

Democracy and Democratic Backsliding

Post-Communist Politics PMCb1109

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Doc. Marek Rybář, PhD.

Results of the Third Wave of Democratization (1974-2017) 1/2

- enormous differences in the quality of democracy
- Mainwaring and Bizzaro (2018): indicators of democracy taken from the V-Dem index
- 91 countries embarked upon democratic transition
- depending on the **transition path** they identify **five** categories:
- **collapse, erosion, stagnation, improvement** and a consistently **high quality** of democracy
- they compare the scores at the beginning of each country's transition and in 2017

Results of the Third Way of Democratization (1974-2017) 1/2

- more than a third new democracies collapsed (**34**), typically within a short time period
- they noticed **2 cases of democratic erosion** (when democratic score was significantly higher at the outset of transition than in 2017)
- **28 cases of stagnation**, i.e., situations with a relatively low score of democracy both in the early period of transition and in 2017
- **improvement** was recorded in **23 cases**
- only **4 cases** where a relatively well-developed democracy persisted until 2017

Collapse

- collapse typically comes gradually with not clear point of break:
- Russia, Turkey or Nicaragua
- military coups rare (Mali)
- a case of usurpation of power by a single individual (Fujimori v Peru)

Erosion

- the cases of Ecuador and Poland
- the level of liberal democracy decreased, however, due to free elections the regime basically remains democratic
- in contrast to the early periods of transition, levels of democracy in 2017 declined

Stagnation

- the cases of regimes that still **remain democratic** (not competitive autocracies)
- elections matter for who rules but the rights of the opposition are sometimes violated, and the electoral game is tilted in favor of the incumbents
- civic rights are not available to all groups of citizens in an equally consistent manner
- some regimes (e.g. Lebanon) stagnated at a very low level
- other, e.g. Greece, stagnated at a considerably higher level

Improvement

- is a logical opposite to erosion (e.g. Latvia, Slovakia, Romania, Mongolia)
- the rights are more respected, the system of checks and balances is stronger, and the elections are more competitive, free and fair
- some democracies with low score improved in this way (El Salvador, Romania)
- other have become more robust over time (Spain, Uruguay)

Consistently strong democracies

- the originally high score of democracy remained intact over time: Lithuania, Slovenia, the Czech Republic, Estonia

TABLE 5—HIGHLY DEMOCRATIC WITHOUT MAJOR ADVANCES

Country	Year of Transition	Liberal Democracy Score		Difference
		First Year	2017	
Czech Rep.	1991	0.819	0.768	-0.051
Estonia	1993	0.830	0.860	0.030
Lithuania	1990	0.751	0.734	-0.017
Slovenia	1991	0.730	0.792	0.062

Broader Context of Democratization

- the countries where democracy levels increased or remained consistently high (groups 4 and 5) systematically differ from the other groups in their high levels of economic growth
- democracy tended to **improve** in the **richer** countries
- democratic **collapse** was **less likely** in the countries surrounded by other **democracies**
- the higher the **initial levels** of democracy, the more likely it is that democracy will survive

Political Transformation 1/2 (BTI data 2022)

Consolidating Democracies (10-8)	Defective Democracies (<8-6)	Highly Defective Democracies (<6)	Moderate Autocracies (>=4)	Hard-Line Autocracies (<4)
Estonia	North Macedonia	BiH	Russia	Belarus
Lithuania	Poland Bulgaria	Kyrgyzstan		Kazakhstan
Czech Republic	Mongolia, Albania, Ukraine			Uzbekistan
Latvia	Montenegro			Azerbaijan
Slovakia	Kosovo			Tajikistan
Slovenia	Hungary			Turkmenistan
Croatia	Serbia			
Romania	Armenia			
	Moldova, Georgia			

Political Transformation 2/2

- North Macedonia and Romania were the only two countries in the region that recorded significant improvements in their political transformation scores
- The slide toward autocracy continued in Hungary, Poland and Serbia, which were joined by Bulgaria and Slovenia
- only moderate changes in the FSU Countries: Moldova's improvement, Georgia's slow decline,
- a pronounced reliance on leadership figures and the personality-centered networks associated with them, especially in autocracies

Economic Transformation (BTI data 2022)

(economic growth, fiscal and monetary situation, national debt, etc.)

Highly Advanced	Advanced	Limited	Very Limited	Rudimentary
Czech Republic	Croatia	Hungary, Montenegro	Uzbekistan	Turkmenistan
Estonia	Bulgaria	Serbia, Romania	Tajikistan	
Slovenia	Romania	BiH, Kosovo, Ukraine		
Lithuania	North Macedonia	Russia, Armenia		
Slovakia		Kazakhstan, Georgia		
Latvia		Moldova		
Poland		Mongolia		
		Kyrgyzstan		
		Azerbaijan		
		Belarus		

Autocratization

- We should distinguish between democratic breakdown, democratic backsliding and autocratization (Lührmann & Lindberg 2019)
- democratic **breakdown** refers to an outright demise of democracy
- democratic **backsliding** refers to reversion of a previously democratic regime
- **autocratization** is seen as a mirror opposite to democratization, meaning "the decline of democratic regime attributes"
- such a decline may occur in any regime

Waves of autocratization

- three waves of autocratization between 1900 and 2017 (Lührmann & Lindberg 2019)
- some two-thirds of the autocratization episodes (N = 142, **65%**) took place in **already authoritarian** states
- about **a third** of all autocratization episodes (N = 75) started in **democratic** regimes
- almost all of them (80%) led to the country turning into an autocracy

The third wave of autocratization

- started in 1994 and by 2017, it dominated with the **reversals outnumbering** the countries making progress
- the first reversed wave affected both democracies and autocracies, and the second reversal period almost only worsened electoral autocracies,
- almost all **contemporary autocratization** episodes **affect democracies**
- the share of democracies remains close to its highest ever – 53%

Alternatives to Institutional Indices of Democracy

- the democratic scores depend on our definition and operationalization of democratic regime
- comparative indicators (e.g. by Freedom House or V-Dem project) emphasize **institutions and their stability** (elections, courts, constitutions, etc.)
- however, contemporary debates about democratic governance revolved around issues such as **deliberation** and **internalization** of liberal democratic values
- institutional indicators **do not include** questions of **economic** equality and those of capacities to **effectively exercise civil rights** and freedoms

Alternatives to Institutional Indices of Democracy

- a **culturalist** critique points out the low level of acceptance of liberal democratic norms in the post-communist region
- a **political-economic** critique: focuses on the relations between state and society, points out the uneven access to wealth and power of different groups of citizens/inhabitants
- it also emphasizes the risk of *state capture*, a situation the state institutions are captured by powerful economic interests who use them to enrich themselves

Alternatives to Institutional Indices of Democracy

- both types of criticism reject the notion of **democratic backsliding as misleading**:
- most post-communist countries have **never been liberal** democracies in the first place, i.e. there is logically no process of sliding back
- some authors claim that Serbia, Macedonia or Montenegro (the Western Balkans) have **never been consolidated** democracies embedded in a democratic political culture
- in all these (and other) countries **illiberal norms prevail** (not true that a majority of citizens would support and practice them)

Alternatives to Institutional Indices of Democracy

- **state capture** is the fact of the day in several countries of the region
- three decades of post-communist development may be too short a period to definitively evaluate the end results of democratic transition:
- historically, stable democracies emerged as a result of mobilization effort of, and struggles between, political movements – affecting the patterns of party competition
- illiberal populist movements: democratic regress should not be surprising; they may even be signs of positive political development
- as attempts to calibrate mobilization mechanisms seeking control of political elites who should be accountable to their voters

Hollowing out and Backsliding of Democracy

- thus, Hungary and Poland **may not be typical** cases of a troubled democratic development of the CEE region
- a victory of previously opposition parties that misuse their newly acquired governmental status to bend the rules (Fidesz, PiS) are quite exceptional in the region
- B. Greskovits (2015) identified two mechanisms of democratic decay: hollowing out and backsliding
- **hollowing out** is a general trend in many democracies and signifies a decline of public participation in political decision-making

Hollowing out and Backsliding of Democracy

- **backsliding** signifies radicalization of a large segment of politically active society that supports the illiberal political elites
- democratic regimes in central and eastern Europe emerged in the early 1990s as “hollowed out”
- they were weakly rooted in political and civil society and displayed low levels of participation of socio-economically defined groups (trade unions etc.)

Stability of Hollowed-Out Democracies

- Estonia and Latvia: ethnically exclusivist political elites are obstacles to democratic improvement without threatening stability of the existing political institutions
- as a result, we have a stable democracy (institutionally defined) where ethnonational minorities are excluded from political participation, and other groups of citizens are pacified (manual workers, pensioners) – hollowing out without democratic decay
- stability of institutions does not mean a good democracy, because **stability may be achieved** by exclusion, public apathy, and by elite control

Predatorial Economic Elites

- in hybrid regimes, stability often results from an equilibrium between a (small) public demanding more democracy, and the intransigence of political elites who, among themselves, compete over who will control the state and its institutions
- oligarchs in Moldova, Ukraine or Latvia managed to take control of political parties that essentially became the political wing of their business interests (pocket parties)
- private economic interests' embeddedness in the state and in political parties is an alternative way of democratic decay, e.g. in Slovenia, Czech Republic and Slovakia

Predatorial Economic Elites

- the Czech case is a good illustration of the phenomenon of cyclical emergence of new anti-establishment parties led to their replacement of the previously dominant political players
- anti-establishment parties often pursue an anti-corruption agenda, however, the case of Andrej Babiš and the ANO indicate that such parties may serve as agents of other economic interests
- a direct participation of oligarchs in political competition is rare, however, and Babiš/ANO case also show the risks and limits of such a strategy