Government Systems

Figures current as of October 2026

How the world's states are governed: monarchies, democracies, hybrid regimes, autocracies, theocracies, juntas, technocracies, and federations, and the ideologies behind them, measured, compared, and tested against the record of 2025 and 2026.

MODULE 1 — Foundations: What a Government System Is

Goal: Establish the questions, the measures, and the count.

Who rules, how power is constrained, and how the economy is organized; the four indices and their 2026 editions; the world's regimes by number and by population; and why systems differ.

MODULE 2 — A Brief History: The Waves and the Reverse Waves

Goal: Trace how regime types rose, fell, and spread.

From city-states and empires through three waves of democracy and their reversals; the democratic recession of 2006-26; and what history says about where regimes come from.

MODULE 3 — Monarchy

Goal: Cover the oldest form and its 43 survivors.

Absolute, semi-constitutional, and constitutional monarchies; the Gulf's rentier absolutism in the year of the Iran war; Britain, Japan, Thailand, and Morocco; and succession, from Norway's routine handover to the Gulf's risk.

MODULE 4 — Democracy I: The Institutional Designs

Goal: Explain how democracies are built and why the design matters.

Presidential, parliamentary, and semi-presidential systems, with the argument over Linz's perils of presidentialism; electoral systems, with one vote worked four ways; and second chambers, courts, and the other veto players.

MODULE 5 — Democracy II: How Democracies Work and Fail

Goal: Read the 2025-26 election record and the American debate.

Two dozen elections from Germany to Brazil's first round; coalitions and France's governments; how democracies die now, and how South Korea's survived; and whether the United States is backsliding, argued both ways.

MODULE 6 — Authoritarianism

Goal: Cover the varieties of non-democratic rule and how they hold power.

Personalist, single-party, military, monarchic, and theocratic regimes; coercion, co-optation, and legitimation; why autocracies last; and the autocratic network against a strained democratic alliance, argued both ways.

MODULE 7 — Totalitarianism and Its Afterlives

Goal: Distinguish total control from ordinary dictatorship and find its modern forms.

The criteria of Arendt, of Friedrich and Brzezinski, and of Linz; the twentieth-century regimes; the survivors, North Korea and Eritrea; whether China and Russia are moving back toward the model, argued both ways; and the digital toolkit.

MODULE 8 — Hybrid Regimes and Competitive Authoritarianism

Goal: Cover the regimes whose elections an opposition can contest but not win, and 2026's turning point.

The playbook in Turkey, Serbia, Georgia, El Salvador, and Tanzania; Hungary's defeat and Magyar's first months, restoration or repetition, argued both ways; Poland's frozen restoration; India's contested classification, argued both ways; and how hybrids end.

MODULE 9 — Theocracy and Religion in Politics

Goal: Cover rule by religious authority and religion's role in other systems.

The spectrum from theocracy to state atheism; Iran's succession in wartime, and whether the Guards now rule, argued both ways; the Taliban; the Vatican and Riyadh; and religion inside democracies, from Israel's draft crisis to India.

MODULE 10 — Military Rule and the Return of the Coup

Goal: Explain why soldiers took power again in the 2020s.

Eleven successful coups in Africa from 2020 to 2025; the Sahel's juntas and their alliance; why coups returned, and whether the juntas deliver, argued both ways; Pakistan's field marshal and the army behind civilian rule; and a coup's survival, worked.

MODULE 11 — Technocracy, Meritocracy, and the Administrative State

Goal: Cover rule by experts and its contest with elected power.

Four forms of rule by experts; central banks and statisticians under political pressure, from Turkey to Argentina; China's and Singapore's meritocracies and their critics; and whether expertise should be insulated, argued both ways through the American overhaul.

MODULE 12 — Federalism, Unitary States, and Secession

Goal: Cover how power is divided within states and when they break.

The federations and their 2026 stresses; Quebec's sovereigntist government, Alberta's referendum, Scotland, Catalonia, the Serb Republic, and Somaliland; whether federalism holds countries together or pulls them apart, argued both ways; and the European Union.

MODULE 13 — The Economic Axis: Capitalism, Socialism, and Communism

Goal: Cover the ideologies of the economy and the systems they built.

From central planning to the libertarian experiment; Cuba and the remnants of planning; the state's return under left and right; and two experiments argued both ways, Milei's Argentina and Mamdani's New York.

MODULE 14 — The 21st-Century Contest: Liberalism, Populism, Nationalism, and the New Left

Goal: Cover the ideologies fighting over the 2020s.

The four ideas competing inside the democracies; the populist right by country, with the latest polls; inclusion against the cordon; whether populism threatens or corrects democracy, argued both ways; and liberalism's answers.

MODULE 15 — How Regimes Perform

Goal: Compare the systems on growth, corruption, health, war, and survival.

The scorecard on famine, war, corruption, growth, and building; whether democracy causes growth, argued both ways; and wealth, oil, and the regimes they produce.

MODULE 16 — Stability, Transition, and Collapse

Goal: Explain how regimes change and how states fail.

The 2024-26 ledger from Syria to Venezuela, Bangladesh, and Nepal; the youth uprisings and what decided them; Venezuela's transition, and the legality of the operation, argued both ways; and the failed states from Sudan to Haiti and Congo.

MODULE 17 — Where Things Stand, and What to Watch

Goal: Close with the argument, the turning points, the contradictions, and the dates.

The course in one argument; seven turning points and one lesson; five contradictions; a dated watch list from October 2026 on; and a last word.

A note on the ratings and the dates: the course rates regimes with four indices, all published in the spring of 2026 (Module 1). Each measures calendar 2025, so the changes of government of 2026, Hungary's among them, will enter next year's editions. Leaders, offices, and ages are as of October 15, 2026. Votes still to come, Brazil's runoff on October 25, Israel's election on October 27, and the American midterms on November 3, appear as dated items to watch (Module 17).

Leaders, as of October 15, 2026

Who holds power in the states the course discusses, and how they are rated

State	Leader and office	Age	In office since (years)	Freedom House 2026	V-Dem class, 2025
Afghanistan	Hibatullah Akhundzada, Supreme Leader (Taliban emir)	about 59	Aug 15, 2021 (5)	8 Not Free	Closed autocracy
Argentina	Javier Milei, President	55	Dec 10, 2023 (2)	85 Free	Electoral democracy
Bangladesh	Tarique Rahman, Prime Minister	57	Feb 17, 2026 (7 mo)	44 Partly Free	Closed autocracy
Belarus	Alexander Lukashenko, President	72	Jul 20, 1994 (32)	7 Not Free	Closed autocracy
Benin	Romuald Wadagni, President	50	May 24, 2026 (4 mo)	61 Partly Free	Electoral autocracy
Bolivia	Rodrigo Paz, President	59	Nov 8, 2025 (11 mo)	69 Free	Electoral democracy
Brazil	Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, President	80	Jan 1, 2023 (3)	73 Free	Electoral democracy
Burkina Faso	Capt. Ibrahim Traoré, President of the transition	38	Sep 30, 2022 (4)	20 Not Free	Closed autocracy
Cambodia	Hun Manet, Prime Minister Hun Sen, Senate president and party chairman	48 74	Aug 22, 2023 (3) Apr 3, 2024 (2)	22 Not Free	Electoral autocracy
Cameroon	Paul Biya, President	93	Nov 6, 1982 (43)	15 Not Free	Electoral autocracy
Canada	Mark Carney, Prime Minister	61	Mar 14, 2025 (1)	97 Free	Electoral democracy
Chile	José Antonio Kast, President	60	Mar 11, 2026 (7 mo)	95 Free	Liberal democracy
China	Xi Jinping, General Secretary and President	73	Nov 15, 2012 (13)	9 Not Free	Closed autocracy
Colombia	Abelardo de la Espriella, President	48	Aug 7, 2026 (2 mo)	69 Free	Electoral democracy
Cuba	Miguel Díaz-Canel, President and party First Secretary	66	Oct 10, 2019 (7)	9 Not Free	Closed autocracy
Czechia	Andrej Babiš, Prime Minister	72	Dec 9, 2025 (10 mo)	95 Free	Liberal democracy
Egypt	Abdel Fattah el-Sisi, President	71	Jun 8, 2014 (12)	18 Not Free	Electoral autocracy
El Salvador	Nayib Bukele, President	45	Jun 1, 2019 (7)	42 Partly Free	Electoral autocracy
Eritrea	Isaias Afwerki, President	80	May 24, 1993 (33)	3 Not Free	Closed autocracy
Ethiopia	Abiy Ahmed, Prime Minister	50	Apr 2, 2018 (8)	18 Not Free	Electoral autocracy
France	Emmanuel Macron, President Sébastien Lecornu, Prime Minister	48 40	May 14, 2017 (9) Sep 9, 2025 (1)	89 Free	Liberal democracy

State	Leader and office	Age	In office since (years)	Freedom House 2026	V-Dem class, 2025
Gabon	Brice Oligui Nguema, President	51	Aug 30, 2023 (3)	25 Not Free	Electoral autocracy
Georgia	Irakli Kobakhidze, Prime Minister Bidzina Ivanishvili, Georgian Dream's founder (no state office)	48 70	Feb 8, 2024 (2) —	51 Partly Free	Electoral autocracy
Germany	Friedrich Merz, Chancellor	70	May 6, 2025 (1)	95 Free	Liberal democracy
Guinea	Gen. Mamady Doumbouya, President	41	Sep 5, 2021 (5)	28 Not Free	Closed autocracy
Guinea-Bissau	Maj. Gen. Horta Inta-A Na Man, transitional President	not published	Nov 27, 2025 (10 mo)	33 Partly Free	Closed autocracy
Haiti	Alix Didier Fils-Aimé, Prime Minister and sole executive	54	Nov 10, 2024 (1)	22 Not Free	Closed autocracy
Hungary	Péter Magyar, Prime Minister	45	May 9, 2026 (5 mo)	65 Partly Free	Electoral autocracy
India	Narendra Modi, Prime Minister	76	May 26, 2014 (12)	62 Partly Free	Electoral autocracy
Indonesia	Prabowo Subianto, President	74	Oct 20, 2024 (1)	56 Partly Free	Electoral autocracy
Iran	Mojtaba Khamenei, Supreme Leader Masoud Pezeshkian, President	57 72	Mar 8, 2026 (7 mo) Jul 28, 2024 (2)	10 Not Free	Electoral autocracy
Israel	Benjamin Netanyahu, Prime Minister	76	Dec 29, 2022 (3)	73 Free	Electoral democracy
Italy	Giorgia Meloni, Prime Minister	49	Oct 22, 2022 (3)	87 Free	Liberal democracy
Japan	Naruhito, Emperor Sanae Takaichi, Prime Minister	66 65	May 1, 2019 (7) Oct 21, 2025 (11 mo)	96 Free	Liberal democracy
Jordan	Abdullah II, King	64	Feb 7, 1999 (27)	34 Partly Free	Closed autocracy
Kazakhstan	Kassym-Jomart Tokayev, President	73	Mar 20, 2019 (7)	23 Not Free	Electoral autocracy
Kuwait	Mishal al-Ahmad al-Jaber al-Sabah, Emir	86	Dec 16, 2023 (2)	30 Not Free	Closed autocracy
Madagascar	Col. Michael Randrianirina, President of the transition	about 52	Oct 17, 2025 (11 mo)	50 Partly Free	Closed autocracy
Mali	Gen. Assimi Goïta, President	42	May 24, 2021 (5)	21 Not Free	Closed autocracy
Mexico	Claudia Sheinbaum, President	64	Oct 1, 2024 (2)	58 Partly Free	Electoral autocracy
Morocco	Mohammed VI, King Fatima Ezzahra El Mansouri, Head of Government	63 50	Jul 23, 1999 (27) Sep 29, 2026 (2 wks)	37 Partly Free	Closed autocracy
Myanmar	Min Aung Hlaing, President (army chief 2011-26)	70	Apr 10, 2026 (6 mo)	4 Not Free	Closed autocracy
Nepal	Balendra (Balen) Shah, Prime Minister	36	Mar 27, 2026 (6 mo)	59 Partly Free	Electoral democracy

State	Leader and office	Age	In office since (years)	Freedom House 2026	V-Dem class, 2025
Netherlands	Rob Jetten, Prime Minister	39	Feb 23, 2026 (7 mo)	97 Free	Liberal democracy
Nicaragua	Daniel Ortega, Co-President Rosario Murillo, Co-President	80 75	Jan 10, 2007 (19) Feb 18, 2025 (1)	14 Not Free	Electoral autocracy
Niger	Gen. Abdourahamane Tiani, President	not published	Jul 28, 2023 (3)	27 Not Free	Closed autocracy
Nigeria	Bola Tinubu, President	74	May 29, 2023 (3)	44 Partly Free	Electoral democracy
North Korea	Kim Jong Un, General Secretary	about 42	Dec 17, 2011 (14)	3 Not Free	Closed autocracy
Norway	Haakon VIII, King Jonas Gahr Støre, Prime Minister	53 66	Aug 28, 2026 (1 mo) Oct 14, 2021 (5)	99 Free	Liberal democracy
Pakistan	Shehbaz Sharif, Prime Minister Field Marshal Asim Munir, Chief of Defence Forces and army chief	75 about 58	Mar 4, 2024 (2) Nov 29, 2022 (3)	32 Partly Free	Electoral autocracy
Peru	Keiko Fujimori, President	51	Jul 28, 2026 (2 mo)	66 Partly Free	Electoral democracy
Poland	Karol Nawrocki, President Donald Tusk, Prime Minister	43 69	Aug 6, 2025 (1) Dec 13, 2023 (2)	82 Free	Electoral democracy
Qatar	Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani, Emir	46	Jun 25, 2013 (13)	25 Not Free	Closed autocracy
Romania	Nicușor Dan, President (a caretaker government since May 5, 2026)	56	May 26, 2025 (1)	83 Free	Electoral democracy
Russia	Vladimir Putin, President (prime minister 2008-12)	74	May 7, 2000 (26)	12 Not Free	Electoral autocracy
Rwanda	Paul Kagame, President	68	Apr 22, 2000 (26)	21 Not Free	Electoral autocracy
Saudi Arabia	Salman bin Abdulaziz, King Mohammed bin Salman, Crown Prince and Prime Minister	90 41	Jan 23, 2015 (11) Jun 21, 2017 (9)	9 Not Free	Closed autocracy
Serbia	Ana Brnabić, acting President Aleksandar Vučić, ruling-party leader (president 2017-26)	51 56	Sep 27, 2026 (2 wks) —	53 Partly Free	Electoral autocracy
Singapore	Lawrence Wong, Prime Minister	53	May 15, 2024 (2)	48 Partly Free	Electoral autocracy
South Korea	Lee Jae-myung, President	62	Jun 4, 2025 (1)	83 Free	Liberal democracy
Spain	Pedro Sánchez, Prime Minister	54	Jun 2, 2018 (8)	91 Free	Liberal democracy
Sudan	Gen. Abdel Fattah al-Burhan, army chief and Sovereignty Council chair Mohamed Hamdan Dagalo (Hemedti), Rapid Support Forces commander	66 early 50s	Aug 21, 2019 (7) —	1 Not Free	Closed autocracy
Syria	Ahmed al-Sharaa, President	43	Jan 29, 2025 (1)	10 Not Free	Closed autocracy
Thailand	Vajiralongkorn, King Anutin Charnvirakul, Prime Minister	74 60	Oct 13, 2016 (10) Sep 7, 2025 (1)	33 Not Free	Electoral autocracy

State	Leader and office	Age	In office since (years)	Freedom House 2026	V-Dem class, 2025
Turkey	Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, President (prime minister 2003-14)	72	Mar 14, 2003 (23)	32 Not Free	Electoral autocracy
Uganda	Yoweri Museveni, President	82	Jan 29, 1986 (40)	33 Not Free	Electoral autocracy
United Arab Emirates	Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan, President	65	May 14, 2022 (4)	18 Not Free	Closed autocracy
United Kingdom	Charles III, King Andy Burnham, Prime Minister	77 56	Sep 8, 2022 (4) Jul 20, 2026 (2 mo)	92 Free	Electoral democracy
United States	Donald Trump, President (also 2017-21)	80	Jan 20, 2025 (1)	81 Free	Electoral democracy
Venezuela	Delcy Rodríguez, acting President	57	Jan 5, 2026 (9 mo)	13 Not Free	Electoral autocracy
Vietnam	To Lam, General Secretary (and President since Apr 7, 2026)	69	Aug 3, 2024 (2)	20 Not Free	Closed autocracy
Zimbabwe	Emmerson Mnangagwa, President	84	Nov 24, 2017 (8)	25 Not Free	Electoral autocracy
The Vatican	Leo XIV, Pope	71	May 8, 2025 (1)	—	—
European Union	Ursula von der Leyen, Commission President António Costa, European Council President	68 65	Dec 1, 2019 (6) Dec 1, 2024 (1)	—	—

Ages and years in office as of October 15, 2026. For leaders who held power continuously in another office, the date is the earliest (Putin and Erdoğan). Freedom House: *Freedom in the World 2026*, total score out of 100 and status. V-Dem: the Regimes of the World class for 2025 in the *Democracy Report 2026*; Hungary's and Bangladesh's 2026 changes of government are not yet reflected. Akhundzada's, Kim Jong Un's, and Munir's birth years are disputed or unpublished; Tiani and Horta Inta-A have not published theirs.

Who's Who, as of October 15, 2026

The parties, institutions, and people the course names; the rulers are in the leaders table

Parties, Movements, and Armed Groups

Name	Country	Who they are
Alternative for Germany (AfD)	Germany	The far-right opposition party
ANO (Action of Dissatisfied Citizens)	Czechia	Andrej Babiš's populist party, governing since December 2025
Awami League	Bangladesh	Sheikh Hasina's party, governing from 2009 to 2024
Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP)	Bangladesh	The governing party since February 2026
Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)	India	Narendra Modi's Hindu nationalist party, governing since 2014
Brothers of Italy (FdI)	Italy	Giorgia Meloni's national-conservative party, governing since 2022
Chega	Portugal	The populist right
Christian Democratic Union and Christian Social Union (CDU/CSU)	Germany	Chancellor Friedrich Merz's center-right alliance
Communist Party of China	China	The ruling party
D66 (Democrats 66)	Netherlands	Rob Jetten's social-liberal party, leading a minority cabinet
Fidesz	Hungary	Viktor Orbán's party, governing from 2010 to 2026
Freedom Party (FPÖ)	Austria	The far right, in opposition
Georgian Dream	Georgia	The governing party since 2012
Houthis (Ansar Allah)	Yemen	The movement ruling the capital and the north
Institutional Revolutionary Party	Mexico	Ruled without interruption from 1929 to 2000
Jamaat-e-Islami	Bangladesh	The main Islamist party
JNIM (Jama'at Nusrat al-Islam wal-Muslimin)	The Sahel	Al-Qaeda's regional affiliate
Kuomintang	Taiwan	Ruled Taiwan alone until its democratization in the 1990s
Labour Party	United Kingdom	Governing since July 2024
Law and Justice (PiS)	Poland	National-conservative; governed from 2015 to 2023
Liberal Democratic Party (LDP)	Japan	Governing for most of the time since 1955
Movement for Socialism (MAS)	Bolivia	Governed from 2006 to 2019 and from 2020 to 2025
March 23 Movement (M23)	Democratic Republic of the Congo	Rebels holding much of the east
Morena (National Regeneration Movement)	Mexico	The left-populist governing party since 2018
National Rally (RN)	France	Marine Le Pen's party, the populist right
New Party	Turkey	Founded in 2026 by deputies of the main opposition party
Parti Québécois (PQ)	Canada	Quebec's sovereigntist party
Party for Freedom (PVV)	Netherlands	Geert Wilders's anti-immigration party
People's Action Party (PAP)	Singapore	Singapore's governing party

Name	Country	Who they are
Progressive Bulgaria	Bulgaria	Rumen Radev's party, governing since May 2026
Rapid Support Forces (RSF)	Sudan	The paramilitary led by Hemedti
Rastriya Swatantra Party	Nepal	The party of Prime Minister Balen Shah
Reform UK	United Kingdom	The populist right
Scottish National Party (SNP)	United Kingdom	Scotland's governing party, for independence
Sweden Democrats	Sweden	The populist right
Taliban	Afghanistan	The ruling movement
Tisza	Hungary	Péter Magyar's party, governing since May 2026
Vox	Spain	The populist right
Workers' Party of Korea	North Korea	The ruling party since the state's founding

Institutions, Alliances, and Sources

Name	Where	What it is
Africa Center for Strategic Studies	United States	A Defense Department research center
Africa Corps	Russia	The Defense Ministry's force in Africa, successor to the Wagner Group
African Union	55 members	The continental body, which suspends governments that seize power
Afrobarometer	Africa	A network of national opinion surveys
Armed Conflict Location and Event Data (ACLED)	—	A monitor that counts political violence worldwide
Assembly of Experts	Iran	The elected clerical body that chooses the Supreme Leader
Bertelsmann Transformation Index (BTI)	Germany	A foundation's rating of governance in developing and post-communist countries
BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa)	—	A forum of large emerging economies, named for its first five members
Corruption Perceptions Index	—	Transparency International's annual ranking
Court of Justice of the European Union	Luxembourg	The European Union's top court
Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS)	West Africa	The regional bloc
Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU)	Britain	Publisher of the annual Democracy Index
European Commission; European Council	European Union	The Union's executive, and its heads of government
European Court of Human Rights	Strasbourg	The court of the Council of Europe's 46 members
Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI)	United States	The federal police and domestic intelligence agency
Federal Reserve	United States	The central bank
Foro Penal	Venezuela	A rights group that counts political prisoners
Freedom House	United States	Publisher of the annual *Freedom in the World* ratings
Gang Suppression Force	Haiti	The UN-authorized international force
Guardian Council	Iran	The body that vets candidates and laws
High Representative	Bosnia and Herzegovina	The international overseer of the 1995 peace agreement
International Criminal Court	The Hague	Tries genocide, war crimes, and crimes against humanity

Name	Where	What it is
International Monetary Fund	Washington	Lends to members in crisis and monitors their economies and data
Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC)	Iran	The regime's own military, separate from the army
National Council of the Judiciary (KRS)	Poland	The body that nominates judges
NATO	32 members	The North Atlantic alliance
Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD)	38 members	A club of mostly rich democracies that publishes comparable statistics
Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC)	—	The oil exporters' cartel, founded in 1960
Pew Research Center	Washington	A nonpartisan research and polling organization
Supreme Court	United States	The final court of appeal and of constitutional review
Transparency International	Berlin	An anticorruption organization
UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)	Geneva	The UN's refugee agency
University Institute of Public Opinion (IUDOP)	El Salvador	The Central American University's polling institute
V-Dem (Varieties of Democracy) Institute	Sweden	Publisher of the annual *Democracy Report* and the regime classes in the leaders table
Wagner Group	Russia	A mercenary company, absorbed into the state's Africa Corps
Pollsters cited	—	40dB (Spain), Cluster17, Elabe, and Ifop (France), Direct Polls and Lazar (Israel), Forsa and INSA (Germany), Janet Brown Opinion Research (Canada), Marist (United States), Opinium and YouGov (Britain)

Political Figures

Name	Who they are	Age
Magdalena Andersson	Leader of Sweden's Social Democrats; prime minister 2021-22	59
Nasry Asfura	President of Honduras since January 27, 2026	68
Bashar al-Assad	President of Syria 2000-24, in exile in Russia	61
András Baka	President of Hungary since August 19, 2026	73
Michel Barnier; François Bayrou	Prime ministers of France, 2024 and 2024-25	75; 75
Flávio Bolsonaro	Brazilian senator, the right's presidential candidate	45
Jair Bolsonaro	President of Brazil 2019-22, his father	71
Iván Cepeda	Colombian senator, runner-up for the presidency in 2026	63
James Comey	Director of the FBI 2013-17	65
Mahamat Déby	Ruler of Chad since April 2021	42
Milorad Dodik	President of the Serb Republic 2010-18 and 2022-25	67
Mario Draghi; Mario Monti	Prime ministers of Italy, 2021-22 and 2011-13	79; 83
Andrzej Duda	President of Poland 2015-25	54
Saleh al-Fawzan	Saudi Arabia's Grand Mufti since October 2025	—
Khalifa Haftar	Commander of the forces that rule eastern Libya	82
Harald V	King of Norway 1991-2026	died at 89

Name	Who they are	Age
Sheikh Hasina	Prime minister of Bangladesh 1996-2001 and 2009-24, in India	79
Ekrem İmamoğlu	Mayor of Istanbul from 2019	56
Jeannette Jara	Chile's left-wing presidential candidate in 2025	52
Joseph Kabila	President of the Democratic Republic of the Congo 2001-19	55
Sushila Karki	Nepal's interim prime minister 2025-26, a former chief justice	74
Arvind Kejriwal	Chief minister of Delhi 2015-24	58
Ali Khamenei	Iran's Supreme Leader 1989-2026	1939-2026
Imran Khan	Prime minister of Pakistan 2018-22	74
Marine Le Pen	The National Rally's presidential candidate	58
María Corina Machado	Venezuela's opposition leader	59
Nicolás Maduro	President of Venezuela 2013-26	63
Luca Niculescu	Romania's prime minister-designate, a diplomat	55
Zohran Mamdani	Mayor of New York City since January 1, 2026	34
Salvador Nasralla	Runner-up for the presidency of Honduras in 2025	73
Alexei Navalny	Russia's opposition leader	1976-2024
K. P. Sharma Oli	Prime minister of Nepal four times, last in 2024-25	74
Viktor Orbán	Prime minister of Hungary 1998-2002 and 2010-26; Fidesz's leader	63
Özgür Özel	Leader of Turkey's main opposition party 2023-26	52
Gustavo Petro	President of Colombia 2022-26	66
Carles Puigdemont	President of Catalonia 2016-17	63
Rumen Radev	Prime minister of Bulgaria since May 8, 2026; president 2017-26	63
Andry Rajoelina	President of Madagascar 2009-14 and 2019-25	52
Marco Rubio	US secretary of state since January 2025	55
Samia Suluhu Hassan	President of Tanzania since March 2021	66
Roberto Sánchez	Runner-up for the presidency of Peru in 2026	—
George Simion	Romanian nationalist leader, runner-up for the presidency in 2025	40
Keir Starmer	Prime minister of the United Kingdom 2024-26	64
Paul St-Pierre Plamondon	Leader of the Parti Québécois and Quebec's premier-designate	49
Tamás Sulyok	President of Hungary 2024-26	70
Rafał Trzaskowski	Mayor of Warsaw, runner-up for the presidency in 2025	54
Muhammad Yunus	Chief adviser of Bangladesh's interim government 2024-26; Nobel Peace Prize 2006	86
Yoon Suk Yeol	President of South Korea 2022-25	65
Asif Ali Zardari	President of Pakistan since 2024 (also 2008-13)	71

Ages as of October 15, 2026, where the birth date is published. Rulers and heads of government in office are in the leaders table before this page.

Historical Leaders

Name	State	In power
Abdulaziz ibn Saud	Saudi Arabia	Founder; king 1932-53
Augustus	Rome	Emperor 27 BC-AD 14
Hugo Chávez	Venezuela	1999-2013
Deng Xiaoping	China	Paramount leader 1978-92
Francisco Franco	Spain	1939-75
Hammurabi	Babylon	About 1792-1750 BC
Adolf Hitler	Germany	Module 7
Ruhollah Khomeini	Iran	Supreme Leader 1979-89
Nikita Khrushchev	Soviet Union	1953-64
Lee Kuan Yew	Singapore	Prime minister 1959-90
Mao Zedong	China	Module 7
Mobutu Sese Seko	Zaire (now the Democratic Republic of the Congo)	1965-97
Robert Mugabe	Zimbabwe	1980-2017
Benito Mussolini	Italy	1922-43
Manuel Noriega	Panama	1983-89
Park Chung-hee	South Korea	1961-79
Joseph Stalin	Soviet Union	Module 7
Suharto	Indonesia	1967-98

Scholars and Their Works

Name	Field	Cited for
Ervand Abrahamian	Historian	*A History of Modern Iran* (Module 9)
Daron Acemoglu, Simon Johnson, and James Robinson	Economists	Inclusive and extractive institutions (Module 1)
Daron Acemoglu, Suresh Naidu, Pascual Restrepo, and James Robinson	Economists	Democracy and growth (Module 15)
Alberto Alesina (1957-2020) and Lawrence Summers	Economists	Central bank independence (1993) (Module 11)
Aristotle	Philosopher	Rule by one, by a few, or by the many (Module 1)
Hannah Arendt (1906-75)	Political theorist	*The Origins of Totalitarianism* (Module 7)
Walter Bagehot (1826-77)	Journalist and constitutional writer	*The English Constitution* (1867) (Module 3)
Jean Bodin, Thomas Hobbes, John Locke, and Jean-Jacques Rousseau	Political philosophers, 16th-18th centuries	Sovereignty and the social contract (Module 2)
Daniel A. Bell	Political theorist	*The China Model* (2015) (Module 11)
José Antonio Cheibub, Scott Mainwaring, and Matthew Shugart	Political scientists	The defense of presidentialism (Module 4)
Erica Chenoweth and Maria J. Stephan	Political scientists	*Why Civil Resistance Works* (2011) (Module 16)

Name	Field	Cited for
John J. Chin	Political scientist	The count of coups (Module 10)
Larry Diamond	Political scientist	The democratic recession (Modules 2 and 17)
Michael Doyle and Bruce Russett	Political scientists	The democratic peace (Module 15)
Daniel J. Elazar (1934-99)	Political scientist	*Exploring Federalism* (1987) (Module 12)
Steven Feldstein	Scholar of technology and politics	The spread of AI surveillance (Module 7)
Samuel Finer (1915-93)	Political scientist	*The Man on Horseback* (1962) (Module 10)
Carl Friedrich (1901-84) and Zbigniew Brzezinski (1928-2017)	Political scientists	The totalitarian checklist (Module 7)
Francis Fukuyama	Political scientist	The origins of political order, and 'the end of history' (Modules 1 and 2)
Manuel Funke, Moritz Schularick, and Christoph Trebesch	Economists	Populist leaders and the economy (2023) (Module 14)
Barbara Geddes, Joseph Wright, and Erica Frantz	Political scientists	*How Dictatorships Work* (2018) (Modules 6 and 16)
Sergei Guriev and Daniel Treisman	Economist and political scientist	The 'spin dictator' (Module 6)
Samuel Huntington (1927-2008)	Political scientist	*The Third Wave* (1991) (Module 2)
Andrea Kendall-Taylor and Richard Fontaine	Security analysts	The 'axis of upheaval' (Module 6)
Jordan Kyle and Yascha Mounk	Political scientists	Populists in power (2018) (Module 14)
Steven Levitsky, Lucan Way, and Daniel Ziblatt	Political scientists	Competitive authoritarianism; *How Democracies Die* (Modules 2, 5, and 8)
Arend Lijphart	Political scientist	*Patterns of Democracy* (Module 4)
Juan Linz (1926-2013) and Alfred Stepan (1936-2017)	Political scientists	Presidentialism, regime types, and federalism (Modules 4, 7, and 12)
Seymour Martin Lipset (1922-2006)	Sociologist	Development and democracy (Module 15)
Branko Milanović	Economist	*Capitalism, Alone* (2019) (Module 13)
Cas Mudde and Cristóbal Rovira Kaltwasser	Political scientists	The definition of populism (Module 14)
Jan-Werner Müller	Political theorist	*What Is Populism?* (2016) (Module 14)
Plato	Philosopher	Rule by philosophers (Module 11)
Adam Przeworski and Fernando Limongi	Political scientists	Development and the survival of democracy (Module 15)
Philip Roeder	Political scientist	Ethnic federalism (Module 12)
Michael Ross	Political scientist	*The Oil Curse* (Module 15)
Kim Lane Scheppele	Legal scholar	Autocratic legalism (Module 8)
Amartya Sen	Economist	Famine and democracy (Module 15)
Naunihal Singh	Political scientist	How coups succeed (Module 10)
Max Weber (1864-1920)	Sociologist	Bureaucracy, and the state as a monopoly of force (Modules 11 and 16)
Fareed Zakaria	Journalist	Illiberal democracy (Module 2's quiz)

Module 1 — Foundations

What a Government System Is

Recommended Reading / Reference

Book: Francis Fukuyama, *The Origins of Political Order* (2011)

Reference: Freedom House, *Freedom in the World 2026*, and the V-Dem Institute, *Democracy Report 2026*

1a. The Three Questions

Every government system answers three questions, and the first is who rules: one person, a few, a party, an army, a clergy, or the many through elections. The second is how power is constrained: by a constitution, courts, a legislature, a free press, a division of power between the center and the regions, or not at all. The third is how the economy is organized: by markets, by the state, or by a mix, and who owns what.

Aristotle's typology of rule by one, by a few, or by the many, each in a good and a corrupt form, answers the first question. The modern typology adds the second, because a king who reigns within limits and one who rules without them head different systems. The third is the axis the twentieth century's ideologies fought over. The systems in this course are the combinations history has produced, and most real states mix several of them.

1b. The Measures

Index	Publisher	What it measures	Classes	The 2026 edition
Freedom in the World	Freedom House (Washington; since 1973)	Political rights (0-40) and civil liberties (0-60), scored out of 100	Free, Partly Free, Not Free	Published March 19, 2026, covering 2025: a twentieth straight year of global decline, with 54 countries down and 35 up; 21% of humanity in Free countries, 39% Partly Free, 40% Not Free
Democracy Report (Regimes of the World)	V-Dem Institute (University of Gothenburg; data back to 1789)	About 500 indicators of electoral, liberal, participatory, deliberative, and egalitarian democracy, coded by country experts	Liberal democracy, electoral democracy, electoral autocracy, closed autocracy	Published March 2026: the counts are in 1c
Democracy Index	Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU; since 2006)	60 indicators in five categories, scored 0-10	Full democracy, flawed democracy, hybrid regime, authoritarian regime	Published April 7, 2026, covering 2025: a global average of 5.19, up from a record-low 5.17; 26 full democracies holding 6.6% of humanity and 61 authoritarian regimes; Norway first at 9.81
Bertelsmann Transformation Index (BTI)	Bertelsmann Stiftung (every two years since 2006)	Political and economic transformation in 137 developing and post-communist countries	Democracies and autocracies, graded by quality	Published March 26, 2026: 77 autocracies to 60 democracies, and 52 hard-line autocracies, the most on record; autocracies first outnumbered democracies in its 2022 edition

Index	Publisher	What it measures	Classes	The 2026 edition
Polity5	Center for Systemic Peace	Institutional authority from -10 to +10	Autocracy, anocracy (mixed), democracy	Not updated since its 2018 data, after the series lost its US government funding in 2020

Each 2026 edition measures calendar 2025. Hungary's change of government and Venezuela's change of leader will enter the 2027 editions.

The measures agree on most countries and split on a few that matter. Freedom House scores rights and liberties against a checklist, V-Dem aggregates the judgments of country experts on hundreds of indicators, and the EIU adds participation and political culture. All three put Norway near the top and North Korea at the bottom.

They part on the contested middle: India is Partly Free for Freedom House, an electoral autocracy for V-Dem, and a flawed democracy at 6.96 for the EIU. The United States is Free, an electoral democracy, and a flawed democracy at 7.65 (Module 5). Governments that score badly often call the indices biased, as India's foreign minister did in 2021. The scholars' reply is that the indices publish their methods and broadly agree with one another.

1c. The World's Regimes by Count and Population

V-Dem class	States	Share of humanity	Examples (2025)
Liberal democracy: free elections plus the rule of law, rights, and checks on the executive	31	7% (0.6 billion)	Norway, Sweden, Denmark, the Netherlands, Germany, France, Italy, Spain, Czechia, Japan, South Korea, Taiwan, Australia, Chile
Electoral democracy: free and fair elections, weaker checks	56	19% (1.6 billion)	The United States, Britain, Canada, Portugal, Poland, Romania, Israel, Brazil, Argentina, Colombia, Peru, Nigeria, Kenya, Malaysia, Nepal
Electoral autocracy: multiparty elections that are not free or fair	57	46% (3.8 billion)	India, Indonesia, Pakistan, Russia, Turkey, Mexico, the Philippines, Egypt, Ethiopia, Iran, Hungary, Serbia, Georgia, El Salvador, Venezuela, Singapore
Closed autocracy: no meaningful multiparty elections	35	28% (2.3 billion)	China, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Qatar, Kuwait, Jordan, Morocco, Vietnam, Cuba, North Korea, Eritrea, Afghanistan, Myanmar, Sudan, Syria, Mali, Burkina Faso, Niger, Bangladesh
All	179	100% (8.3 billion)	92 autocracies and 87 democracies

V-Dem Institute, *Democracy Report 2026*; the classes describe 2025. Bangladesh was governed by an unelected interim government throughout 2025, and Hungary was still under Viktor Orbán.

The count settles two arguments, and the first is about weight: autocracies now outnumber democracies, 92 to 87, and they hold 74% of humanity. The population share turns on two states: China, a closed autocracy of 1.41 billion, and India, an electoral autocracy of 1.48 billion on V-Dem's coding, a judgment India's government rejects (Module 8). India alone holds about 18% of humanity, so its classification moves the world total by that much.

The ten most populous states hold about 57% of humanity, and on V-Dem's coding none of them is a liberal democracy. Three are electoral democracies (the United States, Brazil, and Nigeria), five are electoral autocracies (India, Indonesia, Pakistan, Russia, and Ethiopia), and two are closed autocracies (China, and Bangladesh under its unelected interim government).

The second argument is about direction, and here the measures disagree: Freedom House recorded another year of decline, and V-Dem judges the average person's level of democracy to be back where it was in 1978, but the EIU's index stopped falling in 2025 after eight years of decline.

1d. Why Systems Differ

The explanations for why one country is a democracy and its neighbor a dictatorship come in three families. The institutional and historical family looks at sequence and origins: Fukuyama asks whether a country built a state, the rule of law, and accountable government in an order that let each support the others. Daron Acemoglu, Simon Johnson, and James Robinson ask whether its early institutions were inclusive or extractive, an argument that won them the 2024 Nobel prize in economics.

The economic family starts from income, and in the classic study by Adam Przeworski and colleagues (Module 15), no democracy richer than Argentina was in 1975 had ever collapsed: $6,055 a head in 1985 dollars, roughly $15,000-18,000 in today's money. Its companion is the resource curse, the tendency of oil and mineral wealth to sustain autocrats (Module 15).

The cultural family once argued that Protestantism suited democracy and that Confucianism and Islam did not. The democracies of Taiwan, South Korea, and Japan, and Indonesia's elections since 1999, have mostly discredited it, leaving a residue about trust and political culture. The fair summary is that institutions and income explain most of the map, that oil and coercion explain most of the exceptions, and that the transitions of Module 16 test all three families at once.

Module 1 Key Points

Foundations

• Every government system answers three questions: who rules, how power is constrained, and how the economy is organized.

• Freedom House, V-Dem, and the EIU agree on most countries and split on contested ones, such as India and the United States.

• On V-Dem's count for 2025, autocracies outnumber democracies 92 to 87 and hold 74% of humanity.

• None of the ten most populous states, home to 57% of humanity, is a liberal democracy on V-Dem's coding.

• Institutions and income explain most of the map; oil and coercion explain most of the exceptions.

Module 1 Quiz

Check Your Understanding

1. On V-Dem's count for 2025, what share of humanity lived in autocracies?

A) About 46%, the electoral autocracies alone
B) About 74%
C) About 57%, the share of the ten most populous states
D) About 26%, the same share as in 1978

2. Why does India's classification weigh so heavily on the world totals?

A) It chairs the indices
B) Because V-Dem counts only the countries that hold regular national elections
C) Because India's census counts more people than the UN's estimates show
D) It holds about 18% of humanity

3. How do the three main indices rate the United States in their 2026 editions?

A) Free, an electoral democracy, and a flawed democracy
B) Not Free on all three
C) Partly Free and an electoral autocracy
D) A liberal democracy on all three, with its highest scores since 1973

4. What did the classic study by Przeworski and colleagues find about income and democracy?

A) Poor democracies outlast rich ones
B) Rich countries drift toward autocracy as they age
C) No democracy richer than Argentina was in 1975 had ever collapsed
D) Income has no relation to regime type

5. Which family of explanation have the democracies of Taiwan, South Korea, and Japan mostly discredited?

A) The resource curse
B) The economic family, through income
C) The institutional family of Fukuyama
D) The cultural family

Module 2 — A Brief History

The Waves and the Reverse Waves

Recommended Reading / Reference

Book: Samuel Huntington, *The Third Wave: Democratization in the Late Twentieth Century* (1991)

Reference: Larry Diamond, 'Facing Up to the Democratic Recession' (*Journal of Democracy*, 2015)

Era	Dominant forms	What arrived	What reversed	The count
Antiquity to 1500	Monarchy and empire; Athens' democracy (508-322 BC) and the Roman Republic (509-27 BC) the exceptions	Written law (Hammurabi, Rome); the idea of the citizen; China's examination system (from 605)	Athens fell to Macedon, the Republic to Augustus	No lasting democracies
1500-1789	Absolute monarchy in France, Spain, Russia, the Ottoman and Mughal empires, and Qing China; the Dutch Republic (1581) and England's settlement of 1688	Sovereignty (Bodin, Hobbes); the social contract (Locke, Rousseau); parliaments that constrained kings	—	A handful of republics
1828-1926 (the first wave)	Constitutional monarchies and republics in Europe and the Americas; the nation-state	Mass male suffrage; votes for women from 1893 (New Zealand); federations (the United States, Switzerland, Germany in 1871); party systems	1848's failed revolutions; Bonapartism	29 democracies by 1922
1922-1942 (the first reverse wave)	Fascism in Italy, Nazism in Germany, Soviet communism, and military rule in Japan and Latin America	The one-party state; the totalitarian model; the welfare state	Democracy fell in Italy, Germany, Spain, Portugal, Austria, Poland, the Baltic states, Japan, and most of Latin America	12 by 1942
1943-1962 (the second wave)	West Germany, Japan, and Italy rebuilt as democracies; decolonization	The UN and the rights charters; the developmental state	—	36 by 1962
1958-1975 (the second reverse wave)	Coups across Latin America (Brazil 1964, Chile 1973); one-party states in Africa; the Greek colonels; Suharto's Indonesia	Military rule as a system; 'bureaucratic authoritarianism'	Many of the new democracies of the second wave	30 by 1973
1974-2005 (the third wave)	Portugal's 1974 revolution, then Spain and Greece; Latin America's transitions; the Philippines (1986), South Korea and Taiwan (1987-96); the fall of communism (1989-91); South Africa (1994); Indonesia (1998)	Negotiated transitions; truth commissions; Fukuyama's 'end of history' (1989)	Russia's turn under Putin	See 2a
2006-2026 (the democratic recession)	Elected leaders who dismantled checks (Hungary, Turkey, Venezuela; India and the United States contested); the Arab Spring's failure (2011-13); the coup belt (Module 10)	'Illiberal democracy' as a program; elections won on tilted fields; surveillance at scale	Continued decline on Freedom House's measure	See Module 1

The counts of democracies to 1973 are Samuel Huntington's in *The Third Wave* (1991), with the dates of his waves.

2a. Where Regimes Come From

For most of history the state was a monarchy or an empire. The alternatives, Athens' assembly, Rome's republic, the Italian city-states, and the Dutch Republic, were exceptions that ended in conquest or in a Caesar. Modern democracy is about two centuries old, and it arrived in three waves, each followed by a reversal.

The first wave built constitutional government and mass suffrage in Europe and the Americas, and it gave way to the fascist, communist, and military regimes of the interwar years. The second rebuilt the defeated Axis states as democracies and accompanied decolonization, but many of the new states fell to one-party rule or coups by the mid-1970s. The third ran from Portugal's revolution of 1974 through Latin America, East Asia, and the collapse of communism, and by 2005, 46% of humanity lived in countries Freedom House rated Free.

The two decades since are the third reverse wave, and the share in Free countries has fallen to 21%. This reversal has run less through coups than through elected leaders who dismantled the constraints on their own power. Steven Levitsky and Lucan Way named the pattern 'competitive authoritarianism' in 2002, and its practitioners refined it in Budapest, Ankara, and Caracas.

2b. What History Says

History teaches three lessons, the first being that regimes come in waves because states imitate their neighbors and their patrons, so that the revolutions of 1989 and the coups of the 2020s both spread by example. Democracies now die slowly rather than suddenly (Module 5), so the moment of death is hard to date, and the death is sometimes reversible, as Poland showed in 2023 and Hungary in 2026.

The states that never democratized, among them China, the Gulf monarchies, Vietnam, and the Central Asian republics, showed that the expectation of convergence was a hope rather than a law. A closed autocracy can be rich, stable, and technologically advanced for decades, and that fact reshaped the century's argument about which system works (Module 15).

Module 2 Key Points

A Brief History

• Modern democracy arrived in three waves (1828-1926, 1943-62, and from 1974), each followed by a reversal.

• By Huntington's count, democracies fell from 29 in 1922 to 12 in 1942, then recovered to 36 by 1962.

• The share of humanity in countries rated Free fell from 46% in 2005 to 21% in 2025.

• The current reversal runs mostly through elected leaders dismantling constraints, not through coups.

• A closed autocracy can stay rich and stable for decades; convergence on democracy proved a hope, not a law.

Module 2 Quiz

Check Your Understanding

1. What share of humanity lived in countries Freedom House rated Free in 2005, and in 2025?

A) About half in both years
B) 46% in 2005 and 21% in 2025
C) 21% then and 46% now
D) 74% in 2005 and 46% in 2025, by V-Dem's count of autocracy

2. How has the current reverse wave mostly run?

A) Through military coups, as in the interwar years and the 1960s
B) Through foreign invasions that installed new governments
C) Through elected leaders
D) Through revolutions led by communist parties

3. What were Huntington's counts of democracies in 1922, 1942, and 1962?

A) 29 in 1922, 12 in 1942, and 36 by 1962
B) 12, then 29, then 36
C) 36, then 30, then 12
D) 29, then 36, then 30

4. Why do regimes come in waves, according to the module?

A) Economic cycles
B) States imitate their neighbors and patrons
C) Climate and harvests set the timing
D) The UN's membership rules require neighbors to align their constitutions

5. Who named 'competitive authoritarianism' in 2002?

A) Huntington
B) Larry Diamond, in the Journal of Democracy
C) Levitsky and Way
D) Fareed Zakaria, in an essay on illiberal democracy

Module 3 — Monarchy

The Oldest Form and Its 43 Survivors

Recommended Reading / Reference

Book: Walter Bagehot, *The English Constitution* (1867)

Reference: Freedom House's 2026 country reports on the six Gulf monarchies

Type	Count	Monarchies	Power of the monarch	Note
Absolute: the monarch rules	7	Saudi Arabia, Oman, Qatar, the United Arab Emirates (a federation of seven hereditary emirs), Brunei, Eswatini, and the Vatican (an elective absolute theocracy)	Executive, legislative, and often religious authority; consultative councils at most	The Gulf's rentier absolutism
Semi-constitutional: the monarch shares power	8	Kuwait (its parliament suspended), Bahrain, Jordan, Morocco, Bhutan, Liechtenstein, Monaco, Tonga	Appoints governments, dissolves parliaments, and keeps security and foreign policy; elected legislatures with limited powers	The Arab monarchies that survived 2011 by conceding just enough
Constitutional: the monarch reigns	28	The 15 Commonwealth realms that share Charles III (Britain, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, Jamaica, and ten others), Japan, Spain, the Netherlands, Belgium, Sweden, Norway, Denmark, Luxembourg, Thailand, Cambodia, Malaysia (an elected, rotating kingship), Lesotho, and Andorra (two co-princes)	Ceremonial: opens parliament, appoints the prime minister a majority supports, and signs laws; reserve powers rarely used	Bagehot's 'dignified' part, legitimacy without power; Thailand's crown the exception
All	43	About a fifth of the UN's members		

3a. The Survivors

Monarchy was the world's default form of government until 1914, and many expected it to vanish after 1918, when four empires fell within a year. Forty-three states still have a monarch because the form split in two. The constitutional monarchies of Europe, Japan, and the Commonwealth survived by surrendering power to parliaments. They kept the crown as what Walter Bagehot called the 'dignified' part of the constitution, the symbol that lends legitimacy to the 'efficient' part that governs.

The absolute and semi-constitutional monarchies of the Gulf and the Arab world survived by the opposite route, keeping power and buying consent. The Arab Spring of 2011 toppled four presidents and no king. Political scientists credit the monarchies' dynastic, religious, and tribal legitimacy, their ability to concede reforms without conceding the throne, and, in the Gulf, their money.

3b. The Gulf's Absolutism

Monarchy	Succession	Citizens among residents (about)	Political institutions	2025-26
Saudi Arabia	Chosen by the king and confirmed by the Allegiance Council; Mohammed bin Salman ended the rotation among the founder's sons	18.8 million of 32.2 million (2022 census)	No parliament; an appointed Shura Council; the clergy subordinated since 2017	Crude rerouted by pipeline to the Red Sea port of Yanbu during the Iran war, until drone strikes shut the line in September; Houthi missiles fired at Riyadh in October
United Arab Emirates	Each emirate hereditary; Abu Dhabi's ruler holds the federal presidency	About a tenth of 10-11 million (no official count)	A half-elected Federal National Council with advisory powers	Left OPEC on May 1, 2026; accused of arming Sudan's Rapid Support Forces, which it denies
Qatar	Hereditary (Al Thani); the emir's father abdicated for him	About 0.3 million of 3 million	A Shura Council, wholly appointed again since a 2024 referendum ended the elections first held in 2021	Gas exports halted since Iranian strikes on Ras Laffan on March 2; a mediator in the US-Iran talks
Kuwait	Hereditary (Al Sabah)	About 1.5 million of 4.9 million	The Gulf's only parliament with real powers, suspended by the emir in May 2024 for up to four years	Rated Not Free since 2025; tens of thousands stripped of citizenship; oil exports cut by the closure of Hormuz
Oman	Hereditary; a crown prince named in 2021	About 3 million of 5.2 million	A partly elected consultative council; the sultan supreme	A mediator between Iran and its adversaries, and negotiating a shipping route through the strait with Iran
Bahrain	Hereditary (Al Khalifa)	About 0.7 million of 1.6 million	An elected lower chamber in a Shia-majority state ruled by a Sunni dynasty; the 2011 uprising crushed with Saudi troops	Hosts the US Fifth Fleet; Iran attacked American targets there in July 2026

Populations from national statistics where published, otherwise estimates. Rulers, ages, and reigns are in the leaders table before Module 1.

The six Gulf monarchies are the world's purest absolutisms and among its richest states, and the two facts are linked. Hydrocarbon revenue pays for a bargain in which the state employs most working citizens in Kuwait, Qatar, and the United Arab Emirates, provides housing, health care, and education, taxes almost nothing, and allows no organized opposition.

Saudi Arabia is the case of the decade: Mohammed bin Salman ended the rotation of the throne among the sons of the kingdom's founder, Abdulaziz. He subordinated the clerics who had shared authority with the dynasty since 1744, detained rivals and businessmen in 2017, and remade the state around a diversification plan, Vision 2030. The result is a personalized absolute monarchy that moves faster than the old consensus of princes and depends more on one man.

Kuwait, the one Gulf monarchy whose parliament could block budgets and question ministers, has suspended it. The 2026 Iran war then put all six on the front line, as the table's last column shows, and it proved that their security still rests on an American guarantee they had spent a decade hedging.

3c. The Constitutional Monarchies, and Succession

Constitutional monarchs reign and do not rule: Britain's king opens Parliament and appoints the prime minister who commands the House of Commons. In July 2026 he appointed Andy Burnham, whom Labour had chosen as leader after Keir Starmer resigned, without a general election. Japan's emperor is the 'symbol of the state' under a constitution that gives him no political power. The Scandinavian, Dutch, Belgian, and Spanish monarchs play the same part in states that are republics in all but name.

Their value shows in the states that lack them: a head of state above party, and a focus of identity that outlasts governments. In Spain in 1981 the king's voice helped stop a coup, and in Thailand in 1992 the king's intervention ended a bloody crackdown and the premiership of a former coup leader. Thailand is the exception where the crown still shares power with the army and the courts, and its lèse-majesté law, which punishes insults to the monarchy, has been used against more than 250 people since the protests of 2020, according to Thai Lawyers for Human Rights. Morocco's semi-constitutional king keeps security and foreign policy and appoints the head of government from the winning party. In September 2026 he named the first woman to hold the post, Fatima Ezzahra El Mansouri.

Succession, the question that toppled monarchies for a thousand years, now runs smoothly where the crown is ceremonial. When Norway's Harald V died on August 28, 2026, his son became King Haakon VIII that morning and swore his oath before parliament four days later. In the Gulf, succession remains the structural risk, with two of the six rulers aged 86 or older. The Commonwealth realms' drift toward republics is the constitutional monarchies' only real threat, and it is slow: Barbados left in 2021, and Jamaica's bill to follow it lapsed in 2025 in a dispute over the country's final court of appeal.

Module 3 Key Points

Monarchy

• Forty-three states keep a monarch: 7 absolute, 8 semi-constitutional, and 28 constitutional, 15 of them sharing Britain's king.

• Monarchy survived by splitting: constitutional crowns traded power for legitimacy, while Gulf crowns kept power and bought consent.

• The Arab Spring of 2011 toppled four presidents and no king.

• The 2026 Iran war showed that the Gulf monarchies still depend on an American security guarantee.

• Where the crown is ceremonial, succession is routine: Norway's king died on August 28, 2026, and his son reigned that morning.

Module 3 Quiz

Check Your Understanding

1. How did the Arab monarchies survive the Arab Spring, in the political scientists' account?

A) Foreign troops guarded every palace
B) They held free elections in 2011
C) Their streets saw no protests that year
D) Dynastic and religious legitimacy, concessions short of the throne, and money

2. How many sovereign states have a monarch as of 2026?

A) 43
B) 7, the absolute monarchies
C) 15, the Commonwealth realms
D) 28, the constitutional monarchies

3. What did Kuwait's emir do in May 2024?

A) Left OPEC
B) Held the first free election for the emirship
C) Suspended its parliament
D) Joined Saudi Arabia in a federal union of the Gulf states

4. In Bagehot's terms, what is the constitutional monarch?

A) The efficient part that governs
B) The supreme commander of the armed forces
C) The final court of appeal in constitutional cases
D) The dignified part

5. What happened to Qatar's gas exports in 2026?

A) They doubled
B) Iranian strikes on Ras Laffan halted them
C) They moved to the Red Sea by pipeline
D) They were nationalized after the emir abdicated in favor of his son

Module 4 — Democracy I: The Institutional Designs

How Democracies Are Built, and Why the Design Matters

Recommended Reading / Reference

Book: Arend Lijphart, *Patterns of Democracy* (second edition, 2012)

Reference: Juan Linz, 'The Perils of Presidentialism' (*Journal of Democracy*, 1990)

4a. Presidential, Parliamentary, and Semi-Presidential

System	How the executive is chosen and removed	Countries	Strengths	Weaknesses	2025-26 cases
Presidential	A president elected apart from the legislature for a fixed term, removable only by impeachment	The United States, Brazil, Mexico, Argentina, Colombia, Chile, Indonesia, the Philippines, Nigeria, Kenya, South Korea	Clear accountability; stable tenure; a national mandate	Deadlock between the branches; winner takes all; impeachment or a coup the only exits	South Korea's martial law (Module 5) and the president's removal; Peru's Congress removed two presidents in four months (October 2025 and February 2026)
Parliamentary	A prime minister chosen by the legislature and removable by a vote of confidence; a ceremonial head of state	Britain, Germany, Japan, India, Canada, Australia, Spain, Italy, the Nordic states, Israel, most of Europe	Flexible: governments fall and re-form without crisis; coalitions include more voters	Unstable where parties fragment; a prime minister with a large majority is barely constrained	Britain changed prime minister between elections (Module 3); Japan's prime minister won a snap election outright; Canada's minority government became a majority between elections (Module 5)
Semi-presidential	An elected president with real powers, plus a prime minister answerable to parliament	France, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Ukraine, Taiwan, Sri Lanka; Russia and Egypt in form	A national leader plus parliamentary flexibility	'Cohabitation' when president and parliament differ; presidential power grows in a crisis	France's serial governments (5b); Poland's president vetoed a record number of bills (Module 8); Romania's caretaker government (5b)
Directorial	A collective executive elected by parliament	Switzerland's seven-member Federal Council	Consensus	Slow	Several national referendums a year

The design argument began with Juan Linz, who argued in 1990 that in a presidential system the president and the legislature each hold a mandate, neither can remove the other short of impeachment, and a deadlock invites the army to break it. Linz's critics, among them Scott Mainwaring, Matthew Shugart, and José Antonio Cheibub, answered that presidential democracies failed more often because they were concentrated in Latin America and Africa, where armies had a habit of intervening. In Cheibub's data (2007), the military legacy rather than the constitution explains the difference.

The evidence supports each side in part: where the army has a record of seizing power, every design is fragile, and where it does not, presidential systems last. The cases of 2025-26 fit Linz's warning in form,

since South Korea's president tried to end a deadlock with martial law and Peru's Congress used removal as a routine weapon. They fit his critics in outcome: South Korea's institutions defeated the attempt within hours (Module 5), and Peru's army stayed in its barracks. The course's reading is that design shapes the temptation, while the army's habits and the strength of parties decide whether anyone acts on it.

4b. Electoral Systems, and the Same Vote Worked Four Ways

System	How it works	Countries	Effect on parties	Recent results
First-past-the-post (single-member plurality)	One member per district; the most votes wins	Britain, the United States, Canada, India, Nigeria, Malaysia	Two large parties (Duverger's law); third parties squeezed; landslides from pluralities	Labour won 63% of Britain's seats on 34% of the vote (2024)
Two-round (majority runoff)	A runoff between the top two if no one wins a majority	France; most presidential elections (Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Peru, Poland, Portugal, Romania)	Alliances between the rounds; extremes either blocked or united	Peru's presidency decided by less than a third of a point (Module 5); Brazil's runoff to come (Module 17)
Party-list proportional representation	Seats shared by vote, often above a threshold of 3-5%	The Netherlands, Israel, Spain, Sweden, Norway, Denmark, Portugal, South Africa	Many parties; coalitions the norm	Fifteen parties in the Dutch parliament (2025); eight in Sweden's (2026)
Mixed-member proportional	District seats plus list seats that correct the total to proportionality	Germany, New Zealand, Scotland, Bolivia; Mexico in part	A proportional result with local members	Germany's Bundestag fixed at 630 seats (2025)
Parallel (mixed-member majoritarian)	District and list seats added without correction	Japan, South Korea, Taiwan, Russia, Thailand, Nepal; Hungary, with a winner's bonus	The largest party over-rewarded	Japan's ruling party won 316 of 465 seats on 36.7% of the list vote (Module 5); Hungary's system turned 54% (2022) and Tisza's 2026 vote (Module 5) into two-thirds majorities
Ranked choice: the alternative vote and the single transferable vote	Voters rank candidates; ballots transfer until someone has a majority or a quota	Australia (both houses), Ireland, Malta, Maine and Alaska, New York City's primaries	Majority winners; small parties survive under the transferable vote	Australia's lower house elected by preference since 1918

Worked example — One Country, One Vote, Four Parliaments

A country of 10 million voters elects a 100-seat legislature, and the vote is Party A 38%, Party B 32%, Party C 18%, and Party D 12%, spread evenly across the country. Under first-past-the-post with 100 districts, A wins nearly every district by a plurality, perhaps 70-80 seats, and governs alone on 38% of the vote, while C and D, with 30% between them, win a handful of seats or none.

Under proportional representation with a 5% threshold, the seats are 38, 32, 18, and 12. No party has a majority, so A must govern with C (56 seats) or with B in a grand coalition (70), and the small parties decide the government. Under mixed-member proportional representation, Germany's model, the seats are again 38, 32, 18, and 12, but every voter also has a local member, and the coalition arithmetic is the same.

Under a parallel system with a winner's bonus, Hungary's model, A takes most of the 50 district seats and 38% of the 50 list seats plus the bonus, about 60 seats and a comfortable majority. The same votes yield a single-party government, a coalition, a coalition with local members, or a near-supermajority. That is why

electoral law is among the first things an autocratizing government rewrites, as Hungary's did in 2011, and why the American states' redistricting fights of 2025-26 drew so much attention.

4c. Second Chambers, Courts, and the Veto Players

The other design choices decide how many hands can stop a law. A second chamber adds a veto point, whether it represents states (the US Senate, Germany's Bundesrat, Australia's Senate) or no one in particular (Britain's House of Lords, Canada's Senate), and about 80 national parliaments have two.

Judicial review, a court's power to strike down laws, is strong in the United States, Germany, India, Brazil, Israel, and Colombia. It is weak or absent in Britain, where Parliament is sovereign, and in the Netherlands, whose constitution forbids it. It is also the institution autocratizing governments capture first: Hungary's government packed its Constitutional Court in 2010-13, Poland's captured its tribunal (Module 8), and Israel's tried to curb its Supreme Court in 2023. Mexico began electing its judges by popular vote in June 2025, on a turnout of 13%. Its critics called the change capture by the governing party, and the government called it the end of a closed judicial elite.

Federalism, referendums, independent central banks, and electoral commissions add more veto points. Arend Lijphart found that 'consensus' democracies with many veto players, built on proportional representation, coalitions, federalism, and strong courts, govern more inclusively and no less effectively than 'majoritarian' ones with few. The 2020s added a corollary: veto players are what backsliding removes one at a time, and what a new majority must decide whether to restore (Module 8).

Module 4 Key Points

Democracy I: The Institutional Designs

• Presidential systems give clear accountability but risk deadlock; parliamentary systems are flexible but unstable when parties fragment.

• Linz blamed presidentialism's design for its failures; his critics blamed the military habits of the countries that adopted it.

• Electoral systems decide who governs: Japan's ruling party won two-thirds of the seats on 36.7% of the list vote in 2026.

• The same 38-32-18-12 vote can produce a single-party majority, a coalition, or a near-supermajority.

• Courts are usually the first veto player an autocratizing government captures, and the hardest for a successor to restore.

Module 4 Quiz

Check Your Understanding

1. What was Linz's 'peril of presidentialism'?

A) Two rival mandates, neither able to remove the other, so deadlock invites a coup
B) Presidents serve terms too short to govern
C) Presidents cannot veto the bills they oppose
D) Legislatures choose presidents in secret

2. In the worked example, what does the 38-32-18-12 vote produce under first-past-the-post?

A) A one-party majority for A
B) A hung parliament
C) A grand coalition of A and B with 70 seats
D) Seats of 38, 32, 18, and 12, so the small parties decide

3. How did Japan's February 2026 election show the effect of a parallel system?

A) Every party won seats in proportion
B) The ruling party won two-thirds of the seats on about 37% of the list vote
C) It produced a hung parliament
D) The ruling party lost its majority to the opposition

4. Which institution do autocratizing governments usually capture first?

A) The upper chamber of parliament
B) The national statistics bureau
C) The central bank's governing board
D) The top court

5. What did Lijphart find about consensus democracies?

A) They govern worse on every measure
B) They have fewer parties
C) They govern more inclusively and no less effectively
D) They collapse sooner under stress, because coalitions cannot act

Module 5 — Democracy II: How Democracies Work and Fail

The 2025-26 Election Record, and the American Debate

Recommended Reading / Reference

Book: Steven Levitsky and Daniel Ziblatt, *How Democracies Die* (2018)

Reference: The International Foundation for Electoral Systems' ElectionGuide, and the national election authorities' results

Date	Country	System	Result	What it showed
Feb 23, 2025	Germany	Mixed-member proportional	CDU/CSU 28.5% and 208 of 630 seats; AfD 20.8% and 152, its best; turnout 82.5%; Merz elected chancellor on a second ballot	The far right as the main opposition; the refusal to govern with it held
Apr 28, 2025	Canada	First-past-the-post	Liberals 43.8% and 169 of 343 seats, a minority; a majority by April 2026 through five floor-crossings and three by-elections	An incumbent party revived by an external threat
May 3, 2025	Australia	Preferential	Labor 94 of 150 seats on 55.2% of the two-party vote; the opposition leader lost his own seat	The same effect: the right's brand tied to Washington's
May 18, 2025	Romania	Two-round, rerun	Nicușor Dan 53.6%, George Simion 46.4%, after the 2024 vote was annulled over Russian interference	A centrist win; the annulment precedent still argued
May 18, 2025	Portugal	List proportional	AD 31.8% and 91 of 230 seats; Chega 22.8% and 60, second for the first time	The far right's arrival in a late holdout; its leader lost the 2026 presidential runoff, 33 to 67
Jun 1, 2025	Poland	Two-round presidential	Karol Nawrocki 50.9%, Rafał Trzaskowski 49.1%; turnout 71.6%	A president aligned with the opposition; the restoration frozen (Module 8)
Jun 3, 2025	South Korea	Plurality presidential	Lee Jae-myung 49.4%; turnout 79.4%	The vote that followed a president's removal (5c)
Jul 20, 2025; Feb 8, 2026	Japan	Parallel	The ruling coalition lost its upper-house majority; then, under a new prime minister, the LDP won two-thirds of the lower house alone (Module 4)	A dominant party's slide reversed by a change of leader
Oct 3-4, 2025	Czechia	List proportional	ANO 34.5% and 80 of 200 seats; Andrej Babiš prime minister with two smaller nationalist parties	The populist return in Central Europe
Oct 19, 2025	Bolivia	Two-round	Rodrigo Paz 55.0% in the runoff	Twenty years of MAS rule ended
Oct 26, 2025	Argentina (midterm)	List proportional	Milei's party 40.7% nationally, after a $20 billion swap line from the US Treasury	A radical incumbent vindicated
Oct 29, 2025	Netherlands	List proportional	D66 and the PVV tied for first in seats; a three-party minority cabinet under Rob Jetten	Fragmentation, with the center first
Nov 4, 2025	United States (states and cities)	Plurality	Democrats won Virginia (57.6%) and New Jersey (56.9%); Zohran Mamdani, a democratic socialist, won New York City (50.8%)	The first votes on the second Trump administration

Date	Country	System	Result	What it showed
Nov 30, 2025	Honduras	Plurality presidential	Nasry Asfura 40.3%, Salvador Nasralla 39.6%; Asfura declared the winner on December 24 after a disputed count	Fragile counting institutions under open American pressure
Dec 14, 2025	Chile	Two-round	José Antonio Kast 58.2%, Jeannette Jara 41.8%; turnout 85% under compulsory voting	The swing right
Feb 8, 2026	Thailand	Parallel	Bhumjaithai 192 of 500 seats, the People's Party 120; Anutin Charnvirakul re-elected prime minister	A prime minister who took office after the courts removed his predecessor, confirmed at the polls (Module 10)
Feb 12, 2026	Bangladesh	First-past-the-post	BNP 209 of 300 seats, Jamaat-e-Islami 68; turnout 59.4%; the former ruling party barred	A transition's first test, with the old ruling party excluded (Module 16)
Mar 5, 2026	Nepal	Parallel	Rastriya Swatantra Party 182 of 275 seats; turnout 59.1%; Balen Shah prime minister	A revolution's ballot (Module 16)
Apr 12, 2026	Hungary	Parallel with a winner's bonus	Tisza 53.2% and 141 of 199 seats; Fidesz 38.6% and 52; turnout 79.0%, the highest since 1990	An electoral autocracy voted out under its own rules (Module 8)
Apr 19, 2026	Bulgaria	List proportional	Rumen Radev's Progressive Bulgaria 43.9% and 131 of 240 seats, the first outright majority since 1997	A former president's new party sweeping a fragmented field
Apr 12 and Jun 7, 2026	Peru	Two-round	Keiko Fujimori 50.1%, Roberto Sánchez 49.9%	Peru's ninth president since 2016
May 31 and Jun 21, 2026	Colombia	Two-round	Abelardo de la Espriella 49.7%, Iván Cepeda 48.7%	The right's return after Gustavo Petro
Sep 13, 2026	Sweden	List proportional	The left-leaning bloc 176 seats, the right-leaning bloc 173; the Sweden Democrats 17.5%; a candidate for prime minister rejected (5b)	A government defeated, and a hung formation
Oct 4, 2026	Brazil (first round)	Two-round	Flávio Bolsonaro 47.0%, Lula 45.2%; turnout 78.9%; runoff to come (Module 17)	A convicted former president's son ahead of the incumbent

Results from the national election authorities, as reported. The parties and alliances are in the Who's Who before Module 1. The Israeli election and the American midterms are in Module 17's watch list.

5a. What the Record Shows

Two years of elections in democracies show four things. First, incumbents usually lose: the pattern of 2024, when governing parties lost ground across the developed democracies, continued, and Bolivia's MAS, the left in Chile, Colombia, and Honduras, Hungary's Fidesz, and Sweden's right-leaning government all fell. The exceptions are instructive, since Canada's and Australia's governments were revived by an external threat, Japan's ruling party by a new leader, and Argentina's Milei by a mandate for a radical program.

Second, the far right has arrived as a large minority nearly everywhere. Germany's AfD led national polls in October 2026 (INSA, October 9-12, 2,006 respondents: 30%), Portugal's Chega came second, and Romania's Simion reached a runoff. It governs in a few places, among them Italy, Czechia, and Chile, and the center holds where it unites, as in Romania's rerun and the Dutch election, and loses where it splits.

Third, institutions can beat an autocratizer: Hungary's opposition won under rules designed to prevent it (Module 8), and South Korea's institutions removed a president who declared martial law (5c). Fourth, the most fragile democracies remain presidential systems with weak parties, as Peru's turnover of presidents

and Honduras's month-long disputed count showed. Latin America is also where the right ran strongest in 2025-26, from Bolivia and Chile to Honduras, Peru, and Colombia, with Brazil's runoff still to come.

5b. Coalitions, Confidence, and France's Governments

Most democracies are governed by coalitions, and 2025-26 showed how they form and fail. Germany's took ten weeks and rested on the mainstream parties' refusal to govern with the AfD. The Netherlands' 2025 election followed the collapse of a four-party government over migration, and its successor is a minority. Sweden's September 2026 election left the parliament unable to agree on a prime minister: on October 15 it rejected Magdalena Andersson's proposed single-party Social Democratic government by 248 votes to 99, the first of four permitted attempts. Romania has had only a caretaker government since May 2026, after two nominees lost confidence votes and a third withdrew; a fourth, the diplomat Luca Niculescu, faces a vote in late October with the backing of Romania's Social Democrats.

France is the cautionary case: President Macron's dissolution of 2024 produced an Assembly with no majority. Michel Barnier's government was censured in December 2024, and François Bayrou's fell on a confidence vote in September 2025. Sébastien Lecornu resigned within a month of his appointment and was reappointed four days later. He passed the 2026 budget only under Article 49.3, which adopts a text without a vote unless the government falls to a motion of censure.

The lesson is that parliamentary flexibility fails when no coalition is possible, because a fragmented Assembly beside a president who cannot be removed produces the deadlock of presidentialism without its stability. Both the National Rally and the left expect to win the next presidential election (Module 17).

5c. How Democracies Die Now, and How South Korea's Survived

Drawn from Hungary, Turkey, Venezuela, and Poland under the Law and Justice party, the modern death of a democracy has five steps. An elected leader with a majority captures the referees, meaning the constitutional court, the prosecutors, the electoral commission, and the auditors, by packing, purging, or starving them. He sidelines the opposition and the press through selective prosecution, tax audits, ownership changes, and licensing. He rewrites the rules, from the electoral law and the district maps to the constitution. He wins the next election on the tilted field, and then he repeats.

The defense is the veto players of Module 4, and South Korea's showed how fast they can work. On December 3, 2024, President Yoon Suk Yeol declared martial law and sent troops to the National Assembly. Legislators climbed its fences, and within hours all 190 present voted to lift it. The Assembly impeached him on December 14, the Constitutional Court removed him unanimously on April 4, 2025, and voters chose his successor two months later. On February 19, 2026, a Seoul court sentenced Yoon to life in prison for leading an insurrection; his appeal is pending.

Brazil's courts took the slower route: the Supreme Court convicted Jair Bolsonaro in September 2025 of plotting to overturn the 2022 election and sentenced him to 27 years and 3 months. He began serving the sentence in November 2025 and was moved to house arrest on medical grounds in March 2026. Elsewhere the referees were overrun, in Georgia and El Salvador; they were partly restored in Poland and replaced wholesale in Hungary (Module 8).

5d. Is the United States Backsliding? The Case Made Both Ways

The indices' verdicts of 2026 are the starting point (Module 1). Freedom House's cut to 81, the lowest it has given the country on its 100-point scale, cited the 43-day government shutdown of 2025, the executive's assumption of spending and oversight powers assigned to Congress, weakened safeguards against corruption, and reprisals against speech. V-Dem's demotion to electoral democracy put the country outside the top class for the first time in more than fifty years and listed it among the autocratizing countries, and the EIU now ranks it 34th in the world.

The case that it is backsliding, as the administration's critics make it, begins with the referees. The president has fired the heads of independent commissions, seventeen inspectors general, and the commissioner of labor statistics after a weak jobs report. The civil service lost about 317,000 people in 2025, and a new rule lets policy-influencing posts be filled and emptied at will (Module 11). The Justice Department indicted the president's critics, among them the former FBI director James Comey and New York's attorney general, before a judge dismissed both cases in November 2025.

National Guard troops were sent into cities over governors' objections, and universities, law firms, and broadcasters were pressed through grants, contracts, and licenses. To the critics this is the sequence of 5c: capture the referees, sideline the opponents, and rewrite the rules.

The case that it is not, as the administration and its defenders make it, begins with the voters. The president won the popular vote in 2024 and is carrying out the program he ran on. The Constitution vests the executive power in him, and the Supreme Court has largely agreed about the structure of the executive (see the evidence below). The courts have also checked him repeatedly, and he has adapted rather than defied them. The opposition still wins elections, as Democrats did in Virginia, New Jersey, and New York City. And the indices, the defenders argue, are compiled by scholars who mistake disagreements over policy for damage to democracy.

The evidence cuts both ways. The Supreme Court ruled for the president on the executive's structure, in the *Slaughter* case (6-3, June 29, 2026), which overruled a precedent of 1935 protecting commissioners from removal. It also ruled his way on voting districts: its *Callais* ruling (6-3, April 29, 2026) narrowed the Voting Rights Act, and Louisiana, Tennessee, Florida, and Alabama then redrew their maps. The Court ruled against him on emergency tariffs (6-3, February 20, 2026), on sending the Guard into Illinois (December 2025), and on birthright citizenship (6-3, June 30, 2026). For now it has also blocked the firing of a Federal Reserve governor (5-4, June 29, 2026). After the tariff ruling, the administration imposed tariffs under a different statute rather than defy the Court, and elections are proceeding on schedule.

The course's reading: by the indices' own definitions, the United States has fallen a class but remains a democracy, with competitive elections and courts that rule against the president and are obeyed. Whether it keeps that status turns on two tests rather than on any single policy: whether the midterm elections of November 2026 are run freely and their results accepted, and whether the courts' lines continue to hold. The rule of Module 1, that rich and established democracies do not collapse, has never faced a larger case.

Module 5 Key Points

Democracy II: How Democracies Work and Fail

• Incumbents mostly lost in 2025-26; Canada's, Australia's, and Japan's governments were the exceptions, revived by external threats or new leaders.

• The far right is a large minority nearly everywhere and governs in a few places, including Italy, Czechia, and Chile.

• France shows parliamentary flexibility failing: no majority, three prime ministers since September 2024, and a budget passed without a vote.

• South Korea's parliament overturned martial law within hours; the president was removed in four months and later sentenced to life.

• The United States fell a class on V-Dem's coding; free midterms and obeyed courts are the tests that matter.

Module 5 Quiz

Check Your Understanding

1. What explains the exceptions to the rule that incumbents lost in 2025-26?

A) Compulsory voting in each country
B) An external threat in Canada and Australia, and a new leader in Japan
C) Proportional representation everywhere
D) The timing of the votes

2. How quickly did South Korea's National Assembly overturn martial law in December 2024?

A) After four months, through the Constitutional Court
B) After a week of street protests
C) It never voted; the army withdrew
D) Within hours

3. What does Article 49.3 of France's constitution allow a government to do?

A) Call a snap vote
B) Dismiss the prime minister by presidential decree
C) Adopt a bill without a vote
D) Suspend parliament for up to four years

4. Which Supreme Court ruling of 2026 went in the president's favor?

A) Trump v. Slaughter, on removing commissioners
B) The tariff case
C) The birthright citizenship case, decided 6-3
D) The ruling on firing a Federal Reserve governor, decided 5-4

5. What does the course name as the two tests of the American case?

A) Tariffs and trade
B) The next Freedom House score and the EIU's ranking
C) Free midterms and obeyed courts
D) Whether the Senate confirms the president's judicial nominees

Module 6 — Authoritarianism

The Varieties of Non-Democratic Rule, and How They Hold Power

Recommended Reading / Reference

Book: Barbara Geddes, Joseph Wright, and Erica Frantz, *How Dictatorships Work* (2018)

Reference: Sergei Guriev and Daniel Treisman, 'Informational Autocrats' (*Journal of Economic Perspectives*, 2019)

6a. The Varieties

Type	How power is held	Examples, October 2026	How long it lasts	How it ends
Personalist	One leader controls the party, the army, and the security services through patronage and fear; institutions are hollow	Russia, Belarus, Nicaragua (a married couple as co-presidents), Uganda, Cameroon, Rwanda, Azerbaijan, Turkmenistan and Cambodia (fathers succeeded by sons); Venezuela's until January 2026	As long as the leader lives, often decades	Death, a coup, removal from outside, or an uprising; rarely by negotiation
Single-party	A ruling party with real institutions, a cadre system, and collective leadership	China, Vietnam, Laos, Cuba, North Korea (dynastic), Eritrea	The longest	Reform from within (Taiwan's Kuomintang, Mexico's Institutional Revolutionary Party), collapse (the Soviet Union), or persistence
Military	The armed forces rule as an institution or through a general	Mali, Burkina Faso, Niger, Sudan, Guinea-Bissau, Madagascar; Myanmar, whose army chief became president after a managed election in 2026	The shortest	A return to the barracks, civilianization by election (Egypt, Guinea, Gabon), or another coup (Module 10)
Monarchic	Hereditary rule with a dynasty's legitimacy	Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Qatar, Oman, Brunei, Eswatini; Kuwait, Bahrain, Jordan, Morocco	Often centuries	Revolution (Libya 1969, Ethiopia 1974, Iran 1979) or a turn to constitutional rule (Module 3)
Theocratic	Rule by religious authority	Iran, Afghanistan, the Vatican	Decades so far (Module 9)	Revolution or war (Module 9)
Electoral authoritarian (hybrid)	Elections on a tilted field; an opposition that exists but cannot win	Turkey, Serbia, Georgia, El Salvador, Egypt, Tanzania, Zimbabwe, Kazakhstan	Variable	Defeat at the polls when the field is not tilted enough (Hungary, 2026), an uprising, or closure (Module 8)

Authoritarian regimes differ as much from one another as from democracies, and the differences predict how they behave and how they end. Personalist regimes, in which one leader has made the party, the army, and the security services his own, have been the most common type since the Cold War. They are also the most likely to start wars and to repress, the worst at managing succession, and the likeliest to end by death, coup, or removal from outside.

Single-party regimes last longest, because a party with real institutions and a cadre system outlives each leader and can reform itself; China's Communist Party has ruled since October 1949. Military regimes are

the shortest-lived, because armies rule badly and prefer the barracks, and in Barbara Geddes's data most lasted less than a decade. Monarchies and theocracies rule by inherited or divine legitimacy, and they usually end by revolution.

Dynastic succession has spread beyond the monarchies: Turkmenistan's president handed office to his son in 2022, Cambodia's prime minister did the same in 2023, Nicaragua's president made his wife co-president in 2025, and in 2026 Iran's highest office passed from father to son (Module 9). Each handover keeps the regime in the family, because a ruler who has hollowed out every institution has no other to trust with the succession.

6b. How They Hold Power: The Three Pillars

Pillar	Instruments	Examples	The modern refinement
Coercion	Security services, political police, prisons, and the army; surveillance; selective violence against elites and mass violence against publics	China's Ministry of State Security and the camps of Xinjiang; Russia's Federal Security Service (FSB) and the death of Alexei Navalny in an Arctic prison; Iran's Basij militia; Egypt's political prisoners, about 60,000 on rights groups' estimates; Venezuela's, over 800 before January 2026 and 322 on October 5, 2026 (Foro Penal, a Venezuelan rights group)	Digital surveillance; repression across borders, from assassinations to abductions abroad; jailing a few to frighten many
Co-optation	Patronage: jobs, contracts, licenses, and rents for elites (the army, business, the party) and for publics (subsidies, welfare, public employment)	The Gulf's rentier bargain; Russia's oligarchs and security chiefs; China's cadre ladder; the Egyptian army's business empire	Sanctions-proofing through parallel payment systems; state capitalism as patronage
Legitimation	Ideology, performance (growth, order), tradition (dynasty, religion), and procedure (elections, referendums)	China's growth and nationalism; Putin's war as national revival; El Salvador's gang crackdown, with Bukele's approval at 87.8% (IUDOP, the Central American University's polling institute, May 15-26, 2026, 1,271 respondents); Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030	The 'spin dictator' (below)

Every autocracy stands on three pillars, and the mix defines the regime. Coercion, from the political police and the prisons to the surveillance state, is the foundation, and in the closed autocracies it is plainly visible. Co-optation, the patronage that keeps elites from defecting and publics from rising, is the everyday instrument. Legitimation, whether by ideology, performance, tradition, or procedure, makes the other two cheaper, because a regime that delivers growth, order, or national revival needs less force.

Sergei Guriev and Daniel Treisman argue that since the 1980s the 'dictator of fear' has largely given way to the 'spin dictator', who governs through information control and real but cultivated popularity rather than terror. He jails a few opponents, intimidates many, and wins elections he could lose. Orbán perfected the model in Hungary and lost with it in 2026, while Erdoğan in Turkey and Bukele in El Salvador maintain it, and the hybrid regimes of Module 8 run on it.

6c. The Durability, and the Exits

The 2020s have been the autocracies' decade (Module 1 gives the counts): the coup belt added military regimes, Russia and China consolidated, and the Gulf stayed rich. Their durability surprised the theorists who expected growth and education to open them up. Nine of the leaders in the table before Module 1 have

held power for more than twenty years, four of them for more than thirty, and Cameroon's president won an eighth term in 2025 at the age of 92.

The sources of that durability are the pillars: performance legitimacy looks better when democracies' economies falter, surveillance makes organized opposition harder than ever, and sanctions-proofing has blunted the West's main tool against autocrats, while mutual support does the rest (6d).

Autocracies still fall, and 2024-26 showed how varied the exits are. Syria's Bashar al-Assad fled a rebel offensive, Bangladesh's Sheikh Hasina fled a student uprising, Venezuela's Nicolás Maduro was seized by American forces, and Hungary's Viktor Orbán lost an election (Modules 8 and 16).

6d. The Autocratic Network and the Democratic Alliance

The autocracies are not independent of one another: China lends money and sells surveillance systems, Russia supplies arms and the mercenaries of its Africa Corps, North Korea has sent troops to fight in Russia's war since 2024, and Iran supplies drones, while the Gulf's money reaches every side. The BRICS group, named for its first five members, expanded in 2024 and 2025 to take in Egypt, Ethiopia, Iran, the United Arab Emirates, and Indonesia, and it gives the network a forum and a shared language of sovereignty against Western interference.

Two readings compete. Andrea Kendall-Taylor and Richard Fontaine see an 'axis of upheaval', a bloc more aligned against the West than at any time since the Cold War. Skeptics see transactional partners whose interests diverge, from Russia's and China's rivalry in Central Asia to the Gulf's ties with Washington. The record supports the skeptics on the hardest test: Russia did not save Assad, and neither Russia nor China came to Iran's defense in 2026.

The democracies' alliance is strained by its guarantor's turn. The American administration argues that its allies have ridden free on American protection; it left the World Health Organization and the Paris climate agreement (both effective in January 2026), and it fought the 2026 Iran war alongside Israel while its Gulf partners absorbed the counterstrikes. Its defenders point to a result: at their Hague summit in June 2025, NATO's members pledged 5% of GDP for defense by 2035, 3.5% of it on core military spending, the highest target in the alliance's history.

The course's reading: the autocracies cooperate where it is cheap, through finance, technology, and votes, and the democracies' alliance is paying more for defense while trusting its leader less. Neither side is the solid bloc its rivals describe.

Module 6 Key Points

Authoritarianism

• Personalist regimes are the most common and the worst at succession; single-party regimes last longest, and juntas the shortest.

• Every autocracy rests on coercion, co-optation, and legitimation; the 'spin dictator' rules through information rather than terror.

• Nine leaders in this course have held power for over twenty years, four of them for over thirty.

• Autocracies still fall in many ways: Assad and Hasina fled, Maduro was seized, and Orbán lost an election.

• The autocracies cooperate where it is cheap; NATO's members pledged 5% of GDP for defense while trusting their leader less.

Module 6 Quiz

Check Your Understanding

1. Which type of autocracy lasts longest, and which the shortest?

A) Personalist longest
B) Military longest; monarchic shortest
C) Theocratic longest; single-party shortest, since parties split
D) Single-party longest; military shortest

2. What is a 'spin dictator', in Guriev and Treisman's term?

A) A ruler who keeps power through information control and real approval rather than terror
B) A ruler who governs by open terror
C) A general in civilian clothes
D) A monarch who rules through parliament

3. How did Venezuela's personalist regime lose its leader in January 2026?

A) He lost the July 2024 election and conceded
B) American forces seized him
C) His army deposed him in a palace coup
D) He died in office and the party chose a successor

4. What does the module say about dynastic succession outside the monarchies?

A) It ended with the Kim dynasty
B) Most constitutions ban it outright
C) It happened only in the Gulf
D) It spread: Turkmenistan, Cambodia, Nicaragua, and Iran kept power in the family

5. Which states joined the BRICS group in 2024 and 2025?

A) Turkey, Saudi Arabia, Pakistan, and Venezuela, after long talks
B) Egypt, Ethiopia, Iran, the Emirates, and Indonesia
C) Mexico, Argentina, Nigeria, and Kazakhstan, after votes in 2024
D) Russia, China, Iran, North Korea, and Belarus, as a defense pact

Module 7 — Totalitarianism and Its Afterlives

The Twentieth Century's Extreme, and What Survives of It

Recommended Reading / Reference

Book: Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (1951)

Reference: Steven Feldstein, 'The Global Expansion of AI Surveillance' (Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2019)

7a. The Model

The word began as an insult and became a boast. An Italian opponent of fascism coined it in 1923, and Mussolini adopted it, summing up his program as 'everything within the state, nothing outside the state, nothing against the state'. His own regime never achieved it, since it shared power with the monarchy and the Church, but Hitler's Germany and Stalin's Soviet Union came closer than any states before them.

Hannah Arendt argued in 1951 that totalitarianism was a new form of government rather than an extreme tyranny. It used terror and an ideology claiming to know the laws of history or race to dominate every part of life, and it atomized its subjects so that no family, church, or association stood between the individual and the state. Its central institution was the camp, where the regime tested the proposition that human beings could be made wholly superfluous.

Carl Friedrich and Zbigniew Brzezinski gave political science its working checklist in 1956: an official ideology, a single mass party led by one man, terror by a secret police, a monopoly of communications, a monopoly of weapons, and central direction of the economy. Juan Linz later drew the line that the field still uses: an authoritarian regime tolerates limited pluralism, rules by a 'mentality' rather than an ideology, and prefers a passive public, while a totalitarian one destroys pluralism, imposes an ideology, and mobilizes the public to take part in its own control.

Linz and Alfred Stepan added the 'post-totalitarian' regime for what came after the founders died. The party-state remains, but terror recedes, the ideology becomes ritual, and a private sphere returns, as in the Soviet bloc after Stalin, China after Mao, and Vietnam after its reforms of 1986. Most of the twentieth century's totalitarian states ended that way, by exhaustion rather than overthrow, and the exceptions ended by military defeat.

Regime	Years	Ideology	Instruments	Human cost (estimates)	How it ended
Stalin's Soviet Union	About 1929-1953	Marxism-Leninism	The secret police (NKVD), the Gulag camps, show trials, forced collectivization	The famine of 1932-33 in Ukraine and Kazakhstan; about 680,000 executed in the Great Terror of 1937-38; about 1.6 million deaths in the Gulag	Stalin's death; Khrushchev's denunciation of him (1956)
Nazi Germany	1933-1945	National Socialism	The Gestapo and the SS, the camps, a racial state	The Holocaust (6 million Jews) and a war of conquest that killed tens of millions	Military defeat
Mao's China	1949-1976	Marxism-Leninism and Mao Zedong Thought	Mass campaigns, labor camps, the Great Leap Forward (1958-62), the Cultural Revolution (1966-76)	The famine of 1959-61, with scholars' estimates of 15 to 45 million deaths	Mao's death; Deng Xiaoping's reforms

Regime	Years	Ideology	Instruments	Human cost (estimates)	How it ended
Cambodia under the Khmer Rouge	1975-1979	Agrarian communism	Emptying of the cities, the S-21 prison, the killing fields	About 1.5 to 2 million, a fifth to a quarter of the population	Vietnam's invasion (January 1979)
North Korea	Since 1948	Juche (self-reliance) and a dynasty	Political prison camps; songbun, the ranking of every family by loyalty	The famine of the 1990s, which killed hundreds of thousands at least	In power
Eritrea	Since inde pendence (1993)	Nationalism under one party	Indefinite national service; a constitution (1997) never implemented; no national election since independence	Hundreds of thousands have fled	In power

Death tolls are scholars' estimates and vary widely; the ranges shown are the commonly cited ones.

7b. The Survivors

North Korea is the last regime that fits the model almost completely. The Kim family has ruled for three generations, every family is ranked by its loyalty, and a United Nations commission of inquiry estimated in 2014 that the political prison camps held 80,000 to 120,000 people. At the Workers' Party's Ninth Congress, held on February 19-25, 2026, Kim Jong Un was re-elected general secretary, ruled out giving up nuclear weapons, and declared ties with South Korea 'completely eliminated', rejecting reunification.

Eritrea is Africa's closest equivalent: Isaias Afwerki has ruled since independence, and the independent press has been shut since 2001 (the table has the rest). Turkmenistan, which Freedom House scores 1 out of 100, pairs a personality cult with a dynasty: its former president holds the title 'National Leader' and chairs the People's Council, while his son is president.

7c. China and Russia: The Question of Return

Whether China under Xi Jinping is moving back toward the model is the module's contested question. **Those who say it is** point to the term limits removed in 2018, Xi's thought written into the party's charter and the state's constitution, and the party's reach into private firms. They cite the camps of Xinjiang, which held an estimated one million or more Uyghurs and other Muslims at their peak, and the zero-COVID lockdowns, which confined hundreds of millions at the party's command. The United Nations human rights office concluded in August 2022 that the abuses in Xinjiang 'may constitute' crimes against humanity.

Those who say it is not point to what Mao's state forbade and Xi's allows. China has a market economy, private property, and tens of millions of citizens traveling abroad, and its people do not face mass campaigns of mutual denunciation. The ideology commands ritual rather than belief, and the party prefers a demobilized public to a mobilized one. China calls the Xinjiang camps vocational training centers and says they have closed.

The evidence supports a distinction: where the party sees a threat, as in Xinjiang, Tibet, and Hong Kong since 2020, it uses methods close to total control: mass detention, the surveillance of every phone and street, and the reshaping of religion and language. Elsewhere it governs as a high-capacity single-party autocracy that leaves private life alone in exchange for political silence. The course's reading is that China is not totalitarian, but it has built totalitarian enclaves inside an authoritarian state, and the technology makes those enclaves cheaper to run than ever.

Russia's war has pushed it in the same direction without a mobilizing ideology. Since February 2022 the authorities have detained about 20,000 people for opposing the war, according to the monitoring group OVD-Info, and laws against 'discrediting' the army make dissent a crime. Patriotic education is now compulsory, and on February 12, 2026, the government blocked WhatsApp entirely while promoting a state messenger called Max. The regime still asks for quiet rather than enthusiasm, which keeps it on the authoritarian side of Linz's line.

7d. The Digital Toolkit

The twentieth century's totalitarian states needed millions of informers; the twenty-first century's autocracies can buy cameras and software. Steven Feldstein found in 2019 that at least 75 of 176 countries used artificial-intelligence surveillance, and that Chinese firms supplied it to 63 of them, Huawei alone to at least 50, while firms from the United States supplied 32. The buyers included democracies as well as autocracies, which is the point: the tools are neutral, and the institutions that govern their use decide whether a city has safe streets or a captive population.

The tools lower the cost of control in three ways: facial recognition and phone tracking replace the informer, the analysis of communications replaces the censor's reading room, and the targeting of a few people replaces terror against many. What they have not supplied is belief. Regimes with the most advanced systems, among them Iran and Russia, still face protests and leaks, and China's own lockdown protests spread across cities despite the cameras.

Module 7 Key Points

Totalitarianism and Its Afterlives

• Totalitarianism aims to control every part of life through terror, ideology, and mobilization; authoritarianism settles for obedience.

• Most twentieth-century totalitarian states ended by exhaustion into post-totalitarian rule; Nazi Germany and the Khmer Rouge ended by defeat.

• North Korea fits the model almost completely; its camps held 80,000-120,000 people by a 2014 UN estimate.

• China is not totalitarian, but Xinjiang shows it can build totalitarian enclaves inside an authoritarian state.

• Chinese firms supplied AI surveillance to 63 countries by 2019; technology cheapens control but does not create belief.

Module 7 Quiz

Check Your Understanding

1. In Arendt's account, what was the central institution of totalitarian rule?

A) The secret ballot, which hid dissent
B) The parliament, which ratified decrees
C) The concentration camp, where total domination was tested
D) The central bank, which financed the party's patronage and its wars

2. Which regime does the module treat as the last that fits the totalitarian model almost completely?

A) North Korea
B) Cuba
C) Turkmenistan
D) China under Xi Jinping, since its 2018 constitutional amendments

3. What did the UN's 2014 inquiry estimate about North Korea's political prison camps?

A) That they had closed
B) That they held 5,000
C) That they held a million
D) That they held 80,000 to 120,000 people

4. What did Feldstein's 2019 index find about Chinese firms?

A) Supplied only China itself
B) Supplied 176 countries, every one it studied
C) Supplied AI surveillance to 63 countries
D) Supplied 32 countries, the same as American firms

5. What is the course's reading of China under Xi Jinping?

A) A fully totalitarian state again
B) Totalitarian enclaves inside an authoritarian state
C) A liberal democracy in waiting
D) A post-totalitarian state that has given up surveillance for markets and private life

Module 8 — Hybrid Regimes and Competitive Authoritarianism

Elections Without a Level Field, and How Such Regimes End

Recommended Reading / Reference

Book: Steven Levitsky and Lucan Way, *Competitive Authoritarianism: Hybrid Regimes after the Cold War* (2010)

Reference: Kim Lane Scheppele, 'Autocratic Legalism' (*University of Chicago Law Review*, 2018)

8a. What a Hybrid Regime Is

A hybrid regime holds real elections that the opposition can contest but almost never win. In Levitsky and Way's definition of competitive authoritarianism (Module 2), the opposition is legal, the vote is counted, and the outcome is uncertain enough to matter, yet the incumbent abuses the state so systematically that the field is tilted against every challenger. The tilt runs through the referees, the money, and the media rather than through ballot stuffing, which is why observers often find election day clean and the campaign unfair.

Kim Lane Scheppele named the method 'autocratic legalism': each step is taken through a law, a constitutional amendment, or a court ruling, so that the regime can answer every critic by pointing to a statute. The sequence is the one set out in Module 5, and the table shows how five governments have applied it and where each stood in October 2026.

Country	Ruler	Referees and rules	Opposition and press	October 2026
Turkey	Recep Tayyip Erdoğan	About 4,000 judges and prosecutors dismissed after the 2016 coup attempt; a presidential system adopted by referendum in 2017 (51.4%)	Istanbul's mayor Ekrem İmamoğlu, the strongest challenger, jailed since March 2025 and on trial since March 2026; a court removed the main opposition party's leader in May 2026	The ousted leader and 90 other deputies founded the New Party in July; Erdoğan can run again only if parliament calls an early election
Serbia	Aleksandar Vučić, prime minister from 2014, then president	Observers' reports of a field skewed by the president's dominance of the campaign (2023)	Pro-government tabloids and national broadcasters; mass protests since a station canopy collapsed in Novi Sad in November 2024, killing 16	Vučić resigned the presidency to run for prime minister in a snap election on October 25
Georgia	Georgian Dream; its founder Bidzina Ivanishvili holds no office	A foreign-agent law (2024); an EU accession bid frozen by the government in November 2024	Opposition leaders jailed in 2025; a journalist sentenced to two years; a suit filed on September 24 asking the Constitutional Court to ban the main opposition parties	The ban case undecided
El Salvador	Nayib Bukele	The constitutional court's judges removed in 2021; indefinite re-election and six-year terms adopted in July 2025; a 30% tax on foreign funding of civil groups (2025)	A state of exception since March 2022, renewed monthly, with 92,959 arrests by August 2026; journalists working from abroad	Next presidential election in 2027, moved up to coincide with the legislative vote

Country	Ruler	Referees and rules	Opposition and press	October 2026
Tanzania	Samia Suluhu Hassan (her party and its forerunner since independence)	The main opposition party barred from the October 2025 election	Its leader charged with treason in April 2025; at least 518 killed after the vote, by the government's own inquiry	Samia declared the winner with 97.7%

The table shows the hybrid regime's central weakness: it needs elections for legitimacy, and elections can be lost. As a credible challenger emerges, the regime's options narrow to two: it can accept the risk of defeat, as Hungary's did in 2026, or it can remove the challenger by prosecution or ban, as Turkey, Georgia, and Tanzania have done. Each removal moves the regime closer to closed autocracy, the direction Venezuela and Nicaragua took between 2016 and 2024. Other governments rewrite the rules instead: in 2025-26 Chad and Zimbabwe lengthened presidential terms, and Zimbabwe gave the election of the president to parliament, while Kazakhstan's new constitution reset its president's term count.

8b. Hungary: Restoration or Repetition?

Viktor Orbán's Hungary was the model hybrid regime of the European Union. After winning two-thirds of parliament in 2010, his Fidesz party wrote a new constitution, packed the Constitutional Court, and redrew the electoral law. It gathered some 500 pro-government outlets into a single foundation in 2018 and created a Sovereignty Protection Office to investigate foreign-funded groups. It also entrenched its appointees in posts with nine- to twelve-year terms and in 'cardinal' laws that only a two-thirds majority can amend.

The system was designed to survive a defeat, and in 2026 it suffered one. Péter Magyar, a former Fidesz insider, united the opposition vote behind his Tisza party and won the two-thirds majority that the rules had been built to deny (Module 5). Magyar's government then used that majority at speed: a constitutional amendment of June 15 limited prime ministers to two terms and abolished the Sovereignty Protection Office. A media law of June 23 dissolved the state media agency and put public broadcasting under a board of three government, three opposition, and three professional nominees, and the public channels' news programs were suspended from July 7.

A further amendment of July 13, passed 139 to 6 while Fidesz boycotted the vote, ended President Tamás Sulyok's term and required Constitutional Court judges to retire at 70. Parliament then elected András Baka president, a judge whose own term as head of the Supreme Court Orbán's government had cut short in 2012, a removal the European Court of Human Rights later ruled had violated his rights. In May the European Union agreed to release €16.4 billion of frozen funds as reforms were met, and none had been paid by late August.

The case that this is restoration, as the government and its supporters make it, starts from the trap Orbán built. His loyalists sat in fixed-term posts and his rules in two-thirds laws, so the only lawful way out of a two-thirds system is a two-thirds majority, used before the old guard can obstruct it. The government has bound itself as well, with a two-term limit on its own prime minister, and its new media board gives the opposition a third of the seats.

The case that this is repetition, as Fidesz, some legal scholars, and Human Rights Watch make it, starts from the method. Ending a sitting president's term by amendment, forcing judges out by an age rule, and taking the public broadcaster's news off the air are the tools Orbán used in 2010-13, applied in the opposite direction. In 2011 his government lowered the judges' retirement age to 62, and the EU Court of Justice struck the change down. Human Rights Watch warned on June 25 that the rushed constitutional changes undermined the rule of law.

The evidence so far is mixed: the new government has given up powers as well as taken them, and the opposition remains in parliament. But the amendments passed within weeks of the government taking office, and public news was still off the air in mid-August. **The course's reading:** restoration is the use of a majority to build institutions that the majority itself cannot control. Magyar's government has legislated the first such institution, the balanced media board, and the test is whether it lets that board and a renewed court rule against it. The constitutional review it opened in September, which is to end in a referendum, will show which reading is right.

8c. Poland: The Frozen Restoration

Poland shows the harder case, a restoration without two-thirds. The Law and Justice party (PiS) captured the Constitutional Tribunal in 2015-16 and the body that appoints judges, the National Council of the Judiciary (KRS), in 2017-18, and the European Union froze funds until a new government promised to undo it. Donald Tusk's coalition took office and took control of the public broadcaster by putting it into liquidation, a step its critics called the same abuse it claimed to cure.

The courts proved harder to recover, because a president from the PiS camp holds a veto that the coalition cannot override. Andrzej Duda used it until August 2025, and his successor Karol Nawrocki vetoed 41 bills in his first year, a record, including the bill to rebuild the judicial council on February 19, 2026. The government refuses to publish rulings of a tribunal it regards as illegitimate, and judges disagree about which colleagues were lawfully appointed. Poland therefore has two legal orders, each calling the other unlawful, and the next election (Module 17) will decide which survives.

8d. India: The Contested Classification

India is the largest country whose classification is disputed (Module 1). **The case that it has become a hybrid regime**, as V-Dem, Freedom House, and India's opposition make it, rests on the field between elections. They cite the investigation and arrest of opposition politicians by central agencies, including Delhi's chief minister Arvind Kejriwal on the eve of the 2024 vote, and the use of anti-terror and sedition laws against activists and journalists. They add the consolidation of broadcast media under owners close to the government and the revocation of Kashmir's autonomy in 2019 with its leaders detained.

The case that it remains a democracy, as the government and many Indian scholars make it, rests on the elections themselves. About 642 million people voted in 2024, and the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) lost its majority, falling to 240 of 543 seats, and now governs in coalition. Opposition parties run several large states, the Supreme Court struck down the government's anonymous electoral-bond financing in February 2024, and the opposition has defeated a constitutional amendment the government wanted (Module 12).

The course's reading: the evidence of 2024-26 shows a ruling party that can lose seats and votes, which a closed or well-tilted hybrid regime would not allow. It also shows a field tilted by investigations, media ownership, and pressure on civil society. India is best described as a competitive democracy with a tilted field, closer to Freedom House's 'Partly Free' than to V-Dem's 'electoral autocracy'.

8e. How Hybrid Regimes End

Levitsky and Way found that the hybrid regimes of 1990-2008 ended according to their ties to the West and the strength of their own state and party. Where economic, social, and political links to the European Union or the United States were dense, they tended to democratize, while those with strong ruling parties and few Western ties lasted or closed. The cases of 2023-26 fit the pattern: Hungary, inside the European Union, ended its hybrid regime at the ballot box, as Poland ended its slide in 2023, while Venezuela and Nicaragua, with few Western ties and armies loyal to the ruler, hardened.

A second condition has proved decisive: a united opposition behind one challenger, with turnout high enough to overcome the tilt. Hungary's opposition lost in 2022 as a six-party alliance and won in 2026 as one party, on a record turnout (Module 5). That is why the regimes still standing now aim their prosecutions at the single strongest challenger (8a). The hybrid regime's last line of defense is to make sure that no Magyar emerges.

Module 8 Key Points

Hybrid Regimes and Competitive Authoritarianism

• A hybrid regime holds real elections on a tilted field; its weakness is that elections can still be lost.

• Facing a credible challenger, hybrids accept defeat or remove the challenger; Turkey jailed Istanbul's mayor in March 2025.

• Hungary's new two-thirds majority is undoing Orbán's system with his tools; whether it builds institutions it cannot control is the test.

• Poland's restoration is frozen by 41 presidential vetoes in a year, leaving two rival legal orders.

• India's ruling party lost its majority in 2024: a competitive democracy with a tilted field, by this course's reading.

Module 8 Quiz

Check Your Understanding

1. What is 'autocratic legalism', in Scheppele's term?

A) Dismantling checks by law
B) Rule by military decree, with the courts closed
C) Rule by a court that has replaced the parliament
D) Government by referendum on every major decision

2. Why does the module call elections the hybrid regime's central weakness?

A) They are too expensive to hold
B) It needs them for legitimacy, and they can be lost
C) The army runs them, and the army can turn
D) Foreign observers write the results and can withhold their approval

3. What did Hungary's amendment of July 13, 2026 do?

A) It ended President Sulyok's term and made Constitutional Court judges retire at 70
B) It abolished the presidency
C) It restored Orbán's media foundation
D) It lowered the judges' retirement age to 62

4. How many bills did Poland's President Nawrocki veto in his first year?

A) Seven
B) 35 in ten years, the record set by an earlier president
C) 41, a record
D) Five, all of them on judicial reform

5. What does the course's reading call India?

A) A closed autocracy in which the ruling party cannot lose
B) A liberal democracy with no qualification at all
C) An electoral autocracy, as V-Dem and India's opposition both say
D) A competitive democracy with a tilted field

Module 9 — Theocracy and Religion in Politics

Rule by Clerics, and the Many Ways States Hold Faith

Recommended Reading / Reference

Book: Ervand Abrahamian, *A History of Modern Iran* (second edition, 2018)

Reference: Pew Research Center, 'Many Countries Favor Specific Religions, Officially or Unofficially' (2017)

9a. The Spectrum

Relationship	What it means	Examples	Note
Theocracy	Clerics or a religious leader hold supreme power, and religious law is the state's law	Iran, Afghanistan under the Taliban, the Vatican	Iran's the only one with elections
Religious monarchy or republic	An official religion whose law shapes the state, under secular rulers	Saudi Arabia, Brunei, Pakistan, Mauritania	The rulers, not the clerics, hold power
Official church, secular practice	A state religion with ceremonial or administrative privileges	England, Denmark, Iceland, Greece, Malta, Costa Rica	Among the most secular societies in the world
Preferred religion	No official religion, but one favored in law or practice	Russia (Orthodoxy), Israel (Judaism, with religious courts for marriage), Poland, India in its ruling party's program	Dozens of countries
Separation	The state favors no religion	The United States, France (laïcité, strict secularism), Turkey, Mexico, Japan	Courts police the line
Hostile or controlling	The state restricts or directs religion	China, North Korea, Vietnam, Cuba	Party members in China must be atheists

Counts from Pew Research Center (2017): 43 countries had an official state religion, 27 of them Islam, 13 Christianity, and 2 Buddhism; 40 favored a religion; 10 were hostile to religion.

Theocracy in the strict sense, rule by clerics in the name of God, is rare: three states fit it in 2026. Religion's role in politics is far wider: dozens of countries have or favor an official religion, and in the world's largest democracies religious identity shapes elections, from India's Hindu nationalism to the evangelical vote in the United States. Pew's study of the world in 2020 counted about 2.3 billion Christians and 2.0 billion Muslims, with the religiously unaffiliated at 24.2% of humanity and growing, as people raised Christian leave religion in Europe and the Americas.

9b. Iran: Succession in Wartime

Iran's constitution of 1979 fused a republic with Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini's doctrine of velayat-e faqih, the guardianship of the Islamic jurist. Supreme power belongs to a senior cleric, chosen for life by an elected Assembly of Experts of 88 clerics. A Guardian Council of twelve, half of them clerics appointed by the leader, vets every candidate for office and every law. Within those limits Iranians elect a president and a parliament, and the vetting has narrowed the choice over time: turnout in the presidential vote of June 2024 fell to a record low of 39.9% in the first round.

The Islamic Republic's institutions were tested by violence in 2026: on February 28 the United States and Israel opened a war on Iran, and an airstrike in Tehran killed the Supreme Leader, Ali Khamenei, aged 86. Under the constitution an interim council of the president, the head of the judiciary, and a cleric of the Guardian Council took his powers. At a session on March 8 the Assembly of Experts chose his son, Mojtaba Khamenei, then 56, as the third Supreme Leader, and it announced the choice the next day.

The new leader has not appeared in public since his appointment: he has issued written messages, an undated twelve-second video was released on August 8, and he did not attend his father's burial on July 9. The war itself had no ceasefire in force on October 12, with Pakistan and Qatar mediating between Tehran and Washington.

Is the Islamic Republic now a military regime in clerical dress? Those who say it is, among them exiled opposition groups and many Western analysts, point to the hereditary succession, a strange outcome for a revolution made against a monarchy. They note that the commanders of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) control security, much of the economy, and access to a leader whom no one outside his circle has seen, so that in their account the Guards now rule in his name.

Those who say it is not, among them the regime and some scholars of Iran, point to the procedure. The constitution's interim council functioned, the Assembly of Experts chose the successor within eight days, the new leader is a cleric trained in Qom, and his written messages carry the office's religious authority, while the president and parliament continue to sit and to govern.

The course's reading: the formal structure survived the decapitation, which is more than most personalist regimes manage, but the balance inside it moved toward the Guards. A leader who has gone unseen for seven months cannot arbitrate between factions as his father did. The test is whether he appears and governs in public, and who decides the terms of any settlement with the United States.

9c. The Taliban's Emirate

Afghanistan is the purest theocracy of the three, governed by decree from Kandahar by the Taliban's leader, Hibatullah Akhundzada, as 'commander of the faithful', without a constitution, a legislature, or elections. Girls have been barred from school beyond the sixth grade since March 2022, women from universities since December 2022, and a 'vice and virtue' law of August 2024 forbids women's voices to be heard in public. On July 8, 2025, the International Criminal Court issued arrest warrants for Akhundzada and the Taliban's chief justice for the persecution of women and girls.

The emirate is isolated and yet not alone: Russia became the first state to recognize it, on July 3, 2025, and China, the Gulf states, and the Central Asian republics deal with it as the government in fact. Its border with Pakistan has become a front: after cross-border strikes, Pakistan declared 'open war' on February 27, 2026, a ceasefire was agreed in late March, and fighting resumed in September.

9d. The Other Two Models: The Vatican and Riyadh

The Vatican is an elective absolute monarchy whose ruler is chosen for life by the cardinals under 80. Leo XIV, born Robert Prevost in Chicago, is the first pope from the United States. His state covers 44 hectares, but his church counted 1.422 billion members at the end of 2024, and the papacy's influence runs through that membership rather than through any territory.

Saudi Arabia shows the opposite movement, a religious state becoming less clerical. Its rulers drew their legitimacy for nearly three centuries from an alliance with the Wahhabi clergy. Since 2016, however, the

religious police have lost their power of arrest, women have gained the right to drive (2018), and cinemas and concerts have opened. Religious authority now serves the crown: when the Grand Mufti died on September 23, 2025, the king named his successor, Saleh al-Fawzan, within a month (Module 3 has the crown's side of the story).

9e. Religion Inside Democracies

Israel's draft crisis is the sharpest case of religion straining a democracy's institutions. Ultra-Orthodox (Haredi) men had been exempt from military service by custom and successive laws, until the Supreme Court ruled in June 2024 that no legal basis for the exemption remained. The army has since sent close to 80,000 call-up orders to Haredi men, and only a small fraction have enlisted. The Haredi parties left the government over the issue in July 2025, and a law barring the arrest of draft evaders, passed in July 2026, was struck down by the court on September 3, in a ruling that counted more than 73,000 evaders. The question will shape the coalition that follows the coming election (Module 17).

India's constitution is secular, and its ruling party's program is Hindu nationalist. The prime minister consecrated the temple at Ayodhya, built on the site of a mosque demolished in 1992, in January 2024. A citizenship law in force since March 2024 offers a fast track to non-Muslim refugees from three neighboring countries, and a 2025 law changed the governance of Muslim religious endowments. To the government these are corrections of past neglect and protections for persecuted minorities. To their critics they turn a secular republic into a majoritarian one, a question the census of 2027 will sharpen, since it is the first since 1931 to count caste.

The pattern across the democracies is that religion now enters politics through identity rather than through doctrine. Religious parties and voters contest who belongs to the nation, as in India, Israel, and the American argument over Christian nationalism, more than how the state should be governed. The theocracies, by contrast, are defined by doctrine, and in 2026 Iran faced the question that doctrine cannot answer: who rules when the leader is gone or unseen.

Module 9 Key Points

Theocracy and Religion in Politics

• Only three states are theocracies in 2026; 43 have an official religion, 27 of them Islam (Pew, 2017).

• Iran's Supreme Leader was killed on February 28, 2026; the Assembly of Experts chose his son on March 8.

• The Islamic Republic's structure survived decapitation, but power moved toward the Revolutionary Guards.

• The Taliban bar girls from school past the sixth grade; the International Criminal Court sought its leader's arrest in 2025.

• In democracies religion enters politics through identity: Israel's draft fight and India's Hindu nationalism.

Module 9 Quiz

Check Your Understanding

1. Who chooses Iran's Supreme Leader under its constitution?

A) The Guardian Council
B) The Assembly of Experts
C) The Revolutionary Guards' commanders
D) A national referendum, held within forty days of a vacancy

2. What happened to Iran's leadership in the first half of 2026?

A) Ali Khamenei resigned for health reasons
B) The president took over as leader
C) The Revolutionary Guards abolished the office
D) Ali Khamenei was killed in an airstrike, and his son Mojtaba was chosen on March 8

3. What did the International Criminal Court do on July 8, 2025?

A) It issued arrest warrants for Taliban leaders
B) It recognized the Taliban
C) It indicted Iran's new Supreme Leader
D) It closed its investigation of Afghanistan for lack of cooperation

4. Which state first recognized the Taliban's government?

A) China, its largest neighbor
B) Pakistan
C) Russia
D) Qatar, which hosted the talks that preceded the American withdrawal

5. What does the module say about religion in democracies?

A) It enters politics through identity
B) It has disappeared from elections
C) It is confined to the courts
D) It enters through doctrine, as clerics write the laws in most of them

Module 10 — Military Rule and the Return of the Coup

The Coup Belt, the Army Behind the Throne, and Why Coups Stick

Recommended Reading / Reference

Book: Samuel Finer, *The Man on Horseback: The Role of the Military in Politics* (1962)

Reference: Jonathan Powell and Clayton Thyne, 'Global Instances of Coups' (dataset, updated continuously)

10a. The Coup Belt

Coups had become rare: in the two decades after the Cold War, the African Union's rule suspending governments that seize power, Western aid conditions, and regional sanctions made a coup a costly gamble, and successful coups fell to a few a year worldwide. Then came a run that no one predicted. By the count of the political scientist John J. Chin, Africa saw eleven successful coups between 2020 and the end of 2025, concentrated in a band across the Sahel and West Africa that the press calls the coup belt, and Myanmar's army seized power in Asia.

Country	Coup	Ruler	The promised transition	October 2026
Mali	August 2020 and May 2021	Gen. Assimi Goïta	A five-year renewable presidential mandate from July 2025; parties dissolved in May 2025	An al-Qaeda affiliate, JNIM (Jama'at Nusrat al-Islam wal-Muslimin), has blockaded fuel since September 2025 and Bamako itself since April 2026; the defense minister was killed on April 25
Chad	April 2021, on the president's death	Mahamat Déby, the late president's son	Elected in May 2024; seven-year terms without limit adopted in October 2025	A dynastic succession completed by election
Guinea	September 2021	Gen. Mamady Doumbouya	A new constitution by referendum (September 2025)	Elected president with 86.7% in December 2025
Sudan	October 2021	Gen. Abdel Fattah al-Burhan	Rule shared with the Rapid Support Forces (RSF), a paramilitary, until they fought	At war since April 2023 (Module 16)
Burkina Faso	January and September 2022	Capt. Ibrahim Traoré	The transition extended to 2029; parties dissolved in January 2026	Analysts estimate that jihadist groups contest or control up to 60% of the territory
Niger	July 2023	Gen. Abdourahamane Tiani	A five-year transition from March 2025	Survived a coup attempt in August 2026 (10c)
Gabon	August 2023	Gen. Brice Oligui Nguema	An election within two years	Elected with 94.9% in April 2025
Madagascar	October 2025	Col. Michael Randrianirina	Twenty-four months, to a presidential election in September 2027	An army unit joined youth protests, and the president fled

Country	Coup	Ruler	The promised transition	October 2026
Guinea-Bissau	November 2025, the day before election results were due	Gen. Horta Inta-A Na Man	A new constitution by referendum (August 2026)	Elections set for December 6, 2026
Myanmar	February 2021	Gen. Min Aung Hlaing	A managed election in December 2025 and January 2026	The general became president; the army has lost control of much of the country

Coups counted as successful by John J. Chin's data (2025). Benin's and Niger's attempts failed (10c).

The juntas of the Sahel have moved together. Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger expelled French troops between 2022 and 2023, invited Russian forces (first the Wagner Group, since June 2025 the state-run Africa Corps), and formed the Alliance of Sahel States (AES). They left the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) in January 2025, have since created a joint force and a confederal parliament, and dissolved their political parties. Elsewhere the coup leaders have civilianized through elections they were sure to win: in Chad, Gabon, and Guinea.

10b. Why the Coups Returned, and Whether the Juntas Deliver

Four causes recur in the scholarship. Jihadist insurgencies humiliated the armies of Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger, and officers blamed the civilian governments that sent them to fight underequipped. The deterrent weakened, because ECOWAS sanctions on Mali and Niger failed and its threatened intervention in Niger in 2023 never came. Russia offered regime protection without conditions, and success was contagious, since each coup that survived lowered the expected cost of the next.

The fourth cause is public consent: Afrobarometer's surveys of 2021-23 in 39 African countries, each of about 1,200 to 2,400 adults, found that two-thirds of respondents rejected military rule as a system. Yet a majority said the army may step in when elected leaders abuse power, and the young said so more often than their elders.

The juntas' case, as their leaders and supporters make it, is sovereignty. They point out that French troops are gone and that Niger nationalized its main uranium mine in June 2025. Mali's new mining code takes a larger share of gold revenues, and the juntas argue that Western-backed civilian governments had delivered neither security nor dignity. Rallies in Bamako, Ouagadougou, and Niamey, and a large following for Traoré on social media, are offered as proof of support that elections would only confirm.

The critics' case is that the juntas have failed by their own first promise, security. The Africa Center for Strategic Studies, counting from data gathered by the conflict monitor ACLED (Armed Conflict Location and Event Data), recorded 9,826 deaths linked to militant Islamist groups in the three states in 2025, 41% of Africa's total, and in Niger such deaths quadrupled after the coup. The critics add the massacres of civilians by soldiers and their Russian allies, the dissolution of parties, and elections postponed to the end of the decade.

The course's reading: the juntas have delivered sovereignty as they define it, with foreign troops out and mines nationalized, and have not delivered security, the promise they seized power to keep. The consent they enjoy is real but conditional: the surveys show publics that accept a coup against abusive leaders, not permanent military rule.

10c. The Army Behind Civilian Rule

Military power does not need a junta. In Pakistan, where the army has ruled directly for more than three decades since 1947 and indirectly for most of the rest, the army chief Asim Munir was made a field marshal in May 2025 after the conflict with India. A constitutional amendment of November 2025 then created the post of Chief of Defence Forces, which he took in December for five years, with immunity from prosecution for life. Imran Khan, the former prime minister who fell out with the army, has been in prison since August 2023 and has received sentences of 14 and 17 years.

Egypt's president is the general who led the coup of 2013, and Myanmar's is the general who led its coup (10a). In Thailand the army and the courts have shared a veto over elected governments since the coups of 2006 and 2014. The Constitutional Court dissolved the party that won the 2023 election and removed two prime ministers in 2024 and 2025. Thai voters then returned a government led by Bhumjaithai, a party close to that establishment (Module 5). In Indonesia a law of March 2025 opened 14 civilian institutions to serving officers, up from 10, reviving fears of the army's political role under the Suharto regime.

Worked example — A Coup's Survival

Four questions decide whether a coup sticks once the shooting starts. Does the rest of the army join or stand aside? Does the capital's street accept it? Do the neighbors and patrons act? And can the new rulers pay the soldiers? Naunihal Singh's study of coups (2014) adds the mechanism: a coup succeeds when its leaders persuade the other officers that everyone else is already with them, which is why the first target is the broadcaster.

Niger's coup passed all four tests: the army rallied to the presidential guard, crowds cheered, ECOWAS threatened force but never sent it, and Russia stepped in as patron. Madagascar's passed them in a different order: an army unit, the Corps of Administrative and Technical Personnel and Services (CAPSAT), joined youth protests, the rest of the army followed, and the president fled before the neighbors could act.

Benin in December 2025 failed them: soldiers announced the president's removal on state television, but loyal units fought back within hours, Nigeria sent jets and troops at Benin's request, ECOWAS ordered its standby force deployed, and France supplied surveillance and logistics. Niger's junta itself survived an attempt on August 29, 2026, with the help of Russia's Africa Corps. The lesson is that the outcome is decided in the first hours, by the officers who wait to see who is winning, and that an outside patron willing to act can tip them.

Module 10 Key Points

Military Rule and the Return of the Coup

• Africa saw eleven successful coups from 2020 to 2025, concentrated in a coup belt across the Sahel and West Africa.

• Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger expelled French troops, invited Russia, and left ECOWAS in January 2025.

• The juntas delivered sovereignty but not security: 9,826 militant-linked deaths in the three states in 2025.

• Armies also rule from behind civilians: Pakistan's field marshal holds a five-year command with lifelong immunity.

• A coup is decided in its first hours, by officers who wait to see who is winning; Benin's failed in December 2025.

Module 10 Quiz

Check Your Understanding

1. By John J. Chin's count, how many successful coups did Africa see from 2020 to 2025?

A) Two
B) Five, all of them in the Sahel
C) Eleven
D) Twenty-two, counting failed attempts

2. What did Afrobarometer's 2021-23 surveys find about public attitudes to coups?

A) Most respondents preferred military rule to democracy
B) Support for coups was highest among the old
C) Few respondents had any opinion on military rule
D) Two-thirds rejected military rule, yet a majority accepted the army stepping in against abusive leaders

3. Why did Benin's coup attempt of December 2025 fail?

A) The plotters lost an election
B) Loyal troops and Nigeria
C) France's army restored the president alone
D) The Alliance of Sahel States sent troops to stop it

4. What post did Pakistan's 27th Amendment create for Asim Munir?

A) President, replacing Asif Ali Zardari
B) Prime minister, with emergency powers
C) Chief justice of a new constitutional court
D) Chief of Defence Forces

5. What is the course's reading of the Sahel juntas' record?

A) Sovereignty delivered, security not
B) Security restored
C) Sovereignty lost to Russia, security restored
D) Elections held on schedule, as each junta promised in its first year

Module 11 — Technocracy, Meritocracy, and the Administrative State

Rule by Experts, and the Argument over Insulating Them

Recommended Reading / Reference

Book: Daniel A. Bell, *The China Model: Political Meritocracy and the Limits of Democracy* (2015)

Reference: Alberto Alesina and Lawrence Summers, 'Central Bank Independence and Macroeconomic Performance' (*Journal of Money, Credit and Banking*, 1993)

11a. Rule by Experts

Every state needs people who know things, and the question is how much power to give them. Plato wanted philosophers to rule, imperial China chose its officials by examination for some thirteen centuries, and Max Weber described the modern state as a bureaucracy of trained officials bound by rules. Democracies answered with professional civil services, built in Britain from the reforms of 1854 and in the United States from the Pendleton Act of 1883, that serve elected governments without belonging to them.

Technocracy survives today in four forms, the first being the meritocratic one-party states, China, Vietnam, and in a softer form Singapore, which choose their rulers by performance inside the party rather than by election. Technocratic governments in democracies are a crisis remedy: Italy turned to the economists Mario Monti and Mario Draghi, and Greece to a former central banker in 2011. Independent agencies inside democracies, among them central banks, statistics offices, regulators, and courts, are insulated from elected politicians by fixed terms and protection from dismissal. The European Union adds a fourth form, a supranational executive and central bank that no single electorate chooses (Module 12).

Institution	How it is insulated	When politicians broke the insulation	What followed
Central bank	Long fixed terms, removal only for cause, a legal mandate (price stability)	Turkey's president dismissed three governors in 2019-21 and pressed for lower rates despite rising prices	Inflation peaked at 85.5% in October 2022; after the 2023 election new officials raised rates from 8.5% to 50%
Statistics office	Professional heads, published methods, release calendars	Argentina's government intervened in its statistics institute, INDEC (National Institute of Statistics and Censuses), from 2007, reporting inflation far below private estimates	The International Monetary Fund censured Argentina in 2013, its first censure of a member for bad data; the institute's credibility was rebuilt from 2016
Statistics office	The same	Greece's chief statistician corrected the deficit figures of 2009 that had hidden the scale of its debt	He was prosecuted for years for doing so, a case Europe's statisticians treated as an attack on their profession
Civil service	Hiring by merit, protection from political dismissal	Hungary's Fidesz government and Poland's Law and Justice government replaced professional staff with loyalists	Successor governments inherited administrations they distrusted (Module 8)

11b. Meritocracy's Case: China and Singapore

The strongest case for rule by the able rather than the elected comes from East Asia. Daniel Bell describes China's model as democracy at the bottom, experimentation in the middle, and meritocracy at the top. In this model, officials rise through decades of postings in which the party's Organization Department grades them on growth, stability, and lately the environment, and no one reaches the top without having governed provinces the size of European countries. Its defenders credit the system with the fastest sustained growth in history and with long-term projects, from high-speed rail to solar manufacturing, that electoral cycles would not have sustained.

Singapore offers the democratic-looking version: the People's Action Party (PAP) has governed since 1959, recruits ministers from the top of the civil service, the army, and business, and pays them salaries pegged to private-sector earnings, the highest of any government in the world. It wins real elections against a weak but legal opposition, taking 65.6% of the vote and 87 of 97 seats in May 2025.

The critics' case against meritocracy is that it cannot correct itself, because when the evaluators are the leaders' own appointees, merit drifts toward loyalty. Under Xi Jinping the party opened more than 4.6 million corruption cases against its members and officials between 2012 and 2022, by its own count, a campaign that cleaned up the bureaucracy and also removed his rivals. China's zero-COVID policy (Module 7) showed the cost of a system with no opposition to say stop: it continued for months after its costs exceeded its benefits and ended abruptly in December 2022 after protests.

11c. Should Expertise Be Insulated? The Case Made Both Ways

The case for insulation, as central bankers, statisticians, and most economists make it, rests on time horizons and trust. Elected politicians gain from loose money before elections and from flattering numbers at any time. A central bank that they cannot dismiss can hold inflation down, and Alesina and Summers found that more independent central banks delivered lower inflation at no cost in growth. A statistics office that they cannot direct produces figures that everyone, including the opposition, will accept. The table's cases show what happens when the insulation breaks: Turkey's inflation and Argentina's discredited data.

The case for accountability, made in the United States by the administration and the unitary-executive school of constitutional law and in Europe by critics of Brussels, rests on consent. Unelected officials who write binding rules, they argue, govern without the voters' permission. They describe independent commissions as a headless fourth branch that the Constitution does not mention, and a civil service that cannot be redirected as one that frustrates the program voters chose. Experts err too: the central banks of 2021 called inflation 'transitory' until it reached the highest levels in four decades.

The American overhaul has put the second case into law: in June 2024 the Supreme Court ended the rule that courts defer to agencies' readings of ambiguous statutes (*Loper Bright*), and it has since ended the protection of commissioners from removal (Module 5). A presidential order of January 2025 requires ten regulations to be repealed for each new one. A personnel rule published on February 5, 2026 lets policy-influencing civil servants be dismissed at will; when it proposed the rule, the government estimated that about 50,000 positions would be covered.

The evidence divides by function: where the expert institution is a referee of money or information, a central bank or a statistics office, the record of politicization is consistently bad, from Turkey to Argentina to Greece. Where the institution makes policy, as regulators and most civil servants do, the democratic claim of elected control is stronger, and the record of independence is mixed. Even the American Court drew the line there:

its ruling on commissioners reserved the question of the Federal Reserve, and it let a Federal Reserve governor keep her seat while her case continues (Module 5).

The course's reading: the referees of money and information should stay insulated, because politicians always gain from corrupting them and everyone loses. Policymaking agencies should answer to elected leaders, provided the courts, the legislature, and civil-service rules keep their dismissals lawful and their data honest. Whether the American reforms end up on the right side of that line will show first in the credibility of the country's economic statistics and in the independence of its central bank.

Module 11 Key Points

Technocracy, Meritocracy, and the Administrative State

• Technocracy survives in meritocratic one-party states, crisis governments of experts, independent agencies, and the European Union's institutions.

• Turkey's inflation peaked at 85.5% in October 2022 after its president dismissed three central bank governors.

• China's meritocracy builds long-term capacity but cannot easily correct itself, as zero-COVID showed in 2020-22.

• Insulate the referees of money and information; let elected leaders direct policymaking agencies under lawful rules.

• An American rule of February 2026 makes an estimated 50,000 policy-influencing civil servants dismissible at will.

Module 11 Quiz

Check Your Understanding

1. What happened in Turkey after its president dismissed three central bank governors in 2019-21?

A) Inflation fell to the euro area's level within a year
B) Inflation peaked at 85.5% in October 2022, and new officials later raised rates to 50%
C) The lira was pegged to the dollar
D) The central bank was merged into the finance ministry

2. Why did the International Monetary Fund censure Argentina in 2013?

A) It defaulted on its debts to the Fund
B) It left the Fund
C) Its statistics office's figures could not be trusted
D) Its central bank printed dollars in secret to finance the budget deficit

3. How does Daniel Bell describe China's model?

A) Rule by examination alone
B) Democracy at every level
C) Democracy at the bottom, experiment in the middle, merit at the top
D) Merit at the bottom and heredity at the top, with no elections anywhere in the system

4. What did Loper Bright (2024) change in American law?

A) Agencies may write criminal laws
B) Commissioners may be fired at will, as the Court decided again in 2026
C) The president may abolish independent agencies by executive order alone
D) Courts no longer defer to agencies' readings

5. Which institutions does the course's reading say should stay insulated?

A) Every agency and regulator in government
B) The referees of money and information
C) The regulators, since only they make binding rules
D) Only the courts, since statistics and money are policy choices

Module 12 — Federalism, Unitary States, and Secession

How Power Is Divided by Territory, and the Regions That Want Out

Recommended Reading / Reference

Book: Daniel J. Elazar, *Exploring Federalism* (1987)

Reference: The Forum of Federations' country profiles (forumfed.org)

12a. Federal and Unitary States

A federation divides sovereignty between a central government and regional governments, each with powers the other cannot take away, and it guarantees the division in a constitution that neither level can amend alone. A unitary state concentrates sovereignty at the center, which may delegate powers to regions, as Britain did to Scotland and Wales in 1999, but can in law take them back. About 25 countries are federations, by the Forum of Federations' count, and they hold some 40% of the world's people, because many of the most populous countries are among them: India, the United States, Pakistan, Nigeria, Brazil, Russia, Mexico, and Ethiopia.

Alfred Stepan distinguished two origins. 'Coming-together' federations were formed by units that pooled sovereignty, as the American states, the Swiss cantons, and the Australian colonies did. 'Holding-together' federations were made by a center that devolved power to keep a diverse country whole, as India, Belgium, and in practice Spain did. The second kind is the one tested by secession, and Russia is the cautionary case of a federation in name: its 'subjects' have elected governors on paper and appointed ones in practice.

Federation	Units	2025-26 flashpoint
India	28 states and 8 union territories	The redrawing of parliamentary seats by population: a constitutional amendment to enlarge the lower house and redraw its seats failed on April 17, 2026, by 298 votes to 230 when 352 were needed, with southern states fearing they would lose weight to the faster-growing north. The coming census (Module 9) will supply the numbers for the next attempt
United States	50 states	National Guard deployments against governors' wishes and redistricting between censuses (Module 5)
Germany	16 Länder (states)	The constitutional amendment of March 2025 that exempted defense spending from the debt brake, created a €500 billion infrastructure fund, and let the states borrow
Canada	10 provinces and 3 territories	Challenges from Quebec and Alberta in the same month (12b)
Ethiopia	12 ethnically defined regions	Tigray's 38 seats left unfilled in the election of June 1, 2026, with rival authorities in the region and relations with Eritrea cut in October
Bosnia and Herzegovina	Two entities and a district	The Serb Republic's threats to secede (12b)

12b. The Regions That Want Out

Region	State	Where it stands, October 2026	What comes next
Quebec	Canada	The sovereigntist Parti Québécois (PQ) won 59 of 127 seats on October 5 with 28.0% of the vote, a minority; the outgoing governing party won none	A referendum promised within the term, but not until the American president leaves office in January 2029; Quebec voted No in 1980 (59.6%) and 1995 (50.6%)
Alberta	Canada	A non-binding referendum on October 19 that includes a separation question; polls show staying far ahead, 72% to 23% in the Janet Brown poll for the CBC (September 8-21, 1,200 respondents)	A large No would settle the question for a generation; a close result would strengthen the province's hand against Ottawa
Scotland	United Kingdom	The Scottish National Party (SNP) won 58 of 129 seats on May 7 and governs as a minority; the Scottish Parliament asked for the power to hold a referendum on May 26 (72 to 55), and London refused	The UK Supreme Court ruled in 2022 that Scotland cannot hold one without Westminster's consent; Scotland voted No in 2014 (55.3%)
Catalonia	Spain	Spain's amnesty for the 2017 independence attempt, upheld by its Constitutional Court in 2025 and by the EU Court of Justice on July 16, 2026; the former regional president Carles Puigdemont still abroad, denied amnesty again on September 15	Independence support below its 2017 peak; the parties of independence out of the regional government since 2024
Republika Srpska (the Serb Republic)	Bosnia and Herzegovina	Milorad Dodik convicted in February 2025 of defying the international High Representative and removed in August; his party's candidate leads the October 4 count for the entity's presidency	Official results by November 20; whether Dodik's party renews its secession threats
Somaliland	Somalia	Self-governing since 1991 with its own elections; recognized by Israel on December 26, 2025, the first UN member to do so	Whether others follow; Somalia calls the recognition an attack on its sovereignty

Quebec is the case to watch: the sovereigntists won on a vote split four ways, and their leader, Paul St-Pierre Plamondon, must hold a minority government together for more than two years before the third referendum he has promised can be held. Alberta's vote tests a newer, Western grievance over oil, pipelines, and federal climate policy, and it will be the first vote on leaving Canada held outside Quebec.

Scotland's route is closed by law for now, and the new British prime minister, Andy Burnham, has called a referendum 'off limits'. Catalonia's is closed by politics, and Spain's amnesty has drawn much of the conflict's heat. In each democracy the outcome is being decided by procedure: who may call a vote, on what question, with what majority.

12c. Does Federalism Hold Countries Together or Pull Them Apart?

The case that it holds them together, made by Stepan, Arend Lijphart, and most scholars of divided societies, is accommodation. Giving a minority its own government, schools, and language turns a fight over the state into bargaining within it. India's redrawing of its states along language lines in 1956 ended agitation that had turned violent, Spain's autonomous communities absorbed most of the regional demands that Franco had suppressed, and Quebec and Scotland voted to stay when asked.

The case that it pulls them apart, made by scholars such as Philip Roeder and by many centralists, is capacity. A regional government gives secessionists a budget, a civil service, a parliament, and a claim to speak for a people. Catalonia's government ran its referendum after Spain's Constitutional Court had suspended it, the Scottish government drafts referendum bills, and Quebec's sovereigntists now hold its

government. The communist federations built on ethnic lines, the Soviet Union, Yugoslavia, and Czechoslovakia, all broke apart along their internal borders between 1991 and 1993.

The evidence separates democracies from autocracies: the federations that broke up were communist or authoritarian, and they broke when the center weakened, with Ethiopia's Tigray war of 2020-22 the latest case of an ethnic federation at war with one of its units. In democracies, secession has been put to the vote and lost, as in Quebec and Scotland, or blocked in the courts, as in Catalonia. **The course's reading:** democratic federalism keeps countries together by turning secession into a procedure that unionists have so far won, at the price of keeping the question permanently open.

12d. The European Union: More Than an Alliance, Less Than a State

The European Union is the world's most ambitious experiment in pooled sovereignty, a union of 27 states and 452 million people (January 2026) that shares a market, a court, and a commission with powers no alliance has. It is not a federation: it has no army, its budget is about 1% of members' income, and it cannot tax directly. Yet 21 members share the euro, Bulgaria having joined on January 1, 2026, and 29 countries, including four outside the Union, share the Schengen area without border checks.

The war in Ukraine and the change in Washington have pushed it toward the functions of a state. In 2025 it created a €150 billion loan fund for defense, and in April 2026, after Hungary's outgoing government dropped its veto, it approved a €90 billion loan to Ukraine. Accession negotiations with Ukraine and Moldova opened their first chapters in June and July 2026. The constraint remains the unanimity that foreign and budget decisions require. Hungary's new prime minister has promised a referendum before Ukraine joins, and the Union's next enlargement will test whether a club built for six can decide anything at thirty or more.

Module 12 Key Points

Federalism, Unitary States, and Secession

• About 25 federations hold some 40% of humanity, including India, the United States, Brazil, Nigeria, and Germany.

• India's plan to redraw parliamentary seats by population failed in April 2026, 298 to 230, short of the 352 needed.

• Quebec elected a sovereigntist minority government on October 5, 2026; Alberta votes on separation on October 19.

• In democracies secession has lost at the ballot box or in court; communist ethnic federations broke apart in 1991-93.

• The European Union pools sovereignty without becoming a state: 27 members, 21 in the euro, unanimity on foreign policy.

Module 12 Quiz

Check Your Understanding

1. Why did India's constitutional amendment on parliamentary seats fail in April 2026?

A) It won 298 votes to 230, short of the 352 needed, as southern states feared losing weight to the north
B) The Supreme Court struck it down
C) The ruling party voted against it
D) The states rejected it in a national referendum

2. What did the UK Supreme Court rule in 2022 about a Scottish independence referendum?

A) Scotland may hold one whenever its parliament votes
B) A referendum must wait until 2034
C) Scotland's parliament cannot hold one without Westminster's consent, whatever its election results
D) Only the king may call one, on his ministers' advice

3. Which state became the first UN member to recognize Somaliland?

A) Israel
B) Ethiopia, its landlocked neighbor
C) The United States, after a vote in Congress
D) Turkey, which trains Somalia's army

4. What is 'holding-together' federalism, in Stepan's term?

A) Units pooling sovereignty
B) A center devolving power to keep a diverse country whole
C) Rule by a single party across all regions
D) A unitary state that cannot take back the powers it delegated to its regions

5. What does the course's reading say democratic federalism does with secession?

A) Makes it impossible in law
B) Encourages it through regional budgets and parliaments
C) Settles it permanently with one referendum, after which the question cannot be reopened
D) Turns it into a procedure unionists have won

Module 13 — The Economic Axis: Capitalism, Socialism, and Communism

How States Own, Direct, and Redistribute, and the Experiments of 2026

Recommended Reading / Reference

Book: Branko Milanović, *Capitalism, Alone: The Future of the System That Rules the World* (2019)

Reference: OECD, *Revenue Statistics 2025* (December 2025)

13a. The Spectrum

System	Who owns and directs	Examples, 2026	The state's weight
Central planning	The state owns nearly everything and sets output and prices by plan	North Korea; Cuba, which now allows small private firms	Near total
State capitalism	Markets, but the state owns the commanding heights, directs credit, and steers investment	China, Vietnam, Saudi Arabia and the Gulf through their sovereign funds, Russia	State firms dominate energy, banking, and strategic industry
Social democracy	A market economy with high taxes, universal welfare, and strong unions	Denmark, Sweden, Norway, Finland	Denmark's taxes were 45.2% of GDP in 2024, the highest in the OECD
Social market economy	Markets with codetermination (workers on company boards) and a strong welfare state	Germany, Austria, the Netherlands	Taxes near or above the OECD average of 34.1% (2024)
Liberal market economy	Lighter regulation, lower taxes, more private provision of health and pensions	The United States, Britain, Australia, Ireland	About a quarter of GDP in taxes in the United States
Libertarian experiment	Deregulation, privatization, and deep spending cuts	Argentina under Javier Milei	Public spending cut by more than a quarter in real terms in 2024

Tax ratios from OECD, Revenue Statistics 2025 (Mexico lowest at 18.3% in 2024).

The economic axis asks who owns the means of production, who decides what is produced, and how much of the income is redistributed. The twentieth century's answer at one end, Soviet central planning, lost the contest it entered: it built heavy industry fast and then stagnated, and its collapse in 1991 left only North Korea and, in part, Cuba running planned economies. China and Vietnam kept their communist parties and abandoned the plan, which is why the live debate today is not between capitalism and communism. It is a debate about how much the state should own, direct, and redistribute inside market economies, and it divides democracies as much as it divides democracies from autocracies.

Branko Milanović describes two forms of capitalism now competing, the 'liberal meritocratic' capitalism of the West and the 'political' capitalism of China, Vietnam, and much of the developing world. In the political form a party-state keeps the power to override the market and its owners when it chooses, as China showed in its crackdown on technology firms in 2020-22. The test of political capitalism, in his account, is whether it can keep growth high while controlling corruption, since a state above the law invites it.

13b. The Planned Economies Today

Cuba shows what remains of central planning in 2026: its economy has shrunk for years, and its official statistics office counted 9.75 million residents in 2024, down from 11.09 million in 2022, a loss of more than a tenth in two years, most of it to emigration. Since January 2026 the United States has ordered tariffs on countries that supply Cuba with oil, Mexico paused its shipments, and the national grid collapsed on March 16-17, leaving the island dark. The government blames the American embargo, in place since 1962, and its critics blame a system that permitted private firms only in 2021.

Venezuela's chavismo, a hybrid of oil socialism and political control, ended its run with an economy that had shrunk by about three-quarters between 2013 and 2020 and with nearly 8 million emigrants; its successor's turn to foreign oil companies is in Module 16.

13c. The State Returns, from Both Directions

Since 2020, governments of left and right have expanded the state's role in market economies. The United States passed industrial subsidies for chips and clean energy in 2022 and then, under a different administration, raised tariffs in 2025 to their highest levels since the 1930s. In 2025 the federal government took equity stakes in companies it considered strategic: about 10% of the chipmaker Intel, 15% of the rare-earth producer MP Materials, and a 'golden share' with veto rights in U.S. Steel. Europe built defense and industrial funds (Module 12), and China pressed its state-directed push into advanced manufacturing.

The justification has shifted from efficiency to security, meaning supply chains, technology, and defense, which makes it attractive to nationalists and to the left alike. The objection, from economic liberals, is that governments choose winners badly and that tariffs and stakes invite favoritism. Two experiments at opposite ends of the axis are now testing the arguments directly.

13d. Two Experiments: Buenos Aires and New York

Javier Milei, a self-described anarcho-capitalist, took office in Argentina in December 2023 with inflation at 211% a year. **His supporters' case** is the record of his first two years. Inflation fell to 31.5% in 2025, the budget moved into surplus for the first time in over a decade, and the poverty rate fell from 52.9% in the first half of 2024 to 28.2% in the second half of 2025, according to the national statistics institute, INDEC. Voters endorsed the program in the midterm elections (Module 5).

His critics' case is that the gains rest on cuts to pensions, universities, and public works and on an exchange rate held up by foreign loans, including the American swap line of 2025. They point to the reversal of 2026, when poverty rose to 32.3% in the first half of the year (INDEC, September 24) and inflation to 33.4% in the twelve months to September (INDEC, October 13), as evidence that the stabilization is not yet secure.

Zohran Mamdani, a democratic socialist elected in 2025, now governs New York City (Module 5). **His supporters' case** is that he is delivering a program aimed at the cost of living. The city's rent board froze rents on about a million rent-stabilized apartments on June 25 by 7 votes to 1, the state budget of May included $1.2 billion toward his child-care plan, and the first city-run grocery store was announced in April, with stores to open from 2027. A Marist poll of March 26-31 (1,454 residents) found 48% approving of his performance and 30% disapproving.

His critics' case is that the program's costs fall on others and its limits on him. A rent freeze, they argue, starves older buildings of the money needed for repairs and discourages new supply, and the fare-free buses he promised have not arrived. The city also cannot raise income taxes or run the subway without the state government in Albany, so much of the agenda depends on politicians who do not answer to his voters.

The course's reading: each experiment has met its first test and not yet its decisive one. Milei's program cut inflation and poverty faster than his critics predicted, and its test, after the reversal of 2026, is whether the gains can resume without foreign rescue. Mamdani's has delivered what the city controls, and its test is whether frozen rents and public provision can coexist with more housing and fiscal room. Both show that in a democracy the economic axis is decided less by ideology than by institutions, from Argentina's Congress and bond markets to New York's dependence on its state.

Module 13 Key Points

The Economic Axis: Capitalism, Socialism, and Communism

• Central planning lost: only North Korea and, in part, Cuba run planned economies; China and Vietnam abandoned the plan.

• The live debate is how much the state owns, directs, and redistributes; Denmark taxes 45.2% of GDP, Mexico 18.3%.

• Cuba's population fell from 11.09 million to 9.75 million between 2022 and 2024, mostly through emigration.

• Since 2020 left and right have expanded the state's role, from tariffs and subsidies to American equity stakes in strategic firms.

• Milei cut Argentina's inflation from 211% to 31.5% by 2025; New York froze rents under Mamdani in June 2026.

Module 13 Quiz

Check Your Understanding

1. Which country had the highest tax-to-GDP ratio in the OECD in 2024?

A) France, at 51%
B) Italy, at 49%
C) Denmark, at 45.2%
D) The United States, at 34.1%, the OECD's average

2. What does Milanović call China's form of capitalism?

A) Political
B) Liberal meritocratic
C) Social democratic
D) Central planning with private property rights, as in Cuba's reform of 2021

3. What happened to Cuba's population between 2022 and 2024, by its own statistics?

A) It doubled
B) It held steady at 11 million
C) It rose as Venezuelans fled to the island in large numbers
D) It fell by over a tenth

4. What equity stakes did the United States take in 2025?

A) A majority of Boeing and General Motors
B) About 10% of Intel, 15% of MP Materials, and a golden share in U.S. Steel
C) All of the country's railroads
D) A 51% stake in each of the major banks

5. What did New York's rent board do on June 25, 2026?

A) Raised rents by 10% for every tenant in the city
B) Abolished rent stabilization across all five boroughs
C) Ended the city's tax breaks for new apartment construction
D) Froze stabilized rents

Module 14 — The 21st-Century Contest: Liberalism, Populism, Nationalism, and the New Left

The Ideas Competing Inside the Democracies

Recommended Reading / Reference

Book: Jan-Werner Müller, *What Is Populism?* (2016)

Reference: The PopuList, a database of Europe's populist and far-right parties (Rooduijn and others, 2023 edition)

14a. The Ideas

Idea	Core claim	Leading examples, 2026	Its advocates' case	Its critics' case
Liberalism	Individual rights, limited and divided power, markets, and open societies	Most governing parties of the European center; Canada's and Australia's governments	The record of peace and prosperity since 1945, and rights for minorities	An elite consensus that ignored the losers from trade and migration
Populism	Politics as a struggle of a pure people against a corrupt elite, with the leader as the people's voice	Hungary's Fidesz until 2026, Turkey's Erdoğan, El Salvador's Bukele; on the left, Mexico's Morena and France's La France Insoumise	It gives voice to voters whom the mainstream ignored	It treats opponents as illegitimate and attacks the checks that protect them
National conservatism	The nation as the basis of political community; sovereignty, borders, and tradition first	Italy's Brothers of Italy, Poland's Law and Justice, Germany's AfD, Britain's Reform UK; the American 'America First' movement	Self-government requires a people that shares a nation and controls its borders	Nationalism slides into exclusion of minorities and hostility to neighbors
The new left	Democratic socialism, redistribution, and the green transition	New York's mayor Zohran Mamdani, Spain's coalition partners, Colombia's Gustavo Petro	Inequality and the climate demand a bigger state	Its programs cost more than voters will pay, and its cultural politics repel working-class voters

The twentieth century's ideological contest was between liberal democracy, fascism, and communism, and liberal democracy won it. The twenty-first century's contest takes place largely inside the democracies, between parties that accept elections but disagree about what else democracy requires. Cas Mudde's definition of populism has become the field's standard: a 'thin' ideology that divides society into a pure people and a corrupt elite, and that can attach itself to the right or the left. Jan-Werner Müller adds the feature he considers decisive: the populist claims that he alone represents the real people, so that his opponents are not merely wrong but illegitimate.

Most of the parties that gained in the 2020s combine populism with nationalism. They oppose immigration, distrust supranational bodies such as the European Union, and promise to restore national sovereignty and traditional values. On the left a smaller wave has combined economic populism with democratic socialism, from Mexico's Morena to New York's mayor (Module 13). What the two share is a rejection of the liberal center's settlement of the 1990s: open markets, open borders within Europe, and courts and agencies insulated from majorities.

14b. The Populist Right in 2026

Country	Party	Last national result	Latest polls (pollster, dates, sample)	Position, October 2026
Germany	Alternative for Germany (AfD)	Second (Module 5)	Forsa, October 6-12 (2,502): AfD 26%, CDU/CSU 19%	Won 43.8% in Saxony-Anhalt's state election on September 6; a court blocked its classification as extremist in February
France	National Rally (RN)	First in votes in the 2024 legislative election	For the 2027 first round: Ifop, August 24-25 (1,598), Le Pen 33%; Elabe, August 26-28 (1,501), 34%; Cluster17, August 31-September 1 (1,711), 30%	Marine Le Pen's conviction upheld on appeal on July 7, 2026, with her ban on office cut so that she can run
United Kingdom	Reform UK	14.3% and 5 seats (July 2024)	Opinium, October 7-9 (2,050): Labour 29%, Reform 23%, Conservatives 20%; YouGov, October 4-5 (2,312): 27%, 22%, 20%	Won 1,454 council seats and 14 councils in May 2026, and second place in the Welsh parliament (34 of 96 seats)
Spain	Vox	12.4% (July 2023)	40dB for the Prisa group, October 7-8 (800): People's Party 31.9%, Socialists 28.1%, Vox 18.9%	Third, and rising
Austria	Freedom Party (FPÖ)	First, with 28.8% (September 2024)	—	Kept out of government by a three-party coalition formed in March 2025
Italy	Brothers of Italy (FdI)	26.0% (September 2022), first	—	In government; its justice reform rejected in a referendum on March 22-23, 2026, 53.2% to 46.8%

Results from the national election authorities; polls as published by the pollsters. The parties of Portugal, the Netherlands, Czechia, and Sweden are in Module 5's election table.

The table shows a populist right that is now the largest or second-largest force in most of Western Europe's big democracies. In Germany it leads national polls, and in France its candidate leads every poll for the next presidential election. In Britain it holds councils across England, and in Austria it won the last election. What has varied is how the mainstream responds: Germany's and Austria's parties maintain a cordon, refusing to govern with it, while Sweden's center-right governed with the Sweden Democrats' support from 2022 to 2026, and Italy's and Czechia's governments include such parties.

The record of inclusion is mixed: the Netherlands brought the Party for Freedom (PVV) into government in 2024, the coalition collapsed over migration within a year, and at the election that followed the party fell from 37 seats to 26. Sweden's arrangement survived its full term, and the right-leaning bloc then lost the 2026 election. The cordon has its own costs: when a quarter of voters back a party that can never govern, the remaining coalitions grow broader and weaker, and the excluded party campaigns against all of them at once.

14c. Is Populism a Threat to Democracy or a Corrective? The Case Made Both Ways

The case that it is a threat, made by Müller, Levitsky and Ziblatt, and most scholars of democratic decline, rests on what populists do in office. Because the populist claims to embody the people, every check on his power becomes an obstacle the elite has placed in the people's way. Courts, the press, civil servants, and the opposition are recast as enemies, and the sequence of Module 5 follows. Hungary under Orbán, Turkey under Erdoğan, and Venezuela under Chávez and Maduro are the leading cases.

The case that it is a corrective, made by populists themselves and by scholars such as Mudde and Cristóbal Rovira Kaltwasser in part, rests on whom populists represent. Voters who lost from trade, deindustrialization, and migration were ignored by a consensus of center-left and center-right parties until populists forced their concerns onto the agenda. Populists win elections and lose them. Their supporters add that the word 'populist' is often used to dismiss positions, on immigration or on national sovereignty, that majorities hold.

The evidence on populists in office is consistent: Jordan Kyle and Yascha Mounk studied 46 populist leaders and parties in power in 33 democracies from 1990 to 2018. They found that about 23% caused significant democratic backsliding, against 6% of non-populist governments, and that more than half amended or rewrote their constitutions. Populists also stayed in office about twice as long, 6.5 years on average against 3. On the economy, Manuel Funke, Moritz Schularick, and Christoph Trebesch found across 51 populist presidents and prime ministers from 1900 to 2020 that output per person was about 10% lower after fifteen years than it would otherwise have been.

The course's reading: populism is both, depending on what stands in its way. As a movement in opposition, it has forced real grievances onto the agenda, and the mainstream's responses on migration and trade since 2016 are partly its work. In office, the evidence shows it to be about four times as likely as other governments to damage democratic institutions, and the danger is greatest when it holds a supermajority or a captured court. The corrective works through elections that populists can lose, and 2023-26 showed both outcomes, populists losing in Poland and Hungary and winning in the United States and Czechia.

14d. Liberalism's Answers

The liberal center has responded in three ways, the first of which is to adopt part of the populist agenda. Denmark's Social Democrats have held power since 2019 on a restrictive asylum policy, and Britain's Labour government tightened migration rules in 2025. The second is to deliver on material grievances: the 'abundance' movement in the United States argues that liberals lost voters by failing to build housing, infrastructure, and energy, and should remove the rules that block building.

The third is to defend institutions directly, through courts, election administrators, and constitutional limits that a populist majority cannot easily remove. Which of these works is the open question of the decade. The early evidence suggests that adopting the agenda reduces the populists' vote where it is credible, as in Denmark. Defending institutions works only where the institutions command public trust, which is why the fights of 2025-26 over courts, from Warsaw to Washington, matter beyond their cases.

Module 14 Key Points

The 21st-Century Contest: Liberalism, Populism, Nationalism, and the New Left

• Populism divides society into a pure people and a corrupt elite; Müller's charge is that it treats opponents as illegitimate.

• The populist right leads polls in Germany and France and holds councils across England; Austria's won its last election.

• Populists in office caused significant backsliding about 23% of the time, against 6% for others (Kyle and Mounk, 1990-2018).

• Populist leaders left output per person about 10% lower after fifteen years (Funke, Schularick, and Trebesch).

• Inclusion has a mixed record: the Dutch coalition with the PVV collapsed within a year, and the party fell to 26 seats.

Module 14 Quiz

Check Your Understanding

1. What feature of populism does Müller consider decisive?

A) Its economic program of tariffs and subsidies
B) Its use of social media
C) The claim that the populist alone represents the real people, so that opponents are illegitimate
D) Its age, since it is a new movement

2. What did Kyle and Mounk find about populists in power from 1990 to 2018?

A) Few stayed in office
B) 23% caused significant backsliding
C) They lost office faster than other governments
D) They were less likely than other governments to damage institutions

3. What happened when the Netherlands brought the PVV into government in 2024?

A) The coalition collapsed within a year, and the PVV fell to 26 seats
B) The coalition served its full term
C) The PVV won a majority
D) The courts banned the party from government after it proposed leaving the European Union

4. What did Funke, Schularick, and Trebesch find about populist leaders?

A) Output higher by about a fifth
B) No measurable effect on the economy in either direction
C) Output 10% higher after fifteen years, as protection helped industry
D) Output about 10% lower after 15 years

5. What is the course's reading on populism as threat or corrective?

A) Only a threat, in every case
B) Only a corrective
C) Both: a corrective in opposition and, in office, about four times as likely to damage democratic institutions
D) Neither, since the label means nothing

Module 15 — How Regimes Perform

Growth, Famine, War, Corruption, and the Argument over Which System Delivers

Recommended Reading / Reference

Book: Amartya Sen, *Development as Freedom* (1999)

Reference: Transparency International, *Corruption Perceptions Index 2025* (February 10, 2026)

15a. The Scorecard

Outcome	What the evidence shows	The leading study	The caveat
Famine	No famine has occurred in a functioning democracy with a free press	Amartya Sen (1981, 1999): India has had none since independence, while China's Maoist famine killed tens of millions (Module 7)	Hunger short of famine persists in democracies
War between states	Democracies rarely if ever fight one another	Michael Doyle (1983) and Bruce Russett (1993), the 'democratic peace'	Democracies fight non-democracies as often as others do
Corruption	Established democracies score best, with rich autocracies the exception	Transparency International's index for 2025: Denmark 89 of 100, Singapore 84, the United Arab Emirates 69, the United States 64, Qatar 58, Saudi Arabia 57, China 43, India 39, Russia 22, Somalia and South Sudan 9; the world's average 42, its lowest	The index measures perceptions, not bribes paid
Growth	Contested: no clear difference on average in older studies, a long-run gain for democracy in newer ones	Adam Przeworski and others; Daron Acemoglu and others (15b)	Autocracies show far more variance, producing both the fastest growers and the worst collapses (15b)
Building	Autocracies build faster	China's high-speed rail network, about 48,000 km by 2024, against California's line, approved by voters in 2008 and still unfinished	Speed without consent also builds the wrong things, from ghost towns to the Great Leap Forward

Transparency International's scores measure perceived public-sector corruption on a scale of 0 (highly corrupt) to 100 (very clean).

The scorecard favors democracy on the outcomes that kill people in large numbers. Amartya Sen's argument is that famines are political, not merely natural: a government that faces elections and a free press cannot ignore mass starvation, while one that faces neither can deny it until millions are dead. The democratic peace is the second large regularity, since pairs of democracies have almost never gone to war with one another, which is one reason why the spread or retreat of democracy matters to the international order.

On corruption the picture is more complicated: the cleanest states are almost all rich democracies, but Singapore, the United Arab Emirates, and Qatar show that a rich autocracy with a determined ruler can control everyday corruption, while poorer democracies such as India score worse than China. Income explains much of the pattern, since rich states can pay officials well and audit them, but not all of it: among countries of similar income, those with a free press and competitive elections tend to score better.

15b. Does Democracy Cause Growth? The Case Made Both Ways

The case for the developmental autocracy rests on East Asia, where South Korea under Park Chung-hee, Taiwan under the Kuomintang, Singapore under Lee Kuan Yew, and China since 1978 grew faster for longer than almost any democracy has. Their advocates argue that an autocracy can hold down consumption to finance investment, override vested interests, and plan for decades, as voters and coalitions will not let a democracy do. Adam Przeworski and his co-authors found in 2000 that, averaged over 1950-90, regime type made no clear difference to growth.

The case for democracy rests on newer and larger evidence. Daron Acemoglu, Suresh Naidu, Pascual Restrepo, and James Robinson found in 2019, across some 175 countries from 1960 to 2010, that democratization raised income per person by about 20% over the following 25 years, through more investment, schooling, health, and economic reform. They and others add that for every East Asian success there is a Mobutu, a Mugabe, or a Maduro: autocracies have produced the fastest growth and the deepest collapses, and an investor cannot know in advance which kind of autocrat he will get.

The evidence supports both findings at once, because they measure different things. Averages hide variance: autocracies are spread across the whole range of outcomes, and democracies are clustered in the middle. The newer studies, which follow countries through transitions, find a long-run gain from democratization, while the developmental cases show that some autocracies grow fast for a generation. **The course's reading:** democracy does not slow growth, and on the best recent evidence it raises income over decades. Autocracy's advantage is speed under a capable leadership, and its weakness is the lack of any way to correct a leadership that errs, as the Great Leap Forward, zero-COVID, and Venezuela's collapse showed.

15c. Wealth, Oil, and the Regimes They Produce

Seymour Martin Lipset argued in 1959 that economic development makes democracy more likely, and Adam Przeworski and Fernando Limongi refined the claim in 1997: development does not reliably cause democratization, but it keeps democracies alive, which is the income threshold of Module 1.

The 2020s have strained both halves of the theory: China, with an income per person of about $14,000 in 2025 at market exchange rates (International Monetary Fund), is richer than South Korea was when it democratized in 1987, even after adjusting for inflation, and shows no sign of following. Hungary's slide into what V-Dem classed as an electoral autocracy took place well above Przeworski's threshold, by erosion rather than coup, and the American loss of liberal-democracy status came at more than four times it. The threshold described the risk of a sudden breakdown, and the modern risk is gradual (Module 5).

Oil works in the other direction. Michael Ross showed in 2012 that oil wealth makes democratization less likely, because rulers who live on oil revenue need not tax their citizens and so need not bargain with them, and because the money pays for patronage and repression. The Gulf monarchies, Russia, and Venezuela fit the pattern, and the exceptions prove its logic: Norway found oil after its democracy was secure and put the revenue in a fund insulated from politics, and Botswana managed its diamond wealth through institutions built before the money arrived.

Module 15 Key Points

How Regimes Perform

• No famine has struck a functioning democracy with a free press; pairs of democracies have almost never fought each other.

• Transparency International's world average fell to 42 for 2025; Denmark scored 89, the United States 64, and Russia 22.

• Democratization raised income per person by about 20% over 25 years (Acemoglu and others, 2019).

• Autocracies produce both the fastest growth and the worst collapses; democracies cluster in the middle.

• Oil wealth makes democratization less likely; Norway and Botswana escaped by building institutions first.

Module 15 Quiz

Check Your Understanding

1. What is Sen's claim about famine?

A) It is caused by drought and crop failure alone
B) It spares democracies with a free press
C) Democracies suffer more famines than autocracies
D) Famine ended worldwide after 1945, under every type of government

2. What did Acemoglu and his co-authors find in 2019?

A) Democratization raised income per person by about 20% over 25 years
B) Democracy slowed growth by 20%
C) Regime type made no difference
D) Autocracies grew faster in every decade from 1960 to 2010, by about a fifth

3. Why does the module say the growth studies can both be right?

A) One study used bad data
B) They studied different continents
C) Autocracies vary more, so averages hide both booms and collapses
D) Both were funded by the same governments, which wanted the same answer from each

4. What did Przeworski and Limongi find in 1997 about development and democracy?

A) Development always causes democracy
B) Development keeps democracies alive, though it does not reliably create them
C) Income makes no difference to whether a democracy survives
D) Rich democracies fall more often than poor ones

5. How does oil wealth hinder democracy, in Ross's account?

A) Rulers need no taxes
B) It makes citizens too rich to care about politics
C) Oil companies write the constitutions of producing states
D) It forces governments to borrow from foreign banks, which then demand elections

Module 16 — Stability, Transition, and Collapse

How Regimes End, What Replaces Them, and When States Fail

Recommended Reading / Reference

Book: Erica Chenoweth and Maria J. Stephan, *Why Civil Resistance Works: The Strategic Logic of Nonviolent Conflict* (2011)

Reference: The Fund for Peace, *Fragile States Index* (annual)

16a. The Transitions of 2024-26

Country	What ended, and how	What replaced it	October 2026
Syria	The Assad family's rule (since 1971), in a rebel offensive; Bashar al-Assad fled on December 8, 2024	Ahmed al-Sharaa, the rebel commander, as president under a constitutional declaration that sets a five-year transition	A People's Assembly of 210, two-thirds chosen by electoral colleges and one-third appointed by the president, sat from July 12, 2026; the Kurdish-led forces of the northeast dissolved into the army in August; American sanctions repealed in December 2025
Bangladesh	Sheikh Hasina's government, in a student uprising in which about 1,400 were killed, by the UN human rights office's count; she fled on August 5, 2024	An interim government under the Nobel laureate Muhammad Yunus, then an elected one (Module 5)	Her party barred from political activity since May 2025; she was sentenced to death in absentia in November 2025
Nepal	K. P. Sharma Oli's government, in youth protests of September 8-13, 2025, in which 76 died and the parliament was burned	An interim prime minister, the former chief justice Sushila Karki, then an election (Module 5)	A new party governing under Balen Shah (Module 5)
Venezuela	Nicolás Maduro's rule, in an American military operation (16c)	His vice president, Delcy Rodríguez, as acting president, recognized by the United States in March	No election date; an amnesty law in February; oil opened to foreign firms (16c)
Hungary	Viktor Orbán's government, at the ballot box	Péter Magyar's government (Module 8)	Restoration or repetition (Module 8)
Madagascar	Andry Rajoelina's presidency, in youth protests joined by an army unit (Module 10)	A military-led transition (Module 10)	An election promised (Module 10)

Six governments fell in two years, by four routes: a rebel army, a popular uprising, a foreign military operation, and an election. The variety is the first lesson, since political scientists once expected regimes to end mainly by coups or negotiated pacts between rulers and moderates, but the 2020s have brought every kind of ending at once. The second lesson is that the ending decides little: Syria's transition is run by a former jihadist commander who has courted Western governments, Venezuela's by the deposed leader's own deputy, and Bangladesh's produced an elected government from which the old ruling party was excluded.

Barbara Geddes's data on authoritarian breakdowns since 1946 show that a fallen autocracy is about as likely to be followed by another autocracy as by a democracy. The transitions that produced democracies, from Spain after 1975 to Poland after 1989, had in common a negotiated settlement, a united opposition, and a neighborhood of democracies willing to help. Of the six cases above, Hungary, inside the European Union, is the best placed, while Nepal and Bangladesh have elections without yet having the rest.

16b. The Youth Uprisings

The most striking political events of 2024-25 were uprisings led by people born after 1997. Protesters in Kenya stormed parliament in June 2024 and forced the withdrawal of a finance bill (protests the next year left about 65 dead), and in August Bangladesh's students brought down their government (16a). In 2025 the wave spread to Indonesia in August, Nepal and the Philippines in September, and Madagascar, Morocco, and Peru from late September. Mexico and Bulgaria followed later in the year, and Bulgaria's government resigned in December.

The uprisings shared a style and a grievance: they were organized on social platforms such as Discord and TikTok, without leaders or parties. Many marched under the same symbol, the pirate flag of a Japanese comic series, and they targeted corruption and the privileges of political families. In Nepal the trigger was a ban on social media, followed by anger at the lifestyles of politicians' children; in Indonesia it was lawmakers' housing allowances, and in Morocco spending on football stadiums while hospitals decayed. Nepal's protesters chose their interim prime minister partly through an online poll.

The outcomes depended, as Module 10's coups did, on the security forces. Where the army refused to fire or chose to mediate, as in Bangladesh and Nepal, or joined the protesters, as in Madagascar, the government fell. Where it held, governments survived with concessions: Kenya dropped its tax bill, Indonesia cut the allowances, and Morocco raised its health and education budget for 2026 by 16%. Erica Chenoweth and Maria Stephan found that nonviolent campaigns of 1900-2006 succeeded about twice as often as violent ones, and that none had failed once it drew 3.5% of the population into the streets at its peak. Chenoweth has since reported that nonviolent campaigns succeeded only about a third of the time in the 2010s, as regimes learned to wait them out, and the waves of 2024-25 suggest that their speed is now their advantage.

16c. Venezuela: Transition, Continuity, and the Legality of the Operation

On January 3, 2026, American forces seized Nicolás Maduro and his wife in Caracas in an operation in which 83 people died by Venezuela's official count, among them 47 Venezuelan soldiers and 32 Cuban security personnel. Maduro pleaded not guilty in New York to narco-terrorism charges, his trial is set for June 1, 2027, and his motions claiming immunity as a head of state will be heard on November 17. Secretary of State Marco Rubio set out three phases for the country under its acting government: stabilization, recovery, and transition.

By October the first phases were visible and the third was not. A hydrocarbons law of January 29 ended the state oil company's monopoly and opened production to private and foreign firms, and many political prisoners were released (Module 6). Yet no election has been scheduled, and María Corina Machado, the opposition leader who won the 2025 Nobel Peace Prize, has not returned. The opposition's tally sheets for July 2024 had shown its candidate winning about two-thirds of the vote. Twin earthquakes on June 24, 2026 killed more than 5,000 people and added a humanitarian emergency to a political one.

The case that the operation was lawful, as the administration makes it, is that it was a law-enforcement action with military support. Maduro was under federal indictment since 2020 as the head of a drug-trafficking organization, his 2024 re-election was fraudulent and so conferred no immunity, and American courts have long held that a defendant's trial is not invalidated by the manner of his capture, as in the case of Panama's Manuel Noriega in 1990.

The case that it was unlawful, as most international lawyers and the administration's critics in Congress make it, is that the UN Charter forbids the use of force against another state except in self-defense against

an armed attack or with the Security Council's approval, and neither applied. They add that Congress never authorized the operation, and in the Senate a resolution to restrict further military action advanced by 52 votes to 47 on January 8, a sign of how divided the president's own party was.

The course's reading: the two cases answer different questions, since under international law as most of its scholars read it, the operation lacked a recognized basis, while under American law precedent strongly favors the trial going ahead. Whether it produces a transition rather than a change of personnel will be judged by one measurable test: an election date that the opposition accepts and can contest with its own candidates.

16d. When the State Itself Fails

Country	Who holds power	October 2026
Sudan	The army in the east and center; the Rapid Support Forces, with a rival government proclaimed in 2025, in Darfur and parts of Kordofan	Famine confirmed in El Fasher and Kadugli (November 2025); nearly 12 million displaced, by UNHCR's count; no ceasefire, and the army chief rejected talks on October 7
Haiti	Gangs control most of the capital; the prime minister governs alone since the transitional council's mandate ended on February 7	A UN-authorized Gang Suppression Force of a planned 5,500 had about 1,500 deployed by late September; its mandate runs to March 31, 2027; elections postponed again
Myanmar	The army and the government it installed in 2026, against ethnic armies and resistance forces	The army lost 101 towns after the coup and had retaken 22 by June 2026 (the Institute for Strategy and Policy, ISP-Myanmar)
Democratic Republic of the Congo	The government in Kinshasa; the M23 rebels, backed by Rwanda according to UN experts (Rwanda denies it), in the east	M23 has held Goma and Bukavu since early 2025; on October 12, 2026, the former president Joseph Kabila, sentenced to death in absentia in 2025, launched a rebel front in Goma pledging to end the 'tyranny' by force if necessary
Libya	Two governments, in Tripoli (internationally recognized) and in the east, where Khalifa Haftar's forces rule	An initial agreement on an electoral framework on August 25, 2026
Yemen	The Houthis in the capital and the north; a Saudi-backed council in Aden	The Houthis' war with Saudi Arabia resumed in July 2026 (Module 3)

Max Weber defined the state as the body that successfully claims a monopoly on legitimate force within a territory, and in these six countries no one holds it. State failure is the extreme end of the regime question, because a country with no government able to enforce its writ has no regime to classify. The six cases share a pattern: each lost its monopoly of force to armed rivals, foreign backers fed the rivals, and the resulting war economy, from gold to drugs to kidnapping, gave the armed groups more reason to fight than to settle.

The remedies have a poor record: elections held before the guns are controlled tend to restart wars, and power-sharing deals hold only when outsiders guarantee them. Foreign forces work when they are large and stay long, which the world is now unwilling to provide: Haiti's force has reached less than a third of its planned strength. The Sudanese war, by the UN's counts the largest displacement crisis in the world, has drawn mediators from Washington, Riyadh, and Cairo and outside arms for both sides, and the arms have so far mattered more.

Module 16 Key Points

Stability, Transition, and Collapse

• Six governments fell in 2024-26 by rebel offensive, uprising, foreign operation, or election; the ending decided little about what followed.

• Youth uprisings toppled governments where the army would not fire, as in Bangladesh and Nepal; elsewhere they won concessions.

• Nonviolent campaigns once never failed after drawing 3.5% of the population; their success rate fell to about a third in the 2010s.

• Venezuela's operation lacked a recognized basis in international law; the test of transition is an election the opposition accepts.

• Six states have lost the monopoly of force; Sudan's war has displaced nearly 12 million people.

Module 16 Quiz

Check Your Understanding

1. By what four routes did governments fall in 2024-26, according to the module?

A) Coups only
B) Negotiated pacts between rulers and moderates in each case
C) The deaths of their leaders in office, followed by succession disputes
D) Rebellion, uprising, foreign operation, and election

2. What decided whether the youth uprisings toppled governments?

A) The size of the crowds alone
B) The weather during the protest season
C) Whether the uprisings had a single recognized leader and a party behind them
D) The security forces

3. What threshold did Chenoweth and Stephan find for nonviolent campaigns of 1900-2006?

A) 10% of the population was needed
B) No campaign failed after drawing 3.5% of the population
C) Half the population had to march
D) Campaigns succeeded only when they had a foreign backer and an armed wing ready to fight

4. What does the course name as the test of Venezuela's transition?

A) Maduro's conviction in New York
B) The return of oil production to its 2013 level
C) An election date that the opposition accepts and can contest with its own candidates
D) The release of the remaining political prisoners

5. How did Weber define the state?

A) A monopoly on legitimate force
B) Any government with a flag
C) A territory recognized by the UN
D) A people with a shared language and history, living under one ruler of their own choosing

Module 17 — Where Things Stand, and What to Watch

The Argument, the Contradictions, and the Dates Ahead

Recommended Reading / Reference

Book: Larry Diamond, *Ill Winds: Saving Democracy from Russian Rage, Chinese Ambition, and American Complacency* (2019)

Reference: The election calendars of the International Foundation for Electoral Systems (ElectionGuide) and the national election authorities

17a. The Argument

Every government answers the same questions: who rules, how that power is limited, and who owns what. The answers of 2026 are more varied than at any time since the Cold War ended. Monarchy has survived by splitting into ceremonial crowns and rich absolutisms. Democracy has survived where its veto players survive, and it now dies slowly, as elected leaders remove those players one at a time rather than as tanks surround parliaments. Autocracy has learned to rule by managing information instead of by terror, and the hybrid regime, an election held on a tilted field, has become the century's characteristic form. Beside it the coup has returned wherever its cost fell, and the state itself has collapsed in a handful of countries where no one holds a monopoly of force.

The aggregate measures say that autocracy is winning: a long decline in Freedom House's scores and, on V-Dem's count, more autocracies than democracies (Module 1). The events of 2024-26, set out in 17b, say that no regime is safe.

The course's argument reconciles the two: the aggregate counts measure the slow erosion of rules, which favors incumbents everywhere. The events show that the regimes produced by that erosion remain brittle, because they depend on a few people, on elections they can still lose, and on armies that may stand aside. The next decade will therefore be decided less by the count than by a small number of large cases: the United States, India, and Brazil among the democracies, China and Russia among the autocracies, Turkey and Iran among the regimes in between, and the transitions under way in Syria, Venezuela, and Bangladesh.

17b. Seven Turning Points, and the Lesson

Turning point	What it changed
South Korea's parliament overturned martial law	Showed that institutions acting within hours can defeat a self-coup from the top (Module 5)
Bashar al-Assad fled Damascus	Showed the limits of the autocratic network: Russia and Iran did not save him (Modules 6 and 16)
American forces seized Nicolás Maduro	Removed a ruler without removing his regime, and revived the question of force in regime change (Module 16)
Iran's Supreme Leader killed, his son chosen	Tested whether a theocracy's procedures can survive decapitation in wartime (Module 9)
Hungary's governing party voted out	Showed that a hybrid regime can lose on its own rules, and handed the winner its tools (Module 8)

Turning point	What it changed
The Supreme Court's executive-power rulings	Accepted presidential control of the executive branch and drew lines at the central bank and citizenship (Modules 5 and 11)
The youth uprisings of 2024-25	Made the leaderless, digitally organized uprising the decade's new form of regime change (Module 16)

Read together, the seven teach one lesson about how regimes change. The ballot works where the field can still be overrun, as in Hungary, and the legislature where it can act fast, as in South Korea. Force removes a ruler and leaves its user to inherit the aftermath, as in Venezuela, and the uprising removes a government and hands the next decision to whoever holds the guns, as in Nepal and Madagascar. What a country ends up with depends less on how the old regime fell than on what was still standing when it did: a parliament, a court, an army that stays out, or none of these.

The American case is the one still in progress, and the course's two tests from Module 5, free midterms with accepted results and court rulings that are obeyed, now fall due together.

17c. Five Contradictions

First, the threat to democracy has been its best recruiter. The votes that turned back autocratizers, in Poland in 2023 and Hungary in 2026, drew record turnouts, and South Korea's citizens and legislators rallied within hours of martial law. The polarization that empowers a would-be strongman also mobilizes his opponents, so backsliding is most reversible where it has gone least far: where the vote is still free and counted (Modules 5, 8, and 14).

Second, the regimes the indices score worst are often those their publics rate best. El Salvador's president, who suspended rights to crush the gangs, has overwhelming approval, majorities in Africa accept coups against abusive leaders, and populists who weaken courts win re-election. Democracy's case rests on long-run outcomes, among them no famines, no wars between democracies, and faster growth over decades, while its rivals win on immediate ones: order, sovereignty, and the humiliation of unpopular elites (Modules 6, 10, 14, and 15).

Third, the tools of restoration are the tools of capture. A system entrenched by a supermajority can lawfully be undone only by one, so every restoration looks like repetition to the side that loses, and the only proof of good faith is to build institutions that can rule against their builders (Modules 4 and 8).

Fourth, expertise must be insulated to be trusted, and insulation makes it a target. Central banks, statisticians, and courts command trust because elected leaders cannot direct them, and for the same reason leaders who face bad numbers or adverse rulings call them an unaccountable elite. The insulation protects the public only as long as the public believes in it, which is why the fights over the referees are fights over legitimacy, not law (Modules 4, 5, and 11).

Fifth, technology has made control cheaper and revolt faster at the same time. The surveillance tools that let a state watch every phone in Xinjiang are sold to dozens of governments, while social platforms let leaderless crowds mobilize in hours, as in Nepal and Madagascar. So far the regimes that combine surveillance with a loyal army have survived the wave, and those whose armies wavered have fallen (Modules 7, 10, and 16).

17d. What to Watch

Date	Event	Why it matters
October 19, 2026	Alberta's referendum, which includes a separation question (Module 12)	A decisive vote to stay would show grievance channeled by procedure; a close one would give Quebec's sovereigntists a second front against Ottawa
October 25, 2026	Brazil's presidential runoff: Lula against Flávio Bolsonaro (Module 5)	Whether voters elect the son of a former president convicted of plotting to overturn the last election, and whether the loser accepts the count
October 25, 2026	Serbia's snap parliamentary election, with Aleksandar Vučić running for prime minister; Bulgaria's presidential election	Whether a hybrid regime can renew itself by moving its leader to a new office, as Putin did
October 27, 2026	Israel's election for the 120-seat Knesset. Polls: Lazar for Maariv, October 7-8 (700): governing coalition 52, opposition 52, Arab parties 16; Direct Polls for i24, October 7 (518): 60, 48, and 12	Whether either bloc reaches the 61 seats needed to govern; the result decides the Haredi draft and the fate of a judicial-selection law due to take effect with the new Knesset (Modules 4 and 9)
Late October 2026	Romania's confidence vote on its latest nominee, and Sweden's next vote on a prime minister (Module 5)	Two tests of whether fragmented parliaments can still form governments; a fourth failed vote in Sweden would force an extra election within three months
November 3, 2026	The American midterms: all 435 House seats, 35 Senate seats, and 36 governorships	The course's first test of the American case (Module 5): a free vote, a count that is accepted, and a Congress that decides whether to check the president
November 17, 2026	Nicolás Maduro's immunity hearing in New York (Module 16)	Whether an American court will treat a ruler Washington did not recognize as a head of state
By November 20, 2026	Bosnia's official results, including the Serb Republic's presidency (Module 12)	Whether Dodik's party returns to secession threats or to bargaining
December 6, 2026	Guinea-Bissau's elections after its coup (Module 10)	Whether a junta hands over power or civilianizes, as Gabon's and Guinea's did
January 16, 2027	Nigeria's presidential and legislative elections	Africa's most populous democracy votes inside the coup belt's neighborhood
2027, date not yet set	Hungary's constitutional review and referendum (Module 8)	The clearest test of restoration against repetition
February 9-28, 2027	India's census (Modules 9 and 12)	The numbers for the fight over parliamentary seats, and for caste politics
March 2027	Freedom House's and V-Dem's 2027 reports	The first to score Hungary's change of government and Venezuela's change of leader; whether the decline ends
April 2027	France's presidential election, with Marine Le Pen eligible after her appeal (Module 14)	Whether the populist right wins the presidency of a founding member of the European Union
2027	Poland's parliamentary election (Module 8)	Which of the two legal orders survives
Autumn 2027	China's 21st Party Congress	Whether Xi Jinping takes a fourth term and names a successor, the meritocracy's test of self-correction (Module 11)
September 2027	Madagascar's presidential election (Module 10)	Whether a coup born of a youth uprising returns power to civilians
2028	Turkey's next scheduled election (Module 8)	Whether the strongest challenger can run, and whether Erdoğan can
After January 2029	Quebec's promised referendum (Module 12)	The third test of whether a democratic federation can hold a secession vote and stay whole

Polls as published by the pollsters, with dates and samples. Dates as set by the election authorities on October 15, 2026; Haiti's elections have been postponed without a new date.

17e. The Last Word

The systems this course has described are not fixed types but bargains, between rulers and ruled, between majorities and the rules that bind them, and between the present and the future that institutions are built to protect. Each bargain lasts as long as the people who could break it judge that they gain more from keeping it. That is why a constitution holds in one country and fails in another with the same words, and why the decisive moments of 2024-26 came when a few hundred legislators, a few thousand soldiers, or a few million voters decided not to accept what was put to them.

The question for the next decade is not whether democracy or autocracy is the better system in the abstract (Module 15). It is whether the people inside each system still believe that the rules will protect them when they lose. Where they do, power changes hands peacefully, as it did in Budapest. Where they do not, it changes hands anyway, by coups, uprisings, or foreign force, and the country starts again with whatever is left standing.

Module 17 Key Points

Where Things Stand, and What to Watch

• The aggregate counts favor autocracy, but the events of 2024-26 show that eroded regimes remain brittle.

• The next decade turns on a few large cases: the United States, India, Brazil, China, Russia, Turkey, and Iran.

• How a regime falls matters less than what is still standing when it does: a parliament, a court, an army that stays out.

• The tools of restoration are the tools of capture; the proof of good faith is building institutions that can rule against their builders.

• Watch November 3, 2026: free American midterms with accepted results are the course's first test of the American case.

Module 17 Quiz

Check Your Understanding

1. How does the course reconcile autocracy's aggregate momentum with the sudden falls of 2024-26?

A) Erosion is slow and favors incumbents, while the regimes it produces stay brittle
B) The indices are wrong about the trend
C) The falls were all caused by foreign powers
D) Autocracies are stronger than ever, so the falls were accidents that will soon reverse

2. According to the closing module, what does a country's outcome after a regime falls depend on?

A) How violent the fall was
B) Which foreign power supported the old regime
C) What was still standing when it fell: a parliament, a court, or an army that stays out
D) Whether the old ruler went into exile

3. What is the third contradiction?

A) Autocracies are always more popular than democracies
B) Technology always helps the state against protesters
C) Federalism always ends in secession once a region holds its first referendum
D) Restoring uses capture's tools

4. Why does Israel's election of October 27 matter, according to the watch list?

A) It is Israel's first election since 1988
B) It decides the Haredi draft and a judicial law
C) It will choose the country's president directly
D) It will decide whether Israel adopts a written constitution and a second chamber of parliament

5. What does the last word say decides whether a constitution holds?

A) Its words
B) The age of the document and the respect that age brings to it over time
C) Whether those who could break the bargain gain more from keeping it
D) The number of amendments it allows, and how hard they are to pass in the legislature

Answer Sheet

Answers to every module's Check Your Understanding quiz.

Module	Answers
Module 1 Quiz	1. B 2. D 3. A 4. C 5. D
Module 2 Quiz	1. B 2. C 3. A 4. B 5. C
Module 3 Quiz	1. D 2. A 3. C 4. D 5. B
Module 4 Quiz	1. A 2. A 3. B 4. D 5. C
Module 5 Quiz	1. B 2. D 3. C 4. A 5. C
Module 6 Quiz	1. D 2. A 3. B 4. D 5. B
Module 7 Quiz	1. C 2. A 3. D 4. C 5. B
Module 8 Quiz	1. A 2. B 3. A 4. C 5. D
Module 9 Quiz	1. B 2. D 3. A 4. C 5. A
Module 10 Quiz	1. C 2. D 3. B 4. D 5. A
Module 11 Quiz	1. B 2. C 3. C 4. D 5. B
Module 12 Quiz	1. A 2. C 3. A 4. B 5. D
Module 13 Quiz	1. C 2. A 3. D 4. B 5. D
Module 14 Quiz	1. C 2. B 3. A 4. D 5. C
Module 15 Quiz	1. B 2. A 3. C 4. B 5. A
Module 16 Quiz	1. D 2. D 3. B 4. C 5. A
Module 17 Quiz	1. A 2. C 3. D 4. B 5. C