

# Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem)



"How to Use the V-Dem Data?", Workshop for Democracy Practitioners, Melanisia, 2015.

## KEY FEATURES OF V-DEM

- One of the largest social science databases, with over 350 indicators on democracy and political systems;
- World-wide coverage from 1900 to the present;
- Transparent and reliable indicators based on the knowledge of 2,500 international experts;
- Free and easy online access;
- High-quality research on democracy and policy outreach.

**Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem) is a new approach to conceptualizing and measuring democracy. We provide a multidimensional and disaggregated dataset that reflects the complexity of the concept of democracy as a system of rule that goes beyond the simple presence of elections. The V-Dem project distinguishes between seven high-level principles of democracy: electoral, liberal, participatory, deliberative, egalitarian, majoritarian and consensual, and collects data to measure these principles.**

## The V-Dem database

V-Dem is one of the largest-ever social science data collection efforts with a database containing over 16 million data points. By April 2017, the dataset will cover 177 countries from 1900 to 2016 with annual updates to follow. The V-Dem dataset is available for download, free of charge. Users are also able to explore the V-Dem data through online analysis tools with which they can create and save their own graphs (Figure 2).

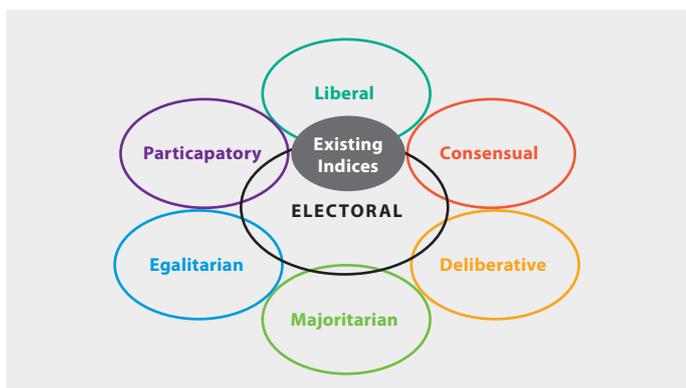


Figure 1. V-Dem High-level Principles of Democracy.

In addition to its 350+ indicators covering many aspects of a country's political system, V-Dem aggregates indicators into mid- and high-level indices designed to measure important dimensions of democracy. High-level indices measure the major types of democracy and mid-level indices capture concepts such as *clean elections*, *women's political empowerment*, and *civil society participation*. Governments, development agencies, and NGOs can thus benefit from the nuanced comparative and historical data when researching critical decisions such as selecting country program priorities, informing program design, and monitoring the impact of their programs.

## The V-Dem team

The V-Dem project is a truly collaborative international effort that unites thousands of social scientists working in the spheres of democracy and governance. The V-Dem project has recruited approximately 2,500 local and cross-national experts from over 160 countries to provide knowl-

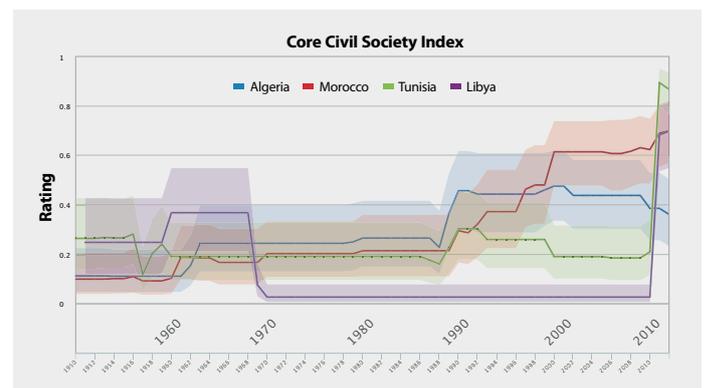


Figure 2. Core Civil Society Index Development in Algeria, Morocco, Tunisia and Libya (1950 - 2012)

edge on democracy across the world. The project is managed by leading scholars in the study of democracy who work closely with experts from all over the world.

## Methodology

V-Dem draws on theoretical and methodological expertise from its worldwide team to produce data in the most objective and reliable way possible. Approximately half of the indicators in the V-Dem dataset are based on factual information obtainable from official documents such as constitutions and government records. The other half consists of more subjective assessments on topics like political practices and compliance with *de jure* rules. On such issues, typically five experts provide ratings.

V-Dem works closely with leading social science research methodologists and has developed a state of the art measurement model that, to the extent possible, minimizes coder error and addresses issues of comparability across countries and over time. V-Dem also draws on the team's academic expertise to develop theoretically informed techniques for aggregating indicators into mid- and high-level indices.<sup>1</sup> In this sense, V-Dem is at the cutting edge of developing new and improved methods of social science measurement.<sup>2</sup>

## V-Dem research and publications

One of V-Dem's core activities is producing high-quality research that provides insights into crucial questions such as the relationship between democracy and development, the conditions that make democracies endure, and the determinants of women's political empowerment. As of September 2016, 36 Working Papers have been published on the V-Dem website covering a wide range of topics.

In addition to article-length working papers, V-Dem regularly produces a range of publications targeting a wider audience. The V-Dem Country Briefs outline the most important political trends in a specific country. The Policy Briefs summarize policy-relevant research findings on topics like accountability, legislative strengthening, and executive corruption.

## V-Dem Democracy Network

As part of its policy outreach program, V-Dem is cooperating with a number of international organizations that work in the sphere of democracy and development, thus creating a network of democracy experts both from academia and the policy world. We have published and contributed to a number of publications, organized and participated in conferences, workshops, and capacity-building trainings. Some of these collaborations include:

- International IDEA: Joint reports, briefs, conferences, publications, consultancies, and outreach.
- Communities of Democracies (CoD): V-Dem works closely with CoD to use V-Dem data to develop a global democracy measure based on Warsaw Declaration principles.

- Capacity building events on V-Dem data usage and statistical analysis for International IDEA, DANIDA, EC/DEVCO and EIAS, Bibliotheca Alexandrina.
- World Bank: V-Dem data will appear in the 2017 World Development Report alongside a background paper produced by the V-Dem team. V-Dem has also supported the World Bank in conducting an expert survey using V-Dem infrastructure on elite power and policymaking.
- UNDP and Sustainable Development Goals: V-Dem is part of a Virtual Network aimed at identifying how the new goals should be measured and evaluated. The final proposal includes 60 V-Dem indicators.
- V-Dem annual conference: Each May, V-Dem organizes a policy dialogue conference to enhance the cooperation between researchers and democracy practitioners. The conference includes leading experts on democratization, democracy, good government and corruption from over 50 organizations.

## Regional V-Dem centers

Currently, Regional V-Dem Centers are operating in Portugal, Chile, Egypt and Estonia. The Centers conduct research on democracy with a regional focus; organize academic conferences and policy oriented workshops. The V-Dem global team is working on creating centers in Kyrgyzstan, the Philippines, Ghana, South Africa, Zambia, and Burkina Faso.

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<sup>1</sup> For more details see Pemstein et al (2015). <sup>2</sup> See Coppedge et al (2016).