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State of the world 2017: autocratization and exclusion?

Democratization

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State of the world 2017: autocratization and exclusion?

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ABSTRACT
This article presents evidence of a global trend of autocratization. The most visible feature of democracy – elections – remains strong and is even improving in some places. Autocratization mainly affects non-electoral aspects of democracy such as media freedom, freedom of expression, and the rule of law, yet these in turn threaten to undermine the meaningfulness of elections. While the majority of the world's population lives under democratic rule, 2.5 billion people were subjected to autocratization in 2017. Last year, democratic qualities were in decline in 24 countries across the world, many of which are populous such as India and the United States. This article also presents evidence testifying that men and wealthy groups tend to have a strong hold on political power in countries where 86% of the world population reside. Further, we show that political exclusion based on socio-economic status in particular is becoming increasingly severe. For instance, the wealthy have gained significantly more power in countries home to 1.9 billion of the world's population over the past decade.

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This article analyses the state of democracy in the world as of 2017, in view of changes since the early 1970s but with an emphasis on the last 10 years. It is based on the annual *Democracy Report 2018: Democracy for All?* from the V-Dem Institute.[1] First, while most people in the world still live in democracies in 2017, democracy has declined in countries home to one-third of the world population – or 2.5 billion people. This trend of *autocratization* seems to occur primarily in the more democratic regions of the world: Western Europe and North America, Latin America and the Caribbean, and Eastern Europe. Perhaps most disquieting, the number of countries backsliding

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last year ($N = 24$) was the same as the number of countries making advancements. This has not occurred since 1979.

Second, while we analyse current trends in terms of the number of countries that change, we also introduce a new metric: levels of democracy weighted by the size of each country's population. Bhutan's recent transition to democracy serving 800,000 people is laudable, but 1.4 billion people still live under dictatorship in China. In addition, the recent significant declines in V-Dem's measure of liberal democracy for India and the United States collectively affect some 1.6 billion people. Therefore, we introduce levels of democracy weighted by the size of each country's population. These measures better reflect how many people in the world enjoy democratic rights and freedoms, and therefore provide greater analytical leverage on the share of the world population affected by these changes. A high level of democracy in a large number of small countries containing a fraction of the world's population can be very misleading is terms of "how much democracy there is in the world" for most people. After all, democracy means "rule by the people" even if we live in a world where representation is the typical formula for its realization. Furthermore, countries with larger populations typically exert influence over neighbouring countries and in the international arena in ways that small countries do not.

Third, even in democracies, some groups – typically, women, some social groups, and the less wealthy – are systematically disadvantaged from access to political power, as shown by V-Dem measures. When it comes to exclusion, it is particularly important to account for the share of the population affected. We find that only 15% of the world population live in countries with somewhat equal access to power in terms of gender and socio-economic status. One in four people, or almost two billion people, live in countries where the more economically well-off have gained *more* political power in the last 10 years by V-Dem's measures of how power is distributed by socio-economic status.

Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem) is the largest-ever social science effort to measure democracy across the world (www.v-dem.net). The V-Dem dataset, first released in 2016, now contains some 19 million data points covering 201 political units over the period 1789–2017. It provides over 400 variables on democracy, human rights, governance, rule of law, and corruption. About half of the indicators are factual in nature, and the other half are evaluative and based on ratings provided by over 3,000 scholars and other country experts. V-Dem uses a state-of-the-art Bayesian item-response theory model to aggregate multiple expert ratings to country-level yearly estimates accompanied by measures of uncertainty. Indicators are also aggregated using Bayesian methods to more than 50 indices covering the five core types of democracy as well as facets like "clean" elections, freedom of expression, rule of law, corruption, women's empowerment, civil society, civil liberties, and accountability.[2]

The term *autocratization* – that is, democratization in reverse – denotes a decline of democratic qualities. It naturally has a "floor effect", in that extremely autocratic countries cannot become much worse, but in principle autocratization can affect countries at any level on a scale. In this article, we use autocratization and backsliding interchangeably.

A global trend of autocratization – except in Africa

V-Dem's Liberal Democracy Index (LDI) consists of two main components. First, there is the Electoral Democracy Index (EDI), the first systematic measure of the de facto

existence of all elements of Robert Dahl's famous articulation of "polyarchy" as electoral democracy.[3] The second component is the Liberal Component Index (LCI), reflecting the liberal tradition, whereby electoral democracy must be supplemented with the rule of law, ensuring respect for civil liberties, with constraints on the executive by the judiciary and legislature. The LDI thus combines both the electoral and liberal principles of democracy.[4]

Figure 1a displays the average global level of liberal democracy based on 178 countries in the world from 1972 to 2017, accompanied by confidence intervals capturing the full range of uncertainty associated with the estimates.[5] It also depicts the average levels for each of the regions of the world. The left-hand panel is based on a regular average across all countries. It captures the well-known "third wave" of democratization taking off with the 1974 overthrow of the *Estado Novo* dictatorship in Portugal. A gradual but steady increase in liberal democracy followed until around the year 2005 after which it plateaued. Notably, however, there is a small decline over the last few years, although within the confidence levels, for the three more democratic regions of the world: Western Europe and North America, Latin America and the Caribbean, and Eastern Europe.

Yet, the country-averages in Figure 1a obscure that some of the most populous countries are part of the current autocratization trend. Figure 1b therefore displays the level of democracy weighted by population, that is the level of democracy the average citizen is living under.

First, the levels of liberal democracy across the world are noticeably lower when weighted by population as in Figure 1b. This reflects that a number of smaller states in the world score high on the LDI, while countries like China with large populations do not.

Second, the recent reversal is *much* more pronounced when we take the size of the population into account.[6] By 2017 we are, in terms of the point estimates, back to the

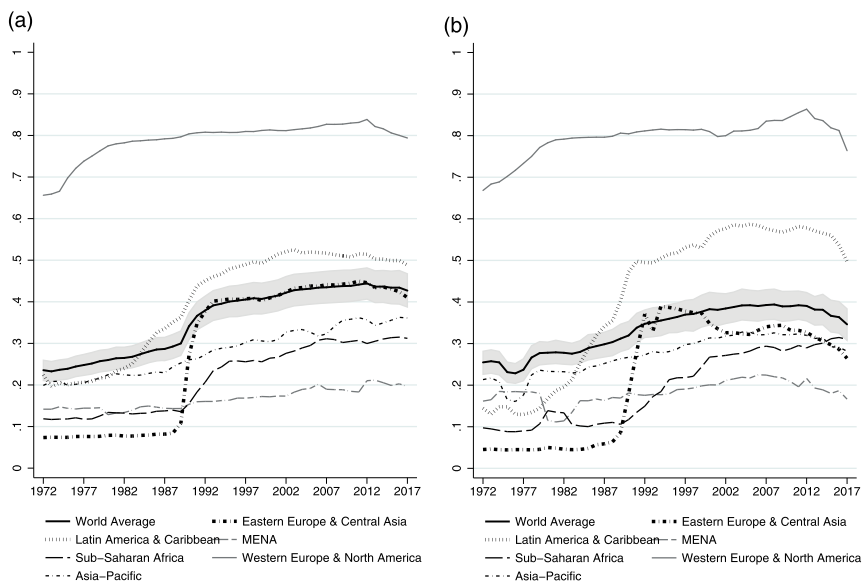

Figure 1. (a) Liberal democracy: global and regional averages (b) Liberal democracy: global and regional averages, population-weighted.

global level of democracy recorded shortly after the end of the Soviet Union in 1991. There is a particularly steep decline in the last few years. From this perspective, the last six years alone have unfortunately brought us back 25 years in time.[7] In terms of the share of the population enjoying democratic rights and freedoms, Western Europe and North America are back to levels of liberal democracy last seen nearly 40 years ago. These are indeed disquieting findings. The only region that seems to be relatively resilient to the current autocratization trend is sub-Saharan Africa, which in the population-weighted metric even shows a small increase in the region's level of democracy.

Autocratization: A growing challenge

Figure 2, left panel, displays the number of countries experiencing significant democratization ("advancers") or autocratization ("backsliders") on the LDI. For each year, we compare every country's score with its rating 10 years before. By taking the difference of the score at time t and time t_{-10}, we are capturing both rapid and gradual change. The right panel depicts the same type of trend weighted by population size. We report only *significant* changes, by which we mean that the confidence intervals do not overlap.[8] Those intervals can be relatively wide, meaning that our measure is conservative as it is more likely to err on the side of not reporting change.

By the unweighted measure in the left panel, the height of the third wave occurred between 1993 and 1999 when each year over 70 countries made significant advances on the LDI while only four to six countries were sliding back. This difference in favour of democratic advances over setbacks has persisted each year to varying degrees since

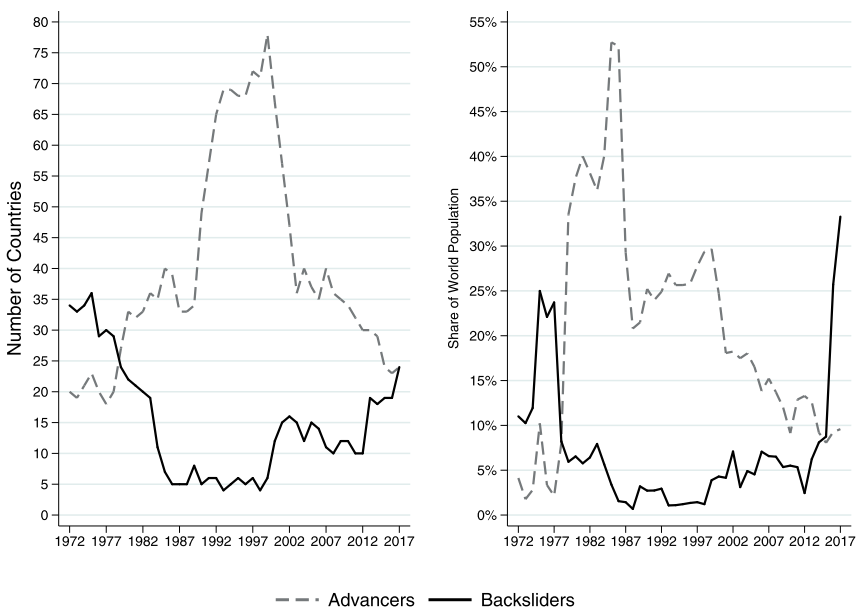

Figure 2. Number of countries with significant changes on Liberal Democracy Index (right panel population-weighted).

Note: We consider changes as significant when they fall outside of the confidence intervals reported in the V-Dem dataset.

1978. We now find a manifest downward trend in the number of countries making democratic advancements since at least 2008. Conversely, the number of countries registering significant change towards autocracy has *increased* since roughly around the turn of the century. In 2017, the number of backsliding countries ($N = 24$) equalled the number of countries making advancements. It is the first time these trends meet again in 40 years.

One aspect making this trend even more distressing is that the population living in the 24 countries backsliding on liberal democracy by far outnumbers the population living in advancing countries. This is reflected in the population-weighted right-hand graph in Figure 2 displaying the striking growth of the share of the world's population living in countries with significant autocratization. By 2017, one-third of the world's population – or 2.5 billion – lived in countries that are part of this global trend across the democracy-autocracy spectrum, such as India, the United States, Brazil, Russia, and Turkey. A much larger share of the world population is experiencing autocratization than the fraction in nations undergoing democratization.

Advancers and backsliders in the last 10 years

Figure 3 plots the changes taking place over the last 10 years, comparing levels of liberal democracy in 2007 to levels in 2017. Labelled countries are those with significant changes over the last 10 years. In the online appendix we report the status as of 2017

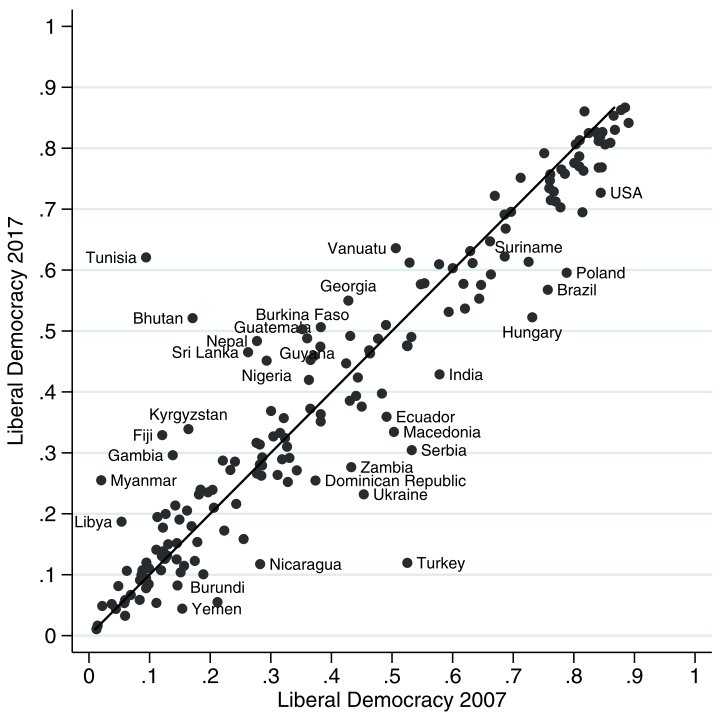

Figure 3. Countries with significant changes on the Liberal Democracy Index, 2007–2017.

Note: We consider changes as significant when they fall outside of the confidence intervals reported in the V-Dem dataset.

of each of the 178 contemporary polities the V-Dem dataset includes, compared to 2007.

As indicated above, most countries with significant advances ($N = 24$) have rather small populations, save Nigeria. At the same time, we find some of the world's most populous democracies – including the United States and India – as new backsliders on democracy. In particular, the United States' decline combined with an explicit denunciation of democracy as a foreign policy priority by the Trump administration does not bode well. Several additional world and regional powers are also found among the backsliders, which gives additional cause for concern since diffusion is "no illusion". Three emerging powers among the BRICS nations register significant backsliding – Brazil, Russia and India. China remains at the end of the autocratic regime spectrum. Among the Eastern European countries, Poland and Hungary are key regional power players that are also backsliding significantly.

Countries with significant changes in the last two years

Sometimes change occurs more rapidly. Table 1 therefore presents the countries in which significant changes registered over the last two years. For example, in the United States autocratization has taken place primarily during these last two years. Turkey continues its descent into dictatorship with every passing year but has now come close to hitting rock-bottom on the scale with its score of 0.12. Brazil, Poland, Romania, and Croatia are now at middling levels on the LDI after also suffering from significant declines also over the last two years. In Poland, swift and far-reaching constitutional changes have reduced checks and balances, affecting in particular the judiciary.[9] Similarly, the Romanian government has limited the rule of law and individual liberties – allegedly in order to curb corruption.[10]

On the positive side, the two cases of significant democratization over the last two years are from West Africa – Burkina Faso and Gambia. In particular, the case of Burkina Faso is notable since it shows that autocratization can sometimes be reversed quickly. In 2014 President Blaise Compaore, who had held power since 1987, attempted to modify constitutional term limits but was ousted after massive protests. After a short period of uncertainty and military rule, the Burkinabe people participated in peaceful and competitive multiparty elections in November 2015. Burkina Faso's rating on the LDI has now reached an all-time high. Gambia's incumbent autocrat of 23 years,

Table 1. Countries backsliding and advancing in the last two years, 2015–2017.

	Change	LDI 2017	LDI 2015
Main backsliders			
Brazil	−0.19	0.57	0.76
Poland	−0.19	0.60	0.79
Turkey	−0.16	0.12	0.27
Croatia	−0.13	0.55	0.68
Romania	−0.12	0.49	0.61
United States	−0.12	0.73	0.85
Main Advancers			
Burkina Faso	0.20	0.50	0.30
Gambia	0.19	0.30	0.11

Note: Table displays only countries with significant (without overlapping confidence intervals) and substantively relevant changes (more than 0.1 difference on the LDI scale).

President Yahya Jammeh, lost the 2016 elections and eventually stepped down in the midst of an ECOWAS intervention in January 2017. It remains to be seen if the new Gambian government will facilitate a full transition to democracy.

Democratic transitions and breakdowns

Until now, we have analysed trends based on significant changes along the spectrum that V-Dem's indices and indicators provide. Another important perspective is the qualitative transition from one type of regime to another, in particular when such transitions cross the democracy-autocracy divide.

Based on the *Regimes of the World* classification,[11] Table 2 shows the status and changes in regime type between 2007 and 2017 for all 178 countries. The bar for being classified as an *electoral democracy* is reasonable but not exceedingly demanding: holding reasonably free and fair multiparty party elections and an average score on V-Dem's EDI above 0.5. The latter indicates achieving Dahl's institutional prerequisites of electoral democracy – or "polyarchy" as it were – at least at a moderate level. In addition to the above, *liberal democracies* also fulfil a more demanding notion measured as high degrees of the rule of law as well as horizontal – effective judicial and legislative – constraints on the executive. In *electoral autocracies*, multiparty elections are held and some political and civil liberties exist but their meaningfulness is undermined by government repression, censorship, and intimidation. Countries rated extremely low in terms of democracy, where the chief executive is not accountable to citizens, are classified as *closed autocracies*.

In total, 95 (53%) out of the 178 countries in the V-Dem dataset were classified as democracies in 2017. Yet, there were only 39 liberal democracies in the world and this is down from 43 in 2007, while 56 met the less demanding criteria for electoral democracy. Among the remaining 83 nations most are electoral ($N = 56$) and only a few are closed ($N = 27$) autocracies. The most common type of dictatorship is of the kind that tries to emulate democracy by a façade of formal electoral institutions.

Despite autocratization, a majority of the world's population (52%) still lives in democracies even if only 14% are in the liberal variety. The largest share of the world population, or 38%, live in the more limited form of electoral democracy. Around 23% of the population live in electoral autocracies, while 25% live in the 27 countries classified as closed.

Looking at changes over the past 10 years, 20 countries have undergone autocratization to the extent of dropping down one category. Among them, we find that four members of the European Union lost the status of liberal democracy to become electoral democracies: Hungary, Poland, Lithuania, and Slovakia. In addition, three other countries are also downgraded from liberal to electoral democracies: Israel, Mauritius, and South Africa.

Notably, eight suffered democratic breakdown over the past 10 years and are now classified as electoral autocracies: Comoros, Honduras, Iraq, Nicaragua, Tanzania, Turkey, Ukraine, and Zambia. Four countries that used to be electoral democracies have slipped further down and are now classified as closed autocracies: Palestine (West Bank), Syria, Yemen, and Uzbekistan.

Among the 17 countries that transitioned upward to a better regime type in terms of democratic expressions, 11 made democratic transitions. Among them, Tunisia is the only country that transitioned from autocracy to achieve the criteria for liberal

Table 2. Regime transitions, 2007–2017.

Country	2007	2017	Country	2007	2017	Country	2007	2017	Country	2007	2017
Australia	LD	LD	Namibia	ED+	ED	Solomon Isl.	ED-	ED	Singapore	EA	EA+
Austria	LD	LD	Panama	ED+	ED+	**Tanzania**	**ED-↓**	**EA+**	Somaliland	EA	EA+
Belgium	LD	LD	São Tomé and Pr.	ED+	ED+	**Zambia**	**ED-↓**	**EA**	**Sri Lanka**	**EA↑**	**ED**
Canada	LD	LD	Vanuatu	ED+	ED+	**Guinea-Biss.**	**EA+↑**	**ED-**	Sudan	EA	EA
Costa Rica	LD	LD-	Argentina	ED	ED	Kosovo	EA+	EA+	**Syria**	**EA↓**	**CA**
Cyprus	LD	LD	Benin	ED	ED+	**Lebanon**	**EA+↑**	**ED-**	Tajikistan	EA	EA
Denmark	LD	LD	Bolivia	ED	ED	Madagascar	EA+	EA+	The Gambia	EA	EA
Estonia	LD	LD	Brazil	ED	ED	Mauritania	EA+	EA	Togo	EA	EA+
Finland	LD	LD	Bulgaria	ED	ED+	**Moldova**	**EA+↑**	**ED-**	**Tunisia**	**EA↑**	**LD-**
France	LD	LD	Burkina Faso	ED	ED	Montenegro	EA+	EA	Uganda	EA	EA
Germany	LD	LD	Croatia	ED	ED	Mozambique	EA+	EA+	**Yemen**	**EA↓**	**CA**
Greece	LD	LD-	Dominican Rep.	ED	ED-	**Seychelles**	**EA+↑**	**ED-**	Zanzibar	EA	EA
Hungary	**LD↓**	**ED**	Ecuador	ED	ED	Venezuela	EA+	EA	Zimbabwe	EA	EA
Iceland	LD	LD	El Salvador	ED	ED	Afghanistan	EA	EA	**Uzbekistan**	**EA-↓**	**CA**
Ireland	LD	LD	Georgia	ED	ED	Algeria	EA	EA	Kuwait	CA+	CA+
Japan	LD	LD	Guatemala	ED	ED	Armenia	EA	EA	**Maldives**	**CA+↑**	**EA**
Lithuania	**LD↓**	**ED**	Guyana	ED	ED	Azerbaijan	EA	EA	Angola	CA	CA
Luxembourg	LD	LD	India	ED	ED	Belarus	EA	EA	Bahrain	CA	CA
Netherlands	LD	LD	Indonesia	ED	ED	BiH	EA	EA	**Bangladesh**	**CA↑**	**EA**
New Zealand	LD	LD	Jamaica	ED	ED	Burundi	EA	EA	**Bhutan**	**CA↑**	**ED+**
Norway	LD	LD	Lesotho	ED	ED	Cambodia	EA	EA	**Myanmar**	**CA↑**	**EA**
Portugal	LD	LD	Liberia	ED	ED+	Cameroon	EA	EA	China	CA	CA
Slovenia	LD	LD-	Macedonia	ED	ED-	CAR	EA	EA	Cuba	CA	CA
South Korea	LD	LD	Mali	ED	ED-	Chad	EA	EA	DR of Vietnam	CA	CA+
Sweden	LD	LD	Mexico	ED	ED	DRC	EA	EA	Eritrea	CA	CA
Switzerland	LD	LD	Mongolia	ED	ED	Djibouti	EA	EA	**Fiji**	**CA↑**	**EA+**
Taiwan	LD	LD	Niger	ED	ED-	Egypt	EA	EA	Hong Kong	CA	CA
Trinidad and Tobago	LD	LD	Paraguay	ED	ED	Eq. Guinea	EA	EA	Jordan	CA	CA
UK	LD	LD	Peru	ED	ED	Ethiopia	EA	EA	Laos	CA	CA
USA	LD	LD	Romania	ED	ED	Gabon	EA	EA	Libya	CA	CA
Uruguay	LD	LD	Senegal	ED	ED+	Guinea	EA	EA	Morocco	CA	CA
Cape Verde	LD-	LD-	**Serbia**	**ED↓**	**EA+**	Iran	EA	EA	**Nepal**	**CA↑**	**ED**
Chile	LD-	LD-	Sierra Leone	ED	ED	**Ivory Coast**	**EA↑**	**ED**	North Korea	CA	CA
Czechia	LD-	LD	Suriname	ED	ED	Kazakhstan	EA	EA	Oman	CA	CA
Ghana	LD-	LD-	Timor-Leste	ED	ED	Kenya	EA	EA	Palest. Gaza	CA	CA

Israel	**LD-↓**	**ED+**	**Turkey**	**ED↓**	**EA**	Kyrgyzstan	EA	EA+	Qatar	CA	CA
Italy	LD-	LD-	**Ukraine**	**ED↓**	**EA**	**Malawi**	**EA↑**	**ED**	Saudi Arabia	CA	CA
Latvia	LD-	LD-	**Albania**	**ED-↑**	**LD-**	Malaysia	EA	EA	Somalia	CA	CA
Mauritius	**LD-↓**	**ED+**	Colombia	ED-	ED	**Nigeria**	**EA↑**	**ED-**	Swaziland	CA	CA
Poland	**LD-↓**	**ED**	**Comoros**	**ED-↓**	**EA+**	Pakistan	EA	EA+	Thailand	CA	CA
Slovakia	**LD-↓**	**ED+**	Haiti	ED-	ED-	**Palestine WB**	**EA↓**	**CA**	Turkmenistan	CA	CA+
South Africa	**LD-↓**	**ED+**	**Honduras**	**ED-↓**	**EA**	Papua New G.	EA	EA	UAE	CA	CA
Spain	LD-	LD	**Iraq**	**ED-↓**	**EA**	R Congo	EA	EA	South Sudan		CA
Barbados	**ED+↑**	**LD-**	**Nicaragua**	**ED-↓**	**EA**	Russia	EA	EA			
Botswana	ED+	ED	Philippines	ED-	ED-	Rwanda	EA	EA			

Note: The countries are sorted by regime type in 2007, and after that in alphabetical order. They are classified based on the Regimes of the World measure, where **LD** stands for Liberal Democracy; ED – Electoral Democracy; **EA** – Electoral Autocracy; and **CA** – Closed Autocracy. We incorporate V-Dem's confidence estimates in order to account for the uncertainty and potential measurement error due to the nature of the data but also to underline that some countries are placed in the grey zone between regime types. The sign **"-"** indicates that taking uncertainty into account, the country could belong to the lower category, while **"+"** signifies that the country could also belong to the higher category. The countries that see a movement upwards or downwards from one level to another are displayed in **bold**.

democracy. Nepal and Bhutan also made huge strides and achieved democratic transitions from closed autocracies to become electoral democracies. Eight countries transitioned from electoral autocracy to electoral democracy: Guinea-Bissau, Ivory Coast, Malawi, Moldova, Nigeria, Lebanon, Seychelles, and Sri Lanka.

In addition, Albania and Barbados moved upwards from electoral to liberal democracies, while Bangladesh, Fiji, Maldives, and Myanmar made progress but only transitioned to electoral autocracies.

Autocratization – which aspects are affected the most?

The nuanced nature of the V-Dem data also makes it possible to discern unevenness across different traits of democracy, down to the level of specific indicators. Figure 4 displays the number of countries that have improved or declined substantially on indices capturing the eight subcomponents of the measure of electoral democracy (EDI) and the liberal aspects (LCI) that together constitute the main liberal democracy measure (LDI) used for much of the analyses above. Placement above the diagonal line indicates that more countries have improved than have declined, and the reverse is true for appearing below the diagonal line. Figure A.1 in the online appendix lists all countries and their changes on the LDI between 2007 and 2017, and Figure B.1 shows which countries have changed on measures of other aspects of democracy.

This disaggregation reveals why the ongoing autocratization trend in some ways is hard to pinpoint with aggregate measures. Key characteristics of democracy such as

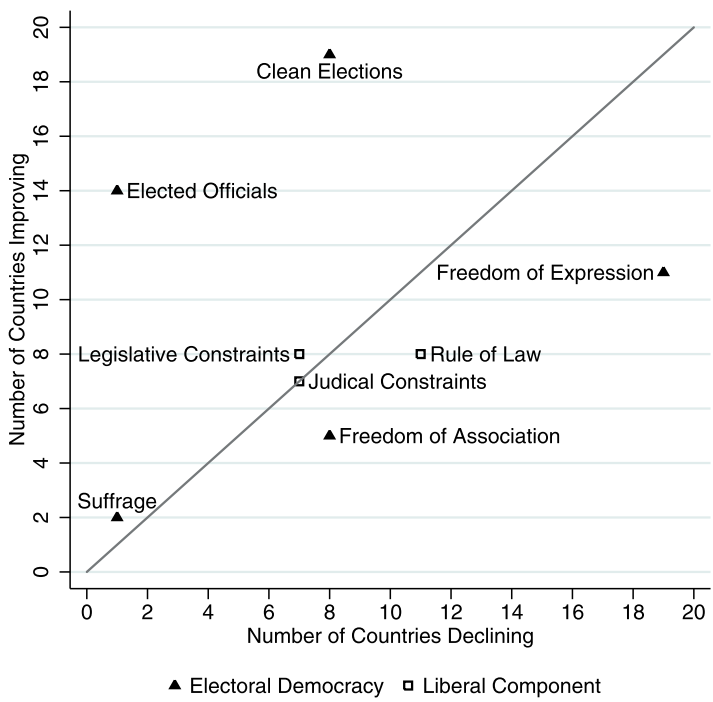

Figure 4. Number of countries with significant changes on various components of democracy, 2007–2017.
Note: We consider changes as significant when they fall outside of the confidence intervals reported in the V-Dem dataset.

the Clean Election Index (capturing how free and fair elections are) and the index measuring the extent to which elected officials are actually vested with power at national level (Elected Officials Index) have improved significantly in a number of countries over the last 10 years, while declining in only a few. Such trends can give the appearance of robust democracy, particularly to outsiders or in the aggregate.

However, Figure 4 also evidences that two key freedoms and the rule of law are in significant decline in many countries, while improving in only a few. In particular, this concerns the subcomponent measuring freedom of expression and alternative sources of information, which has been severely and negatively affected in 19 countries while improving in only 11.

Freedom of expression and alternative sources of information and the freedom of association are key institutional requisites of electoral democracy without which elections risk becoming mere facades as Dahl once argued.[12] Therefore, we disaggregate further to the most precise level of analysis: the individual indicators. Figure 5 compares 2007 to 2017 for the 25 individual indicators that compose the EDI. For each indicator, the legend indicates which subcomponent it belongs to.[13]

All indicators measuring the freedom of expression and alternative sources of information are found below the diagonal line. *All* indicators measuring purely electoral aspects are either above or very close to the line. In particular, two of the most fundamental indicators related to elections – the extent to which the elections were multiparty in practice and that national offices are subject to elections – record more countries improving than declining. The indicators concerning freedom of association are

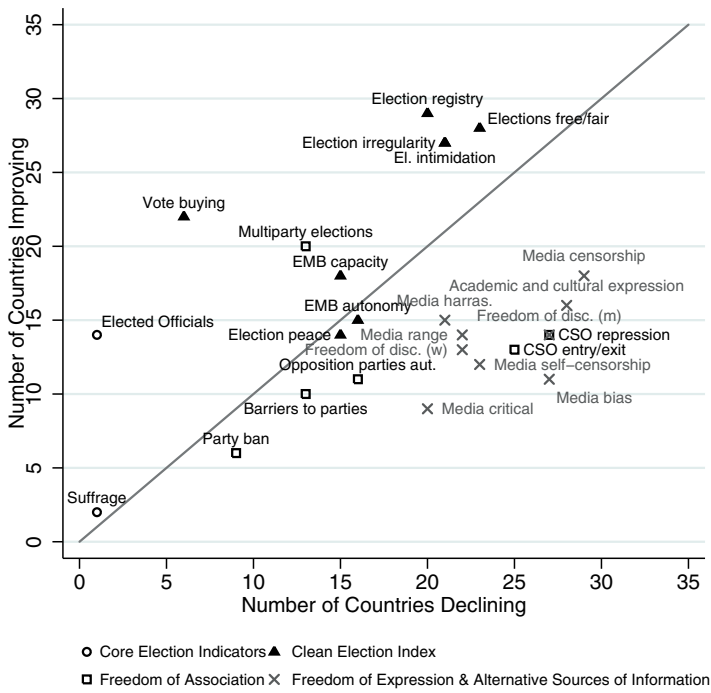

Figure 5. Number of countries with significant changes on specific indicators of electoral democracy, 2007–2017.
Note: We consider changes as significant when they fall outside of the confidence intervals reported in the V-Dem dataset.

mostly close to the line with two exceptions found far below the diagonal, which both measure the extent to which civil society can operate freely from government interference or repression.

While elections typically occur once every four or five years, these rights, freedoms, and rule of law are either maintained or compromised on an everyday basis. Each individual step can appear relatively insignificant. But the effects add up and are now apparent, as expressed in Figure 5. Importantly, the rights and freedoms being diminished are the ones that make electoral processes meaningful and fully democratic. This is a worrisome set of developments posing a clear challenge to the future of democracy.

Figure 5 gives a more precise picture of how the current trend of autocratization is unfolding in the world, and how ruling elites are pursuing autocratic agendas. It corroborates existing findings but is based on more systematic, detailed data.[14] Many of the institutions surrounding elections that are emblematic of democracy have remained in good standing or even improved. Elections are very visible events that attract attention from not only national groups but international media, multilateral organizations, and other watch-dog institutions. Changes in electoral institutions and practices tend also to be more verifiable than many other aspects of democracy.

By contrast, we find that the most negative developments occur in ways that are less conspicuous. Government censorship of the media and harassment of journalists can occur gradually and by relatively hidden means such as inducements, intimidations, and co-optation. Such tactics lead naturally to increasing levels of self-censorship and less explicit criticism of the government. A narrower range of political perspectives in the public sphere as well as a general decline in the freedom of expression is to be expected. Correspondingly, leaders can incrementally constrain the space for autonomous academia, civil society organizations, and cultural institutions to impair their abilities to voice critique, while carving out increasingly wide acceptance for such measures.

The pattern of backsliding in the most populous democracy – India – exemplifies this trend. The infringements on media freedom and civil society activities following the election of a Hindu-nationalist government have started to undermine the longest-standing and most populous democracy in the global south. Yet, the main indicators of the core electoral aspects of democracy do not show significant declines. It remains to be seen if this trend will be reversed in the coming years or if India will descend further into the authoritarian regime spectrum – as during their authoritarian interlude from 1975–1977.

Following the election of Donald Trump, the United States is now significantly less democratic in 2017 than it was in 2007 but the pattern is slightly different and autocratization is mainly found in the liberal component of democracy. Measures of effective oversight and use of investigative power of the executive by the legislature, opposition party oversight, compliance with the judiciary, and executive respect for the constitution have all declined. Thus, the V-Dem data testifies that the principal issue testing the resiliency of American democracy concerns the role of Congress in holding the executive responsible for following the constitution and adhering to the law. Inclusion is an Illusion?

Even where democracy is advancing, social complexity and competition can produce inequalities that advantage some groups over others.[15] Such inequalities affect the extent to which groups are able to participate meaningfully in political and governing processes[16] and as a consequence democratic rule risks becoming less legitimate and effective,[17] which can threaten the survival or further advancement of democracy.[18]

In addition, political inequality and exclusion are associated with poverty[19] and violent conflict.[20] It is therefore important to consider not only advancements and backsliding on liberal and electoral facets of democracy, but also the degree to which countries in the world achieve the democratic principle of equal inclusion.

Political inclusion here refers to the ability of all individuals and groups to influence governing processes.[21] Whereas liberal conceptions of democracy tend to emphasize institutional *guarantees* of rights and freedoms as well as rule of law, democratic inclusion emphasizes *de facto* access to power and influence across societal groups.[22] Even Dahl's influential formulation of the institutional requisites for polyarchy – the basis for the V-Dem's understanding of electoral democracy – calls for a system in which "preferences [ought to be] weighted *equally* in government" (emphasis ours).[23] Building on that insight, the analyses below go beyond more conventional approaches to include democratic inclusion that tends to focus on the question of universal suffrage.[24] We study three cleavages in which power distribution may be more or less inclusive: gender, social group (caste, ethnicity, language, race, region, religion, or some combination thereof), and socio-economic position. Each indicator ranges from 0 (monopoly of power by one group) to 4 (roughly equal power distribution between groups).

Power distributions are mostly unequal

We first provide a snapshot of power distribution broken down by gender, social group and socio-economic status in 2017. Table 3 shows that only a very small proportion of the world's population enjoyed more or less equal distribution of political power by gender, socio-economic position, and social group. Less than 4% of the population lives in countries where power is distributed evenly between social groups, and even fewer live in countries with roughly equal distribution of power by gender and socio-economic status. Even when considering "somewhat equal" power distribution, the picture does not look much better with only 14% of the world population living in countries achieving this standard for gender and socio-economic inclusion and 27% for social groups.

Most of the world's population live in countries where power distributions are somewhat unequal (61% for power distribution by social group, and 61–73% for power distributions by socio-economic status and gender). For each of the three categories, 3–4% of the population live in places where power distributions are completely monopolized by a dominant group.

This evidence testifies that men and wealthy groups tend to have a strong hold on political power in countries where 86% of the world population reside. Unequal distribution of power by social group, where one or more social groups have more political influence than others, affects some 69% of the world's population.

Table 3. Power distribution by gender, social group, and socio-economic status, 2017.

	Power distribution in percent by:					
	Monopolized	Dominated	Somewhat unequal	Somewhat equal	Equal	Total
Gender	3.3%	9.4	72.8	14.4	0.1	100
Social group	3.1%	28.8	37.5	26.9	3.6	100
Socio-economic status	4.3%	20.3	60.8	14.3	0.2	100

Note: Table displays percentage of world population living in countries with power distributions classified as monopolized by one group, dominated by one group, somewhat unequal, somewhat equal, and equal.

Lower income groups are becoming less powerful

The left-hand panel in Figure 6 displays developments in how power has been distributed by gender, social group, and socio-economic position from 1972 to 2017, based on averages across countries. While power distributions by gender and social group improved from the 1970s onwards, the distribution of power by socio-economic group has been relatively unchanged. The ratings in 2017 indicate that men, wealthier people, and members from specific social groups typically control politics.

Yet, taking the population size of countries into account as in the right-hand panel of Figure 6, improvements in *gender*-inclusiveness are much more moderate and indicate a slight downward trend in more recent years. In other words, many of the improvements in the last decades of the twentieth century took place in relatively small countries. For instance, in 1970 an estimated 40 countries had gender power distributions monopolized almost completely by men. In 2017, this number is down to only six countries, but only 2% of the world population was affected by that change. Meanwhile, power distributions by gender in populous countries such as India and the United States have become less equal in recent years.

By the population-weighted measure, the third wave of democratization resulted in only very modest improvements in the distribution of power across *social groups* around the world. And, for the last five years there is clear evidence of backsliding. One source of this decline is the exclusionary politics in Turkey, Greece, and Zimbabwe, even if the Arab Spring brought some advances in access to power for marginalized social groups in parts of North Africa. The level of inclusiveness by *socio-economic status*, when weighted by population, has been in steep decline since the early 1970s. Poor and less wealthy groups have suffered from intensified political exclusion over

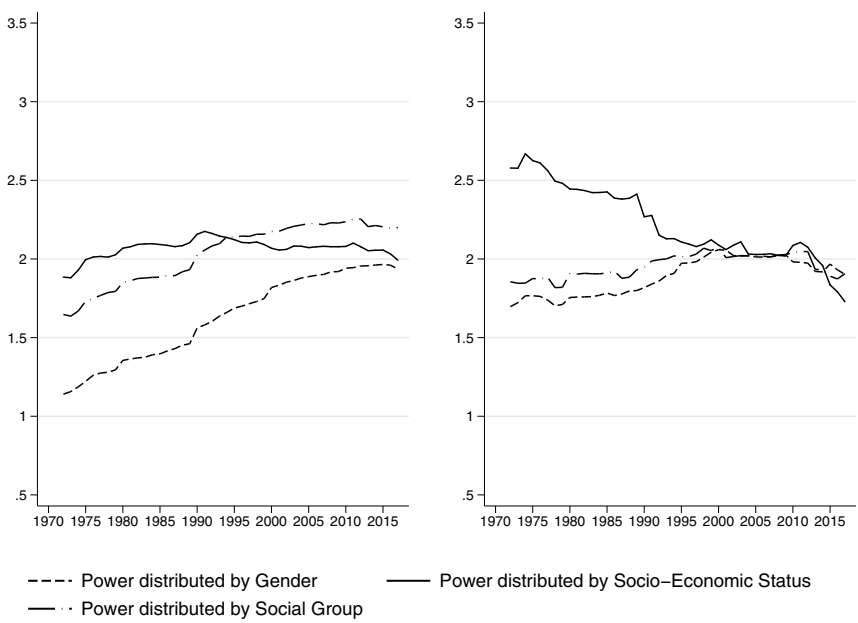

Figure 6. Three key indicators of inclusion, 1972–2017 (right panel population-weighted).
Note: Higher scores correspond to more equal distribution of power.

the past 40 years. After something of a plateau, exclusion has taken a rapid turn for the worse over the last 10 years. By 2017, one-quarter of the world's population, or almost two billion people, lived in countries where the rich have gained significantly more power compared to 2007. Increasing exclusion is affecting massive amounts of people. In online Appendix C we provide a more detailed analysis of exclusion across a series of indicators.

Regime types and patterns of inclusion

Figure 7 compares levels of inclusion by socio-economic status across regime categories in 2017. Countries labelled above the box are over-performers for their regime type, while countries below it are under-performers. The line in the box plot indicates the median level of inclusion for all countries in that category. While we focus on socio-economic status here, the patterns are relatively similar for gender and social group as shown in online Appendix D.

On average, democracies fare much better than autocracies in terms of egalitarianism than autocracies. Notably, despite the importance of individual choice in the liberal

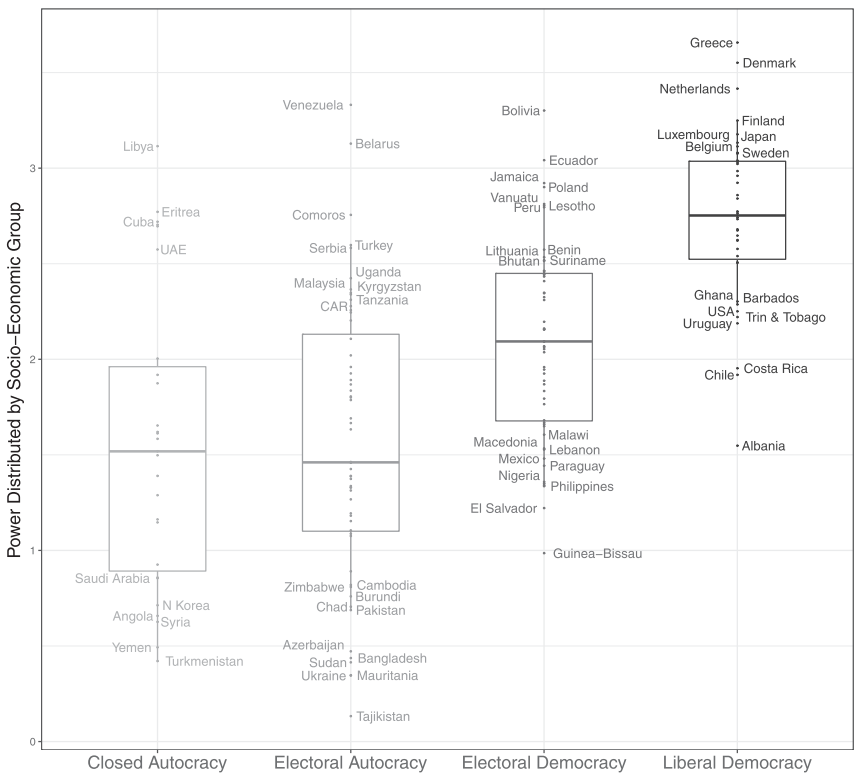

Figure 7. The inclusion gap by regime category and socio-economic group, 2017.

Note: Country names with labels are either over- or under-performers in terms of inclusion (highest and lowest quintile per regime category). High scores correspond to more or less equal distribution of power, while the lowest scores indicate a monopoly of power. To enhance legibility of the graph, we have not labelled five smaller polities.

tradition, almost all liberal democracies score higher than all autocracies and even most electoral democracies on inclusion by socio-economic status.

The pattern in Figure 7 also means that when countries backslide towards either electoral democracy or either type of autocracy, the ability of less well-off socio-economic groups to influence policy is at risk.

There is also variation within regime types. Among liberal democracies, the Nordic countries, Greece, and the Netherlands are over-performers in terms socio-economic inclusion, while Albania, Chile, Ghana, and the United States are distinct under-performers. Among electoral democracies, Benin, Jamaica, and Lithuania perform well above most other nations in this category, underscoring the idea that inclusion is not something only reserved for the more wealthier countries. Under-performers among electoral democracies include El Salvador, Guinea-Bissau, Nigeria, and the Philippines.

Substantial variation accompanies the low median levels of inclusion by socio-economic group across autocracies. Among the worst under-performers – even given the low median levels – are Angola, Azerbaijan, Bangladesh, Mauritania, Sudan, Tajikistan, and Zimbabwe.

We find relatively similar patterns with regard to both gender and social group inclusion, although there is significant variation with regard to which countries are over- and underperformers across types of inclusion (see online Appendix D). In general, liberal democracies perform better than all other regime categories, and with regard to gender and social group inclusion, electoral democracies are even more distinct from the authoritarian regime spectrum than for socio-economic inclusion. This pattern is illustrated well by the developments in Turkey. This country was in the range of somewhat-unequal to somewhat-equal inclusion of social groups for most of the period from 2000 to 2012. After the period of substantial autocratization since 2006, Turkey is also close to having power monopolized by one specific social group.

In short, while the causal relationship cannot be evidenced here, we note that more democracy and greater political inclusion are strongly associated.

Conclusions

Democracy is still in good standing across the world. More than half of the world's population lives under democratic rule. However, recent trends are disquieting. The number of backsliding countries also continues to increase and arrived in 2017 at the same number ($N = 24$) as those countries making advancements. This has not occurred since 1979.

Autocratization also affects some of the world's most important and populous countries, and is gaining momentum. In terms of the point estimates weighted by population, the last six years alone have unfortunately brought the global average back 25 years in time and Western Europe and North America back to levels last seen almost 40 years ago. By 2017, 2.5 billion people lived in nations undergoing autocratization. This translates to a massive reduction in the enjoyment of rights and freedoms. Sub-Saharan Africa is the only region bucking this trend.

Under the current autocratization trend, electoral institutions and practices remain robust or have even improved. It is media freedom, freedom of expression and alternative sources of information, and the rule of law that are being undermined. It seems that aspiring autocrats looking to entrench their power have embraced elections as a way to

placate citizens and the international community. Meanwhile they find ways to undermine their meaningfulness by limiting freedoms of expression, the independence of the media and civil society, and the rule of law.

Furthermore, socio-economic exclusion is on the rise in countries that together contain one-quarter of the world's population, with the wealthy gaining more power. Should these trends continue, there are likely to be further negative repercussions on the inclusiveness of political regimes. Even as it is, women, minorities, and lower income groups have the same access to political power as men, members of dominant social groups, or wealthier groups only in a very small number of countries.

Notes

1. This article builds on *Democracy Report 2018: Democracy for All?* from the V-Dem Institute, and has only been reviewed by the editors of *Democratization* before publication. Anna Lührmann is lead author on the article followed by Valeriya Mechkova, and Staffan I. Lindberg. The remaining co-authors share equal credit mainly for the second section of the article.
2. We use the term more familiar to most, or "confidence intervals," to denote credible regions in which the Bayesian highest posterior densities would place the equivalent of one standard deviation within. For the measurement model details, see Pemstein et al., "The V-Dem Measurement Model."
3. Dahl, *Polyarchy*; Dahl, *Democracy and Its Critics*. For details about the EDI see Teorell et al., "Measuring Polyarchy," and for other V-Dem democracy indices, see Coppedge et al., "Measuring High-Level Democratic Principles," and Pemstein et al., "The V-Dem Measurement Model."
4. V-Dem aggregates the two components using a slightly curv-linear formula where the intuition is that the liberal component should not add too much when the level of electoral democracy is low, but add a lot more when the electoral component scores above half on its scale. See Coppedge et al., *V-Dem Codebook v8*; Coppedge et al., *V-Dem Methodology v8*.
5. Following V-Dem's methodology, "countries" includes semi-sovereign political units like Palestine. The number of countries in the dataset varies in the chosen period from 157 in 1972 to 178 in 2017 dependent on the emergence of new countries and dissolution of others. For a full account of the political units, see Coppedge et al., "V-Dem Country Coding Units v8."
6. Source of population data: World Bank, *World Development Indicators*, and for the Soviet Union: Andreev, Darskij, and Tatiana, *Naselenie Sovetskogo Soiuza*. Values for 2017 are interpolated based on the 2016 population growth rates.
7. The confidence intervals, or highest posterior densities, that V-Dem brings along from all the baseline country-level indicators, indicate that with some amount of possibility, we could still be at 2012 levels of democracy in the world. At the same time, these also indicate that we could possibly already have reversed back to 1978 levels of democracy with the same probability. While taking the estimations of uncertainty seriously, we have chosen here in this report to focus on the point estimates that are the levels with the highest probability, for the sake of parsimony and to avoid making the text unnecessarily dense to digest.
8. For the individual indicators, these estimates are based on an interval in which the V-Dem measurement model places 68% of the probability mass for each country-year score, which is approximately equivalent to one standard deviation upper and lower bounds. For the aggregated indices the confidence bands reflect one standard deviation.
9. Rohac, Dalibor. "Hungary and Poland Aren't Democratic. They're Authoritarian." *Foreign Policy*. February 5, 2018. http://foreignpolicy.com/2018/02/05/hungary-and-poland-arent-democratic-theyre-authoritarian/
10. Clark, David. "Romania's Corruption Fight is a Smokescreen to Weaken its Democracy." *The Guardian*. January 10, 2017. https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/jan/10/romanias-corruption-fight-is-a-smokescreen-to-weaken-its-democracy
11. Lührmann et al., "Regimes of the World." While using V-Dem's data, it is not a measure officially endorsed by the V-Dem Steering Committee of V-Dem (only the main V-Dem democracy indices are).
12. Dahl, *Polyarchy*.

13. The Elected Officials Index (v2x_elecoff) is an index that is constructed from 16 factual indicators that are conditional on each other in a complex formula. See Teorell et al., "Measuring Polyarchy," for details.
14. For instance, Bermeo argues that contemporary backsliding is not characterized by the disappearance of electoral regimes but by more clandestine strategies such as manipulations of the media. Bermeo, "On Democratic Backsliding."
15. Young, *Inclusion and Democracy*.
16. For an overview of the relationship between inequality and participation, see Sigman and Lindberg, "Egalitarian Democracy."
17. Dahl, *Polyarchy*.
18. Boix, "Democracy, Development and the International System"; Houle, "Inequality and Democracy"; Svolik, "Authoritarian Reversals."
19. Acemoglu and Robinson, *Why Nations Fail*.
20. Cederman, Wimmer, and Min, "Why do Ethnic Groups Rebel?"
21. World Bank, *Inclusion Matters*, 3.
22. This focus on *de facto* inclusion is central to V-Dem's principle of egalitarian democracy. See Sigman and Lindberg, "Egalitarian Democracy."
23. Dahl, *Polyarchy*, 3.
24. Coppedge et al., "Contestation and Inclusiveness"; Skaaning et al., "A Lexical Index of Electoral Democracy," 1499.

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Data availability statement

Data for this article come from Coppedge et al., "V-Dem Country-Year Dataset v8," https://www.v-dem.net/en/data/data-version-8/. See also Coppedge et al., "V-Dem Codebook v8". STATA do-files and R scripts for replication of the analyses presented in this article are available from the corresponding author upon request. https://doi.org/10.23696/vdemcy18

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