



Global State of
Democracy Initiative

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KEY FINDINGS

Executive Summary

The findings of the 2025 Global State of Democracy (GSoD) report underscore the current global climate of radical uncertainty, exemplified by political developments in the United States that are shaking long-held assumptions about democratic resilience and multilateralism.

The findings of the 2025 Global State of Democracy report underscore the current global climate of radical uncertainty.

The events in the United States are not happening in a vacuum, as global patterns show that democracy around the world continues to weaken. In 2024, 94 countries—representing 54 per cent of all countries assessed—suffered a decline in at least one factor of democratic performance compared with their own performance five years earlier. In contrast, only 55 countries (32 per cent) advanced in at least one factor over that period.

The GSoD Indices are organized around four core categories of democratic performance—Representation, Rights, Rule of Law and Participation. Each of the four categories includes several factors, such as Credible Elections or Judicial Independence. Among the four categories, performance was strongest overall in Representation, with 47 countries (27 per cent) achieving high scores in 2024. However, in the 2024 electoral super-cycle year, the global score for Representation fell to its lowest level since 2001, with seven times more countries declining than advancing. These declines occurred around the world in both low- and high-performing democracies. Rule of Law continues to be the category with the weakest performance. In 2024, 71 countries (41 per cent)

were categorized as low-performing. The highest number of aggregate-level declines also occurred in the Rule of Law category; 32 countries (19 per cent of those assessed, and most low- or mid-range-performing) registered downturns in this category in 2024. European countries accounted for 38 per cent of these downturns, followed by countries in Africa, the Americas, Asia and the Pacific, and West Asia. Declines within the Rule of Law category were most concentrated in the factor of Judicial Independence.

Within the Rights category, the most extensive global decline occurred in Freedom of the Press, followed by Freedom of Expression, Economic Equality and Access to Justice. Performance in Freedom of the Press declined in 43 countries, nearly one quarter (24.9 per cent) of those covered. This marks the broadest decline in this factor since the beginning of our data set (1975), signalling a serious threat to public accountability and informed political participation.

Participation remained relatively stable, with only 11 countries experiencing notable changes when comparing 2024 to 2019. Declines (9 countries) outweighed advances (2 countries), with most of the declines occurring in countries that were already low-performing, including Afghanistan, the Central African Republic, Kuwait, Myanmar, Nicaragua and Russia. The two countries that improved were Brazil and Fiji, both high performers in this category.

The second part of this document discusses the intersection of global migration flows and their relationship to democracy and democratic institutions. Migration now affects a growing share of the world's population, with 304 million people (or 3.7 per cent of the global population) living outside their country of birth in 2025. Contrary to some popular narratives, most of the people who leave their country of birth move to a neighbouring country or stay within their region. Global migration has emerged as a key factor contributing to the current climate of uncertainty, raising complex questions about citizenship, belonging, the universality and equality of rights, and what it means to be an inclusive democracy today.

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Building on trends identified in the GSoD Indices and in the Democracy Tracker, this report focuses on the technical, legal and institutional dimensions of voting rights for citizens residing abroad. We find that expanding political participation contributes to democratic resilience, and that out-of-country voting (OCV) contributes to the sense of belonging that fosters this resilience. Benefits can accrue to both home and host countries, including by spreading democratic norms across borders. However, data collected for this report show that diaspora turnout rates are relatively low, and the information that is publicly available about eligible diaspora voters is limited and uneven. While there is no one-size-fits-all OCV model, we know that the legal and

administrative design of OCV systems strongly affects participation rates, and broad-based enfranchisement requires carefully designed policies—for both registration and encouraging turnout. To persevere, democracy requires patience, maintenance and, at times, reinvention. The work of democracy is never finished: as the scale and patterns of migration evolve, democracies will have to maintain and regularly re-evaluate institutional frameworks, including, as noted here, the meaning, boundaries and mechanisms of involving non-resident citizens in political decision making.

Key findings

1.

Intraregional migration rates dwarf interregional migration. The majority of migration occurs within regions, not between them, which should inform policy approaches to migration challenges.

2.

Political participation through out-of-country voting helps promote a continued sense of belonging among diaspora communities, contributing to long-term democratic resilience.

3.

The legal and administrative design of voting systems—including registration requirements and voting methods—strongly affects participation rates. Simplified procedures and accessible voting modalities enhance inclusion.

4.

Despite benefits, diaspora turnout rates remain low—averaging just 13.2 per cent of emigrant populations, compared to 55.3 per cent among registered overseas voters and 60.4 per cent of all registered voters in 29 elections covered in 2024 for which we have data.

5.

Disparities in diaspora representation reflect broader questions about equality in democratic systems. Equity in enfranchisement should guide voting reform.

6.

Data on out-of-country voting remain limited and uneven. Better data collection and standardization are essential for evidence-based policy design.

7.

Out-of-country voting design can be influenced by political motivations. Safeguards are needed to ensure enfranchisement doesn't become a tool for partisan gain.

8.

Out-of-country voting systems can be expensive to implement, though detailed cost data are limited. Postal voting offers a relatively affordable option for many countries.

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