

New Global Data on Political Parties: V-Party

Varieties of Party Identity and Organization (V-Party) is a new dataset, produced by the V-Dem Institute, examining the policy positions and organizational structures of political parties across the world¹. The largest ever study of its kind, the data highlight shifts and trends within and between parties since 1970.

Main Findings

- V-Party's Illiberalism Index shows that the Republican party in the US has retreated from upholding democratic norms in recent years. Its rhetoric is closer to authoritarian parties, such as AKP in Turkey and Fidesz in Hungary. Conversely, the Democratic party has retained a commitment to longstanding democratic standards.
- This is a global trend: The median governing party in democracies has become more illiberal in recent decades. This means that more parties show lower commitment to political pluralism, demonization of political opponents, disrespect for fundamental minority rights and encouragement of political violence.

US Parties in Comparative Perspective

Figure 1 shows the movement of the Republican and Democratic parties in this millennium on two dimensions: Illiberal rhetoric and left-right positioning on economic policy. The Republican party has not changed left-right placement but moved strongly in an illiberal direction. In this sense it is now more similar to autocratic ruling parties such as the Turkish AKP, and Fidesz in Hungary than to typical center-right governing parties in democracies such as the Conservatives in the UK or CDU in Germany.

The Illiberalism Index gauges the extent of commitment to democratic norms that a party exhibits before an election. It is the first comparative measure of the "litmus test" for the loyalty to democracy, which the famous political scientist Juan Linz developed in 1978, and Steven Levitsky and Daniel Ziblatt have propagated in their 2018 book on "How Democracies Die". Indicators comprising the Illiberalism Index are low commitment to political pluralism, demonization of political opponents, disrespect for fundamental minority rights and encouragement of political violence.

FIGURE 1. DEVELOPMENT OF THE REPUBLICANS AND DEMOCRATS SINCE 2000: ILLIBERALISM AND ECONOMIC LEFT-RIGHT POSITIONING.

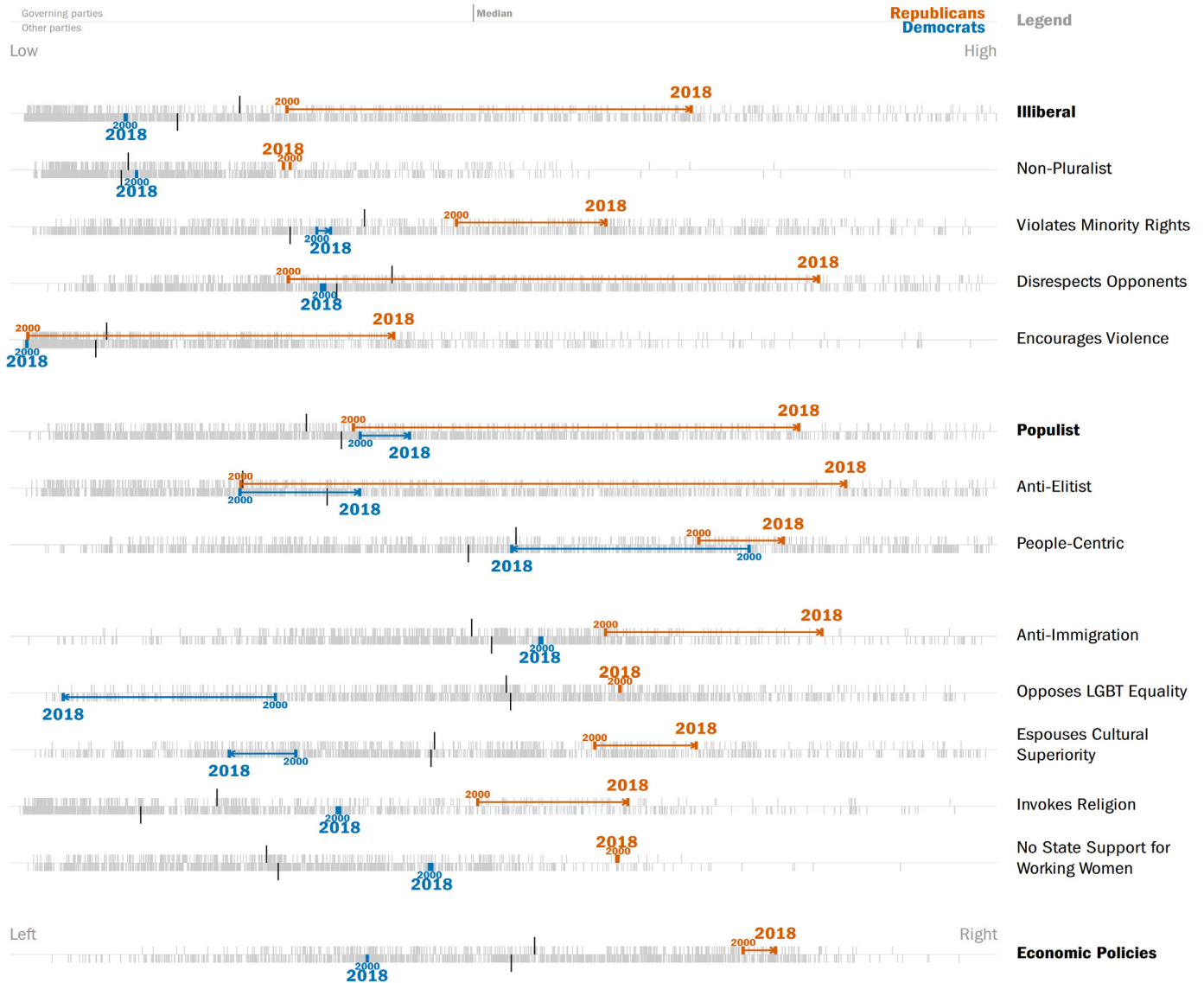


Figure 2 illustrates where the Republican Party (orange dots) and the Democratic Party (blue squares) placed on several indicators before the 2018 election relative to all other ruling parties in democracies (above the line) and opposition parties in democracies (below the horizontal lines) in this millennium. The black vertical line gives the median or typical value.

The data shows that the Republican Party in 2018 was far more illiberal than almost all other governing parties in democracies. Only very few governing parties in democracies in this millennium (15%) were considered more illiberal than the Republican Party in the US. Conversely, the Democratic Party was rated slightly less illiberal than the typical party in democracies. The Republican party scores much higher than almost all parties in democracies on almost all of these indicators.

¹ Lührmann et al. (2020).

FIGURE 2. POSITION OF THE REPUBLICANS AND DEMOCRATS RELATIVE TO OTHER PARTIES IN DEMOCRACIES SINCE 2000.



V-Dem’s Deputy Director Anna Lührmann says: “This rise of illiberalism is not like mere disagreement about policy issues. Lacking commitment to democratic norms signals a willingness to also erode these norms once in power.”

- Both parties use more populist rhetoric – anti-elitism and citizen-centrism – than typical parties in democracies, but the Republicans clearly more so.
- The five indicators capturing cultural issues place the Republicans consistently to the right of the center. Democrats also fare to the right of the median party in democracies in this millennium in terms of the role of religion in politics, immigration, and support of state measures to enhance the equal participation of women in the labor market. They fare to the left of the spectrum when it comes to support for LGBT equality and opposing the idea of cultural superiority of particular group or nation.
- V-Party’s data places the Democratic Party to the left of typical parties in democracies in terms of economic issues and the Republican Party to the right.

Global Increase of Illiberalism of Governing Parties in Democracies

The median governing party in democracies has become more illiberal in recent decades – rising from a score of 0.08 in 1970 to 0.28 in 2019 (top of Figure 3).² “This global trend indicates that contemporary threats to democracy typically come from within the government,” says V-Dem Institute’s Director Staffan I. Lindberg.

The median governing party in autocracies has become somewhat less illiberal in the same period, reflecting the mimicking of multi-party elections in most autocracies.

² We classify countries as democracies in this paper using the ambitious Regimes of the World measure, which includes not only the freedom and fairness of elections, but also a minimal level of freedom of association and speech (see Lührmann et al. 2018).

FIGURE 3. ILLIBERAL RHETORIC OF GOVERNING PARTIES.

Parties that gained or retained the Head of Government post in national elections, including those where the post was not at stake

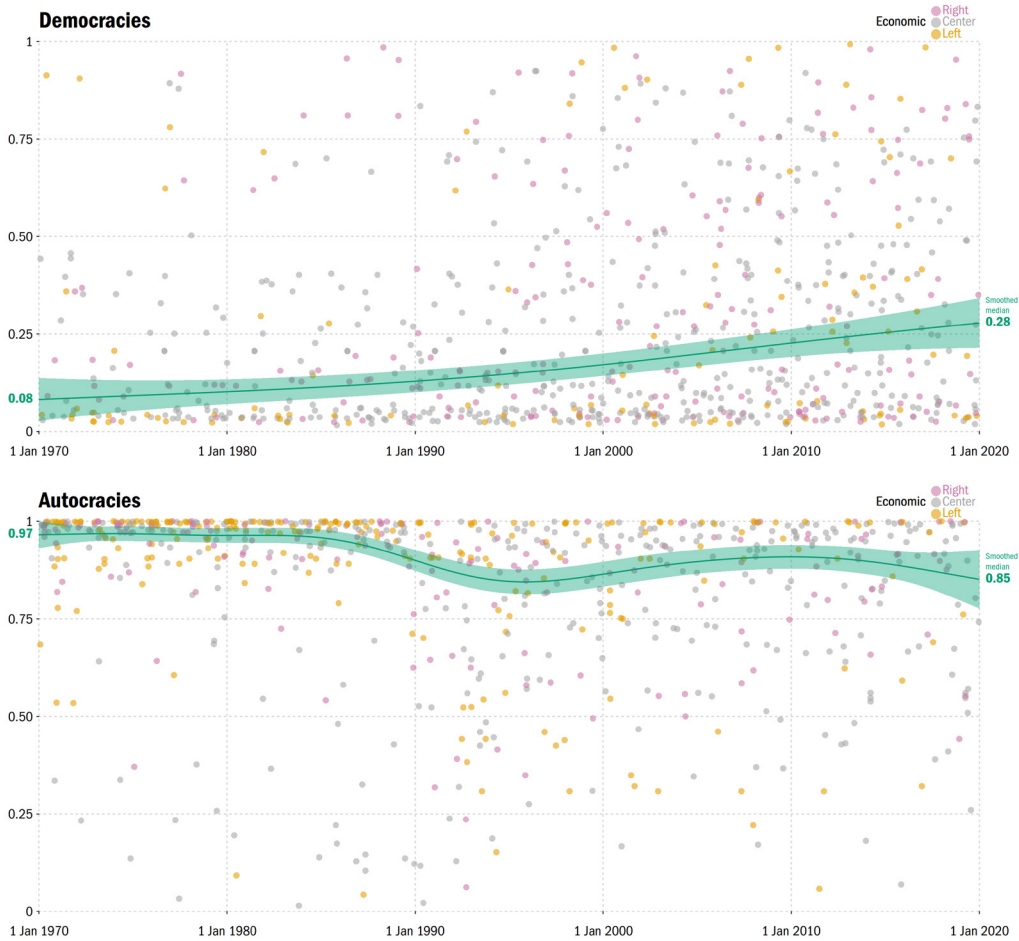
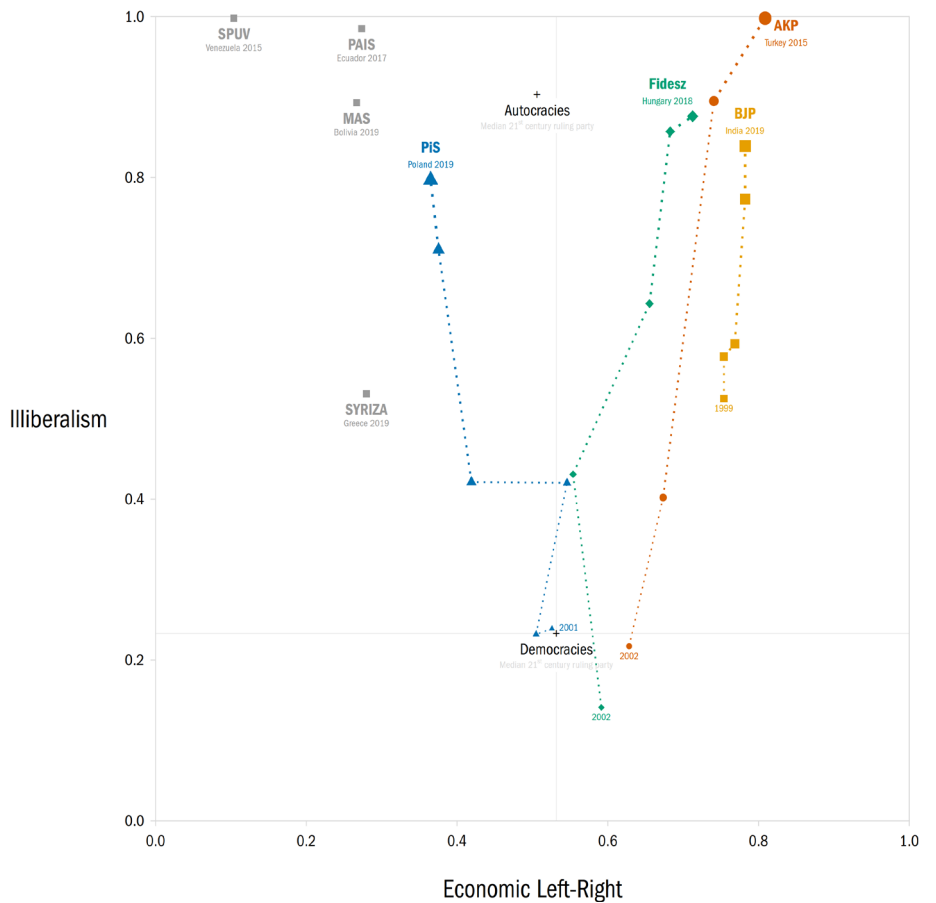


Figure 4 illustrates the development of selected governing parties in autocratizing countries – countries, where the quality of democratic institutions as declined in recent years.³ The Polish Law and Justice Party (PiS), the Hungarian Fidesz Party and the Turkish Justice and Development Party (AKP) have started in this millennium with a score on the illiberalism index close to the typical governing party in democracies. The Indian Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) exhibited already in 1999 some level of illiberalism. However, over the course of the last 20 years, all four parties have become more and more illiberal. By now, they fare close to the typical ruling party in autocracies in terms of illiberalism. Under their leadership, their countries have also becoming increasingly autocratic, with Hungary losing its status as democracy in 2018 and Turkey in 2014.⁴ The data also illustrate the move of PiS towards the left in terms of economic policy and of Fidesz and AKP towards the right.

FIGURE 4. DEVELOPMENT OF PARTIES IN AUTOCRATIZING COUNTRIES SINCE 2000 IN TERMS OF ILLIBERALISM AND ECONOMIC LEFT-RIGHT POSITIONING.



³ On this process of autocratization see Lührmann et al. (2020a).

⁴ Lührmann et al. (2020a).

Background on the Varieties of Party Identity and Organization Dataset (V-Party)

In January 2020, 665 carefully selected country experts have assessed the identity of the political parties in their country of expertise with a vote share of more than 5% in a legislative election between 1970 and 2019 across 169 countries. This generates a dataset on 1,955 political parties across 1,560 elections--- or in total 6,330 party-election year units with 183,570 expert-coded data points. Typically, at least four locally-based experts contributed to each question. Coder responses were aggregated using V-Dem's custom-built statistical model to ensure comparability across countries and time.⁵ It can be downloaded free of charge at [v-dem.net](https://www.v-dem.net).

5 Pemstein et al. (2020).

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ABOUT V-DEM INSTITUTE

V-Dem is a new approach to conceptualization and measurement of democracy. The headquarters – the V-Dem Institute – is based at the University of Gothenburg with 19 staff, and a project team across the world with 5 Principal Investigators, 19 Project Managers, 33 Regional Managers, 134 Country Coordinators, Research Assistants, and 3,200+ Country Experts. V-Dem is one of the world's largest data collection projects on democracy.



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