38	9.52	9.52	9.52	9.52	9.52
Finland	9.03	9.03	9.03	9.03	9.03	9.06	9.06	9.19	9.25	9.25
France	7.80	7.92	7.92	8.04	7.92	7.88	7.77	7.77	8.07	8.07
Germany	8.61	8.63	8.64	8.64	8.31	8.34	8.34	8.38	8.82	8.82
Greece	7.29	7.23	7.45	7.45	7.65	7.65	7.65	7.92	8.13	8.13
Iceland	9.58	9.50	9.58	9.58	9.65	9.65	9.65	9.65	9.65	9.71
Ireland	9.15	9.15	8.85	8.72	8.68	8.56	8.56	8.79	9.01	9.01
Italy	7.98	7.98	7.98	7.85	7.85	7.74	7.74	7.83	7.98	7.73
Luxembourg	8.81	8.81	8.88	8.88	8.88	8.88	8.88	8.88	9.10	9.10
Malta	8.15	8.39	8.39	8.39	8.28	8.28	8.28	8.28	8.39	8.39
Netherlands	8.89	8.80	8.92	8.92	8.84	8.99	8.99	8.99	9.53	9.66
Norway	9.87	9.93	9.93	9.93	9.93	9.93	9.80	9.80	9.68	9.55
Portugal	7.84	7.86	7.79	7.79	7.65	7.92	7.81	8.02	8.05	8.16
Spain	8.08	8.30	8.30	8.05	8.02	8.02	8.02	8.16	8.45	8.34
Sweden	9.39	9.39	9.45	9.73	9.73	9.73	9.50	9.50	9.88	9.88
Switzerland	9.03	9.09	9.09	9.09	9.09	9.09	9.09	9.09	9.15	9.02
Turkey	4.88	5.04	5.12	5.12	5.63	5.76	5.73	5.73	5.69	5.70
United Kingdom	8.53	8.36	8.31	8.31	8.31	8.21	8.16	8.16	8.15	8.08
Average	8.38	8.40	8.42	8.41	8.41	8.44	8.40	8.45	8.61	8.60
Albania	5.98	5.91	5.91	5.67	5.67	5.67	5.81	5.86	5.91	5.91
Armenia	4.11	3.88	4.00	4.13	4.02	4.09	4.09	4.09	4.09	4.15
Azerbaijan	2.65	2.65	2.71	2.83	3.06	3.15	3.15	3.15	3.19	3.31
Belarus	3.13	3.54	3.62	3.69	3.04	3.04	3.16	3.34	3.34	3.34
Bosnia and Herzegovina	4.87	4.87	4.83	4.78	5.02	5.11	5.24	5.32	5.70	5.78
Bulgaria	7.03	7.01	7.14	6.73	6.83	6.72	6.78	6.84	7.02	7.10
Croatia	6.63	6.75	6.93	6.93	6.93	6.93	6.73	6.81	7.04	7.04
Czech Republic	7.62	7.82	7.94	7.94	8.06	8.19	8.19	8.19	8.19	8.17
Estonia	7.79	7.85	7.85	7.74	7.61	7.61	7.61	7.68	7.68	7.74
Georgia	5.93	5.93	5.88	5.82	5.95	5.53	4.74	4.59	4.62	4.90
Hungary	6.64	6.72	6.84	6.90	6.96	6.96	7.04	7.21	7.44	7.53

DEMOCRACY INDEX 2017

FREE SPEECH UNDER ATTACK

Democracy Index 2006-17

	2017	2016	2015	2014	2013	2012	2011	2010	2008	2006
Kazakhstan	3.06	3.06	3.06	3.17	3.06	2.95	3.24	3.30	3.45	3.62
Kyrgyz Republic	5.11	4.93	5.33	5.24	4.69	4.69	4.34	4.31	4.05	4.08
Latvia	7.25	7.31	7.37	7.48	7.05	7.05	7.05	7.05	7.23	7.37
Lithuania	7.41	7.47	7.54	7.54	7.54	7.24	7.24	7.24	7.36	7.43
Macedonia	5.57	5.23	6.02	6.25	6.16	6.16	6.16	6.16	6.21	6.33
Moldova	5.94	6.01	6.35	6.32	6.32	6.32	6.32	6.33	6.50	6.50
Montenegro	5.69	5.72	6.01	5.94	5.94	6.05	6.15	6.27	6.43	6.57
Poland	6.67	6.83	7.09	7.47	7.12	7.12	7.12	7.05	7.30	7.30
Romania	6.44	6.62	6.68	6.68	6.54	6.54	6.54	6.60	7.06	7.06
Russia	3.17	3.24	3.31	3.39	3.59	3.74	3.92	4.26	4.48	5.02
Serbia	6.41	6.57	6.71	6.71	6.67	6.33	6.33	6.33	6.49	6.62
Slovakia	7.16	7.29	7.29	7.35	7.35	7.35	7.35	7.35	7.33	7.40
Slovenia	7.50	7.51	7.57	7.57	7.88	7.88	7.76	7.69	7.96	7.96
Tajikistan	1.93	1.89	1.95	2.37	2.51	2.51	2.51	2.51	2.45	2.45
Turkmenistan	1.72	1.83	1.83	1.83	1.72	1.72	1.72	1.72	1.72	1.83
Ukraine	5.69	5.70	5.70	5.42	5.84	5.91	5.94	6.30	6.94	6.94
Uzbekistan	1.95	1.95	1.95	2.45	1.72	1.72	1.74	1.74	1.74	1.85
Average	5.40	5.43	5.55	5.58	5.53	5.51	5.50	5.55	5.67	5.76
Argentina	6.96	6.96	7.02	6.84	6.84	6.84	6.84	6.84	6.63	6.63
Bolivia	5.49	5.63	5.75	5.79	5.79	5.84	5.84	5.92	6.15	5.98
Brazil	6.86	6.90	6.96	7.38	7.12	7.12	7.12	7.12	7.38	7.38
Chile	7.84	7.78	7.84	7.80	7.80	7.54	7.54	7.67	7.89	7.89
Colombia	6.67	6.67	6.62	6.55	6.55	6.63	6.63	6.55	6.54	6.40
Costa Rica	7.88	7.88	7.96	8.03	8.03	8.10	8.10	8.04	8.04	8.04
Cuba	3.31	3.46	3.52	3.52	3.52	3.52	3.52	3.52	3.52	3.52
Dominican Republic	6.66	6.67	6.67	6.67	6.74	6.49	6.20	6.20	6.20	6.13
Ecuador	6.02	5.81	5.87	5.87	5.87	5.78	5.72	5.77	5.64	5.64
El Salvador	6.43	6.64	6.64	6.53	6.53	6.47	6.47	6.47	6.40	6.22
Guatemala	5.86	5.92	5.92	5.81	5.81	5.88	5.88	6.05	6.07	6.07
Guyana	6.46	6.25	6.05	5.91	6.05	6.05	6.05	6.05	6.12	6.15
Haiti	4.03	4.02	3.94	3.82	3.94	3.96	4.00	4.00	4.19	4.19
Honduras	5.72	5.92	5.84	5.84	5.84	5.84	5.84	5.76	6.18	6.25
Jamaica	7.29	7.39	7.39	7.39	7.39	7.39	7.13	7.21	7.21	7.34
Mexico	6.41	6.47	6.55	6.68	6.91	6.90	6.93	6.93	6.78	6.67
Nicaragua	4.66	4.81	5.26	5.32	5.46	5.56	5.56	5.73	6.07	5.68
Panama	7.08	7.13	7.19	7.08	7.08	7.08	7.08	7.15	7.35	7.35
Paraguay	6.31	6.27	6.33	6.26	6.26	6.26	6.40	6.40	6.40	6.16

DEMOCRACY INDEX 2017

FREE SPEECH UNDER ATTACK

Democracy Index 2006-17

	2017	2016	2015	2014	2013	2012	2011	2010	2008	2006
Peru	6.49	6.65	6.58	6.54	6.54	6.47	6.59	6.40	6.31	6.11
Suriname	6.76	6.77	6.77	6.77	6.77	6.65	6.65	6.65	6.58	6.52
Trinidad and Tobago	7.04	7.10	7.10	6.99	6.99	6.99	7.16	7.16	7.21	7.18
Uruguay	8.12	8.17	8.17	8.17	8.17	8.17	8.17	8.10	8.08	7.96
Venezuela	3.87	4.68	5.00	5.07	5.07	5.15	5.08	5.18	5.34	5.42
Average	6.26	6.33	6.37	6.36	6.38	6.36	6.35	6.37	6.43	6.37
Afghanistan	2.55	2.55	2.77	2.77	2.48	2.48	2.48	2.48	3.02	3.06
Australia	9.09	9.01	9.01	9.01	9.13	9.22	9.22	9.22	9.09	9.09
Bangladesh	5.43	5.73	5.73	5.78	5.86	5.86	5.86	5.87	5.52	6.11
Bhutan	5.08	4.93	4.93	4.87	4.82	4.65	4.57	4.68	4.30	2.62
Cambodia	3.63	4.27	4.27	4.78	4.60	4.96	4.87	4.87	4.87	4.77
China	3.10	3.14	3.14	3.00	3.00	3.00	3.14	3.14	3.04	2.97
Fiji	5.85	5.64	5.69	5.61	3.61	3.67	3.67	3.62	5.11	5.66
Hong Kong	6.31	6.42	6.50	6.46	6.42	6.42	5.92	5.92	5.85	6.03
India	7.23	7.81	7.74	7.92	7.69	7.52	7.30	7.28	7.80	7.68
Indonesia	6.39	6.97	7.03	6.95	6.82	6.76	6.53	6.53	6.34	6.41
Japan	7.88	7.99	7.96	8.08	8.08	8.08	8.08	8.08	8.25	8.15
Laos	2.37	2.37	2.21	2.21	2.21	2.32	2.10	2.10	2.10	2.10
Malaysia	6.54	6.54	6.43	6.49	6.49	6.41	6.19	6.19	6.36	5.98
Mongolia	6.50	6.62	6.62	6.62	6.51	6.35	6.23	6.36	6.60	6.60
Myanmar	3.83	4.20	4.14	3.05	2.76	2.35	1.77	1.77	1.77	1.77
Nepal	5.18	4.86	4.77	4.77	4.77	4.16	4.24	4.24	4.05	3.42
New Zealand	9.26	9.26	9.26	9.26	9.26	9.26	9.26	9.26	9.19	9.01
North Korea	1.08	1.08	1.08	1.08	1.08	1.08	1.08	1.08	0.86	1.03
Pakistan	4.26	4.33	4.40	4.64	4.64	4.57	4.55	4.55	4.46	3.92
Papua New Guinea	6.03	6.03	6.03	6.03	6.36	6.32	6.32	6.54	6.54	6.54
Philippines	6.71	6.94	6.84	6.77	6.41	6.30	6.12	6.12	6.12	6.48
Singapore	6.32	6.38	6.14	6.03	5.92	5.88	5.89	5.89	5.89	5.89
South Korea	8.00	7.92	7.97	8.06	8.06	8.13	8.06	8.11	8.01	7.88
Sri Lanka	6.48	6.48	6.42	5.69	5.69	5.75	6.58	6.64	6.61	6.58
Taiwan	7.73	7.79	7.83	7.65	7.57	7.57	7.46	7.52	7.82	7.82
Thailand	4.63	4.92	5.09	5.39	6.25	6.55	6.55	6.55	6.81	5.67
Timor-Leste	7.19	7.24	7.24	7.24	7.24	7.16	7.22	7.22	7.22	6.41
Vietnam	3.08	3.38	3.53	3.41	3.29	2.89	2.96	2.94	2.53	2.75
Average	5.63	5.74	5.74	5.70	5.61	5.56	5.51	5.53	5.58	5.44
Algeria	3.56	3.56	3.95	3.83	3.83	3.83	3.44	3.44	3.32	3.17
Bahrain	2.71	2.79	2.79	2.87	2.87	2.53	2.92	3.49	3.38	3.53

DEMOCRACY INDEX 2017

FREE SPEECH UNDER ATTACK

Democracy Index 2006-17

	2017	2016	2015	2014	2013	2012	2011	2010	2008	2006
Egypt	3.36	3.31	3.18	3.16	3.27	4.56	3.95	3.07	3.89	3.90
Iran	2.45	2.34	2.16	1.98	1.98	1.98	1.98	1.94	2.83	2.93
Iraq	4.09	4.08	4.08	4.23	4.10	4.10	4.03	4.00	4.00	4.01
Israel	7.79	7.85	7.77	7.63	7.53	7.53	7.53	7.48	7.48	7.28
Jordan	3.87	3.96	3.86	3.76	3.76	3.76	3.89	3.74	3.93	3.92
Kuwait	3.85	3.85	3.85	3.78	3.78	3.78	3.74	3.88	3.39	3.09
Lebanon	4.72	4.86	4.86	5.12	5.05	5.05	5.32	5.82	5.62	5.82
Libya	2.32	2.25	2.25	3.80	4.82	5.15	3.55	1.94	2.00	1.84
Morocco	4.87	4.77	4.66	4.00	4.07	4.07	3.83	3.79	3.88	3.90
Oman	3.04	3.04	3.04	3.15	3.26	3.26	3.26	2.86	2.98	2.77
Palestine	4.46	4.49	4.57	4.72	4.80	4.80	4.97	5.44	5.83	6.01
Qatar	3.19	3.18	3.18	3.18	3.18	3.18	3.18	3.09	2.92	2.78
Saudi	1.93	1.93	1.93	1.82	1.82	1.71	1.77	1.84	1.90	1.92
Sudan	2.15	2.37	2.37	2.54	2.54	2.38	2.38	2.42	2.81	2.90
Syria	1.43	1.43	1.43	1.74	1.86	1.63	1.99	2.31	2.18	2.36
Tunisia	6.32	6.40	6.72	6.31	5.76	5.67	5.53	2.79	2.96	3.06
United Arab Emirates	2.69	2.75	2.75	2.64	2.52	2.58	2.58	2.52	2.60	2.42
Yemen	2.07	2.07	2.24	2.79	2.79	3.12	2.57	2.64	2.95	2.98
Average	3.54	3.56	3.58	3.65	3.68	3.73	3.62	3.43	3.54	3.53
Angola	3.62	3.40	3.35	3.35	3.35	3.35	3.32	3.32	3.35	2.41
Benin	5.61	5.67	5.72	5.65	5.87	6.00	6.06	6.17	6.06	6.16
Botswana	7.81	7.87	7.87	7.87	7.98	7.85	7.63	7.63	7.47	7.60
Burkina Faso	4.75	4.70	4.70	4.09	4.15	3.52	3.59	3.59	3.60	3.72
Burundi	2.33	2.40	2.49	3.33	3.41	3.60	4.01	4.01	4.51	4.51
Cameroon	7.88	7.94	3.66	3.41	3.41	3.44	3.41	3.41	3.46	3.27
Cabo Verde	3.61	3.46	7.81	7.81	7.92	7.92	7.92	7.94	7.81	7.43
Central Africa	1.52	1.61	1.57	1.49	1.49	1.99	1.82	1.82	1.86	1.61
Chad	1.50	1.50	1.50	1.50	1.50	1.62	1.62	1.52	1.52	1.65
Comoros	3.71	3.71	3.71	3.52	3.52	3.52	3.52	3.41	3.58	3.90
Congo (Brazzaville)	3.25	2.91	2.91	2.89	2.89	2.89	2.89	2.89	2.94	3.19
Côte d'Ivoire	3.93	3.81	2.11	1.75	1.83	1.92	2.15	2.15	2.28	2.76
Democratic Republic of Congo	1.61	1.93	3.31	3.53	3.25	3.25	3.08	3.02	3.27	3.38
Djibouti	2.76	2.83	2.90	2.99	2.96	2.74	2.68	2.20	2.37	2.37
Equatorial Guinea	1.81	1.70	1.77	1.66	1.77	1.83	1.77	1.84	2.19	2.09
Eritrea	2.37	2.37	2.37	2.44	2.40	2.40	2.34	2.31	2.31	2.31
Ethiopia	3.42	3.60	3.83	3.72	3.83	3.72	3.79	3.68	4.52	4.72
Gabon	3.61	3.74	3.76	3.76	3.76	3.56	3.48	3.29	3.00	2.72

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Democracy Index 2006-17

	2017	2016	2015	2014	2013	2012	2011	2010	2008	2006
Gambia	4.06	2.91	2.97	3.05	3.31	3.31	3.38	3.38	4.19	4.39
Ghana	6.69	6.75	6.86	6.33	6.33	6.02	6.02	6.02	5.35	5.35
Guinea	3.14	3.14	3.14	3.01	2.84	2.79	2.79	2.79	2.09	2.02
Guinea-Bissau	1.98	1.98	1.93	1.93	1.26	1.43	1.99	1.99	1.99	2.00
Kenya	5.11	5.33	5.33	5.13	5.13	4.71	4.71	4.71	4.79	5.08
Lesotho	6.64	6.59	6.59	6.66	6.66	6.66	6.33	6.02	6.29	6.48
Liberia	5.23	5.31	4.95	4.95	4.95	4.95	5.07	5.07	5.25	5.22
Madagascar	5.11	5.07	4.85	4.42	4.32	3.93	3.93	3.94	5.57	5.82
Malawi	5.49	5.55	5.55	5.66	6.00	6.08	5.84	5.84	5.13	4.97
Mali	5.64	5.70	5.70	5.79	5.90	5.12	6.36	6.01	5.87	5.99
Mauritania	3.82	3.96	3.96	4.17	4.17	4.17	4.17	3.86	3.91	3.12
Mauritius	8.22	8.28	8.28	8.17	8.17	8.17	8.04	8.04	8.04	8.04
Mozambique	4.02	4.02	4.60	4.66	4.77	4.88	4.90	4.90	5.49	5.28
Namibia	6.31	6.31	6.31	6.24	6.24	6.24	6.24	6.23	6.48	6.54
Niger	3.76	3.96	3.85	4.02	4.08	4.16	4.16	3.38	3.41	3.54
Nigeria	4.44	4.50	4.62	3.76	3.77	3.77	3.83	3.47	3.53	3.52
Rwanda	3.19	3.07	3.07	3.25	3.38	3.36	3.25	3.25	3.71	3.82
Senegal	6.15	6.21	6.08	6.15	6.15	6.09	5.51	5.27	5.37	5.37
Sierra Leone	4.66	4.55	4.55	4.56	4.64	4.71	4.51	4.51	4.11	3.57
South Africa	7.24	7.41	7.56	7.82	7.90	7.79	7.79	7.79	7.91	7.91
Swaziland	3.03	3.03	3.09	3.09	3.20	3.20	3.26	2.90	3.04	2.93
Tanzania	5.47	5.76	5.58	5.77	5.77	5.88	5.64	5.64	5.28	5.18
Togo	3.05	3.32	3.41	3.45	3.45	3.45	3.45	3.45	2.43	1.75
Uganda	5.09	5.26	5.22	5.22	5.22	5.16	5.13	5.05	5.03	5.14
Zambia	5.68	5.99	6.28	6.39	6.26	6.26	6.19	5.68	5.25	5.25
Zimbabwe	3.16	3.05	3.05	2.78	2.67	2.67	2.68	2.64	2.53	2.62
Average	4.35	4.37	4.38	4.34	4.36	4.32	4.32	4.23	4.28	4.24
World average	5.48	5.52	5.55	5.55	5.53	5.52	5.49	5.46	5.55	5.52

Source: The Economist Intelligence Unit.

Democracy around the regions in 2017

The developed OECD countries of Europe make up most of the world's "full democracies"; there are the two Australasian countries (but no Asian ones), one Latin American country (Uruguay) and one African country (Mauritius). The almost complete predominance of OECD countries among those ranked as full democracies suggests that the level of economic development is a significant, if not a binding, constraint on democratic development. "Flawed democracies" are concentrated in Latin America (16), Asia (13) and eastern Europe (12), but notably western Europe has six too, including leading European countries such as France and Italy, many more than a decade ago. Eastern Europe does not have a single full democracy, as some of the region's most politically developed nations, such

Democracy across the regions

	No. of countries	Democracy index average	Full democracies	Flawed democracies	Hybrid regimes	Authoritarian regimes
North America						
2017	2	8.56	1	1	0	0
2016	2	8.56	1	1	0	0
Western Europe						
2017	21	8.38	14	6	1	0
2016	21	8.40	14	6	1	0
Eastern Europe						
2017	28	5.40	0	12	9	7
2016	28	5.43	0	13	7	8
Latin America & the Caribbean						
2017	24	6.26	1	16	5	2
2016	24	6.33	1	15	7	1
Asia & Australasia						
2017	28	5.63	2	13	6	7
2016	28	5.74	2	13	8	5
Middle East & North Africa						
2017	20	3.54	0	2	4	14
2016	20	3.56	0	2	4	14
Sub-Saharan Africa						
2017	44	4.35	1	7	14	22
2016	44	4.37	1	7	13	23
Total						
2017	167	5.48	19	57	39	52
2016	167	5.52	19	57	40	51

Source: The Economist Intelligence Unit.

as Hungary, Poland, the Czech Republic and Slovenia, have failed to establish a democratic political culture or encourage broad political participation.

The 28 countries in eastern Europe, which includes the Balkan, the Baltics, the Visegrads (plus Slovenia) and the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) in our Democracy Index classification of regions, now have more non-democratic countries than democratic ones, being home to 16 “hybrid” or “authoritarian” regimes, up from 15 in 2016, and 12 “flawed democracies”. Many countries in Latin America and the Caribbean have fragile democracies; levels of political participation are generally low and democratic cultures are weak.

The Asia and Australasia region has been catching up with Latin America when it comes to the number of “flawed democracies”, but progress stalled in 2016, and in 2017 two countries became “authoritarian regimes” rather than “hybrid regimes”, as they were classified in 2016. The region’s only “full democracies” are Australia and New Zealand. “Hybrid” and “authoritarian” regimes are concentrated in Sub-Saharan Africa (36 out of 44 countries), the Middle East and North Africa (18 out of 20 countries), and to a lesser extent in eastern Europe (16) and Asia and Australasia (13). In the section below, we discuss the main democracy-related developments in the seven regions covered by the Democracy Index, from the highest-scoring region (North America) to the lowest-scoring region (MENA).

Democracy Index 2006-17 by region

	2017	2016	2015	2014	2013	2012	2011	2010	2008	2006
Asia & Australasia	5.63	5.74	5.74	5.70	5.61	5.56	5.51	5.53	5.58	5.44
Eastern Europe	5.40	5.43	5.55	5.58	5.53	5.51	5.50	5.55	5.67	5.76
Latin America	6.26	6.33	6.37	6.36	6.38	6.36	6.35	6.37	6.43	6.37
Middle East & North Africa	3.54	3.56	3.58	3.65	3.68	3.73	3.62	3.43	3.54	3.53
North America	8.56	8.56	8.56	8.59	8.59	8.59	8.59	8.63	8.64	8.64
Western Europe	8.38	8.40	8.42	8.41	8.41	8.44	8.40	8.45	8.61	8.60
Sub-Saharan Africa	4.35	4.37	4.38	4.34	4.36	4.32	4.32	4.23	4.28	4.24
World average	5.48	5.52	5.55	5.55	5.53	5.52	5.49	5.46	5.55	5.52

Source: The Economist Intelligence Unit.

North America

North America has the highest average score in the Democracy Index of any region. Canada and the US continue to perform reasonably well, but they lag behind many European countries, particularly those of northern Europe. Furthermore, the performance of the two North American democracies has diverged in recent years. The US fell below the threshold for a “full democracy” in 2016 and is now rated as a “flawed democracy”. The main cause of the US regression was a serious decline in public trust in US institutions in 2016. This year the country’s overall score remained the same, and the US remains in 21st place in the global rankings. The score for Canada also stayed the same, at 9.15, and it remains in joint sixth place (with Ireland).

North America 2017

	Overall score	Overall rank	Regional rank	I Electoral process and pluralism	II Functioning of government	III Political participation	IV Political culture	V Civil liberties	Regime type
Canada	9.15	=6	1	9.58	9.64	7.78	8.75	10.00	Full democracy
United States of America	7.85	26	2	9.17	7.14	7.22	7.50	8.24	Flawed democracy

Source: The Economist Intelligence Unit.

Donald Trump won the presidential election in November 2016 in part because of his ability to tap into the discontent expressed by many voters with the political and economic state of affairs in the country. His presidency may be an opportunity for the country’s political class to focus on the disempowerment felt by these voters. It is too soon to judge whether President Trump will be successful in assuaging this deep groundswell of popular disaffection. So far his attempts to address the concerns of his voters have resulted in a further polarisation of US politics, resulting in a decline in the score for social cohesion in the 2017 Democracy Index.

According to the Pew Research Centre, partisan divides have widened on a number of issues, notably for example on the question of immigration. In response to a question about whether immigrants strengthen the country, a Pew survey showed that Republicans were almost evenly split in their answer to this question, while the majority of Democrats supported the statement that immigration is good for the US. Polarisation has also increased on economic and environmental policies; Republicans and Democrats have deeply polarised views on whether stricter environmental regulations are harming jobs and the economy, with Republicans tending to believe that these policies are detrimental for growth and employment. The growing divisions between (and within) those who identify as Republicans and Democrats help to explain in part why the Trump administration is finding it so hard to govern, despite controlling both houses of Congress.

Future risks for US democracy

If Mr Trump is unable to reverse the trend towards increasing social polarisation, US democracy will be at greater risk of further deterioration, especially given the interplay of this trend with other, long-standing drivers of democratic decline. For example, the US scores comparatively poorly in the Democracy Index in the *functioning of government* category. Bitter partisanship has developed in part because many congressional districts have been redrawn in a way that gives one party a built-in advantage. As a result, members of Congress fear a challenge in their party primaries, which are controlled by the party base, and are consequently incentivised to move to the right (for Republicans) or to the left (for Democrats). The upshot is a stronger emphasis on ideological purity and less appetite for compromise, which reinforces existing cynicism among voters about the workings of Congress. The trend towards partisanship has coincided with an erosion of confidence in government and public institutions over many years. Major political events over many decades have damaged confidence, including the Vietnam war, the Watergate scandal, the Iraq wars, the financial crisis in 2008-09 and repeated federal government shutdowns.

Income inequality has also been a key factor in fuelling popular dissatisfaction with government, its institutions and politicians. Income inequality is higher in the US than in other rich countries and has worsened since the global economic and financial crisis of 2007-09. Studies show that higher income inequality reduces trust in others and undermines social capital. There is a risk that income inequality will widen further in coming years following the major tax changes passed by Congress in late 2017; tax cuts in the bill favour those on higher incomes, especially in the medium term. Also, the central feature of Obamacare was repealed, which the Congressional Budget Office estimates will lead to a loss of access to health insurance for 13m citizens over the next decade.

Canada has performed well in recent years

With a long history of democratic government, Canada has scored consistently well in the Democracy Index—it is currently ranked joint 6th and has never been outside the top ten countries. Of the index's five pillars, it scores highly in the *electoral process* and the *functioning of government* categories, and also for *civil liberties*. Freedom of expression and religious and cultural tolerance are championed by the Canadian state, which is important given Canada's large French-speaking and native minorities. All Canadians enjoy equality under the law.

In contrast to its neighbour south of the border, Canada maintained a democratic advantage over the US in 2017 in a number of key areas. Tensions over federal-provincial relations eased following the victory of the federalist Parti Libéral in the Quebec provincial election in 2014. The defeat of the separatist Parti Québécois has all but eliminated medium-term concerns over the unity of the country. Canada receives a higher score than the US on several indicators, including that concerning the political power and influence of interest groups and the proportion of women in parliament (in 2015 Canadians elected a record 88 women to parliament, representing 26% of the seats in the House of Commons, the lower house of parliament and main legislative body).

There is scope for improvement in *political participation*, the only category in which Canada scores relatively poorly. This is a problem faced by many developed countries and reflects poor voter turnout, low membership of political parties and a general lack of political engagement. Indeed, the majority of the top ten countries in the index recorded a relatively lower score for *political participation* compared with their scores in the other four pillars of the index.

Western Europe

Western Europe's average score declined slightly for the second consecutive year, from 8.40 in 2016 to 8.38 in 2017, but European countries occupy seven of the top ten places in the global Democracy Index, including the top three spots. It has the second highest average regional score, but that is because it comprises 21 countries, compared with North America's two. It has 14 "full democracies", six "flawed democracies", and Turkey, its only "hybrid regime". Despite the overall downward adjustment, seven countries improved their scores in 2017, including—in descending order—Iceland, Denmark, the Netherlands, the UK, Austria, Belgium and Greece. On the other hand, none of Europe's "flawed democracies"—Italy, Portugal, France, Belgium, Cyprus and Greece—moved into the "full democracy" category.

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Western Europe 2017

	Overall score	Global Rank	Regional rank	I Electoral process and pluralism	II Functioning of government	III Political participation	IV Political culture	V Civil liberties	Regime type
Norway	9.87	1	1	10.00	9.64	10.00	10.00	9.71	Full democracy
Iceland	9.58	2	2	10.00	9.29	8.89	10.00	9.71	Full democracy
Sweden	9.39	3	3	9.58	9.64	8.33	10.00	9.41	Full democracy
Denmark	9.22	5	4	10.00	9.29	8.33	9.38	9.12	Full democracy
Ireland	9.15	=6	5	9.58	7.86	8.33	10.00	10.00	Full democracy
Finland	9.03	=9	=6	10.00	8.93	7.78	8.75	9.71	Full democracy
Switzerland	9.03	=9	=6	9.58	9.29	7.78	9.38	9.12	Full democracy
Netherlands	8.89	11	8	9.58	9.29	8.33	8.13	9.12	Full democracy
Luxembourg	8.81	12	9	10.00	8.93	6.67	8.75	9.71	Full democracy
Germany	8.61	13	10	9.58	8.21	8.33	7.50	9.41	Full democracy
United Kingdom	8.53	14	11	9.58	7.50	8.33	8.13	9.12	Full democracy
Austria	8.42	15	12	9.58	8.21	8.33	6.88	9.12	Full democracy
Malta	8.15	17	13	9.17	8.21	6.11	8.75	8.53	Full democracy
Spain	8.08	19	14	9.17	7.14	7.78	7.50	8.82	Full democracy
Italy	7.98	=21	15	9.58	6.43	7.22	8.13	8.53	Flawed democracy
Portugal	7.84	=26	16	9.58	7.50	6.11	6.88	9.12	Flawed democracy
France	7.80	29	17	9.58	7.50	7.78	5.63	8.53	Flawed democracy
Belgium	7.78	32	18	9.58	8.93	5.00	6.88	8.53	Flawed democracy
Cyprus	7.59	35	19	9.17	6.43	6.67	6.88	8.82	Flawed democracy
Greece	7.29	=38	20	9.58	5.36	6.11	6.88	8.53	Flawed democracy
Turkey	4.88	100	21	5.33	6.07	5.00	5.63	2.35	Hybrid regime

Source: The Economist Intelligence Unit.

Decades of decline in the quality of democracy have swelled support for anti-establishment parties in western Europe, both on the left and on the right. In major elections in France, the Netherlands and Germany two-round or proportional voting systems helped to keep radical parties out of office in 2017. However, the underlying problem of mainstream parties' failure to address the concerns and insecurities of younger and working-class voters remains unresolved. This will continue to sustain anti-establishment sentiment for the foreseeable future, tempting some mainstream parties to adopt illiberal stances to counter the rise of the populists.

Last year the largest declines in score were recorded by Malta (-0.24), Spain (-0.22), Turkey, (-0.16), and France (-0.12). At 8.08, Spain's score remains just above the threshold of 8 for full democracies, having fallen significantly as a result of the national government's attempt to stop by force Catalonia's illegal referendum on independence on October 1st. After a unilateral declaration of independence by the regional parliament, the national government temporarily suspended Catalan home rule. Several pro-independence leaders face criminal charges and have been jailed on remand, but pro-independence parties still won a snap regional election held on December 21st. With opinion in

the region deeply divided and tensions with the national government running high, the conflict is set to continue.

Turkey's score continued to deteriorate as a result of the use of emergency powers, assumed after a failed coup in mid-2016 by the president, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, to consolidate power and weaken opposition political forces. Malta's score has slipped following the unresolved murder in October 2017 of Daphne Caruana Galizia, an anti-corruption blogger, which has raised questions about the rule of law and the authorities' willingness to investigate sensitive crimes. Finally, France became subject to greater social and political polarisation in 2017, despite the defeat of the far-right candidate, Marine Le Pen, by the centrist president, Emmanuel Macron, in May. Also the incorporation of state of emergency powers into the body of French law presents a potential threat to the rights and freedoms of many groups in France, and not only potential terrorist groups or individuals.

Latin America

Latin America's average score declined from 6.33 in 2016 to 6.26 in 2017. Nevertheless, the region remains the most democratic in the developing world. Latin America scores well above the global average for *electoral process* and *pluralism*, but its performance is less impressive in other categories. For example, Latin America's average score is only slightly ahead of the global average for *functioning of government* as well as for *political participation*, reflecting the region's issues with corruption, organised crime (with the already high murder rate related to drug trafficking rising throughout the region in 2017), and low levels of political engagement. The region falls below the global average for *political culture*, reflecting relatively low levels of popular confidence in democracy. According to Latinobarómetro, a Chilean pollster which publishes annual assessments of public perceptions of democracy in eight Latin American countries, public support for democracy has steadily declined since polling began in 1995, falling to 53% in 2017 (support for authoritarian rule has also declined over time).

Most countries had only minor changes in their overall scores in 2017. However, two countries in the region shifted categories. Ecuador improved from a "hybrid regime" to a "flawed democracy", reflecting efforts by the newly inaugurated president, Lenín Moreno, to combat some of the more controversial excesses of his predecessor, Rafael Correa, particularly with respect to press freedom and efforts to combat corruption (see box). Venezuela, by contrast, moved from a "hybrid regime" to an "authoritarian regime", joining Cuba in that category. This reflects Venezuela's continued slide towards dictatorship as the government has side-lined the opposition-dominated National Assembly, jailed or disenfranchised leading opposition politicians and violently suppressed opposition protests. The region now counts just one "full democracy" (Uruguay), 16 "flawed democracies", five "hybrid regimes" and two "authoritarian regimes".

Stealing money and elections

Corruption was the major story of the region in 2017. Corruption investigations continued to engulf Brazil's political class, exposing malfeasance between politicians and several of the country's largest companies, mainly entailing kickbacks in return for government contracts and other political favours.

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Latin America & the Caribbean 2017

	Overall score	Global Rank	Regional rank	I Electoral process and pluralism	II Functioning of government	III Political participation	IV Political culture	V Civil liberties	Regime type
Uruguay	8.12	18	1	10.00	8.93	4.44	7.50	9.71	Full democracy
Costa Rica	7.88	=23	2	9.58	7.14	6.67	6.88	9.12	Flawed democracy
Chile	7.84	=26	3	9.58	8.57	4.44	7.50	9.12	Flawed democracy
Jamaica	7.29	=38	4	9.17	7.14	4.44	6.88	8.82	Flawed democracy
Panama	7.08	45	5	9.58	6.79	6.11	5.00	7.94	Flawed democracy
Trinidad and Tobago	7.04	46	6	9.58	7.14	5.56	5.00	7.94	Flawed democracy
Argentina	6.96	48	7	9.17	5.00	6.11	6.88	7.65	Flawed democracy
Brazil	6.86	49	8	9.58	5.36	6.11	5.00	8.24	Flawed democracy
Suriname	6.76	50	9	9.17	6.43	5.56	5.00	7.65	Flawed democracy
Colombia	6.67	=53	10	9.17	6.79	4.44	5.00	7.94	Flawed democracy
Dominican Republic	6.66	55	11	9.17	5.36	6.11	5.63	7.06	Flawed democracy
Peru	6.49	61	12	9.17	5.36	5.56	5.00	7.35	Flawed democracy
Guyana	6.46	63	13	8.75	5.71	6.11	4.38	7.35	Flawed democracy
El Salvador	6.43	65	14	9.17	5.36	5.56	5.00	7.06	Flawed democracy
Mexico	6.41	=66	15	7.83	6.43	7.22	4.38	6.18	Flawed democracy
Paraguay	6.31	=71	16	8.75	6.07	5.00	4.38	7.35	Flawed democracy
Ecuador	6.02	76	17	8.75	4.64	5.56	4.38	6.76	Flawed democracy
Guatemala	5.86	80	18	7.92	5.71	3.89	5.00	6.76	Hybrid regime
Honduras	5.72	82	19	8.25	5.36	4.44	4.38	6.18	Hybrid regime
Bolivia	5.49	=89	20	7.00	4.64	5.00	3.75	7.06	Hybrid regime
Nicaragua	4.66	=105	21	3.42	3.29	3.89	5.63	7.06	Hybrid regime
Haiti	4.03	114	22	5.17	2.21	2.22	4.38	6.18	Hybrid regime
Venezuela	3.87	=117	23	2.17	2.86	6.11	4.38	3.82	Authoritarian
Cuba	3.31	131	24	1.33	4.29	3.89	4.38	2.65	Authoritarian

Source: The Economist Intelligence Unit.

Brazil's president, Michel Temer, narrowly avoided a trial over corruption charges after his allies in Congress voted to block two separate requests by the prosecutor-general to open a trial at the Supreme Court. The fallout from the corrupt practices by one of Brazil's companies at the centre of the scandal, Odebrecht, an engineering firm, was also felt across the region owing to its operations over the years in several countries. These allegations nearly cost the Peruvian president, Pedro Pablo Kuczynski, his job as he faced possible impeachment in December (he survived), and led to the forced removal from office of the Ecuadorean vice-president, Jorge Glas. Investigations of possible bribes received by politicians from Odebrecht continue in Peru, Colombia, Panama, the Dominican Republic and elsewhere.

In several countries lower scores reflected departures from democratic norms. In Guatemala the president, Jimmy Morales, sparked a political crisis after he tried to expel Iván Velázquez, the

Ecuador: reining in excesses

Ecuador experienced the most significant improvement in Latin America in 2017, moving from “hybrid regime” to a “flawed democracy” in the 2017 Democracy Index. The upgrade reflects efforts by the newly inaugurated president, Lenín Moreno, since taking office in May 2017 to undo some of the more controversial encroachments on the rule of law and freedom of expression made by his predecessor, Rafael Correa (2007-17).

In October Mr Moreno announced a referendum that will take place on February 4th 2018 and seeks the imposition of a two-term limit on the presidency (prohibiting Mr Correa from running again in 2021), the restructuring of the Consejo de Participación Ciudadana y Control Social (a state entity with power over judicial appointments, headed by Correa loyalists), and

the withdrawal of civic rights and confiscation of property for persons found guilty of corruption.

The latter proposal references the vice-president and Correa ally, Jorge Glas, who was removed from office on corruption charges in August and in December was sentenced to six years in prison on the charge of illicit association with the Brazilian construction firm Odebrecht. In August a former Correa-era oil minister, Carlos Pareja Yannuzzelli, also returned to Ecuador to face justice for his involvement in a corruption case at Petroecuador, the state oil company.

These developments represent instances of accountability following a decade of perceived official impunity under Mr Correa. As discussed in our previous special section on media freedom around the regions in this report, Mr Moreno has also taken steps to remove or at least relax some of Mr Correa’s restrictions on the media.

head of the UN-backed International Commission against Impunity in Guatemala, as the body moved to investigate allegations that a drug-trafficking cartel had funded Mr Morales’s presidential campaign. The Supreme Court vetoed Mr Velázquez’s expulsion, but Congress upheld Mr Morales’s presidential immunity.

At the presidential election in Honduras in November there were serious irregularities in the country’s voting process. In Nicaragua, the ruling Frente Sandinista de la Liberación Nacional won a sweeping victory at the November municipal elections that the Organisation of American States criticised as unfair. In Bolivia the president, Evo Morales, overrode the result of a 2016 referendum which rejected an extension of presidential term limits and had the Supreme Court (dominated by loyalists) declare him eligible for a fourth presidential run in 2019.

Asia and Australasia

Since we began producing the Democracy Index in 2006, Asia and Australasia has made more headway in advancing democracy than any other region, increasing its regional average score from 5.44 to a peak of 5.74 in 2015, but after stagnating in 2016 progress in advancing democracy in the region underwent a reversal in 2017. The regional average score fell sharply, reflecting a tumultuous year of negative change for many countries. In terms of its overall average score, Asia experienced the biggest decline of any of our seven regions in 2017, when its average score fell to 5.63.

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Asia and Australasia encompasses the widest variation in scores of any region—from top-scoring New Zealand (9.26), ranked 4th in the global index (out of 167 countries), through to North Korea (1.08), still at the bottom of the ranking in 167th place. Boasting two “full democracies” in Australasia and 13 “flawed democracies”, the majority of Asian countries are classified as democratic. However, despite impressive progress, at least between 2006 and 2015, the region is still some way from catching up with Latin America (average score 6.26), western Europe (8.38) and North America (8.56).

Asia’s two largest emerging democracies, India and Indonesia, suffered significant declines in their scores and fell down the rankings in our latest assessment. India dropped from 32nd position in 2016

Asia & Australasia 2017

	Overall score	Global Rank	Regional rank	I Electoral process and pluralism	II Functioning of government	III Political participation	IV Political culture	V Civil liberties	Regime type
New Zealand	9.26	4	1	10.00	9.29	8.89	8.13	10.00	Full democracy
Australia	9.09	8	2	10.00	8.93	7.78	8.75	10.00	Full democracy
South Korea	8.00	20	3	9.17	7.86	7.22	7.50	8.24	Flawed democracy
Japan	7.88	=23	4	8.75	8.21	6.11	7.50	8.82	Flawed democracy
Taiwan	7.73	33	5	9.58	8.21	6.11	5.63	9.12	Flawed democracy
India	7.23	42	6	9.17	6.79	7.22	5.63	7.35	Flawed democracy
Timor-Leste	7.19	43	7	9.08	6.79	5.56	6.88	7.65	Flawed democracy
Philippines	6.71	51	8	9.17	5.71	7.22	4.38	7.06	Flawed democracy
Malaysia	6.54	59	9	6.92	7.86	6.11	6.25	5.59	Flawed democracy
Mongolia	6.50	60	10	9.17	5.71	5.56	5.00	7.06	Flawed democracy
Sri Lanka	6.48	62	11	7.83	7.14	5.00	6.25	6.18	Flawed democracy
Indonesia	6.39	68	12	6.92	7.14	6.67	5.63	5.59	Flawed democracy
Singapore	6.32	=69	13	4.33	7.86	6.11	6.25	7.06	Flawed democracy
Hong Kong	6.31	=71	14	3.92	6.07	5.56	7.50	8.53	Flawed democracy
Papua New Guinea	6.03	75	15	6.92	6.07	3.89	5.63	7.65	Flawed democracy
Fiji	5.85	81	16	6.58	5.36	6.11	5.63	5.59	Hybrid regime
Bangladesh	5.43	92	17	7.42	5.07	5.00	4.38	5.29	Hybrid regime
Nepal	5.18	94	18	4.33	5.36	5.00	5.63	5.59	Hybrid regime
Bhutan	5.08	99	19	8.33	6.07	2.78	4.38	3.82	Hybrid regime
Thailand	4.63	107	20	3.00	4.29	5.00	5.00	5.88	Hybrid regime
Pakistan	4.26	110	21	6.50	5.36	2.22	2.50	4.71	Hybrid regime
Myanmar	3.83	120	22	3.67	3.93	3.89	5.63	2.06	Authoritarian
Cambodia	3.63	124	23	1.33	5.71	2.22	5.63	3.24	Authoritarian
China	3.10	139	24	0.00	5.00	2.78	6.25	1.47	Authoritarian
Vietnam	3.08	140	25	0.00	3.21	3.89	5.63	2.65	Authoritarian
Afghanistan	2.55	149	26	2.50	1.14	2.78	2.50	3.82	Authoritarian
Laos	2.37	=151	27	0.83	2.86	1.67	5.00	1.47	Authoritarian
North Korea	1.08	167	28	0.00	2.50	1.67	1.25	0.00	Authoritarian

Source: The Economist Intelligence Unit.

Indonesia's minority crisis

Soon after his electoral defeat in Jakarta's governorship election in April 2017, former mayor Basuki Tjahaja Purnama (known as Ahok), was found guilty of blasphemy by a local court in the capital. Ahok, who was facing the charges for alleged blasphemy as the Jakarta election campaign was in full swing, was one of the few politicians in Indonesia hailing from the minority Chinese-Christian community. His conviction, and effective exclusion from politics, cast a shadow over Indonesia's secularist principles set out under Pancasila, the five foundational codes of the nation, and demonstrate how the country's draconian blasphemy laws are used not only to restrict freedom of expression but also to constrain political actors.

Ahok's downfall was fast. Only a year earlier his position in the city hall had seemed safe. Having been the running mate of Joko Widodo, also known as Jokowi, in the 2012 gubernatorial election, Ahok took over from Jokowi after the latter became president in 2014. However, Jokowi distanced himself from his former ally during the blasphemy row, fearing the reaction of mainstream Islamic organisations, which were involved in the first big protests against Ahok in November 2016. One of Jokowi's main opponents, Prabowo Subianto, the leader of the opposition Great Indonesia Movement Party (Gerindra), took full advantage of the situation and supported Ahok's main electoral adversary, Anies Baswedan, who won the governorship run-off on April 19th.

Identity politics was not entirely to blame for Ahok's defeat. He had some flaws which undermined his campaign. However,

Ahok's downfall in a Muslim-majority country that has a secular constitution has exposed some uncomfortable truths about minority rights in the archipelago. The Jakarta election was fought on religious lines and Mr Baswedan sought to appeal to powerful political players in Muslim strongholds. Given the myriad social debates over the religious identity of Indonesia, the Jakarta governorship election created up an opportunity for national-level politicians to court the electorate by appealing to religious feeling.

This was especially the case for Mr Subianto, a former special forces commander and son-in-law of the late dictator, Suharto (in power 1968-98), who emerged from the Jakarta campaign as the most credible challenger to Jokowi. He is an old-school, strongman who resented his loss to Jokowi in the 2014 presidential election and seems determined to run for president for a second time in 2019. Several senior opposition figures and members of the conservative Muslim faction appeared with Mr Subianto when Mr Baswedan declared victory, including the leaders of the Islamist Prosperous Justice Party (PKS) and Hary Tanoesoedibjo, the patron of the Indonesian Unity Party (Perindo).

Party support in Indonesia tends to be fluid and in 2019 the parties will support the strongest candidate, but the Jakarta election revealed the low level of tolerance for minority rights and freedom of expression among Indonesia's moderate Muslim majority. They are prepared to uphold these democratic rights in theory, but in practice tolerance is limited. The archipelago's draconian blasphemy law, which has often been used to suppress freedom of expression, is a firm reminder of its strong religious identity.

to 42nd in 2017, while Indonesia slid to 68th position from 48th. Democracy in Indonesia suffered a setback following the mayoral polls in Jakarta, the capital, in which the incumbent governor, Basuki Tjahaja Purnama (known as Ahok), who comes from a minority community, was arrested for alleged blasphemy. Indonesia's stringent blasphemy law has often been used to limit freedom of expression. The rise of conservative religious ideologies also affected India. The strengthening of right-wing Hindu forces in an otherwise secular country led to a rise of vigilantism and violence against minority communities, particularly Muslims, as well as other dissenting voices.

Meanwhile, Myanmar (ranked 120th), Cambodia (ranked 124th) and Vietnam (ranked 140th) sank deeper into authoritarianism as each country dropped significantly in the 2017 rankings compared with 2016. Myanmar's repression of the minority Rohingya Muslim community and the refugee crisis in mid-to-late 2017 revealed the still strong influence of nationalist Bamar Buddhists on the government. From late August 2017 (and in the weeks thereafter) 600,000 Rohingya Muslims fled Rakhine state, on the western coast of Myanmar, as the army conducted indiscriminate clearance operations against suspected Muslim insurgents. In particular, this led to a significant deterioration in the country's *civil liberties* score.

Cambodia scored poorly in *electoral process and pluralism* following the forced dissolution of the main opposition party in November 2017, which turned the country into a *de facto* one-party state. There were a few improvements in the region, such as Fiji, which improved from 89th to 81st position in the global ranking, and Nepal (from 102nd to 94th). Nepal successfully held a series of local and provincial elections under the constitution that was ratified in 2015. In South Korea a popular movement eventually led to the impeachment of the then president, Park Geun-hye, who was found guilty of embezzlement. South Korea ranked 20th in 2017, improving from 24th in 2016. Australia (ranked 8th) and Taiwan (ranked 33rd) both legalised gay marriage in 2017. However, the lesbian, gay, bi-sexual and transgender (LGBT) community continues to face significant difficulties in other parts of Asia.

Leaders consolidate power

In countries as diverse as Japan (ranked 23rd in our latest assessment), the Philippines (ranked 51st) and China (ranked 139th), there was a consolidation of power by the country's leaders. In China President Xi Jinping further entrenched his power by writing his theoretical contribution to the Chinese Communist Party's ideology, dubbed "Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era" (or "Xi Jinping Thought"), into the party's constitution. As an eponymous ideology, it gives Mr Xi a status comparable with the two other "paramount" Chinese party leaders, Mao Zedong and Deng Xiaoping.

In Japan the prime minister, Shinzo Abe, secured his fourth term in office in a landslide election win. His party, the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP), remains predominant in the legislature. Relative weakness in the *political participation* and *political culture* scores has kept Japan as a "flawed democracy"; the decline from being a "full democracy" occurred in 2016. Finally, the indefinite declaration of martial law in the southern state of Mindanao in the Philippines, and the rule of country's strongman leader, Rodrigo Duterte, adversely affected the quality of democracy in the Philippines. Mr Duterte has led the way among the many Asian countries that are infringing democratic values.

Eastern Europe

Eastern Europe has traditionally recorded low scores in the Democracy Index. A weak political culture, a chaotic transition, difficulties in creating institutions aimed at safeguarding the rule of law and persistent, endemic corruption create a difficult bedrock for democracy. In some countries the population eschews liberal values that are widely held in western Europe, such as LGBT rights for example, and favours conservative policies and strong leaders. In 2017 the majority of the countries in

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the region (17 out of 28) experienced a deterioration in their scores. Five countries stagnated and six countries improved, albeit often from a low base. The regional average score fell to its lowest ever level, at 5.40 (compared with 5.43 in 2016 and 5.76 in 2006, when the index was first constructed).

Eastern Europe continues to present a mixed picture: 12 countries are characterised as “flawed democracies” (the 11 EU member states plus Serbia); nine have “hybrid regimes” (the western Balkan states other than Serbia, Ukraine, Moldova, Armenia, Georgia and the Kyrgyz Republic); and the remainder are authoritarian states (Russia, Belarus, Azerbaijan and all central Asian countries except for the Kyrgyz Republic). Two countries experienced changes in categories this year. Moldova was

Eastern Europe 2017

	Overall score	Global Rank	Regional rank	I Electoral process and pluralism	II Functioning of government	III Political participation	IV Political culture	V Civil liberties	Regime type
Estonia	7.79	=30	1	9.58	7.86	6.11	6.88	8.53	Flawed democracy
Czech Republic	7.62	34	2	9.58	6.43	6.67	6.88	8.53	Flawed democracy
Slovenia	7.50	36	3	9.58	6.79	6.67	6.25	8.24	Flawed democracy
Lithuania	7.41	37	4	9.58	5.71	6.11	6.25	9.41	Flawed democracy
Latvia	7.25	40	5	9.58	5.71	5.56	6.88	8.53	Flawed democracy
Slovakia	7.16	44	6	9.58	6.79	5.56	5.63	8.24	Flawed democracy
Bulgaria	7.03	47	7	9.17	6.43	7.22	4.38	7.94	Flawed democracy
Poland	6.67	=53	8	9.17	6.07	6.11	4.38	7.65	Flawed democracy
Hungary	6.64	=56	9	8.75	6.07	4.44	6.88	7.06	Flawed democracy
Croatia	6.63	58	10	9.17	6.07	5.56	5.00	7.35	Flawed democracy
Romania	6.44	64	11	9.17	5.71	5.00	4.38	7.94	Flawed democracy
Serbia	6.41	=66	12	8.25	5.36	6.11	5.00	7.35	Flawed democracy
Albania	5.98	77	13	7.00	4.71	5.56	5.00	7.65	Hybrid regime
Moldova	5.94	78	14	7.50	4.64	6.11	4.38	7.06	Hybrid regime
Georgia	5.93	79	15	8.67	4.29	6.11	5.00	5.59	Hybrid regime
Ukraine	5.69	=83	16	6.17	3.21	6.67	6.25	6.18	Hybrid regime
Montenegro	5.69	=83	17	6.08	5.36	5.56	4.38	7.06	Hybrid regime
Macedonia	5.57	88	18	6.50	5.00	5.56	3.75	7.06	Hybrid regime
Kyrgyz Republic	5.11	=95	19	6.58	2.93	6.67	4.38	5.00	Hybrid regime
Bosnia and Hercegovina	4.87	=101	20	6.50	2.93	5.00	3.75	6.18	Hybrid regime
Armenia	4.11	111	21	5.25	2.86	5.00	1.88	5.59	Hybrid regime
Russia	3.17	135	22	2.17	1.79	5.00	2.50	4.41	Authoritarian
Belarus	3.13	138	23	0.92	2.86	3.89	5.63	2.35	Authoritarian
Kazakhstan	3.06	141	24	0.50	2.14	4.44	4.38	3.82	Authoritarian
Azerbaijan	2.65	148	25	0.50	2.14	3.33	3.75	3.53	Authoritarian
Uzbekistan	1.95	158	26	0.08	1.86	2.22	5.00	0.59	Authoritarian
Tajikistan	1.93	=159	27	0.08	0.79	1.67	6.25	0.88	Authoritarian
Turkmenistan	1.72	162	28	0.00	0.79	2.22	5.00	0.59	Authoritarian

Source: The Economist Intelligence Unit.

downgraded from a “flawed democracy” to a “hybrid regime” as a result of problematic elections. By contrast, Armenia moved from the authoritarian category to a “hybrid regime” as a result of constitutional changes that shifted power from the presidency to parliament.

“Flawed democracies” fall further

Among the “flawed democracies” in the region, every country except Bulgaria experienced a fall in its score in 2017. The main cause was a decline in public confidence in governments and political parties. Poland, the biggest country in this group, was in the spotlight in 2017 (see box). Since being elected to office in late 2015 the Polish government, led by the nationalist, right-wing, conservative Law and Justice (PiS) party, has instigated a series of contentious reforms that have undermined the country’s democratic institutions. The government has subordinated the Constitutional Tribunal, which rules on the constitutionality of laws, into a politically pliant body; replaced the management of state-controlled media and the civil service; exerted greater control over the funding of civic organisations; passed a law restricting the freedom of assembly; and changed the rules governing the appointment of judges.

Romania also experienced a sharp decline in its score, reflecting continuing attempts by the ruling coalition to weaken the independence and effectiveness of the judiciary and to block the efforts of some bodies tackling corruption. In January 2017 the government tried unsuccessfully to pass an emergency ordinance to decriminalise minor corruption offences. In May the Judiciary Committee of the Senate (the upper house of parliament) introduced amendments to a draft law that would have softened the sentences of corruption offenders. Amendments to the criminal procedure codes that would limit liability for corruption offences are being debated in parliament. So far, civil society has been the main obstacle to the implementation of these measures.

Serbia also experienced a decrease in its score compared with 2016, reflecting the informal consolidation of power in the hands of the president, Aleksandar Vucic, the weakness of the political opposition, a poorly functioning parliament and a deterioration in media freedom. The Serbian Progressive Party dominates the legislative and executive branches and controls the judiciary. Alleged electoral violations in the 2017 presidential election caused mass protests. The underlying problems of Serbian democracy include an unsatisfactory system of checks and balances, a low level of participation in politics, including in elections, and a media that are financially constrained, insufficiently robust, heavily controlled by the government and prone to self-censorship.

The fight against corruption proves contentious

Some of the region’s “hybrid regimes” recorded improvements in their score in 2017, notably Albania and Macedonia. However, much remains to be done for this group of countries to advance to the category of “flawed democracies”. In another “hybrid regime”, Ukraine, the clash between vested interests (who have enjoyed the benefits of being in power for decades) and reformist forces is central to its future progress. Tensions between the National Anti-Corruption Bureau (NACB)—which is broadly independent—and other law-enforcement agencies—which are widely considered as close to the government—have emerged as a key area of conflict between reformist forces and vested interests. So far not a single investigation of the NACB has led to a conviction. Yet Petro Poroshenko,

Poland pushes on with its “illiberal” reform agenda

In November 2017 the European Parliament approved a resolution on Poland’s breach of the rule of law, taking the first step towards triggering Article 7—which is designed to deter serious violations of European fundamental values—of the EU treaties. Such a move could lead to hefty fines or a suspension of Poland’s voting rights within the bloc. Poland’s ally Hungary, which is led by a self-styled “illiberal democrat”, Viktor Orban, has said that it would block the triggering of Article 7. The conflict illustrates the growing divide between the EU’s leading advocates of liberal, cosmopolitan values and East European countries such as Poland, Hungary and others which look to the nation state, history and tradition as the basis for their more conservative values. Some see this conflict as one between democracy and anti-democracy, but Mr Orban and his allies see it as a cultural war between one conception of democracy and another.

The European Parliament raised several concerns in its resolution, in particular about the independence of Poland’s judiciary. It also referred to Poland’s failure to comply with a European Court of Justice (ECJ) order to suspend large-scale logging in the Bialowieza Forest, restrictions placed on the availability of contraception and abortion, and the

November 11th independence march in Warsaw, the capital, at which extremist organisations displayed xenophobic symbols. In late December the European Commission announced that it would propose that the European Council starts rule-of-law proceedings against Poland. Earlier in 2017 the European Parliament adopted a similar Article 7 resolution regarding Hungary. At the time, Poland and Hungary pledged to veto any such action against each other. The case against Hungary remains stuck, and a similar fate awaits the Polish measure.

Rather than back down, the Polish government may even harden its uncompromising stance, because it is ideologically committed to the policies it is pursuing. The PiS leader, Jaroslaw Kaczynski, believes that his main mission is to implement institutional change in Poland. He insists that the state remains captive to the former communist nomenklatura, which according to him is now seeking to retain its elite status by helping the EU to erode national sovereignty. That agenda is encouraged by polls showing that support for the PiS is at record highs, whereas support for the pro-European opposition continues to decline. The PiS is also benefiting from a booming economy. The governing party is also using its fight with the EU to consolidate its conservative-nationalist voter base.

the president, cannot allow the NACB to be stripped of its independence, as this would provoke international condemnation.

The Kyrgyz Republic experienced its first peaceful, orderly and democratic transfer of power when Sooronbai Zheenbekov was elected as the new president in 2017. Mr Zheenbekov's win brought to an end an intense election campaign, during which concern was expressed by international observers and opposition candidates that the government had been instructing government employees to vote for Mr Zheenbekov. According to Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) observers, the election ensured an orderly transition of power, but there were cases of misuse of "administrative resources" and concerns regarding vote buying.

There are few positive signs among the authoritarian countries of the region. In Russia public confidence in state institutions is very low, and the disconnect between the population and the political elite is very high. In the run-up to the March 2018 elections the authorities will be keen to show that they are tackling corruption, leading to possible high-profile arrests and trials, such as that of Aleksei Ulyukaev, a former economy minister, in December 2017. However, such legal cases mainly serve cosmetic purposes, and we expect that little will be done to increase transparency and fight corruption at the top political level.

Belarus, Azerbaijan and the four central Asian states (Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan) remain authoritarian dictatorships, whose leaders have stayed in place for decades. Belarus experienced a sharp deterioration in its score in 2017. Starting in February demonstrations took place in the capital, Minsk, and in several provincial cities. The cause was the threatened introduction of a so-called parasite tax, a tax on those employed for only part of the year, named to imply that these individuals were leeching off the state. We expect little improvement in the scores of these countries over the coming years, as little hope exists that any meaningful political opposition may at some point stand a chance of coming to power.

Sub-Saharan Africa

Reflecting the scant democratic progress made in Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) in recent years, the region's average score in the Democracy Index has remained relatively flat since 2011, but dipped again in 2017, to 4.35 (from 4.37 in 2016 and 4.38 in 2015). *Political participation* and *political culture* have improved over the past five years (albeit with a few notable exceptions), but this has been offset by deteriorating scores for *civil liberties* and the *functioning of government*. Moreover, while elections have become commonplace across much of the region, the regional score for electoral processes has remained persistently low, reflecting a lack of genuine pluralism in most countries.

The relatively unchanged average headline score for the region masks a mixed picture, in which a few significant score increases in 2017 helped to offset a wider trend of deterioration across much of the continent. Only 11 countries out of the 44 recorded any improvement in their overall score, eight were unchanged, and so the majority, 25, suffered a deterioration in their democratic credentials. There was one star performer, The Gambia, which was upgraded from being among the world's most authoritarian regimes to being a "hybrid democracy". The country's score also rose by more than any other country in the entire 2017 index, and by a considerable margin.

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Sub-Saharan Africa 2017

	Overall score	Global Rank	Regional rank	I Electoral process and pluralism	II Functioning of government	III Political participation	IV Political culture	V Civil liberties	Regime type
Mauritius	8.22	16	1	9.17	8.21	5.56	8.75	9.41	Full democracy
Cabo Verde	7.88	=23	2	9.17	7.86	6.67	6.88	8.82	Flawed democracy
Botswana	7.81	28	3	9.17	7.14	6.11	7.50	9.12	Flawed democracy
South Africa	7.24	41	4	7.42	7.50	8.33	5.00	7.94	Flawed democracy
Ghana	6.69	52	5	8.33	5.71	6.67	6.25	6.47	Flawed democracy
Lesotho	6.64	=56	6	9.17	5.00	6.67	5.63	6.76	Flawed democracy
Namibia	6.31	=71	7	5.67	5.36	6.67	5.63	8.24	Flawed democracy
Senegal	6.15	74	8	7.50	6.07	4.44	6.25	6.47	Flawed democracy
Zambia	5.68	85	9	6.17	5.00	3.89	6.88	6.47	Hybrid regime
Mali	5.64	86	10	7.42	3.93	4.44	6.25	6.18	Hybrid regime
Benin	5.61	87	11	6.50	5.36	5.00	5.63	5.59	Hybrid regime
Malawi	5.49	=89	12	6.58	4.29	4.44	6.25	5.88	Hybrid regime
Tanzania	5.47	91	13	7.00	5.00	5.00	5.63	4.71	Hybrid regime
Liberia	5.23	93	14	7.42	2.57	5.56	5.00	5.59	Hybrid regime
Kenya	5.11	=95	=15	3.50	5.36	6.67	5.63	4.41	Hybrid regime
Madagascar	5.11	=95	=15	6.08	3.57	5.56	5.63	4.71	Hybrid regime
Uganda	5.09	98	17	5.25	3.57	3.89	6.88	5.88	Hybrid regime
Burkina Faso	4.75	103	18	4.42	4.29	4.44	5.63	5.00	Hybrid regime
Sierra Leone	4.66	=105	19	6.58	1.86	3.33	6.25	5.29	Hybrid regime
Nigeria	4.44	109	20	6.08	4.64	3.33	3.75	4.41	Hybrid regime
Gambia	4.06	113	21	4.48	3.93	3.33	5.63	2.94	Hybrid regime
Mozambique	4.02	115	22	4.42	2.14	5.00	5.00	3.53	Hybrid regime
Côte d'Ivoire	3.93	116	23	4.42	2.14	3.33	5.63	4.12	Authoritarian
Mauritania	3.82	121	24	3.00	3.57	5.00	3.13	4.41	Authoritarian
Niger	3.76	122	25	5.25	1.14	3.33	4.38	4.71	Authoritarian
Comoros	3.71	123	26	4.33	2.21	4.44	3.75	3.82	Authoritarian
Angola	3.62	125	27	1.75	2.86	5.56	5.00	2.94	Authoritarian
Gabon	3.61	=126	=28	2.58	2.21	4.44	5.00	3.82	Authoritarian
Cameroon	3.61	=126	=28	4.00	2.86	3.89	4.38	2.94	Authoritarian
Ethiopia	3.42	129	30	0.00	3.57	5.56	5.63	2.35	Authoritarian
Congo (Brazzaville)	3.25	132	31	3.17	2.50	3.89	3.75	2.94	Authoritarian
Rwanda	3.19	=133	32	0.83	5.00	2.78	4.38	2.94	Authoritarian
Zimbabwe	3.16	136	33	0.50	2.00	4.44	5.63	3.24	Authoritarian
Guinea	3.14	137	34	3.50	0.43	4.44	4.38	2.94	Authoritarian
Togo	3.05	142	35	3.17	0.79	2.78	5.00	3.53	Authoritarian
Swaziland	3.03	144	36	0.92	2.86	2.22	5.63	3.53	Authoritarian
Djibouti	2.76	145	37	0.42	1.79	3.33	5.63	2.65	Authoritarian
Eritrea	2.37	=151	38	0.00	2.14	1.67	6.88	1.18	Authoritarian
Burundi	2.33	153	39	0.00	0.43	3.89	5.00	2.35	Authoritarian
Guinea-Bissau	1.98	157	40	1.67	0.00	2.78	3.13	2.35	Authoritarian
Equatorial Guinea	1.81	161	41	0.00	0.43	2.78	4.38	1.47	Authoritarian
Democratic Republic of Congo	1.61	163	42	0.50	0.71	2.22	3.75	0.88	Authoritarian
Central African Republic	1.52	164	43	2.25	0.00	1.11	1.88	2.35	Authoritarian
Chad	1.50	165	44	0.00	0.00	1.11	3.75	2.65	Authoritarian

Source: The Economist Intelligence Unit.

There were significant changes in the category of *electoral process* in 2017; the average score for the region improved from 4.20 in 2016 to 4.31. However, some countries still face major challenges in this area. Kenya and Liberia found their respective elections to be extremely testing periods, with first-round results of presidential polls becoming mired in legal challenges and the threat of constitutional crisis. In both contests the prospect of an opposition figure achieving government was high (and eventually happened in Liberia), but the chances of a smooth electoral process were blighted by unclear, unestablished and unaccepted institutional mechanisms for dealing with electoral disputes. The same was the case for The Gambia in a contested December 2016 presidential election, where the impasse was resolved only in early 2017 by external military intervention, not domestic institutions.

The only other category which registered an improved score in 2017 was *political participation*, with an increase from 4.26 to 4.32. Legislatures and cabinets have more women, populations turned out to vote in greater numbers in some elections, and electronic media are making it easier for people to follow politics. However, the picture is highly varied, with some populations finding their willingness to get involved in politics being obstructed. Notably, demonstrations have become more difficult to attend in some places, with security forces taking a harder line on a growing number of protesters demanding political reform.

Star performer: The Gambia

In 2017 The Gambia moved from an “authoritarian regime” to a “hybrid regime” after the country underwent its first ever democratic transfer of power. This brought to an end 22 years of rule by Yahya Jammeh, a dictator who suppressed political freedoms, centralised powers within his ethnic group and relied heavily on the military to instil fear in the population. In terms of ranking within the region, The Gambia jumped from 36th in 2016 to 21st place in 2017. Globally, The Gambia now ranks 113th, up from 143rd, the biggest rise of any country in 2017.

Improvements apply to all categories of the index, but the most significant one were in *electoral process*. During most of Mr Jammeh’s tenure elections were farcical—characterised by an uneven playing field that overwhelmingly benefited the incumbent as well as the intimidation of the media, electoral officials and

voters to ensure the ballot returned him to power. But by the time of the 2016 election, despite fear tactics, popular grievances proved strong enough to lead to a massive shift in support away from Mr Jammeh and towards an opposition that was more co-ordinated and confident than had previously been the case. The transition of power was messy; Mr Jammeh initially accepted the result but then backtracked and ignored pressure to step down. He left office—and the country—only in late January 2017, after troops from the Economic Community of West African States, a regional bloc, intervened with a direct but bloodless military incursion.

The improvements in The Gambia’s score in other categories of the index were more modest. Reforms improving accountability and the functioning of government have been instituted and many restrictions on media and personal freedoms have been rolled back. However, the development of a political culture that supports democracy will take time.

Tying in with this, the aggregate score for *civil liberties* also dropped in 2017, partly reflecting attacks on the media and on freedom of expression by governments. The score for the *functioning of government* remains the region's weakest category, with an average score of 3.36, down from a score of 3.48 in 2016. There have long been glaring shortcomings in this area. In many countries accountability within government is weak or entirely absent; there are too few checks and balances on executives; corruption is endemic; the civil service is unskilled; and cronyism and patronage often trump efficiency in the eyes of policymakers. Confidence in government tends to be very low. No country except The Gambia improved in any aspect of the category, and several countries saw their scores for the *functioning of government* decline, either owing to a further lapse in accountability—as was the case in Mauritania, where the Senate and High Court were both disbanded—or, most commonly, worsening perceptions of corruption.

The Middle East and North Africa (MENA)

After a year of stagnation in 2016 there was a small regression in the state of democracy in the MENA region in 2017. The average regional score declined from 3.56 in 2016 to 3.54 in 2017. As in previous years, the region was characterised by a concentration of absolute monarchies, the existence of other authoritarian regimes and the prevalence of military conflicts. As in 2016, five of the 15 lowest-ranked countries in the world come from MENA, with Syria still occupying the second-lowest spot, above only North Korea. Syria's president, Bashar al-Assad, is still unacceptable to the opposition forces, despite their weakened state, and shows little desire to ease his tactics of violence and repression. Moreover, political instability across the region continued to weigh on democratic progress in 2017, with a number of countries slipping further into authoritarian practices as several regimes intensified their crackdown on the media and freedom of speech.

The primary example of this trend came as a result of the Gulf dispute, in which Qatar has been boycotted by Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, the UAE and Egypt over issues with its foreign policy—notably its alleged support for regional Islamist groups. The UAE authorities brought in a law making it illegal to publicly criticise the boycott. Qatar's authorities also tightened media restrictions and increased arrests of political opponents.

Bahrain's score has worsened following an intensifying crackdown on the political opposition, which was exemplified by the reintroduction of military courts to try opponents. Meanwhile, the brief resignation of Lebanon's prime minister, Saad Hariri, which has increased the likelihood of further delays to the electoral schedule, was also partly the result of the deepening regional rivalry between Saudi Arabia and Iran, owing to the Islamic Republic's rising military and political influence in the country via the Shia proxy group, Hizbullah. As a result, Lebanon has dropped to the fourth-ranked country regionally, below Morocco.

Even among the highest-ranked countries in the region there was little improvement. Indeed, Israel—which remains the top-ranked regionally—fell one place globally to 30th. In addition, the score for Tunisia, the only other “flawed democracy” in the region and often highlighted as a

Middle East & North Africa 2017

	Overall score	Global Rank	Regional rank	I Electoral process and pluralism	II Functioning of government	III Political participation	IV Political culture	V Civil liberties	Regime type
Israel	7.79	=30	1	9.17	7.50	8.89	7.50	5.88	Flawed democracy
Tunisia	6.32	=69	2	6.00	5.71	7.78	6.25	5.88	Flawed democracy
Morocco	4.87	=101	3	5.25	4.64	4.44	5.63	4.41	Hybrid regime
Lebanon	4.72	104	4	3.50	2.57	7.22	5.63	4.71	Hybrid regime
Palestine	4.46	108	5	3.83	2.50	7.78	4.38	3.82	Hybrid regime
Iraq	4.09	112	6	4.33	0.07	7.22	5.00	3.82	Hybrid regime
Jordan	3.87	=117	7	3.58	4.29	3.89	4.38	3.24	Authoritarian
Kuwait	3.85	119	8	3.17	4.29	3.89	4.38	3.53	Authoritarian
Algeria	3.56	128	9	2.58	2.21	3.89	5.00	4.12	Authoritarian
Egypt	3.36	130	10	3.58	3.21	3.33	3.75	2.94	Authoritarian
Qatar	3.19	=133	11	0.00	4.29	2.22	5.63	3.82	Authoritarian
Oman	3.04	143	12	0.00	3.93	2.78	4.38	4.12	Authoritarian
Bahrain	2.71	146	13	0.83	3.21	2.78	4.38	2.35	Authoritarian
United Arab Emirates	2.69	147	14	0.00	3.57	2.22	5.00	2.65	Authoritarian
Iran	2.45	150	15	0.00	3.21	4.44	3.13	1.47	Authoritarian
Libya	2.32	154	16	1.00	0.36	1.67	5.63	2.94	Authoritarian
Sudan	2.15	155	17	0.00	1.79	2.78	5.00	1.18	Authoritarian
Yemen	2.07	156	18	0.00	0.00	4.44	5.00	0.88	Authoritarian
Saudi Arabia	1.93	=159	19	0.00	2.86	2.22	3.13	1.47	Authoritarian
Syria	1.43	166	20	0.00	0.00	2.78	4.38	0.00	Authoritarian

Source: The Economist Intelligence Unit.

democratic bright spot following the 2011 Arab Spring, continues to fall, with pressure on democratic representatives by members of the former regime increasingly influencing policymaking.

This typifies the lack of genuine progress towards democracy in the wake of the Arab Spring. The power vacuums left by the overthrow of long-standing dictators often filled by either civil wars, as in Libya and Yemen, or the rise of new strongmen in their place, as in Egypt. There was, however, an improvement in Iran's score in 2017, which saw it climb four places to 150th globally as a result of consistently high voter turnout in recent elections.

Importantly, several recent developments have so far failed to result in score changes but could lead to changes in 2018. For example, the Libyan authorities have tentatively scheduled parliamentary and presidential elections for 2018, and the Iraqi government defeated Islamic State, thus reasserting sovereignty over parts of the country previously out of its control.

Freedom of speech under attack

Media freedom around the world has fallen to its lowest level since we began producing the Democracy Index in 2006, and restrictions on freedom of speech have become commonplace even in developed democracies. In this section we explain why freedom of speech is the most important freedom of all and a prerequisite for establishing a healthy democracy. We will examine how and where freedom of expression is endangered globally, focusing first on the broad trends that have emerged or been consolidated over the past year. We will also discuss the particular challenges confronting free speech and media freedom in the seven regions covered by the Democracy Index.

In recognition of the importance of defending freedom of expression for all, this year we have produced a Media Freedom Index and ranking for the 167 countries covered by the Democracy Index. The Media Freedom Index is compiled on a scale of 0-10 based on five indicators from the *civil liberties* category of the Democracy Index. Scores of 9 and 10 denote that a country's media (including print, broadcast and social media) are fully free; scores of 7 and 8 indicate that they are partly free; scores of 5 and 6 mean that the media are largely unfree; and scores of 0 to 4 signify that the media are unfree.

Media freedom around the world, 2017

	No. of countries	% of countries	% of world population
Fully free	30	18.0	11.0
Partly free	40	24.0	34.2
Largely unfree	50	29.9	18.9
Unfree	47	28.1	35.9

Note: Based on five indicators from the *civil liberties* category of the Democracy Index. On a scale of 0-10, whereby 9 and 10 = fully free; 7 and 8 = partly free; 5 and 6 = largely unfree; 0 to 4 = unfree.

Source: The Economist Intelligence Unit.

According to our media freedom ranking, only 30 countries out of the 167 covered by the Democracy Index—18% of the total, representing 11% of the world's population—are classified as “fully free” (see table above). These countries have free electronic and print media; there are few restrictions on freedom of expression and protest; there is robust media coverage and dissenting views are represented; and there are no political restrictions on access to the internet. Another 40 countries, representing 24% of all countries and 34.2% of the world's population, are classified as “partly free”. This means that the media in these countries are pluralistic but that the state or a handful of private owners have significant influence over or dominate the media; that minority or dissenting viewpoints are not adequately represented and/or that libel laws heavily restrict freedom of expression; that media coverage is not robust and self-censorship is prevalent; and that there are some restrictions on freedom of the internet.

Some 97 countries in our Media Freedom Index are rated as “unfree” or “largely unfree”. This means that 58% of countries—and more than one-half of the world's population—do not have access to a

free or partially free media and are prevented from exercising their right to freedom of conscience and expression.

Our media freedom ranking correlates closely with our overall Democracy Index ranking, in which 76 countries—45.5% of the total and 49.3% of the world’s population—are classified as “full” or “flawed” democracies. The figures for the countries in which the media are classified as “fully free” or “partly free” are only slightly lower. This correlation is apposite, as freedom of expression is a sine qua non of democracy and for this reason is the most important component of our *civil liberties* category. It follows that those countries which are classified as “largely unfree” or “unfree” in our media freedom ranking almost always fall into the “hybrid regime” or “authoritarian regime” categories in our Democracy Index, although there are some notable exceptions.

Media freedom ranking, 2017

	score	rank	media freedom status
Australia	10	1	fully free
Canada	10	1	fully free
Denmark	10	1	fully free
Finland	10	1	fully free
Iceland	10	1	fully free
Ireland	10	1	fully free
Luxembourg	10	1	fully free
New Zealand	10	1	fully free
Sweden	10	1	fully free
United States	10	1	fully free
Austria	9	11	fully free
Belgium	9	11	fully free
Chile	9	11	fully free
Estonia	9	11	fully free
France	9	11	fully free
Germany	9	11	fully free
Israel	9	11	fully free
Jamaica	9	11	fully free
Latvia	9	11	fully free
Lithuania	9	11	fully free
Mauritius	9	11	fully free
Netherlands	9	11	fully free
Norway	9	11	fully free
Papua New Guinea	9	11	fully free
Portugal	9	11	fully free
Spain	9	11	fully free
Switzerland	9	11	fully free

Media freedom ranking, 2017

	score	rank	media freedom status
Taiwan	9	11	fully free
United Kingdom	9	11	fully free
Uruguay	9	11	fully free
Argentina	8	31	partly free
Botswana	8	31	partly free
Cabo Verde	8	31	partly free
Costa Rica	8	31	partly free
Cyprus	8	31	partly free
Czech Republic	8	31	partly free
Dominican Republic	8	31	partly free
Italy	8	31	partly free
Japan	8	31	partly free
Malta	8	31	partly free
Namibia	8	31	partly free
Panama	8	31	partly free
Romania	8	31	partly free
Slovakia	8	31	partly free
Slovenia	8	31	partly free
South Africa	8	31	partly free
Timor-Leste	8	31	partly free
Trinidad and Tobago	8	31	partly free
Albania	7	49	partly free
Bangladesh	7	49	partly free
Bolivia	7	49	partly free
Brazil	7	49	partly free
Bulgaria	7	49	partly free
Burkina Faso	7	49	partly free
Croatia	7	49	partly free
Georgia	7	49	partly free
Greece	7	49	partly free
Guatemala	7	49	partly free
Guyana	7	49	partly free
India	7	49	partly free
Liberia	7	49	partly free
Macedonia	7	49	partly free
Mali	7	49	partly free
Nicaragua	7	49	partly free
Nigeria	7	49	partly free

Media freedom ranking, 2017

	score	rank	media freedom status
Paraguay	7	49	partly free
Peru	7	49	partly free
Philippines	7	49	partly free
South Korea	7	49	partly free
Suriname	7	49	partly free
Afghanistan	6	71	largely unfree
Benin	6	71	largely unfree
Bosnia and Hercegovina	6	71	largely unfree
Central African Republic	6	71	largely unfree
Colombia	6	71	largely unfree
Côte d'Ivoire	6	71	largely unfree
Ecuador	6	71	largely unfree
El Salvador	6	71	largely unfree
Fiji	6	71	largely unfree
Ghana	6	71	largely unfree
Haiti	6	71	largely unfree
Honduras	6	71	largely unfree
Hong Kong	6	71	largely unfree
Hungary	6	71	largely unfree
Indonesia	6	71	largely unfree
Iraq	6	71	largely unfree
Kenya	6	71	largely unfree
Kyrgyz Republic	6	71	largely unfree
Lebanon	6	71	largely unfree
Lesotho	6	71	largely unfree
Madagascar	6	71	largely unfree
Malawi	6	71	largely unfree
Mauritania	6	71	largely unfree
Mexico	6	71	largely unfree
Moldova	6	71	largely unfree
Mongolia	6	71	largely unfree
Montenegro	6	71	largely unfree
Nepal	6	71	largely unfree
Niger	6	71	largely unfree
Poland	6	71	largely unfree
Senegal	6	71	largely unfree
Serbia	6	71	largely unfree
Sierra Leone	6	71	largely unfree
Sri Lanka	6	71	largely unfree

Media freedom ranking, 2017

	score	rank	media freedom status
Tunisia	6	71	largely unfree
Uganda	6	71	largely unfree
Ukraine	6	71	largely unfree
Zambia	6	71	largely unfree
Algeria	5	109	largely unfree
Angola	5	109	largely unfree
Armenia	5	109	largely unfree
Comoros	5	109	largely unfree
Libya	5	109	largely unfree
Malaysia	5	109	largely unfree
Morocco	5	109	largely unfree
Mozambique	5	109	largely unfree
Pakistan	5	109	largely unfree
Palestine	5	109	largely unfree
Venezuela	5	109	largely unfree
Zimbabwe	5	109	largely unfree
Bhutan	4	121	unfree
Cameroon	4	121	unfree
Congo (Brazzaville)	4	121	unfree
Egypt	4	121	unfree
Gabon	4	121	unfree
Guinea-Bissau	4	121	unfree
Kuwait	4	121	unfree
Myanmar	4	121	unfree
Tanzania	4	121	unfree
Thailand	4	121	unfree
Togo	4	121	unfree
Cambodia	3	132	unfree
Chad	3	132	unfree
Guinea	3	132	unfree
Oman	3	132	unfree
Qatar	3	132	unfree
Singapore	3	132	unfree
Swaziland	3	132	unfree
Gambia	2	139	unfree
Jordan	2	139	unfree
Russia	2	139	unfree
Sudan	2	139	unfree

Media freedom ranking, 2017

	score	rank	media freedom status
UAE	2	139	unfree
Yemen	2	139	unfree
Bahrain	1	145	unfree
Burundi	1	145	unfree
Democratic Republic of Congo	1	145	unfree
Djibouti	1	145	unfree
Iran	1	145	unfree
Kazakhstan	1	145	unfree
Laos	1	145	unfree
Rwanda	1	145	unfree
Vietnam	1	145	unfree
Azerbaijan	0	154	unfree
Belarus	0	154	unfree
China	0	154	unfree
Cuba	0	154	unfree
Equatorial Guinea	0	154	unfree
Eritrea	0	154	unfree
Ethiopia	0	154	unfree
North Korea	0	154	unfree
Saudi	0	154	unfree
Syria	0	154	unfree
Tajikistan	0	154	unfree
Turkey	0	154	unfree
Turkmenistan	0	154	unfree
Uzbekistan	0	154	unfree

Note: Based on five indicators from the *civil liberties* category of the Democracy Index. On a scale of 0-10, whereby 9 and 10 = fully free; 7 and 8 = partly free; 5 and 6 = largely unfree; 0 to 4 = unfree.

Source: The Economist Intelligence Unit.

Free speech is the most important liberty of all

The Democracy Index regards freedom of expression as essential for democracy to take root and flourish. The quality of democracy in any country may in large measure be gauged by the degree to which freedom of speech prevails. Societies that do not tolerate dissent, heresy and the questioning of conventional wisdom cannot be “full democracies”.

As Timothy Garton Ash reminds us in his book *Free Speech: Ten Principles for a Connected World*, the link between free speech, democracy and good government is “a central tenet of Western liberal democracy”. In a democracy, individuals need to be able to hold their government to account in a

meaningful way. Freedom of expression is what allows us to become autonomous individuals who are able to engage with ideas and decide what we believe in.

Freedom of speech, access to information and a free media are necessary for good governance because these freedoms enable voters to follow, question, criticise and exercise control over their elected representatives and the government. Free speech is the means by which we can strive towards an understanding of the truth. Garton Ash cites Anthony Lewis (2016), who refers to free speech as “a search engine for the truth”. It is through the exchange of ideas, discussion, debate and argument that society establishes the values in which it believes. Free speech is therefore the most important liberty on which all others depend.

What is free speech, and should there be any limits on it? The clue is in the qualifying adjective “free”, which means that speech should not be qualified at all (except if it incites imminent violence or harm to others). Freedom of speech is a universal right, and it must be defended for all. As soon as freedom of expression is qualified, the question arises as to who is allowed to speak and who is not, what can be said and what cannot be said, and who decides all of these questions.

At issue is whether every opinion, no matter how unconventional, unpopular or just plain stupid, has a right to be expressed and whether we all have a right to hear it. When posed in this abstract way,

*“If liberty means anything at all, it means the right to tell people what they do not want to hear.” George Orwell, *The Freedom of the Press*, 1945.*

almost everyone will assent. However, as the English author George Orwell understood, once the question arises in relation to a concrete opinion, the answer often turns out to be no. In the UK, for example, some student union officials have sought to ban the gay rights activist Peter Tatchell and the feminist Germaine Greer, from speaking at their universities because of their

views on transgender issues. The feminist writer Julie Bindel has been no-platformed—formally banned from speaking on campus—by the National Union of Students (NUS) for her alleged transphobic views. According to an annual survey of free speech on UK campuses, in 2017 a total of 21 universities banned speakers from attending lectures, debates or speeches because their views were deemed to be offensive (Free Speech University Rankings, reported in *The Telegraph*, January 24th 2018).

When contemporary orthodoxies are challenged, the principle of free speech often comes under attack. But if speech is to be really free it must apply to those of dissenting opinion and to those whose views the majority finds objectionable. As the Polish-Jewish-German revolutionary Rosa Luxemburg said, free speech must mean “freedom for the other fellow”. She meant that a commitment to liberty requires us to defend “freedom for the one who thinks differently”. It is easy to uphold free speech for those with whom we agree, but the litmus test of a free society is whether it defends the freedom of expression of those with whom it disagrees.

Luxemburg’s insistence on the importance of defending freedom for “the other fellow” echoed the adage attributed to the French Enlightenment philosopher Voltaire by his English biographer, Evelyn Beatrice Hall, in her 1906 biography: “I detest what you say; I will defend to the death your right to say it.” Defending freedom of conscience and freedom of speech must mean defending the right of everyone without exception to say or write what he/she believes to be the truth.

New and old threats to media freedom and free speech

As noted by our sister publication, *The Economist*, on June 4th 2016, the advent of the internet and the proliferation of social media mean that we are living “in a golden age for free speech”. However, despite the enormous expansion of the possibilities of free speech, including via social media in authoritarian states, in practice freedom of expression is increasingly circumscribed and under attack. According to our media freedom ranking, in 2017 less than one-half of the global population had access to a free or partially free media and enjoyed the right to speak freely. Moreover, in many of those countries media freedom and freedom of expression were being eroded. Censorship is no longer the prerogative of authoritarian regimes; it is being deployed increasingly in the world’s democracies as well.

The internet age has brought new challenges and pressures for the global media industry. The old media business model that once supported the fourth estate has been in decline for decades. But in the past few years the problems confronting the traditional print media have become critical as people have increasingly moved to online and social media sources for their news. Traditional media, including newspapers, radio and television, remain important sources of news for many people, but the internet and social media platforms, such as Twitter and Facebook, have assumed much greater importance for the distribution of content. A survey published by the Pew Research Centre in September 2017 revealed that 67% of Americans said that they obtained at least some of their news from social media, up from 62% in 2016. Most of the increase was driven by older, less-educated, non-white Americans. This was the first time in Pew’s surveys that more than half (55%) of Americans aged 50 and older had reported getting news on social media sites (78% of those under 50 reported doing so, unchanged from 2016). Facebook is by far the most important source for those who get at least some of their news on social media, followed at some distance by YouTube.

Social media have transformed the business of news

The development of social media platforms such as Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, Instagram and Snapchat, and the development of search engines such as Google, have presented a major challenge to the economic viability of news publishers and broadcasters. Traditional print media have experienced a huge decline in circulation and revenue. For example, in the UK print circulation of the leading dailies fell from about 12m at the turn of the 21st century to an estimated 6m today. Online newspapers are now competing with each other and with social media sites for readership and advertising. Paywalls for online access to newspapers has created a new source of revenue, but newspapers also need advertising revenue and advertising earnings depend on how many readers they can attract to their websites. The shift in advertising revenue towards the internet has resulted in an increasing concentration of media markets. The economic impact on traditional media companies has resulted in huge changes, including a cull of journalists, which has had a negative impact on the quality of journalism especially in areas such as foreign news reporting.

Apart from the problems generated by new technology and social media, the media and free speech are under attack or at risk in three main ways: governments of all stripes are attacking, controlling

and regulating the media and clamping down on free speech; non-state actors are posing a growing danger to journalists, bloggers and free thinkers; and those who insist on their right not to be offended are stifling speech, enforcing conformity, creating “safe spaces” and encouraging self-censorship. Most worryingly, free speech is now under attack in different ways in the developed democracies, encouraging repressive regimes around the world to take their cue from the Western censors. In a subsequent section we look at the issues region by region, but below we outline the broader global trends.

State-led repression is the first threat to freedom of expression

Government repression of the media and suppression of free speech are nothing new. Journalists in non-democratic countries continue to be subject to traditional means of censorship, such as imprisonment and murder, but they are also increasingly hamstrung by legal threats and obstacles. In particular, governments are deploying defamation laws, prevention of terrorism laws, blasphemy and “hate speech” laws to curb freedom of expression and stymie media freedom.

Authoritarian governments routinely use blackouts of social media and the internet to prevent the flow of information and silence dissent. Examples from around the regions show the tendency of state authorities to curtail access to websites and social media applications at election times or during periods of political or social unrest. This prevents the free flow of information and makes it more difficult for the opposition to organise and the media to operate.

China, Middle Eastern autocracies, African dictatorships, Russia and Turkey all have a terrible track record in this respect. China’s president, Xi Jinping, has presided over a media crackdown since he took power in 2012, including tough censorship of social media and the arrest of hundreds of dissidents. Since the reversals suffered by the Arab Spring after 2012, the Middle East has once again become a byword for repression of the media and suppression of free speech. Africa’s dictators have always controlled the media, and little has changed on that score. The Russian state and its intermediaries control all the main TV news channels, and Russia is a dangerous place for media critics of the regime to practise their profession. Turkey, meanwhile, has become a vast prison for journalists, with hundreds languishing in the country’s jails because they are regarded as opponents of the president, Recep Tayyip Erdogan.

Governments also use their financial clout to exercise control over and influence the media. The examples of this are legion across many countries and continents. There have been many instances of governments using their influence to stop state bodies from subscribing to newspapers that are hostile to the authorities, placing adverts in them and even from providing them with official government information. Newspapers in many developing countries cannot afford to lose funding, given that many are struggling financially.

It is not just the usual suspects, however, who have been undermining media freedom. Western governments have introduced curbs on freedom of expression and restrictions on the electronic and print media, citing national security, the need to protect data privacy, the alleged preponderance of “fake news” and the spread of offensive material on social media platforms. The UK and France have

both paved the way for potential infringements of media freedom in the name of increased security. France criminalised “the defence of terrorism” in 2014 and has since enforced the law more stringently with every successive terrorist attack. In November 2017 France incorporated into law (in the form of a new counter-terrorism bill) many state-of-emergency powers, including giving the state the power to shut down places of worship for up to six months if it detects ideas, theories, sermons or activities that encourage or cause violence or acts of terrorism in France or abroad. The law has been widely criticised for its potential to undermine civil liberties, including freedom of expression.

The UK’s anti-terror laws have also been widely criticised for curbing the exercise of freedom of expression in the name of protecting public order and national security. A vague and wide definition of the term terrorism means that the law can be deployed to clamp down on a wide range of social and political protests. For example, recent legislation outlaws “indirect encouragement” or “other inducement” of terrorism. These imprecise and broad prohibitions have the potential to criminalise freedom of expression and could curb debate about issues of public interest.

An obsession with surveillance and a professed concern about violations of the right to the confidentiality of sources have also hobbled the media in several countries. The UK introduced a new data protection bill to parliament in December 2017 that will almost certainly undermine the ability of journalists to pursue investigative and public interest reporting. Clause 164 of the bill gives those being investigated the right to delay or stop journalistic reports before they are shown or published. At the same time the UK has passed one of the most draconian surveillance laws of any democracy, seriously undermining the rights of its citizens to privacy and freedom of expression.

Another way in which media freedom and free expression is being curbed today is through the use of libel and defamation laws. The US is a rare exception here. Its constitution gives strong protection to free speech, including insults and criticism of public figures. However, in most countries in Asia and many in Africa, Latin America and the Middle East defamation is in some cases a crime. This is also the case in Canada and in 23 EU member states. Most European countries have criminal defamation laws, and in many these carry terms of imprisonment. In many countries the law has been used to silence the media and prevent criticism of the authorities or prevent media probes into sensitive areas. Greece and Turkey are particularly promiscuous in their use of criminal defamation laws to constrain freedom of expression. Civil defamation laws are also widely used in Europe and represent a threat to media freedom and freedom of information. Many media outlets do not want to risk exorbitant claims for damages that would result in financial losses or even bankruptcy.

Organised crime, Islamists and other non-state actors also threaten freedom of speech

A second threat to free speech comes from unofficial, non-state actors. Compounding the hostile environment for free speech created by governments in many parts of the world, the increasing use of intimidation, threats, violence and murder by non-state actors is having a chilling effect on freedom of expression. This is a particular problem in parts of Latin America such as Mexico, where many journalists investigating organised crime and rampant corruption have been murdered. In the Mexican

state of Veracruz, for example, journalists have been killed with impunity by drug gangs. Ricardo Monlui became the 20th journalist to be murdered in Veracruz since 2000, when he was gunned down in March 2017 as he left a restaurant with his wife and children in Yanga, a small town near the city of Cordoba. The 57-year-old edited *El Politico*, a local newspaper in Cordoba, while also writing for other newspapers and running a Cordoba association of reporters and press.

Meanwhile, militant Muslims and Islamists have murdered people they believe have insulted the Prophet. In 1989 the Iranian Ayatollah Khomeini issued an Islamic directive, or fatwa, against Salman Rushdie, the author of *The Satanic Verses*, a novel which the Ayatollah claimed had insulted Islam. He invited Muslims everywhere to carry out the sentence; Mr Rushdie's Japanese translator was murdered in 1991; the killer was not caught.

In 2004 a Dutch-born Moroccan Muslim assassinated Theo van Gogh, a Dutch film producer, because his film *Submission*, which was made with the help of a Somali-born writer and activist, Ayaan Hirsi Ali, criticised the treatment of women in Islam. In his book *Tyranny of Silence*, Flemming Rose, a former editor of *Jyllands-Posten*, discusses the reaction to his newspaper's decision to publish cartoons of Muhammad in 2005, which led to the deaths of about 200 people around the world at the hands of Muslims saying they were offended by the depictions of the Prophet. "Taking offence has never been easier, or indeed more popular," says Rose. Since then Muslims purportedly acting in defence of Islam have been responsible for the massacre of 12 people at the French satirical weekly *Charlie Hebdo* in 2015 and the killing of countless other journalists, cartoonists, artists and bloggers around the world.

Freedom of expression is under threat from those who claim the right not to be offended

Finally, as discussed earlier, a growing body of opinion thinks that people and groups have a right not to be offended, and this is leading to the intrusive policing of social media to eradicate "hate speech" and silence and even prosecute offenders. As being offended is such a subjective thing, handing the power to some body or other to police it can result in the arbitrary and extensive exercise of censorship. The idea that some speech harms the listener has led to the creation of "safe spaces" on university campuses in the US and the UK into which students who do not wish to be exposed to words and ideas they do not like can retreat.

The offence-takers argue that they are for free speech but against "hate speech", which they say has nothing to do with free speech. When they demand that "hate speakers" be banned from university campuses they say that they are merely defending the rights of individuals or groups not to be assaulted by hateful words and the right of all students to feel safe. This habit of taking offence is creating a disturbing culture of politically correct conformism, in which certain ideas that are deemed to be offensive must be silenced.

The Framework Decision on Combating Racism and Xenophobia, which was adopted in 2008, requires all EU countries to criminalise "hate speech", and most have adopted "hate speech laws", which have been used extensively against individuals expressing racist, homophobic, misogynistic or bigoted

ideas. People have been arrested, fined and even jailed for publicly expressing views of this sort. Hate speech is an imprecise concept, and the law has been used to silence a wide range of political views.

Many of the advanced democracies have introduced new laws to protect people from alleged offensive speech on social media (including racist, misogynistic, and homophobic speech). As a result of its Nazi past, Germany is especially intolerant of those espousing offensive views and has among the most stringent anti-hate speech laws in the world. A new law which took effect in October 2017 requires social media companies in Germany with more than 2m users, including Facebook, Google (which owns YouTube) and Twitter, to delete illegal, racist or slanderous comments and posts within 24 hours of them being reported or risk being fined. The legislation shifts the burden of responsibility for policing the media from the courts on to the providers themselves. Social media platforms that were established to provide more free speech will end up having to censor their own services. Companies which persistently fail to address complaints by taking too long to delete illegal content (such as Nazi symbols, for example) will face fines that start at US\$5.7m and could rise as high as US\$50m.

One consequence of this growing intolerance of allegedly offensive speech is that it allows dictators and authoritarians to justify their own curbs on freedom of expression in similar terms and to accuse the West of double standards when it criticises their clampdowns on freedom of expression. China, for example, has jailed Tibetan independence campaigners for “inciting ethnic hatred”. In India, people can be locked up for up to three years for promoting disharmony on the grounds of religion, race or caste, for example. In Russia, the courts have imprisoned critics of the government’s policy in Ukraine for promoting “extremism”. When Westerners demand that offensive words be censored, they give encouragement to militant Islamists who justify their murderous activities on the grounds that their victims have insulted Islam.

The state of media freedom around the regions

North America

The US and Canada are both rated as “fully free” in our media freedom ranking, and North America has the top regional average score of any region. The US has free media, and its constitution provides strong legal protection for freedom of expression and free reporting. But press freedom in the US has nevertheless been under pressure owing to a variety of factors that predate the presidency of Donald Trump. The rise of the internet has weakened the financial basis of long-established media organisations; this has had a negative knock-on effect on the quality of local news coverage and in-depth investigative reporting. The polarisation of the media into outlets that pursue openly partisan agendas has undermined public trust. The media are one of the least trusted institutions in the US after Congress, according to polls by Gallup, Pew and others.

North America

	Score	Rank	Media freedom status
Canada	10	1	fully free
United States	10	1	fully free
Regional average	10	1	

Source: The Economist Intelligence Unit.

Mr Trump has been accused of pursuing a witch-hunt against journalists, although he has argued with some justification that some media outlets have pursued a vendetta against him from the moment he declared his candidacy for the presidency. He has repeatedly criticised sections of the media, and especially the TV news channel CNN, accusing them of deliberately spreading “fake news”.

No US president in recent memory has shown greater contempt for sections of the media than Mr Trump in his first months in office. Borrowing a term popularised by the Soviet leader, Joseph Stalin, Mr Trump has labelled some journalists as “enemies of the people”. A Trump adviser described journalists as “the opposition party”.

The president’s thin-skinned attacks on the media are out of keeping with the long US tradition of defending freedom of expression. So far, however, his attacks on sections of the media have not led to any concrete measures being taken to undermine media institutions. Also, he is not the only recent US president to harbour hostility towards the media. Several recent presidents have sought to limit their exposure to reporters, tried to bypass mainstream news outlets or made it difficult for the media to access government records under the Freedom of Information Act. The Obama administration pursued a crackdown on federal officials who leaked information to the press, and many journalists criticised excessive efforts to control access to the Obama White House.

Canada is fully free when it comes to the media and free speech, but not quite as free as the US. The electronic and print media are pluralistic and the print media have avoided high concentration levels of private ownership. Media coverage is robust and there is a diversity of opinion. Section two of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms says that freedom of expression is a “fundamental freedom”; but section one sets out the “reasonable limits” to that freedom, including incitement to violence.

However, there is concern that legislation against “terrorist propaganda”, or words that “promote” terrorism, could be used to infringe freedom of speech. Also, several sections of the criminal code forbid “hate speech” or “hate propaganda”. An act (Bill C-16, 2016) amending the Human Rights Act and the Criminal Code, so that they include gender expression and identity as protected rights, became law in June 2017. Free speech advocates such as Toronto psychology professor Jordan Peterson say that the law is a threat to freedom of speech because it will compel people to address others by their preferred gender pronouns. Censorship on campus has become a concern in Canada as in the US, as a result of the spread of “safe spaces” and “trigger warnings” and of campaigns by some students to ban certain speakers whom they accuse of holding “unacceptable” views.

Western Europe

Even in the most successful European democracies, some aspects of media freedom are coming under pressure or are being eroded. Most west European countries are ranked in our Media Freedom Index as fully free, and some are partly free. The regional average score, at 8.6, is the second-highest in the world, after North America. The regional average ranking is 19.6, dragged down by Turkey’s lowly 154th place. The other outliers are Cyprus, Italy and Malta; in the latter a female investigative journalist, Daphne Caruana Galizia, was killed in a car bomb attack in 2017. She wrote a popular blog exposing high-level political corruption, murky business deals and the activities of criminal gangs on the island. Malta’s score in the 2017 Democracy Index fell sharply.

Germany passed a new law in June 2017 giving the courts powers to fine social media platforms if they did not censor “offensive” and illegal content in a reasonable timescale. A year earlier Germany had passed a law extending the mass surveillance powers of the Federal Intelligence Agency (BND) without making any exception for journalists. The grounds cited for the new law was the need to combat terrorism, harmonise legislation and bring it into compliance with the constitution. The BND can now legally spy on all non-German and non-EU nationals, including journalists and lawyers. It turns out that this law has helped to legalise existing practices. A few months after its adoption Germans learned that the BND had already spied on at least 50 journalists and news media since 2000.

UK infringements of free speech

The UK in 2017 brought to parliament a new data protection law, one year after it too had adopted a new law extending the surveillance powers of the British intelligence agencies. Dubbed the Snoopers’ Charter, the Investigatory Powers Act 2016 is the most extreme surveillance legislation ever adopted in the UK. The law gives the intelligence forces unprecedented powers of surveillance and provides little protection to journalists or their sources. Even more alarming, in 2017 the Law Commission proposed a new Espionage Act, which would allow the courts to imprison journalists and others for up to 14 years

Western Europe

	Score	Rank	Media freedom status
Austria	9	11	fully free
Belgium	9	11	fully free
Cyprus	8	31	partly free
Denmark	10	1	fully free
Finland	10	1	fully free
France	9	11	fully free
Germany	9	11	fully free
Greece	7	49	partly free
Iceland	10	1	fully free
Ireland	10	1	fully free
Italy	8	31	partly free
Luxembourg	10	1	fully free
Malta	8	31	partly free
Netherlands	9	11	fully free
Norway	9	11	fully free
Portugal	9	11	fully free
Spain	9	11	fully free
Sweden	10	1	fully free
Switzerland	9	11	fully free
Turkey	0	154	unfree
United Kingdom	9	11	fully free
Regional average	8.6	19.6	

Source: The Economist Intelligence Unit.

for obtaining leaked information. Moreover, the UK has the harshest libel laws of any country, for which it is penalised in our media freedom scoring.

During the past year the trend towards the concentration of media ownership has continued apace in France, with the result that the links between journalists and political/economic interests have become closer. France provides a salutary reminder of how easily media independence can be compromised by such links, having experienced several conflicts of interest in recent years. Media pluralism and reliability of the news have been put in doubt.

In Turkey, a coup attempt in 2016 against the president, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, exacerbated an already terrible situation for independent, critical media. Under a state of emergency declared after the failed coup, dozens of outlets were shut down, thousands of journalists and media workers lost their jobs, and scores more were forbidden from leaving the country. According to the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ), Turkey had at least 130 journalists behind bars as of December 2017—the highest number in the world and about half the estimated global total of 262. The government also clamped down on the internet, blocking social media during the coup attempt and ordering websites perceived as critical to be blocked or taken down.

Latin America

Latin America has an average regional score of 6.8 in our media freedom ranking. The average score would be higher were it not for Cuba, which scores 0, and to a lesser extent Venezuela, which scores 5. Uruguay, the region's sole "full democracy", scores 9, putting it in joint 11th place in the global ranking. Journalists in Latin America face violence, lawsuits and harassment on a large scale. The pattern of extreme violence against journalists in several Latin American countries continued unabated in 2017. Brazil, Colombia, Honduras and Mexico are among the world's most dangerous places for journalists, and few of the crimes committed against journalists are investigated or prosecuted. El Salvador has traditionally recorded less violence against journalists despite its high overall murder rate, but intimidation of the media has increased there as well. Governments apply political pressure and obstruct journalists even in the more developed democracies, such as Uruguay and Chile, with the aim of suppressing coverage of corruption, embezzlement or conflicts of interest.

Latin America

	Score	Rank	Media freedom status
Argentina	8	31	partly free
Bolivia	7	49	partly free
Brazil	7	49	partly free
Chile	9	11	fully free
Colombia	6	71	largely unfree
Costa Rica	8	31	partly free
Cuba	0	154	unfree
Dominican Republic	8	31	partly free
Guatemala	7	49	partly free
Guyana	7	49	partly free
Ecuador	6	71	largely unfree
El Salvador	6	71	largely unfree
Haiti	6	71	largely unfree
Honduras	6	71	largely unfree
Jamaica	9	11	fully free
Mexico	6	71	largely unfree
Nicaragua	7	49	partly free
Panama	8	31	partly free
Paraguay	7	49	partly free
Peru	7	49	partly free
Suriname	7	49	partly free
Trinidad and Tobago	8	31	partly free
Uruguay	9	11	fully free
Venezuela	5	109	largely unfree
Regional average	6.8	52.9	

Source: The Economist Intelligence Unit.

The number of murders in Mexico has risen in recent years, especially for reporters covering police abuses, drug trafficking and governmental corruption. Corruption is rife in Mexico, and violent organised crime, especially at the local level, is endemic. In terms of level of risk for journalists, Mexico is nowadays only just behind Syria and Afghanistan. The targeting of journalists has resulted in more than 110 being killed since 2000, far more than could be expected to die in a major war zone over many years.

Brazil, which scores 7, is hardly a bastion of media freedom either, with many journalists receiving death threats (resulting in murder in several cases) and being subject to intimidation and harassment. In Brazil, as elsewhere in the region where impunity for crimes against journalists is standard, journalists try to protect themselves through self-censorship.

In Venezuela, which this year became an “authoritarian regime” in the Democracy Index, the government declared a state of emergency in response to political and social unrest in 2016 that persisted through 2017. The state frequently harasses and denies access to journalist trying to cover protests.

In Ecuador, which improved from a “hybrid regime” to a “flawed democracy” in the 2017 Democracy Index, there was some progress in enhancing freedom of expression, albeit in a modest way. This was a result of efforts by the new president, Lenín Moreno, to combat some of the excesses of his predecessor, Rafael Correa, especially with respect to press freedom. Mr Correa had a tumultuous relationship with the press, often accusing it publicly of bias and attacking journalists verbally and through his Twitter account. Following a decade of declining press freedom under Mr Correa, which included a 2013 Communications Law that restricted content and permitted the government to sue media outlets for their coverage (for instance for not providing news “in the public interest”), the Moreno administration has struck a more conciliatory tone. It plans to put forward a reform of the controversial communications law, which will mark a break from the antagonistic relationship between the executive and the fourth estate.

Asia and Australasia

Asia’s average regional score in our media freedom ranking is 5.5, and its average ranking is 79.4. Governments and powerful political and business interests in many Asian countries use defamation laws and related criminal provisions to punish criticism in the media, clamping down on critical commentary on social media. The rising pressure on social media platforms is troubling, given the shortage of independent reporting from the mainstream press in these countries. The Chinese authorities have imposed some of the region’s harshest penalties for negative online reporting as censors have become increasingly sensitive to criticism of the regime and the Communist Party of China (CCP) leadership, putting pressure on foreign news agencies and journalists as well as domestic critics.

The Asia-Pacific region is the third-worst violator of media freedom, after the MENA and SSA regions. In some ways, however, it is a far worse place in which to operate for journalists, bloggers and civil-rights activists. China, North Korea and Laos are black holes for independent news and

information. All three are authoritarian, communist regimes in which journalists have to follow the party line if they want to continue working.

In China and Vietnam dissenters are locked up in large numbers and on a far bigger scale than anywhere else (Turkey's recent clampdown on the media is comparable in its highly repressive treatment of journalists, who are accused of seeking to undermine or overthrow the president and the government). The region is also a very dangerous place for journalists, who face physical and death threats on a regular basis in countries such as Bangladesh, Pakistan and the Philippines. There

Asia & Australasia

	Score	Rank	Media freedom status
Afghanistan	6	71	largely unfree
Australia	10	1	fully free
Bangladesh	7	49	partly free
Bhutan	4	121	unfree
Cambodia	3	132	unfree
China	0	154	unfree
Fiji	6	71	largely unfree
Hong Kong	6	71	largely unfree
India	7	49	partly free
Indonesia	6	71	largely unfree
Japan	8	31	partly free
Laos	1	145	unfree
Malaysia	5	109	largely unfree
Mongolia	6	71	largely unfree
Myanmar	4	121	unfree
North Korea	0	154	unfree
Nepal	6	71	largely unfree
New Zealand	10	1	fully free
Pakistan	5	109	largely unfree
Papua New-Guinea	9	11	fully free
Philippines	7	49	partly free
Singapore	3	132	unfree
South Korea	7	49	partly free
Sri Lanka	6	71	largely unfree
Taiwan	9	11	fully free
Thailand	4	121	unfree
Timor-Leste	8	31	partly free
Vietnam	1	145	unfree
Regional average	5.5	79.4	

Source: The Economist Intelligence Unit.

have been hundreds of attacks in Bangladesh against journalists and bloggers, and several have been murdered.

In Pakistan the law penalises blasphemy and defamation, and the authorities have extensive powers to control and censor the media on the grounds of national security. Journalists are at risk from government, military and non-state actors and radical groups, and the threat of violence has a chilling effect on media coverage. India has also become a more dangerous place for journalists, especially the central state of Chhattisgarh and the northern state of Jammu and Kashmir. The authorities there have restricted freedom of the press, closed down several newspapers and heavily controlled mobile internet services. Several journalists were murdered in India in 2017, as in the previous year.

In the Philippines the president, Rodrigo Duterte, has castigated journalists and even issued death threats. The country has a history of repression of the media and violence against journalists. Mr Duterte has managed to make an already bad situation even worse for the media in the Philippines.

In Afghanistan, journalists are at constant risk because of a dangerous security situation resulting from the Taliban and Islamic State insurgencies, which have turned entire provinces into news and information “black holes.”

Eastern Europe

Many former Soviet republics are still ruled by dictators, who keep a tight grip on the news media. Five countries —Belarus, Azerbaijan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan—score 0 in our media freedom ranking, and are all ranked in joint last place at 154, along with the worst offenders in other regions (Turkey, Cuba, China, North Korea, Saudi Arabia, Syria, Equatorial Guinea, Eritrea, Ethiopia). Kazakhstan, on 1 point, and Russia, on 2 points, are not far off the bottom either, in 145th and 139th place respectively. The climate for free expression in Russia has become increasingly inhospitable. Ukraine scores 6 points in our media freedom ranking, having made gains in media freedom overall in recent years. However, restrictions on Russian outlets and attempts to foster “patriotic” reporting raise questions about the government’s commitment to media autonomy.

Even in eastern Europe’s most advanced democracies the media environment can be problematic. The highest scores are attained by Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania, with scores of 9 and a joint ranking of 11th. The Czech Republic, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia all score 8 and are ranked in joint 31st place. Several countries have scores of 7 (Bulgaria, Croatia, Georgia, Macedonia) and a rank of 49. Meanwhile two Visegrad countries, Hungary and Poland, score only 6 and are ranked in 71st place, having experienced a significant deterioration in their media freedom scores over the past year and more. Poland has brought public radio and TV broadcasters under state control and replaced their directors. Several independent publications which are critical of the government have been subjected to a state-led financial squeeze. The government has also been highly critical of foreign-controlled media organisations. A similar pattern of heavy-handed state interference in the media has been evident in Hungary in recent years, where the government, led by the Fidesz party, has been consolidating its control over the media since taking power in 2010. It has sold several media outlets to new owners who appear to have close government ties. The closure and subsequent sale of *Népszabadság*, one of

Eastern Europe

	Score	Rank	Media freedom status
Albania	7	49	partly free
Armenia	5	109	largely unfree
Azerbaijan	0	154	unfree
Belarus	0	154	unfree
Bosnia and Hercegovina	6	71	largely unfree
Bulgaria	7	49	partly free
Croatia	7	49	partly free
Czech Republic	8	31	partly free
Estonia	9	11	fully free
Georgia	7	49	partly free
Hungary	6	71	largely unfree
Kazakhstan	1	145	unfree
Kyrgyz Republic	6	71	largely unfree
Latvia	9	11	fully free
Lithuania	9	11	fully free
Macedonia	7	49	partly free
Moldova	6	71	largely unfree
Montenegro	6	71	largely unfree
Poland	6	71	largely unfree
Romania	8	31	partly free
Russia	2	139	unfree
Slovakia	8	31	partly free
Slovenia	8	31	partly free
Serbia	6	71	largely unfree
Tajikistan	0	154	unfree
Turkmenistan	0	154	unfree
Ukraine	6	71	largely unfree
Uzbekistan	0	154	unfree
Regional average	5.4	76.2	

Source: The Economist Intelligence Unit.

Hungary's oldest and most respected newspapers, revealed the government's intolerance of a critical press.

The Balkans have a worse track record than the Baltic and Central European countries. Successive governments in Serbia, for example, have sought to shape news coverage by exerting political influence over public broadcasters and being supportive of certain private outlets such as Pink TV that take a less critical anti-government line. The governing Serbian Progressive Party (SNS) of the president, Aleksandar Vucic, has taken an uncompromisingly hostile approach to news organisations that have been more outspoken against the government. It relies on the pro-government tabloid

Informer, which impugns journalists who have criticised the government, accusing them of being in the pay of foreigners or of having ties to organised crime. Previous Serbian governments have also been guilty of heavy-handed treatment of the media, but recent developments have contributed to a further deterioration in the quality of media coverage and in the status of freedom of expression in Serbia.

Sub-Saharan Africa

The Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) region has an average score of 4.8 in our media freedom ranking and an average ranking of 93.4. This is the second-worst global performance after the MENA region. Several African countries are at the bottom of the media freedom ranking: Equatorial Guinea, Eritrea and Ethiopia score 0 and Burundi, Djibouti and Rwanda score 1, while Sudan scores 2. All of these have autocratic regimes or brutal dictatorships and are classified in the Democracy Index as “authoritarian regimes”. All of them repress their people and crack down on the slightest sign of dissent.

Eritrea has consistently suppressed all divergence from the official state line. The media are at the mercy of the president, Isaias Afewerki, and his ruling clique. The Eritrean government continues to arrest and jail dozens of political prisoners and journalists arbitrarily.

Both Omar al-Bashir in Sudan and Teodoro Obiang Nguema in Equatorial Guinea have kept an iron grip on power by suppressing free speech and cracking down on the media if they do not fall into line. In Djibouti the president, Ismail Omar Guelleh, has inflicted harsh punishment on dissenters and ruled the media with an iron fist.

Ethiopia is one of the worst places in the world for media freedom. The authorities launch regular crackdowns on independent media and are especially intolerant of the media coverage of anti-government protests. Large numbers of journalists are imprisoned in Ethiopia.

Even the more enlightened regimes in the region are not averse to clamping down on the media and limiting freedom of expression. In Kenya, journalists routinely face harassment and intimidation while carrying out their work. Despite a recent lifting of anti-media laws, journalists can face criminal prosecution under security legislation, and violent attacks against media workers increased in the run-up to the country’s August 2017 elections.

Media freedom in South Africa—long considered one of the most open in Sub-Saharan Africa—deteriorated under the president, Jacob Zuma, and remains under pressure today. Freedom of expression is guaranteed in the constitution, but in practice it is circumscribed by legislation and by the actions of powerful interest groups. The Protection of State Information Bill (known as the Secrecy Bill), which has yet to become law, includes a very broad definition of the national security interest that has the potential to impose severe restrictions on media freedom to report on many issues. Bills on “hate” crimes and cyber security also infringe media freedom. The leadership of the public broadcaster, the South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC), has on occasion sought to restrict coverage of protests and has fired journalists who protested at the official censorship of the news. Powerful and often corrupt interest groups have also tried to restrict media freedom and prevent investigations of their activities by intimidating journalists.

DEMOCRACY INDEX 2017

FREE SPEECH UNDER ATTACK

Sub-Saharan Africa

	Score	Rank	Media freedom status
Angola	5	109	largely unfree
Benin	6	71	largely unfree
Botswana	8	31	partly free
Burkina Faso	7	49	partly free
Burundi	1	145	unfree
Cameroon	4	121	unfree
Chad	3	132	unfree
Cabo Verde	8	31	partly free
Central African Republic	6	71	largely unfree
Comoros	5	109	largely unfree
Congo (Brazzaville)	4	121	unfree
Democratic Republic of Congo	1	145	unfree
Côte d'Ivoire	6	71	largely unfree
Djibouti	1	145	unfree
Equatorial Guinea	0	154	unfree
Eritrea	0	154	unfree
Ethiopia	0	154	unfree
Gabon	4	121	unfree
Gambia	2	139	unfree
Ghana	6	71	largely unfree
Guinea	3	132	unfree
Guinea-Bissau	4	121	unfree
Kenya	6	71	largely unfree
Lesotho	6	71	largely unfree
Liberia	7	49	partly free
Madagascar	6	71	largely unfree
Malawi	6	71	largely unfree
Mali	7	49	partly free
Mauritania	6	71	largely unfree
Mauritius	9	11	fully free
Mozambique	5	109	largely unfree
Namibia	8	31	partly free
Niger	6	71	largely unfree
Nigeria	7	49	partly free
Rwanda	1	145	unfree
Senegal	6	71	largely unfree
Sierra Leone	6	71	largely unfree
South Africa	8	31	partly free
Sudan	2	139	unfree
Swaziland	3	132	unfree
Tanzania	4	121	unfree

Sub-Saharan Africa

	Score	Rank	Media freedom status
Togo	4	121	unfree
Uganda	6	71	largely unfree
Zambia	6	71	largely unfree
Zimbabwe	5	109	largely unfree
Regional average	4.8	93.4	

Source: The Economist Intelligence Unit.

The Gambia the newly elected president, Adama Barrow, has promised a “new era” following 22 years of authoritarian rule, raising hopes that he will overhaul suffocating media laws and rein in the intelligence agency’s notorious intimidation of journalists.

Governments across the region are increasingly encroaching on media freedom. There were numerous instances of clampdowns on free expression via the internet in 2017. This has taken several forms, ranging from subtly increasing regulatory powers over social media to wholesale internet shutdowns, as was the case in Togo and Cameroon.

The Middle East and North Africa

The Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region, with an average regional score of 3.6 and an average rank of 116.2, is the world’s worst region for press freedom, according to the Democracy Index classification of regions (which includes the mainly authoritarian Commonwealth of Independent States in a broader eastern European region). Journalists and media entities in countries such as Algeria, Bahrain, Iran, Morocco and the United Arab Emirates suffer harassment, threats and attacks, particularly regarding critical coverage of government officials. Meanwhile, the conflicts in Iraq, Syria and Yemen have made them the world’s deadliest places for journalists. Financial pressures have led to the closure of news outlets in countries such as Lebanon and Tunisia.

Many journalists have been imprisoned in Egypt and in Bahrain. Egyptian authorities restrict journalistic freedom in part through gag orders and censorship practices that suppress criticism of the president, Abdel Fattah el-Sisi, and other high-ranking officials. The military’s influence on news channels is significant, and the private media no longer have any independence.

Defence of religion, morality and the established order are the grounds usually given in the Middle East for violating media freedom. Iran imprisons journalists arbitrarily by the dozen on the pretext of combating “obscenity” or threats to national security. The Iranian regime imposes inhuman and medieval punishments such as flogging. For “insulting Islam”, Saudi Arabia sentenced the writer and dissident Raif Badawi to 600 lashes and seven years in prison in 2013, after being arrested in 2012 on charges such as “insulting Islam through electronic channels” and apostasy. In 2014 his sentence was increased to ten years in prison, 1,000 lashes and a fine.

Several regimes intensified their crackdown on the media and freedom of speech. In the Gulf states, this was a reaction to the dispute with Qatar, which has been boycotted by Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, the UAE and Egypt over its alleged sponsorship of regional Islamist groups. The UAE authorities brought in a law making it illegal to publicly criticise the boycott. The Qatar authorities also tightened media restrictions.

Middle East & North Africa

	Score	Rank	Media freedom status
Algeria	5	109	largely unfree
Bahrain	1	145	unfree
Egypt	4	121	unfree
Iran	1	145	unfree
Iraq	6	71	largely unfree
Jordan	2	139	unfree
Kuwait	4	121	unfree
Oman	3	132	unfree
Qatar	3	132	unfree
Jordan	2	139	unfree
Kuwait	4	121	unfree
Israel	9	11	fully free
Lebanon	6	71	largely unfree
Libya	5	109	largely unfree
Morocco	5	109	largely unfree
Palestine	5	109	largely unfree
Saudi	0	154	unfree
Syria	0	154	unfree
Tunisia	6	71	largely unfree
UAE	2	139	unfree
Yemen	2	139	unfree
Regional average	3.6	116.2	

Source: The Economist Intelligence Unit.

Appendix

Defining and measuring democracy

There is no consensus on how to measure democracy. Definitions of democracy are contested, and there is a lively debate on the subject. The issue is not only of academic interest. For example, although democracy promotion is high on the list of US foreign-policy priorities, there is no consensus within the US government as to what constitutes a democracy. As one observer put it: “The world’s only superpower is rhetorically and militarily promoting a political system that remains undefined—and it is staking its credibility and treasure on that pursuit,” (Horowitz, 2006, p. 114).

Although the terms “freedom” and “democracy” are often used interchangeably, the two are not synonymous. Democracy can be seen as a set of practices and principles that institutionalise, and thereby, ultimately, protect freedom. Even if a consensus on precise definitions has proved elusive, most observers today would agree that, at a minimum, the fundamental features of a democracy include government based on majority rule and the consent of the governed; the existence of free and fair elections; the protection of minority rights; and respect for basic human rights. Democracy presupposes equality before the law, due process and political pluralism. A question arises as to whether reference to these basic features is sufficient for a satisfactory concept of democracy. As discussed below, there is a question as to how far the definition may need to be widened.

Some insist that democracy is, necessarily, a dichotomous concept: a state is either democratic or not. But most measures now appear to adhere to a continuous concept, with the possibility of varying degrees of democracy. At present, the best-known measure is produced by the US-based Freedom House organisation. The average of its indexes, on a 1 to 7 scale, of *political freedom* (based on 10 indicators) and of *civil liberties* (based on 15 indicators) is often taken to be a measure of democracy.

The Freedom House measure is available for all countries, and stretches back to the early 1970s. It has been used heavily in empirical investigations of the relationship between democracy and various economic and social variables. The so-called Polity Project provides, for a smaller number of countries, measures of democracy and regime types, based on rather minimalist definitions, stretching back to the 19th century. These have also been used in empirical work.

Freedom House also measures a narrower concept, that of “electoral democracy”. Democracies in this minimal sense share at least one common, essential characteristic. Positions of political power are filled through regular, free and fair elections between competing parties, and it is possible for an incumbent government to be turned out of office through elections. Freedom House’s criteria for an electoral democracy include:

- 1) A competitive, multi-party political system.
- 2) Universal adult suffrage.
- 3) Regularly contested elections conducted on the basis of secret ballots, reasonable ballot security and the absence of massive voter fraud.

- 4) Significant public access of major political parties to the electorate through the media and through generally open political campaigning.

The Freedom House definition of political freedom is more demanding (although not much) than its criteria for electoral democracy—that is, it classifies more countries as electoral democracies than as “free” (some “partly free” countries are also categorised as “electoral democracies”). At the end of 2015, 125 out of 193 states were classified as “electoral democracies”; of these, on a more stringent criterion, 89 states were classified as “free”. The Freedom House political-freedom measure covers the electoral process and political pluralism and, to a lesser extent, the functioning of government and a few aspects of participation.

A key difference in measures is between “thin”, or minimalist, and “thick”, or wider, concepts of democracy (Coppedge, 2005). The thin concepts correspond closely to an immensely influential academic definition of democracy, that of Dahl’s concept of *polyarchy* (Dahl, 1970). Polyarchy has eight components, or institutional requirements: almost all adult citizens have the right to vote; almost all adult citizens are eligible for public office; political leaders have the right to compete for votes; elections are free and fair; all citizens are free to form and join political parties and other organisations; all citizens are free to express themselves on all political issues; diverse sources of information about politics exist and are protected by law; and government policies depend on votes and other expressions of preference.

The Freedom House electoral democracy measure is a thin concept. Its measure of democracy based on political rights and civil liberties is “thicker” than the measure of “electoral democracy”. Other definitions of democracy have broadened to include aspects of society and political culture in democratic societies.

The Economist Intelligence Unit measure

The Economist Intelligence Unit’s index is based on the view that measures of democracy which reflect the state of political freedoms and civil liberties are not thick enough. They do not encompass sufficiently, or, in some cases, at all, the features that determine how substantive democracy is. Freedom is an essential component of democracy, but not, in itself, sufficient. In existing measures, the elements of political participation and functioning of government are taken into account only in a marginal and formal way.

Our Democracy Index is based on five categories: *electoral process and pluralism*; *civil liberties*; the *functioning of government*; *political participation*; and *political culture*. The five categories are interrelated and form a coherent conceptual whole. The condition of holding free and fair competitive elections, and satisfying related aspects of political freedom, is clearly the *sine qua non* of all definitions.

All modern definitions, except the most minimalist, also consider civil liberties to be a vital component of what is often called “liberal democracy”. The principle of the protection of basic human rights is widely accepted. It is embodied in constitutions throughout the world, as well as in the UN

Charter and international agreements such as the Helsinki Final Act (the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe). Basic human rights include freedom of speech, expression and of the press; freedom of religion; freedom of assembly and association; and the right to due judicial process. All democracies are systems in which citizens freely make political decisions by majority rule. But rule by the majority is not necessarily democratic. In a democracy, majority rule must be combined with guarantees of individual human rights and the rights of minorities. Most measures also include aspects of the minimum quality of functioning of government. If democratically based decisions cannot be or are not implemented, then the concept of democracy is not very meaningful.

Democracy is more than the sum of its institutions. A democratic political culture is also crucial for the legitimacy, smooth functioning and, ultimately, the sustainability of democracy. A culture of passivity and apathy—an obedient and docile citizenry—is not consistent with democracy. The electoral process periodically divides the population into winners and losers. A successful democratic political culture implies that the losing parties and their supporters accept the judgment of the voters and allow for the peaceful transfer of power.

Participation is also a necessary component, as apathy and abstention are enemies of democracy. Even measures that focus predominantly on the processes of representative, liberal democracy include (albeit inadequately or insufficiently) some aspects of participation. In a democracy, government is only one element in a social fabric of many and varied institutions, political organisations and associations. Citizens cannot be required to take part in the political process, and they are free to express their dissatisfaction by not participating. However, a healthy democracy requires the active, freely chosen participation of citizens in public life. Democracies flourish when citizens are willing to participate in public debate, elect representatives and join political parties. Without this broad, sustaining participation, democracy begins to wither and become the preserve of small, select groups.

At the same time, even our thicker, more inclusive and wider measure of democracy does not include other aspects—which some authors argue are also crucial components of democracy—such as levels of economic and social wellbeing. Therefore, our Index respects the dominant tradition that holds that a variety of social and economic outcomes can be consistent with political democracy, which is a separate concept.

Methodology

The Economist Intelligence Unit's index of democracy, on a 0 to 10 scale, is based on the ratings for 60 indicators, grouped into five categories: *electoral process and pluralism*; *civil liberties*; the *functioning of government*; *political participation*; and *political culture*. Each category has a rating on a 0 to 10 scale, and the overall Index is the simple average of the five category indexes.

The category indexes are based on the sum of the indicator scores in the category, converted to a 0 to 10 scale. Adjustments to the category scores are made if countries do not score a 1 in the following critical areas for democracy:

1. Whether national elections are free and fair.
2. The security of voters.
3. The influence of foreign powers on government.
4. The capability of the civil service to implement policies.

If the scores for the first three questions are 0 (or 0.5), one point (0.5 point) is deducted from the index in the relevant category (either the *electoral process and pluralism* or the *functioning of government*). If the score for 4 is 0, one point is deducted from the *functioning of government* category index.

The index values are used to place countries within one of four types of regime:

1. Full democracies: scores greater than 8
2. Flawed democracies: scores greater than 6, and less than or equal to 8
3. Hybrid regimes: scores greater than 4, and less than or equal to 6
4. Authoritarian regimes: scores less than or equal to 4

Full democracies: Countries in which not only basic political freedoms and civil liberties are respected, but which also tend to be underpinned by a political culture conducive to the flourishing of democracy. The functioning of government is satisfactory. Media are independent and diverse. There is an effective system of checks and balances. The judiciary is independent and judicial decisions are enforced. There are only limited problems in the functioning of democracies.

Flawed democracies: These countries also have free and fair elections and, even if there are problems (such as infringements on media freedom), basic civil liberties are respected. However, there are significant weaknesses in other aspects of democracy, including problems in governance, an underdeveloped political culture and low levels of political participation.

Hybrid regimes: Elections have substantial irregularities that often prevent them from being both free and fair. Government pressure on opposition parties and candidates may be common. Serious weaknesses are more prevalent than in flawed democracies—in political culture, functioning of government and political participation. Corruption tends to be widespread and the rule of law is weak. Civil society is weak. Typically, there is harassment of and pressure on journalists, and the judiciary is not independent.

Authoritarian regimes: In these states, state political pluralism is absent or heavily circumscribed. Many countries in this category are outright dictatorships. Some formal institutions of democracy may exist, but these have little substance. Elections, if they do occur, are not free and fair. There is disregard for abuses and infringements of civil liberties. Media are typically state-owned or controlled by groups connected to the ruling regime. There is repression of criticism of the government and pervasive censorship. There is no independent judiciary.

The scoring system

We use a combination of a dichotomous and a three-point scoring system for the 60 indicators. A dichotomous 1-0 scoring system (1 for a yes and 0 for a no answer) is not without problems, but it has several distinct advantages over more refined scoring scales (such as the often-used 1-5 or 1-7). For

many indicators, the possibility of a 0.5 score is introduced, to capture “grey areas”, where a simple yes (1) or no (0) is problematic, with guidelines as to when that should be used. Consequently, for many indicators there is a three-point scoring system, which represents a compromise between simple dichotomous scoring and the use of finer scales.

The problems of 1-5 or 1-7 scoring scales are numerous. For most indicators under such systems, it is extremely difficult to define meaningful and comparable criteria or guidelines for each score. This can lead to arbitrary, spurious and non-comparable scorings. For example, a score of 2 for one country may be scored a 3 in another, and so on. Alternatively, one expert might score an indicator for a particular country in a different way to another expert. This contravenes a basic principle of measurement, that of so-called *reliability*—the degree to which a measurement procedure produces the same measurements every time, regardless of who is performing it. Two- and three-point systems do not guarantee reliability, but make it more likely.

Second, comparability between indicator scores and aggregation into a multi-dimensional index appears more valid with a two- or three-point scale for each indicator (the dimensions being aggregated are similar across indicators). By contrast, with a 1-5 system, the scores are more likely to mean different things across the indicators (for example, a 2 for one indicator may be more comparable to a 3 or 4 for another indicator). The problems of a 1-5 or 1-7 system are magnified when attempting to extend the index to many regions and countries.

Features of The Economist Intelligence Unit’s Index

Public opinion surveys

A crucial, differentiating aspect of our measure is that, in addition to experts’ assessments, we use, where available, public-opinion surveys—mainly the World Values Survey. Indicators based on the surveys predominate heavily in the *political participation* and *political culture* categories, and a few are used in the *civil liberties* and *functioning of government* categories.

In addition to the World Values Survey, other sources that can be leveraged include the Eurobarometer surveys, Gallup polls, Asian Barometer, Latin American Barometer, Afrobarometer and national surveys. In the case of countries for which survey results are missing, survey results for similar countries and expert assessment are used to fill in gaps.

Participation and voter turnout

After increasing for many decades, there has been a trend of decreasing voter turnout in most established democracies since the 1960s. Low turnout may be due to disenchantment, but it can also be a sign of contentment. Many, however, see low turnout as undesirable, and there is much debate over the factors that affect turnout and how to increase it.

A high turnout is generally seen as evidence of the legitimacy of the current system. Contrary to widespread belief, there is, in fact, a close correlation between turnout and overall measures of democracy—that is, developed, consolidated democracies have, with very few exceptions, higher turnouts (generally above 70%) than less established democracies.

The legislative and executive branches

The appropriate balance between these is much disputed in political theory. In our model, the clear predominance of the legislature is rated positively, as there is a very strong correlation between legislative dominance and measures of overall democracy.

The model

I Electoral process and pluralism

1. Are elections for the national legislature and head of government free?
 Consider whether elections are competitive in that electors are free to vote and are offered a range of choices.
 1: Essentially unrestricted conditions for the presentation of candidates (for example, no bans on major parties).
 0.5: There are some restrictions on the electoral process.
 0: A single-party system or major impediments exist (for example, bans on a major party or candidate).
2. Are elections for the national legislature and head of government fair?
 1: No major irregularities in the voting process.
 0.5: Significant irregularities occur (intimidation, fraud), but do not significantly affect the overall outcome.
 0: Major irregularities occur and affect the outcome.
 Score 0 if score for question 1 is 0.
3. Are municipal elections both free and fair?
 1: Are free and fair.
 0.5: Are free, but not fair.
 0: Are neither free nor fair.
4. Is there universal suffrage for all adults?
 Bar generally accepted exclusions (for example, non-nationals; criminals; members of armed forces in some countries).
 1: Yes.
 0: No.
5. Can citizens cast their vote free of significant threats to their security from state or non-state bodies?
 1: Yes.
 0: No.
6. Do laws provide for broadly equal campaigning opportunities?
 1: Yes.
 0.5: Formally, yes, but, in practice, opportunities are limited for some candidates.
 0: No.
7. Is the process of financing political parties transparent and generally accepted?

- 1: Yes.
0.5: Not fully transparent.
0: No.
8. Following elections, are the constitutional mechanisms for the orderly transfer of power from one government to another clear, established and accepted?
1: All three criteria are satisfied.
0.5: Two of the three criteria are satisfied.
0: Only one or none of the criteria is satisfied.
9. Are citizens free to form political parties that are independent of the government?
1: Yes.
0.5: There are some restrictions.
0: No.
10. Do opposition parties have a realistic prospect of achieving government?
1: Yes.
0.5: There is a dominant two-party system, in which other political forces never have any effective chance of taking part in national government.
0: No.
11. Is potential access to public office open to all citizens?
1: Yes.
0.5: Formally unrestricted, but, in practice, restricted for some groups, or for citizens from some parts of the country.
0: No.
12. Are citizens allowed to form political and civic organisations, free of state interference and surveillance?
1: Yes.
0.5: Officially free, but subject to some unofficial restrictions or interference.
0: No.

II Functioning of government

13. Do freely elected representatives determine government policy?
1: Yes.
0.5: Exercise some meaningful influence.
0: No.
14. Is the legislature the supreme political body, with a clear supremacy over other branches of government?
1: Yes.
0: No.
15. Is there an effective system of checks and balances on the exercise of government authority?

- 1: Yes.
0.5: Yes, but there are some serious flaws.
0: No.
16. Government is free of undue influence by the military or the security services.
1: Yes.
0.5: Influence is low, but the defence minister is not a civilian. If the current risk of a military coup is extremely low, but the country has a recent history of military rule or coups.
0: No.
17. Foreign powers and organisations do not determine important government functions or policies.
1: Yes.
0.5: Some features of a protectorate.
0: No (significant presence of foreign troops; important decisions taken by foreign power; country is a protectorate).
18. Do special economic, religious or other powerful domestic groups exercise significant political power, parallel to democratic institutions?
1: Yes.
0.5: Exercise some meaningful influence.
0: No.
19. Are sufficient mechanisms and institutions in place for ensuring government accountability to the electorate in between elections?
1: Yes.
0.5: Yes, but serious flaws exist.
0: No.
20. Does the government's authority extend over the full territory of the country?
1: Yes.
0: No.
21. Is the functioning of government open and transparent, with sufficient public access to information?
1: Yes.
0.5: Yes, but serious flaws exist.
0: No.
22. How pervasive is corruption?
1: Corruption is not a major problem.
0.5: Corruption is a significant issue.
0: Pervasive corruption exists.
23. Is the civil service willing to and capable of implementing government policy?

- 1: Yes.
 0.5: Yes, but serious flaws exist.
 0: No.
24. Popular perceptions of the extent to which citizens have free choice and control over their lives.
 1: High.
 0.5: Moderate.
 0: Low.
 If available, from World Values Survey
 % of people who think that they have a great deal of choice/control.
 1 if more than 70%.
 0.5 if 50-70%.
 0 if less than 50%.
25. Public confidence in government.
 1: High.
 0.5: Moderate.
 0: Low.
 If available, from World Values Survey, Gallup polls, Eurobarometer, Latinobarometer
 % of people who have a "great deal" or "quite a lot" of confidence in government.
 1 if more than 40%.
 0.5 if 25-40%.
 0 if less than 25%.
26. Public confidence in political parties.
 1: High.
 0.5: Moderate.
 0: Low.
 If available, from World Values Survey
 % of people who have a "great deal" or "quite a lot" of confidence.
 1 if more than 40%.
 0.5 if 25-40%.
 0 if less than 25%.

III Political participation

27. Voter participation/turn-out for national elections.
 (Average turnout in parliamentary elections since 2000. Turnout as proportion of population of voting age.)
 1 if above 70%.
 0.5 if 50%-70%.
 0 if below 50%.

- If voting is obligatory, score 0. Score 0 if scores for questions 1 or 2 is 0.
28. Do ethnic, religious and other minorities have a reasonable degree of autonomy and voice in the political process?
1: Yes.
0.5: Yes, but serious flaws exist.
0: No.
29. Women in parliament.
% of members of parliament who are women.
1 if more than 20% of seats.
0.5 if 10-20%.
0 if less than 10%.
30. Extent of political participation. Membership of political parties and political non-governmental organisations.
Score 1 if over 7% of population for either.
Score 0.5 if 4-7%.
Score 0 if under 4%.
If participation is forced, score 0.
31. Citizens' engagement with politics.
1: High.
0.5: Moderate.
0: Low.
If available, from World Values Survey
% of people who are very or somewhat interested in politics.
1 if over 60%.
0.5 if 40-60%.
0 if less than 40%.
32. The preparedness of population to take part in lawful demonstrations.
1: High.
0.5: Moderate.
0: Low.
If available, from World Values Survey
% of people who have taken part in or would consider attending lawful demonstrations.
1 if over 40%.
0.5 if 30-40%.
0 if less than 30%.
33. Adult literacy.

1 if over 90%.

0.5 if 70-90%.

0 if less than 70%.

34. Extent to which adult population shows an interest in and follows politics in the news.

1: High.

0.5: Moderate.

0: Low.

If available, from World Values Survey

% of population that follows politics in the news media (print, TV or radio) every day.

1 if over 50%.

0.5 if 30-50%.

0 if less than 30%.

35. The authorities make a serious effort to promote political participation.

1: Yes.

0.5: Some attempts.

0: No.

Consider the role of the education system, and other promotional efforts. Consider measures to facilitate voting by members of the diaspora.

If participation is forced, score 0.

IV Democratic political culture

36. Is there a sufficient degree of societal consensus and cohesion to underpin a stable, functioning democracy?

1: Yes.

0.5: Yes, but some serious doubts and risks.

0: No.

37. Perceptions of leadership; proportion of the population that desires a strong leader who bypasses parliament and elections.

1: Low.

0.5: Moderate.

0: High.

If available, from World Values Survey

% of people who think it would be good or fairly good to have a strong leader who does not bother with parliament and elections.

1 if less than 30%.

0.5 if 30-50%.

0 if more than 50%.

38. Perceptions of military rule; proportion of the population that would prefer military rule.

1: Low.

0.5: Moderate.

0: High.

If available, from World Values Survey

% of people who think it would be very or fairly good to have military rule.

1 if less than 10%.

0.5 if 10-30%.

0 if more than 30%.

39. Perceptions of rule by experts or technocratic government; proportion of the population that would prefer rule by experts or technocrats.

1: Low.

0.5: Moderate.

0: High.

If available, from World Values Survey

% of people who think it would be very or fairly good to have experts, not government, make decisions for the country.

1 if less than 50%.

0.5 if 50-70%.

0 if more than 70%.

40. Perception of democracy and public order; proportion of the population that believes that democracies are not good at maintaining public order.

1: Low.

0.5: Moderate.

0: High.

If available, from World Values Survey

% of people who disagree with the view that democracies are not good at maintaining order.

1 if more than 70%.

0.5 if 50-70%.

0 if less than 50%.

Alternatively, % of people who think that punishing criminals is an essential characteristic of democracy.

1 if more than 80%.

0.5 if 60-80%.

0 if less than 60%.

41. Perception of democracy and the economic system; proportion of the population that believes that democracy benefits economic performance.

If available, from World Values Survey

% of people who disagree with the view that the economic system is badly run in democracies.

- 1 if more than 80%.
 0.5 if 60-80%.
 0 if less than 60%.
42. Degree of popular support for democracy.
 1: High.
 0.5: Moderate.
 0: Low.
 If available, from World Values Survey
 % of people who agree or strongly agree that democracy is better than any other form of government.
 1 if more than 90%.
 0.5 if 75-90%.
 0 if less than 75%.
43. There is a strong tradition of the separation of Church and State.
 1: Yes.
 0.5: Some residual influence of Church on State.
 0: No.

V Civil liberties

44. Is there a free electronic media?
 1: Yes.
 0.5: Pluralistic, but state-controlled media are heavily favoured. One or two private owners dominate the media.
 0: No.
45. Is there a free print media?
 1: Yes.
 0.5: Pluralistic, but state-controlled media are heavily favoured. There is high degree of concentration of private ownership of national newspapers.
 0: No.
46. Is there freedom of expression and protest (bar only generally accepted restrictions, such as banning advocacy of violence)?
 1: Yes.
 0.5: Holders of minority viewpoints are subject to some official harassment. Libel laws heavily restrict scope for free expression.
 0: No.
47. Is media coverage robust? Is there open and free discussion of public issues, with a reasonable

- diversity of opinions?
1: Yes.
0.5: There is formal freedom, but a high degree of conformity of opinion, including through self-censorship or discouragement of minority or marginal views.
0: No.
48. Are there political restrictions on access to the Internet?
1: No.
0.5: Some moderate restrictions.
0: Yes.
49. Are citizens free to form professional organisations and trade unions?
1: Yes.
0.5: Officially free, but subject to some restrictions.
0: No.
50. Do institutions provide citizens with the opportunity to petition government to redress grievances?
1: Yes.
0.5: Some opportunities.
0: No.
51. The use of torture by the state.
1: Torture is not used.
0: Torture is used.
52. The degree to which the judiciary is independent of government influence.
Consider the views of international legal and judicial watchdogs. Have the courts ever issued an important judgement against the government, or a senior government official?
1: High.
0.5: Moderate.
0: Low.
53. The degree of religious tolerance and freedom of religious expression.
Are all religions permitted to operate freely, or are some restricted? Is the right to worship permitted both publicly and privately? Do some religious groups feel intimidated by others, even if the law requires equality and protection?
1: High.
0.5: Moderate.
0: Low.
54. The degree to which citizens are treated equally under the law.
Consider whether favoured groups or individuals are spared prosecution under the law.
1: High.
0.5: Moderate.

- 0: Low.
55. Do citizens enjoy basic security?
1: Yes.
0.5: Crime is so pervasive as to endanger security for large segments.
0: No.
56. Extent to which private property rights are protected and private business is free from undue government influence
1: High.
0.5: Moderate.
0: Low.
57. Extent to which citizens enjoy personal freedoms.
Consider gender equality, right to travel, choice of work and study.
1: High.
0.5: Moderate.
0: Low.
58. Popular perceptions on protection of human rights; proportion of the population that think that basic human rights are well-protected.
1: High.
0.5: Moderate.
0: Low.
If available, from World Values Survey:
% of people who think that human rights are respected in their country.
1 if more than 70%.
0.5 if 50-70%.
0 if less than 50%.
59. There is no significant discrimination on the basis of people's race, colour or religious beliefs.
1: Yes.
0.5: Yes, but some significant exceptions.
0: No.
60. Extent to which the government invokes new risks and threats as an excuse for curbing civil liberties.
1: Low.
0.5: Moderate.
0: High.

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