

Two valuable non-partisan surveys track the standing of 166 sovereign states, 164 of them UN member states. One is the Democracy Index, compiled by the Economist Intelligence Unit, a UK-based private company which publishes The Economist.

The other is Freedom House, a non-profit, majority U.S. government-funded organization in Washington, D.C., that conducts research and advocacy on democracy, political freedom, and human rights. Freedom House was founded in October 1941, and Wendell Willkie and Eleanor Roosevelt served as its first honorary chairpersons.

With the disarray of democracies, both American and around the world, we are seeing a decline of the once unquestioned superiority of democracy over any other governing systems since the US won the Cold War against the USSR. This is a good time to see where the US stands in this list, and how we could do better. There are dire warnings that might show otherwise. We must make some structural changes to the Constitution to save ourselves.

Democracies are rated according to the following criteria:

- \225 Electoral process and pluralism
- \225 Civil liberties
- \225 Functioning of government
- \225 Political participation
- \225 Political culture.
- \225

Missing, in my opinion, is how countries treat women, an essential condition for a healthy democracy. One need only look at Afghanistan's Taliban rulers to see how abysmally they govern. The contrast before they recaptured the country and now illustrates the decline of institutions without the equal participation of women. Compare Afghanistan's life conditions with Norway, for example.

The 2022 Index rates the countries as follows:

Full Democracies are nations where civil liberties and fundamental political freedoms are not only respected, but are reinforced by a valid system of checks and balances, with an independent judiciary whose decisions are enforced, and a diverse and independent news media.

Flawed democracies have fair and free elections and basic civil liberties, but may have less than independent media, underdeveloped political culture, and low levels of political participation.

Hybrid regimes have fraudulent elections, government-threatened free media, government-threatened judiciary, widespread corruption, anemic rule of law, and low political participation.

Authoritarian regimes have no political pluralism, are absolute monarchies or dictatorships, abuse civil liberties, have powerless judiciary, and rubber-stamped parliaments.

Rankings of Democracies.

- \225 Working Democracies: The top 10 countries are Denmark, Norway, Finland, Sweden, Germany, Switzerland, Netherlands, New Zealand, Belgium, and Costa Rica.
- \225 Deficient Democracies: Uruguay, United States, Slovenia, Tunisia, Malta, Poland, Hungary, and a long list of others.
- \225 Hybrid Regimes: Kenya, India, Singapore, Mexico, Burma/Myanmar, Ukraine, and a long list of others.
- \225 Moderate Autocracies: Pakistan, Turkey, Egypt, Cuba, Belarus, and a long list.
- \225 Hard Autocracies: Venezuela, Somalia, Palestine/West Bank, Sudan, Syria, Saudi Arabia, North Korea, and a long list.

Why is the US half way down this list and defined as deficient? The problems are a failing political culture, low voting participation, only one of the two political parties functioning as a democracy, an undemocratic system of gerrymandering, a senate that can obstruct the popularly elected Congress, and a less-than-trusted judiciary.

Perhaps the most serious problem is the lack of good character of elected officials, including the most serious lack of character of all: a former president who came to office despite losing popular vote thanks to an undemocratic "electoral college," which gives power to states with small populations. The Senate suffers from the same undemocratic stacking: two senators from each state, despite population numbers.

Unfortunately, participatory governments are only as good as their participants. The system is not ironclad by laws, such as in a dictatorship. Our founding fathers noted that if men were angels, we would not need government. We know today that we depend heavily on norms of behavior, and one president who violates these norms can endanger the entire enterprise.

To remedy these deficiencies, we would need more public participation, rules that could protect us against bad character in our elected officials, elimination of Electoral College, rules against unfair gerrymandering of state governments, and a change in Supreme Court appointments and reexamination of life tenure.

The next column will suggest how we address our democracy's shortcomings before they become worse.

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