Online Exchange on "Democratic Deconsolidation"

In July 2016 and January 2017, the *Journal of Democracy* published two articles on "democratic deconsolidation" by Roberto Stefan Foa and Yascha Mounk. These essays not only generated a great deal of commentary in the media, but also stimulated numerous responses from scholars focusing on Foa and Mounk's analysis of the survey data that is at the heart of their argument.

Several prominent experts approached the *Journal* asking if we would publish their critiques of the Foa and Mounk articles. This created a dilemma for us. Given our space constraints and our commitments to authors writing on other topics, there was no way we could publish these critiques quickly enough to keep pace with discussion in other forums.

Moreover, given their extensive reliance on graphics and the necessarily technical character of arguments about the interpretation of survey data, there was no way that we could accommodate these critiques within the usual confines of our print issues. The *Journal* has always sought to make its articles reader-friendly to non-academics. Accordingly, we strictly limit the length of articles and avoid extensive use of graphics and endnotes. We also edit articles intensively and with great care to make them as accessible as we can to political practitioners and activists, as well as to a general audience. It would have been an insuperable task, especially given our small editorial staff, to try to adhere to these standards with regard to these critiques of Foa and Mounk.

Therefore, in a departure from our usual practice, we have decided to make three of these critiques—by **Amy C. Alexander and Christian Welzel; Pippa Norris;** and **Erik Voeten**—available to readers *exclusively on our website*, along with a **reply by Foa and Mounk.** The three critiques and the reply may be viewed **here.**

Our regular readers will note that they do not resemble typical *Journal of Democracy* articles. They have not been condensed or edited by us, and they contain extensive graphics. An advantage of presenting them solely online, however, is that we are able to display these graphics in full and in a much more readable form than would be possible in our print edition.

We are pleased to be able to make available in this way a timely discussion of some of the important issues raised by the Foa and Mounk articles, and we hope that interested scholars will find this exchange useful. As is the case with all articles in the *Journal*, our parent organization, the National Endowment for Democracy, does not necessarily endorse the views expressed here, which are those of the authors.

—The Editors, 28 April 2017 (updated 26 June 2017)

IS WESTERN DEMOCRACY BACKSLIDING?
DIAGNOSING THE RISKS

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Until recently, it was widely assumed that Western societies would be governed by moderate political parties, committed to liberal democracy, open economies, and multilateral cooperation. The core values respecting free elections, rule of law, human rights, and civil liberties seemed sacrosanct and, despite some major challenges and notable setbacks, elections and democratic values appeared to be spreading to every corner of the world. The overall mood within the beltway started to become gloomier around a decade ago, however, following the failure of stable states to take root in Iraq and Afghanistan, and the persistence of repression after the botched Arab uprisings. Anxiety accelerated rapidly in Europe following the shock of Brexit and then Trump's victory, reenergizing populist hopes. The predominantly sunny end-of-history optimism of the late-1980s and early-1990s, following the fall of the Berlin Wall, turned rapidly into a more pessimistic zeitgeist. Prognostications differ but observers detect worrying signs of a global democratic retreat, so that, in Huntington's classic formulation, the world could face the onset of a third reverse wave of democratization.[1]

What helps us to understand whether we have reached an inflection point—and whether even long-established European and American democracies are in danger of backsliding? Like second-guessing a plunge in the Dow Jones, there is a mass of speculation, but little sage guidance. Seeking inspiration, scholars have dusted off Juan Linz and Alfred Stepan's *The Breakdown of Democratic Regimes,* published in 1978 after the end of the second reverse wave, and their subsequent masterwork on *Problems of Democratic Transition and Consolidation,* published in 1996 after the tide turned again towards the third wave. In their famous formulation, regime

consolidation means that democracy has become 'the only game in town.'[2] This is thought to depend essentially upon three characteristics.

(i) Culturally, the overwhelming majority of people believe that democracy is the best form of government, so that any further reforms reflect these values and principles.

(ii) Constitutionally, all the major actors and organs of the state reflect democratic norms and practices.

(iii) Behaviorally, no significant groups actively seek to overthrow the regime or secede from the state.

What does evidence suggests about the contemporary state of each of Linz and Stepan's conditions in Western democracies? This essay advances three core claims:

Culturally, we can examine systematic survey data monitoring public attitudes towards democratic ideals and performance. When compared with their parents and grandparents, there is evidence in Anglo-American democracies that Millennials express weaker approval of democratic values, as claimed by Foa and Mounk.[3] But this is *not* a consistent pattern across two-dozen diverse Western democracies; elsewhere, in several countries such as Spain and France, there are no significant trends by birth cohort.[4] This pattern may also be a life-cycle rather than a generational effect. When evaluating the performance of how democracy works in their own country, the evidence confirms that deep dissatisfaction persists among critical citizens living in several states in Mediterranean Europe, as long observed in Italy and Greece.[5] But over the last four decades, those living in Northern Europe and Scandinavia are consistently more satisfied with how democracy works. Moreover cultural attitudes and values are proxy indices of liberal democracy and not equivalent to more sticky political institutions; old floorboards can crack for years without the foundations collapsing.

This leads to the second key point: *constitutionally*, trends from estimates by Freedom House provide no evidence that the quality of *institutions* protecting political rights and civil liberties deteriorated across Western democracies from 1972 to end-2016. These patterns are confirmed by other standard indices.

This also leads naturally towards the final point: *behaviorally*, the most serious contemporary threats to Western liberal democracies arise from twin forces that each, in different ways, seek to undermine the regime: sporadic and random terrorist attacks on domestic soil, which damage feelings of security, and the rise of populist-authoritarian forces. The potential dangers of these developments, which feed parasitically off each other, should not be under-estimated. In particular, President Donald

Trump's blustering rhetoric, as exemplified by his Inauguration speech, tramples willy-nilly over many standard norms and conventional practices observed in liberal democracies, and it also dismisses America's leadership role in the world as an advocate defending fundamental freedom. Populist leaders like Trump typically benefit from mistrust of 'the establishment' and they seek to further undermine faith in the legitimate role of the media ('enemy of the people'), the independence of the courts ('so-called judges'), and the integrity of elections ('rigged'). A spate of new scholarship debates the complex economic and cultural reasons behind support for varieties of populism.[6] But contrary to Foa and Mounk's suggestion, in fact the reverse pattern of generational support for populist-authoritarian parties can be observed; in the United States and in many European countries, voters supporting these parties and leaders are drawn disproportionately from the *older* generation, not the Millennials.[7]

With the steady erosion of human rights and civil liberties, several hybrid regimes in less well-off societies have slid back towards autocracy, including Venezuela, Turkey, Hungary, and the Philippines. Despite the angry, anti-establishment, pitchfork rhetoric, and the major threats this poses to liberal values, social tolerance, and multilateral cooperation, it remains to be seen how far populist-authoritarian forces will be checked in Western societies by resilient democratic institutions, including the bailiwick of the vigilant news media, independent courts, effective opposition parties, and reenergized civil societies.

Let's unpack the evidence behind each of these arguments.

I: Cultural trends

Taking up the cultural proposition, in recent essays in the *Journal of Democracy,* Roberto Stefan Foa and Yascha Mounk detect alarming signs that the United States and several other Western democracies are in potential danger of 'deconsolidation.'[8] The studies compare public attitudes, values and behavioral indicators derived mainly from the European and World Values Survey (pooling waves 3-6, conducted from the 1994 to 2014) in several affluent post-industrial societies.[9] In lieu of longitudinal survey data where the same questions are measured over many years, the authors use cohort analysis. Comparisons are drawn across four West European societies (Germany, Sweden, Spain and the Netherlands), four Anglo-American democracies (the United States, Australia and New Zealand, Britain), and two East European states (Romania and Poland). The authors conclude that significant generation gaps can be observed: Foa and Mounk argue that compared with their parents and grandparents, the Millennial generation (born after 1980) are significantly *less* supportive of democratic values and institutions, as well as more disengaged in both civic and protest forms of political activism. These symptoms are interpreted by

the studies as warning flags for a broader malaise that may produce deconsolidation of several Western democracies, at best, and heightened risks of potential breakdown, at worst. Although direct evidence is not presented, the authors couple cultural indicators with the rise of populist leaders who claim legitimacy from popular sovereignty and the support of 'ordinary people,' even if this conflicts with civil liberties, minority rights, and institutional checks and balances.

The argument that Millennials have become disillusioned with liberal democratic institutions and values in the West has attracted considerable attention, going viral in media commentary.[10] The thesis is attractive not least because, if true, this may help to explain the Trump phenomenon, as well as electoral support for populist parties and illiberal leaders in Europe, such as Geert Wilders, Marine Le Pen and Nigel Farage.

If the younger generation in Western states were indeed deeply cynical about the core ideals and practices of liberal democracy, this should indeed be a genuine cause for concern. Ever since Almond and Verba's seminal book, *The Civic Culture* (1963), social-psychological theories have suggested that stable regimes are built upon the congruence between political values and institutional practices.[11] In the well-known conceptualization of levels of system support (following David Easton), dissatisfaction with the performance of specific leaders and political institutions can be regarded relatively sanguinely as part of the normal give-and-take of politics.[12] If the acid of disaffection has spread upwards to corrode the more diffuse level of support for democratic ideals and core regime principles, however, then this is usually regarded as far more problematic for stability.

Yet as *Critical Citizens* (1999) concluded many years ago, the implications of cultural change are not necessarily clear-cut and straightforward to interpret. Deep disenchantment with the workings of political institutions, like elections and legislatures, may have destabilizing effects upon the body politic, opening the door to populist demagogues attacking the courts ('so-called judges') and independent media ('fake news'). Alternatively, when reflecting genuine problems, critical citizens could also spur grassroots pressures for much-needed pro-democratic reforms, such as by reenergizing American initiatives designed to strengthen electoral integrity, restore voting rights, clean up campaign funding, and eradicate gerrymandering.[13]

Before considering the possible consequences, however, is there actually plausible evidence to support Foa and Mounk's bold claims? There are good reasons to doubt their more sweeping conclusions.[14]

Figure 1: Approval of having a democratic system by birth cohort across post-industrial democracies
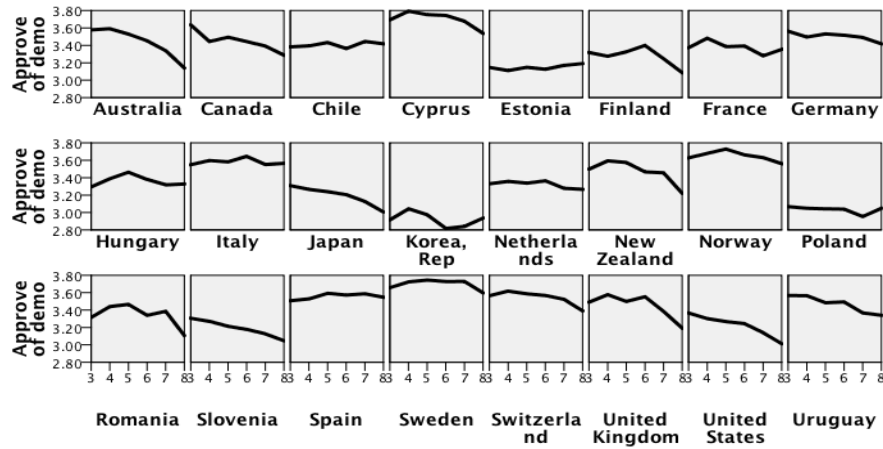
Note: Q: *"I'm going to describe various types of political systems and ask what you think about each as a way of governing this country. For each one, would you say it is a very bad (1), fairly bad (2), fairly good (3), or very good (4) way of governing this country?...Having a democratic political system."* Mean approval by birth cohort. 3'Born 1930s' 4'Born 1940s' 5'Born 1950s' 6'Born 1960s' 7'Born 1970s' 8'Born 1980s'. N. 42,357.

Correlation shows a significant decline by birth cohort: 12 (Australia, Canada, Cyprus, Japan, S Korea, NZ, Norway, Romania, Slovenia, UK, US, Uruguay). **No significant decline by cohort**: 12 (Czech Republic, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Hungary, Italy, the Netherlands, Poland, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland).

Source: World Values Survey waves 5 and 6 (2005-2014) in democratic states (Freedom House classified as 'Free') and in post-industrial societies (measured by the World Development Indicators by those with per capita GDP (in 2011 US$ in purchasing power parity) greater than $16,000).

Support for democratic values

Culturally, when more systematic survey data is examined across a broader range of more than two-dozen Western democracies and over a longer time period, in fact the claims by Foa and Mounk fail to prove consistently reliable and robust. The generational gaps presented by the authors are exaggerated both by cherry-picking cases and by the visual presentation and treatment of the survey data. Far from a uniform 'European' pattern, countries vary widely in public perception of democratic performance and persistent contrasts are observable. The data also suggests a persistent life-cycle effect.

For evidence testing whether Foa and Mounk's findings are dependent upon their particular selection of cases, or whether they prove to be robust, their

analysis of approval of democratic governance by birth cohort can be replicated using the pooled 5th and 6th waves of the World Value Survey (WVS) across a broader range of two dozen societies. The countries are all classified by Freedom House as democratic states, and they share similar characteristics as upper-middle income societies (measured by the World Development Indicators with per capita GDP (in purchasing power parity) above $16,000). The first comparison employs one of the standard WVS question widely used during the last two decades for monitoring support for democratic values or ideals, namely approval of having a democratic political system. The WVS question is as follows: *"I'm going to describe various types of political systems and ask what you think about each as a way of governing this country. For each one, would you say it is a very bad (1), fairly bad (2), fairly good (3), or very good (4) way of governing this country?...Having a democratic political system.*"

As Figure 1 shows, the results display mixed patterns and diverse trends by cohort across the range of societies under comparison. Thus the Anglo-American democracies (including Australia, the US, Canada, the UK and New Zealand) do indeed display a statistically significant fall in democratic approval by birth cohort, as Foa and Mounk note.[15] More modest generation gaps can also be observed in several other countries, including Slovenia, Uruguay, Japan and the Republic of Korea. But, contrary to the Foa and Mounk thesis, in half of the post-industrial democracies under comparison, no significant difference by birth cohort can be observed, including in Spain, Norway, the Netherlands, Chile, Germany, Hungary and France. Striking contrasts in the overall levels of democratic approval are also clearly evident among societies, particularly the low approval found in America, with a profile more like Slovenia than Sweden. The contrasts observed across similar post-industrial democracies are usually greater than the contrasts by cohort within each society. To see whether the estimates are robust, Figure 2 shows an alternative WVS measure of democratic values, using a 10-point scale monitoring how respondents assess the 'importance of democracy.' Here the results do lend greater support for the Foa and Mounk thesis, with two thirds of the countries under comparison showing significant cohort-related trends, although again several important exceptions remain in Western Europe, such as Germany, Italy, and Spain.

Independent survey evidence from other sources also throws light on these general observations; for example, a recent study of U.S. public opinion by the Pew Research Center found no consistent age differences in American views about the important components of a strong democracy.[16] Thus compared with the oldest (65+) generation of Americans, Millennials attached slightly greater importance to the rights to peaceful protest and to express unpopular views, while they regarded the value of open and fair elections as slightly less important. This probably reflects more generation

orientations towards alternative forms of civic engagement. They proved similar to other age groups, however, in their views about the importance of media freedom and the need for checks and balances on executive power.

Figure 2: Importance of democracy by birth cohort across post-industrial democracies
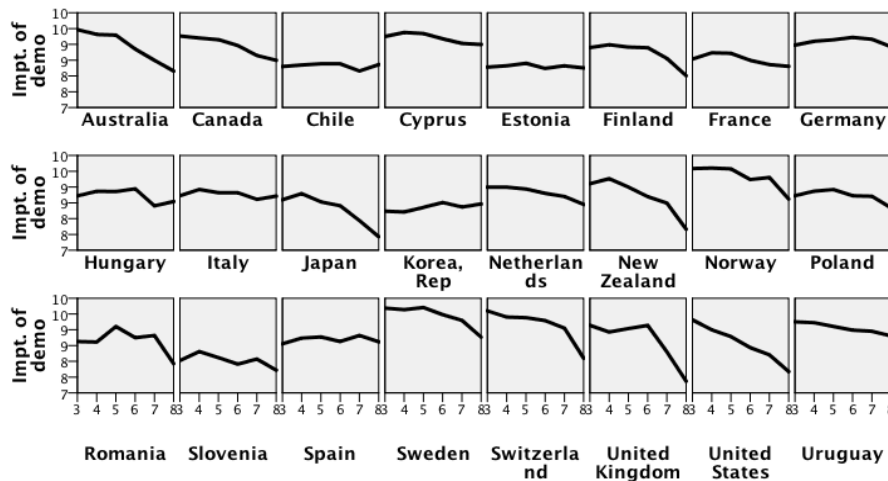
Note: Q *"*How important is it for you to live in a country that is governed democratically? On this scale where 1 means it is "not at all important" and 10 means "absolutely important" what position would you choose?" Mean importance by birth cohort. 3'Born 1930s' 4'Born 1940s' 5'Born 1950s' 6'Born 1960s' 7'Born 1970s' 8'Born 1980s'. N. 43,432.

Correlation shows as a significant decline by birth cohort:18 (Australia, Canada, Cyprus, Finland, France, Hungary, Japan, Netherlands, NZ, Norway, Poland, Romania, Slovenia, Sweden, Switzerland, UK, US, Uruguay. **No significant decline**: 6 (Chile, Estonia, Germany, Italy, S Korea, Spain).

Source: World Values Survey waves 5 and 6 (2005-2014) in democratic states (Freedom House classified as 'Free') and in post-industrial societies (measured by the World Development Indicators by per capita GDP (in constant US$ with purchasing power parity) greater than $16,000).

Democratic performance

We can look more broadly across a wider range of European societies in public evaluations of how well people believe that democracy performs in their own country. The standard Eurobarometer question used since the early-1970s asks: "*On the whole, are you very satisfied, fairly satisfied, not very satisfied or not at all satisfied with the way democracy works in (OUR COUNTRY)?*" As shown by Figure 3, drawing upon the Eurobarometer survey data from 1972-2016 in EU member states, satisfaction with how well democracy works divides the North and South. Divergent responses

across similar European regions can probably be explained, at least in part, by the relative capacity of national governments to manage economic growth and deliver inclusive public goods and services, as well as by the democratic quality of their political institutions.

Figure 3: Citizen dissatisfaction with the performance of democracy in their own country, EU 1976-2016
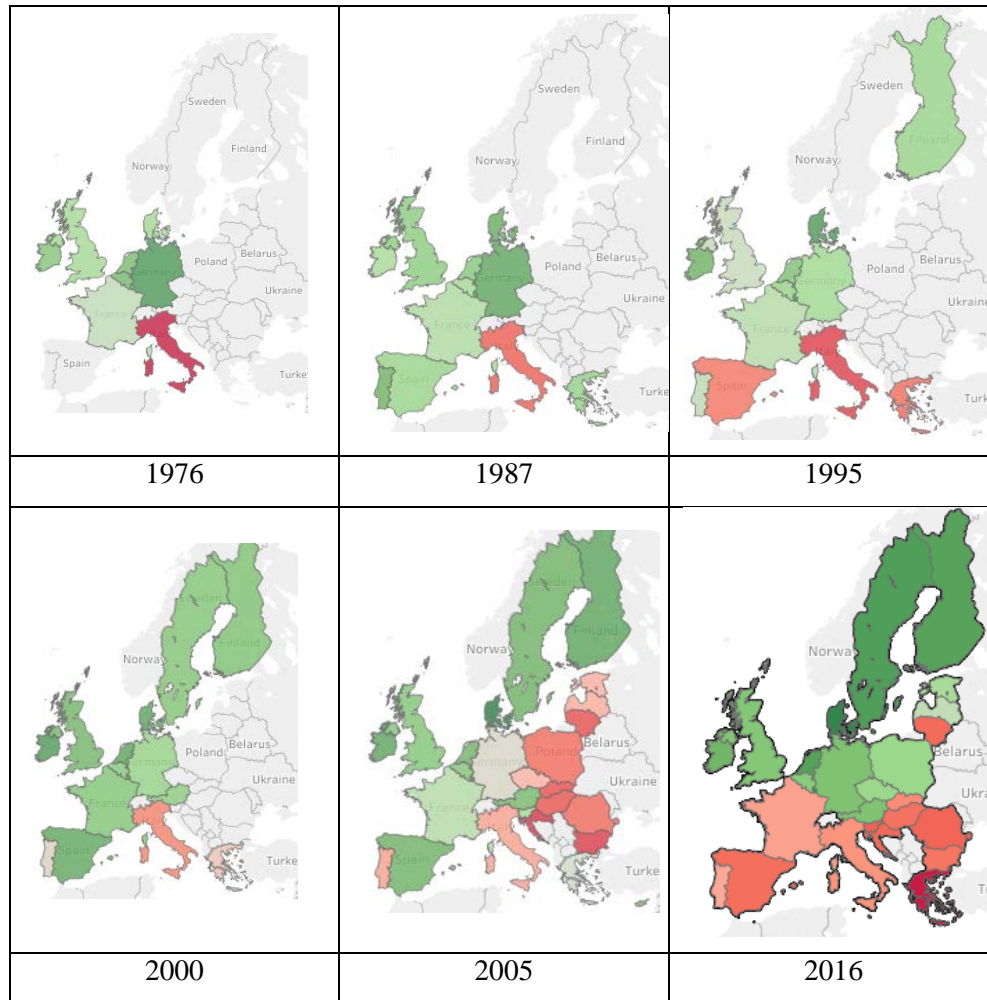
Note: Q "On the whole, are you very satisfied, fairly satisfied, not very satisfied or not at all satisfied with the way democracy works in (OUR COUNTRY)?" % 'Not very' and 'Not at all' satisfied. Source: Eurobarometer surveys 1976-2016.

As Lijphart argues, these two factors are linked; parliamentary democracies with PR elections and stable multiparty coalition governments, typical of the Nordic region, generate a broader consensus about welfare policies addressing inequality, exclusion, and social justice, and this avoids the adversarial winner-take-all divisive politics and social inequality more characteristic of majoritarian systems.[17]

Figure 4: Approval of democracy by age group, 1995-2011
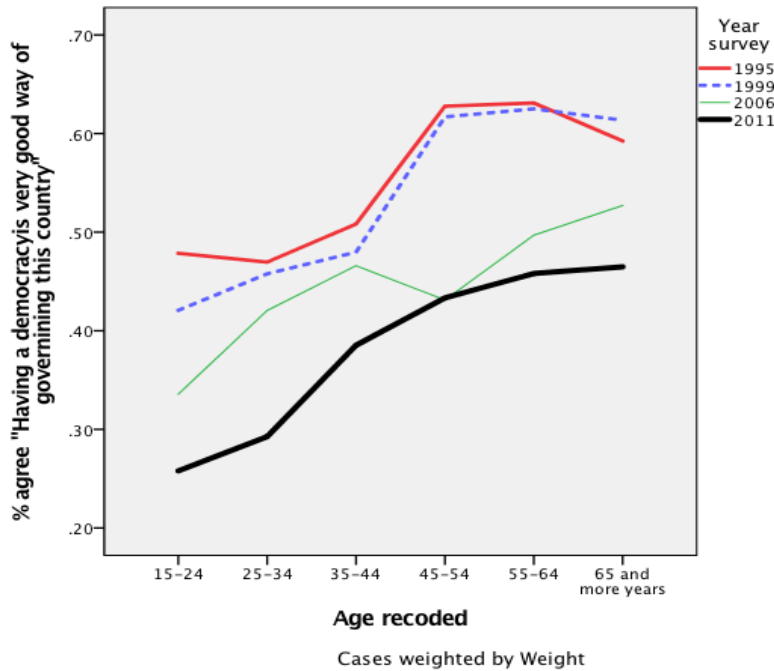
Cases weighted by Weight

Note: Q *"I'm going to describe various types of political systems and ask what you think about each as a way of governing this country. For each one, would you say it is a very good, fairly good, fairly bad or very bad way of governing this country? Having a democratic political system.'* Proportion saying 'very good' by age group and survey year, U.S. sample only.

Source: World Values Survey, US sample only, 1995-2011.

To determine whether any observed age-related differences in democratic values or evaluations of regime performance are the product of generational, life-cycle or period effects, however, analysis of longitudinal time-series survey evidence is needed. By pooling recent waves of the World Value Survey datasets, Foa and Mounk are unable to distinguish among these different types of effects. They assume *generational* patterns, which suggest that values and habits acquired by formative socialization processes at an impressionable early age are maintained as stable orientations throughout people's lifetimes. Political generations are thought to share similar experiences, so that European citizens born in the Interwar years, the Baby Boomers, and Millennials acquire distinctive orientations during their impressionable years that continue as they mature in life. Yet there is well-established evidence that age differences in political attitudes and behavior, like voter turnout, are at least partially the product of *life-cycle* effects, which are grounded in social and psychological experiences

that affect all people as they gain in years, such as through going to school and college, entering the paid workforce, settling down in a local community, raising a family, gaining leisure in retirement from the paid workforce, and gradually losing some physical mobility in old age.[18] Life-cycle effects suggest that young people will eventually come to resemble the middle-aged. In addition, *period* effects arise from specific shared experiences and defining events that stamp an indelible mark on society, such as the shock of 9/11 on perceptions of terrorist threats in the U.S. and the impact of the 2008 financial crisis on Mediterranean European economies.

To examine the evidence from the World Values Survey, Figure 4 shows the proportion of Americans agreeing that 'Having a democracy is very good' by age and year of the survey wave. It is apparent that younger Americans in 2011 are indeed more negative towards democracy than their parents and grandparents. But this is nothing new; in the data for 1995 and 1999, similar age-related patterns can be observed. Certainly all Americans have become more critical of democracy in recent years, but this does not mean that younger citizens have suddenly lost faith in these values. Similar well-established life-cycle effects have long been observed in patterns of voter turnout.[19] Given a consistent pattern during successive surveys, it is implausible to posit generational change in democratic values as an explanation of President Trump's victory, and indeed this flies directly against the age profile of his voters, as discussed in the final section of this paper.

II: Institutional trends

In addition, cultural attitudes towards democracy are far from equivalent to institutions. Theories built upon the *Civic Culture* tradition conventionally treat democratic values as the canary in the coalmine, providing an advance warning of potential problems to come. But attitudes are not equivalent to constitutions; formal structural arrangements, like electoral systems, can persist in equilibrium even when cultural support is fragile. This leads to the second key argument: constitutionally, Figure 5 shows trends estimated by Freedom House, converted into standardized 100-point scales, providing no evidence that the quality of political rights and civil liberties deteriorated across two-dozen Western democracies from 1972 to end-2016. Although we currently lack data covering the last few years, these findings are confirmed independently by their correlation with other widely-used longitudinal indices available until 2012, including the Polity IV index of democracy-autocracy, the CIRI Human Rights database, the Varieties of Democracy measures of liberal democracy, and the Economist Intelligence Unit Index of Democracy.[20]

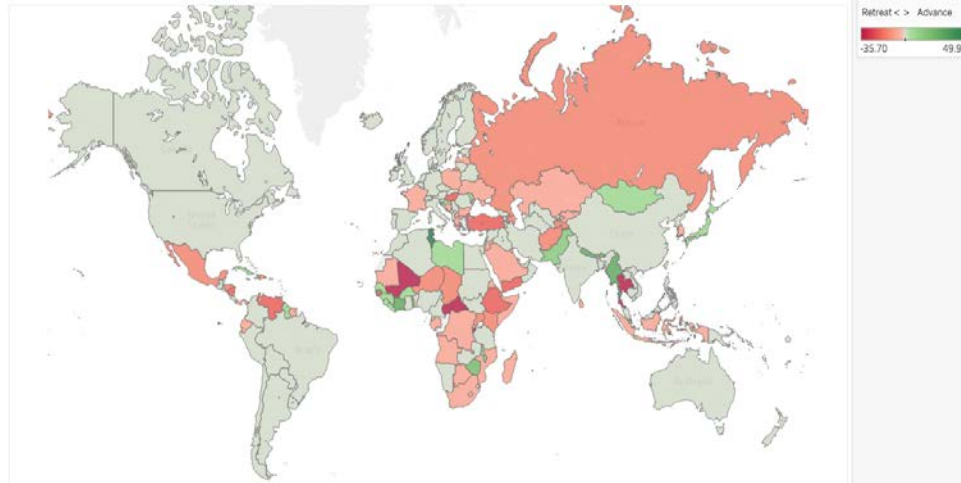**Figure 5: Trends in liberal democracy in 24 Western nations, 1972-2016**
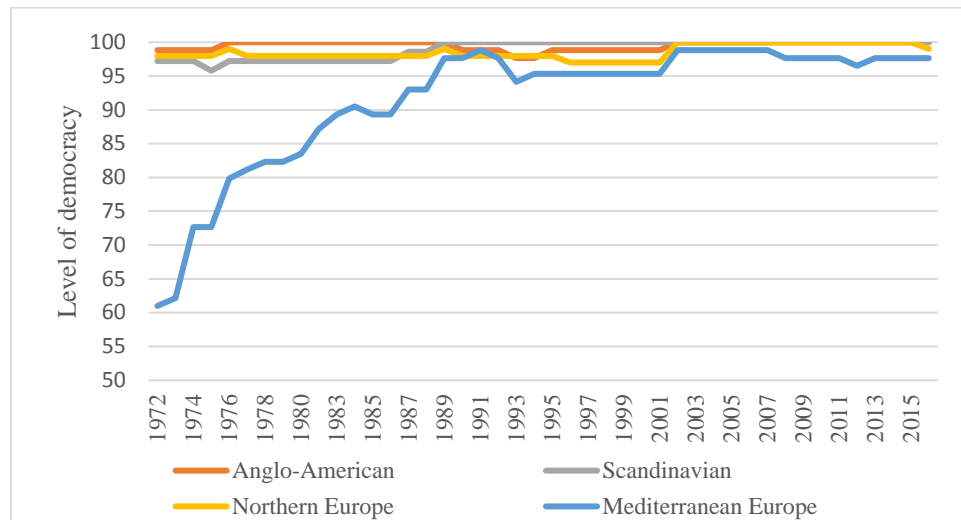
Note: Annual estimates of civil liberties and political rights by Freedom House converted into a 100-point standardized scale. The figure illustrates the net change in democratization in 193 countries worldwide from 2005 to 2016, using the 2005 Freedom House regime classification into 'Free' (democracies), 'Partly free' ('Hybrid regimes') and 'Not free' (autocracies).

The net gains and losses for freedom around the globe during the last decade are documented in the map in Figure 6, Figure 7 comparing regime types, and Table 1 comparing countries.

According to these estimates, important setbacks have indeed occurred among several non-Western global regions, developing societies, and fragile states elsewhere in the world. This includes outbreaks of violence in countries with a long history of civil wars, and actual or attempted military coups, destabilizing hybrid regimes in Thailand, Burundi, and the Central African Republic.

Among non-Western states classified as democratic in 2005, significant losses (over 14 points on the 100-point standardized scale) registered in Mali (following the coup-d'état), Hungary (under the new constitution brought in by Viktor Orbán's Fidesz government), Poland (under the Law and Justice party), the Dominican Republic (following restrictions on human rights), Mexico (destabilized by narco-crime), and Nauru (after restricting the judiciary and media).

Figure 6: Net changes in democratization worldwide, 2005-2016.

Note: Annual estimates of civil liberties and political rights by Freedom House converted into a 100-point standardized scale. The map illustrates the net gains (in green) and losses (in red) in 193 countries worldwide from 2005 to 2016.

Source: Calculated from Freedom House. *Freedom in the World, 2005-2016,* www.freedomhouse.org

Figure 7: Net change in democratization by type of regime, 2005-16
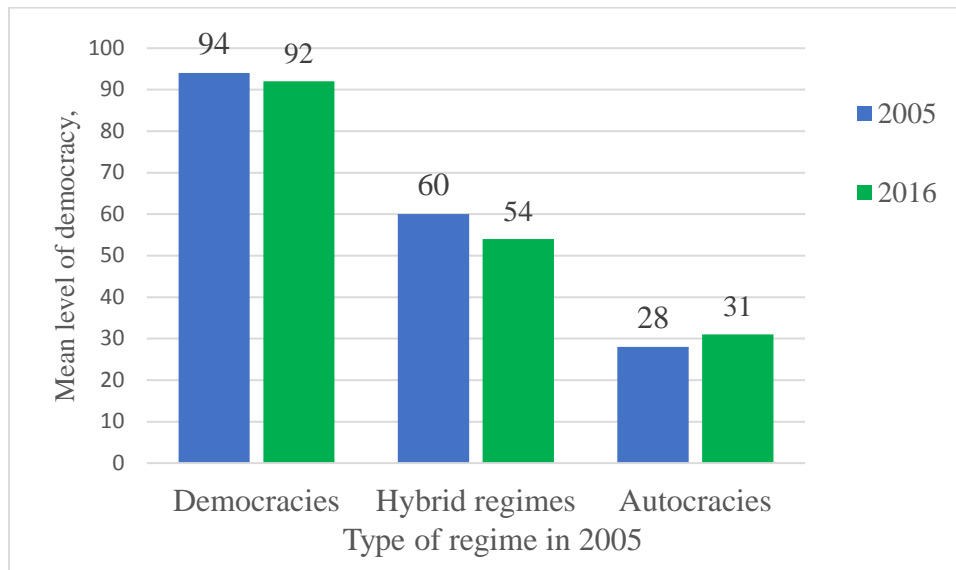
Note: Annual estimates of civil liberties and political rights by Freedom House converted into a 100-point standardized scale. The figure illustrates the net change in democratization in 193 countries worldwide from 2005 to 2016, using the 2005 Freedom House regime classification into Democracies ('Free'), 'Hybrid regimes (Partly free') and Autocracies ('Not free').

Source: Calculated from Freedom House. *Freedom in the World, 2005-2017,* www.freedomhouse.org

Some of the worst backsliding during the last decade has happened in states classified in 2005 as hybrid regimes (or 'partly free', using Freedom House's categorization), exemplified by Russia, Venezuela, Kenya, and Turkey. Hybrid regimes, in the grey zone of neither being full democracies nor absolute autocracies, are often the least stable politically, and at high risk of social conflict, with competitive elections but weak institutionalized checks and balances on executive power and poor-quality governance.

The last decade also saw some counter-balancing gains that do not always merit as much attention in international headlines, notably in Mongolia, Nepal, Bhutan, Tunisia, and Côte d'Ivoire.

Most importantly, however, according to these standard indices, since 2005 the core institutions safeguarding political rights and civil liberties have not (yet) declined in Western states. Some criticize Freedom House data, which may be conservative, but the available evidence for trends until 2012 from equivalent assessments, such as the Varieties of Democracy project (V-Dem), CIRI, and Polity IV, point in a similar direction.[21] Contemporary developments can be confirmed with greater confidence once data covering the last few years is released from these sources.

III: Threats from terrorism and populist authoritarianism

This also leads towards the final point: behaviorally, the most serious contemporary threats to Western democracies arise from the confluence of twin forces seeking to destabilize democratic regimes, those of terrorism and those associated with populist authoritarianism.[22]

The problems of sporadic terrorist acts on Western soil for destabilizing societies are self-evident, with a series of attacks in cities such as London, Berlin, Boston, Ottawa, Paris, Nice, Istanbul, Sydney, and Brussels raising public anxieties, especially where jihadist supporters serve to fuel the flames of Islamophobia.[23] The dangers to public confidence are obvious, especially the apparent incapacity of the security forces to prevent the random mass shootings, bombings, and weaponization of vehicles by home-grown militants holding national citizenship, with no prior association with radical support networks, and with no previous track record of violence. Anxieties are also heightened by the refugee crisis in Europe. Most importantly, like tapeworms, fleas, aphids, fungi, and barnacles, a parasite-host relationship links anxieties over random terrorist acts with growing support for populist-authoritarian parties. The consequences for destabilizing the cultural and constitutional foundations of Western democratic regimes and the global world order continue to play out as events unfold. But there could be serious dangers in the reaction of the Trump administration to whatever will be the next Boston Marathon or San Bernardino act occurring on American soil, and the security response such an event would be thought to justify.[24]

The rise of populist authoritarianism in the United States, especially by the risks that President Trump poses to core democratic values, practices and institutions, pose major threats to liberal democracy. Beyond America's borders, prospects for active U.S. democracy promotion policies are undermined both by his example and by his 'America First' transactional views. The Trump administration's foreign policies continue to evolve, but the president favors the build-up of hard-power military might rather than soft-power State department diplomacy, proposed budget cuts to international development aid for dealing with humanitarian crisis, lukewarm indifference towards the leaders of traditional allies such as Germany and Australia, hostility towards international trade and climate agreements, criticism of the multilateral agencies of global governance like NATO and the UN, and favorable attitudes towards strongman rulers elsewhere in the world, including Putin.

America is far from alone; populist authoritarian parties have gained strength at the polls in many Western societies. This includes the profound shock of Brexit in the UK, as well as record support reported in contemporary opinion polls for Geert Wilders for PVV in the Netherlands, Marine Le Pen's National Front in France, and Giuseppe Grille's Five Stars Movement in Italy. Across Europe, the average share of the vote for populist parties in national and European parliamentary elections has more than doubled since the 1960s, from around 5.1% to 13.2%.[25] During the same era, their share of seats has tripled, from 3.8% to 12.8%. The growth of populist-authoritarianism threatens liberal democracy at home by challenging the core values of pluralism, social tolerance, rule of law, human rights, and freedoms in Western societies. Populists also threaten Western efforts at democracy promotion abroad, such as by doing business with authoritarian leaders irrespective of their human rights record, disengaging from the post-war world order and institutions of global governance, including the United Nations, and slashing development aid budgets.[26]

Trump's angry nativist rhetoric and dark fear-mongering also echoes xenophobic political discourse among populist leaders in several hybrid regimes worldwide, from Recep Tayyip Erdoğan in Turkey to Viktor Orbán in Hungary, Rodrigo Duterte in the Philippines, and the late Hugo Chávez and Nicolás Maduro in Venezuela. [27] These cases provide the clearest warning of how populist forces have the capacity to undermine fundamental human rights and freedoms under these types of regimes.

To understand the risks, it helps to see populism as a governing style with three defining features. Firstly, populist rhetoric emphasizes that legitimate political authority is based on popular sovereignty and majority rule. Secondly, populism challenges the legitimacy of the establishment. This concept remains vague but the term reflects disapproval of the privileged

classes ('the haves') holding the reins of political, cultural, and economic power in any society. Finally, despite the rhetoric about popular sovereignty, in practice populist forces are often led by maverick outsiders ('none-of-the-above') claiming to speak for the vox populi and to serve ordinary people.

It should be emphasized that not all populists are authoritarian, and not all authoritarians are populists, by any means. For example, Bernie Sanders' Democrats, Spain's Podemos and Italy's Five Star Movement are all anti-establishment but more progressive in their values.

When the populist style of governance is coupled with authoritarian values, however, this potent combination presents most dangerous risk to the principles and practices at the heart of liberal democracy. Trump falls into this category.[28] Authoritarian values emphasize the importance of protecting traditional lifestyles against perceived threats from 'outsiders', even at the expense of civil liberties and minority rights. These values advocate strict conformity to conventional norms, such as in the spheres of the family, religion, marriage, sexual orientations, and gender identities, rather than tolerance of multiculturalism, fluid identities, and diverse lifestyles. Finally these values also reflect xenophobic and racist attitudes towards foreigners, refugees and immigrants, coupled with deep mistrust of cosmopolitanism, multiculturalism, and the institutions of global governance. [29]

Populism undercuts the legitimacy of the checks and balances on executive power in liberal democracies, thereby leaving the backdoor ajar, and turning off the burglar alarm, protecting citizens from strong leaders advocating authoritarian values attacking the heart of liberal freedoms, social tolerance, and cosmopolitanism.

For all these reasons, Foa and Mounk correctly identify populist-authoritarianism as a real threat to the future of liberal democracies, however they misdiagnose the social basis of their appeal. In fact, voting support for populist-authoritarian parties and leaders in Europe is disproportionately concentrated among the *older* generations, not the young. This pattern persists even after controlling for many other factors, such as sex and education.[30] This is hardly surprising; we have known for years that older people in post-industrial societies are far more traditional in their social values, especially more nationalistic, while young people are far more cosmopolitan and tolerant of diverse life-styles.[31] The age-gap was sharply evident in the autopsy of the Brexit vote, with the elderly casting ballots to leave while the younger generation preferred to remain (but saw its hopes of educational and job opportunities in Europe dashed).[32]

Figure 8: Trump vote in the 2016 U.S. Presidential election by birth cohort
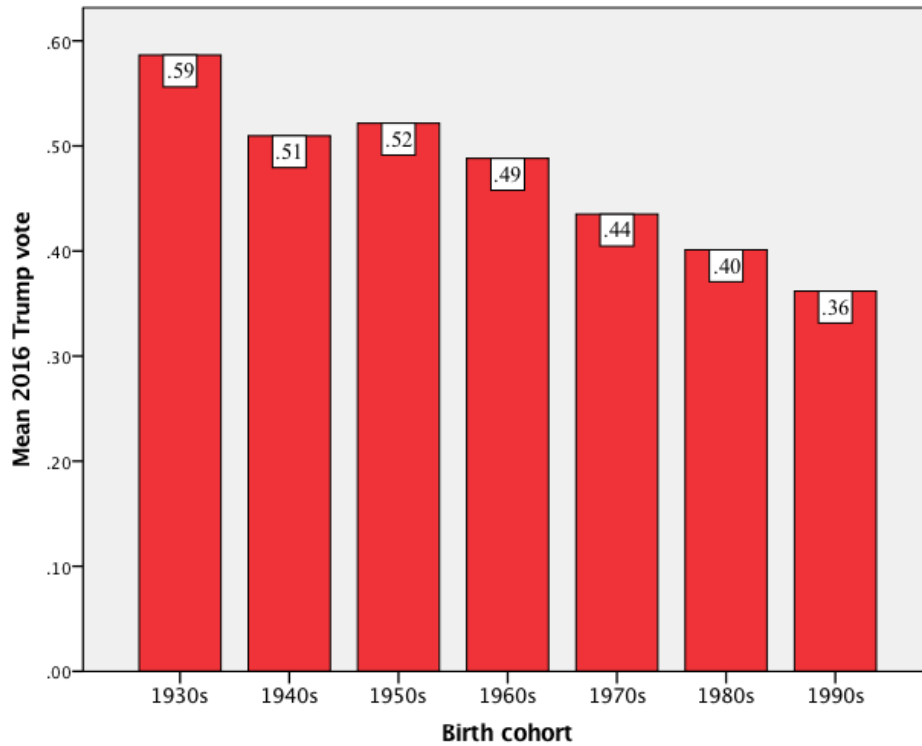
Source: American National Election Study, 2016 (N. 4,271)

As shown in Figure 8, drawn from the 2016 American National Election Study, the profile of Trump voters also skews heavily towards the older birth cohorts. If only those born before the 1960s had cast a ballot, Trump would have won the popular vote. By contrast Clinton swept the support of Millennials. This is a robust pattern which can also be observed in the 2016 Exit Poll and the 2016 Cooperative Congressional Election Study.[33]

What explains this pattern? As argued elsewhere, the key reason driving the generation gap concerns cultural values, not income differences. Support for Trump is strongly associated with a cultural backlash; the older generation of Americans feel like they are losing from long-term cultural trends transforming a wide range of social norms and mores, weakening adherence to traditional values associated with faith, family, and patriotism.[34] American moral attitudes have gradually been transformed in recent decades, especially among the younger generation and college educated sectors, such as through acceptance of more fluid gender identities, respect for LGBTQ rights, and tolerance of diverse lifestyles, ethnic identities, and cultural practices, as well as by the deep-rooted value

shifts associated with long-term processes of secularization and cosmopolitanism.

In this short paper, this general pattern can be illustrated most simply by how far Americans agreed or disagreed in the 2016 American National Election Study with the statement: *"The world is always changing and we should adjust our view of moral behavior to those changes."* Factor analysis (not shown here) demonstrated that attitudes towards this single statement were strongly related to numerous other indicators of cultural and moral change, such as attitudes towards newer lifestyles, traditional family values, laws to project gay and lesbian rights, transgender policies, moral relativism, and same sex marriage. Agreement and disagreement on the 5-point scale towards world change can be standardized around the mean (z-scores) to compare how attitudes vary between traditionalists, rejecting change, and progressives, accepting it.

Figure 9: American responses to the changing moral world
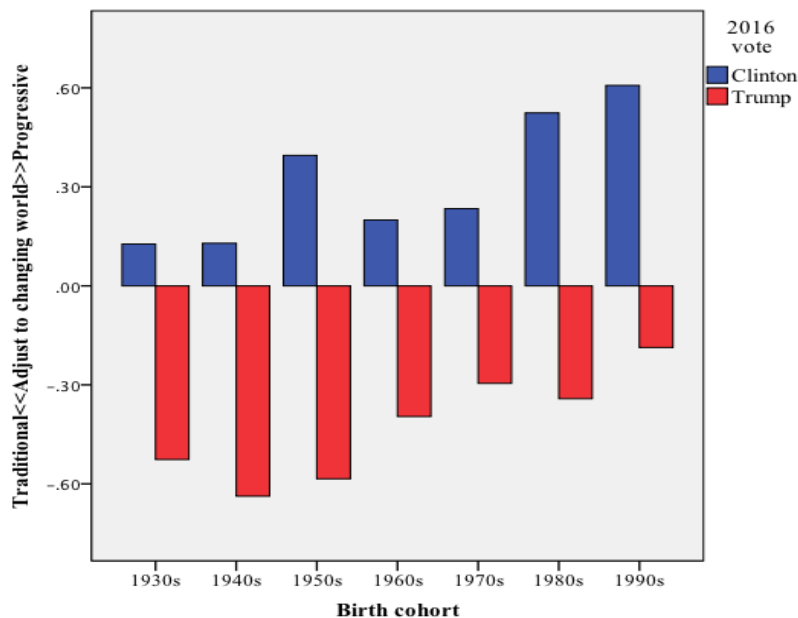
Note: Q: *'The world is always changing and we should adjust our view of moral behavior to those changes.' Do you [agree strongly, agree somewhat, neither agree nor disagree, disagree somewhat, or disagree strongly.'*

Source: 2016 American National Election Study, time-series dataset

As shown in Figure 9, Clinton clearly predominated among Millennials expressing progressive attitudes towards moral change. By contrast, Trump voters rejected this statement, especially among the older generation who feel deeply nostalgic for the traditional moral values underlying the Trump slogan 'Making America Great Again'. Cultural indices are strong and

significant predictors of voting for Clinton or Trump in the 2016 presidential election even after controlling for many other factors, such as education, sex, race, income, economic security, party ID, and evaluations of economic performance. Again this is a robust pattern and similar patterns can be observed for numerous other indicators of value change.

Conclusions

In conclusion, the popular zeitgeist about the state of Western democracies – and the postwar international order – has swung from a mood of complacency to a pervasive sense of unease and even strident alarm. The proximate triggers in Western societies were the shock of the Brexit decision to withdraw the United Kingdom from the European Union, followed by the unexpected Electoral College victory of President Trump and his subsequent authoritarian rhetoric and erratic behavior, coupled with indicators of rising electoral support for populist challengers in many European states. The fate of the Dutch, French and German elections will provide further signs. The underlying threat from terrorism and the refugee crisis has reinforced broader anxieties and insecurities.

If we return to Juan Linz and Alfred Stepan's original formulation for insights, however, the consolidation of democracies can be understood as a mature stage when regimes prove resilient even under periods of severe crisis and electoral turbulence. Of course, like steel bars that appear strong until shattered by liquid nitrogen, regimes may appear resilient until they are not. But are the United States and other Western democracies actually in danger of backsliding so that they come to resemble hybrid regimes like Turkey, Thailand, the Philippines, and Venezuela, characterized by weak checks and balances on executive powers, flawed or even suspended elections, fragmented opposition forces, state restrictions on media freedoms, intellectuals, and civil society organizations, curbs on the independence of the judiciary and disregard for rule of law, the abuse of human rights by the security forces, and tolerance of authoritarian values?

Consolidation is theorized to rest on the pillars of widespread public agreement with democratic values, constitutional arrangements reflecting democratic norms and principles, and the absence of major groups and parties threatening to undermine the regime. Of these pillars, populist-authoritarian forces threatening to dismantle core values in liberal democracy pose the gravest risk, especially in America, given the vast powers of the U.S. presidency and its hegemonic role in the world. The mainstream news media, the courts, and a reenergized civil society are actively pushing back to resist the threats to democracy arising from the Trump administration. In Congress and State Houses, however, the Democrats are decimated, and the Republican party and conservative activists seem willing to be seduced by dreams of power. It remains to be

seen whether the red cap 'Make America Great Again' forces of Trump, or the pink-hat resistance, will succeed.

Table 1: Net changes in democratization by country, 2005-2016

Democracies in 2005				Hybrid regimes in 2005				Autocracies in 2005			
	2005	2016	Chge		2005	2016	Chge		2005	2016	Chge
Mali	86	50	-36	Burundi	57	21	-36	Azerbaijan	36	21	-14
Hungary	100	79	-21	Central African Rep	50	14	-36	Chad	36	21	-14
Dominican Republic	86	71	-14	Thailand	71	36	-36	Russia	36	21	-14
Mexico	86	71	-14	Bahrain	43	21	-21	Tajikistan	36	21	-14
Nauru	100	86	-14	Ethiopia	43	21	-21	Angola	36	29	-7
Botswana	86	79	-7	Gambia, The	50	29	-21	Congo, Demo Rep	29	21	-7
Bulgaria	93	86	-7	Guinea Bissau	64	43	-21	Equatorial Guinea	21	14	-7
France	100	93	-7	Nicaragua	71	50	-21	Eritrea	21	14	-7
Greece	93	86	-7	Turkey	71	50	-21	Kazakhstan	36	29	-7
Indonesia	79	71	-7	Venezuela	57	36	-21	Rwanda	36	29	-7
Latvia	100	93	-7	Yemen	43	21	-21	Saudi Arabia	21	14	-7
Lesotho	79	71	-7	Afghanistan	43	29	-14	Somalia	21	14	-7
Liechtenstein	100	93	-7	Congo, Republic of	43	29	-14	Algeria	36	36	0
Mauritius	100	93	-7	Honduras	71	57	-14	Belarus	21	21	0
Monaco	93	86	-7	Kenya	71	57	-14	Brunei	36	36	0
Panama	93	86	-7	Niger	71	57	-14	Cambodia	36	36	0
Poland	100	93	-7	Uganda	50	36	-14	Cameroon	29	29	0
South Africa	93	86	-7	Bosnia Herzegovina	64	57	-7	China	21	21	0
South Korea	93	86	-7	Djibouti	43	36	-7	Egypt	36	36	0
Suriname	86	79	-7	Ecuador	71	64	-7	Iran	29	29	0
Ukraine	79	71	-7	Gabon	43	36	-7	Iraq	36	36	0
Andorra	100	100	0	Jordan	50	43	-7	Laos	21	21	0
Antigua & Barbuda	86	86	0	Kuwait	50	43	-7	North Korea	14	14	0
Argentina	86	86	0	Kyrgyzstan	50	43	-7	Oman	36	36	0
Australia	100	100	0	Macedonia	71	64	-7	Qatar	36	36	0
Austria	100	100	0	Madagascar	71	64	-7	Sudan	14	14	0
Bahamas	100	100	0	Mauritania	43	36	-7	Swaziland	29	29	0
Barbados	100	100	0	Mozambique	64	57	-7	Syria	14	14	0
Belgium	100	100	0	Sri Lanka	71	64	-7	Turkmenistan	14	14	0
Belize	93	93	0	Albania	71	71	0	United Arab Emirates	29	29	0
Benin	86	86	0	Armenia	50	50	0	Uzbekistan	14	14	0
Brazil	86	86	0	Bangladesh	57	57	0	Vietnam	29	29	0
Canada	100	100	0	Bolivia	71	71	0	Cuba	14	21	7
Cape Verde	100	100	0	Colombia	71	71	0	Guinea	36	43	7
Chile	100	100	0	Fiji	64	64	0	Libya	14	21	7
Costa Rica	100	100	0	Georgia	71	71	0	Maldives	36	43	7
Cyprus	100	100	0	Guatemala	57	57	0	Pakistan	36	50	14
Czech Republic	100	100	0	Lebanon	50	50	0	Haiti	21	43	21
Denmark	100	100	0	Malaysia	57	57	0	Togo	36	57	21
Dominica	100	100	0	Morocco	50	50	0	Zimbabwe	21	43	21
El Salvador	79	79	0	Nigeria	57	57	0	Bhutan	36	64	29
Estonia	100	100	0	Papua New Guinea	71	71	0	Cote d'Ivoire	29	57	29
Finland	100	100	0	Paraguay	71	71	0	Myanmar	14	43	29
Germany	100	100	0	Philippines	71	71	0	Nepal	36	64	29
Ghana	93	93	0	Seychelles	71	71	0	Tunisia	36	86	50
Grenada	93	93	0	Tanzania	64	64	0				
Iceland	100	100	0	TimorLeste	71	71	0				
India	79	79	0	Zambia	57	57	0				
Ireland	100	100	0	Burkina Faso	57	64	7				
Israel	93	93	0	Comoros	57	64	7				
Italy	100	100	0	Guyana	71	79	7				
Jamaica	79	79	0	Liberia	57	64	7				
Kiribati	100	100	0	Moldova	64	71	7				
Lithuania	100	100	0	Sierra Leone	64	71	7				
Luxembourg	100	100	0	Singapore	50	57	7				
Malta	100	100	0	Solomon Islands	71	79	7				
Marshall Islands	100	100	0	Malawi	57	71	14				
Micronesia	100	100	0	Tonga	57	86	29				
Namibia	86	86	0								
Netherlands	100	100	0								
New Zealand	100	100	0								
Norway	100	100	0								
Palau	100	100	0								
Peru	79	79	0								
Portugal	100	100	0								
Romania	86	86	0								
Saint Kitts and Nevis	100	100	0								
Saint Lucia	100	100	0								

Democracies in 2005				Hybrid regimes in 2005				Autocracies in 2005			
	2005	2016	Chge		2005	2016	Chge		2005	2016	Chge
Samoa	86	86	0								
San Marino	100	100	0								
Sao Tome & Principe	86	86	0								
Slovakia	100	100	0								
Slovenia	100	100	0								
Spain	100	100	0								
Sweden	100	100	0								
Switzerland	100	100	0								
Taiwan	100	100	0								
Tuvalu	100	100	0								
United Kingdom	100	100	0								
United States	100	100	0								
Uruguay	100	100	0								
Vanuatu	86	86	0								
Croatia	86	93	7								
Japan	93	100	7								
Mongolia	86	93	7								
Saint Vincent & Gren	93	100	7								
Senegal	79	86	7								
Trinidad & Tobago	79	86	7								
Total	94	91	-2	Total	60	54	-6	Total	28	31	3

Note: Annual estimates of civil liberties and political rights by Freedom House converted into a 100-point standardized scale. The figure illustrates the net change in democratization in 193 countries worldwide from 2005 to 2016, using the 2005 Freedom House regime classification into 'Free' (democracies), 'Partly free' ('Hybrid regimes') and 'Not free' (autocracies).

Source: Calculated from Freedom House. *Freedom in the World, 2005-2017,* www.freedomhouse.org

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