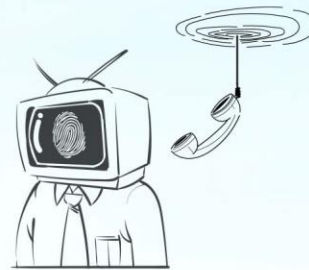




CENTRE for AEROSPACE & SECURITY STUDIES



Democracy in the 21st Century: Exploring Contemporary Trends

Shaza Arif

Research Associate

Working Paper



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Abstract

In the aftermath of the Cold War, a wave of democratisation, coined by American political scientist Samuel Huntington as the 'Third Wave' swept across the world. The wave refers to the transition of several non-democratic setups to democratic ones, promising a future where democratic ideals would grow. However, the present century has witnessed geopolitical events and developments that have impacted the ideals of governance worldwide. The paper aims to investigate contemporary trends of democracy prevalent in the world. It uses prominent democracy indices and reports like the Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem); Freedom in the World; Democracy Index; Bertelsmann Transformation Index and the Global State of Democracy report, to have better insights about the Third Wave of Democracy. It also highlights the major factors that are seemingly responsible for its existing status. The findings of the paper reveal that while democracy is seen as an ideal form of governance by many, two decades into the 21st Century, a large proportion of the world is struggling with the third wave in one form or the other. While several internal factors can trigger democratic decline, recurring coup attempts and the rise of far-right populism are accelerating the decline of the Third Wave of democratisation at the global level.

Keywords: Democracy, Third Wave, Democratic Trends, Coups d'État, Right Wing Populism.



Introduction

The onset of the 21st Century has unfolded an era of change where technological advancement, globalisation and new societal norms are profoundly shaping the world. Central, among other vital aspects, is the evolving nature of democracy. Democracy lacks a precise definition; however, for general understanding, the definition proposed by the Council of Europe can be useful. According to this definition, democracy is 'the government on behalf of all the people, according to their will.'¹ It is also described as 'a way of governing that depends on the will of the people.'² Similarly, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights highlights democracy by stating that 'the will of the people shall be the basis of the authority of government.'³

It should be noted that democracy is not a static or uniform concept; it varies across a spectrum from electoral democracy to liberal democracy. In electoral democracy, the primary focus is on appointing a government through the people's vote, which may include elements of authoritarianism. Conversely, liberal democracy gives equal attention to individual rights, the rule of law, and the limitation of powers, in addition to holding elections.⁴

Over the years, democracy has thrived and provided governance models for many states. However, in parallel, it has witnessed considerable setbacks. The present century is marked by both democratic advancements and an increase in authoritarianism, where the ideals of democracies are frequently tested. It is crucial to examine ongoing democratic trends, as explored in this *Working Paper*. Utilising Samuel Huntington's framework, which outlines three waves of democracy, the paper provides a succinct overview of the earlier waves. It then focuses on the trajectory of the third wave, analysing data from the latest indices and reports, including those of the Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem) Project, Freedom House, the Economist Intelligence Unit, the Bertelsmann Transformation Index, and the International IDEA's Global State of Democracy report. The paper also seeks to identify key trends

¹ Council of Europe, "Democracy," <https://www.coe.int/en/web/compass/democracy> [Accessed August 11, 2023].

² Ibid.

³ United Nations, "Universal Declaration of Human Rights," <https://www.un.org/en/about-us/universal-declaration-of-human-rights> [Accessed August 5, 2023].

⁴ Andreas Schedler, "Elections Without Democracy: Menu of Manipulation," *Journal of Democracy* 13, no. 2 (2002): 36-50, https://web.pdx.edu/~mev/PS475_FALL_19/Schedler_Elections%20Without%20Democracy.pdf.



associated with the decline in democracy. It concludes with a discussion that not only analyses these trends but also sets the stage for future research focused on identifying and addressing the underlying factors contributing to the current challenges to democracy.

This research is qualitative and relies on secondary data to assess the status of democracy. Data was collated from the globally well-recognised democracy indices and reports published between 2022-24, with key findings summarised to provide an overview of democratic trends. Sources for information on the underlying factors influencing democracy included books, reports, journal articles, and websites. Journal articles were identified through searches on Scopus and Google Scholar using the keywords 'Democracy,' 'Third Wave,' and '21st Century.' Thematic analysis was employed to analyse the data. To maintain a focused approach, the study limits itself to five reports. While these reports outline general trends, they do not review the comprehensive details of individual countries.

Waves of Democracy

In his book, *The Third Wave: Democratization in the Late Twentieth Century*, Samuel defines a democratic wave as 'A group of transitions from non-democratic to democratic regimes that occur within a specified period of time and that significantly outnumber transitions in the opposite directions during that period of time.'⁵ Table I gives a brief overview of the three waves of democracy:

⁵ Samuel P. Huntington, *The Third Wave: Democratization in the Late Twentieth Century* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1991), 15.



Table I: Waves of Democracy

	First Wave	Second Wave	Third Wave
Time Frames	1828-1926	1943-1962	Mid-1970 onwards
Notable Characteristics	<p>Granting the right to vote to 50 percent of the adult male population.</p> <p>Establishing a responsible Executive with majority support or chosen via periodic popular elections.</p>	<p>Allied forces actively promoted the establishment of democratic institutions in Italy, West Germany, Japan, Italy, Austria, and Korea. Likewise, democracy in Turkey, Greece, Uruguay, Argentina, Colombia, Peru, and Venezuela was also positively influenced by this wave.</p>	<p>The democratic tide manifested itself in different regions, including the Western Hemisphere, Southern Europe, Asia, Latin America, and even within the communist world.</p>
Democratic Countries	<p>Over nearly 100 years, 30 countries established democratic setups.</p>	<p>The wave peaked by 1962 when the figure of recognised democracies in the world reached 36</p>	<p>By 1990, approximately 45 percent of the world's 58 states were considered democratic.</p>
Democratic Countries	<p>By 1922, the global count of democracies had dwindled to a mere 29.</p>	<p>One-third of 32 working democracies in the world in 1958 had shifted to authoritarianism by the mid-1970s.</p>	<p>Will be discussed in the paper</p>

Source: Samuel P. Huntington, *The Third Wave: Democratization in the Late Twentieth Century* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1991), 16-18.

In the Middle East and North Africa region, the Arab Spring sparked optimism that a potential fourth wave of democracy may be on its way, akin to how democracy expanded in Europe after the breakup of the Soviet Union. However, the events that followed shortly after establishing new orders in those states proved otherwise. Either they went back to authoritarianism or fell into anarchy. The collapse of dictatorships in these areas has resulted in further instability. Apart from Tunisia, where a semi-



democratic setup managed to establish itself, democracy could not take root. Presently, there is a debate on the future of the third wave. Hence, it is pertinent to assess the present democratic trends to predict where the third wave is headed.

Measuring Democracy

Democracy or its associated values are inherently difficult to quantify, yet various methodologies have been employed by institutions to gauge democratic attributes. The research paper uses the latest well-recognised global democracy indices and reports used to assess the state of democracy across different countries:

- Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem)'s 'Democracy' Report
- Freedom House's 'Freedom in the World' Report
- Economist Intelligence Unit's (EIU) 'Democracy Index'
- Bertelsmann Foundation's 'Bertelsmann Transformation Index' (BTI)
- International IDEA's 'Global State of Democracy' Report

Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem)'s 'Democracy' Report

The Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem) Institute at the University of Gothenburg assembles one of the most comprehensive global datasets on democracy. It comprises more than 31 million data points for 202 countries spanning from 1789 to date.⁶ This collaborative project includes approximately 4,000 scholars and country experts, who evaluate numerous attributes of democracy. The V-Dem reports highlight that the most significant shifts in democracy have occurred predominantly within the last decade. These changes have regressed democratic progress by 35 years. Table II provides a detailed overview of democratic decline, measured in years:⁷

⁶ Evie Papada, Fabio Angiolillo, Lisa Gastaldi, Tamara Köhler et al., *Democracy Report 2023: Defiance in the Face of Autocratization*, report (University of Gothenburg: Varieties of Democracy Institute, 2023), https://www.v-dem.net/documents/29/V-dem_democracyreport2023_lowres.pdf.

⁷ Ibid., 9.



Table II: Democratic Decline

Area	Level of Declination
Global Level	1986 level
Asia-Pacific	1978 level
Eastern Europe	Pre-1990 level
Central Asia	Pre-1990 level
Latin America and Caribbean	1989 level

Source: Evie Papada, Fabio Angiolillo, Lisa Gastaldi, Tamara Köhler et al., *Democracy Report 2023: Defiance in the Face of Autocratization*, report (University of Gothenburg: Varieties of Democracy Institute, 2023, 10), https://www.v-dem.net/documents/29/V-dem_democracyreport2023_lowres.pdf.

Both the 2024 and 2023 V-Dem reports show a decline in freedom of expression in 35 countries.⁸ Populace living in 'autocratizing countries' continue to dominate considerably over those living in democratic countries. Eastern Europe and South and Central Asia continue to witness the greatest decline in democracy.⁹ Distribution of the global population across various types of regimes is shown in Table III:

Table III: World Populations Under Different Regimes

Percentage of World Population %	Figures	Regime
72	5.7 billion	Autocratic Regime
28	2.2 billion	Closed autocracies
44	3.5 billion	Electoral Autocracies
13	1 billion	Liberal democracies

Source: Papada, Angiolillo, Gastaldi, Köhler et al., *Democracy Report 2023*.

⁸ Marina Nord, Martin Lundstedt, David Altman, Fabio Angiolillo et al., *Democracy Report 2024: Democracy Winning and Losing at the Ballot*, report (University of Gothenburg: Varieties of Democracy, 2024), https://www.v-dem.net/documents/43/v-dem_dr2024_lowres.pdf.

⁹ Ibid.



In 2023, the number of liberal democracies was reported to have peaked at 44 in 2009 but since declined to 32. Strikingly, closed autocracies increased from 22 in 2012 to 33 in 2022 and remained at that level in 2023. The report underscored that only 16% of the world's population lived in electoral democracies.¹⁰ By 2024, 71% of the global population resided under autocratic regimes, 29% under electoral and liberal democracies, and 44% under electoral autocracies,¹¹ reflecting similar trends to the previous year.

The V-Dem 2023 report indicated the worsening state of freedom of speech. Up until 2022, freedom of expression had deteriorated in seven countries. By 2023, this number had escalated dramatically, with 35 countries experiencing a decline in freedom of expression. Additionally, government repression against civil society intensified in 37 countries over the past decade. Media censorship became stricter in 47 countries,¹² and the quality of election processes deteriorated in 30 countries. Only 2% of the global population experienced a shift toward democratisation, with the number of such states dropping to 14, the lowest since 1973.¹³ Conversely, the number of countries shifting towards autocracy increased from 33 in 2022 to 42 in 2023, affecting 46% of the global population, up from 36% the previous year.¹⁴ An intriguing trend noted in the 2023 report was the shift in global trade power towards autocracies. Data from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) revealed that the proportion of global trade between democracies, which peaked at 74% in 1988, declined to 47% by 2022. Democracies became more inclined to trade with autocracies, evidenced by an increase from 21% in 1999 to 35% in 2022. Moreover, autocracies increasingly traded among themselves, with their share of global trade tripling to 18% since 1992.¹⁵

The 2024 report continued to highlight freedom of expression as a major issue,¹⁶ impacting not only the media but society as a whole, particularly women.¹⁷ The quality

¹⁰ Papada, Angiolillo, Gastaldi, Köhler et al., *Democracy Report 2023*.

¹¹ Nord, Lundstedt, Altman, Angiolillo et al., *Democracy Report 2024*.

¹² Papada, Angiolillo, Gastaldi, Köhler et al., *Democracy Report 2023*, 9.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 7.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 19.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 34.

¹⁶ Nord, Lundstedt, Altman, Angiolillo et al., *Democracy Report 2024*, 6.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 16.



of elections continues to decline in 23 countries, and 42 countries are now undergoing autocratisation. Alarming, 7 out of 9 countries that were on the path to democratisation shifted away from this trajectory.¹⁸ Of the 60 countries with scheduled elections, 31 were noted as witnessing a decline in their democratic levels, with improvements seen in only 3.¹⁹

Overall, the V-Dem Democracy Reports for 2023 and 2024 revealed a concerning decline in democratic governance and an increase in autocratic tendencies worldwide, alongside significant shifts in global trade dynamics favoring autocracies.

Freedom House's 'Freedom in the World' Report

Freedom House's annual 'Freedom in the World' report is dedicated to evaluating freedom, particularly regarding government accountability. It assesses the status of freedom in 195 countries and 15 territories, using 25 indicators scored from 0 to 4. These scores accumulate to a maximum of 100 points, providing a comprehensive overview of global freedom. These indicators are grouped into two categories:

1. Political rights (0-40 points)
2. Civil liberties (0-60 points)

The combined scores from these indicators are used to classify each state as 'Free', 'Partly Free', or 'Not Free'.²⁰

According to the latest 2024 report, global freedom experienced its 18th consecutive year of decline, marked by significant deterioration across 52 countries, while only 21 countries saw improvements. Political rights and civil liberties were compromised, often due to flawed elections and escalating armed conflicts, which both endangered freedom and led to severe human suffering. Election-related issues like violence and manipulation were rampant; for example, in Ecuador, violent criminal groups disrupted elections, affecting the country's status from 'Free' to 'Partly Free'. Similarly, incumbents in countries like Cambodia, Guatemala, Poland, and Zimbabwe were noted as influencing electoral processes to hinder opposition and maintain power. Conversely, Thailand improved slightly due to more competitive elections, despite a military-drafted constitution influencing government formation. Furthermore, military

¹⁸ Nord, Lundstedt, Altman, Angiolillo et al., *Democracy Report 2024*, 7.

¹⁹ Ibid., 6.

²⁰ Freedom House, *Freedom in the World 2023*, report (Washington, D.C.: Freedom House, 2023), 2, https://freedomhouse.org/sites/default/files/2023-03/FIW_World_2023_DigitalPDF.pdf.



coups, notably in Niger, contributed to significant declines, continuing the trend of instability in Africa's Sahel region.

Armed conflicts and authoritarian threats decreased global safety and democracy, causing extensive harm and endangering freedoms. Notably, Nagorno-Karabakh faced a severe decline in freedom following a military offensive by Azerbaijan, leading to significant changes in its governance and demographic composition.²¹ The ongoing Russian-Ukraine war and conflicts in other regions like Myanmar and Sudan were discussed as regions with severe violence affecting civilians. The suppression of political rights and civil liberties, particularly in disputed territories, also continued to undermine freedom. Regions such as Crimea, the West Bank, Gaza Strip, and Indian Illegally Occupied Jammu & Kashmir saw intensified repression by both autocratic regimes and democratic governments like India, challenging the principles of democracy.²²

Unfortunately, the 2023 report had also painted an equally gloomy picture.²³ It had noted that 'freedom of media' and 'freedom of personal expression' had sharply declined since 2005.²⁴ In fact, it pointed out that approximately 38% of the global population lived in countries classified as 'Not Free', marking the highest proportion since 1997. In contrast, only 20% of the global population resided in countries considered 'Free.' This erosion of democracy was largely attributed to repeated coups and the actions of illiberal incumbents who undermined democratic institutions.²⁵ 2022 witnessed immense pressure on media freedom in at least 157 countries and territories amid incentives to self-censor online and offline content, invasions of privacy, and harassment, decreasing freedom of expression.²⁶ Journalists encountered persistent attacks from autocrats and their supporters, often receiving insufficient protection from intimidation even in democratic setups. The number of countries and territories, scoring 0 out of 4 on 'Personal Expression' hiked from 6 to 15 in the duration of 2005 to 2022.²⁷

²¹ Freedom House, *Freedom in the World 2024*, report (Washington, D.C.: Freedom House, 2024), https://freedomhouse.org/sites/default/files/2024-02/FIW_2024_DigitalBooklet.pdf.

²² Freedom House, *Freedom in the World 2024*.

²³ Freedom House, *Freedom in the World 2023*, 2.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 13.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 2.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 2.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 14.



While both the 2023 and 2024 reports highlighted some positive trends in states such as Lesotho, Slovenia, Kenya, Columbia, Maldives, Nepal, Thailand, Fiji, Mauritania and Liberia, breaches in freedom of expression were noted as pivotal drivers of the global decline in democracy.

Table IV provides a breakdown of the overall status of states as assessed by Freedom House:

Table IV: Freedom House Index 2024

Status	Country	Territories
Free	83	1
Partly Free	56	3
Not Free	56	11
Total	195	15

Source: Freedom House, *Freedom in the World 2024*, report (Washington, D.C.: Freedom House, 2024), https://freedomhouse.org/sites/default/files/2024-02/FIW_2024_DigitalBooklet.pdf.

Following is the regional breakdown:

Table V: Regional Breakdown

Region	Total Countries	Free %	Partly Free %	Not Free %
Africa	54	17	37	46
Americas	35		26	11
Asia-Pacific	39	44	35	21
Eurasia	12	-	33	67
Europe	42	81	17	2
Middle East	13	8	15	77

Source: Freedom House, *Freedom in the World 2024*, report (Washington, D.C.: Freedom House, 2024), https://freedomhouse.org/sites/default/files/2024-02/FIW_2024_DigitalBooklet.pdf.

Economist Intelligence Unit's 'Democracy Index'

Initiated in 2006, the Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU)'s 'Democracy Index' provides a comprehensive view of democracy across 165 states and two territories. Microstates are not included in this index. The categories used in the Index are as follows:



1. Electoral Process and Pluralism
2. Functioning of Government
3. Political Participation
4. Political Culture
5. Civil Liberties.²⁸

Using the scores assigned on a range of indicators within these categories, each country is categorised as a:

- A. Full Democracy
- B. Flawed Democracy
- C. Hybrid Regime
- D. Authoritarian Regime

Like the others, the Democracy Index for 2023, launched in February 2024, revealed a troubling year for democracy, as the average global score dropped to its lowest level since the index's inception in 2006. The annual index registered a decline in its total score from 5.29 in 2022 to 5.23. Less than 8% of the world's population lives in a full democracy, while nearly 40% resides under authoritarian regimes - a percentage that has been gradually increasing over recent years. Interestingly, the count of democracies rose by two in 2023, with Paraguay and Papua New Guinea moving from 'hybrid regimes' to 'flawed democracies.' Angola saw an improvement, being elevated to a 'hybrid regime' and Greece advanced to a 'full democracy' status, though Chile was downgraded to a 'flawed democracy'. The rise in violent conflicts significantly impacted the global democracy score, hindering any recovery from the pandemic years of 2020-22. According to the EIU, world democracies appear powerless in preventing wars across the globe based on analysis of the relationship between

²⁸ Economist Intelligence Unit, *Democracy Index 2022: Frontline Democracy and the Battle for Ukraine*, report (New York: Economist Intelligence Unit, 2023), 1, <https://pages.eiu.com/rs/753-RIQ-438/images/DI-final-version-report.pdf>.



democracy, war, and peace and the geopolitical drivers of conflict. The index also explained shifts in global rankings and provided a detailed regional overview.²⁹

In 2022, 59 countries were classified as 'authoritarian regimes', while 36 were classified as 'hybrid regimes', marking an increase from the previous year's figure of 34.³⁰ Although more countries were able to improve their score in 2022, i.e., 75 compared with 47 but over half of the countries, i.e., 92 either declined or remained in their previous position vis-a-vis the average index score.³¹ Except for Western Europe, whose score boosted decisively, the scores for other regions remained relatively stable and did not alter remarkably, either positively or negatively. Russia was among the foremost states performing poorly. Moreover, Belarus also experienced a significant decline in its Democracy Index score.³² Similarly, Burkina Faso in West Africa, witnessed a considerable decline. In Latin America, notable shifts were observed with negative changes in El Salvador and Mexico. Meanwhile, in terms of absolute score and year-on-year score, the Middle East and North Africa scored the worst amongst all regions. Countries such as Tunisia, Iraq and Jordan also scored considerably low in the index for 2023 and 2022.

Bertelsmann Foundation's 'Bertelsmann Transformation Index' (BTI)

Since 2004, the Bertelsmann Stiftung's 'Bertelsmann Transformation Index' (BTI) has conducted periodic assessment of the quality of democracy, economic performance and governance worldwide. The evaluation is made via comprehensive country reports with the combined effort of 250-300 experts from renowned universities and think tanks from 120 countries.³³ The review period for the edition launched in March 2024 was from 1 February 2021 through 31 January 2023. It revealed that nearly a third of the 137 countries surveyed exhibited the lowest levels of political participation opportunities ever recorded by the BTI. Over the past two years, elections in 25 countries have become less free and fair. The rights to assembly and association in 32 states were increasingly restricted, and freedom of expression in 39 countries faced tighter controls. The 2024 BTI indicated that autocracies continued to gain ground,

²⁹ Economist Intelligence Unit, *Democracy Index 2023: Age of Conflict*, report (New York: Economist Intelligence Unit, 2024), https://www.eiu.com/n/campaigns/democracy-index-2023/?utm_source=eiU-website&utm_medium=blog&utm_campaign=democracy-index-2023.

³⁰ Economist Intelligence Unit, *Democracy Index 2022*, 3.

³¹ Economist Intelligence Unit, *Democracy Index 2022*, 4.

³² *Ibid.*, 6.

³³ Hauke Hartmann and Peter Thiery, *Resilience Wearing Thin*, report (Gütersloh: Bertelsmann Stiftung, 2022), 26, https://bti-project.org/BTI_2022_Global_Findings.pdf.



while countries governed democratically faced setbacks as seen in Bangladesh and Mozambique.³⁴ 74 developing and transition countries, home to four billion people, were governed by autocratic regimes. Alarming, only 67 democratic governments were listed in 2022 Index with 70 autocratic regimes,³⁵ while the 2021 Index had featured 74 democracies and 63 autocratic regimes.

The 2024 report identified 45 regimes, ranging from Cambodia to Venezuela to Zimbabwe, that were at the bottom of the efficiency scale. These regimes were characterised by widespread disorganisation and corruption and predominantly ruled with an iron fist. While there were a few autocratic regimes that managed to demonstrate efficient governance, they remained rare exceptions. According to the 2024 BTI, over the past decade, 80 countries³⁶ have seen a decline in their ability and willingness to foster consensus, representing the most significant deterioration in good governance observed in recent times.

Despite these challenges, some democracies had managed to withstand external pressures. The Baltic States, along with South Korea, Costa Rica, Chile, and Uruguay, exemplify successful democratic transformations. According to the 2024 report, to combat the erosion of democratic norms, robust institutions and oversight mechanisms such as the judiciary, parliament, and media are crucial. Recent elections in East-Central and Southeastern European countries like Czechia, Moldova, North Macedonia, Poland, and Slovenia, as well as in Latin American nations like Brazil, Guatemala, and Honduras, demonstrated that change could be achieved through free and (partially) fair elections.³⁷

Interestingly, as per BTI 2022, over the last decade, approximately one out of every five democracies experienced a gradual erosion in its democratic values.³⁸ This group included states previously classified as stable or established democracies - Serbia, Hungary, Bulgaria and India. Poland and Brazil also fell into this category at that time.³⁹ According to the 2022 Index, seven countries were classified as autocracies in the sub-Saharan Africa region. This group included Tanzania, Madagascar, Guinea,

³⁴ Bertelsmann Stiftung, *BTI 2024 Transformation Index*, report (Gütersloh: Bertelsmann Stiftung, 2024), https://bti-project.org/BTI_2024_Executive_Summary.pdf.

³⁵ Hartmann and Thiery, *Resilience Wearing Thin*.

³⁶ Bertelsmann Stiftung, *BTI 2024 Transformation Index*.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Hartmann and Thiery, *Resilience Wearing Thin*, 5.

³⁹ Ibid., 5.



Zambia, Côte d'Ivoire, Mali, and Nigeria. It was in the 2022 Index that for the first time, the BTI identified more autocracies than democracies, marking a significant shift.

Table VI shows the decline in points witnessed in various indicators of democracy at the global level from 2006 to 2024 for 119 continuously assessed countries:

Table VI: Weakening Core Democratic Institutions

Indicator	Decline by Point
Free and Fair Elections	-0.74
Association / Assembly Rights	-1.29
Freedom of Expression	-1.11
Separation of Powers	-0.97
Civil Rights	-0.83

Source: Bertelsmann Stiftung, *BTI 2024 Transformation Index*, report (Gütersloh: Bertelsmann Stiftung, 2024), 4, https://bti-project.org/BTI_2024_Executive_Summary.pdf.

International IDEA's 'Global State of Democracy' Report

The Global State of Democracy (GSoD) indices provide detailed qualitative democratic trends at country, regional, and global levels across a wide array of democratic attributes from 1975 to date. The final report includes 174 countries and is based on 157 individual indicators devised by various scholars and organisations.⁴⁰

Half of the countries assessed in GSoD 2023 experienced declines in at least one indicator of democratic performance. This marked the sixth consecutive year where more countries saw net declines in democratic performance than advancements. Significant declines were observed in areas such as 'Representation' (including Credible Elections and Effective Parliament), 'Rule of Law' (encompassing Judicial Independence and Personal Integrity and Security), 'Freedom of Expression' and 'Freedom of Assembly and Association', across every region globally.⁴¹

⁴⁰ International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance, *The Global State of Democracy 2023: The New Checks and Balances*, report (Strömsborg: International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance-IDEA, 2023), <https://cdn.sanity.io/files/2e5hi812/production/0c4fe84a1378d22287fdcf36584c237264bef9.pdf>.

⁴¹ Ibid.



As pointed out in other indices and democracy reports, the GSoD Index 2022 also concluded that the strength of states leaning towards authoritarianism has doubled as compared to those moving toward democracy.⁴² From 2006, the classification of 27 countries was downgraded while only 13 demonstrated improvement.⁴³ 52 democracies were marked as unstable, registering a decline in at least one sub-attribute in contrast to only 12 a decade ago.⁴⁴ The same report also referred to the concept of 'backsliding',⁴⁵ indicating an intense form of democratic erosion, which continues to pose formidable obstacles for democracies. A severe form of backsliding was indicated in Brazil, El Salvador, Hungary and Poland. On the other hand, a moderate form of backsliding was noted in India, Mauritius, and even the United States.⁴⁶ This pattern underscores the fragility of democracy that could be exploited by leaders in power. This also indicates and stresses the importance of fortifying institutions so they can endure such pressures, particularly in uncertain times. Similar concerns of democratic backsliding were given in the latest 2023 report. Afghanistan, Russia, Belarus, Cambodia, Comoros and Nicaragua have considerably declined across multiple GSoD sub-attributes.

⁴² International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance, *The Global State of Democracy 2022: Forging Social Contracts in a Time of Discontent*, report (Strömsborg: International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance-IDEA, 2022), 6, <https://www.idea.int/democracytracker/sites/default/files/2022-11/the-global-state-of-democracy-2022.pdf>.

⁴³ International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance, *The Global State of Democracy 2022*, 6.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 6.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 2.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 7.



Despite these declines, there were some positive developments reported. In 2022, efforts to combat corruption showed limited improvements, especially in regions such as Africa, Asia and the Pacific, and Europe. The 2023 report echoed this sentiment, noting some progress in anti-corruption efforts, although it stressed that these gains were fragile and required substantial support to sustain. While the index also pointed to an encouraging trend of increased public participation and mobilisation, suggesting that despite the broader declines, there is potential for positive change driven by public engagement, overall, both 2022 and 2023 saw declining democratic standards worldwide.

Comparison of Different Democratic Setups

Before discussing the trends in democratic decline and subsequent analysis, it is essential to compare and contrast various democratic setups. Table VII provides a comprehensive comparison and contrast of less effective democracies, hybrid regimes, and well-functioning democracies:



Table VII: Comparative Overview of Less Effective Democracies, Hybrid & Well-Functioning Democracies

Features	Less Effective Democracies	Hybrid	Well-functioning Democracies
Nature of Politics	Authoritarian	Mix of democratic and authoritarian aspects / Can be Populist	Participatory
State Capacity	Persistently weak and compromised	Strong / More efficient in specific areas	Strong and Effective
Political Participation	Very limited	Shallow outside elections	Inclusive
Public Trust in Government	Eroding	Moderate to high	Persistently high
Economic Stability	Unstable and increasingly vulnerable	Generally stable, but can witness fluctuation	Persistently high
Political Rights and Civil	Weakly protected	Partially protected	Strongly protected
Welfare System	Inconsistent and/or improperly implemented	Varies - adequately maintained to occasionally lacking	Robust and supportive
Governance and Corruption	High penetration of systemic corruption	Moderate levels of corruption - Occasional issues are expected	Generally transparent with minimal corruption
Accountability/ Transparency	Low	Mixed level - often with some gaps	High
Rule of Law	Upheld	Generally upheld / occasionally selectively applied	Erratic
Freedom of Expression	Suppressed	Allowed with limitations	Protected
Examples	North Korea, South Sudan, Somalia, Venezuela	Philippines, Morocco, Malaysia, Kyrgyzstan	New Zealand, Norway, Denmark, Sweden

Source: Author's own.



Trends in Democratic Decline

All recent reports and democracy indices suggest that the third wave of democracy is in retreat. Several internal and external factors have contributed to the decline of democracy over the past few years. However, two major trends have been identified, which are further discussed in the following section.

Coups d'État

One of the primary catalysts for democratic decline has been direct attacks on democracies through 'Coups d'État'. The latter are significant irregular transfers of political power with lasting impacts on a country's well-being. In countries that have experienced significant setbacks in democracy, successful coups or attempted coups have left a lasting impact.

Coup attempts typically have an inverse relationship with democracy, often causing setbacks to hard-earned democratic gains.⁴⁷ They undermine state institutions and processes. Most importantly, they disrupt the electoral process, depriving citizens of chosen representatives and subjecting them to a rule by unelected individuals.⁴⁸ The absence of a functioning legislature, coupled with the establishment of military rule can severely impact the principles of democracy. These events are frequently associated with curbs on freedom of speech, restrictions on civil liberties and an environment of repression, all of which impede the strengthening of democratic values. Furthermore, coups often trigger economic instability and social unrest, which can worsen an already precarious situation.⁴⁹ Additionally, regimes established through coups may struggle to gain public acceptance, leading to further instability and a critical lack of legitimacy.

⁴⁷ Joshua Kurlantzick, "The Revival of Military Rule in South and Southeast Asia," (paper, Council on Foreign Relations, 2021), https://cdn.cfr.org/sites/default/files/report_pdf/Kurlantzick-RevivalMilitaryRule_0.pdf?_gl=1*7rqidm*_ga*MTM3NzQ1MDcxMi4xNjk1Mzk3NjE1*_ga_24W5E70YKH*MTY5NTM5NzYxNi4xLjEuMTY5NTM5NzY1Ny4xOS4wLjA.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 18.

⁴⁹ George Derpanopoulos, Erica Frantz, Barbara Geddes, and Joseph Wright, "Are Coups Good for Democracy?" *Research & Politics* 3, no.1 (2016):1-7, <https://doi.org/10.1177/2053168016630837>.



The various indices and reports discussed earlier also indicated a rise in military coups, with democratically elected leaders in Bolivia, Egypt,⁵⁰ Honduras, and Thailand⁵¹ being ousted from power over the last decade. These coups have coincided with a significant decline in democracy in these countries, according to the reports.

Of particular concern is Africa, which has been cited as one of the least democratic regions. Remarkably, the region has witnessed 222 coup attempts since 1946.⁵² Between 2020 and 2022, there were 11 coup attempts in Africa, with five resulting in success. These successful coups have led to a significant erosion of democracy in the affected nations.⁵³

Coup attempts have been executed in other parts of the world as well. In Mali, for instance, Assimi Goita led a coup attempt and ousted President Ibrahim Boubacar Keita in August 2020. Likewise Myanmar, Chad, Sudan, Niger and Guinea witnessed military coups in 2021, overthrowing the democratically elected leader, suspension of elections and humanitarian crises.⁵⁴ In the same year, Tunisia also underwent a self-coup attempt which led to the dismissal of the democratic government by the President Kais Saied.⁵⁵ In 2022, Burkina Faso experienced two military coups, drawing significant attention in all five reports concerning the country's democratic decline. According to Freedom House, Burkina Faso observed the steepest decline in its democratic standing in the 2023 report, losing 23 points on the 100-point scale. This drastic drop led to a change in its status from 'Partly Free' to 'Not Free.'⁵⁶

It needs to be kept in mind that even a failed coup can inflict significant damage to democracy. In 2022, Peru experienced a coup attempt when President Pedro Castillo

⁵⁰ Amal Kabesh, "Political Upheaval in Egypt: Disavowing Troubling States of Mind," *Psychoanalysis, Culture & Society* 20, (2015): 343-358, <https://doi.org/10.1057/pcs.2015.61>.

⁵¹ Yoshifumu Tamada, "Democratization and the Military in Thailand" in *Emerging States at Crossroads. Emerging-Economy State and International Policy Studies* ed. Keiichi Tsunekawa and Yasuyuki Todo (Singapore : Springer, 2019).

⁵² John J. Chin and Jessica Kirkpatrick, "African Coups in the COVID-19 Era: A Current History," *Frontiers in Political Science* 5, (2023): 1-20, <https://www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/fpos.2023.1077945/full#note2a>.

⁵³ Ibid., 2.

⁵⁴ Kamissa Camara, "A Coup in Niger: What It Means for Africa, U.S. and Partners," *United States Institute of Peace*, July 27, 2023, <https://www.usip.org/publications/2023/07/coup-niger-what-it-means-africa-us-and-partners>.

⁵⁵ Risa Brooks and Peter White, "Oust the Leader, Keep the Regime? Autocratic Civil-Military Relations and Coup Behaviour in the Tunisian and Egyptian Militaries During the 2011 Arab Spring," *Security Studies* 31, no.1 (2022): 118-151, <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/09636412.2022.2040585>.

⁵⁶ Freedom House, *Freedom in the World 2023*, 4.



tried to dissolve Congress in response to a potential impeachment against him.⁵⁷ While Castillo was removed shortly thereafter, his arrest sparked country-wide protests that gave special powers to the military and restricted citizen's movement. Over two dozen people were killed and hundreds were injured as a result of the force used to stop the protestors, shifting the status of Peru from 'Free' to 'Partly Free' in the 2023 Freedom House report.⁵⁸ Likewise, coup attempts also seriously undermine human rights in the long run given the exercise of unlimited power that can lead to curbs on freedom of speech, dissent, and use of force.⁵⁹

Social scientists have faced challenges in creating a comprehensive, well-sourced global inventory of coups, detailing the types and initiators of these events. The Cline Center's Coup d'État Project provides the world's largest registry of both failed and successful coups, documenting and categorising these events for every country globally. According to the Cline Center's data, there has been an observable rise in coup attempts in recent years. The data indicates an increase in both the frequency and number of successful coups, particularly in regions like Africa.⁶⁰ The Coup D'état Project even categorised the storming of the U.S. Capitol Building on 6 January 2021 as an attempted coup.⁶¹ Given the recent trends, the wave of coup d'état can pick up pace, particularly in African states and other countries grappling with civil-military rifts. The growing frequency of coup attempts pose a tangible threat to democracies around the world.

Rise of Right-Wing Populism

While coup attempts represent an outright assault on democracy, democratic declines are also possible within ostensibly democratic structures. Right-wing populism has also

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ United Nations Development Programme, *Soldiers and Citizens: Military Coups and the Need for Democratic Revival in Africa*, report (New York: United Nations Development Programme, 2023), 3, <https://www.undp.org/sites/g/files/zskgke326/files/2023-07/undp-africa-soldiers-citizens-2023-en.pdf>.

⁶⁰ Buddy Peyton, Joseph Bajjalieh, Dan Shalmon, Michael Martin, Jonathan Bonaguro and Emilio Soto, 'Cline Center Coup d'État Project Dataset', Cline Center for Advanced Social Research, V.2.1.3, University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign, February 2024, doi: 10.13012/B2IDB-9651987_V7.

⁶¹ Cline Center for Advanced Social Research, "It Was an Attempted Coup: The Cline Center's Coup d'État Project Categorizes the January 6, 2021 Assault on the US Capitol," January 27, 2021, https://clinecenter.illinois.edu/coup-detat-project/statement_jan.27.2021.



been identified as a potential driving factor in democratic decline.⁶² The ideology espouses the concept that welfare should be restricted to certain groups and opposes the phenomena of immigration and globalisation.⁶³

Leaders advocating right-wing populism often shift public attention away from recognising how economic inequalities can translate into political inequalities. They talk about the power disparity between the 'ordinary people' and the 'powerful elites,' diverting focus from systemic issues that exacerbate inequality. This rhetoric highlights the division and directs public frustration toward perceived elite dominance rather than addressing underlying economic and political disparities.⁶⁴ This approach appeals to voters, especially those who feel economically disenfranchised. Right-wing populist leaders often capitalise on public dissatisfaction with corruption and political dysfunction, promising to realign the political system with the interests of ordinary citizens. They may also exploit fears of globalisation, immigration, and cultural changes, underscoring the need to protect national identity. This strategy effectively taps into economic grievances and cultural anxieties, garnering support from those who feel left behind by the current political and economic systems.⁶⁵

Under the pretext of securing national strength, these leaders damage democracy by advocating nationalist policies that favour a particular ethnicity or identity group over the other. They provide a picture that may be very appealing to individual citizens, irrespective of their practicality.

Far-right wing populism contradicts democratic principles by undermining democratic institutions. It can lead to scenarios where human rights, particularly those of minority groups, are not protected by elected governments. Once in power, right-wing leaders are likely to exhibit autocratic tendencies, suppressing dissent and restricting press

⁶² William A. Galston, "The Populist Challenge to Liberal Democracy," *Journal of Democracy* 29, no. 2 (2018): 5-19, <https://www.journalofdemocracy.org/articles/the-populist-challenge-to-liberal-democracy/>.

⁶³ Iza Ding and Marek Hlavac, "'Right' Choice: Restorative Nationalism and Right-Wing Populism in Central and Eastern Europe," *Chinese Political Science Review* 2, (2017): 427- 444, <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s41111-017-0069-8#citeas>.

⁶⁴ Saskia Pauline Ruth Lovell and Sandra Grahn, "Threat or Corrective to Democracy? The Relationship Between Populism and Different Models of Democracy," *European Journal of Political Research* 62, no.3 (2023): 677-698, <https://ejpr.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/1475-6765.12564>.

⁶⁵ Marek Rewizorski, "Backlash against Globalisation and the Shadow of Phobos," *Fudan Journal of the Humanities and Social Sciences* 14, (2021): 123-141, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s40647-020-00308-0>.



freedom. They may also promote a strong narrative against minorities and immigrants, exacerbating social divisions and eroding the inclusive foundations of democracy. For instance, the strong grip of the Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán's Fidesz on the elections ever since 2010 has been attributed to his consistent effort to undermine civil society, media, and opposition parties.⁶⁶ Regimes like that of President Rodrigo Duterte, Prime Minister Narendra Modi and President Nayib Bukele etc. exemplify the rise of right-wing populism. Interestingly, all these countries saw a decline in democratic norms in the indices and reports under study in this paper.

While the rise of right-wing nationalism has intermittently surfaced in other regions, it is alarming to see it in consolidated democracies in Europe and even in countries such as the US.⁶⁷ It is frequently cited that the threat to liberal democracy has primarily originated from right-wing parties, especially in Western Europe. These parties often challenge democratic norms and institutions, promoting policies and rhetoric that undermine minority rights and democratic governance. The rise of right-wing populism has led to increased polarisation and the erosion of democratic values, posing significant risks to the stability and integrity of liberal democracies.⁶⁸ These parties have been able to gain considerable influence over the years. The United Kingdom Independence Party (UKIP) leveraged its popularity and electoral victory in the European Parliament elections to force a referendum in 2016.⁶⁹ Similarly, the Alternative für Deutschland in Germany emerged as a significant far-right party with representation in the Bundestag. In Italy, the far-right 'Brothers of Italy' secured a majority in municipal elections.⁷⁰ Likewise, the far-right 'Brothers of Italy also secured a majority in the municipal elections. Additionally, right-wing leader Marine Le Pen posed a formidable challenge to Emmanuel Macron in France, reflecting the rising influence of right-wing populism across Europe.⁷¹ Furthermore, Sweden Democrats

⁶⁶ Kim Lane Scheppele, "How Viktor Orbán Wins," *Journal of Democracy* 33, no. 3 (2022): 45-61, <https://www.journalofdemocracy.org/articles/how-viktor-orban-wins/>.

⁶⁷ Paula Sandrin, "The Rise of Right-Wing Populism in Europe: A Psychoanalytical Contribution" in *Financial Crisis Management and Democracy*, ed. Bettina De Souza Guilherme, Christian Ghymers, Stephany Griffith-Jones, and Andrea Ribeiro Hoffmann (Cham: Springer, 2021).

⁶⁸ Lovell and Grahn, "Threat or Corrective to Democracy?", 678.

⁶⁹ James J. Fahey, Trevor J. Allen, Hannah M. Alarian, "When Populists Win: How Right-Wing Populism Affects Democratic Satisfaction in the U.K. and Germany," *Electoral Studies* 77, (2022): 102469, <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0261379422000294>.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ "Le Pen has been Defeated by the Left, but who will Govern France? Our Panel Responds," *Guardian*, July 8, 2024, <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/article/2024/jul/08/marine-le-pen-left-france-election-far-right>.



has emerged as a prominent right wing party and an important part of the right wing coalition.⁷² Likewise, right wing-populism has emerged in Poland, Hungary, the Czech Republic, and Slovakia and has weakened democratic consolidation, if not reversed it.⁷³ In these cases, a nationalistic approach has been adopted, which inevitably impacts democratic values. This rise in nationalism often leads to the prioritisation of national identity over inclusive democratic principles, contributing to the erosion of civil liberties and minority rights. The focus shifts towards protecting perceived national interests, often at the expense of democratic norms and institutions.

Discussion and Analysis

General Trends

If the findings of the latest democracy indices and reports are analysed, it can be noted that the third wave of democratisation is on a decline. Although all reports use different methods and different indicators to arrive at their respective conclusions, a consistent trend can be observed which provides a comprehensive overview of the decline of various democratic characteristics. Furthermore, ongoing democratic backsliding discussed earlier explains that even established democracies are vulnerable to decline. The rate of decline is different for various regions but is certainly on the negative trend across the board. The findings of the research reveal that both the developed and developing world are struggling with democracy, while an outright assault on democracy can be seen in the developing world, consolidated democracies are also witnessing a decline in the guise of far-right wing nationalism or exclusionary politics. Moreover, in states untouched by right-wing populism or coup d'état, the nuances of authoritarianism continue to manifest themselves with assaults on democratic values, particularly on freedom of expression which is largely controlled by those in power. These trends lead to scenarios that undermine democratic principles.

Increasing Authoritarianism

The paper highlights a global shift in democratic practices, leading to more closed and controlled political environments. There is a notable and rapid move towards electoral democracy, with authoritarianism becoming more prominent, rather than progressing

⁷² Sandrin, "The Rise of Right-Wing Populism in Europe: A Psychoanalytical Contribution", 228.

⁷³ Ding and Hlavac, "'Right' Choice: Restorative Nationalism and Right-Wing Populism in Central and Eastern Europe," 429.



towards liberal democracy - the ideal form. The assertion that 72% of the global population resides in autocratic regimes, as indicated by V-Dem, further supports this observation. This trend reflects a significant departure from inclusive democratic principles, indicative of the growing influence of authoritarianism worldwide.

Role of Social Media

The role of social media has been somewhat overlooked in the studied data sets and reports. While online platforms democratise information and amplify the voices of underrepresented groups, they can also undermine the democratic process. This happens through the spread of hate speech, disinformation, and propaganda, which can sway public opinion, erode trust in institutions, lead to social unrest, and even incite violence. The significant impact of social media on democracy is notably missing from these analyses.

Economic Factors

An important takeaway is that economic challenges can exacerbate democratic weaknesses and vice versa. The reports highlight that external events such as the eruption of wars and natural disasters such as the COVID-19 Pandemic can significantly impact democracy. The perceived failure of democratic setups and increasing disparity in such circumstances can lead to economic discontent and search for alternative setups such as populist regimes.

Freedom of Expression

All cited reports have highlighted a continuous decline in freedom of speech and expression over the years. The 18th consecutive year of decline (as per Freedom House) is deeply concerning and warrants attention. Media, a crucial pillar of democracy, holds significant importance. Increased censorship, restrictive laws, and government control over journalism create an environment where media freedom is curtailed. This undermines the fundamental democratic principle of open speech and restricts the free exchange of information, further weakening democratic structures.

Trade Shifts Favouring Autocracies

Recent data from the V-Dem Institute indicates a significant shift in global trade patterns favouring autocracies. The share of world trade between democracies decreased from 74% in 1998 to 47% in 2022. Conversely, trade between democracies and autocracies increased from 21% in 1999 to 35% in 2022. This shift reflects a



realpolitik approach where economic interests often override ideological alignments or commitments to democratic values.

Additionally, autocracies have become less dependent on democracies for their exports and imports, further highlighting this trend according to their 2023-24 data. This evolving trade dynamic underscores how economic priorities can influence international alignments, at the expense of promoting democratic principles

Fraying Social Contract

The decline of democracy is evident on two fronts, as highlighted by the 'Global State of Democracy Report' for 2023 and 2024. A significant takeaway from these reports is that evolving societal needs and priorities are not being adequately addressed by the regimes in various countries. This disconnect may be contributing to the democratic decline, as governments fail to meet societal expectations, leading to social unrest. Such trends can cause the public to gravitate towards populist regimes and other quick fixes, which might be detrimental to democratic indicators in the long run. The failure to address the public's evolving needs (not fulfilling the social contract between state and citizen) undermines trust in democratic institutions and can pave the way for authoritarian tendencies to gain traction.

Towards Democratic Renewal

A worldwide decline in democratic systems can lead to political instability, as rising levels of authoritarianism provoke greater resistance. Such an environment impedes the progress of democratic norms in society. Additionally, crafting foreign policies between more democratic setups and less democratic ones will likely become increasingly complex in the future. Hence, remedial measures are urgently needed to address these threats.

Analysis of the data from various indices and reports that measure and assess democracy reveal that the deterioration of democratic practices and norms varies significantly across different regions, necessitating specific and targeted measures to address existing challenges. For instance, in some states, consolidating democracy through a fair and transparent electoral process may be essential. In contrast, others might need to focus more on strengthening inclusion and civic participation. This variation in democratic decline underscores the importance of tailored approaches to



reinforce democratic institutions. There are no one-fit-all measures in this regard. There is a need for region-specific or state-specific strategies to improve democracies based on their historical, cultural, economic and political context. By addressing the unique needs and challenges of each region, it is possible to support the restoration and growth of democratic norms globally.

The reinforcement of democracy is a two-way process. Public awareness of the democratic process, and promoting democratic participation are crucial to strengthen democracy. However, a lot of effort that goes into consolidating democracy such as strengthening institutions, promoting freedom of expression, ensuring equal opportunities and introduction of reforms is largely vested with the government. The firm intent and political will of policymakers has major role in democratic consolidation; without which the process may be long and challenging.

To address these challenges effectively, the essence of democracy must be reevaluated. Democracy, as defined in the paper, is 'a government on behalf of all the people, according to their will.' Therefore, public preferences should be the driving force behind the state of affairs. When people perceive a need to change the system, this may manifest in various forms, including increased resistance. The apparent decline in democracy coincides with a growing awareness among the masses (e.g. through social media), who are increasingly questioning the concept of democracy itself, sometimes through undemocratic measures. This paradox requires a nuanced approach as indicated in Table V:

Table VIII: Targeted Measures to Address Democratic Decline

Measure	Description
Strengthening Electoral Processes	Focus on ensuring fair and transparent elections, preventing fraud, and enhancing the overall integrity of the electoral process.
Enhancing Civic Participation	Promote active engagement in democratic processes and ensure that all voices, particularly those of marginalised communities, are heard and considered.
Addressing Economic Inequalities	Implement policies to reduce economic disparities and provide greater opportunities for all citizens, restoring faith in democratic institutions.
Promoting Media Freedom	Reduce censorship, protect journalists, and ensure the media can operate without undue influence or restrictions.
Building Robust Institutions	Strengthen institutions such as the judiciary, parliament, and anti-corruption bodies to uphold democratic norms and maintain checks and balances on power.

Source: Author's own based on the various indices and reports under study.



Conclusion

The paper asserts that the democratic landscape in the 21st Century is marked by a concerning trend. Similar to the first and second waves of democracy, the third wave is visibly in retreat. Numerous indicators associated with both electoral and illiberal democracies show a significant decline. While the decline of democracy in the developing world is troubling, it is particularly alarming to observe its rapid deterioration in developed countries as well. The research suggests that a range of internal and specific factors contribute to this trend, but the increasing number of military coups and the rise of right-wing populism worldwide are substantial contributors to the decline in democracy. The findings underscore an urgent need to understand these new trends better. This paper serves as a pressing call for vigilance and concerted efforts to safeguard democratic values in the years ahead.





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