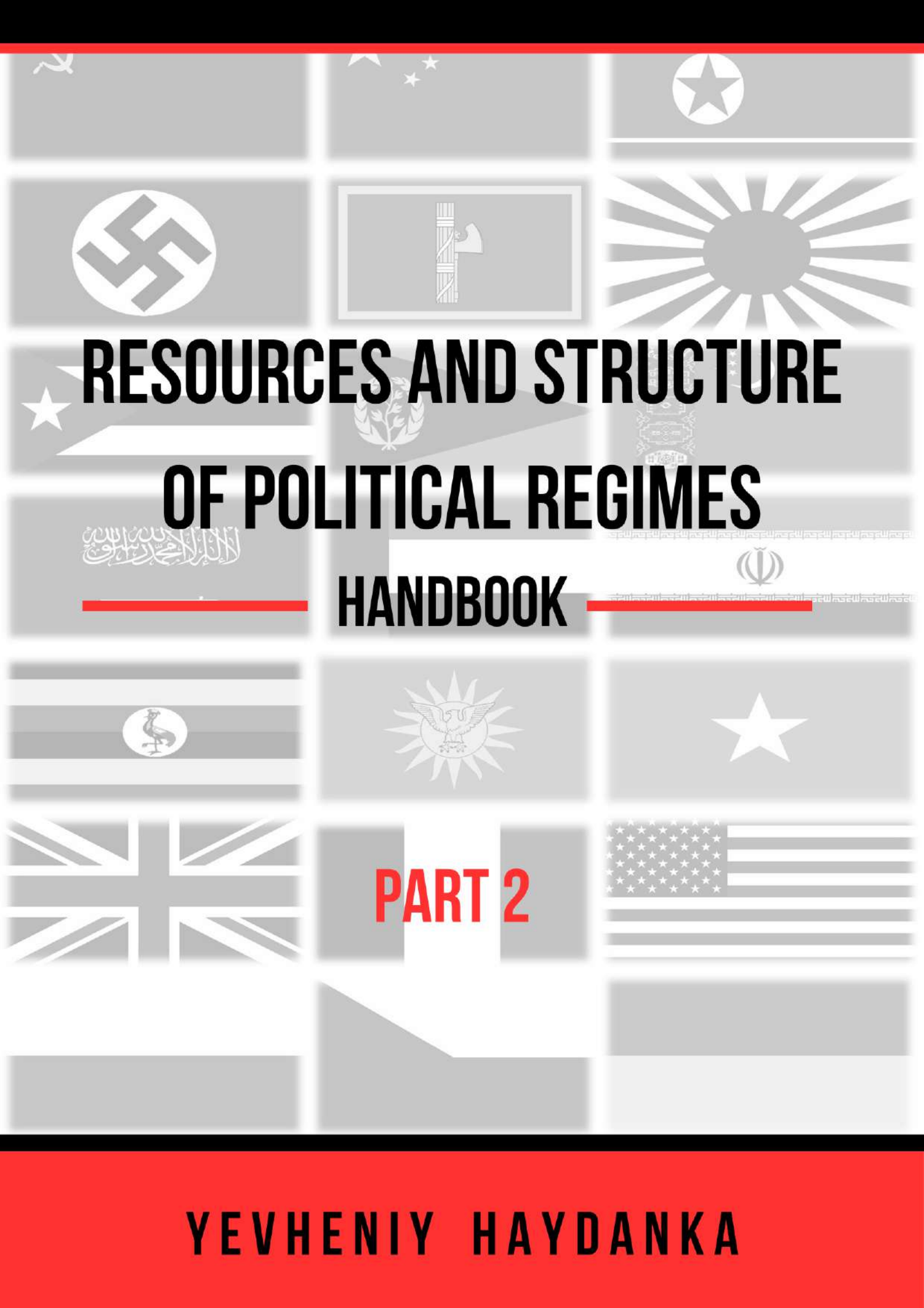




RESOURCES AND STRUCTURE OF POLITICAL REGIMES

HANDBOOK

PART 2

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**Resources and Structure
of Political Regimes**

PART II

HANDBOOK

TRNAVA UNIVERSITY

The Faculty of Philosophy and Arts

The Department of Political Science



This publication presents the second part of the handbook, dedicated to the classification of traditional and contemporary political regimes. It explores three fundamental categories: totalitarian, authoritarian, and democratic regimes. A thorough analysis is provided for each type, examining their role as socio-political organisations of power, their historical variations, and the sources of legitimacy that underpin them. The handbook also offers an in-depth consideration of the historical development of democratic regimes, alongside a comprehensive political science framework for understanding the functioning of democracies. Furthermore, the theoretical insights are supported by empirical data that illustrate the processes of democratisation and authoritarianisation in different regimes.

This handbook is intended for political science students and researchers interested in analysing the stability and dynamics of modern political regimes.

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ISBN 978-80-568-0853-5

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Cover: © Yevheniy Haydanka
Author's sheets: 3,8

Published in the Slovak Republic
by the Faculty of Philosophy and Arts,
Trnava University, Trnava
www.ff.truni.sk

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INTRODUCTION

In the first part of the handbook, I examined the social and political institutions that underpin political regimes. I also explored the factors that contribute to their legitimacy and identified the primary resources that sustain them. The second part shifts the focus to the classification of classical political regimes, seeking to establish an alternative methodology for analysing contemporary political regimes. I advocate a modern approach to regime classification that integrates innovative concepts with empirical indices and calculations. This part addresses essential topics, including the explanation of prevailing patterns, the identification of institutional characteristics specific to classical regime types, the exploration of new analytical approaches for modern political regimes, and the empirical assessment of the dynamics inherent to these regimes.

The first chapter of this handbook addresses totalitarian regimes. It explores totalitarianism as a socio-political phenomenon, providing a classification of various types of totalitarian regimes along with comprehensive explanations of notable historical examples. *The second chapter* analyses the concept of authoritarianism and the characteristics of authoritarian political regimes. It highlights the challenges of identifying and stabilising these regimes, and presents both classical and contemporary classifications of authoritarian systems. *The third chapter* is dedicated to a comprehensive analysis of democratic regimes from a traditional political science perspective. It explores the complexities of defining the classical model of democracy and highlights key factors that contribute to the stability of democratic systems, including the socio-economic and socio-cultural environments, as well as the influence of political culture models. *The fourth chapter* presents a contemporary political science framework for analysing modern democratic regimes. It outlines the fundamental components that characterise these systems,

examines empirical examples of ‘*democracy in action*’, and addresses the challenges encountered by ‘*functioning democracies*’. The final *fifth chapter* focuses on the empirical examination of the global processes of authoritarianisation and democratisation at present. This analysis is grounded in data derived from notable monitoring programmes, including Freedom in the World, the Bertelsmann Political Transformation Index, and Varieties of Democracy.

This part of the handbook is intended as a coherent extension of the first, offering a comparative analysis of modern political regimes. Furthermore, it aims to elucidate the dynamics of these political regimes in the current context. It is my hope that this handbook will be a valuable resource for both academic studies and the practice of political science.

CHAPTER 1

TOTALITARIAN POLITICAL REGIME

1.1 Totalitarianism as a Form of Socio-Political Organisation

The relationship between power and society defines the nature of a political regime. Totalitarian regimes, categorised alongside authoritarian and democratic regimes in the traditional trio of political systems, are characterised by a disruption of the balance between authority or power and societal interests. In a totalitarian context, the political elite maintains maximum control over society, often prioritising the state's interests over individual or group interests. Consequently, designations such as '*violent*', '*harsh*', and '*dictatorial*' are frequently used to characterise the features of a totalitarian regime.

Encyclopedia Britannica defines totalitarianism as “...*a form of government that theoretically permits no individual freedom, and that seeks to subordinate all aspects of individual life to the authority of the state*” (Encyclopedia Britannica 2026).

The concept of '*totalitarianism*' emerged in the 1920s and 1930s to characterise a specific type of centralised power structure. This term is often associated with modern totalitarian regimes, particularly the regime of Italian dictator Benito Mussolini. In the early 1920s, Mussolini, known as the '*Duce*', used the term '*totalitario*' to describe a state that exerted control over all aspects of society. Over time, the totalitarian fascist state evolved into a model that Mussolini believed would facilitate the '*restoration*' of historical justice in Italy during the 1930s (Bosworth 2021).

Classic examples of modern totalitarian regimes include Fascist Italy under Benito Mussolini (1922–1945), Nazi Germany under

Adolf Hitler (1933–1945), Soviet Russia under Joseph Stalin (1924–1953), and China under Mao Zedong (1949–1976). In the 21st century, notable totalitarian regimes include North Korea, governed by the Kim dynasty since 1953, and Eritrea, under the leadership of President Isaias Afwerki since 1993.

Numerous studies have explored classical forms of totalitarian regimes in comparative political science; however, Hannah Arendt (1973), Carl Friedrich, Zbigniew Brzezinski (1956), and Juan Linz (2000) are notable for their foundational contributions. *Hannah Arendt* highlights the specific historical conditions that facilitated the emergence and expansion of totalitarian regimes in the first half of the 20th century. Among these conditions, anti-Semitism and imperialism were crucial, serving as ideological foundations for totalitarian models such as that of Nazi Germany. Totalitarian regimes, e.g. Nazi Germany and Soviet Russia, functioned as entirely autonomous forms of governance, markedly distinct from earlier tyrannical and despotic systems. A defining characteristic of a totalitarian regime is its aspiration for comprehensive control over the masses, extending beyond mere political adversaries (Arendt 1973). *Carl Friedrich* and *Zbigniew Brzezinski* thoroughly examined the origins of totalitarianism and the extent of autonomy exhibited by totalitarian regimes. The totalitarian movements of the 20th century, including their distinct forms, such as Nazi, fascist, and Soviet, emerged not through gradual evolution but as a direct consequence of prevailing political circumstances. Profound political crises enabled the rise of authoritarian leaders, creating the conditions for the emergence of a new form of governance, i.e. totalitarianism (Friedrich & Brzezinski 1956). *Juan Linz*, another classic of totalitarian studies, outlines three fundamental characteristics of totalitarian regimes: a highly centralised authority, an overarching and alternative-less ideology, and extensive mobilisation of the population. However, during the latter half of the 20th century, the evolution of political systems led to a decline in totalitarianism. These rigid regimes were largely supplanted by autocracies. Although autocratic systems typically

reduce mass mobilisation, they often seek legitimacy by promoting economic stability (Linz 2000).

A totalitarian regime is the most extreme form of governance, characterised by total control over the behaviour of individuals and groups in society. This form of government is often described as ‘tyranny’, ‘dictatorship’, or ‘despotism’. Furthermore, as political systems have become increasingly complex, totalitarianism has evolved from its ancient manifestations, such as tyranny, to contemporary regimes (Márquez 2025). The very concept of this regime tends to be reduced to the dominance of a single political force, frequently marked by a cult of leadership and the suppression of dissent. Traditional totalitarian regimes that employ violence to legitimise authority are quite uncommon. It is crucial to distinguish between different types of governance, for instance, General Franco’s authoritarian regime in Spain following World War II and the classical Soviet model of totalitarianism in pre-war Russia (Linz 2002).

A totalitarian regime is defined by an **inherent dualism**:

(1) Differentiation between totalitarian and authoritarian political regimes – totalitarianism is defined as a more stringent form of authoritarianism, characterised by an attempt to exert total control over all aspects of society, yet it often falls short of achieving this complete dominance. The trajectory of the Putin regime illustrates a possible shift toward greater control over society, particularly evident during the Russian-Ukrainian war that began in 2022. In this context, we can draw a parallel with Turkmenistan, another post-Soviet country that, since 2007, has been caught between authoritarianism and totalitarianism under the dictatorship of President Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov. It is also noteworthy that classic totalitarian regimes did not typically arise through a gradual evolution from softer forms of governance. For instance, the totalitarian regimes in Italy in 1922 and in Germany in 1933 emerged amid significant political crises and societal anomies. Likewise, the Soviet model of totalitarianism originated in the 1917 military coup, which was accompanied by

considerable chaos within Russian society. Accordingly, it is evident that the classic forms of totalitarian regimes did not evolve from less authoritarian predecessors.

(2) *Totalitarianism as a specific type of political regime* characterised by the stability of rigid political structures that can last for approximately 20 to 30 years, distinguishing it as a unique form of governance. The autonomy of a political regime is reflected in its capacity to sustain stability and legitimacy over a defined period. However, the question of the minimum regime viability without undergoing transformation remains open to discussion. In democratic systems, the rotation of political elites typically occurs within 4 to 5 years, corresponding to the terms of parliament or the presidency. Conversely, the circumstances in non-democratic regimes are more complex, as elections may be absent or merely ceremonial. Should we examine the longevity of traditional totalitarian regimes, the following timelines can be observed (with an upper limit set at 2025): the Fascist model lasted for 23 years, the Nazi model for 12 years, the Soviet model for 21 years, the Chinese model for 27 years, the North Korean model exceeds 72 years, and the Eritrean model exceeds 32 years. Each of these totalitarian models demonstrates a lifespan that surpasses the typical minimum elite rotation period in democratic regimes. Additionally, contemporary totalitarian regimes show a remarkable ability to compete with other forms of governance.

Attributes of totalitarianism that set it apart as a unique form of political regime:

(1) *The extensive centralisation of authority and the overarching control over society.* No other political regime is as severe as a totalitarian one, where violence serves as the primary means of maintaining legitimacy. Unlike democratic systems that promote dialogue or authoritarian regimes that seek compromise, totalitarian regimes focus solely on isolating or eliminating dissenting voices.

(2) *Major social and political crises* that act as catalysts of the regime emergence, including elections, which are characteristic of democratic systems, as well as minor political crises and revolutions, which can give rise to authoritarian regimes. The rise of a dictator and the subsequent mobilisation of the population are typical during major political upheavals. Such conditions may arise from various circumstances, including military defeat, territorial annexation, military coups, social revolutions, or the pressing need to uphold religious standards. Among the most widespread tools, populism stands out as a key mechanism, serving as the foundation for the establishment of a ‘*cult of the leader*’.

(3) *The accelerated rate of political elite formation*. As a result, it leads to an increase in the concentration of state power. This trend is characterised by the mass mobilisation of the population around extremist political factions, which leverage populist rhetoric to claim their ability to effectively resolve the ongoing crisis. Until a totalitarian regime has solidified its grip on power, a majority of the population may tacitly support and condone acts of mass violence. Over time, the regime may resort to restrictions and forceful measures to mitigate immediate societal crises; however, these solutions are often only temporary and can deepen the crisis in the long run. When underlying issues remain unresolved, such regimes frequently resort to external military operations. The main objective of initiating wars is to bolster internal legitimacy and effectively mobilise the population.

1.2 Types of Totalitarian Political Regimes

1.2.1 Criteria for Classifying Totalitarian Regimes

A totalitarian regime is typically clear and easy to identify in the realm of political practice. This assertion is supported by numerous classical totalitarian regimes observed throughout the 20th and

21st centuries. We are discussing a ‘*dying*’ regime, as contemporary models often exhibit substantial political deviations.

To classify totalitarian regimes, it is essential to establish specific criteria or indicators. This classification will be based on **ten distinct criteria** that encompass all facets of society.

(1) *Cult of Leadership* – a political leadership model characterised by the prominent political image of a singular leader;

(2) *Ideology* – the prevailing ideology that serves as the foundational belief system for a totalitarian regime;

(3) *Party Model* – the overarching structure of a single-party system, including the specific type of party nomenclature;

(4) *Leader’s Charisma* – a distinctive form of charisma demonstrated by a leader that contributes to their influence;

(5) *Path to Power* – the process through which a leader achieves power and the subsequent transition to a totalitarian regime;

(6) *Societal Structure* – an assessment of either a static or dynamic societal structure, along with the actual possibilities for social mobilisation;

(7) *Economic Model* – the degree of centralisation and militarisation of the economic system;

(8) *Cultural Values* – the effects of the regime on a monocultural environment;

(9) *Religion and the Regime* – a framework for understanding the interaction between the totalitarian regime and religion, including the real degree of secularisation or sacralisation in society;

(10) *Foreign Strategy* – the model of a regime’s behaviour in its relations with other nations, reflecting both the level of aggressiveness and adherence to international law.

To classify totalitarian regimes, we will adopt a traditional classification approach, which aligns with the classification proposed by A. Tsygankov (Tsygankov 1995). One of the primary

criteria for classifying regimes is the stability and ideological foundation of the regime.

1.2.2 Traditional Approaches to the Classification of Totalitarian Regimes

Traditionally, the following **types of totalitarian regimes** are outlined (Tsygankov 1995) (See Table 1):

(1) *Racial national socialist totalitarianism* is defined by the supremacy of a single race and aims for world domination. It is often characterised by instability, e.g. Hitler's Germany, which destroyed centralised authority through external aggression. It is worth recognising the ideological distinctions between National Socialism and Fascism, as these differences influence the institutional characteristics of the totalitarian regimes in Italy and Germany (Whittam 1995; Spielvogel & Redles 2020). The fascist and Nazi models of totalitarianism exhibit notable similarities; however, A. Tsygankov argues that the National Socialist model stands as the ideal type of a totalitarian regime rooted in radical right-wing ideology.

(2) *Communist totalitarianism* is characterised by the dominance of a singular social class, specifically the proletariat. Historically, these are rather stable regimes, e.g. North Korea, the former USSR, China, Romania, Albania, and Cuba. Notably, the Soviet Union, the most politically influential communist regime, existed for nearly 70 years before its dissolution in 1991. Additionally, significant ideological differences among various communist regimes often lead to conflicts, as exemplified by the complex relationships between Moscow and Belgrade and between Moscow and Beijing during the latter half of the 20th century (Rajak 2011; Lüthi 2008). North Korea's long-standing totalitarian regime is characterised by an ideological blend of

communism and nationalism, referred to as '*political religion*' *Juche* (Çiçek & Kivrak 2025).

(3) *Theocratic totalitarianism* is characterised by the integration of a single religious ideology with the state apparatus. A prominent example of this phenomenon can be observed in the Ayatollah Khomeini's regime in post-revolutionary Iran. This type of totalitarian regime must be examined within the broader context of the threats posed by Islamic fundamentalism and radical secular regimes in the 21st century, e.g. the terrorist activities of ISIS and Al-Qaeda, as well as the secular regime in Iraq, resembling the totalitarian regime under Saddam Hussein's Ba'ath Party (Faust 2015).

There are the following **peculiarities of traditional totalitarian political regimes** (Tsygankov 1995, 194–196):

(1) Racial national-socialist regime:

- The prevailing ideology is marked by nationalism and an anti-Semitic foundation, which emphasises Aryan racial purity and the promotion of a healthy physical force.
- Denial of liberal channels of communication between the party leadership and society. Individuals are perceived as components of a unified state apparatus, with societal interests subordinate to the interests of the nation.
- The party's organisational structure, with a high level of militarisation, incorporates military units that blend party and military functions.
- A charismatic leadership style, exemplified by the inherent charisma of figures such as Hitler.
- A method of rising to power, e.g. Hitler's rise, facilitated through the 1933 parliamentary elections and his subsequent appointment as chancellor, initially provided him with limited authority. His influence expanded through a gradual consolidation of power and the systematic dismantling of parliamentary democracy.

- Militarisation of the economic system, lacking comprehensive reforms and maintaining a stable social-class hierarchy.
- *Cultural Sphere*: the cult of Aryan culture is maintained, while efforts are made to combat the cultural heritage of Jewish communities. This also encompasses the persecution of sexual minorities, including the imposition of criminal penalties for homosexuality (Tschantret 2020).
- *Religious sphere*: all church denominations were compelled to collaborate with the Nazi regime. As a result, the major Christian denominations, functioning as social institutions, experienced a loss of autonomy, ultimately becoming '*positive Christians*' to cooperate with the Nazi ideology (Steigmann-Gall 2007). Occultism and paganism served as the spiritual foundation of the Nazi regime, leading to the establishment and operation of specialised units like the Ahnenerbe (Junginger 2013);
- The regime's *foreign policy*: the Nazi regime aimed for external expansion of '*Aryan domination*', engaged in war against liberal countries, and fostered cooperation with ideologically similar regimes, primarily fascist Italy (Weinberg 2010). The annexation of Austria in 1938 and the subsequent occupation of the Sudetenland in Czechoslovakia marked the beginning of the largest war in history, initiated by the Nazi regime.

(2) Communist regime:

- The ideology is international in scope, with the objective of establishing a multinational federation. Although anti-Semitic sentiment is widespread within society, the party's ideology continues to prevail.
- There is a populist approach to democratic principles; elites often leverage democracy primarily as a tool for populist rhetoric. This merging of democratic ideals with authoritarian practices is exemplified by '*proletarian democracy*' and '*democratic centralisation of the party*'.
- The internal organisation of the communist party is characterised by a hierarchical structure with an expansive party apparatus that seeks mass engagement. The military operates

independently of the party, serving primarily as an instrument for enhancing societal control.

- The political system is marked by the presence of a charismatic leader. Stalin's charisma was rooted in his strategic use of violence and his leadership during World War II.
- The military-revolutionary approach to acquiring power grants considerable authority to the Bolshevik party elite.
- The communist regime has demonstrated its ability to exert effective control over the economic system, facilitating industrialisation, rural urbanisation, and shifts in the social hierarchy. However, the decline of communist regimes in Central and Eastern Europe toward the end of the 1980s demonstrated the futility of the Soviet economic model, which struggled to adapt to rising global competition and the end of the Cold War (Allen 2001).
- *Cultural sphere*: culture is defined by internationalisation, while national identities are often deemed unacceptable. In the Soviet Union, all cultural activities were designed to support the communist regime. The Soviet government promoted the development of '*social realism*' in the arts (James 1973) and the ideological socialisation of the youth (Gorsuch 1992). During the era of Mao Zedong in China, the Cultural Revolution lasted from 1966 to 1976 and targeted intellectuals and dissidents (Scott 2016).
- *Religious sphere*: communist ideology predominates within the regime, leading to a decline in the influence of religious institutions on society. The principle of internationalism, which is the communist ideal, excludes religious identity. As a result, the Stalinist regime has garnered a reputation for persecuting church denominations associated with the Vatican, while seeking partnership with the tightly controlled and regulated Orthodox Church (Kalkandjieva 2025).
- *Foreign policy*: The behaviour of communist regimes in the international arena tends to be non-aggressive; however, these regimes seek to engage in global affairs. The Cold War between

the Soviet Union and the United States serves as an example of foreign policy confrontation. Furthermore, the isolation of communist regimes can be an indispensable element in sustaining their legitimacy, as exemplified by North Korea (Lee Yong Suk 2016).

(3) Theocratic regime:

- Ideology is shaped by religious principles and promotes the idea of spreading a single religion externally, exemplified by the '*export of the Islamic revolution*'.
- There is a complete rejection of democratic principles in society, with religion defined as the only means of exercising state power. Democracy is viewed as a Western concept, entirely disconnected from Islamic fundamentalism.
- Totalitarian parties and movements have a structured internal organisation, with an established unified system of religious groups. The highest authority in this '*party organization*' is the mosque.
- The political system features a charismatic leader, such as Khomeini, whose natural charisma considerably influences governance in Iran.
- Khomeini's authority derives from the religious-revolutionary method of seizing power.
- The state has a monopoly on regulating the country's economic processes, leading to the full nationalisation of domestic and foreign trade.
- *Cultural and religious spheres*: theocratic totalitarian regimes frequently integrate culture and religion into a unified framework, as the synthesis of religion, culture, and politics is essential to their functioning. In post-revolutionary Iran, a defining characteristic of governance is the comprehensive influence of Islam over the public life of its citizens (Boroujerdi & Rahimkhani 2018). It is evident that alternative religious or cultural movements to Islam may be unacceptable.

- *Foreign policy:* The behaviour of totalitarian Iran is influenced by two main factors: (a) the export of the ideals of the Islamic Revolution, particularly to other countries in the Middle East, and (b) the ideological conflict between Iran and the United States, as well as its regional allies, such as Saudi Arabia (Mabon 2023). This geopolitical strategy has been clearly visible in recent years, as Iran is one of the few countries supplying arms to Russia in the war with Ukraine (Alibabalu Sayyad Sadri 2023). Additionally, Iran conducted short-term military actions against Israel in 2025.

Totalitarian political regimes were most typical during the first half of the 20th century. Following World War II, these totalitarian dictatorships largely vanished. Influenced by democratisation and decolonisation, many rigid political regimes transitioned into authoritarian or similar forms of governance. While they were viable in the early 20th century, they are now political deviations, exemplified by the regimes in North Korea and Eritrea.

Table 1. Types of Traditional Totalitarian Regimes

Types	Subtypes / Typical Countries	Regime Vitality	Leader
Racial / National	Nazism / Germany	12 (1933 – 1945)	<i>Fuhrer Hitler</i>
	Fascism / Italy	23 (1922 – 1945)	<i>Duce Mussolini</i>
	Francism / Spain	23 (1936 – 1959)	<i>Caudillo Franco</i>
Communist	Soviet communism / USSR	29 (1924 – 1953)	<i>Stalin</i>
	Cuban Revolution / Revolutionary Cuba	49 (1959 – 2008)	<i>Fidel Castro</i>
	Democratic Government of Albania / People’s Republic of Albania	39 (1946 – 1985)	<i>Enver Halil Hoxha</i>
	Romanian People’s Republic / Socialist Republic of Romania	42 (1947 – 1989)	<i>Nicolae Ceausescu</i>
	Juche / Democratic People’s Republic of Korea	72+ (1953 – present)	<i>Kim Dynasty</i>
	Great Proletarian (Cultural) Revolution / People’s Republic of China	27 (1949 – 1976)	<i>Mao Zedong</i>
	Islam Revolution / Islamic Republic of Iran	10 (1979 – 1989)	<i>Ayatollah Khomeini</i>

Source: drafted by the author.

CHAPTER 2

AUTHORITARIAN POLITICAL REGIMES

2.1 The Nature and Key Characteristics of Authoritarianism

Authoritarian political regimes represent one of the most ‘disguised’ forms of governance, balancing between the extreme repression of totalitarianism and the liberal freedoms of democratic systems. This inherent duality complicates the classification of authoritarianism, as it manifests differently across political and societal contexts. The main challenge in identifying authoritarianism is that the only consistent attribute is the absence of democratic elections; otherwise, authoritarian regimes differ in their structures and practices.

The Encyclopedia Britannica defines authoritarianism as a social and political phenomenon or “...systems of government that have no established mechanism for the transfer of executive power and do not afford their citizens civil liberties or political rights. Power is concentrated in the hands of a single leader or a small elite, whose decisions are taken without regard for the will of the people” (Lindstaedt 2026).

Authoritarian political regimes rely on state coercion, with power centralised in the hands of a single ruler or dominant political entity. The institutionalised state violence enables the centralisation of executive power at the highest political level, such as granting the president or prime minister unlimited authority and eliminating parliamentary opposition (Malesky & Schuler 2010). Authoritarian regimes fall into two distinct types based on their methods of governance. The first type relies primarily on violence, employing military and law enforcement agencies to maintain control, e.g. Russia and Belarus. In contrast, the second type upholds traditional values such as culture and religion, and is often centred around the charisma

of a leader, as observed in Argentina under Perón and Portugal under Salazar.

The socio-political developments of the 19th century, along with those of the latter half of the 20th century and the early 21st century, have transformed authoritarian regimes. This transformation is linked to several key factors, including the spread of parliamentarism, the impact of two world wars, the global movement toward democratisation, the militarisation of politics, and the decline of communism. As a result, authoritarian regimes have evolved considerably, either moving toward totalitarianism or, conversely, masquerading as democratic.

Drawing on the main approaches for understanding authoritarian regimes in contemporary comparative political science (Kailitz 2013; Levitsky & Way 2021; Wahmana, Teorell & Hadenius 2013; Hadenius & Teorell 2006; Puddington 2017), we can identify **10 fundamental institutional characteristics of authoritarian regimes**:

- (1) Exclusion of political opposition from the state decision-making process;
- (2) Lack of democratic procedures for exercising control over power, such as democratic elections and an active civil society participation;
- (3) Preference for power-based methods in resolving conflicts at both the state and societal levels;
- (4) The state authorities' desire for total control over society as a means of suppressing opposing social groups;
- (5) Widespread dissemination of state ideology and propaganda aimed at undermining historical traditions, cultural values, and alternative media;
- (6) The seclusion of the political elite from the influence of the public;
- (7) The participation of the ruling elite in the contest for the highest offices within the country;

(8) A constant pursuit of an ideal ideology that enhances the legitimacy of a leader, to cultivate a renewed charisma for the leader;

(9) Disguising the authoritarian regime as a more liberal form of governance to maintain international cooperation with the world's leading economies;

(10) Limiting internet freedom and regulating social media to preserve the necessary level of legitimacy.

In political practice, the institutional boundaries of authoritarian regimes are quite ambiguous. Such regimes typically progress through various phases in their development, fluctuating between more rigid and more flexible approaches. For example, following the dissolution of the Soviet Union, Russia initiated liberalisation efforts. However, the majority of these democratisation efforts proved unsuccessful, leading to the emergence of a hybrid regime during the 1990s that combined elements of '*chaotic democracy*' with post-Soviet authoritarianism. With Vladimir Putin's ascent to power in 2000, Russia has shifted toward a model of traditional authoritarianism based on oligarchy. The consolidation of presidential powers under Putin has led to a distinct form of authoritarianism referred to as '*Putinism*' (Fish 2017). The militarisation of Russia and the onset of a large-scale war with Ukraine in February 2022 have brought the country closer to a hybrid authoritarian-totalitarian regime.

2.2 Problems of Authoritarian Political Regimes Operation

An essential component of any political regime is its legitimacy and the durability it entails. An authoritarian regime, a synthesis of totalitarian and democratic elements, leverages the legitimacy factors of both systems. There is a problematic issue, i.e. the short-term legitimacy typically associated with authoritarian political regimes. Totalitarianism, as a rule, relies on mass terror through revolutionary means, while democracy is grounded in non-violent coercion, characterised by high levels of freedom and prosperity. This disparity

creates challenges for the durability of authoritarian regimes, leading to instability in their legitimacy. Furthermore, single-party governance often fails to fully realise the state’s ideological objectives, which complicates the overall stability of such regimes. An analysis of the practices of authoritarian regimes during the latter half of the 20th century, particularly before the collapse of communism, reveals several factors that contributed to their destabilisation (See Table 2).

Table 2. Factors Destabilising Authoritarian Political Regimes

Political Institute	Destabilisation Factor	Legitimacy Conflict
Regime Ambiguity	Regime’s dual nature	<i>Authoritarianism exists on a spectrum between totalitarian and democratic regimes</i>
State Authority	Low level of legitimacy	<i>Power is concentrated in the hands of a few individuals (military leaders, party elites, or a single leader)</i>
Monoleadership	High level of legitimacy	<i>The legitimacy is low, except for the monoleader</i>
Opposition	Weak influence or lack of opposition influence	<i>The cult of the leader and the one-party system</i>
Regime’s Strategy	Low level of the regime’s efficiency	<i>Military and religious authoritarian regimes do not commit to reforms</i>

Source: drafted by the author based on the research by V.Bunce, S.Wolchik (2020), C.Davenport (2007), J.Gerschewski (2013), J.Gandhi, A.Przeworski (2007).

This approach to understanding authoritarianism is somewhat superficial, as it conflates the experiences of authoritarian regimes from different regions, such as the Arab world, Latin American dictatorships, and African despotisms. It is important to provide a

more thorough analysis of the sources of legitimacy behind these authoritarian regimes, as they directly influence their durability. Based on the various sources of legitimacy, authoritarian regimes can be classified into **six traditional types**. For comparison, we can also consider the sources of legitimacy associated with liberal democratic regimes (Kailitz 2013).

The general model of legitimacy for each political regime is comprised of *two key factors*: (1) *exogenous factors*, which pertain to the formation of legitimacy originating outside the regime itself, and (2) *endogenous factors*, which relate to the regime’s governance over the political institutions that are responsible to the population (See Table 3).

Table 3. Methods for Legitimising Authoritarian Political Regimes

Political regime	External Legitimacy	Control over the dominant or leading political institution
Electoral autocracy	No	No
Communist ideocracy	Yes (communist purpose)	Yes (communist elite)
One-party autocracy	No (not ideocratic)	Yes (party)
Monarchy	Yes (monarchic origin)	No
Military regime	No	Yes (military)
Personalist autocracy	Maybe (not monarchic)	No (neither party nor military)
Liberal democracy	No	No

Sources: drafted by the author based on Steffen Kailitz’s approach (Kailitz 2013, 45).

The influence of the people on the establishment of power is essential in determining the extent to which citizens can control their leaders. The key political procedures that lend legitimacy to authoritarian regimes include the institution of elections, the structure

of party systems, and mechanisms that constrain the executive branch from usurping power (See Table 4).

Table 4. Political Procedures for Legitimising Authoritarian Political Regimes¹

Political regime / <i>Lifespan of the regime</i>	Multiparty elections	Multi- candidate elections	Fairness of elections	Executive constraints
Electoral autocracy <i>(11 years)</i>	+	+	—	—
Communist ideocracy <i>(19 years)</i>	—	—	—	—
One-party autocracy <i>(8 years)</i>	—	—	—	—
Monarchy <i>(23 years)</i>	Maybe	—	—	—
Military regime <i>(8 years)</i>	Maybe	—	—	—
Personalist autocracy <i>(12 years)</i>	—	—	—	—
Liberal democracy <i>(20 years)</i>	+	+	+	+

Sources: drafted by the author based on Steffen Kailitz’s approach (Kailitz 2013, 45–50).

Between 1946 and 2010, an analysis was conducted to determine the durability of various types of authoritarian regimes. The findings suggest that monarchies were the most enduring, outlasting even liberal democratic regimes. Conversely, single-party autocracies and military regimes demonstrated the least resilience to both external and

¹ — No, + Yes.

internal challenges (Kailitz 2013, 50). These are general estimates of the durability of authoritarian regimes, as individual cases often display periods of stability that vary considerably; e.g., the Soviet Union was established in 1922 under Lenin's initiative. During the Russian Civil War, the regime was rather ambiguous: it exhibited features of military totalitarianism during the period of War Communism (1918–1921) and leaned towards moderate authoritarianism with the implementation of the New Economic Policy (1921–1928) (Richman 1981). With Stalin's coming to power in 1924, the Soviet Union adopted the features of totalitarianism. Following his death in 1953, the country began to experience a gradual period of '*thaw*' (Taubman 2006), during which it evolved into a communist authoritarian dictatorship.

The dual nature of authoritarian regimes contributes to substantial instability and yields ambiguous forms of governance, often reflecting characteristics of both totalitarianism and democracy.

1. Hybrid Regimes: transitional systems that lie between authoritarianism and democracy. They are typically characterised by a multifaceted apparatus dominated by an oligarchic elite, with a single political force holding predominant power.

Hybrid regimes display features of both deficient democratic and totalitarian regimes. When considering hybrid regimes as political structures positioned between traditional totalitarianism and functioning democracy, we can classify them into *three distinct categories*: (a) *Closed authoritarianism*, (b) *Electoral authoritarianism*, and (c) *Defective democracy* (Bogaards 2009, 414).

Political regime transformations reveal that crises arising from the delegitimisation of political elites often pave the way for the emergence of hybrid regimes. Between 2020 and 2025, *five main scenarios* of these hybrid regimes were projected: (1) *Status quo preservation* – Lebanon, (2) *Political transformation (autocratization)* – North African countries, Turkey, Russia, Georgia, Hungary, (3) *Political transformation (democratisation)* – Armenia,

Moldova, (4) *Extreme political change* – none (Dandashly, Delcour & Noutcheva 2026).

2. Façade democracies: a transitional form of a political regime, defined by a constitutional framework that appears democratic but fails to establish the principles of liberal democracy. The term '*façade democracy*' was introduced in response to the global slowdown of democratisation observed in the early 2000s or the outcomes of '*Western patrons' liberal rhetoric*' in Third World countries (Ritter 2014). This concept encompasses regimes situated in a '*grey zone*' of political transformation (Carothers 2002, 10). In the context of post-Soviet transformations, it is worth examining the experiences of the republics that have successfully transitioned to democracy, with the exception of the Baltic states. The consolidation of democracy in these countries was impeded by formal constitutionalism. Prior to Mikheil Saakashvili's presidency, Georgia was under a 'shadow of reforms' (Devdariani 2004, 81). In Ukraine, the 2004 constitutional reform frequently led to stagnation in interactions between the executive and legislative branches (Serdyk & Petrov 2010, 178).

3. Pre-totalitarian regimes: arise from the crisis of democratic governance, specifically in representative institutions, and are implemented individually, by bureaucracy or the military. Political parties play an important role, leading the state toward a monopolistic single-party system. An exemplary case of a pre-totalitarian regime is Germany during the interwar period of 1918 to 1933. During this era, countries were faced with three options for political regime development: a liberal regime, a social democratic regime, or a fascist regime (Luebbert 1991). In light of the systemic crisis of the post-war regime in Germany and the rise of revanchist sentiments propagated by Adolf Hitler, the German government on the eve of the 1933 parliamentary elections can be defined as pre-totalitarian. Such regimes are indicative of a transitional phase from an authoritarian to a totalitarian regime, typically occurring over a relatively short period. Generally, the gradual authoritarian consolidation of power in a non-functional democracy ultimately results in the establishment of harsh totalitarian regimes.

4. Post-totalitarian regimes: emerge from the foundations of totalitarian regimes, functioning within the legacy of the previous political system (totalitarian practices are characterised by ongoing critique and undergo continuous modernisation). In the context of post-totalitarian regimes, there is a clear dualism in explaining their institutional nature. Using the traditional classification of regimes (totalitarian, authoritarian, democratic), the Soviet Union after Stalin's death is classified as a post-totalitarian regime. The transition of Soviet power from 1953 to 1956 (Taubman 2006) ultimately led to a more liberal form of governance – an authoritarian communist ideocracy. It is evident that this brief transition from totalitarianism to authoritarianism in the Soviet Union should be regarded as a '*post-totalitarian regime*'.

2.3 Classical Typology of Authoritarian Regimes

The classification of authoritarian regimes presents a challenge due to their inherently dual political nature, depending on whether they align more closely with totalitarianism or democracy, leading to distinct types of authoritarian regimes. In modern comparative political science, scholars have identified numerous categories of authoritarian regimes, which are classified by historical context or by specific models of authoritarian political systems. The principal criterion for classifying authoritarian political regimes lies in the characteristics of the ruling elite and the nature of their interactions with society. Authoritarianism typically seeks to diminish political competition among elites while limiting citizens' political participation.

The traditional approach to classifying authoritarian regimes identifies *three main types*: (1) *one-party authoritarian regimes*, (2) *military authoritarian regimes*, (3) *authoritarian regimes characterised by personal power*. The primary criteria for this classification are two essential aspects: (a) *the nature of authoritarian*

leadership, and (b) the historical conditions under which each authoritarian regime operates.

(1) One-party authoritarian regimes – are characterised by the dominance of a single political party within the political system and the enforcement of its ideology in society. The model commonly used to describe these regimes is the '*one-party state*'. In one-party authoritarianism, the regime fulfils two main functions: (a) co-opting the opposition, and (b) building mass support (Magaloni & Kricheli 2010, 126–128). The mechanism of a one-party authoritarian regime presupposes the monopolisation of state power by a single political party, which operates under a unified state ideology. Access to positions of authority in the regime is granted through membership in the party's upper echelons.

One-party systems often emerge from revolutions, as seen in the USSR, or are imposed externally, such as in parts of Central and Southern Europe. A contemporary example of a modernised one-party authoritarian regime is communist China at the turn of the 20th and 21st centuries. It is characterised by the dominance of a single party and social class, while simultaneously having a competitive economy (Koss 2018, 3). In the post-colonial era, efforts to democratise in African countries during the second half of the 20th century often resulted in the establishment of strict one-party regimes. These regimes can be classified into different subtypes. In some cases, they were relatively liberal, as seen in Mozambique from 1999 to 2004 (Tolerant/Non-Hegemonic Regime). In contrast, other countries exhibited much stricter regimes, such as Cameroon from 1997 to 2002 (Repressive/Hegemonic Regime) (Morse 2015, 137). Although single-party authoritarian regimes are frequently associated with communist dictatorships.

(2) Military authoritarian regimes – are established through military coups or the removal of civilian leaders from power, and they often impose their control through frequent military and anti-constitutional activities. These regimes usually follow the existing model of governance, in which power is held by a single individual

(usually the highest-ranking military officer) or a group of individuals (a junta composed of several top military officials). This type of regime is primarily found in countries across Africa and Latin America.

Military regimes typically emerge during favourable conditions, particularly when a country is experiencing a governmental or economic crisis. The format of '*armed politics*' (Whynes 1979, 770) is crucial in this context, as it involves the strategy of interactions between the civilian political elite and military groups that pose a potential threat to the existing constitutional order. Four main strategies can be distinguished in the relationship between the state and military forces: (a) suppression, (b) containment, (c) collusion, and (d) incorporation (Staniland 2015, 773–776). The likelihood of establishing a military regime may vary based on the selected strategy.

Military regimes frequently fail to establish effective economic policies, leading to a predominant focus on military expenditures and security concerns (Whynes 1979, 101). This situation is a significant factor contributing to the vulnerabilities of military authoritarian regimes. These regimes emerged as a prominent political phenomenon in the second half of the 20th century, with the military seizing power through coups in various regions across the globe. Distinct models of military authoritarianism developed in different geographical contexts, including:

(a) *African military regimes*, e.g. the military coup in Ghana in 1966 and Uganda in 1971;

(b) *Latin American military regimes*, e.g. Brazil's coup in 1964 and Argentina's in 1966;

(c) *Asian military regimes*, e.g. the coups in Syria in 1966 and Iraq in 1968 (Whynes 1979, 102).

Military authoritarian regimes are unstable and mainly rely on the stability of the military leader's position rather than on the regime's legitimacy. In comparison to single-party systems and personal dictatorships, military regimes are more likely to transition toward democratization (Geddes, Frantz & Wright 2014, 160). Military

regimes, among other traditional authoritarian regimes, have largely lost their relevance in the 21st century, with only a few exceptions.

(3) Authoritarian regime of personal power – arises when state authority is concentrated in the hands of a single leader, e.g. Nicolae Ceaușescu in Romania and António Oliveira Salazar in Portugal. This form of one-person authoritarianism can emerge during transitions between different authoritarian regimes. For example, the military coup in Chile did not give rise to a personal dictatorship led by Augusto Pinochet; rather, it resulted in the establishment of a military dictatorship.

Among the modern examples of one-person authoritarian regimes in geographical (not political) Europe are the regimes of Alexander Lukashenko in Belarus (1994–2026) and Vladimir Putin in Russia (2000–2022). In Belarus, the model of authoritarianism has not undergone any significant changes in recent years. However, with the onset of the Russian-Ukrainian war in 2022, authoritarianism in Russia became even more rigid, characterised by the militarisation of everyday life, increased repression and censorship (Zavadskaya 2024). This has led to a regime that resembles an authoritarian-totalitarian hybrid.

The most important factor affecting the level of authoritarianism in one-person dictatorships is the regime's leader. Unlike other types of authoritarian regimes, such as one-party or military regimes, one-person regimes concentrate political and military control solely in the hands of a single individual (Geddes 1999). The stability of one-person dictatorships is influenced by the extent of '*personalisation of politics*', which in turn affects the level of sanctions that may be applied. They sustain themselves mainly through internal support, driven by severe repression. Leaders in these systems typically fulfil two main functions: (a) they intensify repressive measures to suppress alternative political methods, and (b) they appoint loyal individuals to oversee security forces, ensuring that these leaders retain their positions through coercive power (Frantz et al. 2020). Ultimately,

among classic authoritarian regimes, one-person dictatorships proved the most stable.

2.4 Modern Classification of Authoritarian Regimes

Global political events in the latter half of the 20th century and the early 21st century have considerably reshaped political regimes. Many traditional forms of authoritarian governance have undergone visible changes and now operate on new institutional foundations. Decolonisation in the post-war era, the decline of communist dictatorships, and efforts toward democratisation during the 1990s and early 2000s have all contributed to the emergence of new subtypes of authoritarian regimes.

Between 1972 and 2003, a number of new transitional authoritarian regimes emerged. These regimes can be classified based on *three main methods of consolidating power*: (1) *hereditary succession of power*, (2) *the use or threat of military force or violence*, and (3) *elections that are characterised by notable deficiencies* (Hadenius & Teorell 2006). Depending on the specific method to acquire power, different types of authoritarian regimes are observed (See Table 5). In certain cases, authoritarian nations may exhibit characteristics similar to those of democratic regimes, while in others they may lean toward authoritarian-totalitarian dictatorships.

The latter half of the 20th century can be categorised into two distinct periods: the era preceding the ‘*third wave of democratisation*’, which began in 1974, and the subsequent broader democratisation process, firmly established after the dissolution of communist autocracies in the early 1990s (Huntington 1991).

**Table 5. Typology of Authoritarian Political Regimes by
A. Hadenius and J. Teorell (1972–2003)**

Classical types of authoritarian regimes	Subtypes of authoritarian regimes	Typical country (years)
Party regime	<i>Multiparty traditional</i>	Albania (1992–1995)
	<i>Partyless</i>	Samoa (1962–1978)
	<i>Dominant party</i>	Cameroon (2002–2003)
	<i>No-party traditional</i>	Haiti (1973–1978)
	<i>One-party traditional</i>	Poland (1960–1988)
Military regime	<i>Military traditional</i>	Argentina (1966–1972)
	<i>Military multiparty</i>	Korea, South (1978–1987)
	<i>Rebel regime</i>	Cuba (1960–1975)
	<i>Military one-party</i>	Iraq (1980–2002)
	<i>Military no-party</i>	Uganda (1989–2003)
Monarchy	<i>One-party monarchy</i>	Iran (1975–1978)
	<i>Traditional monarchy</i>	Saudi Arabia (1960–2003)
	<i>No-party monarchy</i>	Kuwait (1963–1975)
	<i>Multiparty monarchy</i>	Morocco (1977–2003)
Other types	<i>Civil war</i>	Bosnia and Herzegovina (1992–1995)
	<i>Occupation</i>	Afghanistan (1979–1989)
	<i>Theocracy</i>	Iran, Islamic Republic (1979–2003)
	<i>Transition</i>	Bolivia (1978–1979)

Sources: drafted by the author based on the approach by A.Hadenius and J.Teorell (2006).

The evolution of democracy at the end of the 20th century significantly limited the potential of authoritarian regimes, often leading them to adopt a hybrid form of governance. One reason for revising the classification of authoritarian regimes was the changing understanding of authoritarianism. During the political upheaval of the 1970s and 1980s, these regimes were compelled to adapt to the global push for democratisation. As a result, the role of the

authoritarian leader diminished while the regime’s stability increased. This shift demonstrates that an authoritarian regime can change its leader without losing its legitimacy (Wahmana, Teorell & Hadenius 2013, 31). The mechanisms of elected legislatures are crucial in determining the stability of authoritarian regimes. A typology of these regimes, depending on the presence or absence of elected legislatures, encompasses several distinct subtypes (See Table 6).

**Table 6. Typology of Authoritarian Political Regimes by
A.Wahman, J. Teorell, and A.Hadenius**

Types of authoritarian regimes	Subtypes of authoritarian regimes	Typical country (start year)
— Elected legislatures	<i>Military</i> <i>Monarchies</i>	Burkina Faso (1987) United Arab Emirates (1972)
+ Elected legislatures	<i>No-party</i> <i>One-party</i> <i>Multiparty</i> <i>authoritarian</i>	Maldives (1978) Uzbekistan (1992) Russia (2000)

Sources: drafted by the author based on the analytical approaches by A.Wahman, J. Teorell, and A.Hadenius (2013).

During the late 20th and early 21st centuries, authoritarian regimes had to adapt to globalisation and find alternative sources of legitimacy. This led to the emergence of hybrid models of authoritarianism that incorporate features of at least two distinct types of regimes. For instance, a regime without elected legislatures can blend elements of no-party, one-party, and multiparty authoritarian systems (Wahmana, Teorell & Hadenius 2013, 28). Hybrid regimes are often short-lived and are indicative of a nation in a transitional phase. A notable example of this is Syria, particularly during the civil war and the period of crisis surrounding Bashar al-Assad’s leadership from 2014 to 2016.

Authoritarian regimes in the 21st century are quite different from traditional forms of authoritarianism. Modern authoritarianism not only focuses on preserving its unique characteristics and maintaining legitimacy but also seeks to gradually expand its influence into

democratic countries (Puddington 2017). Authoritarian regimes serve as an alternative to democratic systems.

Six fundamental values characteristics of modern authoritarian regimes can be identified (Puddington 2017, 7–8):

(1) “*Majoritarianism*” – Authoritarian leaders only permit elections in which their political forces achieve absolute results, effectively depriving the opposition of political influence. This reflects President Erdoğan’s approach to elections in modern Turkey;

(2) “*Sovereignty*” – The idea of ‘*absolute sovereignty*’ is often used to dismiss international criticism regarding violations of minority rights, political persecution, and high levels of corruption, exemplified by the authoritarian regime in Belarus under Alexander Lukashenko;

(3) “*Dictatorship of law*” – The establishment of a closed legal system that legitimises authoritarian violence, undermining judicial independence and international legal standards (the term originated from Russian President Vladimir Putin);

(4) “*History revised*” – Singling out only those historical events that support authoritarian governments, such as the prohibition of criticism regarding the Mao Zedong era in modern China;

(5) “*Democracy redefined*” – Preservation of democratic discourse under actual authoritarian or hybrid regimes, such as ‘*sovereign democracy*’ in Russia with President Vladimir Putin and ‘*illiberal democracy*’ in Hungary under Viktor Orban;

(6) ‘*return of the leader for life*’ – The abolition of constitutional limits on presidential terms is primarily justified by the need to preserve national identity and to combat external threats. An example of this is the reset of term limits for Vladimir Putin in 2020.

The first decade of the 2000s saw a noticeable slowdown in the global trend of democratisation. In contrast, authoritarian rule began to rise rapidly worldwide. According to Freedom House, between 2007 and 2016, the fastest growth of authoritarian tendencies was recorded in ten countries across different regions (See Table 7). In numerous cases, democratic regression has resulted in the

establishment of authoritarian regimes or a movement toward totalitarianism. However, there are notable exceptions, such as Ukraine.

Table 7. The Biggest Democratisation Regression During the Period from 2007 to 2016 (Freedom House)

Countries	Regress	Type of regime, 2025, score (100% max.)
Turkey	— 28%	Not free / 32%
Bahrein	— 25%	Not free / 12%
Ethiopia	— 21%	Not free / 18%
Azerbaijan	— 17%	Not free / 6%
Venezuela	— 17%	Not free / 13%
Hungary	— 16%	Partly free / 65%
Ecuador	— 12%	Partly free / 64%
Russia	— 12%	Not free / 12%
Ukraine	— 12%	Partly free / 51%
Afghanistan	— 10%	Not free / 8%

Sources: drafted by the author based on the Monitoring Programme Freedom in the World (2026).

In the current atmosphere of turbulence in international relations, there has been a notable increase in authoritarianisation. This situation is giving rise to new transitional forms of governance, including various types of authoritarian regimes. Political science focuses on the examination of individual cases of these regimes, which frequently exhibit hybrid characteristics.

CHAPTER 3

DEMOCRATIC POLITICAL REGIMES: GENERAL ISSUES

3.1 The Definition and Peculiarities of the Modern Democratic Political Regime

Democracy is a global trend in state formation. In the aftermath of the totalitarian regimes in the first half of the 20th century, the world has entered a phase of democratisation. The defeat of powerful totalitarian states, such as Nazi Germany, fascist Italy, and imperial Japan, during World War II, demonstrated a shift towards democratic governance. In the latter half of the 20th century, numerous regimes began to embrace democratisation, emerging as viable alternatives to the totalitarian governments that ultimately collapsed. As nations adopted democratic principles, the world transitioned into a post-colonial phase, leading to the establishment of democratic regimes not only in Southern Europe but also across Latin America and Africa. The pinnacle of this democratisation process was marked by the fall of the communist system in the late 1980s, epitomised by the '*parade of sovereignty*' in newly democratic countries of Central and Eastern Europe, particularly in the post-Soviet space (Hale 2010). However, the sustainability of newly established national democracies, along with the potential rise of authoritarianism in democracies lacking strong legitimacy, remains a pertinent issue that requires further consideration and discussion.

The era of democratisation in the second half of the twentieth century is recognised as a global movement that impacted governance across the globe. Each wave of democratisation contributed to a notable increase in the number of democracies. *The first wave* resulted in the establishment of 29 new democracies, *the second wave* brought forth 36, and *the third wave*

introduced an unprecedented number of democratic forms of governance worldwide (Huntington 1991). A global fashion towards democratisation has become evident, yet it often leads to a decline in the effectiveness of newly established democratic regimes. Over the course of the 2000s, many regions experienced a gradual movement toward authoritarianism under various governments (V-Dem 2025). The crisis of democratic regimes, the rise of populism, and ongoing global instability have emerged as key factors in the evolution of modern political development.

There are various definitions of democracy, both as a form of government and as a political regime. Our primary interest lies in understanding democracy as a regime type. Therefore, we will refer to the classic definition of modern democracy as detailed in the *Encyclopedia Britannica*: “...*form of government in which supreme power is vested in the people and exercised by them directly or indirectly through a system of representation usually involving periodic free elections*” (Encyclopedia Britannica 2021).

There is a challenge in defining a liberal democratic political regime through both normative and empirical lenses. For example, a polis where direct elections are held, while the opposition is subject to persecution. This contrasts sharply with a contemporary model of democracy that fosters a balance of power and dialogue between the government and the opposition.

The peculiarity of contemporary democratic models lies in the legislative mechanisms that facilitate citizen participation in governance and society. In this situation, the debate about the actual institutional possibilities of ‘*government by the people*’ becomes relevant (Przeworski 2019, 21). In complex contemporary political landscapes, there is a close interrelationship between direct and representative democracy.

The main institutions that embody and convey the ‘*will of the citizens*’ traditionally consist of *three essential components*:

(a) *Political parties* that bring together representatives who share similar ideologies (Kelsen 2013),

(b) *Competing political elites* that alternate in positions of power and influence (Schumpeter 1976), or

(c) *A group of officials*, typically professional bureaucrats, who are elected through competitive elections (Downs 1957).

Elections represent the only procedure capable of ensuring the rotation of political elites (Pareto 1991) while enabling the exercise of power on behalf of the people (Bobbio 1989, 93). In the 21st century, it has become evident that incumbents often win in elections over the long term. The evolution of democratic institutions, particularly political parties and parliamentary systems, from the mid-19th century to the early 2000s has demonstrated ambiguous results. High-ranking officials, including prime ministers, party leaders, and presidents, have won approximately 80% of the time in subsequent national elections (Przeworski 2019, 22). Elections continue to serve as a vital mechanism for selecting political elites. Nonetheless, the emphasis is increasingly on the extent to which these processes adhere to fundamental democratic principles and on the overall competitiveness of participants involved in the electoral process.

Democratic regimes are experiencing transformations in the 21st century. There has been a notable transition from a normative understanding of democracy, commonly described as *'people power'*, to a focus on empirical regime types such as *'polyarchy'* (Dahl 1971), *'consolidated democracy'* (Schmitter 1995), and *'electoral democracy'* (Rabinowitz & MacKuen 2003). Additionally, modern democratic regimes are reconfiguring their institutional designs, moving away from the principles established in late-19th-century and mid-20th-century liberal democracy.

3.2 Institutions and Stability Factors of the Democratic Regime

The fundamental principle of a democratic regime is to foster political competition while protecting the rights of minorities. This is achieved through free elections, which not only sustain political competition but also prevent the establishment of a dictatorship.

3.2.1 Polyarchy as Regime

A key characteristic of a democratic regime is the legislative process that allows for the emergence and influence of the opposition, which can be political and social in nature. An effective opposition and a polycentric decision-making mechanism are the main components of modern democratic regimes. *Robert Dahl* described the current democratic regime as a '*polyarchy*', which closely aligns with democratic ideals (Dahl 1971). Polyarchy is a complex governance mechanism in which the operations of the state, represented by a democratic government, are influenced and regulated by independent political parties and pressure groups.

For a polyarchy to operate effectively, the regime must meet the following *basic institutional requirements of political democracy*:

- (a) the right to form and join organisations;
- (b) the right to freedom of expression;
- (c) the right to vote;
- (d) the right to run for public office;
- (e) the right of political leaders to compete for support;
- (f) access to alternative sources of information;
- (g) conducting free and fair elections;
- (h) institutions that ensure government policies are influenced by votes and other preferences of the people (Dahl 1971, 3).

Robert Dahl's methodology has been utilised to empirically evaluate the degree of democracy within regimes in the context of the bipolar world (Coppedge & Reinicke 1990) and is applicable to contemporary regimes as well (Marina et al. 2026). The alignment of modern governance systems with *R.Dahl's* criteria for polyarchy is regarded as a valuable indicator of their progression toward political democracy and their capability to maintain long-term stability.

3.2.2 The Socio-Economic Welfare as a Factor in the Stability of Democratic Regime

A fundamental principle of democracy is *equality*; therefore, it is necessary to explore the relationship between regime stability and socio-economic welfare. In the context of a globalised world, democratic regimes must effectively address *four essential* needs:

- (a) *fostering economic growth,*
- (b) *ensuring population health,*
- (c) *promoting gender equality, and*
- (d) *maintaining peace* (Lindberg 2026).

The impact of democracy on socio-economic stability extends beyond just a few factors. The wave of mass democratisation following World War II highlighted the social and economic conditions essential for stabilising democratic regimes. *Seymour Lipset* argues that the likelihood of establishing a democratic regime significantly increases when economic indicators are favourable at the onset of democratic transitions (Lipset 1959). Furthermore, a higher socio-economic level in the future tends to enhance the stability of these democratic regimes. For instance, the average income per capita in stable European democracies ranges from \$420 to \$1,453, whereas in stable Latin American dictatorships it ranges from only \$40 to \$331. Similar trends are

observed in social indicators that contribute to the stabilisation of democracies and autocracies (See Table 8).

Table 8. Social and Economic Factors Affecting the Stabilisation of Democratic and Authoritarian Regimes, According to Seymour Lipset (1959)

Country	Per Capita Income	Males in Agriculture	Higher Education Enrollment 1000 persons	Metropolitan Areas
European Stable Democracies	420 – 1 453 \$	6 – 46%	1,7 – 17,83	22 – 56%
European Dictatorships	128 – 482 \$	16 – 60%	1,6 – 6,1	7 – 49%
Latin American Democracies	112 – 346 \$	30 – 63%	0,7 – 4,6	17 – 44%
Latin American Stable Dictatorships	40 – 331 \$	46 – 87%	0,2 – 3,1	7 – 26%

Source: concept of democracy requisites by Seymour Lipset (1959).

A democratic political regime does not inherently ensure a high level of economic development, the material welfare of its citizens, or social justice; this observation has been consistently supported by political practice. Nevertheless, the political stability of a democratic regime remains a critical factor in assessing society’s overall welfare. Furthermore, unpredictability in socio-economic development is often characteristic of ‘*partial*’ or ‘*unconsolidated*’ democratic regimes (Epstein 2004, 1). The relationship between the depth of democracy and a country’s economic success continues to be a subject of considerable debate in comparative political science, particularly in the context of a country’s modernisation (Przeworski et al. 2000).

Certain smaller economies in the European Union, such as Bulgaria and the Baltic nations, are demonstrating economic

growth alongside certain autocratic regimes, including China, Turkey, and the United Arab Emirates. However, instances of economically successful authoritarian countries are relatively rare. In non-democratic states, economic advancement is frequently characterised by substantial state control over economic activities (Lindberg et al. 2026). Consequently, the disintegration of autocratic governance can lead to the collapse of their centralised economic systems.

The United Nations Human Development Index is traditionally considered an indicator of overall welfare (Human Development Index 2023). However, the indicator is perceived as too broad and static, with insufficient consideration of regional specifics. As a result, the methodology used for calculating the index received significant criticism during the 1990s (Sagar Ambuj & Najam Adil 1998). The indicator of socio-economic welfare provides a more detailed and comprehensive view than the indicators of economic development and overall development prospects. The components of socio-economic welfare should encompass not only traditional factors such as healthcare and education but also levels of personal freedom and government transparency. *The Legatum Prosperity Index* (2023) offers comprehensive indicators of socio-economic welfare, which we will use to analyse the correlation between welfare and the democratic nature of regimes (See Table 9).

Expectations for enhanced welfare in democracies are not always fulfilled. During the transition from authoritarian regimes to democracies, the population anticipates improvements in economic conditions. The democratic transitions in Central and Eastern Europe demonstrate the ambiguity of the outcomes achieved. The objective was to establish and solidify democratic institutions by fostering positive economic growth. During 2004–2013, eleven post-socialist countries joined the European Union with the intention of aligning their economic indicators with those of EU member states. As of 2022, only the Czech Republic,

Lithuania, and Slovenia have met or exceeded the EU average in GDP per capita (László 2025, 11).

Table 9. The Correlation between Socio-Economic Welfare and the Democratic Nature of Political Regimes, 2023

Country	The Legatum Prosperity Index Rank, 2023	Freedom in the World, 2023
Denmark	1	<i>Free</i> 97%
Singapore	17	<i>Partly Free</i> 48%
USA	19	<i>Free</i> 84%
Hungary	42	<i>Partly Free</i> 65%
United Arab Emirates	44	<i>Not Free</i> 18%
Romania	45	<i>Free</i> 83%
Bulgaria	48	<i>Free</i> 78%
China	54	<i>Not Free</i> 9%
India	103	<i>Partly Free</i> 62%
South Sudan	167	<i>Not Free</i> 1%

Source: drafted by the author based on empirical calculations by The Legatum Prosperity Index (2023) and Freedom in the World (2024).

The gradual narrowing of the gap between newer and older EU member states in terms of the functioning of democratic institutions has not led to stable economic convergence.

3.2.3 The Sociocultural Environment for the Stabilisation of a Democratic Regime

In addition to political factors, the socio-cultural environment is essential in the stability or destabilisation of a democratic regime. However, some socio-cultural factors are subject to debate. By integrating the concepts of the components of the socio-cultural environment and democratisation, we can identify *five main groups of factors* (See Table 10). It is worth mentioning that we are discussing the political regimes that have emerged as a consequence of the ‘*third wave of democratisation*’ following the period of 1974–1975 (Papaioannou & Siourounis 2008).

**Table 10. Social and Economic Factors in Stabilising the
‘Third Wave of Democratisation’ Regimes by Elias Papaioannou
and Gregorios Siourounis**

Factor	Indicators
Modernization	<i>GDP p.c., year</i> <i>Schooling, year</i> <i>Life expectancy, year</i>
Social Structure	<i>Ethnic fragmentation</i> <i>Religious fragmentation</i> <i>Muslim share</i> <i>Confucian share</i>
Natural Resource Curse	<i>Oil producer</i> <i>Diamond</i>
Liberalization	<i>Trade openness</i> <i>Trade share</i>
Early Institutions	<i>Executive constraints at independence</i> <i>Independence</i> <i>Settler mortality</i> <i>Population density in 1500</i>

Source: concept of economic and social factors driving democratisation by Elias Papaioannou and Gregorios Siourounis (2008, 372–373).

The socio-economic factors observed during the third wave of democratisation have contributed to the emergence of diverse political regimes (Papaioannou & Siourounis 2008, 369). The most numerous and stable regimes were those classified as ‘*Always authoritarian*’, which remained unaffected by the ‘*third wave*’ of democratisation. This group includes 51 countries considered the least democratic, including Afghanistan, the UAE, China, Tunisia, North Korea, and Cuba. It also encompasses authoritarian regimes that emerged after the fall of the USSR and have continued on their undemocratic path since then. This primarily includes the eight Central Asian countries and Belarus. In second place, in terms of stability and quantity, are the ‘*Always democratic*’ regimes, which maintained a high level of democracy despite the ‘*third wave*’.

This group traditionally comprises Western European and Anglo-Saxon regimes, as well as Scandinavia, Botswana, India, Japan, and several other countries. There are 41 countries classified as *'Always democratic'*.

The following are groups of countries whose political regimes were transformed during the *'third wave of democratisation'*. The largest group is *'Full democratisation'*, comprising 31 countries. This group comprises various types of democratic regimes that emerged from the collapse of long-term one-person dictatorships (such as Portugal in 1974 and Spain in 1978) and military juntas (such as Argentina in 1983). It also includes countries that underwent decolonisation (such as Senegal in 2000) and the most stable post-socialist regimes (including Hungary, Poland, and Romania in 1990, as well as Bulgaria in 1991). Additionally, the new independent national democracies that emerged after the fall of communist dictatorships are classified as full democracies. These include the Central European countries of the Czech Republic and Slovakia (established in 1993), the Baltic states (Estonia in 1992, Latvia and Lithuania in 1993), and the former Yugoslav countries Croatia (2000) and Slovenia (1992).

The next group consists of regimes that face challenges but are the closest to being democratic, which can be classified as *'Partial democratisation'*. This category includes 17 countries, among which only one is European: Albania. The rest are primarily African countries, such as Ethiopia (1995), Nigeria (1999), and Tanzania (1995), as well as unstable democracies in Latin America, including Nicaragua (1990) and Paraguay (1993). Additionally, a notable number of post-socialist countries in Europe are also classified as partial democracies, such as Russia (1993), Ukraine (1994), and Moldova (1994), along with the Balkan countries of Macedonia (1991) and Serbia-Montenegro (2000), and Armenia in the Caucasus (1998).

The smallest group of regimes is the *'Borderline and reversals'* group, which includes only 11 countries. Borderline regimes are

defined as those where successful democratic reforms in public administration have occurred, but there are ongoing issues with ensuring rights and freedoms. An example of this is South Africa during the fight against apartheid. Reversal regimes, on the other hand, are characterised by a regression of democracy and a movement toward authoritarianism, as seen in Gambia in 1994 and Zimbabwe in 1987. This '*Borderline and reversals*' group also includes a specific type of regime, classified as '*Intermediate*' and unique to this group: Malaysia and Tonga.

3.2.4 Political Culture and Civil Society Factors

An important element that stabilises democratic regimes is **political culture**. The prevalence of democratic values in a society supports the success of democratic reforms during transitions and enhances the legitimacy of a democratic regime. *Gabriel Almond and Sidney Verba* proposed one of the first typologies of political culture, identifying *three types* in the post-war world:

(1) *Parochial political culture*, which is most suitable for archaic or economically underdeveloped societies,

(2) *Subject political culture*, which typically stabilises authoritarian and totalitarian regimes, and

(3) *Participatory political culture*, which is essential for the stabilisation of a democratic regime (Almond & Verba 1993).

A country's political culture determines whether it adopts a democratic or authoritarian regime. An optimal model of political culture for a developed democracy is civic culture, which enhances society's capacity to influence political decisions effectively (Almond & Verba 1993).

The transformation of democratic regimes at the turn of the 20th and 21st centuries has resulted in the emergence of new values in political culture. For instance, in Europe, this change is often linked to the distinction between Western and Eastern European

cultural values (Janmaat 2006). It is important to take into account the post-communist context and support of democratic values in transitional societies.

Political culture in democratic regimes is underpinned by *three key elements*: (a) *culture*, (b) *structure*, and (c) *process* (Fuchs & Klingemann 2006, 29). Given the cultural specificity of society, predominant values are formed. Traditionally, there is a strong commitment to democracy and an acknowledgement of individual rights and freedoms by the state. The essential components of political culture consist of '*rules and institutions*'. In a democratic political culture, the evaluation of political institutions, whether supportive or critical, should be conducted in line with democratic principles, emphasising the rule of law and tolerance. Furthermore, an important aspect of the political culture process is represented by '*actions*'. In this regard, both political elites and citizens are moving away from relying on coercion and force as a means of political expression. Rather, political compromise is recognised as the primary mechanism for decision-making in the political sphere.

The stability of a democratic regime is influenced by societal fragmentation and divisions between supporters of democratic and authoritarian governance. It is important to explore the distinction between democrats and autocrats, particularly in the context of post-communist societies (See Table 11).

'*Strong democrats*' are citizens who fully support the democratic path of the country's development and do not view authoritarian regimes as a viable alternative to democracy. '*Weak democrats*', on the other hand, are those who generally favour a democratic government but may accept the use of authoritarian methods in certain situations, such as during a government crisis. Meanwhile, '*Autocrats*' actively advocate for authoritarian rule, supporting the restriction of democratic institutions and promoting a return to previous autocratic systems, such as the political revival of the Soviet Union (Klingemann 2006, 4–6). The most unstable societies are those with a large number of '*Undecided citizens*'. In

the context of rising populism and a democratic crisis, this segment of society may align with autocrats.

**Table 11. Society Fragmentation and the Dichotomy
«Democrats – Autocrats», 1999**

Country	Strong Democrats, %	Weak Democrats, %	Autocrats, %	Undecided Citizens, %
USA	44	49	3	4
Norway	60	36	2	2
Poland	20	64	8	8
Czechia	33	62	2	3
Slovakia	34	60	3	3
Bulgaria	11	68	12	9
Latvia	10	76	6	8
Belarus	10	67	12	11
Ukraine	7	67	13	13
Russia	4	54	26	16

Source: drafted by the author according to the research by Hans-Dieter Klingemann, Dieter Fuchs, Susanne Fuchs and Jan Zielonka (2006, 5).

A principal factor in maintaining a stable democratic regime is **the development of civil society**. Civil society and its institutions serve as an important counterbalance to government actions, effectively representing the interests of minority groups. In contemporary global governance, civil society is vital in upholding democratic principles (Scholte 2002, 281). Civil society is essential in strengthening democracy in transitional societies. The establishment of democratic institutions at the political level must be mirrored at the societal level. A well-developed civil society acts as a stabilising force for democratic regimes in Western Europe and serves as a pathway to democratisation in transitional countries (Howard 2003, 31). In the context of transitology, civil society is regarded as a vital channel of communication between the political elite and individual citizens. It is necessary for interest groups, independent of party affiliations, to collaborate and unite in civil society to effectively convey their perspectives (Schmitter & Karl 1991, 79–80). The resilience of civil society is

fundamentally influenced by the depth and stability of democratic institutions.

One indicator of the effectiveness of civil society is the stability of its organisations. According to USAID, the development of civil society in various countries is assessed through the *CSO Sustainability Index* (USAID 2022). Let us examine the interrelationship between the resilience of civil society organisations and the stability of political regimes (See Table 12)

The development of civil society is a key factor in influencing the political elite. In countries where political leaders seek to manipulate public opinion, there is often apparent pressure on these leaders or specific civil society organisations. In contrast, democratic regimes tend to foster an environment that provides the most favourable conditions for the growth and establishment of networks of non-governmental organisations.

Table 12. The Interrelationship between the Resilience of Civil Society Organisations and the Political Regimes' Stability (2013 – 2022)

Country	Years,										
	Indicators: (1) CSO Index, dynamic, (2) Freedom in the World, dynamic										
Hungary	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	
	1	↓	↓	=	↓	↓	=	=	↓	=	
2	↓	↓	↓	↓	↓	↓	=	↓	=	↓	
Egypt	1	↑	=	↓	↓	=	↑	↑	=	—	
	2	↓	↓	↑	↓	↓	=	↓	=	—	
Georgia	1	↑	=	=	=	↑	=	=	=	=	
	2	↑	↑	=	=	↓	↓	↓	↓	=	
Iraq	1	↑	↑	=	=	↑	↑	=	=	—	
	2	↓	↓	↑	=	↑	↓	↓	=	—	
Mexico	1	—	—	—	—	↑	↓	↓	↓	↓	
	2	—	—	—	—	↑	↓	↓	↓	=	

Source: drafted by the author based on the empirical data by CSO Sustainability Index (2022) and Freedom in the World (2024).

CHAPTER 4

DEMOCRATIC POLITICAL REGIMES: A NEW APPROACH

4.1 Concepts of Contemporary Empirical Democratic Regimes

Democratic regimes have emerged as unique features of global political development in the latter half of the 20th century. The distinct trajectories of political developments across various regions, as well as the transformational processes during that period, emphasised the need to revise the traditionally recognised types of democratic regimes. In contemporary political systems, the regime reflects the dynamics of interaction between the political elite and the citizens. An indispensable component of modern democratic regimes is the development of civil society. Further on, we will examine several approaches to understanding the functioning of modern democratic regimes.

4.1.1 Components of Modern Democratic Regimes

Modern democratic governance models must accurately represent the actual levels of political and civil liberties. Implementing general theoretical concepts, such as elitist, pluralistic, or participatory models, can be challenging in practice, especially when it comes to ensuring social stability. The experiences of democratic regimes in the 21st century demonstrate that the success of a democratic government relies on a complex set of conditions, including both historical and current political contexts. Let us examine the *key conditions (or indicators)* that contribute to the stability and future prospects of a functioning democratic regime.

33 main indicators that determine the peculiarities of contemporary democratic regimes (a comparative study conducted by a group of Western political scientists, 2011) (Coppedge et al. 2011, 255–256).

(1) *Sovereignty* – it is a country’s legal capacity to independently formulate and implement domestic and foreign policy, without external influences.

(2) *Authority* – it is the extent to which central power is disseminated throughout the country, as well as the government’s political influence in different regions.

(3) *Elective government* – it is the extent to which executive functions in a country are carried out by officials elected through competitive elections.

(4) *Male suffrage* – it refers to various legal and practical restrictions that may affect adult men’s rights to participate in elections, both in terms of active suffrage and passive suffrage.

(5) *Female suffrage* – it refers to various legal and practical restrictions that may affect adult women’s rights to participate in elections, both in terms of active suffrage and passive suffrage.

(6) *Turnout* – it refers to the level of voter participation in official elections, referendums, and various electoral processes.

(7) *Regular elections* – it is the adherence to the constitutional schedule and the consistency with which these elections are conducted.

(8) *Free elections* – it refers to the regime’s commitment to fundamental principles of transparency in the electoral process. These principles include: (a) fostering political competitiveness among parties and candidates, (b) ensuring a fair competition for voters’ support without government interference, and (c) guaranteeing proportional and accurate counting of votes.

(9) *Access to media and campaign finance* – it refers to the regime’s upholding the integrity of the electoral process to ensure the following: (a) all political parties and candidates have equal access to the media, (b) there is fair and equal financial support

provided for election campaigns, and (c) conditions are established to foster proportional support from the electorate for each political party and candidate.

(10) *Executive rule of law* – it refers to the extent to which the executive branch, e.g. the government, ministries, and individual officials, complies with the principles of legality and established legal acts. In instances of dispute, these principles are subject to interpretation by the Constitution and the courts.

(11) *Executive constraints* – these are the existing and effective constitutional and political methods to limit executive power, which can come from both elected and non-elected authorities.

(12) *Legislative power* – it is the extent of constitutional and political authority exercised by the legislative branch over the executive branch. The concept of ‘*artificial*’ dominance of the legislative branch is relevant only if the form of state envisages it.

(13) *Judicial independence* – it refers to the extent to which the judiciary is free from political or other influences from the executive branch and external factors.

(14) *Judicial review* – it encompasses the extent to which the regime upholds the constitutional review of legislative acts passed by parliament and government resolutions, as well as the degree to which authorities comply with court decisions.

(15) *Party strength* – it encompasses the organisation of a party structure characterised by two fundamental elements: (a) the institutionalisation of political parties as essential participants in the political process, rather than merely as tools for influential political figures, and (b) the centralisation of parties, reflected in a cohesive party policy or a unified election campaign strategy.

(16) *Party ideology* – it refers to the alignment of political parties with specific political ideologies.

(17) *Party system size* – it refers to the number of political parties that have secured seats in national parliaments and the extent of fragmentation within the party system.

(18) *Electoral system proportionality* – it refers to the absence of legislative and political barriers that restrict the representation of small political parties at various levels of government, such as the size of voting districts or electoral thresholds.

(19) *Competitiveness* – it refers to the ‘*electoral distance*’, which is the closeness of the votes between the two candidates who received the highest level of support in a national election.

(20) *Turnover* – it refers to the cyclical nature of political control within the regime, including both party control and individual authority over the executive branch and, if applicable, the most powerful office.

(21) *Media development* – it refers to the media’s independence and their ability to present diverse political views while reaching larger audiences.

(22) *Civil society independence* – it refers to the extent to which civil society and its institutions operate independently from state policy, as well as the ability of civil society organisations and leaders to critique political elites.

(23) *Civil society political engagement* – it refers to the involvement of civil society institutions in the formation of policy through their influence on electoral processes and consultations with government bodies.

(24) *Subnational government elections* – it refers to the regime ensuring the effective operation of elected subnational government bodies through free and transparent elections.

(25) *Unevenness in democratic development* – it refers to the regime maintaining a constitutional and political balance among subnational authorities. The absence of serious separatist threats in the country is due to all subnational governments showing equal respect for the democratic system.

(26) *Direct democracy* – it refers to the political system that enables citizens to engage directly in decision-making processes. This is achieved through mechanisms such as local referendums and plebiscites.

(27) *Civil liberty* – it refers to the extent to which citizens can exercise their freedom of speech and be protected from political persecution by the government.

(28) *Property rights* – it refers to the effective mechanisms for protecting property rights.

(29) *Religious freedom* – it refers to the establishment of an effective mechanism to ensure religious freedom for individuals to practice their beliefs.

(30) *Equal resources* – it refers to cases when regimes guarantee their citizens equal and full access to resources (income level, education, and healthcare) that can influence their involvement in political processes.

(31) *Gender equality* – it refers to the extent to which women achieve equal representation in legislative bodies and government institutions, as well as in senior leadership positions across the country.

(32) *Ethnic equality* – it refers to the regime's establishment of an effective mechanism to safeguard the rights of ethnic groups, including at least two main requirements: (a) formal rights for individuals to vote and hold government positions, and (b) genuine opportunities for these individuals to participate in elections and to hold elected positions in government.

(33) *Inclusive citizenship* – it refers to the extent to which the rights and freedoms of citizens and long-term residents in a country are protected.

All the indicators listed above are essential components of well-functioning democratic regimes. Depending on the specific model of democracy, certain indicators may be more fundamental, but do not contradict others. For instance, in a liberal democracy, '*civil liberty*' is a key indicator, whereas an elitist democracy places more emphasis on '*party strength*'. However, political practice demonstrates the significance of all 33 indicators, irrespective of their priority in a given democratic model.

4.2 Comparative Political Science Approach

The classification of empirical democratic regimes relies on a comprehensive approach developed in 2011 by a group of 14 political scientists (Coppedge et al. 2011). This group subjects the traditional concepts of democratic regimes to constructive criticism by examining them through the lens of functioning democratic systems in the 21st century. Their new classification approach is grounded in a *four-dimensional analysis*: (a) *historical*, (b) *multidimensional*, (c) *disaggregated*, and (d) *transparent* (Coppedge et al. 2011, 247).

Each concept of the modern democratic regime includes *three basic structures*:

- (1) *the basic principle/principles of management*;
- (2) *the dominant question* for each concept to answer;
- (3) *political and civic institutions* that ensure the operation of the democratic regime (Coppedge et al. 2011, 254).

There are six basic concepts of the modern democratic regime (Coppedge et al. 2011, 253–254).

(1) Electoral (elite, minimal, realist, Schumpeterian), main principles: contestation, competition.

Question: *Are government offices filled through free and fair multiparty elections?*

Institutions: *elections, political parties, competitiveness, and turnover*.

The traditional concept of a democratic regime relies on electoral competition. The primary stabilisers of this regime are the political parties and elites, which emerge from competitive elections (Schumpeter 1942). This model represents the most '*limited type of democracy*', often referred to as a minimalist democracy. It is further enhanced by constitutional rights and freedoms, as well as by independent media and judiciary systems.

(2) Liberal (consensus, pluralist), main principles: limited government, multiple veto points, horizontal accountability, individual rights, civil liberties, transparency.

Question: *Is political power decentralized & constrained?*

Institutions: *multiple, independent and decentralised, with special focus on the role of the media, interest groups, the judiciary and a written constitution with explicit guarantees.*

This concept aligns closely with the democratic ideal and is primarily applied at the societal level. It fosters civil rights and political freedoms while effectively reducing the influence of elite groups (Hamilton, Madison & Jay 1992). Within this political framework, majority governments are established, ensuring that the rights and freedoms of minority populations are upheld and not restricted.

(3) Majoritarian (responsible party government), main principles: *majority rule, centralisation, vertical accountability.*

Question: *Does the majority (or plurality) rule?*

Institutions: *consolidated and centralised, with special focus on the role of political parties.*

The term ‘majority’ refers to the rule of the dominant political party, supported by voters in competitive elections. Most political institutions are centralised around party government, reflecting the country’s unitary nature. Majoritarian and plural electoral systems are predominant, while proportional representation is quite rare (Lijphart 1999). The majoritarian model does not contradict the rule of law or the constitutional mechanisms that protect citizens’ rights and freedoms.

(4) Participatory, main principle: *government by the people.*

Question: *Do ordinary citizens participate in politics?*

Institutions: *Election law, civil society, local government, direct democracy.*

This concept is the closest to direct democracy, representing some of the earliest forms of democratic governance. In complex

political systems, participatory democracy should be viewed as a complement to representative democracy and a viable method for local governance. In this model, citizens are directly involved in decision-making processes (Macpherson 1977). Ultimately, participatory democracy holds historical significance as an important form of democracy rather than being a contemporary democratic regime.

(5) Deliberative, main principle: *government by reason*.

Question: *Are political decisions the product of public deliberation?*

Institutions: *media, hearings, panels, other deliberative bodies*.

The deliberative political regime focuses on the overarching public interest: democratic governance. In this process, citizens' private interests are transformed through discussions that lead to democratic decisions (Bohman 1998). To facilitate this dialogue, advisory and consultative bodies are established within the government, the courts, and other institutions (Held 2006). The key principle guiding this approach is the importance of discussing and reaching prior agreement on decisions made.

(6) Egalitarian, main principle: *political equality*.

Question: *Are all citizens equally empowered?*

Institutions: *Designed to ensure equal participation, representation, protection and politically relevant resources*.

The principle of egalitarianism is applied in a specific type of democratic regime. This involves promoting the ideals of equality, implementing them in daily life, and ensuring the fair distribution of resources throughout the country. In addition to political equality, it is crucial to guarantee social equality, which can sometimes conflict with the fundamental democratic principle of 'majority rule' (Dahl 1989). The established mechanisms for distributing resources equitably play a key role in determining the possibility of achieving equality in society.

4.3 Ideal Types of Democratic Regime

(acc. to Benjamin Barber)

The late 20th and early 21st centuries have impacted the complexity of democratic development trajectories in various countries. Democracy is increasingly viewed as an ideal form of governance, regarded as a concrete model of government. The fall of communist regimes, the completion of decolonisation worldwide, and the rise of populism in governments around the globe are blurring the lines between historical forms of democracy and specific types of democratic regimes. *Benjamin Barber* has sought to articulate a framework of modern ideal democratic regimes, drawing on concepts of both ‘*representative*’ and ‘*direct*’ democracy (Barber 2004).

According to the fundamental principles of democracy, there are **two primary forms: (1) Representative Democracy** and **(2) Direct Democracy**. Each of these forms encompasses several ideal types of democratic political regimes. Each political regime is characterised by specific components or indicators.

Basic components (indicators) of a democratic political regime as articulated by Benjamin Barber: (a) Political Mode, (b) Value, (c) Institutional Bias, (d) Citizen Posture, (e) Government Posture, (f) “Independent Ground” | Disguised As (Barber 2004, 241).

The Representative Democracy group includes the following three types of democratic regimes: **(1) Authoritative Regime**, **(2) Juridical Regime**, and **(3) Pluralist Regime**, with every ideal type of democratic regime having a formal definition.

The formal definition of **Authoritative Regime** is as follows: “*Democracy in the authoritative mode resolves conflict in the absence of an independent ground through deferring to a representative executive elite that employs authority (power plus wisdom) in pursuit of the aggregate interests of its electoral constituency*”.

Structure of Authoritative Regime

Political Mode: *authority (power/wisdom)*

Value: *order*

Institutional Bias: *executive*

Citizen Posture: *deferential, unified*

Government Posture: *centralised, active*

Disguised As: *noblesse oblige, wisdom*

The formal definition of **Juridical Regime** is as follows:
“Democracy in the juridical mode resolves conflict in the absence of an independent ground through deferring to a representative judicial elite that, with the guidance of constitutional and preconstitutional norms, arbitrates differences and enforces constitutional rights and duties”.

Structure of Juridical Regime

Political Mode: *arbitration and adjudication*

Value: *right*

Institutional Bias: *juridical*

Citizen Posture: *deferential, fragmented*

Government Posture: *centralised, limited*

Disguised As: *natural right, higher law*

The formal definition of **Pluralist Regime** is as follows:
“Pluralist democracy resolves public conflict in the absence of an independent ground through bargaining and exchange among free and equal individuals and groups, which pursue their private interests in a market setting governed by the social contract”.

Structure of Pluralist Regime

Political Mode: *bargaining and exchange*

Value: *liberty*

Institutional Bias: *legislative*

Citizen Posture: *active, fragmented*

Government Posture: *decentralised, active*

Disguised As: *invisible hand, natural equality, market rules*

The Direct Democracy group includes two types of democratic regimes: **(1) Unitary Regime**, and **(2) Strong Regime**.

The formal definition of **Unitary Regime** is as follows:
“Democracy in the unitary mode resolves conflict in the absence of an independent ground through community consensus as

defined by the identification of individuals and their interests with a symbolic collectivity and its interests”.

Structure of Unitary Regime

Political Mode: *consensus*

Value: *unity*

Institutional Bias: *symbolic*

Citizen Posture: *active, unified*

Government Posture: *centralised, active*

Disguised As: *the collective, the general will*

The formal definition of **Strong Regime** is as follows: “*Strong democracy in the participatory mode resolves conflict in the absence of an independent ground through a participatory process of ongoing, proximate self-legislation and the creation of a political community capable of transforming dependent private individuals into free citizens and partial and private interests into public goods*”.

Structure of Strong Regime

Political Mode: *participation*

Value: *activity*

Institutional Bias: *populist*

Citizen Posture: *active centralising*

Government Posture: *decentralising active*

Disguised As: *(no “independent ground”)*

At the turn of the 20th and 21st centuries, the very concept of democracy as the rule of the people has been subjected to critical examination. In this context, the notion of a ‘*thin*’ democracy emerges as a potential alternative to traditional liberal democracy (Barber 2004, 4). Modern democratic regimes typically operate through representative democracy. By electing political representatives, such as deputies and other officials, citizens often deepen their own political apathy and reluctance to engage actively in political life. In contrast to ‘*thin*’ democracy, ‘**strong**’ democracy aligns more closely with the principles of direct democracy (Barber 2004, 117). ‘*Strong democracy*’ shows that relying solely on passive voting to elect government representatives can undermine the essential principles of democratic governance.

There are twelve distinct forms of institutionalisation that characterise strong democracy in contemporary society (Barber 2004, 267–307):

(1) *'Neighbourhood Assemblies'* (from one to five thousand citizens),

(2) *'Television Town Meetings and a Civic Communications Cooperative'*,

(3) *'Civic Education and Equal Access to Information'* (a Civic Education Postal Act and a Civic Videotex Service),

(4) *'Supplementary Institutions'* (town meetings, office-holding by lottery, etc.),

(5) *'A National Initiative and Referendum Process'*,

(6) *'Electronic Balloting'*,

(7) *'Election by Lottery'* (sortition, rotation, pay),

(8) *'Vouchers and the Market Approach to Public Choice'*,

(9) *'National Citizenship and Common Action'* (Universal Citizen Service and related training and employment opportunities),

(10) *'Neighbourhood Citizenship and Common Action'* (at Local Level),

(11) *'Democracy in the Workplace'*,

(12) *'Building a New Architecture of Civic and Public Space'*.

CHAPTER 5

EMPIRICAL PROSPECTS OF THE DEMOCRATIC POLITICAL REGIME

The rapid spread of democracy worldwide at the end of the 20th century does not imply the establishment of stable democratic political regimes. *Firstly*, newly formed democracies must receive adequate support from both the political elite and civil society in order to thrive. Democratic regimes, established over a period of two to three years, required political elites to ensure adherence to democratic governance principles, thereby enhancing their legitimacy in society. *Secondly*, many citizens expect substantial financial guarantees from new democracies, which often poses a challenge. The potential successes of political transformation need to be bolstered by positive economic dynamics and financial incentives for citizens. *Thirdly*, the success of democratic transitions in post-socialist countries did not always ensure the stability of democratic regimes. In the early 2000s, for instance, illiberal forms of democracy began to emerge, particularly in Hungary.

This analysis will explore the empirical dimensions of modern democratic regimes, employing insights from global monitoring centres as a primary resource.

5.1 Freedom in the World Ranking

The leading American research organisation provides a range of monitoring programmes dedicated to analysing the status and future prospects of democratic regimes. One of its comprehensive initiatives, which examines developments worldwide, is

‘Freedom in the World’ (Freedom in the World 2025). Annually, comprehensive reports summarising the dynamics of democratic regimes are published.

From a methodological perspective, a democratic regime is defined by its institutional capacity to ensure civil liberties and political rights in a country. The framework of this regime allows for a maximum provision of *political rights* at 40%, while *civil liberties* can be ensured at a maximum level of 60%. Based on a country’s adherence to specific indicators, it can be classified into one of *three categories*: ‘*free*’, ‘*partly free*’, or ‘*not free*’. Only those countries that qualify as ‘*free*’ are recognised as democratic regimes.

The calculations for each country are performed using indicators of ‘*political rights*’ and ‘*civil liberties*’ (See Table 13).

Table 13. Components of a Political Regime as Outlined by the Freedom in the World Programme for 2025

Spheres	Indicators	Adherence to a Democratic Regime
Political Rights	Electoral process	
	Political pluralism and participation	18 – 40%
	Functioning of the government	(max. – 40%)
Civil Liberties	Freedom of expression and belief	
	Associational and organisational rights	34 – 60%
	Rule of Law	(max. – 60%)
	Personal autonomy and individual rights	

Source: drafted by the author based on the empirical data from Freedom in the World (Freedom House 2026).

The *main trends in the dynamics of democratic regimes*, as outlined by the Freedom in the World programme, are the following (Freedom in the World 2026):

(1) Over the past several decades, there has been a *noticeable decline in democratic regimes* and a decrease in the effectiveness of various indicators of democracy. A comprehensive analysis of nearly 200 countries and territories reveals the following findings:

in 2005, democracy strengthened in 83 countries while it deteriorated in 53. However, as of 2025, democracy has strengthened in only 35 countries and deteriorated in 54.

(2) *The global decline in ‘quality’ democracies* is evident worldwide. In 2025, the deterioration of democracy notably affected the USA, Hungary, Bulgaria, Russia, Mali, Thailand, Turkey, Mexico, Yemen, and others.

(3) The primary factors contributing to the decline of democracy were the following *four*: (a) *Violence and armed conflict* – typical regimes in Saudi Arabia, Central African Republic, Ukraine, (b) *Military coups* – Mali, Burkina Faso, Niger, (c) *Erosion of democratic institutions* – Hungary, Egypt, Georgia, (d) *Authoritarian repression* – Azerbaijan, Belarus.

(4) As of 2025, statistics on *the dynamics of democratic regimes* show that out of 195 countries, 88 are classified as ‘*free*’ and meet the criteria for a democratic system. The remaining countries fall into two categories: 48 are considered ‘*partly free*’ and classified as semi-democratic, while 59 are categorised as ‘*not free*’, indicating non-democratic regimes.

(5) As of 2025, *the distribution of the world’s population* by the type of democratic regime is as follows: 21% of people live in countries classified as ‘*free*’, which are fully democratic; 39% reside in ‘*partly free*’ countries, which have hybrid regimes; and 40% of the population lives in ‘*not free*’ countries, with non-democratic regimes.

5.2 Bertelsmann Political Transformation Index

The Bertelsmann Foundation’s monitoring studies offer a thorough examination of the prospects for democratic regimes. Below are the specifics of the empirical calculations undertaken in this research:

(a) Countries undergoing transformation are examined (a total of 137 countries). This ranking excludes countries with stable

democratic regimes that have been in place for decades, such as Anglo-Saxon nations and those in Western Europe;

(b) To analyse the regime’s dynamics, two- to three-year intervals are used; for instance, the current report published in 2026 covers changes in the world from February 1, 2023, to January 31, 2025;

(c) Regime transformation is analysed in *three dimensions: politics, economy, and governance*. Each dimension is measured by a distinct index: *the Political Transformation Index, the Economic Transformation Index, and the Governance Index* (BTI 2026).

Let us explore the procedures and indicators of *the Political Transformation Index*, along with potential options for the functioning of democratic regimes (See Table 14).

Democratic regimes’ dynamics prospects according to the **Bertelsmann Political Transformation Index, 2026** (Transformation Atlas 2026):

(1) Out of 137 countries studied, only 16 are classified as having the most developed democratic regimes, known as ‘*democracy in consolidation*’. In percentage terms, this means that only 11,67% of these countries meet the standards of a functioning democracy, excluding traditional Western models.

(2) *The regime of consolidated democracy*, while exceptional, is increasingly common worldwide. The largest concentration of consolidated democracies is found in the post-socialist region, which includes the three Baltic countries, Slovenia and Croatia in the Balkans, as well as Poland, the Czech Republic, and Slovakia. Notable examples in Latin America include Uruguay, Chile, Costa Rica, Jamaica, and Trinidad and Tobago. In Asia, South Korea and Taiwan serve as models of consolidated democracies, while Botswana stands out as the only example in Africa.

(3) The largest category of democratic regimes is known as ‘*defective democracies*’, which encompasses 35 countries. This diverse group includes nations from various parts of the world that

meet the institutional criteria of democracy but often experience significant challenges in their democratic functioning. These regimes are particularly evident in South America (e.g., Brazil and Argentina), Africa (e.g., South Africa), and the post-communist region (e.g., Ukraine, Moldova, and Romania). Additionally, India and Mongolia also fall under the category of defective democracies.

(4) The third category of democratic regimes consists of what are known as *'highly defective democracies'*. This group includes only eight countries. These regimes operate within a democratic framework, featuring regular elections, insubstantial political violence, and the presence of political opposition, but they still require significant democratic reforms. Notable examples of such regimes include Mexico, Peru, Indonesia, and Bosnia and Herzegovina.

(5) Among the 137 countries in transition, authoritarian regimes are prevalent, numbering 77 in total. 25 countries are classified as *'moderate autocracies'*. The most rigid and undemocratic regime category, known as *'hard-line autocracies'*, comprises 52 countries, twice as many as moderate autocracies. These undemocratic regimes are primarily found in some of the most densely populated countries, such as China, Turkey, and a significant portion of northern Africa (with India being an exception). Geographically, undemocratic regimes are most concentrated in Eurasia and Africa, while their presence is less dominant in Latin America and parts of the post-communist regions.

Table 14. Components of the Political Transformation Index and Types of Democratic Regimes according to the Bertelsmann Transformation Index Methodology (2026)

Procedures	Indicators	Potential Types of a Democratic Regime
Stateness	Monopoly on the use of force State identity No interference with religious dogmas Basic administration	<i>Democracy in Consolidation</i>
Political participation	Free and fair elections Effective power to govern Association/assembly rights Freedom of expression	<i>Defective Democracy</i>
Rule of law	Separation of powers Independent judiciary Prosecution of office abuse Civil rights	<i>Highly Defective</i>
Stability of democratic institutions	Performance of democratic institutions Commitment of democratic institutions	<i>Democracy</i>
Political and social integration	Party system Interest groups Approval of democracy Social capital	

Source: drafted by the author based on the empirical data from the Bertelsmann Political Transformation Index (BTI 2026).

5.3 Varieties of Democracy Monitoring

An alternative approach to the study of modern democratic regimes is presented by a group of European political scientists as part of the **V-Dem project** (V-Dem 2026). The V-Dem offers a distinct perspective compared to traditional monitoring organisations, such as Freedom House, by concentrating on the

authoritarian processes rather than democratisation. Notably, experts have presented the concept of a ‘*third wave of authoritarianism*’, which originated in 1994 with instances of authoritarian rule in Russia, Belarus, and Armenia, and has since expanded internationally (Lührmann & Lindberg 2019, p. 1107).

To classify a specific type of political regime, the experts at V-Dem have developed *six foundational indices*. Each index measures a distinct component of democratic governance: (a) *Liberal democracy index*, (b) *Electoral democracy index*, (c) *Liberal component index*, (d) *Egalitarian component index*, (e) *Participatory component index*, and (f) *Deliberative component index* (Nord et al. 2026, 48).

The total of all indices determines the type of political regime, which can be positioned on a spectrum ranging from Autocratizing Countries to Democratizing Countries (See Table 15).

Table 15. Political Regime Types by Direction ‘Autocratizing – Democratizing Countries’ (2026)

Types of Regimes		Main procedures
Democratization	Liberal Democracy	Judicial constraints on the executive power Protection of civil liberties Equality before the law
	Electoral Democracy	Multiparty elections Free and fair elections Satisfactory level (suffrage, freedom of expression, freedom of association)
Autocratization	Electoral Autocracy	Multiparty elections Insufficient level (freedom of expression and association) Insufficient level (free and fair elections)
	Closed Autocracy	No multiparty elections Absence (freedom of expression and association) Absence (free and fair elections)

Source: drafted by the author based on the empirical data from V-Dem (Nord et al. 2026, 14).

Democratic Regimes Dynamics according to V-Dem, 2025
(Nord et al. 2026):

(1) As of 2025, *authoritarian regimes are prevalent worldwide*. Statistics indicate that 92 countries are governed by authoritarian regimes, compared to 87 with democratic regimes. The vast majority of the global population, approximately 75% (around six billion people), resides in countries with authoritarian rule. In contrast, only about 7% of the world’s population (roughly 600 million people) live in countries with fully functioning democratic systems, specifically liberal democracies.

(2) The *greatest threats to democratic regimes* are internal authoritarianism and the decline of democratic institutions. Notable examples of countries experiencing noticeable authoritarian processes within their democratic frameworks include several EU member-states, specifically Croatia, Italy, Slovenia, and Slovakia, as well as the United Kingdom and the United States. The primary tools used by these authoritarian regimes have been (a) censorship and restrictions on media freedom, and (b) repression of civil society.

(3) The processes of democratisation in various regimes *have diminished considerably*. Currently, only 18 countries are still moving towards democratisation, and only three new democratic regimes have emerged. A striking example of authoritarianism’s superiority over democratisation is the USA under the administration of Donald Trump, during which virtually all democratic indicators have worsened.

(4) *The leaders in democratic rankings* are the Scandinavian countries: Denmark, Sweden, and Norway. Among post-communist nations, the most successful are Estonia, which ranks fifth, and the Czech Republic, which ranks eleventh. In Western Europe, excluding Switzerland, which ranks fourth, France has the highest democratic rating, coming in at ninth place. The United Kingdom is ranked 30th, while the United States is in 50th place. At the bottom of the democratic regime rankings are Eritrea, in 179th place, and North Korea, in 178th place.

(5) In addition to the traditional democratic and authoritarian types of political regimes, there are intermediate types known as ‘grey zone’ regimes. These can be further classified according to their proximity to democratic or authoritarian governance. Specifically, there are (a) *democratic grey zones*, such as Moldova, and (b) *autocratic grey zones*, such as Ukraine. Quantitatively, these transitional regimes are significantly less prevalent than classical democratic or authoritarian regimes.

CONCLUSIONS

The classification of political regimes represents a complex area in modern comparative political science. Traditionally, scholars classify regimes into three primary categories: totalitarian, authoritarian, and democratic. However, the trend towards democratisation, accompanied by decolonisation efforts in the latter half of the 20th century, the dissolution of communist regimes, and the emergence of various hybrid systems, has necessitated the search for new methodologies to categorise contemporary political regimes. The first two decades of the 21st century have been marked by notable changes in political landscapes worldwide, illustrating dynamic processes within authoritarianisation-democratisation dichotomy.

A totalitarian regime, which actively fosters state violence while eliminating political competition and civil rights, is traditionally regarded as the most extreme form of political regime. Historically, totalitarian regimes, such as national socialist, communist, or theocratic, are largely associated with the 20th century. In the contemporary landscape of the 21st century, North Korea and Eritrea can serve as examples that closely align with the characteristics of severe totalitarianism.

Authoritarian regimes exist on a spectrum between totalitarianism, which involves the centralisation of power, and democracy, which provides certain freedoms and allows for political competition. These regimes are frequently characterised by institutional dualism and exhibit a high degree of instability, continuously searching for new sources of legitimacy. The typology of authoritarian regimes is extensive, ranging from absolute monarchies to military governments. The recent trend toward authoritarianisation in contemporary political systems evokes concern and warrants careful consideration.

In contemporary discourse, the definition, functionality, and prospects of democratic regimes are subjects of heated debate. Various socio-economic factors, including the economic well-being of citizens, the socio-cultural environment, and the openness of the political culture, are essential in stabilising democratic systems. Civil society serves as an important counterbalance to the political elite, and the level of its development can effectively constrain the potential for authoritarianism. Modern democratic regimes, often classified as ‘*democracies in action*’ or ‘*functioning democracies*’, are situated between representative and direct democracy.

Data from leading monitoring centres, including Freedom House (Freedom in the World), the Bertelsmann Political Transformation Index, and Varieties of Democracy, indicate that authoritarianism currently is becoming more dominant than democratisation on a global scale. A substantial majority of countries and their populations live under autocratic regimes. The democratisation trend appears to have reached a stagnant point, with the deterioration of democratic institutions posing a threat to the future of democratic governance.

The second part of the handbook serves to enhance the first by offering a typology of political regimes. I sincerely hope that both parts provide a thorough and insightful perspective on the academic discipline titled “Resources and Structure of Political Regimes”.

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Resources and Structure of Political Regimes. Part 2.
Handbook.

© Department of Political Science
Faculty of Philosophy and Arts
Trnava University

Hornopotočná 23, 918 43 Trnava; ff.truni.sk
ISBN 978-80-568-0853-5



TRNAVA - 2026