



The State of Democracy among Norway's Partner Countries in Development Policy

Recent protests in places as varied as Hong Kong, Bolivia and Iraq remind us that people worldwide value the right to hold their leaders accountable and to freely speak their mind. Yet democracy can offer more than these civil liberties. Compared to their autocratic counterparts, democratically elected politicians deliver better development outcomes, such as lower infant mortality rates or higher literacy. Democracy fosters development. In this policy brief, we present trends in democratic governance among Norway's 17 partner countries over the past two decades. While there is no general trend common to all 17 countries, civil liberties have been increasingly restricted, especially among the long-term development partners. Further, political turmoil in several of these countries in 2021 creates new uncertainty about the prospects for democracy.

Brief Points

- Civil liberties are under strain in several of Norway's partner countries.
- Civil liberties in Afghanistan improved after the invasion in 2001, but the country's democratization has been limited.
- Myanmar has had a tremendous shift towards democracy over the past decade, but the military coup in February 2021 is likely to break with this trend.
- Uganda is slowly but steadily moving from bad to worse. This is especially driven by President Museveni's extensive use of physical repression, as well as increasingly limited private civil liberties.
- The election of President Magufuli in Tanzania embarked the country on a steady decline towards autocracy. It remains to be seen whether the new President Hassan will continue down the path of authoritarianism.

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Introduction

In 2018, Norway announced 17 partner countries in their development policy. The goal is to concentrate Norway's aid towards 17 partners, with the aim to achieve better results in these countries. There are two categories of partnerships: partners for long-term development cooperation, and partners for stabilization and conflict prevention. An overview of the countries is listed in Table 1.

In this policy brief, we present recent trends in democratic governance among the 17 partner countries. Recent protests in countries as varied as Hong Kong, Bolivia, Iraq, Lebanon, and Algeria remind us that people worldwide value the right to hold their leaders accountable and to freely speak their mind. Yet democracy can offer more than these intrinsic liberal values. Compared to their autocratic counterparts, democratically elected politicians deliver better development outcomes such as lower infant mortality rates or higher literacy. Not least, democracy serves as a safeguard against disastrous policies that upend national economies (Knutsen 2021).

To investigate patterns in democratic governance, we rely on the liberal democracy index from Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem) (Coppedge et al. 2021). The V-Dem dataset is based on large expert surveys about political institutions and other social conditions in 202 countries worldwide. Concepts such as liberal democracy or freedom of expression are constructed as an aggregate of several lesser indica-

Long-term development cooperation

Ethiopia
Colombia
Ghana
Indonesia
Malawi
Mozambique
Myanmar
Nepal
Tanzania
Uganda

Stabilization and conflict prevention

Afghanistan
Mali
Niger
Palestine
Somalia
South Sudan
DR Congo

Table 1: Partner countries in Norwegian development policy

tors. For a full explanation of the measurement methodology, see Pemstein et al. (2020).

Using this liberal democracy index from V-Dem, Figure 1 illustrates a snapshot of liberal democracy around the world in 2020. More democratic countries are shaded in darker colors, and the 17 partner countries are highlighted with black borders. As a general remark, recipients of official development assistance (or aid) tend to score lower on different indices of democracy, since the most democratic countries also tend to be wealthier nations that are less likely to depend on development assistance.

development cooperation. Out of the 17 countries, Ghana is the most democratic, and it has been so since the first successful Ghanaian democratic transfer of power in 2000. Indonesia is also a relatively stable democracy, albeit with some worrying authoritarian trends in the most recent years. Nevertheless, there is room for improvement in both of these countries. For example, Ghana has several rural areas that have less access to power and state resources, while in Indonesia, the autonomy of the legislature has declined in recent years.

At the other end of the spectrum, Somalia, South Sudan, and Palestine fail to hold regular elections, a feature they share with only nine other countries globally. Consequently, they are among the countries that score the lowest on liberal democracy. However, given the dismal conditions for free and fair elections and civil rights in Afghanistan, DR Congo, Ethio-

General Trends

Most of Norway's development partners are relatively undemocratic countries, and the partners for stabilization and conflict prevention tend to score lower than partners for long-term

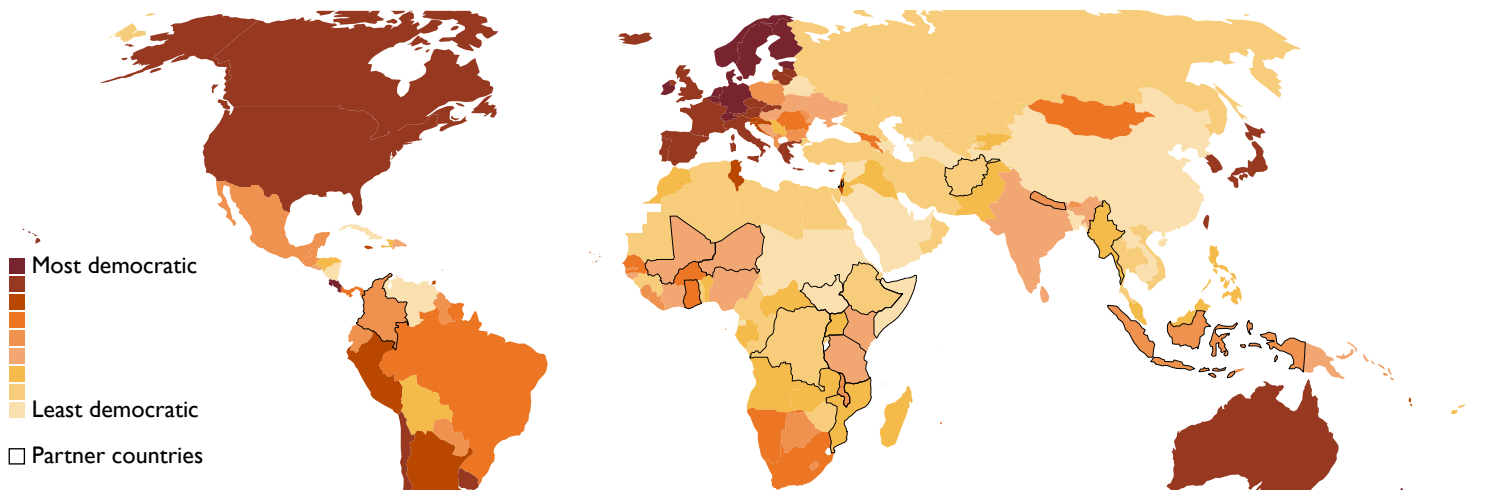


Figure 1: Liberal democracy around the world, 2020

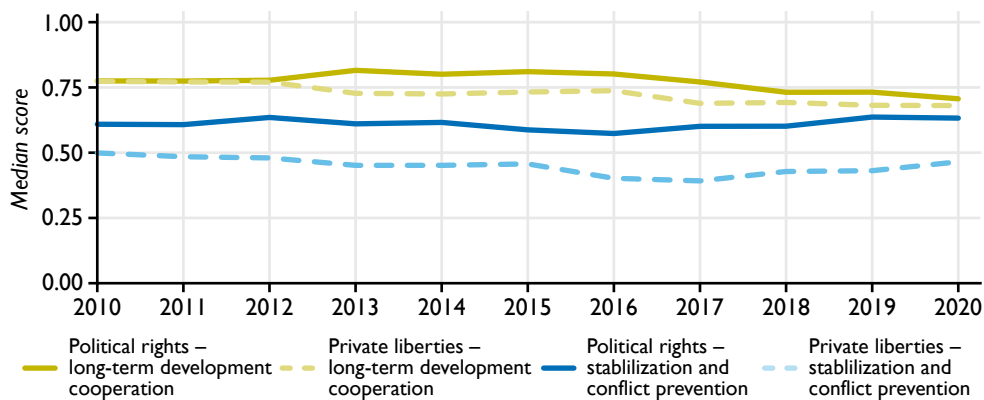


Figure 2: Trends in political rights and civil liberties among Norway's partner countries

pia, and Uganda, these partners do not score much better.

There has not been any unequivocal trend towards more democracy or more autocracy common to all 17 partner countries in the past 10 years. On average, there is a *slight* downward trend, but it is not significant enough to raise any alarm. However, this aggregate trend hides important changes happening within individual countries, and some ill omens for the future.

Civil Liberties under Attack

The lack of any clear *aggregate* trends hides changes taking place among the sub-components of liberal democracy. One worrying sign in particular is a slow but steady deterioration of political and private civil liberties among the long-term development partners. Political civil liberties are freedom of expression, including freedom of the press, and freedom of association. Private civil liberties include the right to freedom of movement, religion and property, and freedom from forced labor. In Figure 2, we illustrate the trend in the median score on these two indices for the long-term development partners and partners for stabilization and conflict prevention. In 2012, the long-term development partners had a median score of approximately 0.77 on both of these indices. By 2020, this had dropped to 0.7 and 0.68 – a significant drop for a scale that ranges from 0 to 1. While there is no reason to be alarmist about this modest downward trend, attacks on civil liberties have been among the most common early signals for growing authoritarianism in recent years (Mechkova, Lührmann and Lindberg 2017).

The situation is not likely to improve next year. Ethiopia and Myanmar are the only two countries among the long-term development partners that have drastically *improved* their civil liberties over the past decade. Their development moves the median score in Figure 2 in a positive direction. But both of these countries have experienced political turmoil in 2021. In February, the elected government of Myanmar fell to a military coup. Since then, the military government has violently repressed prodemocracy protesters and limited civil liberties in several ways. In Ethiopia, conflict erupted in late 2020 between government forces and the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF). The election of President Abiy Ahmed in 2018 was considered by many to be a positive sign for democracy in Ethiopia, but with prolonged conflict in Tigray, it remains to be seen whether such a trend will continue in the coming years.

Limited Democratization

Democracy in Afghanistan has improved after the invasion in 2001. This has first and foremost been driven by improvements in political and private civil liberties. Civil rights improved dramatically and rapidly after the fall of the Taliban government. Far less development was made on establishing free and fair contested elections, bolstered by the exclusion of large regions and ethnic groups from political power and state resources. While many laud the progress made on female empowerment, we emphasize that, compared to the other partner countries, Afghanistan has remained a highly unequal society where a large proportion of women have been excluded from power and state resources – exclusion of women in Afghanistan is surpassed only by Somalia and is on par with South Sudan. Nor was there any solid progress on the separation of powers. Advancements were made right after the establishment of the parliament in the mid-2000s and until 2015, but in the past five years the Afghani legislature has lost much of its autonomy and oversight over the executive. These trends are illustrated in Figure 3. With the capitulation of the government to the Taliban in 2021, we express concern that the progress made on civil rights will be lost, and very little will remain of democratic governance in Afghanistan.

From Bad to Worse

President Museveni has slowly but steadily pushed Uganda towards authoritarianism. This is especially driven by an increasing use

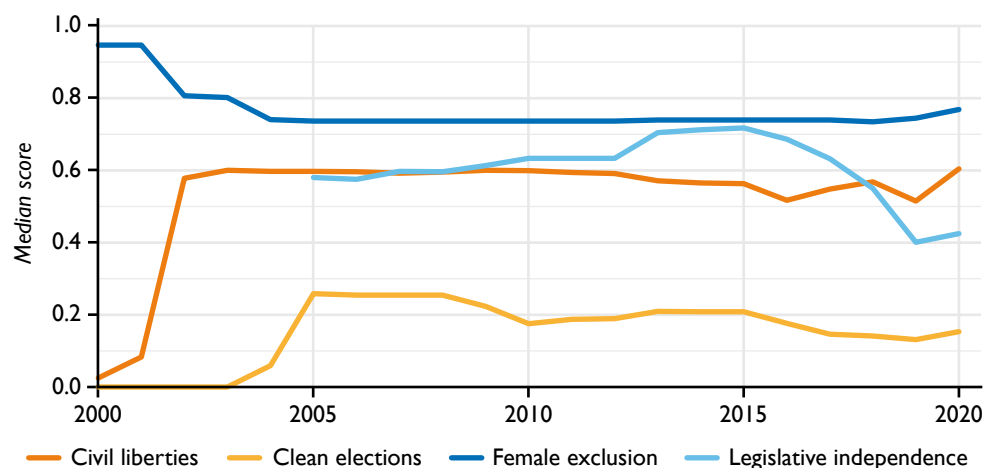


Figure 3: Trends on four democratic indicators in Afghanistan, 2000-2020

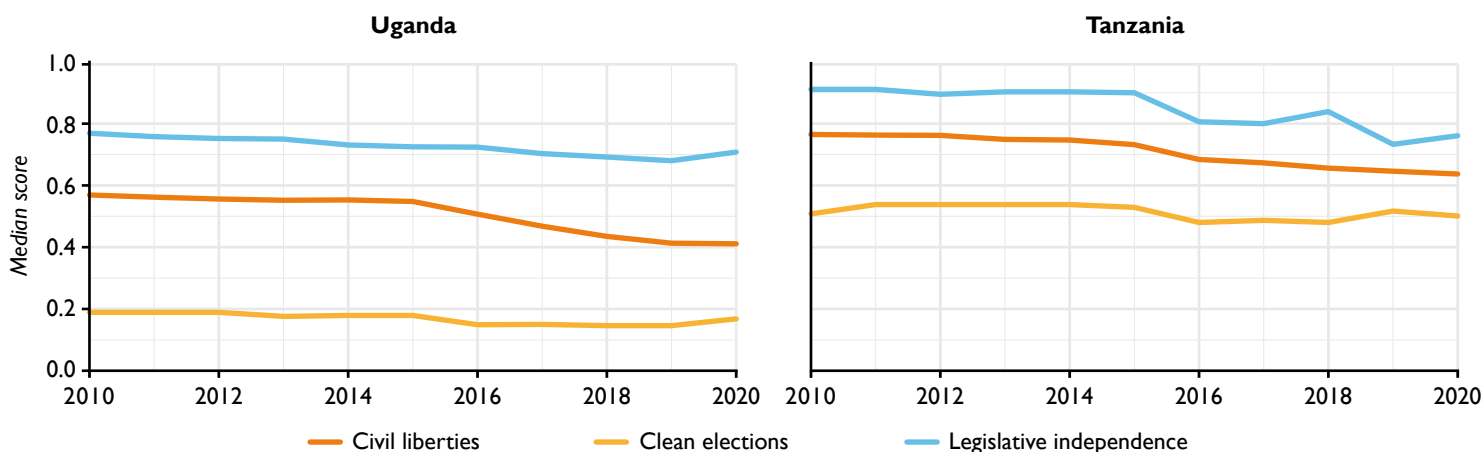


Figure 4: Trends on three democratic components in Uganda and Tanzania, 2010–2020

of physical repression and curtailment of private civil liberties. This was most recently on display during the election in 2021, when the government violently repressed the vocal challenging candidate Bobi Wine and his followers. For instance, during a rally in November 2020, Ugandan government forces killed 54 of the attendees during their crackdown. Uganda has never known anything but an autocratic government, and these developments are moving the country from bad to worse.

Things have also moved in the wrong direction in Tanzania. President John Magufuli, elected in 2015, has proven to be a highly authoritarian leader. In the past five years, he has gradually deteriorated conditions for freedom of speech and association, threatened religious communities, and attempted to undermine the parliament. The government has detained members of the opposition and passed a law that allows them to ban parties that engage in activism. The environment for civil society organizations has also become far more strained, as the government has expanded its rights to suspend and deregister organizations it disapproves of.

In protest against the government, the opposition boycotted the local elections in 2019, but this only further expanded the power of the ruling party Chama Cha Mapinduzi (CCM). Magufuli won a second term in October 2020, in an election that was marred with fraud and violent turmoil. Yet there is hope that this trend will not continue in the coming years. Magufuli died in March 2021, and it remains to be seen how the country will develop under the new President Samia Suluhu Hassan.

Violence and Democracy

Conflict remains a serious obstacle for democracy in several of Norway's partner countries. Violence is prevalent in Somalia, South Sudan, and especially Afghanistan. These are also among the countries that score low on indicators for democracy and that have seen little or no progress. The conflict in Afghanistan has caused more than 200,000 casualties over the past two decades, and in Somalia, between 1,000 and 3,000 people have lost their lives in violent conflict each year since 2006. Recently, conflict has also erupted in Mali, Mozambique,

Ethiopia and Tanzania. If peace is not achieved in these places, democratization will be much harder to achieve. ■

Further Reading

Coppedge, Michael et al. (2021) *V-Dem Dataset VII. Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem)*. Available at: <https://www.v-dem.net/en/data/reference-material-v11/> [Last visited 28-08-2021].

Knutsen, Carl Henrik (2021) 'A business case for democracy regime type, growth, and growth volatility'. *Democratization* 28(8): 1505–1524.

Mechkova, Valeriya; Anna Lührmann & Staffan I. Lindberg (2017) 'How Much Democratic Backsliding?' *Journal of Democracy* 28(4): 162–169.

Pemstein, Daniel et al. (2020) 'The V-Dem Measurement Model: Latent Variable Analysis for Cross-National and Cross-Temporal Expert-Coded Data'. *V-Dem Working Paper No. 21*, 6th edition. University of Gothenburg: Varieties of Democracy Institute.

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THE PROJECT

The *Conflict Trends* project aims to answer questions related to the causes of, consequences of and trends in conflict. The project will contribute to new conflict analyses within areas of public interest, and works to produce thorough and quality-based analysis for the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

PRIO

The Peace Research Institute Oslo (PRIO) is a non-profit peace research institute (established in 1959) whose overarching purpose is to conduct research on the conditions for peaceful relations between states, groups and people. The institute is independent, international and interdisciplinary, and explores issues related to all facets of peace and conflict.