

# Democracy in the Digital Era

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# THE STATE OF DEMOCRACY AROUND THE WORLD

Source: EIU.com

The Democracy Index provides a snapshot of the state of democracy around the world since 2006. This year's report reveals that democracy is failing worldwide due to the negative impact of covid-19 pandemic on democracy and freedom.



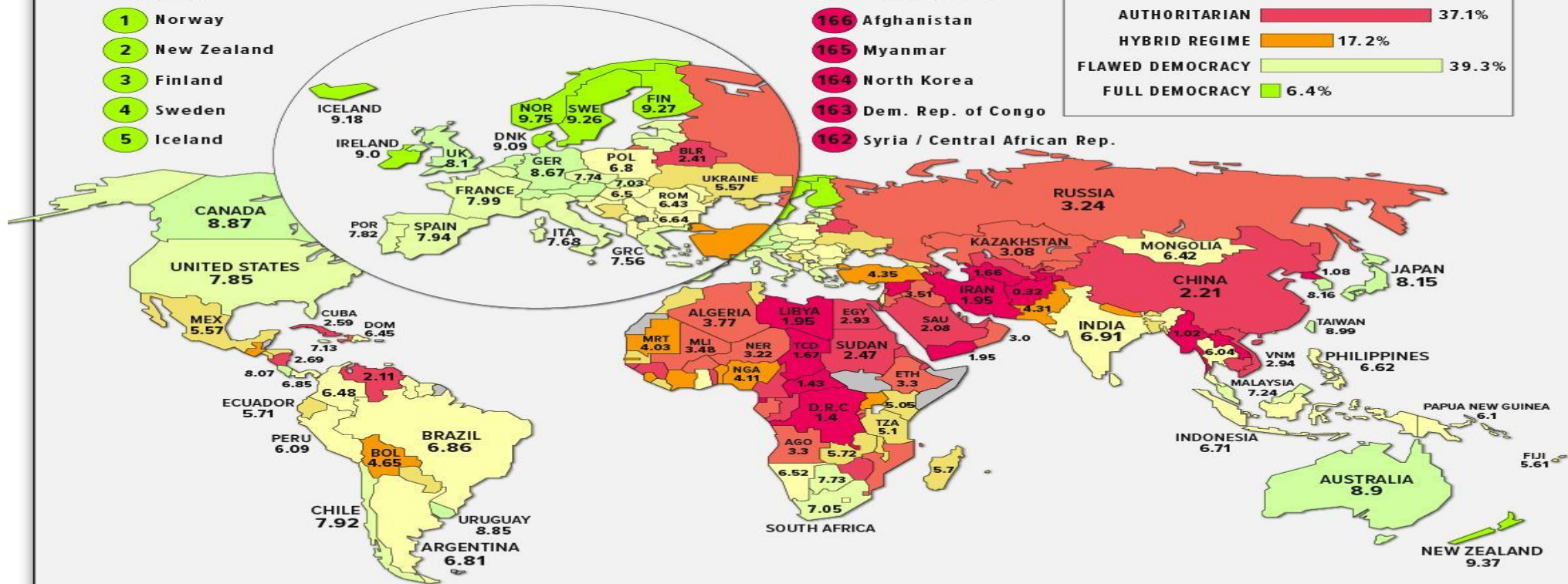
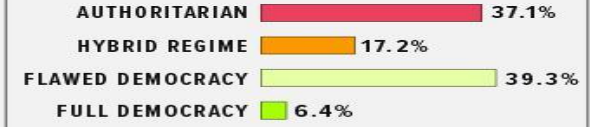
### Top 5 Ranked Countries

- 1 Norway
- 2 New Zealand
- 3 Finland
- 4 Sweden
- 5 Iceland

### Bottom 5 Ranked Countries

- 166 Afghanistan
- 165 Myanmar
- 164 North Korea
- 163 Dem. Rep. of Congo
- 162 Syria / Central African Rep.

In 2020, 49.4% of the world population lived in some sort of democracy. This has dropped substantially to 45.7% in 2021 and 37.1% of the world population live in "authoritarian regimes".



THE DEMOCRACY INDEX IS BASED ON FIVE CATEGORIES:



# 1789-1989: The three waves of democracy

- **1789- 1918** (revolutions in France, US, Haiti) and the break-up of empires
- **1945-1960** Decolonization

A U.S. “Empire by invitation” in post-WWII Europe and a 45-year Cold War

While in the USSR a political system was established which according to East Germany’s Walter Ulbricht “ must look like democracy but with everything under our control” (Democracy has won as a label but not in substance since)

**1974-1989** End of dictatorships in Spain, Portugal, Brazil

Collapse of the USSR and Eastern European, Asian, African Democracies

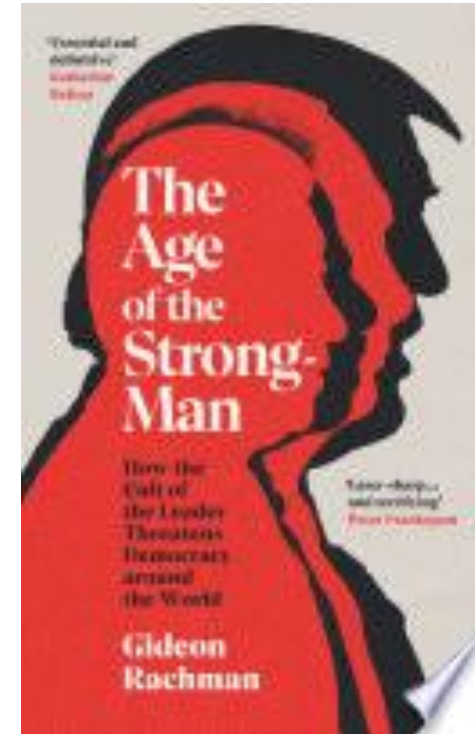
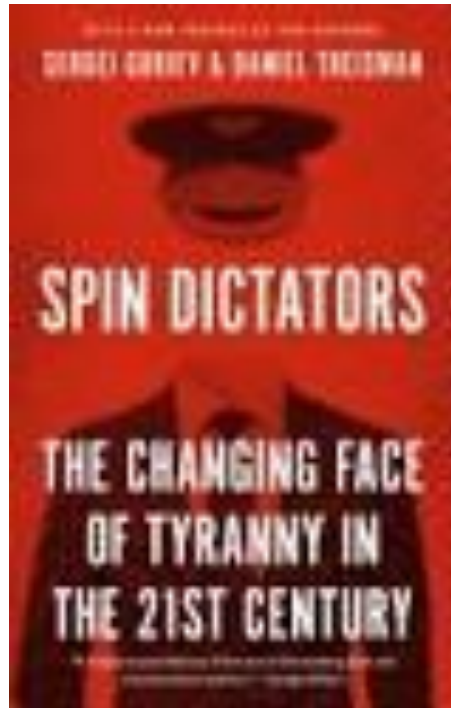
**Since 1989** Euphoria of the 90’s and then decline after the turn of the century 😞

# Worldwide

polarization, extremism, attraction to “strong” leaders

Disengagement of young people

The rise of “spin dictators” (with heavy reliance on disinformation)



# Most cited (and intertwined) threats to democracy

- Economic **inequalities** ( especially after 2008 crisis, globalization effects)
- Immigration ( especially after 2015 crisis)
- **Climate** crisis, food security, natural disasters threatening more immigration
- Internal erosion (**Institutional Flaws**, corruption, spin dictators)
- The breakdown of trust of citizens in the processes of democracy
- Cyberthreats to democratic processes (internal and external)
- AI-powered rising **misinformation/disinformation**
- AI –exacerbated **concentration** of economic and political power

# Intertwining example: Climate and Democracy

- Democracy and Climate have both been taken for granted
- Democracy and Climate both at crossroads
- 19 states in the U.S. Have passed voter restriction laws
- The same 19 states have rejected climate protection legislation
- 23 states are consistently democracy and climate friendly
- Billions of climate refugees ?
- Analogies between Big Oil and Big Tech
- Democracy is both threatened by and better equipped to deal with climate crisis
- **If AI helps or hurts one, it helps or hurts the other**
- **CLIMATE and DEMOCRACY INITIATIVE** <https://www.climatedemocracyinitiative.org/>

# Digital/AI and economic inequalities

## Hopes and realities

- 1990's **Hopes**
- Digital as the great equalizer
- Online education breaking barriers /empowering students everywhere
- Digital-powered banking enabling all to participate in the global economy
- Economic growth everywhere via low entry cost opportunities
- **Realities: It didn't happen, did it?**
- Inequalities decreasing trend in the 20th century were reversed since the 90's
- Deploying advanced AI requires costly energy and computing power (Global South?)
- Current AI “automation rather than augmentation” R&D direction will amplify inequalities ( Acemoglu and Johnson: Power and Progress)

# Institutional Flaws : Erosion of checks and balances

- The executive has too much power (and the legislative too little)
- Erosion of the independence of the Judiciary
- The influence of money is too strong (lobbying, contributions)
- Citizen input after elections too restricted
- Inadequate understanding and response to “public opinion”
- Citizen disengagement (especially the young)
- AI –ASSISTED DEMOCRACY?



# Citizen participation in the democratic process



- ✓ Elections
- ✓ Opinion polls / referenda
- ✓ AI supported Deliberative Democracy/Citizens assemblies

COMPLEMENTARY TO EXISTING PROCESSES

LOCAL NATIONAL TRANSNATIONAL

# AI mediation for democratic processes

- AI as a “rapporteur” (Easy for 10, difficult for a 100, impossible for a 1000)
- Categorizing arguments ,identifying underlying trends
- Aggregation/clustering of Opinions
- Summaries and conclusions
- Can AI summarize Parliamentary discussions for people?
- Citizen Assemblies for nascent proposals?
- A stipend for people who cannot afford to participate?
- Handling mis/dis-information
- Handling selection and algorithms bias!

# The Taiwan example (following Polis)

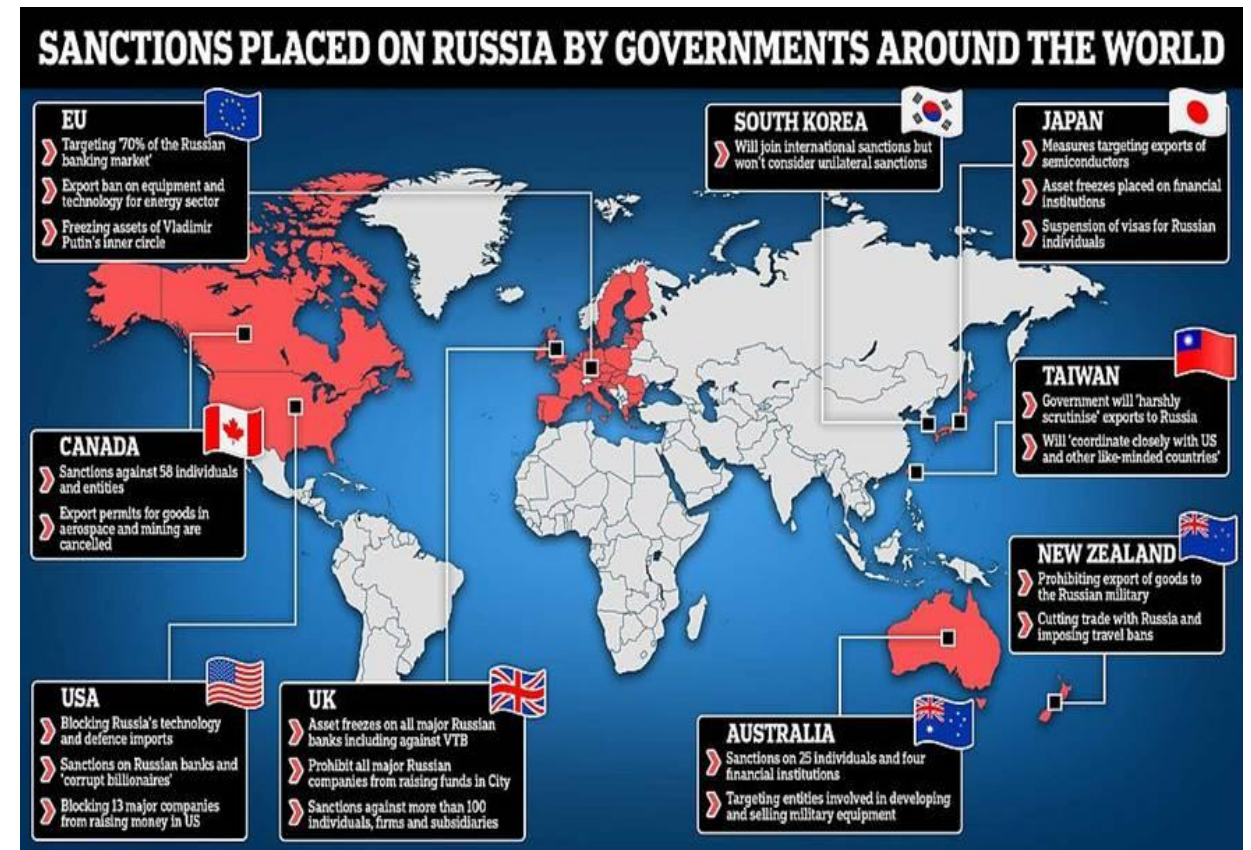
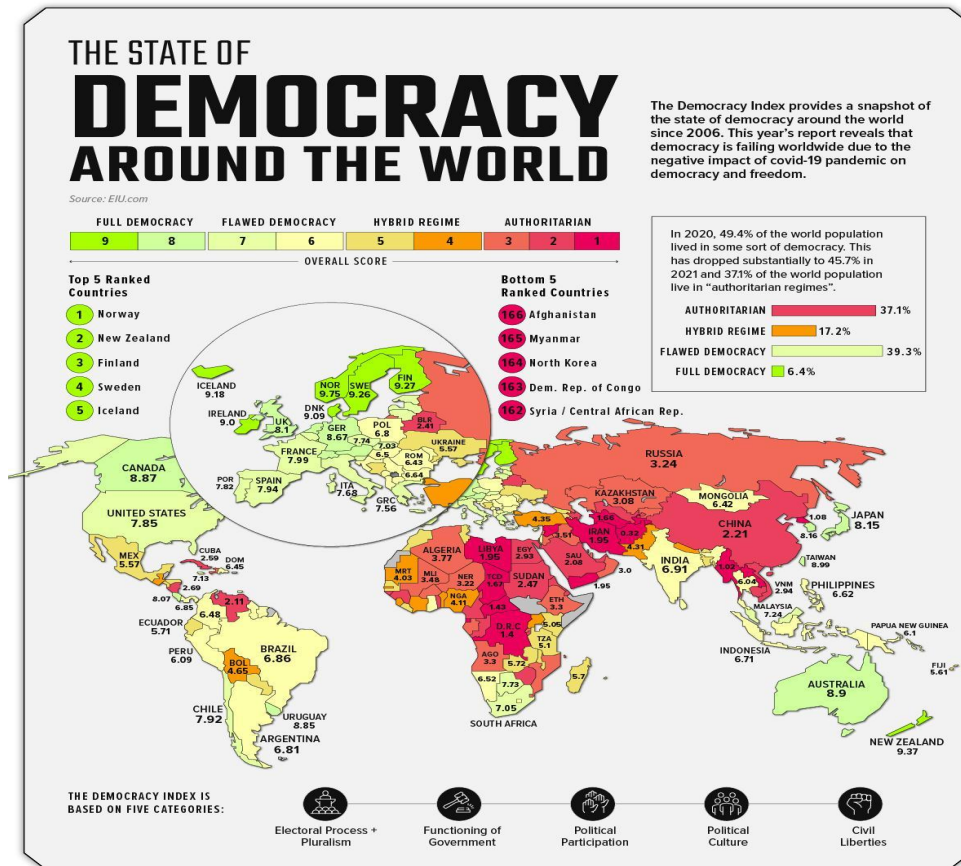
- the Talk to the City (Taiwan) provides real-time AI-assisted summarization, translation and interaction.
- *Polis, Taiwan (Audrey Tang)* <https://www.talktothe.city/polis>  
[https://youtu.be/Z6wLJ\\_IDsks](https://youtu.be/Z6wLJ_IDsks)
- **RUN MORE PILOTS** (and think SONY Walkman)
- *EU Competence Center on Participatory Deliberative Democracy*
- *OECD guidelines of Citizen Participation Processes*

# Where do you plug CA's into existing processes?

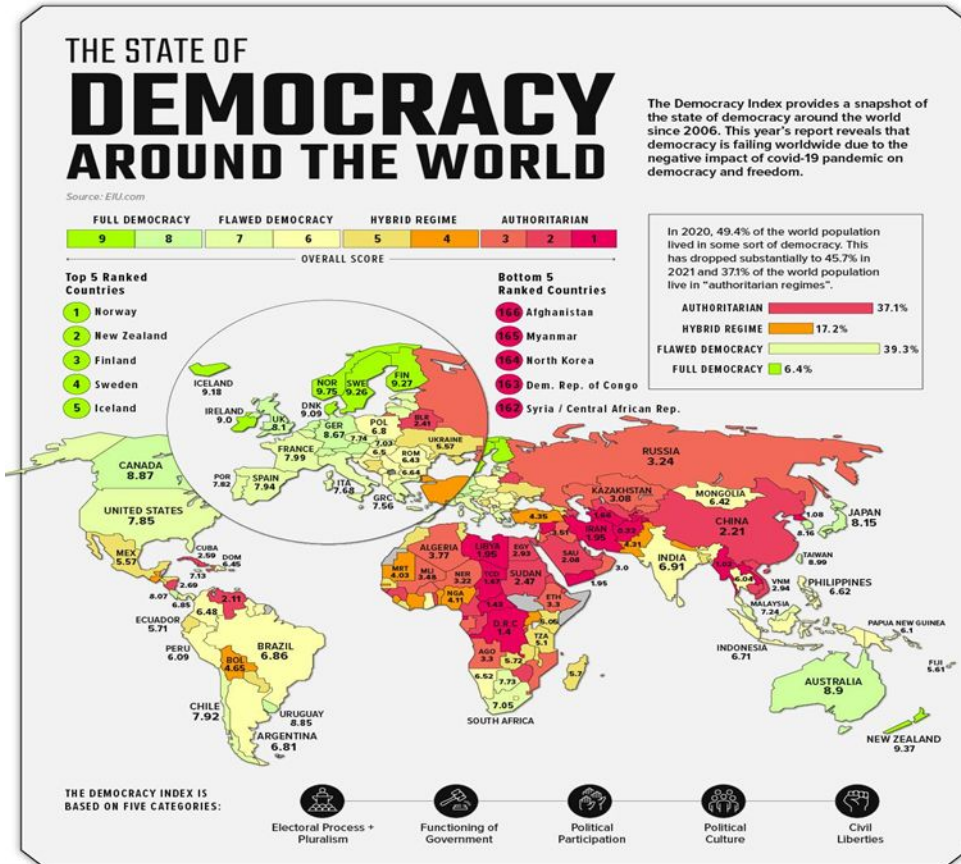
## Local-National-Transnational

- Feedback to local government proposals (incl. budget)
- Prior to referenda
- Parliamentary Committees before going to plenary
- A European Citizens Assembly (feeding into EP)
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# The West and the Rest on Ukraine



# The West and the Rest on Middle East



# “The West and the Rest”: Quo Vademus?

- Will/can/ this change? What is cause and what is effect?
- Can democracy be exported ? Can it be imported if made more attractive?
- Afrobarometer: 66% prefer democracy, 80% reject one man/party rule, 38% are not satisfied with the democracy they experience(d)
- The “*Democracy is a Western word*” syndrome?
- In the “non-West” there seems to be a desire for more freedom (universal?) coupled with perception of Western model as dysfunctional ( e.g. pragmatic Chinese)
- AI can help/harm democracy . Ditto for the East/West cleavage.

# Athens Olympic stadium 2004





# The Erosion of Democracy (lack of maintenance?)



# Dare to hope!

- Stopping /reversing the erosion (Hope from Poland !)
- Re-engineering some of the building blocks of democracy with AI support
- “Machines” can help if they are designed to help.
- New AI research directions: Assist rather than replace humans
- A democratic, not technocratic approach to AI governance.
- Get and stay ahead of the curve re regulation ( look at bioethics)
- Re-Write the Maintenance manual!
- **FROM SAPERE AUDE TO SPERARE AUDE!**

# Digital Humanism: A proposal

- Build **synergies** with like –minded organizations towards making joint proposals to policy makers (both sides of the Atlantic and ROW)
- **TEENS FOR DIGITAL HUMANISM**
- 1. Provide a mechanism that will allow teens to familiarize themselves with and exchange ideas about Digital Humanism
- Frame and test a strategy to engage local and regional high schools in supporting this initiative
- Bring local and national government representatives to “tables” curated by teens