

Democracy

Adam Przeworski

September 11, 2024

Democracy rare and fragile

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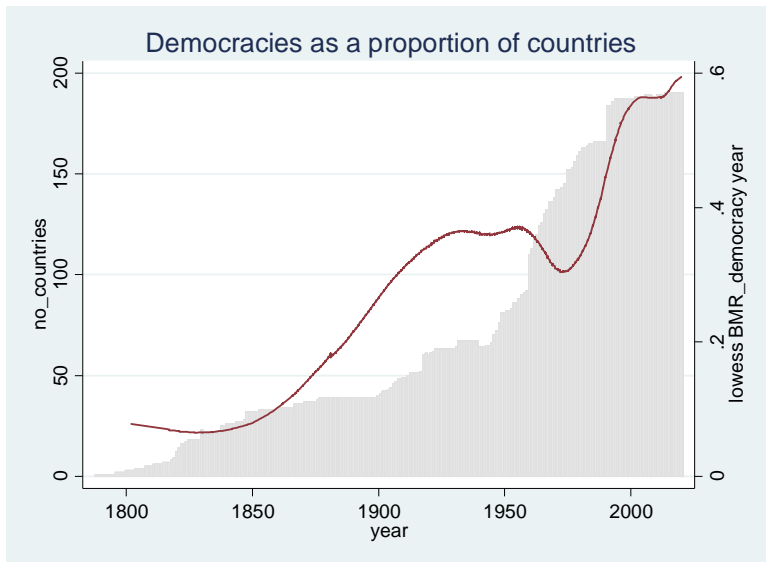
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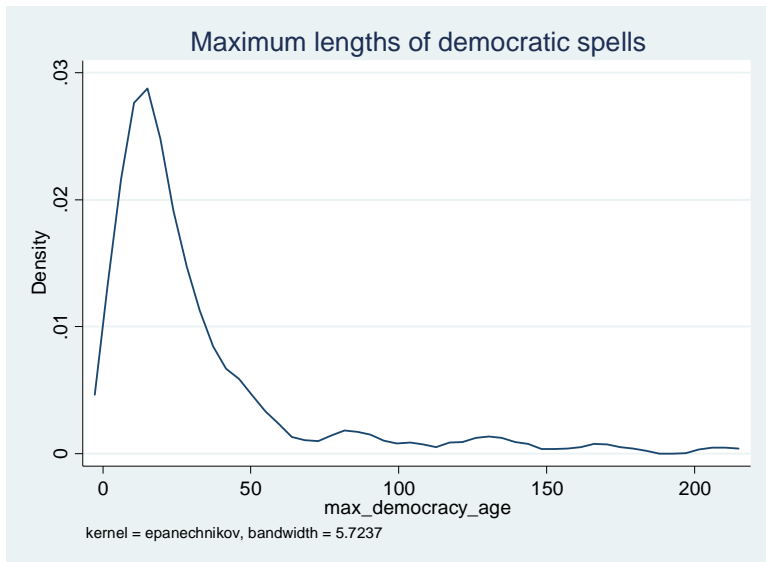
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- Still 68 countries, China and Russia





Plan

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- How democracy works?

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- How democracy works?
- How it fails or deteriorates?

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- Of what? Selecting governments through elections, including removing the incumbents.
- But with profound consequences: a method for processing conflicts in liberty and peace.
- How does it work?

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- Even minute issues can evoke passions
- How, then, do we manage to process conflicts in peace without curtailing political freedom?

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- Not the only.
- But elections are the only conflict processing mechanism which is open to all citizens.

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- Winning is better than losing.
- Losers decide whether to peacefully accept their defeat or to engage in costly conflicts, in the extreme try to grab power by force.

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 - Losers accept temporary loss

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- Regime transitions: enormous literature.

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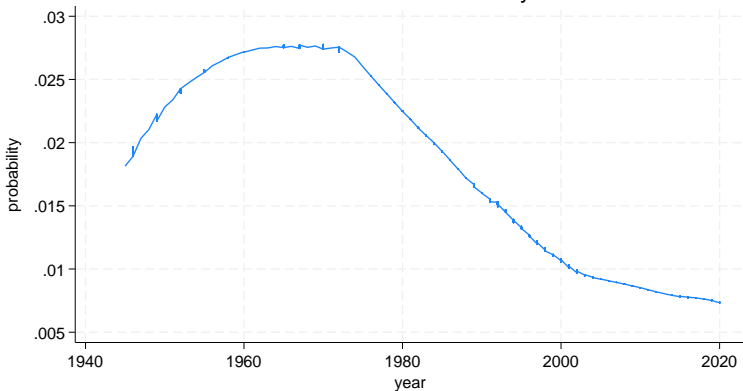
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- Inequality?

Breakdowns now rare

Transitions to autocracy



Source: BMR 2022

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 - Many examples: Venezuela, Hungary, India, Turkey, Bolivia, Uganda,
- Incumbents monopolize power for ever and to do whatever they want while in power.

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 - the incumbent grabs partisan advantage beyond the level that would be tolerated by the majority, which then opposes the incumbent even when it does not find the challengers better, just to stop the power grab, and the incumbent backslides because otherwise it will lose and does not admit defeat if loses. ("Stealth", Varol 2015)

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 - Erdogan, documentation at the polls, political financing (US, India)

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- **Hard to measure: Meng and Little (2023) versus V-Dem.**

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 - Defending democracy requires a positive, future-oriented, program to reform it.

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- The rejection of backsliding may be majoritarian but particular proposals for reform still minoritarian.
- Oppositions to backsliding governments can unite only if they agree to rely on the democratic method to process conflicts over their other values.
- When different groups opposing violations of democratic norms attach different values to democracy, democracy can be defended only as a method for processing conflicts.

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Adam
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Historical
perspective

Democracy as
a method

When it does
not?

Defending
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 - winners rarely win more than a bare majority of votes, so about a half of voters are disappointed,
 - never completely fulfill their promises, so that even those who voted for the winner are rarely perfectly satisfied.
- But each time, the current losers hope to win the next time around and that governments would fulfill their hopes.

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