

Democracy in the Digital Era

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THE STATE OF DEMOCRACY AROUND THE WORLD

Source: EIU.com

The Democracy Index provides a snapshot of the state of democracy around the world since 2006. This year's report reveals that democracy is failing worldwide due to the negative impact of covid-19 pandemic on democracy and freedom.



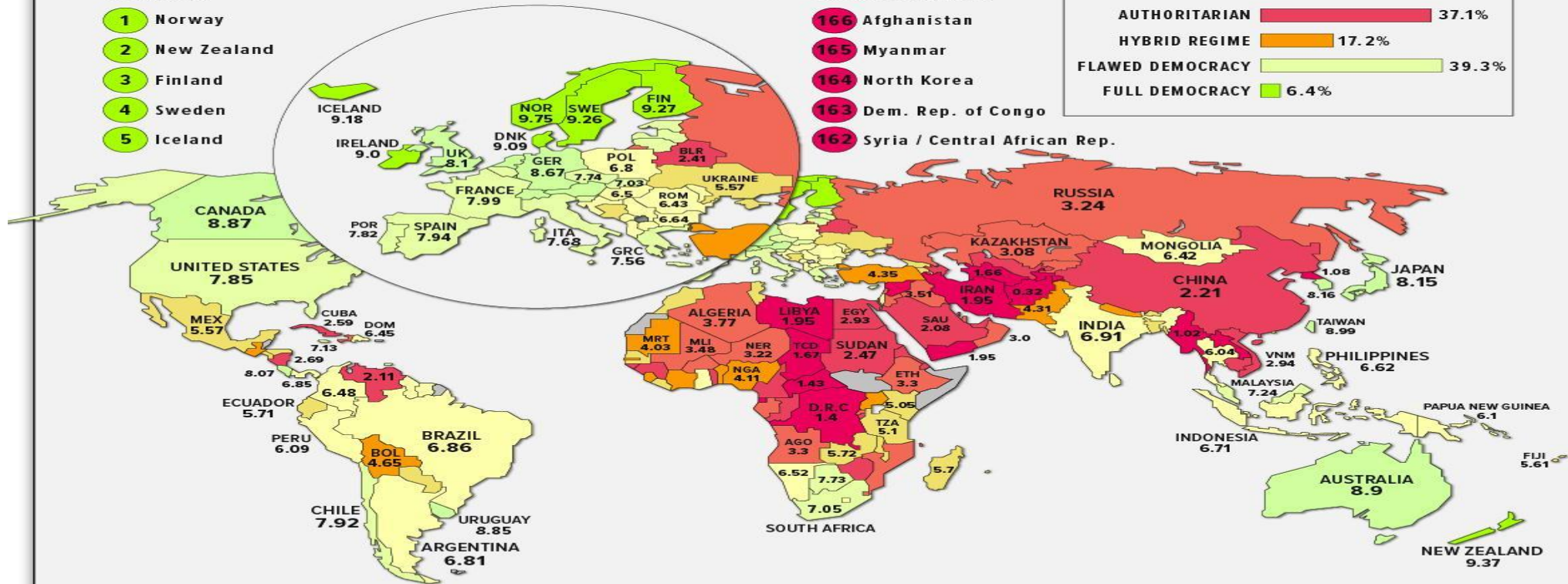
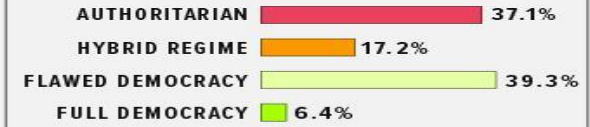
Top 5 Ranked Countries

- 1 Norway
- 2 New Zealand
- 3 Finland
- 4 Sweden
- 5 Iceland

Bottom 5 Ranked Countries

- 166 Afghanistan
- 165 Myanmar
- 164 North Korea
- 163 Dem. Rep. of Congo
- 162 Syria / Central African Rep.

In 2020, 49.4% of the world population lived in some sort of democracy. This has dropped substantially to 45.7% in 2021 and 37.1% of the world population live in "authoritarian regimes".



THE DEMOCRACY INDEX IS BASED ON FIVE CATEGORIES:



Electoral Process + Pluralism



Functioning of Government



Political Participation



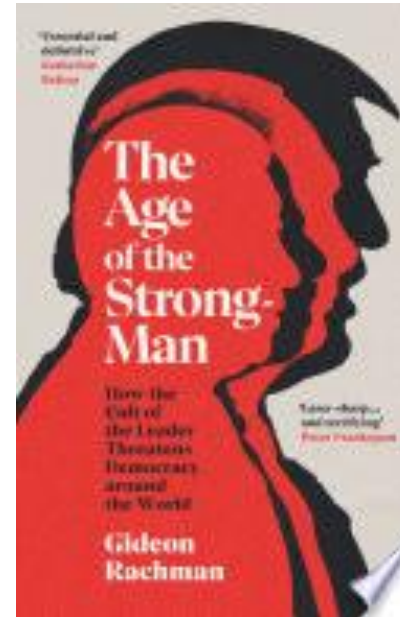
Political Culture



Civil Liberties

Worldwide

polarization, extremism, attraction to “strong” leaders



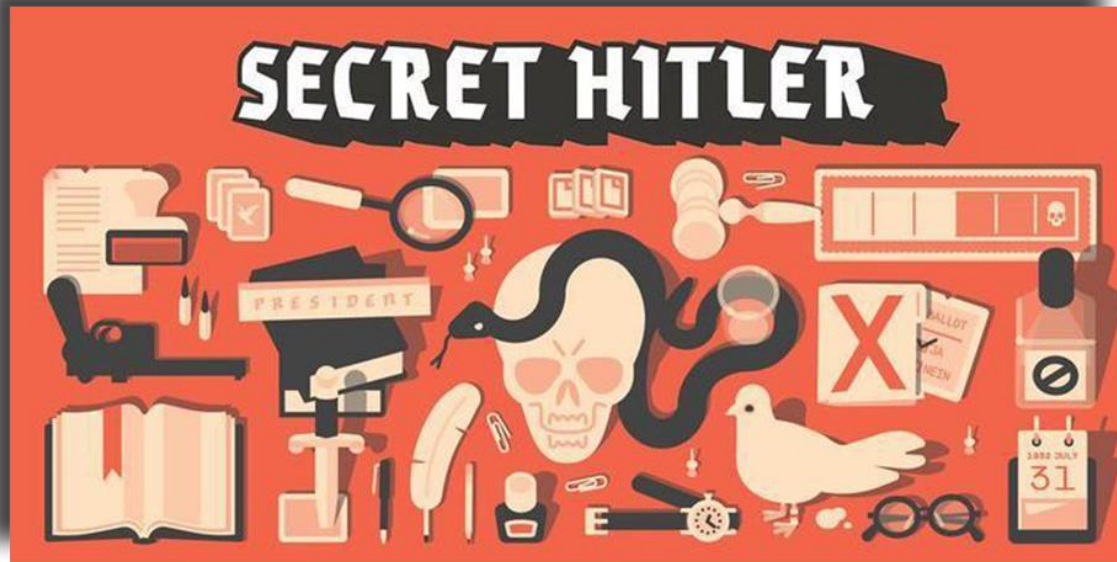
Democracy and the Young

- Increasing percentages among the young (10-24) agree with:
- “ In a democracy nothing gets done, we need perhaps less democracy and more effectiveness”
- “ a strong leader who does not have to deal with parliaments and elections”
- Young people refrain from politics resulting in a political class that self-recycles (Hofsbbaum)

Democracies have always been vulnerable

- Democracies have had a rather short life and are not static
- Democracies always nurtured the seeds of their degeneration.
- Their openness can be (and is) exploited by demagogues (From Louis-Napoleon 1852 self-coup to ...)
- Democracy and liberalism
- Information manipulation is not new but is empowered by digital and
- “going on steroids” via AI

A “social deduction” game: Revealing!



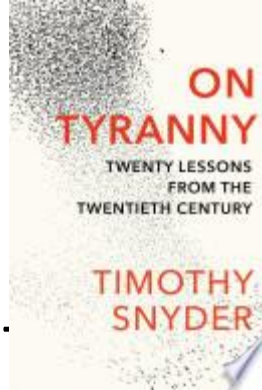


1789



1789-1989: The three waves of democracy

- **1789- 1918** (revolutions in France, US, Haiti) and the break-up of empires
- **1945-1960** Decolonization
A U.S. “Empire by invitation” in post-WWII Europe and a 45-year Cold War
While in the USSR a political system was established which according to East Germany’s Walter Ulbricht “ must look like democracy but with everything under our control” (Democracy has won as a label but not in substance)
- 1975-1989** End of dictatorships in Spain, Portugal, Brazil
Collapse of the USSR
- Since 1989** A democratic recession 😞



• 1989-2023

- After Fukuyama's (in) famous "the end of History" which expected eventual triumph of liberal democracy, it has been backsliding instead
- After 45 years of Cold War, democracy was no longer considered under threat and it started being taken for granted
- It was perceived as a "natural state" to be nurtured and preserved by capitalism and globalization...deterministically and independently of increasing inequality of wealth and decreasing participation
- There was a weakening of defenses, a **"unilateral moral disarmament"** (T.Snyder, Yale)

Democracy and big tech: Parallel lives!

- 1990's : Euphoria about democracy. Euphoria about digital.
- “ We let our guard down” concerning democracy AND digital
- Warning bells about both and their intersection start after the “Arab Spring”
- Increased awareness that democracy is in danger and concerns about digital
- ChatGPT triggered new concerns and intensified existing ones
- The end of abdication from governance?
- Historically, Governance decisions determine whether tech progress helps or harms democracy
(Acemoglu and Johnson: Power and progress)
- Regulation and “digital FOR democracy”

Democracy will not live or die by Digital alone

Most cited (and intertwined) threats:

- Economic inequalities (especially after 2008 crisis)
- Globalization effects (winners and losers)
- Immigration (especially after 2015 crisis)
- Internal degeneration (constitutional defects, plutocracy/ kleptocracy, Orbanism)
- The fallacy of inevitability (that somehow globalization , capitalism and trade will preserve and spread democracy)
- Big Tech and Social media. Concentration of Power
- Cyberthreats to democratic processes (internal and external) AI-powered Misinformation/disinformation
- Most see digital connectivity/social media making people more easy to manipulate – but also more informed (Pew 2023)

Unprecedented concentration of Power

- Corporate value power (incl. lobbying)
- Power to influence/manipulate public opinion/elections
- Surveillance power
- Nudging, herding, conditioning
- Predictable humans can be reliably presented with ads they will click on
- Political extremists are more predictable than moderates
- **Pernicious polarization** (when a society becomes defined almost exclusively by political allegiances).

AI and Democracy: Perils

- Research shows that people cannot discern AI generated news or fake responses from politicians from “real “ones. Politicians cannot discern messages from real constituents from generated ones
- As such content proliferates people may be manipulated or simply end up not believing anything (mistrusting ALL sources, not able to agree on ANY facts)
- This would erode a core tenet of a democratic system which is trust
- “Disinformation is the 5th horseman of the Apocalypse”

AI as a catalyst for regulation

- As the digital ecosystem evolves there are two main sources of strain on democracy
- 1. Misinformation /manipulation (fakes, both deep and “shallow”). Already there via social networks, aggravated direly by the advent of generative AI and its prospects) **Social network design was done in the absence of any regulatory guidelines.**
- 2. Concentration of power (already there via BigTech, aggravated direly by the advent of generative AI and its prospects) **Big Tech giants grew in the absence of any regulatory guidelines**

Need for AI regulation and fake arguments

- Big Tech argues for self-regulation because “bureaucrats” do not understand the technology and they, the experts, do.
- Two responses:
- Regulators regulate Aviation Safety, Pharmaceuticals etc. for decades!
- AI is not just about technology as it implicates human rights and democracy

Big Tech is not an expert in democracy and their track record in human rights is abominable

Motherhood and apple pie pledges

- White House's voluntary principles
- <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2023/07/Ensuring-Safe-Secure-and-Trustworthy-AI.pdf>
- OECD AI principles
- <https://oecd.ai/en/ai-principles>
- Big Tech fell over themselves pledging their agreement
- <https://ai.google/responsibility/responsible-ai-practices/>
- <https://www.microsoft.com/en-us/ai/responsible-ai>
- As meaningless as the pledges in the wake of the 2016 election cycle

Gouverner, c'est prévoir

- Regulators were asleep at the wheel while Big Tech ballooned into giants
- FTC let Google buy DoubleClick (ad SW) in 2007 . In 2023 the DoJ sues Google for monopoly abuse over the ad market
- FTC declined to challenge Fb's purchase of Instagram in 2012 and Whatsapp in 2014
- FTC sued Fb on 2020 on anti-trust arguing that those two acquisitions had allowed it to illegally cut off competition

NEW LEGISLATION IS AIMED AT ANTICIPATION/PREVENTION

- This is governance!

Regulation and new research directions

- EU: DMA/DSA and AI Act
- ex-ante (Precautionary Regulatory principle)
- New AI R&D directions aimed at opportunities for citizens rather than primarily for corporations and governments .
- This will not happen if control of the development of transformational technologies like generative AI is left in the hands of the few and powerful
- **A new impetus for regulation including anti-trust**

FTC investigates Open AI (July 2023)

- Possible violations of consumer protection law
- Potential harm to consumers including reputational harm
- Capacity to generate statements about real individuals that are false, misleading and/or disparaging
- FTC's current approach comes closer to the EU's AI Act which looks at AI applications from product safety and consumer protection viewpoints
- Will all this evaporate after the 2024 US elections?

Social media and the Young (US)

- They have largely replaced news media or search for the vast majority of young people
- AI has an aggravating effect (customization)
- Outsourcing essentially human rituals like exploration and trial and error to AI?
- Is the journey of discovery (and the ensuing fulfilment) an essential part of being human?
- Protecting Kids on Social Media Act (Bi-partisan, US Senate)
- “Prohibition of social media companies using the data they collect on kids to build and fuel AI algorithms that spoon-feed individualized content back to them”

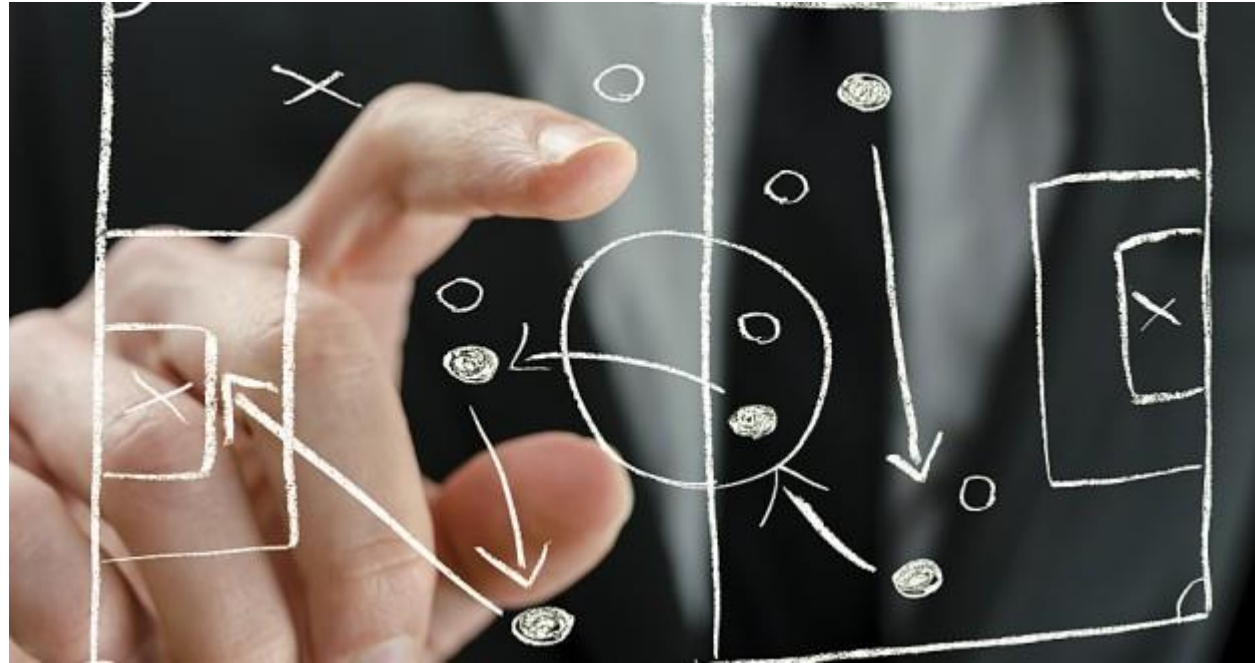
Globally speaking.... (*A. Bradford, Digital Empires*)

- The global battle to regulate technology
- US Market-driven
- China State- driven
- EU Rights-driven
- US exports technology
- China exports infrastructure (affordable)
- EU exports regulation

And most other countries buy from all three !

Digital FOR Democracy





Guard against the bad, empower the good

Citizen participation in the democratic process

- ✓ Elections
- ✓ Opinion polls / referenda
- ✓ Deliberative democracy/Citizens assemblies

The pandemic acted as “laboratory” in the use of digital technologies for participation in democratic processes (e.g. virtual Town Hall meetings) not as a substitute but as a complement

Can digital technologies foster greater transparency and citizen participation ?

The limits of referenda as an attempt for “direct democracy”

- Manichaistic by its nature. Unsuitable for complex issues.
- Often simply a protest vote
- Rarely is care taken to properly “educate” the electoral body
- The negative track record of referenda (EU constitution, Brexit, Putin’s , Lukashenko’s)

What is a Citizens' assembly?

<https://citizensassemblies.org/>

<https://citizens-democracy.ch/examples-of-citizens-assemblies/>

- People randomly selected to reflect gender, age, education, socio-economic status.

- Deliberative body:
 - i. Learning
 - ii. Discussion,
 - iii. Decision

- Recommendations

Historical Outcome in Ireland



The Taiwan Digital Democracy experiment

“Fast ,Fair and Fun”

A mix of direct and representative democracy



AI and Democracy: Harnessing tech for public good

- Lawmakers are inundated by mails by constituents
- AI tools to screen out bot generated mails
- AI tools can be used to provide summaries by issue
- Also (with disclosure) to prepare responses of higher quality than boilerplate
- Improved, meaningful connection between government and people
- who donated the most to our campaign” or “which company employs the most of my former staffers” are currently the main metrics for prioritizing public comments. AI can help elected representatives do much better. Will they want to?
- AI as discussion moderator and consensus builder?

Questions begging for answers

- How can we best deal with the use of AI by malicious actors to manipulate the beliefs and understanding of citizens?
- How can we ensure that the engagement of the public with elected representatives—a cornerstone of democracy—is not drowned out by AI-generated noise?
- How can we help everyone, including our scientific, political, industrial, and educational leaders, develop the **critical thought** needed to identify AI-generated misinformation, impersonation, and manipulation?
- How can we promote the development of a new generation of AI tools designed to support democratic processes?

Critical thinking in the age of AI



Education for Democracy

