



I focus

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Malta's democracy indicators and rankings

Within the public sphere, we frequently encounter contrasting perspectives about the state of Malta's democracy. For some, we've never had it better, whilst for others, we are facing a never-seen-before crisis.

In this short article I will refer to Malta's standing in three global reports on democracy, which are reputable and evidence-based, namely those published by Freedom House, the Economist Intelligence Unity and Varieties of Democracy respectively. The three of them have published their most recent reports over the past weeks, in a global context characterised by matters such as the war in Ukraine and the pandemic recovery. I myself use these three indicators as secondary data for my own sociological reference. There are other reputable global indicators, and one may also refer to them accordingly. One may also read about the respective methods used by the reports in question on their respective websites. Freedom House, which this year celebrates its '50 Years in the Struggle for Democracy', reports in the 2023 report that 'the demand for freedom is universal', even if 'global freedom declined for the 17th consecutive year'. At the same time, 'the struggle for democracy may be approaching a turning point. The gap between the number of countries that registered overall improvements in political rights and civil liberties and those that registered overall declines for 2022 was the narrowest it has ever been through 17 years of global deterioration.'

Freedom House defines Malta as 'a parliamentary democracy

with regular, competitive elections and periodic rotations of power. Civil liberties are generally respected. New and smaller political parties encounter difficulties in challenging the dominance of the two main parties, and official corruption is a serious problem.' The full narrative report for the current year has not yet been uploaded, but figures are available.

Thus, Malta's score is of 89 out of 100, which in turn comprises Political Rights (35/40) and Civil Liberties (54/60). Malta is hereby considered to be a 'free' country. The other categorisations are 'partly free' and 'not free'.

In 2022, Malta's score was identical, but online data shows that it has been declining since the first available year, 2017, where Malta had scored 96/100.

For comparative purposes, Norway, Finland and Sweden top the Freedom House rankings, with 100 points each, whilst South Sudan, Tibet and Syria occupy the last posts with 1 point each.

Next comes the report published by the Economist Intelligence Unit, namely 'Democracy Index 2022', which this year focuses on "Frontline democracy and the battle for Ukraine". Here, 'the average global index score stagnated in 2022. Despite expectations of a rebound after the lifting of pandemic-related restrictions, the score was almost unchanged, at 5.29 (on a 0-10

scale), compared with 5.28 in 2021. The positive effect of the restoration of individual freedoms was cancelled out by negative developments globally. The scores of more than half of the countries measured by the index either stagnated or declined. Western Europe was a positive outlier, being the only region whose score returned to pre-pandemic levels.'



According to the Economist Intelligence Unit, Malta is a 'Flawed Democracy'. Other possible categorizations include 'Full Democracy', 'Hybrid Regime' and 'Authoritarian' respectively. Malta's overall score is 7.70 out of 10, and it is ranked 33rd out of 165 countries and 2 territories. In turn, Malta's score comprises the following sub-categories: Electoral Process and Pluralism 9.17, Functioning of Government 7.14, Political Participation 5.56, Political Culture 8.13 and Civil Liberties 8.53.

In 2021, Malta had occupied the same ranking, but its global points were lower, namely 7.57. At the same time, Malta had scored 7.95 in 2019, 8.21 in 2018 and 8.28 in 2012.

By comparison, the top three countries according to this report are Norway (9.81); New

Zealand (9.61) and Iceland (9.52). The last three places are occupied by North Korea (1.08), Myanmar (0.74) and Afghanistan (0.32).

Last but not least, there is Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem), which issues its 'Democracy Report', which, in its own words, 'produces the largest global dataset on democracy with over 31 million data points for 202 countries from 1789 to 2022. Involving almost 4,000 scholars and other country experts, V-Dem measures hundreds of different attributes of democracy.'

One major finding in this year's report, entitled 'Defiance in the Face of Autocratization', is that 'advances in global levels of democracy made over the last 35 years have been wiped out', as '72% of the world's population - 5.7 billion people - live in autocracies by 2022.'

V-Dem categorizes countries as 'Liberal Democracies', 'Electoral Democracies', 'Electoral Autocracies', and 'Closed Autocracies' respectively. Each categorisation could also have an added plus (+) or minus (-). The former 'signifies that the country could also belong to the higher category', whilst the latter takes 'uncertainty into account', meaning

that 'the country could belong to the lower category'.

In this regard, Malta is categorised as an "Electoral Democracy +", with 0.64 points out of 1, and is ranked 44th out of 179 countries. Malta ranks as follows in the following sub-categories: Electoral democracy index 37th (0.78); Liberal component index 52nd (0.81); Egalitarian component index 15th (0.9); Participatory component index 12th (0.67); Deliberative component index 54th (0.8).

In line with the V-Dem method, Malta's score has neither 'improved over the past 10 years, substantively and at a statistically significant level', and nor has it 'decreased over the past 10 years, substantively and at a statistically significant level'.

On a global level, the most democratic countries according to V-Dem are Denmark (0.89), Sweden (0.87) and Norway (0.86). The bottom-most positions are occupied jointly by Nicaragua, Syria, Chad, Afghanistan (0.3) and Eritrea and North Korea (0.1).

Such data can help us contextualise and understand Malta's democracy indicators and global ranking in a more objective manner.