

World's Largest Democracies Now Run by Populists

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The common understanding and most noted description for democracy in the West has many descriptions but can be broadly defined as: a system of government by the whole population or all the eligible members of a state, typically through elected representatives. It is widely understood that democracy is by far the best method of managing a nation and its economy for the benefit of all citizens. Whilst you may disagree with that statement, one only has to look at life in authoritarian countries to see some of the worst abuses of human rights and inequality imaginable.

However, the Western world is changing politically and is doing so rapidly. This change, as widely recognised by many economists as being firmly based in the late 1970s when Thatcher and Raegan agreed that neoliberal capitalism – that the free-market should dominate both economic and political policy. Over the following four decades, the political pendulum swang from social democracy to rapidly rising commercial liberalisation with an American style of doing business that sought out profit at almost any cost. Its crest manifested itself as the global financial crash, caused by the wealthiest people working in the financial services industry that subsequently sucked trillions of dollars out of the global economic system, only to be shouldered by the least well off in an ideology (not an economic model) called austerity.

A decade later, anger has turned into action, most notably against the failed authority of the establishment. Subsequent protests and rising dissent has then seen a rise of populism. And populism is on the rise globally.

The worlds largest democracies are now led by populist leaders – India (pop 1.3billion), United States (pop 329m), Indonesia (pop 268 million), Brazil (pop 209 million) and Mexico (pop 129 million). This group represents 2.2 billion people or 28.6 per cent of the 7.7 billion total world population.

Of the largest ten nations by population in the world, no one country is classified as a full democracy, with two – China and Russia being authoritarian and three, Pakistan, Nigeria and Bangladesh, being classed as hybrid regimes. India, the USA, Indonesia, Brazil and Mexico are classed as ‘flawed democracies’.

Of all countries in the world, only 20 can call themselves a full democracy. Another 55 are flawed democracies, 39 are hybrid regimes and 53 are authoritarian.

Full democracies are nations where civil liberties and basic political freedoms are not only respected but also reinforced by a political culture conducive to the thriving of democratic principles.

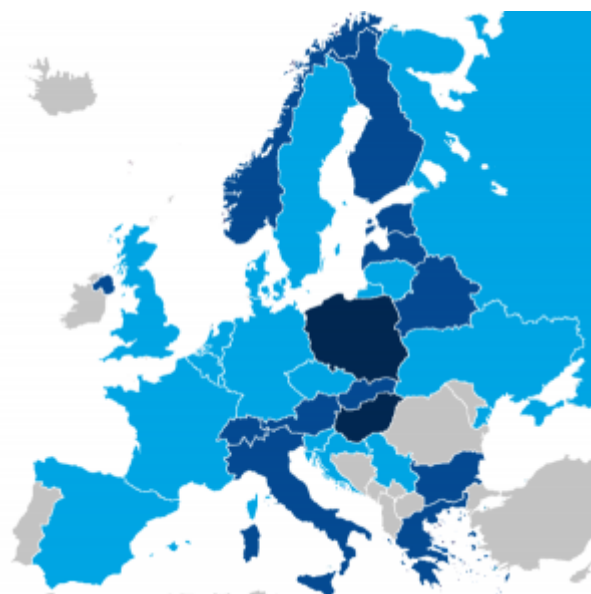
Flawed democracies are nations with free elections but weighed down by weak governance, an underdeveloped or declining political culture and low levels of political participation

Hybrid regimes are nations where consequential irregularities exist in elections, regularly preventing them from being fair and free. These nations commonly have governments that apply pressure on political opponents, non-independent judiciaries, widespread corruption, harassment and pressure placed on the media and anaemic rule of law.

Authoritarian regimes are nations where political pluralism has vanished or is extremely limited. These nations are often absolute monarchies or dictatorships, may have some conventional institutions of democracy but with meagre significance. Infringements and abuses of civil liberties are commonplace, elections (if they take place) are not fair and free, the media is often state-owned or controlled by groups associated with the ruling regime, the judiciary is not independent, and there is omnipresent censorship and suppression of governmental criticism.

Hybrid regimes were the most widespread political systems in the world towards the end of the twentieth century but democracy (in all its forms) at the beginning of the 21st century has that title now.

Image below: European national parliaments with representatives from right-wing populist parties in June 2018: (Light blue) Right-wing populists represented in the parliament (Blue) Right-wing populists involved in the government (Dark Blue) Right-wing populists appoint prime minister (Source: TP)



In the European Union, all are classed as full democracies or flawed democracies with 10 of the top 20 democracies in the world being EU member states. Of them, Romania, Croatia, Hungary, Poland and Bulgaria rank the lowest out of the current 28 members of the EU.

The Top ten democracies in the world are regularly [listed](#) each year but they also happen to be small nations in terms of population size. Number one to top the worlds best democracies is Norway, followed by Iceland, Sweden, New Zealand, Denmark, Ireland, Canada, Finland, Australia and Switzerland. Together, their combined population is just 106 million, with seven of those with a population below 10 million. Canada and Australia have a combined population of less than 62 million and both are inside the top ten worlds [largest countries by land mass](#).

Greenland is the 12th largest land mass of any country and is of Danish territory with just 56,000 citizens. Greenland is one of the EU countries' overseas countries and territories (OCT). Citizens of [Greenland are, nonetheless, EU citizens](#) within the meaning of EU treaties and Danish nationality law and is, therefore, listed as a full democracy.

Right-wing populists are now politically represented in almost every country in the EU and gaining ground. In [political science](#), the terms **radical right** and **populist right** have been used to refer to the range of European far-right parties that have grown in support since the late 1970s. Populist right-wing groups have shared a number of causes, which typically include opposition to globalization, criticism of immigration and multiculturalism, and opposition to the European Union itself.

This is where caution is required as the surge towards [radical right-wing](#) politics is now endemic and a cause for great concern. The ideological spectrum of the radical right extends from right-wing populism to white nationalism and neo-fascism.

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