

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)

The End of the Consolidation Paradigm

A Response to Our Critics *

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IN *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, Thomas Kuhn described the process by which scientific paradigms develop, mature, and eventually break down. At first, researchers lack consensus on a theory. Over time, they adopt a working paradigm that can explain most observations. Eventually, anomalies accumulate that are inconsistent with the original framework, and which cannot be explained by it. At that point, scientists might be expected to call the original paradigm into question. Instead, Kuhn argued that this is precisely the thing that

scientists never do when confronted by even severe and prolonged anomalies. Though they may begin to lose faith and then to consider alternatives, they do not renounce the paradigm that has led them into crisis...Once it has achieved the status of paradigm, a scientific theory is declared invalid only if an alternate candidate is available to take its place.¹

*Reply to articles by Pippa Norris, Erik Voeten, and Amy C. Alexander and Christian Welzel in the *Journal of Democracy's* "Online Exchange on Democratic Deconsolidation," 28 April, 2017. We would like to give thanks to Monica Hersher for stellar research assistance, especially on differential shifts in attitudes towards democracy across different age groups.

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In the study of democracy and democratization, there is a clear and prevailing paradigm that has reigned since the early 1990s: the theory of democratic consolidation. According to this theory, democratic consolidation is a one-way street. Once a set of threshold conditions is attained, the stability of democracy is assured. Democracy has become consolidated. To be sure, scholars of democratic consolidation vary in their assessment of the precise nature of these threshold conditions. On various accounts, they consist in the legitimacy of democratic institutions and processes among political actors;² the procedural acceptance of democratic rules³ and the passing of a “two-turnover test;”⁴ the growth of the civic sector as a check upon political elites;⁵ or the spread of liberal values in society as a whole.⁶ But despite such differences of emphasis, they share a crucial premise: implicitly or explicitly, they believe that a successful transition to democracy will prove permanent.

The purpose of our articles, published in the July 2016 and January 2017 editions of the *Journal of Democracy*,⁷ has been a modest one: We sought to give serious consideration to the mountain of anomalies that has accumulated in recent years; to assess whether confidence in the consolidation paradigm is still warranted; and to invite scholars to think anew about the conditions under which democratic governance may be considered durable and stable.⁸

We did this by pointing to a number of anomalies that seemed to contradict core predictions of the theory of democratic consolidation. First, we called attention to a set of longstanding observations that have mostly been downplayed in the literature: In many democracies, electoral turnout, membership in political parties, and political trust have all declined. The lay observer might interpret declining confidence in political elites, experts, and the media as a sign that support for the key institutions of representative democracy is eroding. But in the eyes of political scientists, these same indicators were transmuted into a positive story, according to which people were merely developing more “critical” or “assertive” forms of citizenship.⁹ Similarly, eroding participation in the “formal politics” of voting and party membership might be seen as opening the door to new forms of toxic, populist, anti-establishment politics. But according to most adherents of the consolidation paradigm, it was explained by the preference of young voters to engage in non-traditional form of protest and political organizing.¹⁰

We also uncovered a second series of striking anomalies: In many countries, enthusiasm for liberal democracy has fallen while openness to illiberal authoritarian alternatives to democracy has risen. What’s more, this tendency of what we call “democratic deconsolidation” has been more pronounced among the young than the old. These findings seem to call the longstanding confidence in democratic stability into doubt in an even more radical way, and so it is little wonder that they had considerable public impact upon publication. And yet, many political scientists are still trying to argue that they

do not contradict the normal science framework of democratic consolidation.

As encapsulated by our critics, believers in this framework have offered three kinds of responses. One response has been to deny that there really are anomalies: While support for democracy might have fallen in some countries, for example, it has not fallen in others. Another response has been to claim that these anomalies do not necessitate a full-scale reconsideration of the consolidation paradigm: even insofar as anomalies do occur, it is claimed, they merely necessitate cosmetic adjustments to the original theory. Finally, the most intrepid response has been to claim that, rightly understood, the anomalies we observe should actually *strengthen* confidence in the idea of democratic stability: on this view, skepticism of democratic governance reflects higher civic standards, and the unexpected electoral success of populists like Donald Trump is best explained by the fact that their electoral base “has become smaller,” and thus “easier to address and to mobilize.”¹¹

It is always tempting to come up with post-hoc explanations that entrench our belief in a dominant paradigm after anomalies have occurred. That is why it is important to ask whether the major theories that predict ongoing democratic stability conceived of the possibility that we would observe declining confidence in democracy and rising support for illiberal movements before we pointed out the existence of these trends. The answer is that they did not. As a result, we remain as confident as ever that there are some very important developments which the standard point of view cannot explain – ones that necessitate a serious reconsideration of some of our most foundational assumptions.

How Broad is this Trend?

Let’s start with the basics. The consolidation paradigm made a strong prediction for all democracies that were supposedly consolidated: Once a country qualified for the status of a consolidated democracy, it was supposed to be safe from democratic backsliding.

When did democracies qualify as consolidated? Despite differing specifications of the conditions, there has been a surprising amount of overlap on this question: for a democracy to become “the only game in town,” a large majority of its citizens needed to have a firm attachment to its political system. As Pippa Norris summarizes the point in her response to us, one of the conditions for “regime consolidation” is that “the overwhelming majority of people believe that democracy is the best form of government, so that any further reforms reflect these values and principles.”¹²

In our recent work, we have shown that this is no longer the case in a large range of countries. It is not only that young citizens give less importance to living in a democracy than older citizens, or that the belief that democracy

is a good system of government has declined over time. Strikingly, support for straightforwardly authoritarian alternatives to liberal democracy – like a “strong leader who does not have to bother” with elections, as the World Values Survey asks – has also increased. As a result, the vote share of populist authoritarian movements has steadily risen over time: Analysis by Simon Hix and Giacomo Benedetto shows that, across 31 democracies, the vote share for radical right parties is at its highest level since the 1930s.¹³ Similarly, outside of this exchange, Pippa Norris has presented data showing rising electoral support for authoritarian populism over time.¹⁴

The responses by Pippa Norris and Erik Voeten add important nuance to our findings. Norris, for example, agrees with us that “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,” and that “[m]ore modest generation gaps can also be observed in several other countries, including Slovenia, Uruguay, Japan and the Republic of Korea.” At the same time, Norris cautions that, “in half of the post-industrial democracies under comparison, no significant difference by birth cohort can be observed.”¹⁵ Similarly, Voeten points out that there are a good number of countries, including Finland, Switzerland, and the Czech Republic, in which there was no erosion of democratic values until 2009.¹⁶

To put this another way, Norris and Voeten show that the thing that should not happen anywhere if we were to retain full confidence in consolidation theory is only happening in about half of the democracies for which we have data. Their conclusion from this finding is to suggest that the original paradigm remains intact. Our conclusion is different: If half of all supposedly consolidated democracies – including such important ones as the United States and Great Britain – appear to be deconsolidating, then there is strong evidence for revising our assumptions regarding the stability of longstanding democracies.

Three Hypotheses

Our critics are wrong to draw an optimistic conclusion from the fact that democracy is not deconsolidating in all countries all at once. But they help to formulate a set of questions that, we submit, should be central to research on democracy and democratization in the years to come: Why do some democracies seem to be deconsolidating while the other democracies appear to retain the confidence of their citizens? And how might these differences help us to predict their respective paths in the future?

While we do not, as yet, have the answers to these questions, we believe that future work on this topic should test three main hypotheses.

The most optimistic hypothesis holds that the observations we adduce are

simply outliers. Perhaps, for example, they merely pick up on temporary dissatisfaction with democracy following the Great Recession (Appendix, Figure A3), or perhaps they simply reflect nuances in survey items and methodology.

The necessary evidence to exclude those possibilities with full confidence does not yet exist: we need a lot more surveys focused on questions about regime legitimacy to gain a clear picture of the most important temporal and geographic trends. But though we cannot yet exclude the most optimistic interpretation, it does not seem especially plausible. A host of individual surveys in countries across North America and Western Europe have also shown deep dissatisfaction with democratic institutions. In the United States, for example, 46 percent of respondents in an October 2016 survey reported that they either “never had” or had “lost” faith in U.S. democracy.¹⁷ In France, two-fifths of respondents in a 2015 survey believed that the country should be put in the hands of “an authoritarian government” free from democratic constraints; two-thirds were willing to delegate the task of enacting “unpopular but necessary reforms” to “unelected experts.”¹⁸ While nothing excludes the possibility that we might soon be able to celebrate a phase of democratic re-consolidation, hopes for a future turning point are, at this point, no more than hopeful speculation.

A somewhat less optimistic hypothesis holds that the countries in which there is less evidence of democratic deconsolidation get something right that countries in which there is strong evidence of democratic deconsolidation get wrong. Perhaps widespread attachment to democracy was always dependent on a rapid improvement of living standards for ordinary people, for example, and the gains from economic growth have been more concentrated among the rich in deconsolidating democracies than in countries in which the democratic consensus persists. Or perhaps a greater degree of ethnic and religious diversity creates special strains on the feeling of solidarity required by democracy, and these countries have experienced higher levels of immigration over recent decades. This would imply that those countries in which citizens continue to attach strong importance to democracy can avoid democratic deconsolidation for the foreseeable future as long as they can maintain the conditions that have made them stable so far. And it might also imply that countries like the United States can slow, halt, or even reverse the process of deconsolidation if they somehow manage to import some of the features that have helped to stabilize other democracies.

Finally, the most pessimistic hypothesis holds that a process of democratic deconsolidation is taking place in all, or most, democracies – but is simply more advanced in some of them than in others. On such a view, the causes of democratic deconsolidation are more pronounced in countries like the United States than in countries like Sweden. But over time, the same causes are likely to materialize in those countries as well. If this hypothesis is true,

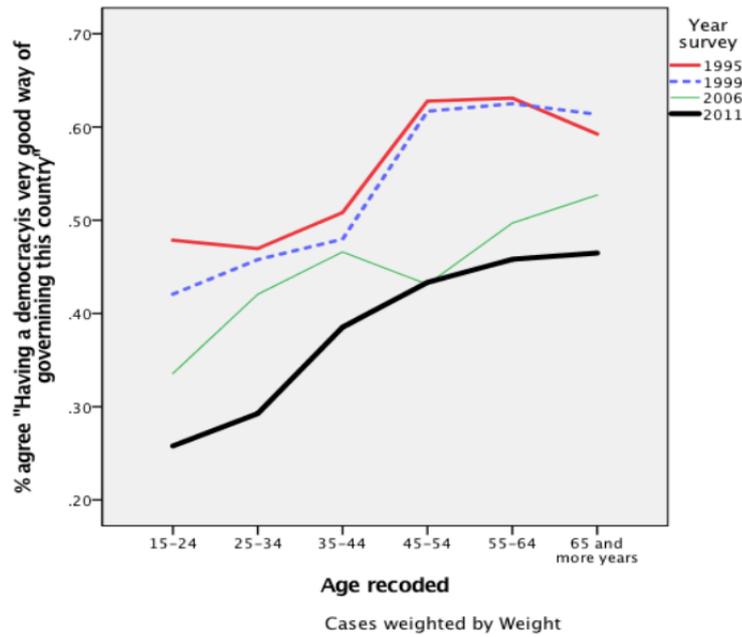
then we should see opinion about democracy trend increasingly negative in countries like Sweden or Germany in the coming years. While we hope that this will not be the case, there are some worrying indicators that make this seem plausible. For example, the surge of populist parties that has been notable across North America and Western Europe in past decades seems to have occurred belatedly in the countries in which Voeten (based on data from 2008-2009) does not identify democratic deconsolidation.

The Young

Our main contention is that the conditions for democratic stability seem to be eroding in many countries and across many age groups. The striking fact that the process of deconsolidation seems to be especially pronounced among the young is only one part of this larger story. But since it has generated a lot of interest, it is worth analyzing in further detail.

In our previous papers, we made two main claims about young people: First, at this point in time, millennials are more disillusioned with democracy than their elders. And second, at this point in time millennials are also more disillusioned with democracy than previous generations were at a similar life stage. Strikingly, our critics actually add further evidence for these two key hypotheses in the process of pushing back against us. Take the graph presented by Pippa Norris as counter-evidence to our thesis of eroding youth support in the United States: it clearly shows both a) that, at this point in time, young people are more critical of democracy than older people; and b) that young people at this point in time are more critical of democracy than young people had been in the past (Figure 1).

Figure 1: Figure from Norris (2017): Approval of Democracy by Age Group, 1995-2011.



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.

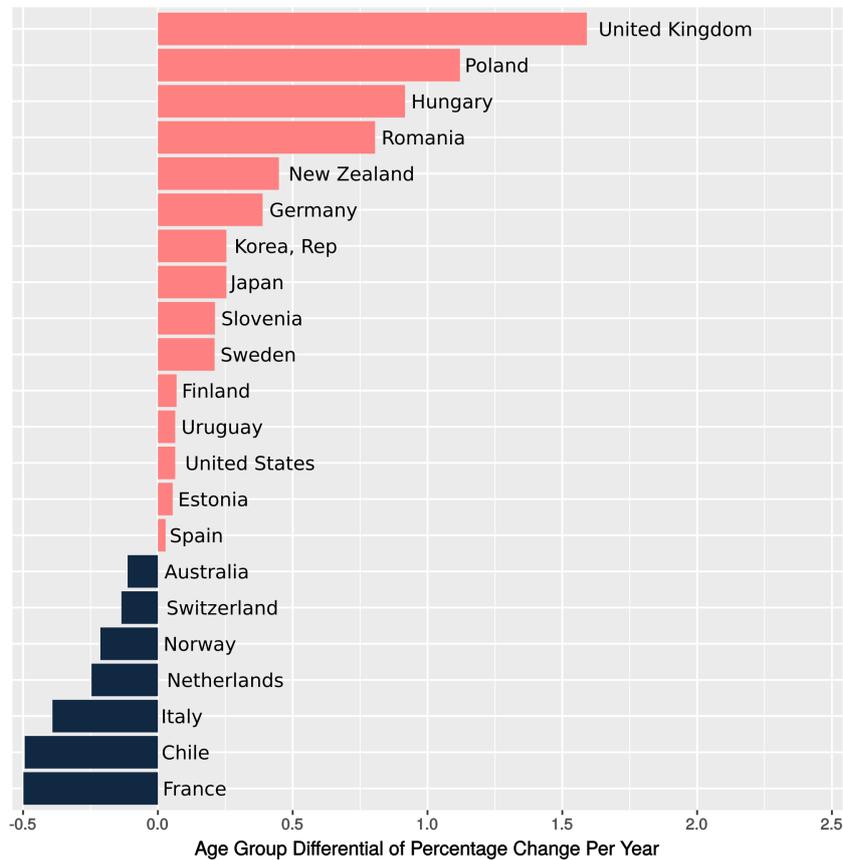
Source: World Values Survey, US sample only, 1995-2011.

Taken together, these two realizations should surely do a lot of damage to the key assumptions of the consolidation paradigm, according to which the citizens of consolidated democracies should continue to endorse a democratic consensus over time. So why use this graph to push back against our finding that there is reason to be especially concerned about the young? The graph is included to make a highly specific point, which relies on a rather surprising inference: That we need not be too worried about an ongoing erosion of democratic norms because disillusionment with democracy is happening at a similar rate across different age groups.

This claim falls short both on the inference and on the evidence. First, there would be strong reason to worry about democratic disenchantment even if Norris’s claim was empirically sound: So long as young people are more critical of democracy than they have ever been, it is reasonable to worry

about their views even if the rate of increase by which their views have turned more negative is not higher than that of older people. But second, and more decisively, Norris's underlying empirical claim is also wrong: As we show in Figure 2, in most countries – including such important cases as the United Kingdom, Germany, and Poland – the rate at which the views of young people have turned more negative is much higher than the rate at which the views of older people have done so (see also Appendix, Figure A4).

Figure 2: Respondents Aged 15-24 have become Critical of Democracy at a Faster Rate than People Aged 65+

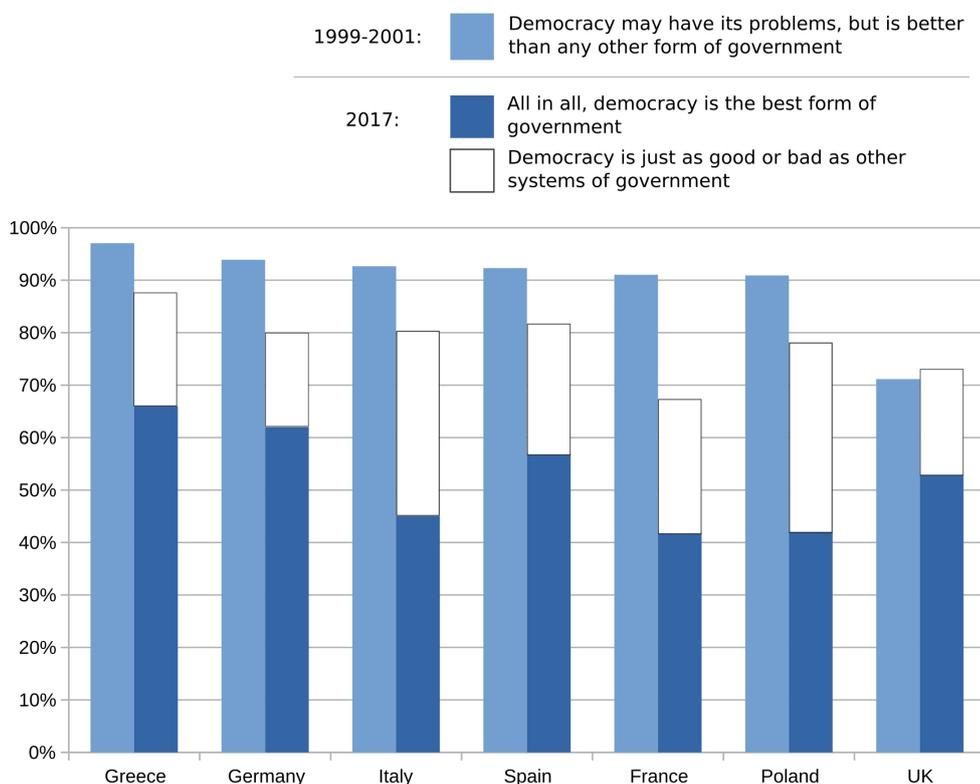


Source: World Values Survey Waves 3 and 6 and European Values Study Waves 3 and 4.
Notes: “Critical of democracy” is defined as respondents who rank democracy as a political system as “very bad” or “fairly bad.” Participants were asked to respond to this question in waves 3 through 6 of WVS and waves 3 and 4 of EVS, and this chart selects the first and last of these surveys that each country participated in to calculate the percentage change per year of the populace which is critical of democracy for respondents aged 15-24 and aged 65+. The chart then plots the difference between the percentage change per year for respondents aged 18-24 and respondents aged 65+. Countries classified as “Free” by Freedom House and with a per capita GDP greater than \$16,000 as measured by the World Development Indicators are shown, excluding Canada and Cyprus as they only participated in the relevant surveys in adjacent waves. Australia, Chile, Estonia, Germany, Japan, Republic of Korea, New Zealand, Romania, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, US, and Uruguay participated in WVS waves 3 and 6, so the percentage change per year is calculated from first survey data between 1995-1998 and last survey data between 2010-2013. Finland, Hungary, Norway, and Switzerland participated in WVS wave 3 and EVS wave 4, so the first surveys fall between 1996-1998 and the last surveys fall between 2008-2009. Poland participated in EVS wave 3 and WVS wave 6 with a first survey in 1999 and last survey in 2012, and the UK participated in EVS wave 3 and EVS wave 4 with a first survey in 1999 and last survey in 2009.

More data on youth attitudes about democracy is sorely needed to assess just how worrying these findings are. But it is worth noting that, over

recent months, further support for the decline of democratic attitudes among young people has kept emerging from other sources. To name just one example, data collected by YouGov across seven European countries in 2017 shows that dissatisfaction with democracy among young Europeans is widespread: In three countries (France, Italy, and Poland), only a minority of those aged 16 to 26 view democracy as “the best form of government.” In the UK, just over half of young respondents take this view. Even in Germany, which has so far shown less strong democratic deconsolidation than other countries, only about three in five respondents believe this (Figure 3).

Figure 3: Support for Democracy among European Youth (16-26) Respondents, 1999-2001 and 2017.



Notes: 1999-2001 results are from the European Values Study (EVS), and show the percentage of respondents aged 16-26 who “agree” or “strongly agree” that “democracy may have its problems, but is better than any other form of government.” 2017 results are from YouGov, and show the percentage of respondents aged 16-26 who agree that “all in all, democracy is the best form of government.” “Don’t know” responses also included in percentage total calculations for both data sources.

Sadly, there is no time-series data for the specific question asked by YouGov. But around the turn of the millennium, when the European Values Study asked respondents a similar survey item (in its third wave, conducted from 1999 to 2001), large majorities of young respondents agreed that “democracy may have its problems, but is better than any other form of government.” And though the comparison should be taken with a grain of salt, given the somewhat different formulation of the respective questions, what it shows is surely striking. It is not just that the proportion of Europeans who held a positive view of democracy was much higher twenty years ago than it is now. Rather, the proportion of young Europeans who held a positive view of democracy twenty years ago is much higher than the proportion of Europeans who hold *either* a positive or neutral view today (see Figure 3).

Output Legitimacy

Why might faith in democracy be eroding across a broader set of western societies? In their responses to our work, both Norris and Alexander and Welzel try to cast doubt on the idea that democratic deconsolidation might be occurring by expressing skepticism that one of its most plausible causes – a decline in the performance of democracies – has worsened over time. It is not our intention to put forward an affirmative account of the causes of democratic deconsolidation in this paper. But it is worth noting that there is much stronger support for the hypothesis that the performance of democratic societies has deteriorated over time, and has made citizens less loyal to their political systems, than our critics assume.

Norris, for example, makes two main arguments in this context. First, she presents data from Freedom House, which does not show any change in the ratings assigned to western countries in recent years. Second, she claims that this positive finding is “confirmed by other standard indices.”¹⁹

The best barometer of what standard indices have to say regarding respect for political rights and civil liberties is the Worldwide Governance Indicator for Voice and Accountability, because it aggregates the most widely-used cross-country measures – including not only the scores produced by Freedom House, but also those of the Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU), the Bertelsmann Foundation, the International Country Risk Guide, the Cingranelli-Richards dataset, and Reporters Without Borders – into a single annual index. And these aggregated scores do indeed show marked declines in the quality of democracy among western countries since the start of the series in 1996. The degree of democratic rule has slipped in 14 out of 17 Western European and North American democracies since the 1990s (Appendix Table A1). Individual indices reflect similar results: According to the EIU, countries like France, the United States, and Belgium, which had once been rated as “full” democracies, have since deteriorated to being

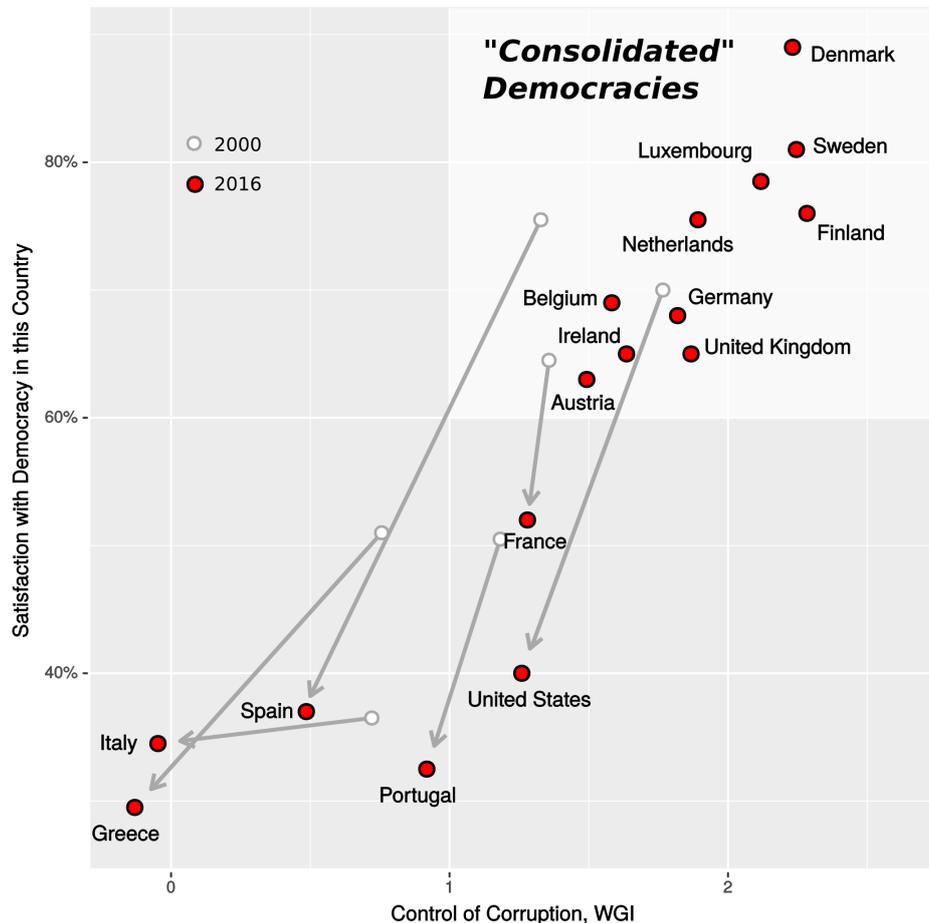
rated as “flawed” democracies.

What’s more, broader measures of democratic performance in western countries – such as the indices of the Worldwide Governance Indicators that cover political stability, rule of law, or control of corruption – show a similar deterioration over time. Ratings for the degree of corruption, for example, have deteriorated among 14 of 17 democracies in Western Europe and North America since 1996 (Appendix Table A2).

How do deteriorating assessments of democratic performance by experts relate to those of citizens? Norris cites data from Eurobarometer – which tracks respondents’ levels of satisfaction with “the way democracy works” in their country – as evidence that satisfaction with democracy remains high among citizens. Across the developed democracies of the west, she argues, government remains effective, transparent, and non-corrupt. As a result, citizens are relatively satisfied with the way democracy functions. For both of these reasons, we should continue to think of these democracies as fully consolidated.

This description would have been accurate for most western democracies as late as the turn of the millennium. Back in 2000, levels of perceived corruption were generally low. In every country other than Italy, a majority of citizens expressed satisfaction with the “way democracy works.” But today, the same no longer holds. On the contrary, an important subset of western countries – including not only Italy or Greece but also Portugal, Spain, and the United States – have seen both rising levels of corruption and a loss of faith in the performance of the democratic system. In fact, in each of these countries, an outright majority of the population now expresses dissatisfaction with the way democracy is working in their country (Figure 4).

Figure 4: Change in Satisfaction with Democracy and Control of Corruption Scores, 2000-2016.

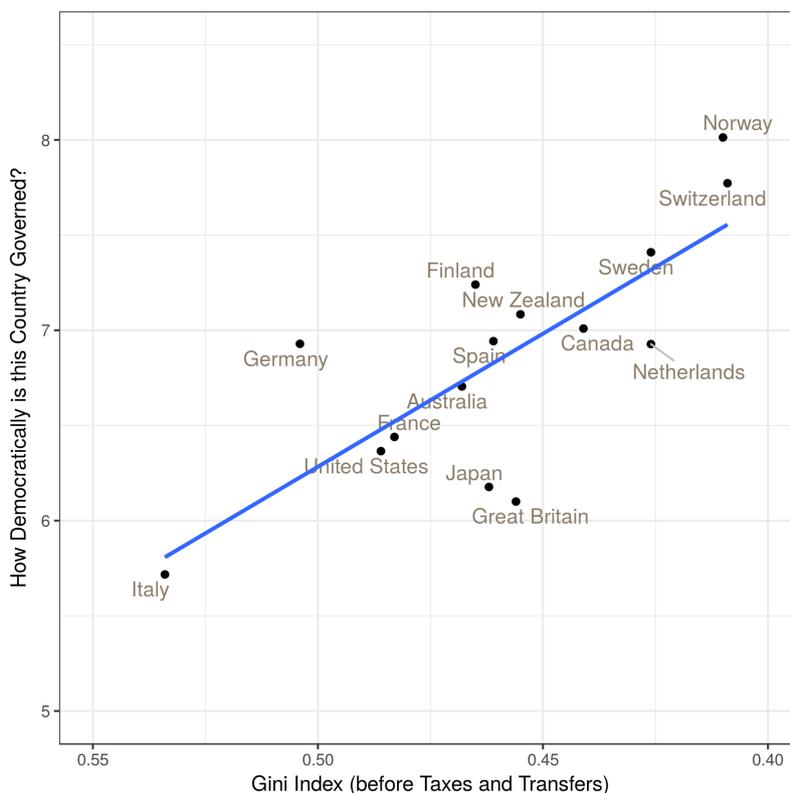


Notes: Survey data for European countries is from Eurobarometer, showing the percentage of respondents who are “very satisfied” or “fairly satisfied” with “the way democracy works” in their country in 2000 and in 2016. Survey data for the United States is taken from Gallup (2003) and Opinion Research/CNN (2010); in both surveys respondents were asked whether they were “satisfied with the way democracy is working in this country.” Control of Corruption scores are taken from the Worldwide Governance Indicators for 2000 and 2015 (most recent year) for all countries except the United States, for which estimates are taken for the same years as for the public opinion survey data shown (2003 and 2010).

Why might rising civic dissatisfaction be reflective of real declines in the performance of western democracies? As authors such as Bo Rothstein and Eric Uslaner have argued, falling political trust and declining institutional performance constitute a “social trap” that poses a serious risk for societies undergoing a sharp rise in economic inequality.²⁰ There is no reason to believe that western democracies are any more immune from such risks than transitional democracies have been when exposed to similar pressures. And

so it is especially notable that attitudes to democracy in the longstanding democracies of Europe and North America correlate surprisingly well with inequality in pretax income – the best indicator, perhaps, of disparities in earning potential from both human capital and rents from land and financial assets (Figure 5).

Figure 5: Perceptions of How Democratically the Country is Governed, and Income Equality before Taxes and Transfers.



Notes: Gini index before taxes and transfers, from the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). Survey data from the World Values Survey; mean average response to the item, “how democratically is this country being governed today?” (1-10).

Let us be clear: We do not present these observations in order to suggest a fully-formed paradigm that can explain the precise nexus between declining confidence in democracy, the rise of anti-system parties, the growth of income inequality, and institutional performance. Rather, we present them to open the minds of our critics to alternative hypotheses that they have not seriously countenanced so far: Rather than being indicative of a healthy civic culture, the rising skepticism of democratic institutions may instead reflect feelings of relative deprivation, frustration at the lack of democratic responsiveness,

anger at the remoteness of political elites, and a long-term disengagement from political institutions.

How Worried Should We Be?

All of this leads up to the most important set of questions: How worried should we be by the evidence as it stands? One way to answer this question is from within the data we have presented: How much disenchantment with democracy is actually a sign that the system may be becoming less stable? What does public opinion about democracy look like in authoritarian countries, for example, or in democracies that have begun the process of democratic backsliding?

According to Erik Voeten, we should be sanguine about the prospects of democracy because “democracy is most popular by some distance” when compared to “army rule” or support for a “strong leader.”²¹ But this seems too simplistic an approach: After all, Voeten’s own analysis shows that democracy, though less popular than in North American or Western Europe, remained by far the most-favored political system during the period in which Recep Tayyip Erdogan consolidated his autocratic rule in Turkey.

So what should we make of the fact that, as we showed in our January article, the proportion of citizens expressing approval for authoritarian alternatives to democracy has risen across most countries for which a full time-series (from 1995-7 to 2010-4) exists? We are now at work on a substantive research paper that will answer some of these questions in a more systematic manner, and includes time-series regressions that show loss of confidence in democracy to be predictive of democratic backsliding. But some simple descriptive statistics are enough to demonstrate that the threshold to be concerned is much lower than some of our critics seem to assume – and that many supposedly consolidated democracies have already cleared that threshold.

The question on whether democracy is a “good” or a “bad” way to run the country has been asked in 103 surveys around the world since it was first fielded by the Values Surveys in 1995. The two highest recorded levels for the sentiment that democracy is a “fairly bad” or “very bad” way to run the country were recorded in Russia in 1995 (43 percent of respondents) and Pakistan in 1997 (32 percent of respondents). Four years after the Russian survey, Vladimir Putin was elected as Russia’s president. Two years after the Pakistani survey, Pervez Musharraf took power in a military coup. Looking more broadly, the other countries in which skepticism of democratic governance was found to be widespread include Belarus in a survey conducted in 1996, two years following the election of Alexander Lukashenko, and Iran in 2000, before the election of the conservative populist Mahmoud Ahmadinejad. Data from Latinobarometer also show that cynicism of demo-

cratic institutions was more widespread than in most neighboring countries in the Venezuela of the 1990s, foreshadowing Hugo Chávez's ascent to power.

Obviously, these countries lack the democratic traditions and accountability mechanisms of western democracies. Even if skepticism of democracy were to approach similar levels in France, the United States, or Italy, it would not necessarily predict a similar regression in democratic norms or institutions. But what such cases do illustrate is that the threshold for a society to count among the countries in which affective support for democracy is weak is comparatively low – and that countries in which more than 20 percent of respondents express cynicism of democratic governance have, historically, been highly susceptible to the rise of authoritarian parties, candidates, and political movements.

The recent experience of western democracies is itself illustrative of the extent to which even a moderate degree of erosion of democratic idealism can result in a surprising degree of tolerance for illiberal and anti-democratic behaviors. Twenty years ago, political scientists believed that candidates who disdain basic democratic norms should never get elected to high office in consolidated democracies; that citizens in consolidated democracies should not be deeply angry at, or even disgusted with, their political system; that most citizens should agree that their countries are being ruled democratically; and that there should be far-reaching agreement on the basic democratic rules. And yet, none of these statements ring true today.

Just take the United States: The country is now ruled by a President who openly threatened to jail his political opponent when he was campaigning, and suggested that he would keep people “in suspense” about whether he would accept the outcome of the election. Anger at politicians keeps rising and satisfaction with their performance keeps falling. A rapidly growing number of people believe that their countries aren't being ruled in a truly democratic manner. Finally, in many places, political partisanship has risen so much that many politicians from establishment parties are willing to undermine basic rules in order to keep their opponents out of power – at times going so far as to curtail the duties of key offices when politicians from the opposing parties have captured them.

Conclusion: Beyond the Consolidation Paradigm

In 2002, Thomas Carothers argued that it was time to abandon the “transition paradigm,” according to which new democracies would steadily move from authoritarianism to liberal democracy. In the dozen years since then, scholars of democratization – noting the persistence of hybrid regimes, illiberal democracies, and other forms of electoral authoritarianism – have largely come to agree that an initial shift from authoritarian rule to electoral com-

petition need not signal an inevitable transition to democratic pluralism.²²

Even so, the intellectual cousin of the transition paradigm has largely remained unchallenged so far. When assessing the stability and vitality of existing democratic institutions in general, and those of western societies in particular, political scientists, policymakers, and journalists still make implicit reference to the consolidation paradigm. The result, we believe, has been an unfortunate degree of complacency about the future prospects of supposedly consolidated democracy; a shortfall in academic scholarship on what it means to have a functioning democratic political system; and a dearth of rigorous indicators that might be used to assess the degree of the current threat.²³

We began writing our articles in 2014, before the election of populist governments in Greece and Poland, the victory of Donald J. Trump, and the sharp rise of populist movements and parties in France, the United Kingdom, and Germany. If our work has taken on additional salience since we began, it is because the anomalies that we identified a few years ago have continued to multiply.

This suggests the urgent need for an alternative paradigm. Our original articles did not pretend to offer one. Instead, they called for scholars to engage in an open and honest dialogue regarding the stability of liberal values and the consolidation of established democracies:

If political scientists are to avoid being blindsided by the demise of established democracies in the coming decades... they need to find out whether democratic deconsolidation is happening; to explain the possible causes of this development; to delineate its likely consequences (present and future); and to ponder the potential remedies.²⁴

The responses put forward by Norris, Voeten, and Alexander and Welzel are important contributions to the dialogue we hoped for. While we disagree with them on some important points, we have already learned a lot from their engagement with our articles. We therefore hope that, taken together, our exchange can be a first step in developing a new paradigm – one that takes the fundamental changes of the last years seriously, and is able to answer some of the most pressing questions of our political moment.

Notes

- ¹ Thomas Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962).
- ² See Juan Linz and Alfred Stepan, *Problems of Democratic Transition and Consolidation* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996); Adam Przeworski and Fernando Limongi, "Modernization: Theories and Facts," *World Politics* 49:2 (January 1997): 155-183.
- ³ Guillermo O'Donnell, "Illusions about Consolidation," *Journal of Democracy* 7 (April 1996): 34-51.
- ⁴ Samuel Huntington, *The Third Wave: Democratization in the Late Twentieth Century* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1991).
- ⁵ Larry Diamond, *Developing Democracy: Toward Consolidation* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999).
- ⁶ Ronald Inglehart and Christian Welzel, *Modernization, Cultural Change and Democracy: The Human Development Sequence* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005).
- ⁷ Roberto Stefan Foa and Yascha Mounk, "The Danger of Deconsolidation: The Democratic Disconnect," *Journal of Democracy* 27 (July 2016): 5-17; and Roberto Stefan Foa and Yascha Mounk, "The Signs of Deconsolidation," *Journal of Democracy* 28 (January 2017): 5-15.
- ⁸ In this effort we are not the first, and several of the authors whose names are most closely associated with the consolidation viewpoint - such as Ronald Inglehart and Francis Fukuyama - have in recent years written articles that raise concerns regarding the consequences of rising inequality, partisanship, and political gridlock on the health of democratic institutions. See Ronald Inglehart, "Inequality and Modernization," *Foreign Affairs*, January/February 2016; Ronald Inglehart, "The Danger of Deconsolidation: How Much Should We Worry?" *Journal of Democracy* 27 (July 2016): 18-23; Francis Fukuyama, "The Future of History: Can Liberal Democracy Survive the Decline of the Middle Class?" *Foreign Affairs*, January/February 2012; Francis Fukuyama, "America in Decay," *Foreign Affairs*, September/October 2014; and Francis Fukuyama, "American Political Decay or Renewal?" *Foreign Affairs*, July/August 2016.
- ⁹ See Pippa Norris, *Democratic Deficit: Critical Citizens Revisited* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011), and Christian Welzel, *Freedom Rising: Human Empowerment and the Quest for Emancipation* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013).
- ¹⁰ See Pippa Norris, *Democratic Phoenix: Reinventing Political Activism* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002), and Russell Dalton and Christian Welzel (eds.) *The Civic Culture Transformed: From Allegiant to Assertive Citizens* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014).
- ¹¹ Amy C. Alexander and Christian Welzel, "The Myth of Deconsolidation: Rising Liberalism and the Populist Reaction," <http://journalofdemocracy.org>, 28 April 2017, <http://journalofdemocracy.org/sites/default/files/media/Journal%20of%20Democracy%20Web%20Exchange%20-%20Alexander%20and%20Welzel.pdf>.
- ¹² Pippa Norris, "Is Western Democracy Backsliding? Diagnosing the Risks," <http://journalofdemocracy.org>, 28 April 2017, http://journalofdemocracy.org/sites/default/files/media/Journal%20of%20Democracy%20Web%20Exchange%20-%20Norris_0.pdf.

- ¹³ Simon Hix and Giacomo Benedetto, "Rise and Fall of Social Democracy: 1918-2017," paper presented at the annual meeting of the European Political Science Association, June 24, 2017.
- ¹⁴ Pippa Norris, "It's not just Trump. Authoritarian populism is rising across the West. Here's why," *Washington Post*, 11 March 2016.
- ¹⁵ Pippa Norris, "Is Western Democracy Backsliding? Diagnosing the Risks," <http://journalofdemocracy.org>, 28 April 2017, http://journalofdemocracy.org/sites/default/files/media/Journal%20of%20Democracy%20Web%20Exchange%20-%20Norris_0.pdf.
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- ¹⁷ Nathaniel Persily and Jon Cohen, "Americans Are Losing Faith in Democracy – And in Each Other," *Washington Post*, 14 October 2016, https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/americans-are-losing-faith-in-democracy--and-in-each-other/2016/10/14/b35234ea-90c6-11e6-9c52-0b10449e33c4_story.html.
- ¹⁸ Ifop, "L'attrance des Français pour un gouvernement technocratique ou autoritaire," 7 and 5, http://ifop.fr/media/poll/3185-1-study_file.pdf.
- ¹⁹ Pippa Norris, "Is Western Democracy Backsliding? Diagnosing the Risks," <http://journalofdemocracy.org>, 28 April 2017, http://journalofdemocracy.org/sites/default/files/media/Journal%20of%20Democracy%20Web%20Exchange%20-%20Norris_0.pdf.
- ²⁰ See Bo Rothstein and Eric Uslaner, "All for All: Equality, Corruption, and Social Trust" *World Politics*, Vol. 58(1), October 2005, pp. 41-72, Bo Rothstein, *The Quality of Government: Corruption, Inequality and Social Trust in International Perspective* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011), and Eric Uslaner, *Corruption, Inequality, and the Rule of Law: The Bulging Pocket Makes the Easy Life*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008).
- ²¹ Erik Voeten, "Are People Really Turning Away from Democracy?" <http://journalofdemocracy.org>, 28 April 2017, http://journalofdemocracy.org/sites/default/files/media/Journal%20of%20Democracy%20Web%20Exchange%20-%20Voeten_0.pdf.
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Appendix

Table A1: Changes in Voice and Accountability, 1996-2015.

country	1996	2015	change
Germany	1.33	1.43	+0.10
Sweden	1.55	1.60	+0.05
Finland	1.56	1.56	0.00
Denmark	1.58	1.57	-0.01
Luxembourg	1.53	1.52	-0.01
United Kingdom	1.29	1.27	-0.02
Netherlands	1.61	1.57	-0.04
Ireland	1.40	1.35	-0.05
Belgium	1.46	1.39	-0.07
Austria	1.49	1.40	-0.09
Italy	1.13	1.01	-0.12
France	1.31	1.18	-0.13
Canada	1.62	1.44	-0.18
United States	1.37	1.08	-0.29
Spain	1.33	1.02	-0.31
Greece	0.97	0.59	-0.38
Portugal	1.54	1.12	-0.42

Source: Worldwide Governance Indicators, www.govindicators.org. Western European countries of the European Union, plus the United States and Canada.

Table A2: Changes in Control of Corruption, 1996-2015.

country	1996	2015	change
Belgium	1.31	1.58	+0.27
Luxembourg	2.05	2.12	+0.07
France	1.26	1.28	+0.02
Sweden	2.31	2.25	-0.06
Finland	2.36	2.28	-0.08
Denmark	2.37	2.23	-0.14
Ireland	1.79	1.64	-0.16
Germany	1.99	1.82	-0.18
United States	1.57	1.38	-0.19
United Kingdom	1.57	1.38	-0.19
Netherlands	2.22	1.89	-0.32
Canada	2.20	1.85	-0.34
Italy	0.36	-0.05	-0.41
Austria	1.93	1.49	-0.44
Greece	0.34	-0.13	-0.47
Spain	1.05	0.49	-0.56
Portugal	1.52	0.92	-0.60

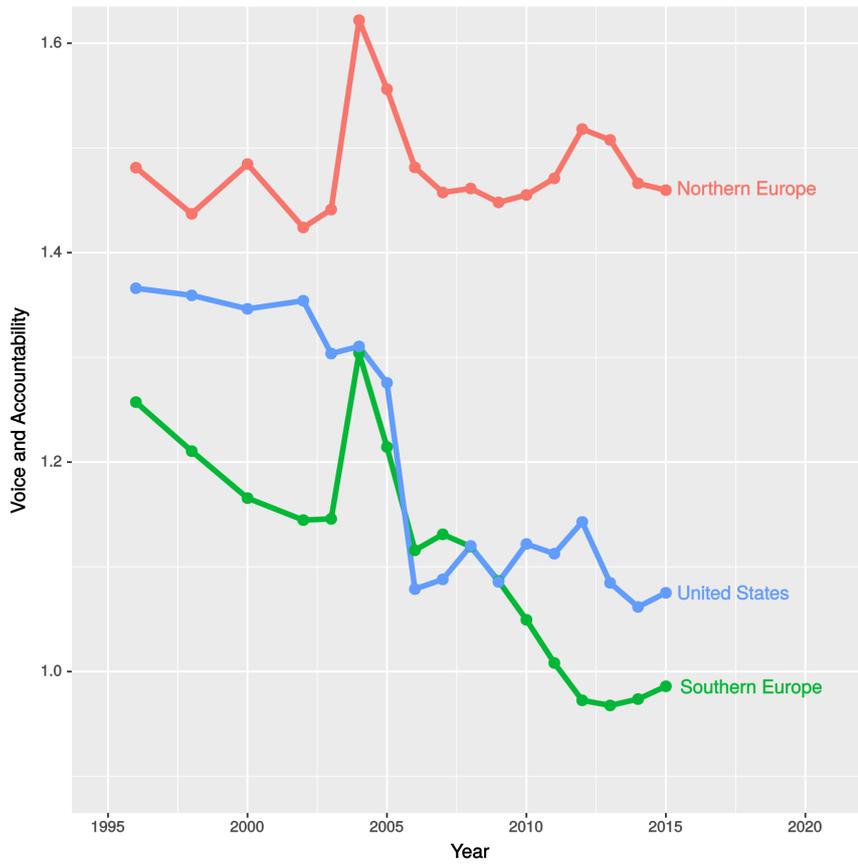
Source: Worldwide Governance Indicators, www.govindicators.org. Western European countries of the European Union, plus the United States and Canada.

Table A3: Changes in the EIU Democracy Index, 2006-2016.

country	2006	2016	change
United Kingdom	8.08	8.36	+0.28
Italy	7.73	7.98	+0.25
Ireland	9.01	9.15	+0.14
Canada	9.07	9.15	+0.08
Spain	8.34	8.30	-0.04
France	8.07	7.92	-0.15
Germany	8.82	8.63	-0.19
Finland	9.25	9.03	-0.22
United States	8.22	7.98	-0.24
Austria	8.69	8.41	-0.28
Portugal	8.16	7.86	-0.30
Denmark	9.52	9.20	-0.32
Belgium	8.15	7.77	-0.38
Sweden	9.88	9.39	-0.49
Netherlands	9.66	8.80	-0.86
Greece	8.13	7.23	-0.90

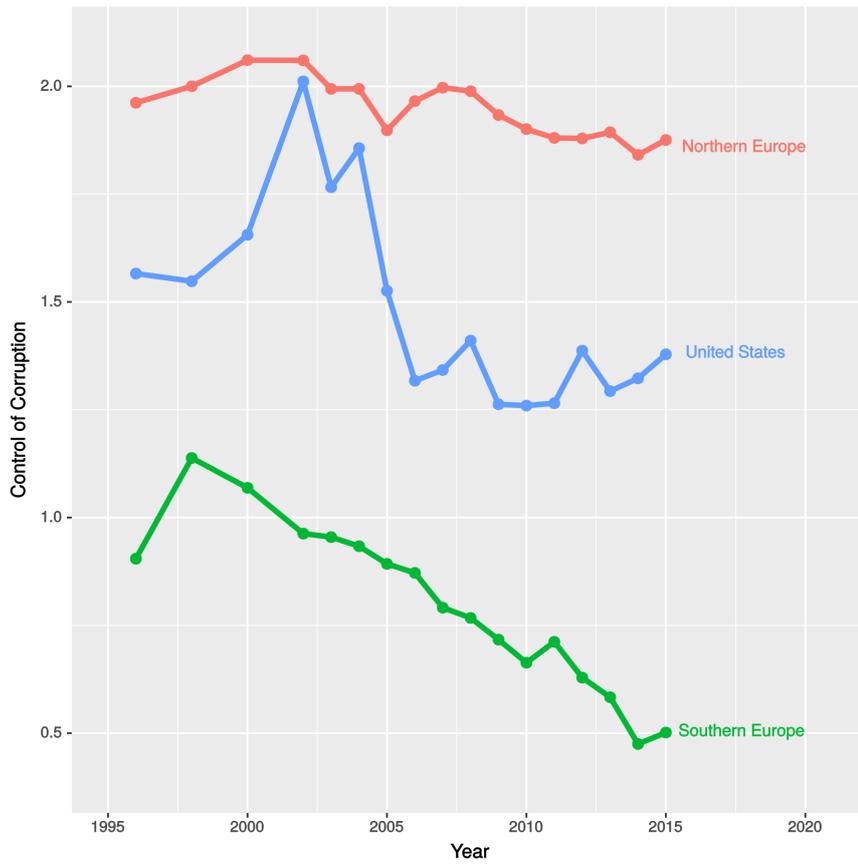
Source: Economist Intelligence Unit. Western European countries of the European Union, plus the United States and Canada.

Figure A1: Changes in the Voice and Accountability Index, 1996-2015.



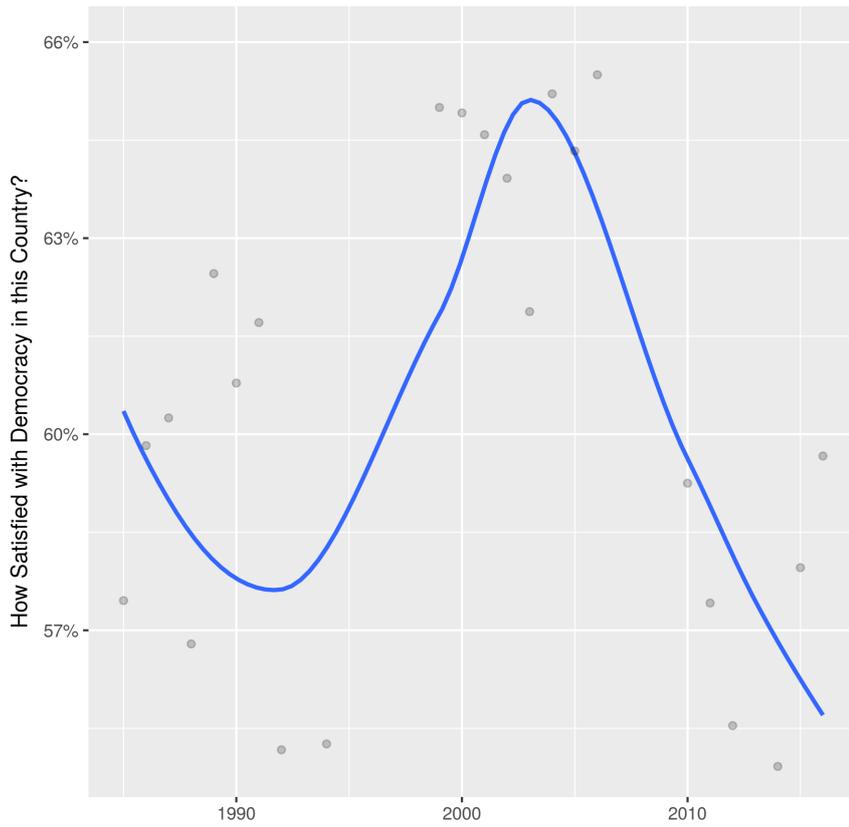
Source: Worldwide Governance Indicators, www.govindicators.org.

Figure A2: Changes in the Control of Corruption Index, 1996-2015.



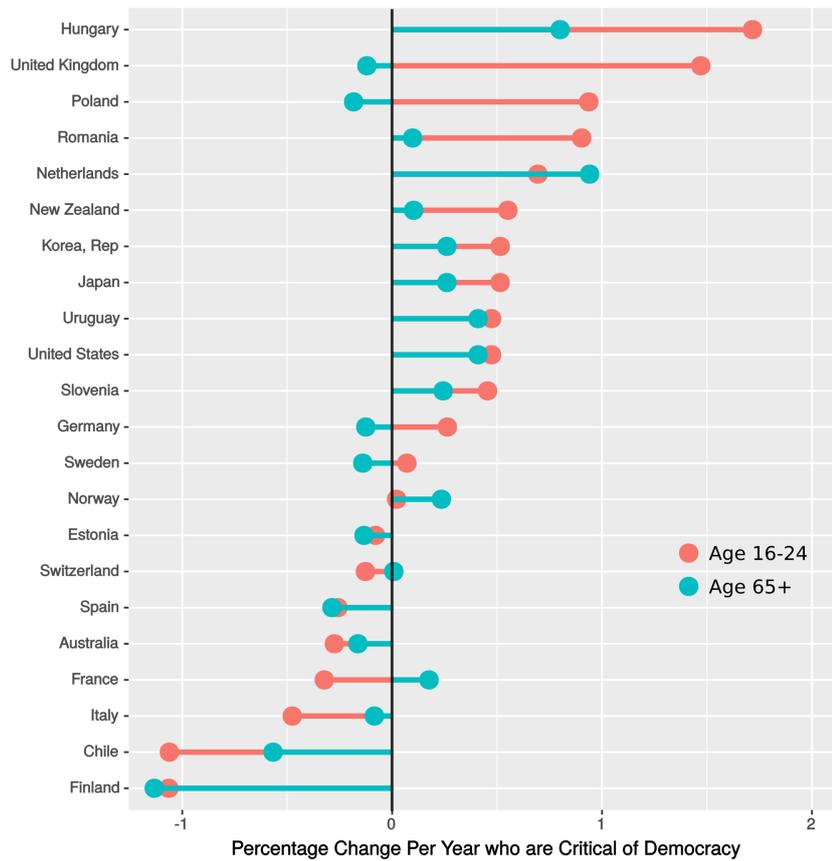
Source: Worldwide Governance Indicators, www.govindicators.org.

Figure A3: Satisfaction with Democracy in Western Europe, 1985-2016



Source: Eurobarometer. Mean average across Western European countries included from 1985 to 2016: Belgium, Denmark, France, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Portugal, Spain, United Kingdom. Data for Sweden and Austria unavailable before 1999; data for Finland unavailable before 1993.

Figure A4: Rising Skepticism of Democracy: Youth and Older Respondents Compared



Notes: “critical of democracy” is defined as respondents who rank democracy as a political system as “very bad” or “fairly bad.” Participants were asked to respond to this question in waves 3 through 6 of WVS and waves 3 and 4 of EVS, and this chart selects the first and last of these surveys that each country participated in to calculate the percentage change per year of the populous which is critical of democracy for respondents aged 15-24 and aged 65+. Countries classified as “Free” by Freedom House and with a per capita GDP greater than \$16,000 as measured by the World Development Indicators are shown, excluding Canada and Cyprus as they only participated in the relevant surveys in adjacent waves. Australia, Chile, Estonia, Germany, Japan, Republic of Korea, New Zealand, Romania, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, US, and Uruguay participated in WVS waves 3 and 6, so the percentage change per year is calculated from first survey data between 1995-1998 and last survey data between 2010-2013. Finland, Hungary, Norway, and Switzerland participated in WVS wave 3 and EVS wave 4, so the first surveys fall between 1996-1998 and last surveys fall between 2008-2009. Poland participated in EVS wave 3 and WVS wave 6 with a first survey in 1999 and last survey in 2012, and the UK participated in EVS wave 3 and EVS wave 4 with a first survey in 1999 and last survey in 2009.