



THE GLOBAL STATE OF DEMOCRACY IN FOCUS

No. 12, March 2022

The Ukraine War and the Struggle to Defend Democracy in Europe and Beyond

Rising stakes in the struggle for democracy

Increasing authoritarianism in some countries, such as Russia, coupled with gradual democratic erosion around the world, poses an exceptional threat to a rules-based global order, and consequently to peace and prosperity. The invasion of Ukraine is the most blatant and tragic realization of this threat. Although the current conflict has been ongoing at a low level since at least 2014, the recent escalation in interstate hostilities is on a scale that is unprecedented in recent history and makes real a key assumption that all democratic governments should contemplate: democracy has powerful enemies willing to destroy it.

Rising Russian authoritarianism has contributed to a context that has made the unprovoked aggression in Ukraine possible. The Russian Government has hollowed out any space in which the opposition could question its policy decisions or in which any political institution or civil society could hold it accountable. The little sprouts of democracy that appeared in Russia in the mid-1990s have, for the most part, been eliminated in the years since Vladimir Putin first became President in 2000. Without checks and balances, legislative scrutiny and other actors who can provide accountability for governmental decisions, the Russian Government is unconstrained in its desire to go to war.

But the conflict in Ukraine is also a reflection of how democracy in any country is a barrier to an authoritarian agenda and its capacity to influence sovereign countries. Ukraine has taken, since the Orange Revolution in 2004–2005, a number of political decisions aimed at enhancing its independence and democratic decision-making processes. Because of the political decisions taken in Ukraine—especially, but not only, at the constitutional level—Russia is no longer as capable as it once was to influence Ukraine’s policymaking and keep it in alignment with what Russia considers acceptable. This influence was channelled through pro-Russian politicians, and the oligarchs supporting them. These individuals could use their offices and their power to push the country closer to Russia and away from the European Union. With more freedom to choose its own path, Ukraine has actively sought to pivot towards the EU and away from Russia in recent years. The fact that Russia is losing its capacity to influence Ukraine to stop that pivot is a contributing factor in the war.

Ukraine’s path is not unique. Across Baltic and Central European states, democratization has helped to solidify national sovereignty and reduce Russia’s capacity for direct influence on politicians and institutions in its neighbouring countries. (Although Russia has, arguably, continued to gain leverage over the past two decades through its exports of oil and gas to

Rising Russian authoritarianism has contributed to a context that has made the unprovoked aggression in Ukraine possible.

Europe, as the EU's anxiety about its gas supplies in the first weeks after Russia's invasion demonstrated.¹⁾ As the case of Ukraine illustrates, a major factor in this shift in Russian influence is the existence of democratic governments, which rely on checks and balances to constrain decision-making processes, which are held accountable by civil society and the media, and which generally show respect for the rule of law. They stand in stark contrast to authoritarian regimes, where rulers secure their positions through a combination of coercion and corruption, as the case of Belarus clearly demonstrates.

The next section will delve into the divergent paths of democracy in post-1989 Europe, with a special focus on Russia's journey back to authoritarianism and the tumultuous path towards democracy in Ukraine. A concluding section lays out the consequences that the war in Ukraine will have for democracy worldwide and some recommendations for its defence.

THE DIVERGENT PATHS OF DEMOCRACY IN EASTERN EUROPE

The fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 ushered in an astonishing period of democratization in Europe. Several countries that had been under the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics' (USSR) sphere of influence, or even part of the USSR, managed to establish robust democracies by the mid-1990s. However, democracy in the region has suffered from erosion and backsliding in recent years and faces significant challenges. It has also been distributed unevenly, as there are some beacons of democracy, such as Estonia, but also some struggling democracies, such as Armenia, Georgia and Moldova. In addition, the countries of Central Europe that had advanced a great deal in the 1990s and early 2000s have since entered a period of democratic stagnation or decline, such that the 2010s were a 'lost decade' in which opportunities for democratic consolidation were not realized (see Figure 1).² Many former Soviet and former Yugoslavian countries have oscillated between mid-level and weak democratic performance (and, more recently, even hybrid regimes), and have in general exhibited a concerning level of instability in their democratic performance.³

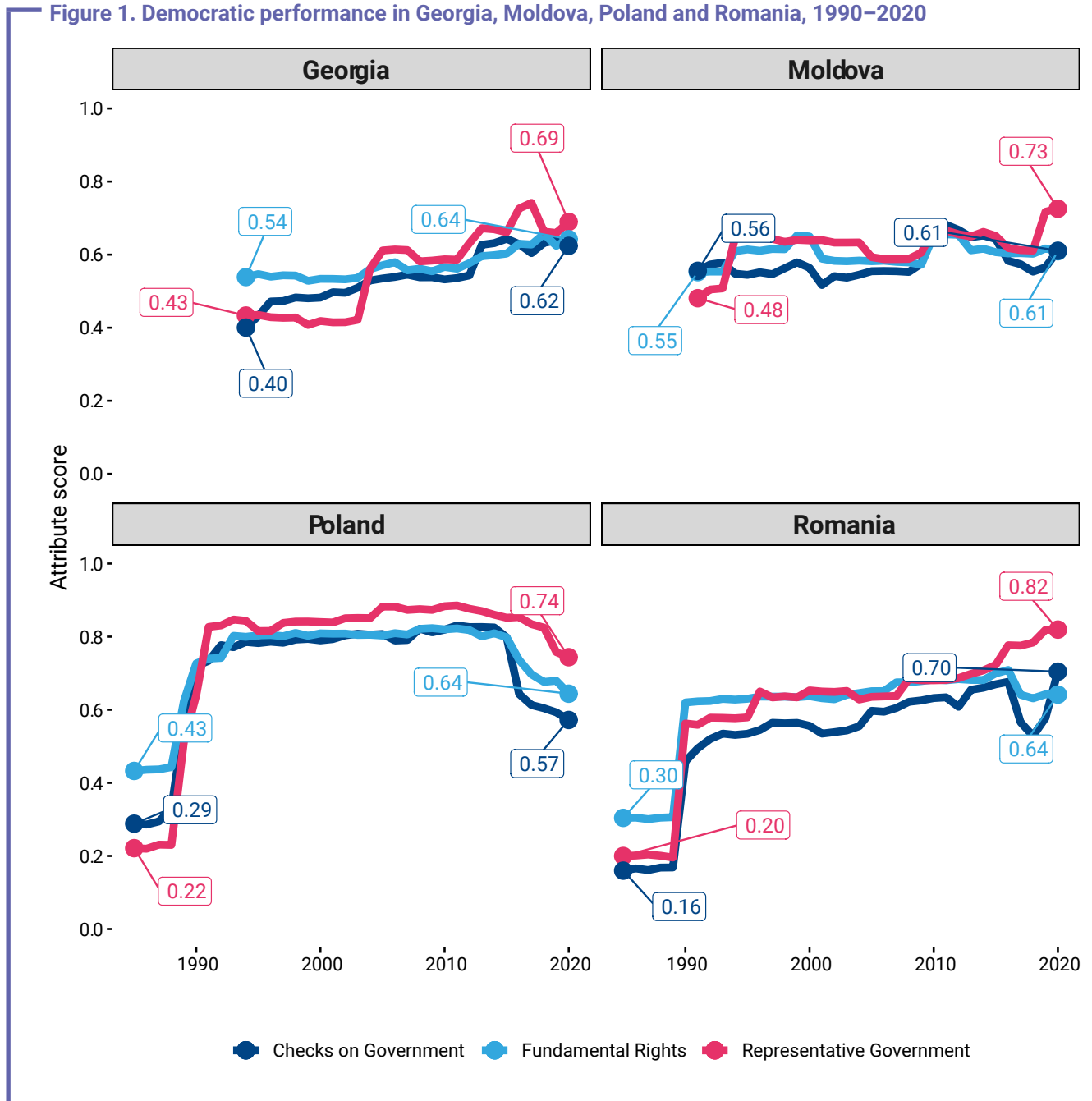
The current conflict in Ukraine would have been unthinkable if the Kremlin had a democratically elected leadership.

The current conflict in Ukraine would have been unthinkable if the Kremlin had a democratically elected leadership. Two democracies—according to the *democratic peace theory*—do not go to war with each other.⁴ Today, Ukraine is a democracy, but Russia is far from being one. It did not have to be like this. With the collapse of the USSR, the country embarked on a timid path of opening and democratization that started to recede when Putin came to power in 2000. After the economic collapse of 1991–1992, and the 1993 constitutional crisis, Russia emerged as a strong presidential system with some embryonic institutions of democracy.⁵ These included an independent parliament, a weak but nonetheless capable opposition, improvements in the protection of fundamental rights, and relatively free and fair elections in 1996 and 2000. From 1993 to 2003, Russia was considered a weak democracy in International IDEA's Global State of Democracy Indices.

Since the election of Vladimir Putin to the presidency in 2000, however, Russia's nascent democratization has been quashed (see Figure 2). This trend has been characterized by three features which define 'Putinism'. First, Putin uses state resources, especially the

1. Milosevich, M., *Russia's Westpolitik and the European Union* (Washington: Center for Security and International Studies, 2021), <<https://www.csis.org/analysis/russias-westpolitik-and-european-union>>, accessed 7 March 2022.
2. International IDEA, *The State of Democracy in Europe 2021: Overcoming the Impact of the Pandemic* (Stockholm: International IDEA, 2021), <<https://doi.org/10.31752/idea.2021.96>>.
3. Ibid.
4. Rousseau, D. L., et al., 'Assessing the dyadic nature of the democratic peace, 1918–88', *The American Political Science Review*, 90/3 (1996), pp. 512–33, <<https://doi.org/10.2307/2082606>>.
5. McFaul, M., 'Russia's road to autocracy', *Journal of Democracy*, 32/4 (2021), pp. 11–26, <<https://doi.org/10.1353/jod.2021.0049>>.

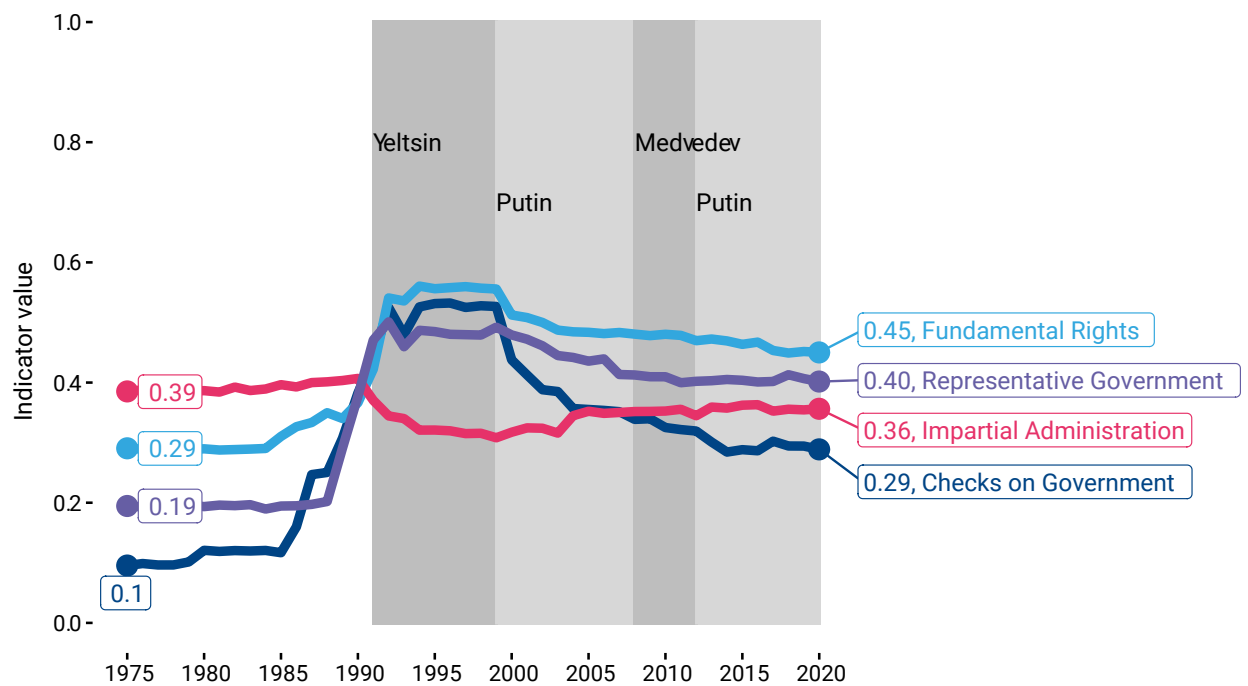
Figure 1. Democratic performance in Georgia, Moldova, Poland and Romania, 1990–2020



military, security forces and intelligence services, to repress and degrade institutions and practices that could support democracy. The use of state resources has one clear objective: to perpetuate Putin’s uncontested grip on power. Civil society *has shrunk* to an almost non-existent state, and the regime has routinely repressed, harassed and imprisoned opposition figures (see Figure 3). The way that Russia has used laws ostensibly about terrorism and foreign agents to repress domestic pro-democracy groups has set an example that other authoritarian regimes and backsliding democracies follow.⁶ It has also carried out targeted assassinations of journalists and opposition leaders, such as **Boris Nemtsov**.⁷ According to the Committee to Protect Journalists, 25 journalists have been murdered in Russia since

6. Human Rights Watch, ‘Briefing on Shrinking Space for Civil Society in Russia’, 24 February 2017, <<https://www.hrw.org/news/2017/02/24/briefing-shrinking-space-civil-society-russia>>, accessed 4 March 2022.
 7. Bushuev, M., ‘Boris Nemtsov: The man who dared to criticize Vladimir Putin’, 27 February 2020, <<https://www.dw.com/en/boris-nemtsov-the-man-who-dared-to-criticize-vladimir-putin/a-52561085>>, accessed 11 March 2022.

Figure 2. Democratic highs and lows in Russia, 1975–2020

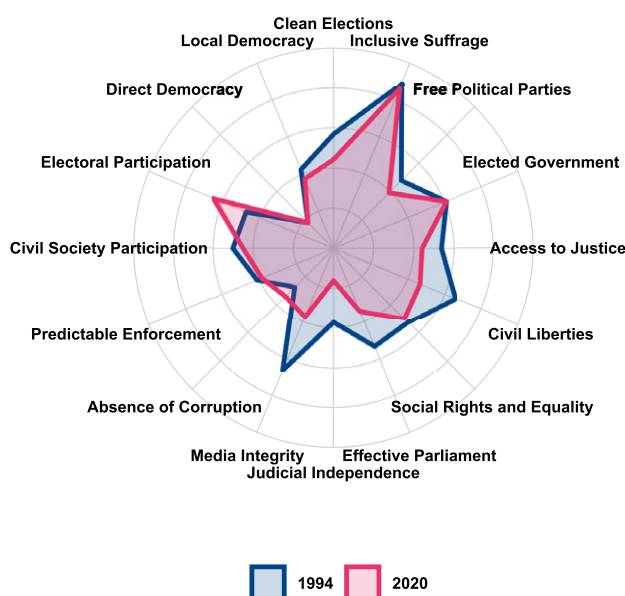


2000.⁸ Many of these journalists were killed as a result of their reporting on corruption. Since Russia invaded Ukraine, repression of journalism has become even worse.⁹

Second, although the process started with the collapse of the Soviet Union and the transfer of economic assets from the state to private individuals, after 2000 the Russian leadership has extensively colluded with dominant oligarchs to entrench a kleptocratic system.¹⁰ This

system enables the extreme enrichment of a business and political minority, while at the same time allowing the Russian Government, especially Putin, to exert control over officials and business elites and coup-proof his grip on power (see Figure 4).¹¹

Figure 3. Democratic contraction in Russia, 1994–2020



8. Committee to Protect Journalists, '38 journalists killed in Russia', 2022, <<https://cpj.org/data/killed/europe/Russia/murdered>>, accessed 9 March 2022.

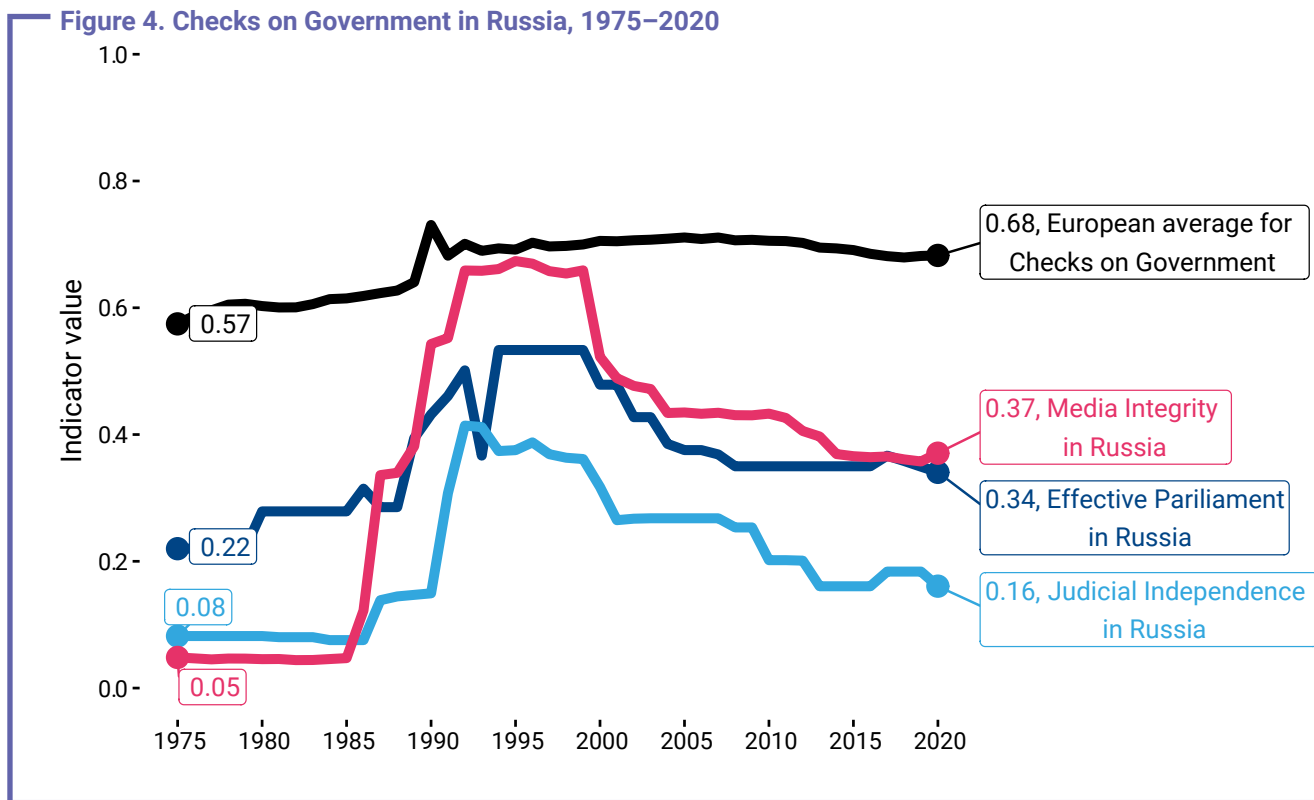
9. Al Jazeera, 'Russia's parliament approves jail for "fake" war reports', 4 March 2022, <<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/3/4/russia-prison-media-law-fake-reports-ukraine-war>>, accessed 9 March 2022.

10. Lansky, M. and Myles-Primakoff, D., 'The rise of kleptocracy: power and plunder in Putin's Russia', *Journal of Democracy*, 29/1 (2018), pp. 76–85, <<https://doi.org/10.1353/jod.2018.0006>>.

11. Trenin, D., *Reading Russia Right* (Moscow: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2005), <<https://carnegieendowment.org/files/pb42.trenin.FINAL.pdf>>, accessed 9 March 2022.

Luttwak, E., *Coup D'État: A Practical Handbook*, revised edition (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2016), <<https://doi.org/10.4159/9780674969674>>.

Figure 4. Checks on Government in Russia, 1975–2020



A third defining characteristic of Putinism is the increasingly aggressive approach to regaining Russia’s status as a major geopolitical power.¹² Especially since 2012, with Putin’s return to the presidency after a four-year interlude as Prime Minister, the country has embarked on an aggressive expansion of its regional and international influence. However, even before that, in 2008, the Russian army had invaded Georgia and established two *de facto* independent republics in Georgia’s territory (Abkhazia and South Ossetia), after using the granting of Russian citizenship to the separatists as a pretext for conflict.¹³ In service of a long-term goal to counteract the perception of a weakened Russia, the country intervened in the conflict in Syria and has used mercenary groups in the Central African Republic, Libya, Mali, Mozambique, and Ukraine, among other countries.¹⁴ Russia has also expanded its influence by sowing information chaos,¹⁵ financing and supporting far-right candidates and anti-EU parties in Europe and even supporting separatist movements.¹⁶ Russia’s attempts

12. Stoner, K. E., *Russia Resurrected: Its Power and Purpose in a New Global Order* (Oxford University Press, 2020), <<https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780190860714.001.0001>>.

13. Littlefield, S., ‘Citizenship, identity and foreign policy: The contradictions and consequences of Russia’s passport distribution in the separatist regions of Georgia’, *Europe-Asia Studies*, 61/8 (2009), pp. 1461–82, <<https://doi.org/10.1080/09668130903134848>>.

14. Saini Fasanotti, F., ‘Russia’s Wagner Group in Africa: Influence, commercial concessions, rights violations, and counterinsurgency failure’, Brookings, 8 February 2022, <<https://www.brookings.edu/blog/order-from-chaos/2022/02/08/russias-wagner-group-in-africa-influence-commercial-concessions-rights-violations-and-counterinsurgency-failure>>, accessed 9 March 2022.
 Bellingcat, ‘Inside Wagnergate: Ukraine’s Brazen Sting Operation to Snare Russian Mercenaries’, 17 November 2021, <<https://www.bellingcat.com/news/uk-and-europe/2021/11/17/inside-wagnergate-ukraines-brazen-sting-operation-to-snare-russian-mercenaries>>, accessed 10 March 2022.

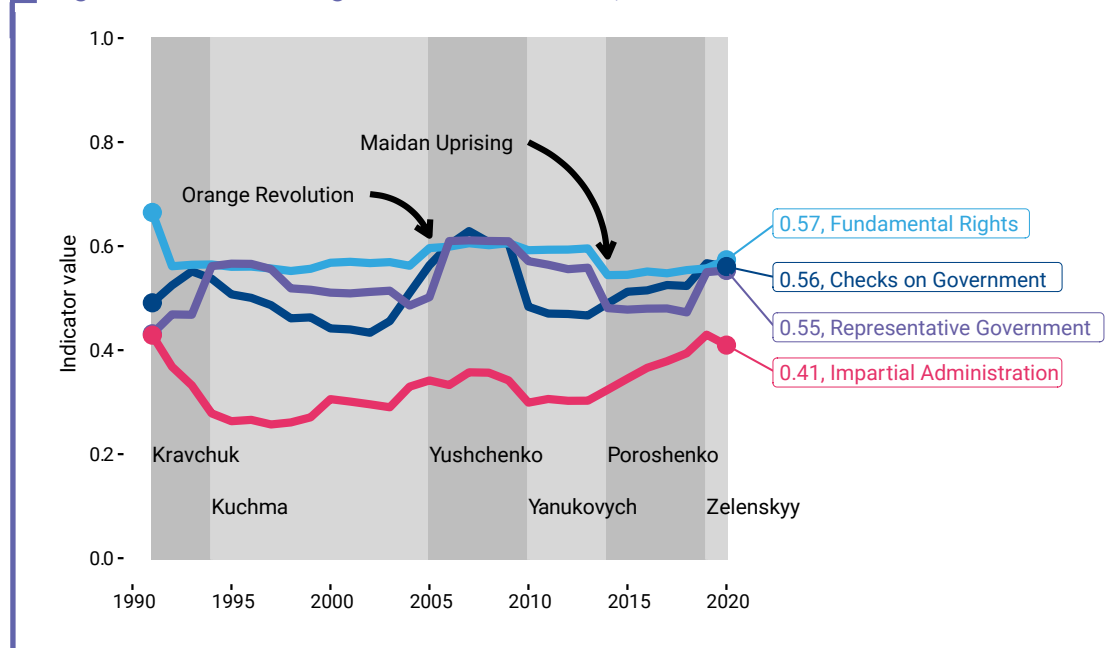
15. Paul, C. and Matthews, M., *The Russian ‘Firehose of Falsehood’ Propaganda Model: Why It Might Work and Options to Counter It* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2016), <<https://www.rand.org/pubs/perspectives/PE198.html>>, accessed 9 March 2022.

16. Weiss, A. S., *With Friends Like These: The Kremlin’s Far-Right and Populist Connections in Italy and Austria* (Washington: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2020), <https://carnegieendowment.org/files/Weiss-Austria_and_Italy-FINAL.pdf>, accessed 9 March 2022.
 Schwartz, M. and Bautista, J., ‘Married Kremlin spies, a shadowy mission to Moscow and unrest in Catalonia’,

to influence the 2016 United States presidential election are by now well documented, and included a hack of the Democratic Party campaign, connections between some members of Trump’s campaign staff and Russian intelligence services, and various disinformation efforts.¹⁷ Russia engaged in a similar campaign during the 2020 US presidential election.¹⁸

Perhaps the biggest challenge that Russia has faced in its neighbourhood is the tumultuous process of democratization in Ukraine. For Russia, Ukraine is one of the most important—if not the most important—strategic, cultural, political and economic countries in its neighbourhood. Ukraine has been a democracy uninterruptedly since its 1994 elections, according to International IDEA’s Global State of Democracy data. Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, two popular revolutions—the Orange Revolution in 2004–2005 and the Maidan Uprising in 2013–2014—have marked important moments in the evolution of popular demand for democracy in Ukraine (see Figure 5). As in Russia, Ukraine’s economic elite profited from the transfer of state assets to private hands and acquired unprecedented influence in Ukrainian politics through a deep network of patronage and state-capture immediately after the collapse of the Soviet Union. This pattern was consolidated during the presidency of Leonid Kuchma (1994–2005).¹⁹

Figure 5. Democratic highs and lows in Ukraine, 1990–2020



The 2004 elections were a watershed moment for democracy in Ukraine. After widespread accusations of electoral fraud, compounded by rampant corruption and political scandals, a popular uprising (known as the Orange Revolution) forced a repeat of the run-off vote for the presidency. Some of the demands for democracy that were expressed in the Orange Revolution were realized in constitutional reforms that recalibrated the relative power of the president and the legislature. Specifically, Ukraine has alternated between two forms of semi-presidentialism (premier-presidential and president-parliamentary). The president-

The New York Times, 3 September 2021, <<https://www.nytimes.com/2021/09/03/world/europe/spain-catalonia-russia.html>>, accessed 9 March 2022.

17. Hosenball, M., 'Factbox: Key Findings from Senate Inquiry into Russian Interference in 2016 U.S. Election', Reuters, 18 August 2020, <<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-trump-russia-senate-findings-fact-idUSKCN25E20Y>>, accessed 4 March 2022.

18. Barnes, J. E., 'Russian interference in 2020 included influencing Trump associates, report says', *The New York Times*, 16 March 2021, <<https://www.nytimes.com/2021/03/16/us/politics/election-interference-russia-2020-assessment.html>>, accessed 4 March 2022.

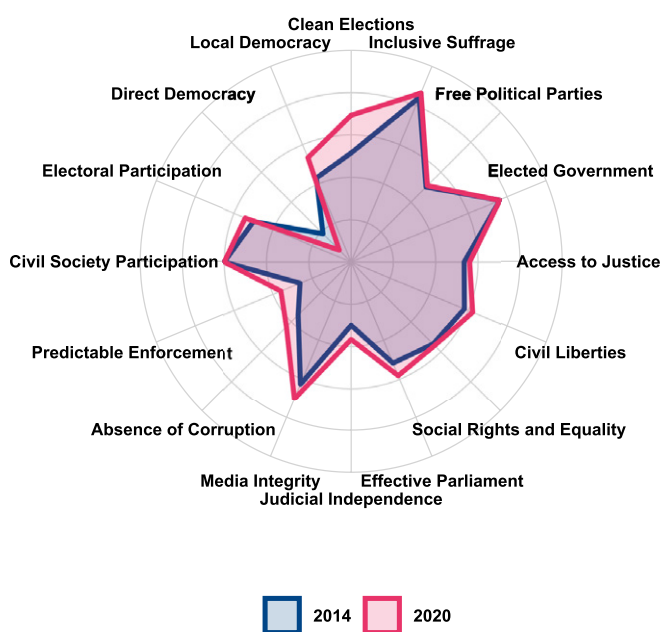
19. Rohozinska, J. and Shpak, V., 'Ukraine’s post-Maidan struggles: The rise of an “outsider” president', *Journal of Democracy*, 30/3 (2019), pp. 33–47, <<https://doi.org/10.1353/jod.2019.0040>>.

parliamentary system gives the president more power in the legislature (through the power to appoint and dismiss the prime minister), and was the system adopted in Ukraine's Constitution in 1996. After the Orange Revolution (in an arrangement that lasted from 2006 to 2010), and later after the Maidan Uprising, Ukraine's legislature amended the Constitution to adopt a premier-presidential system (in which only the legislature can dismiss the prime minister).²⁰ The changing balance of power between the president and the legislature has been a key feature of the ebbs and flows in democracy in Ukraine.

The democratic momentum from the Orange Revolution had dissipated by the beginning of the 2010s. Ukraine entered a period of democratic backsliding that coincided with a turn towards closer relations with Russia. Central to that period was the administration of Viktor Yanukovich (in power from 2010 to 2014, after having lost the disputed 2004 election), who pushed to reverse the 2006 constitutional change and return to a president-parliamentary form of government, driving the country towards hybridity and a bias in favour of Russia.²¹ This authoritarian impulse provoked the 2014 revolution, the trigger for which was the creation of a customs union with Russia and the Ukrainian Government's refusal to sign an association agreement with the European Union. Demands that emanated from the revolution included the reinstatement of the 2006 constitutional amendments that had been revoked during Yanukovich's term in office.²² Russia saw the revolution as a sign that Ukraine was reversing the reorientation of the Yanukovich years and turning, perhaps inexorably, towards Europe. Russia's reaction after the ousting of Yanukovich was to support a military insurgency that

took control over parts of the Donetsk and Luhansk regions, and to directly annex Crimea.

Figure 6. Democratic expansion in Ukraine, 2014–2020



After 2014, reforms to parliament and the electoral process, and a return to premier-presidentialism, were central to Ukraine's democratic progress (see Figure 6). Moreover, the declines of the backsliding years were reversed through action against corruption and support for a vibrant civil society and a more active media sector. Our data shows dramatic improvements in key indicators, such as Absence of Corruption, Clean Elections, Media Integrity and Local Democracy, between 2014 and 2020 (see Figure 7). Such reforms threatened Russia's capacity to subject Ukraine to its agenda.²³ This period coincided with a more deliberate turn towards closer ties with Europe. Most notably, before the 2019 election, a constitutional amendment was introduced committing the country to work towards membership of the EU and NATO.²⁴ Russia

20. Choudhry, S., Sedelius, T. and Kyrychenko, J., *Semi-Presidentialism and Inclusive Governance in Ukraine: Reflections for Constitutional Reform* (Stockholm: International IDEA, 2018), <<https://doi.org/10.31752/idea.2018.8>>.

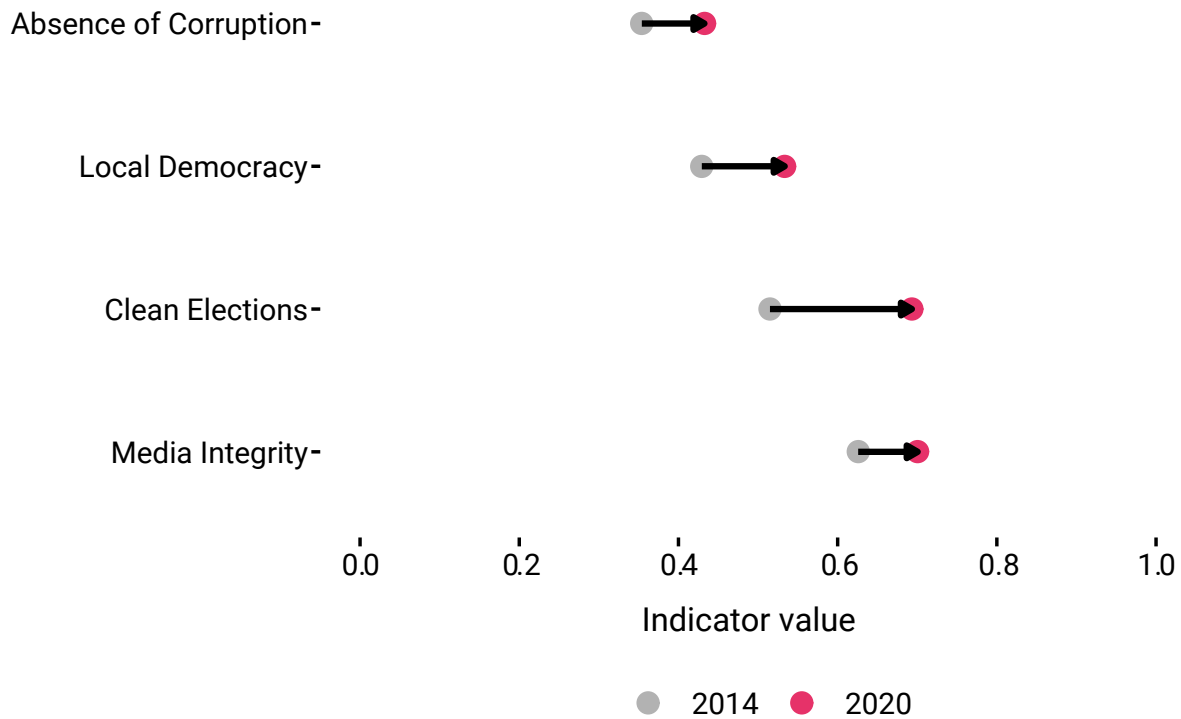
21. Kudelia, S., 'The Maidan and beyond: The house that Yanukovich built', *Journal of Democracy*, 25/3 (2014), pp. 19–34, <<https://doi.org/10.1353/jod.2014.0039>>.

22. Choudhry et al., *Semi-Presidentialism and Inclusive Governance in Ukraine*.

23. Kaleniuk, D. and Halushka, O., 'Why Ukraine's fight against corruption scares Russia', *Foreign Policy*, 17 December 2021, <<https://foreignpolicy.com/2021/12/17/ukraine-russia-corruption-putin-democracy-oligarchs>>, accessed 2 March 2022.

24. Lapa, V. and Frosini, J., 'Would Ukraine breach its own constitution if it dropped its NATO bid?', *Verfassungsblog*, 18 February 2022, <<https://verfassungsblog.de/would-ukraine-breach-its-own-constitution-if-it-dropped-its-nato-bid>>, accessed 9 March 2022.

Figure 7. Absence of Corruption, Local Democracy, Clean Elections and Media Integrity in Ukraine, 2014–2020



has recently demanded this constitutional amendment be dropped—among other things—as a condition for stopping its invasion.²⁵

The 2019 presidential election was far from perfect, but international observers determined that it was competitive, and that fundamental rights were respected during the campaign.²⁶ Volodymyr Zelenskyy’s winning campaign had given great weight to the fight against corruption, but in his first two years in office Zelenskyy had struggled to make significant progress beyond the gains of 2014 to 2019.²⁷ International IDEA’s data shows that corruption actually got worse between 2019 and 2020. Corruption has been an enduring obstacle to the consolidation of democracy in Ukraine, and an area through which Russia has been able to influence Ukrainian politics.²⁸ Before the Russian invasion, Ukraine was a **mid-range performing** democracy, certainly beset by challenges, but making slow improvements nonetheless.

25. Belton, C., ‘Russia will stop “in a moment” if Ukraine meets terms – Kremlin’, Reuters, 7 March 2022, <<https://www.reuters.com/world/kremlin-says-russian-military-action-will-stop-moment-if-ukraine-meets-2022-03-07/>>, accessed 9 March 2022.
 26. Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, *Ukraine Presidential Election, 31 March and 21 April 2019: ODIHR Election Observation Mission Final Report* (Warsaw: Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, 2019), <https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/8/3/439631_0.pdf>, accessed 4 March 2022.
 27. Gak, M., ‘Ukraine: Anti-corruption fight “moving in the right direction”’, Deutsche Welle, 14 May 2021, <<https://www.dw.com/en/ukraine-anti-corruption-fight-moving-in-the-right-direction/a-57525129>>, accessed 4 March 2022.
 28. Shinar, C., ‘Ukraine’s struggle for independence’, *European Review*, 30/1 (2022), pp. 43–57, <<https://doi.org/10.1017/S1062798720001076>>.

We must seek a world in which every country is ruled in a way that provides for citizen control of political decisions and decision-makers, and equality in the exercise of that control.

THE CONFLICT IN UKRAINE AND THE FUTURE OF DEMOCRACY

The Russian invasion of Ukraine is likely to be a turning point in European history, and an event that informs approaches to interstate ideological contestation worldwide. It sharply defines the stakes in the struggle between democracy and autocracy. This needless war shows that—if we want peace—we must seek a world in which every country is ruled in a way that provides for citizen control of political decisions and decision-makers, and equality in the exercise of that control.

International IDEA and other organizations have been [reporting](#) for several years now that the global trend has been one of decline in democracy and expansion of autocracy.²⁹ This inherently carries with it the risk of further violent conflict and instability in many regions of the world. Democracies have suffered declines in key areas, while autocrats have been emboldened to take ever more repressive actions against their people and to export their repressive practices abroad. While democracies have a certain quality of [resilience](#), democratic states must take these threats very seriously. A country like Belarus can be made a tool of Russian foreign policy at an elite level, but democracies have vulnerabilities at the mass level, as foreign propaganda seeks to misinform and divide, and illiberal movements gain influence and power.

Fundamentally, peace and democracy in Europe do not depend only on military, material and financial support for Ukraine. They also depend on dedicated, coherent and long-term action to defend democracy at the state level from foreign and domestic threats. Democracy does not flourish through benign neglect and positive thinking. It flourishes when the entirety of the polity, from student unions to the cabinet, understand the work that democracy requires and the enemies that it faces.

This implies a number of pressing problems for Europe and the world to confront.

First, right-wing populism in Europe has had demonstrable links to Putinism.³⁰ While Hungary's Viktor Orbán seeks to find a way to support EU efforts without endangering his relations with Russia,³¹ thousands of protesters marched in support of Russia in Serbia,³² perhaps indicating that Serbians view their future as being more tied to Russia than the EU. It is now clear what this association means, in terms of democratic allegiance and the type of governance that right-wing populists seek to foster. Key elections in Hungary and France in the coming months will give us some indication of how right-wing parties will recalibrate their orientation towards Russia going forward.

29. International IDEA, *The Global State of Democracy 2021: Building Resilience in a Pandemic Era* (Stockholm: International IDEA, 2021), <<https://doi.org/10.31752/idea.2021.91>>. V-Dem Institute, *Autocratization Turns Viral: Democracy Report 2021* (Gothenburg: V-Dem Institute, 2021), <http://v-dem.net/static/website/files/dr/dr_2021.pdf>, accessed 2 March 2022. Freedom House, *Freedom in the World 2022: The Global Expansion of Authoritarian Rule* (Washington: Freedom House, 2022), <<https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/2022/global-expansion-authoritarian-rule>>, accessed 2 March 2022.
30. Batta, A. and Ishiyama, J., 'The Russia connection: What explains level of support for Russia in Central and Eastern Europe? Testing the economic attraction and ideological affinity hypotheses', *Communist and Post-Communist Studies*, 53/1 (2020), pp. 1–12, <<https://doi.org/10.1525/cpcs.2020.53.1.1>>. Dixon, R. and Landau, D., '1989–2019: From democratic to abusive constitutional borrowing', *International Journal of Constitutional Law*, 17/2 (2019), pp. 489–96, <<https://doi.org/10.1093/icon/moz038>>.
31. Dunai, M., 'Hungarian leader faces watershed moment on Russia and Ukraine', *Financial Times*, 7 March 2022, <<https://www.ft.com/content/4f1a05cb-f879-43bc-84f0-ce2fd6880033>>, accessed 7 March 2022.
32. Filipovic, B., 'Pro-Russia Serbs march in Belgrade as country treads ever finer line between East and West', Reuters, 5 March 2022, <<https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/pro-russia-serbs-march-belgrade-country-treads-ever-finer-line-between-east-west-2022-03-04>>, accessed 7 March 2022.

Second, if what we are facing is a global cleavage dividing democratic systems from authoritarian systems, it is vital that democracies up their game and address their own long-term problems, particularly inequality and different forms of social uncertainty, that have given rise to populism.³³

Third, since Russia has been a standard-setter in terms of the means of autocratic repression in the last two decades, we may expect that other autocratic regimes will draw conclusions from the reaction of the international community to the Ukrainian crisis. Specifically, the point at which moral and ideological concerns would trump economic interests in the world's leading democracies is much clearer now than it was before Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

Fourth, the longer-term political implications of this new wave of war-driven migration are important to consider. Should Ukrainian refugees need (or desire) to stay in their new host countries over the longer term, they will be aided in their social integration by the existing Ukrainian immigrant communities in many countries in Central and Western Europe. In this way, they have an advantage over those who came in the most recent wave of migration (also fleeing war) from Western Asia in 2015 and following. Recent polls show that 76 per cent of Britons support accepting refugees from Ukraine,³⁴ and an astounding 90 per cent of Poles would welcome Ukrainian refugees.³⁵ Yet the obvious and inexcusable difference in how many Europeans have received refugees from Ukraine in comparison with the patterns of exclusion and racism that refugees from Western Asia have encountered must be confronted. In our view, social group equality is an important component of democracy. Part of supporting democracy in Europe requires action to address racism and xenophobia.

Russia's invasion of Ukraine is the most tragic and desperate act in a growing campaign to undermine democracy globally. Democracy is now facing an existential threat. Democratic governments and societies must therefore commit themselves to the cause of protecting democracy at home and abroad, with a sense of urgency and long-term vocation.

33. Jay, S. et al., 'Economic inequality and the rise of far-right populism: A social psychological analysis', *Journal of Community & Applied Social Psychology*, 29/5 (2019), pp. 418–28, <<https://doi.org/10.1002/casp.2409>>.

Rodríguez-Pose, A., 'The rise of populism and the revenge of the places that don't matter', *LSE Public Policy Review*, 1/1 (2020), pp. 1–9, <<https://doi.org/10.31389/lseppr.4>>.

34. Smith, M. 'Support for taking in Ukraine refugees rises to 76%', YouGov, <<https://yougov.co.uk/topics/politics/articles-reports/2022/03/02/support-taking-ukraine-refugees-rises-76>>, accessed 10 March 2022.

35. Dąbrowska, Z., 'Sondaż: Większość Polaków gotowych na przyjęcie wszystkich uciekinierów z Ukrainy' [Poll: Most Poles ready to accept all refugees from Ukraine], Rzeczpospolita (Warsaw, 28 February 2022), <<https://www.rp.pl/spoleczenstwo/art35776491-sondaz-wiekszosc-polakow-gotowych-na-przyjecie-wszystkich-uciekinirow-z-ukrainy>>, accessed 10 March 2022.

Acknowledgements

This GSoD In Focus was written by Alberto Fernandez Gibaja and Alexander Hudson. Thanks also go to Sumit Bisarya, Kevin Casas-Zamora, Nana Kalandadze, Seema Shah, Massimo Tommasoli, Adina Trunk and Sam van der Staak for their valuable review.

Where to find the data

The [GSoD Indices](#) are available on International IDEA's website. Users can generate their own data visualizations and extract data at the country, regional and global levels across the attributes and subattributes for specific years or for selected time periods starting from 1975. The Indices are updated annually.

© 2022 International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance

International IDEA publications are independent of specific national or political interests. Views expressed in this publication do not necessarily represent the views of International IDEA, its Board or its Council members.

Layout: International IDEA

DOI: <<https://doi.org/10.31752/idea.2022.14>>

ISBN: 978-91-7671-530-7 (PDF)



International IDEA
 Strömsborg
 SE-103 34 Stockholm
 SWEDEN
 +46 8 698 37 00
 info@idea.int
 www.idea.int