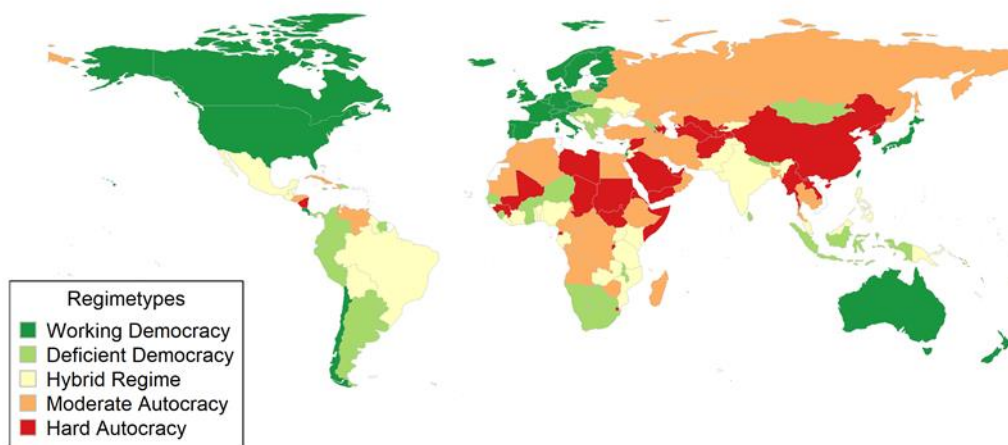


Democratic Deficits and Autocratic Closings Outweigh Breakdowns of Democracies and Democratization Dynamics

State of Democracy 2021 (Context Measurement)



The Democracy Matrix (DeMaX) is a tool for measuring the quality of democracy for over 175 countries between 1900 and 2021 based on the Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem) dataset. It differs from other measurement instruments by its conceptualization, linking the abstract dimensions of democracy - freedom, equality, and control - with more concrete institutions. This brief report presents some insights on recent developments in democratization around the world and contrasts them with long-term trends. Further information about the measurement instrument and the possibility to create own analysis and graphs exists online: www.democracymatrix.com

- The world faces an increase of autocratization dynamics, but breakdowns of democracy are rare among regime transformations
- Democracies lose quality and develop more often democratic deficits.
- Hybrid regimes and moderate autocracies move towards the pole of hard autocracy.
- Historically, the global level of democracy is still high and there are no clear proofs for a wave of autocratization.

The Global State of Democracy in 2021

Based on the DeMaX typology, 84 out of 177 countries have the status of **democracies** (46.9%). However, there are fewer working democracies (34) than deficient democracies (50). In the case of

the latter, not all elements of democracy are fully, but at least to a sufficient degree developed.

At the opposite end of the regime continuum, 60 **autocracies** account for 33.5 % of the global distribution of regimes. In contrast to moderate autocracies (31), hard autocracies (29), which restrict freedom completely, reject basic equality, and have no control over the use of power, have recently gained in numbers. In between, there are

33 **hybrid regimes** that combine both democratic and autocratic elements, varying greatly in their overall quality depending on their mix of elements.

The dominant regime type in **Europe and North America** is democracy: 23 working democracies are found in Europe, as well as the United States, Canada, Australia and New Zealand. 12 regimes are classified as deficient democracies, such as Albania, Hungary, Poland or Slovenia that are characterized by illiberal tendencies or a lack of political and legal control. There are also two hybrid regimes in Europe (Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina).

In **East Asia**, democracies represent the majority of regimes, but it is a **region of striking contrasts**: The working democracies in Taiwan, Japan and South Korea are opposed by hard autocracies in North Korea and China.

Region	HA	MA	HR	DD	WD
North America*	0	0	0	0	4
Europe	0	0	2	12	23
Small island states	0	0	2	4	1
East Asia	2	1	0	1	3
Latin America	1	5	5	9	2
South Asia	1	2	2	4	0
South-East Asia	2	3	3	2	0
Post-Soviet States**	4	3	2	3	0
Sub-Saharan Africa	9	11	14	15	0
MENA***	10	6	3	0	1
Total	29	31	33	50	34

* incl. AUS+NZ, ** without EU-members, *** Middle East and Northern Africa, HA = Hard Autocracy, MA = Moderate Autocracy, HR = Hybrid Regime, DD = Deficient Democracy, WD = Working Democracy

In **Latin America**, democracies account for slightly more than half of the regime types. Costa Rica and Chile are rare cases of working democracies accompanied by nine deficient democracies, some of which have a rather low overall quality of democracy (e.g., Ecuador or Colombia). In contrast, five states of Latin America are hybrid regimes like Mexico or Bolivia. Moderate autocracies are also present in Latin America (e.g., Honduras or Cuba), as well as the highly dysfunctional state Venezuela. Therefore, Latin America, which was once perceived as the transformation region with the highest potential

for democratization, **is not heading in the direction of democratic consolidation.**

In **South Asia** democracies are the minority. Three countries are classified as autocratic regimes (Iran, Bangladesh, and Afghanistan). **India and Pakistan, both hybrid regimes, are below the thresholds for a democracy.** Nepal, the Maldives, Sri Lanka and Bhutan are deficient democracies.

In **South-East Asia**, the **deficient democracies** of Indonesia and Timor-Leste **are surrounded by** hybrid regimes (Singapore, Malaysia and Philippines), moderate autocracies (Thailand, Vietnam, and Cambodia) and two hard autocracies (Laos, Myanmar).

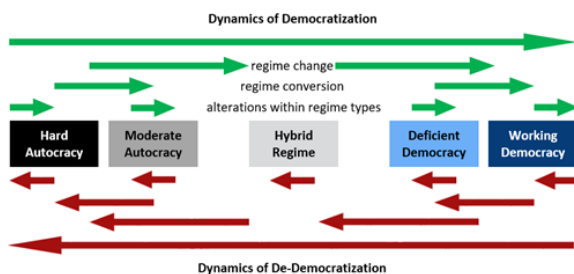
Among the **post-Soviet successor states**, Moldova, Georgia, and Armenia are exceptional cases of deficient democracies within the region. Seven out of the 12 countries are classified as Autocracies (four hard autocracies, three moderate autocracies). Ukraine and Kyrgyzstan are hybrid regimes.

In **Sub-Saharan Africa**, **most states are deficient democracies**, especially within the sub-regions of Southern (e.g., South Africa, Namibia, Botswana) and West Africa (e.g., Ghana, Senegal, The Gambia). 14 of **the Sub-Saharan states are hybrid regimes and vary considerably in their combinations of democratic and autocratic elements as well as their overall degree of democratization.** Autocracies are geographically concentrated in Central and East Africa, the moderate version only slightly outnumbering hard autocracies. Democratic transformation within the Sub-Saharan region is further hindered by widespread state fragility: Burundi, Mali, Somalia, South Sudan, Chad or Equatorial Guinea are extremely fragile states.

Israel is the sole working democracy in the **MENA** region, the only region predominantly inhabited by autocracies. Whereas moderate autocracies have some liberalized regime elements, most prominently Turkey (electoral regime and intermediate sphere), hard autocracies are restrictive regarding all dimensions. Almost half of the hard autocracies worldwide are located in the MENA region, among them petrostates (e.g., Saudi-Arabia or Qatar) as well as war-torn countries like Syria, Libya, and Yemen. Three countries (Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon) are hybrid regimes with contradictory regime features.

What changed between 2020 and 2021?

From the perspective of *differences in kind*, processes of regime transformations take two forms: in a regular **regime change**, a country moves from one basic type to another (e.g., autocracy to democracy). In contrast, countries undergoing a **regime conversion** shift the subtype – a transformation takes place within a political regime – but not the basic type on the regime continuum (e.g., from deficient democracy to working democracy). A regime change indicates a more severe regime variation than a regime conversion from this perspective.



From the perspective of *differences in degree*, variations of political regimes can be analyzed regarding the *extensity* – the number of elements that vary – and *intensity* – the magnitude of variations. Consequently, there may be **gradual regime alterations** that do not qualify as regime change or regime conversion, since they remain in the same subtype, but they may be substantial anyway. In the following we use both perspectives to highlight some case that experienced transformations between 2020 and 2021.

Autocratization

Autocratic closing

There is an ongoing debate about the scope of the current wave of autocratization. The results for 2021 show that the **high number of hard autocracies are not the result of breakdowns of democracies, but rather of autocratic closing**: Afghanistan, Chad, Eswatini, Guinea, Nicaragua and Uzbekistan underwent regime conversions from moderate to hard autocracies. Burma/Myanmar and Mali changed from hybrid regimes to hard autocracies. Hence, this part of the autocratic wave did not encompass democratic regimes, but regimes that were

already autocratic or included autocratic features. Extending the view on these case, Mali and Nicaragua are somewhat special, since they underwent gradual processes of democratic decline starting in the democratic spectrum and ending as autocracies, whereas the other cases never were democratic. The aggregation of various regime changes under the umbrella term autocratization, which often suggests in public debates that democracies have collapsed, runs the risk of presenting a biased picture. Moreover, many of these cases experienced stateness problems, since non-state competitors challenged the state monopoly of physical violence.

Mali, that only briefly experienced democratic rule (1992-1996; 2002-2006), still struggles with the multidimensional crisis of 2012, when a Tuareg rebellion that resulted in the occupation of two-thirds of the country's territory by armed groups triggered a military intervention. After a phase of political tension and uncertainty, two military coups in 2020 and 2021 further disrupted political proceedings. Plans to return to civilian rule and hold democratic elections have been postponed.

Under the rule of the "Frente Sandinista de Liberación Nacional", Nicaragua descended from a deficient democracy (1991-2005) to a hybrid regime in 2006 and further deteriorated into a moderate autocracy in 2012. Waves of protest against the Ortega administration led the regime to further tighten its grip on civil society and opposition, limiting fundamental freedoms, while rampant corruption within the government remains unchecked.

Oscillation between hybridity and autocracy

In El Salvador, Ethiopia, and Hong Kong, the status of the regime changed from hybrid to autocratic regimes. In El Salvador, the regime has been continuously oscillating between hybridity and deficient democracy since 1994. Limitation of the judicial independence and the overall weakening of the rule of law in combination with the authoritarian tendencies of president Bukele have led to the deterioration into an autocratic regime. Ethiopia, a hard autocracy until 1990, was a stable moderate autocracy from 1991 to 2018. The following short period of hybridity interrupted the autocratic rule and was reversed in 2021.

Although Ethiopia's elite was determined to implement democratic reforms and there are signs of democratic improvement among the procedures of decision, the rules settlement and implementation fell below the threshold because of violent ethnic conflicts and insurgency warfare.

Grave losses in democratic electoral standards led to the regime change of Hong Kong to a moderate autocracy. Hong Kong is a special administrative region of China that used to sustain its own political system under the 'one country, two systems' doctrine. In 2020, China abandoned this path and tightened its grip on Hong Kong: the National Security Law (2021) changed Hong Kong's electoral system, giving Beijing the control over selection of Hong Kong's political candidates.

From deficient democracies to hybrid regimes

Four countries with only short periods of democratic experience in the past changed from deficient democracies to hybrid regimes.

Guyana, a hybrid regime between 1986 and 2012, started its path of democratic transformation ten years ago. Guyana was a deficient democracy from 2013 to 2020, when elections were impaired over attempted fraud by the incumbent government. Although political parties can form freely and people have the right to form labor unions, clientelism within the intermediate sphere contradict its democratic functioning.

After the civil war 2003, Liberia's progress of democratic transformation (2006 - 2012) was followed by a phase of oscillation between hybridity and deficient democracy that continues. Despite the election of president Weah and the first peaceful transfer of power that marked a shift in politics, Liberia's political regime is plagued with high levels of corruption that undermine the democratic institutions.

In Malaysia, democratization has begun only recently (2018-2020), when the political coalition "Barisan Nasional" that ruled the country between 1957 and 2018, lost general elections to an opposition alliance. However, steps of democratic liberalization ended shortly thereafter when political turmoil led to the resignation of the Prime Minister. The following

government that consists of parties of the autocratic era abandoned democratic reforms.

Democratic Deficits

Between 2020 and 2021, only Greece experienced a loss of democratic quality that resulted in the conversion from a working to a deficient democracy. Greece is now located slightly below the threshold of a working democracy as a result of increasing political violence as well as the reforms of the media system. Although the current government has taken steps to reform the political system and reorganize the civil services of the state, enforcement of regulations is dysfunctional. Clientelism and corruption within the executive and legislative still weaken the regulatory framework.

Sharpest Declines in DeMaX Total Value (context)					
Top 5 Countries	2020		2021		Change
	Total	Rank	Total	Rank	
Myanmar	0,50	99	0,05	171	-0,46
Afghanistan	0,39	123	0,03	175	-0,35
Mali	0,45	112	0,12	155	-0,33
Guinea	0,28	139	0,09	161	-0,19
Hong Kong	0,43	116	0,27	137	-0,16
Largest Gains in DeMaX Total Value (context)					
Top 5 Countries	2020		2021		Change
	Total	Rank	Total	Rank	
Moldova	0,68	61	0,77	41	+0,09
Qatar	0,05	170	0,12	157	+0,06
Zambia*	0,46	108	0,52	97	+0,05
Dominican R.*	0,58	85	0,63	71	+0,05
The Gambia*	0,60	77	0,65	66	+0,05
* Non-substantial annual changes					

Democratization

In contrast to previous editions, autocratic tendencies clearly outweigh democratization dynamics between 2020 and 2021. Values of countries that gained "democratic points" must be interpreted in relation to start and end point. Except for Moldova, the top five gains (Qatar, Dominican Republic, The Gambia and Zambia) do not display substantive conversions.

Democratization of Democracy

Only four cases can be selected on the basis of the difference in kind perspective. The United States have recovered and are now a functioning democracy again after being classified as a

deficient democracy for a year. On the one hand, the temporary deficient democracy in the USA co-varies with the end of the Trump presidency and the turbulent transfer of governmental responsibility to Biden, which was accompanied by the storming of the capitol. In addition, the declining degree of consultation of other political actors before making important decision – in other words, a concentration of executive power – were negatively evaluated by V-Dem coders. On the other hand, the decrease of quality of democracy is not a short-term trend in the USA but started already in 2015 before Trump was elected in 2017. Still, this conversion is not to be interpreted as a full recovery since the USA are still close to the threshold of a deficient democracy.

United States of America 2021



Democratic Transition

In the Dominican Republic, the constitutional court prevented laws that would have endangered media freedom, and popular protests forced the president to abandon a planned constitutional amendment that would have allowed him to serve another term. This seems to have created a momentum for reform and a strengthening of democracy, whereupon the country is classified by DeMaX as a democracy for

the first time since 1900, albeit a deficit democracy due to a variety of problems, especially police violence.

Liberalization of Autocracy

Venezuela left the category of hard autocracies, however, this is caused by a moderate value for the dimension of political equality, which is technically correct, but should not be interpreted as a sign of comprehensive liberalization. Venezuela is also still a highly fragile state, aggravating its road to ‘recovery’.

Gains of Quality of Democracy

From the gradual perspective, three additional cases display substantial gains in quality of democracy regarding the total context index (>0.05), that do not qualify as a regime conversion or regime change. This includes the strengthening of the deficient democracy in Moldova, where the pro-European Party of Action and Solidarity (PAS) of President Sandu won the parliamentary elections in 2021 after an institutional gridlock between the constitutional court and political parties. This equipped the ruling party with political power to implement democratic reforms, although this optimistic perspective has yet to materialize.

Zambia experienced a super election year, having legislative and presidential elections, which resulted in the replacement of the incumbent president and his party. Although these elections were shattered by widespread violence, the election process itself received some acceptance by domestic and international actors for its credibility. Further slight improvements can be seen concerning the independence of and the access to the judiciary. However, Zambia remains a hybrid regime struggling to overcome serious obstacles on the way to democratization.

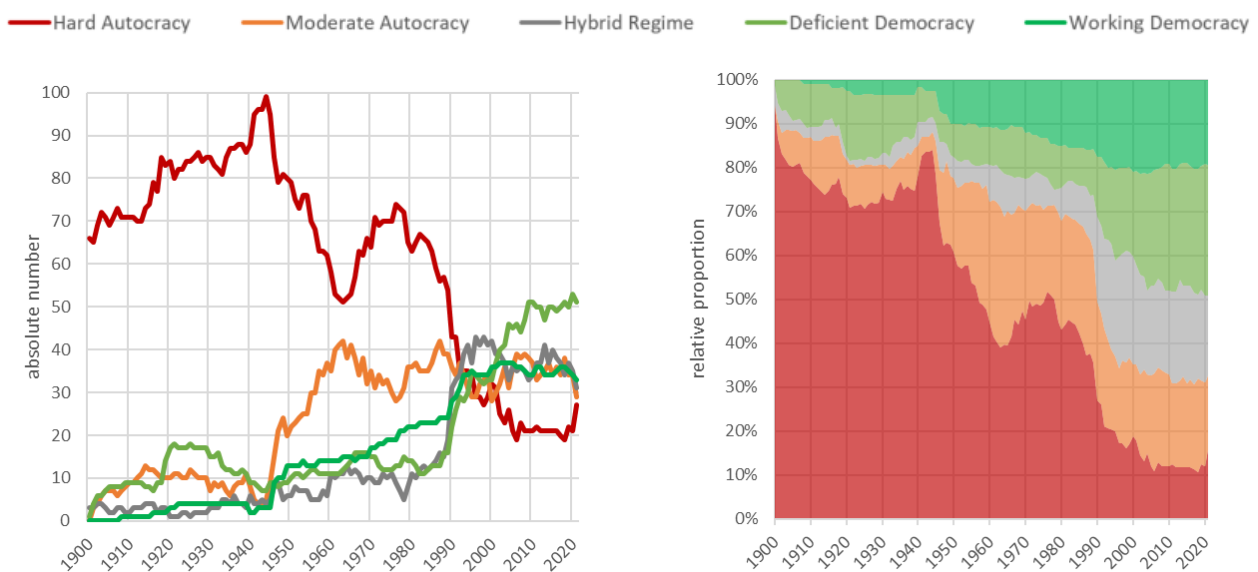
The drafting of a new electoral law resulted in higher values for the democratic quality of the electoral process in Honduras. Nevertheless, the country continues to be an autocracy, however, a moderate one with a sharply limited political competitiveness and a somehow election-based access to political power, missing the establishment of horizontal accountability.

Short-term trends or long-term developments?

Since the beginning of the third wave in 1974, the number and proportion of democracies increased, whereas autocracies decreased (see graph below). Since 1989 hybrid regimes gained significance and jumped up in numbers. Although democracies rose in numbers until 2018, the pace slowed down since the mid-2000s. Until 2002 the global ratio between democracies and non-democracies was

askew in favor of democratic regimes, with the exception of a temporary dip in the 1990s. Since 2002, the distribution of regimes tends toward non-democracies. However, this did not result in a reversal of the regime distribution, but in a stagnation, which is why we could also say: ‘After the tide does not come the ebb’. The number of democracies is still on a high level in historical perspective.

Distribution of Regime Types¹ since 1900
(absolute numbers on the left and relative proportions on the right)



Nevertheless, many new – and in recent years also consolidated working democracies – experienced democratic deficits, leading to the highest increase of deficient democracies since the caesura of 1989. In addition, hard autocracies have gained in numbers.

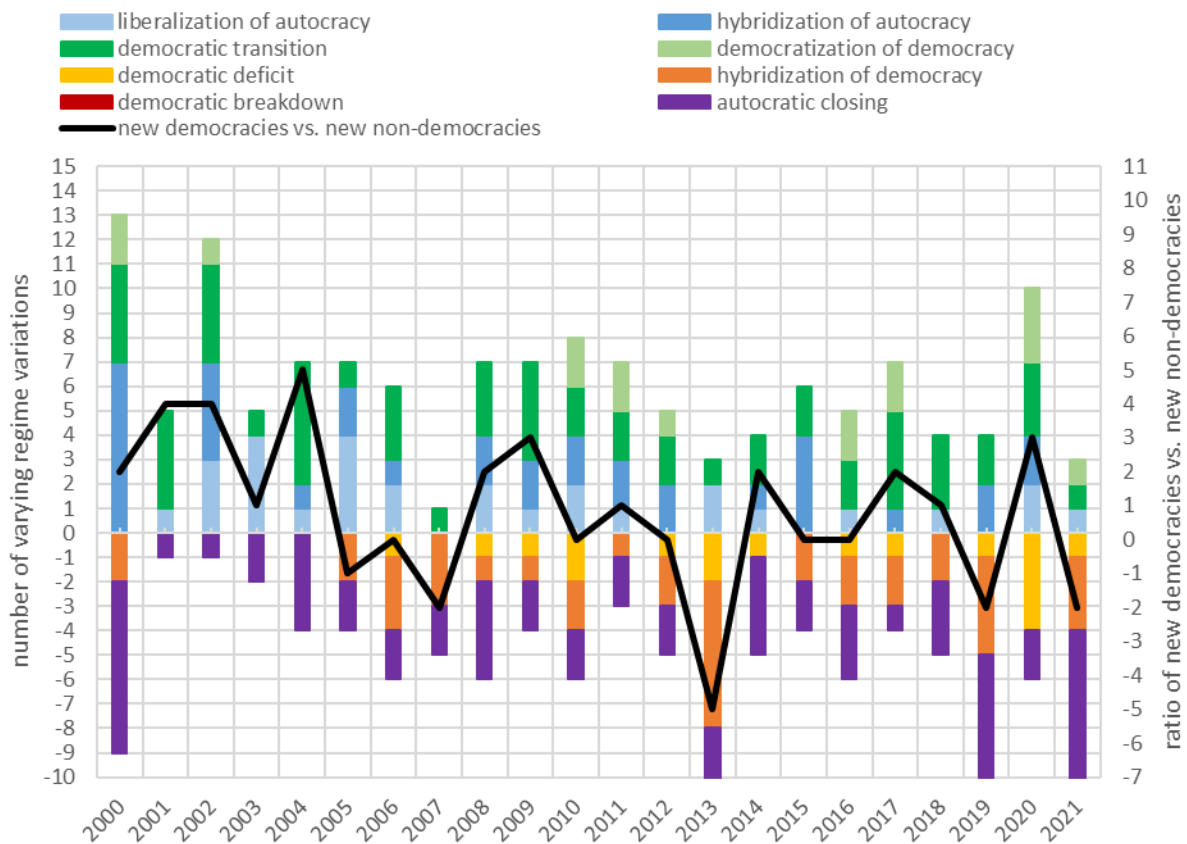
In the last twenty years (see graph below), several findings are noteworthy: First, there are less direct democratic breakdowns, where a democracy changed to an autocracy within a year. However, there are some democracies that steadily declined and took a route from (deficient) democracy over an intermediate phase as hybrid regime to (moderate) autocracy (e.g. Turkey). This is an often described characteristic of

present autocratization dynamics, which sets them apart from earlier ones in the first and second reversed wave, when coups ended democracy overnight.

Second, many democracies lose quality in degree and convert to deficient democracies. Even though these developments are worrisome, they do not indicate or necessarily result in a breakdown of democracy. Several democracies show surprisingly more resilience than expected, stabilize after declines (e.g. Croatia) or even reverse the trend and recover (e.g. South Korea, Taiwan).

¹ The accuracy of this analysis suffers from interruptions of time series caused by missing data. With the next update of the Democracy Matrix in 2023 we will provide imputed time series to offer users the opportunity for more consistent data analysis.

Annual regime transformations around the globe since 1999 (differences in kind)



liberalization of autocracy = hard autocracy (HA) → moderate autocracy (MA); hybridization of autocracy = HA + MA → hybrid regime (HR); democratic transition = HA + MA + HR → deficient democracy (DD) or working democracy (WD); democratization of democracy = DD → WD; democratic deficit = WD → DD; hybridization of democracy = WD + DD → HR; democratic breakdown = WD + DD → MA + HA; autocratic closing = HR + MA → HA

Third, regime changes from democracy, most often deficient democracy, to hybrid regimes became more frequent. Although, these regime variations qualify as a regime change, which means they drop out the democratic spectrum, they do not eliminate all democratic institutions and preserve some, but introduce autocratic institutions as well (e.g. Benin, Serbia, India).

Fourth, autocratic closings accounts for many regime variations (e.g., Russia, Azerbaijan), i.e., conversions that start as hybrid regimes or autocracy and move on the regime continuum towards the pole of hard autocracies. Many of these developments take place in countries that only became hybrid regimes and are inherently unstable with only weak and few democratic institutions. It is striking that many of the cases that fall into this category of regime transformations are characterized by violent

conflicts and a dissolution of the monopoly on the use of force (e.g. Afghanistan, Mali, Libya), which suggests that dynamics of fragilization potentially outweigh autocratization.

This does not mean that there are no threats to democracy. Various developments (e.g., globalization, digitization, social restructuring, and disintegration, increases in complexity, etc.) threaten democratic rule, which is accompanied by a decline in trust in democratic institutions. In addition, autocratic regimes are becoming more resilient and more autocratic, indicating a return of the regime confrontation democracy vs. autocracy.