TARTU UNIVERSITY

Faculty of Social Sciences

Johan Skytte Institute of Political Studies

Asilbek Usmanov

Corruption, Populism, and Polarization: Unraveling the Causes of Democratic Backsliding in 68 Countries

MA Thesis

Supervisor: Martin Mölder (Johan Skytte Institute of Political Studies at University of Tartu, Estonia)

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Authorship Declaration

I have prepared this thesis independently. All the views of other authors, as well as data from literary sources and elsewhere, have been cited.

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Abstract

This thesis examines the dynamics of democratic backsliding, focusing on the potential impacts of affective polarization, populism, and political corruption, with inflation as a control variable. Utilizing three primary datasets: the Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem) dataset, the V-Dem's Party Dataset, and the World Bank's Global Database of Inflation (GDI), the study conducts both univariate and multivariate regression analyses. The findings confirm that affective polarization significantly predicts changes in both electoral and deliberative democracy, supporting the hypothesis that increased polarization can lead to democratic backsliding. However, the relationships between populism and liberal democracy, and political corruption and egalitarian democracy, were not statistically significant at the conventional levels. Despite these limitations, this study contributes to the literature on democratic backsliding by highlighting the potential impact of political corruption, affective polarization, populism, and inflation on various forms of democracy. The findings underscore the complexity of democratic backsliding and the need for further research in this area. As democratic backsliding continues to be a pressing issue in many parts of the world, it is important to understand these dynamics. Future research could benefit from expanding the dataset to include more countries and a longer timeframe. This would increase the number of observations and potentially lead to more robust findings. Additionally, future studies could consider incorporating other variables that might influence democratic backsliding, such as institutional strength, and cultural factors.

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Introduction

The phenomenon of democratic backsliding has become a major problem in modern politics. Democratic backsliding is a process of regime change towards autocracy that makes usage of power more repressive, while declining the engagement of public in policy making (Cassani & Tomini, 2019). This study aims to delve into the dynamics of democratic backsliding, focusing on its relationship with affective polarization, political corruption, and populism. In light of the increased attention given to affective polarization, political corruption, and populism in recent scholarly articles and by respected analytical hubs (Exler, 2020; Orhan, 2022; Theuns, 2020; V-Dem, 2023), I have chosen to study these phenomena in more detail to understand their relationships with democratic backsliding. As affective polarization, characterized by strong partisan animosity, can lead to political instability and undermine democratic norms, potentially facilitating democratic backsliding (Druckman et al., 2023). Political corruption, on the other hand, can erode public trust in democratic institutions, creating a fertile ground for anti-democratic forces (Transparency International, 2021). Populism, with its emphasis on the "will of the people" over institutional constraints, can also pose a threat to liberal democratic values (Elenak, 2023). These variables have been at the forefront of contemporary political discourse, making them particularly relevant for this study. By examining these relationships, this research aims to contribute to the ongoing scholarly conversation and provide insights into the dynamics of democratic backsliding.

The independent variables under consideration are affective polarization, political corruption, and populism, with inflation serving as a control variable representing the economic health of the countries. The dependent variable is democratic backsliding, represented through the change in five dimensions of democracy - electoral, liberal, deliberative, egalitarian, and participatory.

This thesis utilizes three primary datasets: the Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem) dataset, the V-Dem's Party Dataset, and the World Bank's Global Database of Inflation (GDI). The analysis encompasses a time frame from 2006 to 2019 and includes a diverse set of 68 countries, all classified as "Free" by Freedom House in 2006. This selection allows for a nuanced understanding of how and why democracies erode over time in contexts where democratic norms and institutions are presumably well-established.

Given this context, the research question guiding this thesis is:
"How do affective polarization, political corruption and populism influence democratic backsliding?"

This research question will guide the exploration of the dynamics of democratic backsliding and the roles of affective polarization, political corruption, and populism in this process. The findings of this study will contribute to the broader understanding of the factors influencing democratic stability and change.

This thesis will proceed with a comprehensive literature review, synthesizing findings from previous studies. The review will concentrate on the central concepts of this research: democracy, its five dimensions, democratic backsliding, affective polarization, political corruption, populism, and inflation. This section will incorporate the existing body of knowledge on these topics and establish expectations for the forthcoming analysis. The literature review will finalize with a formulation of hypotheses, supported by the reviewed secondary literature.

Following the literature review, the methodology chapter will define the research strategy employed in this study. It will provide a thorough explanation of the selection criteria and process that resulted in the final sample of 68 countries. This chapter will also discuss the methods used to answer the research question, outlining the principles of data analysis and acknowledging the limitations of the results due to data and methodological constraints.

The subsequent chapter will delve into the analysis of the results derived from the statistical models and the key findings. It will encompass both descriptive and inferential statistics. The inferential statistics section will adhere to a step-by-step modelling approach. The univariate models will consist solely of the dependent and independent variables, while the multivariate models will incorporate all relevant predictors of the dependent variables, as identified in the literature.

The thesis will conclude with a brief summary of the entire paper, containing the key points, findings, and implications of the research. This conclusion will serve to tie together the various areas of investigation and provide a comprehensive overview of the study's contributions to the understanding of democratic backsliding.

1. Literature Review

1.1. Democracy

Studying the distant past is essential to comprehending democracy's long history. This history is marked by many examples of democracies arising, growing, and sometimes fading (Gerring et al., 2005). For instance, the Roman Republic, which existed from 509-27 BC, is an early example of a democracy that eventually transitioned to an autocratic regime under Julius Caesar (Baehr, 2017). Similarly, in the modern era, Turkey has seen a shift from a democratic to a more authoritarian regime (Bartels et al., 2023). This pattern of repetition emphasizes how vulnerable democratic institutions are and how much care and attention they need to be preserved. Additionally, it suggests that democratic backsliding - a phenomena that is currently being observed in a number of different parts of the world - is not a novel phenomenon but rather a repetitive experience throughout the entire history of democracy. This point of view allows for understanding the current problems confronting democracies and helps develop strategies to safeguard them for future generations.

The origins of democracy can be traced back to the city-state of Athens in the fifth century BC in Ancient Greece. Athens was a significant hub for philosophy, the arts, and the sciences throughout this period of significant intellectual and cultural expansion (Fleck & Hanssen, 2006). During this time, the Athenians began to believe in the inherent value and potential of every person, which gave rise to the idea of democracy. The Greek terms "demos" (people) and "kratos" (rule) are the source of the word "democracy", which defines a government in which the people hold control of power (Dahl, 2020).

This represented an important departure from the oligarchies and monarchies that were the norm at the period. In a monarchy, a single person, typically a king or queen, holds all authority and is chosen for the role at birth (Parker, 2011). In an oligarchy, a small number of people, frequently belonging to a specific class or group, hold all the authority (Grewal, 2022). Democracy, on the other hand, gives the people power - either directly or through elected representatives (Ingham, 2021). This change was a major development in political philosophy and laid the foundation for many of the democratic values that people consider important today. Since democracy's establishment in Ancient Greece, it has experienced significant shifts. At first, it was a direct form of governance in which qualified citizens had an active role in making

decisions. Every citizen of the city-state of Athens had the right to speak and vote in the assembly, which established the laws of the state, where this type of democracy was practiced (Pritchard, 2015). But only because of the city-state's limited size this was possible.

It is crucial to remember that not everyone in the community had the right to take part in this early democratic process. There was a limited number of individuals who were allowed to vote and participate in politics. Citizenship, and hence the ability to take part in the democratic process, was restricted in ancient Athens. The "demos", or those who could take part in the democratic process, were limited to adult male citizens who had served in the military (Hatzis, 2016). This implied that only roughly 30,000 of the approximately 250,000 individuals living in the country could take part in the democratic process (Hatzis, 2016). A number of groups were not allowed to participate in the democratic process. Voting was not permitted for women, slaves, and foreigners born in Athens, as they were not regarded as citizens (Tridimas, 2019). The exclusion of significant portions of the population contrasts sharply with contemporary democratic regimes, which aim for inclusivity and provide adult individuals the opportunity to vote.

Direct democracy eventually became unfeasible due to the size and complexity of societies growing over time. Representative democracy emerged as a response to the practical difficulties of assembling all citizens in one location for the purpose of making decisions. Under this system, representatives are chosen by the people to act on their behalf (Landwehr & Schäfer, 2023). Most contemporary democracies, such as those in the US, the UK, and India, use this type of democracy. It makes sure that the people have the final voice in matters of power but permits effective decision-making.

The constant expansion of voting rights is another feature that defines the history of democracy. Voting rights were frequently confined to propertied adult men in early democracies, such as the Athenian democracy and many democracies founded in the 18th and 19th centuries (Paulsen et al., 2022). This implied that a significant percentage of the general population was kept out of the political process, including women, the poor, and members of minority groups. But eventually, these limitations were removed. The 19th and 20th centuries saw an increase in movements for universal suffrage, which resulted in laws granting the right to vote to all adult citizens, regardless of their gender, color, or socioeconomic status (Duong, 2021). A key

component of democracy's development has been the extension of voting rights, which has increased its inclusivity and made it more representative of the entire population.

Different social changes have had an important effect on democracy's evolution. Political systems have developed and expanded along with societies. As a result of the interaction between these social developments and the ideals of individual liberty, equality, and public engagement in governance, new democratic institutions and practices have emerged (Fourie, 2011). For example, major reforms in many democracies, such as the adoption of labor rights and the establishment of the welfare state, were brought about by the rise of the labor movement in the 19th and 20th centuries (Flanagan, 2016).

The emergence of social media and the internet in recent years has significantly changed how citizens engage in democratic processes (Congge et al., 2023). New kinds of political activity and communication have been made possible by these technological advancements, giving people the chance to organize movements, express their thoughts, and shape legislation on an extent that was previously impossible. Democracies now face additional difficulties as a result of them, including the dissemination of false information and the possibility of cyberattacks on election infrastructure (Whyte, 2020).

Furthermore, the understanding of the fundamental principles of democracy has changed over time. For example, the idea of equality now includes social and economic equality in addition to political rights. As a result, laws like affirmative action and progressive taxation that seek to advance social justice and reduce economic inequality have been developed (Sommer & Asal, 2018).

In the same way, the idea of citizen participation has expanded to include not only voting but also other types of political participation. Nowadays, citizens engage in various kinds of political activities in many democracies, including lobbying, public discussions, and protests (Jessani et al., 2022). While increasing public participation has made democracies more open to the needs and interests of their people, it has also brought up new issues about the role of special interest groups and the impact of money in politics (Rossetto, 2021).

In conclusion, since the start in Ancient Greece, democracy has advanced significantly. From a system that restricted participation to a small percentage of the society, it has developed into

a more inclusive system that values the opinions of all citizens. Democracy's path has been characterized by continuous evolution and adaptation, impacted by societal shifts, technological advancements, and evolving understandings of its fundamental ideas. The fundamental component of democracy - a form of government in which the people hold the power - remains unchanged despite these modifications.

Democracy is not a monolithic concept; it is multifaceted and can take various forms depending on the context. The five dimensions of democracy - electoral, liberal, deliberative, egalitarian, and participatory - each highlight a unique aspect of democratic governance. Examining these dimensions individually allows for a more nuanced understanding of how democracy operates in different societies. It helps appreciate the diversity of democratic practices and assists in identifying areas where democratic processes can be enhanced or are under threat. Therefore, a discussion on the types of democracy is not merely an academic exercise, but a necessary step towards a comprehensive understanding of this complex political system.

Electoral Democracy

A system that allows every citizen to choose one candidate from a list of candidates for political office is the foundation of electoral democracy (MacKuen & Rabinowitz, 2003). Elections are the result of this procedure, in which every citizen registers as a voter and submits a secret ballot containing their choices. Citizens in representative democracies are only able to voice their opinions by choosing representatives to serve as chief executives and lawmakers (Little, 2020). The main option available to voters when legislators pass laws that a large number of people disagree with is to elect new lawmakers who will uphold alternative priorities and values. Given this knowledge, public servants have a vested interest in endorsing laws and policies that align with the preferences of the vast majority of voters in their districts.

Among the essential components of electoral democracy are (Little, 2020):

- Free and fair elections: elections are the foundation of democracy because they give people the power to choose representatives to represent them in parliament and other governmental roles.
- Universal suffrage: every citizen has the right to vote regardless of their social standing, color, gender, or religion.

- Rule of law: all citizens are treated equally under the law.
- Political participation: citizens have a word in decisions affecting the collective life of the country.
- Representative government: in a representative democracy, representatives are chosen by their fellow citizens to serve as legislators and chief executives.

Modern electoral democracy has its roots in Europe during the French Revolution. Despite the French Revolution's democratic shortcomings (such as the lack of political parties, electoral campaigns, and declared candidates), a thorough analysis of revolutionary elections comes to the conclusion that the French Revolution and its American counterpart are associated with creating modern electoral democracy (Edelstein, 2016).

Liberal Democracy

A liberal democracy is a system of governance that blends liberal political philosophy concepts with the structure of a representative democracy. It is a form of governance in which institutions and norms created by the constitution safeguard people's freedoms and rights while also limiting the power of the state (Rhoden, 2013).

Some essential components of a liberal democracy are:

- Elections: Between or among multiple distinct political parties (Gu, 2024).
- Separation of powers: Into different branches of government (Von Achenbach, 2017).
- Rule of law: In everyday life as part of an open society (Del Llano, 2023).
- Market economy: With private property (Popov, 2021).
- Universal suffrage: The right to vote for all citizens (Vines & Glick, 1967).
- Equal protection: Of human rights, civil rights, civil liberties, and political freedoms for all citizens (Mukand & Rodrik, 2020).

The Age of Enlightenment is where liberal democracy started, as well as its name. A small but influential group of Enlightenment intellectuals first opposed the traditional beliefs that supported monarchs and aristocracies, arguing instead that reason and the ideals of liberty and equality should govern human affairs (Higley & Burton, 2006).

Deliberative Democracy

Deliberation is a key component of decision-making in deliberative democracy. By restricting decision-makers to a smaller but more representative sample of the population that is given the time and resources to concentrate on a single topic, it prioritizes quality over quantity. The bare minimum definition of deliberative democracy is two-way communication in which interests, values, and preferences are considered and discussed in relation to issues of shared concern (Bächtiger et al., 2018). It includes the conditions that for communicative impact to be effective, deliberation must occur in environments of reciprocity, equal recognition, respect, and power.

Among the crucial elements of deliberative democracy are (Cohen, 2007):

- Genuine Thought: Not just the sum of preferences expressed during voting, but genuine thought is the main source of legitimacy for legislation.
- Inclusive and Equal Participation: Every citizen should be able to take part in the deliberation process on an equal basis.
- Reasoned Argumentation: Participants should provide justification for their positions and take into account the arguments made by others.
- Consensus Decision-Making: The goal of deliberation is to come to a consensus or, at the very least, a majority agreement.

Deliberative democracy is a theory and practice that dates back thousands of years, as the roots of deliberative democracy can be traced back to Aristotle and his notion of politics, but it has garnered more scholarly interest in the 1990s (Meagher & Feder, 2010).

Egalitarian Democracy

One kind of democracy that prioritizes citizen equality is the egalitarian one. It is seen as a system that de facto protects citizens' rights and freedoms, distributes resources so that every citizen can meaningfully participate in politics, and cultivates an atmosphere that allows every person and social group to have an impact on political and governance processes (Sigman & Lindberg, 2015).

There are three primary dimensions that support this general principle (Sigman & Lindberg, 2018):

- Equal Protection of Rights and Freedoms: This dimension guarantees that all citizens have the same rights and freedoms, irrespective of their cultural, social, or economic backgrounds.
- Equal Access to Power: This dimension creates an atmosphere where all people and social groups have an equal chance to influence political and governing processes.
- Equal Distribution of Resources: This dimension makes sure that resources are distributed in a way that allows all citizens to participate meaningfully in political processes.

The idea of egalitarian democracy gained popularity and application in the 20th century, especially in relation to social democratic movements and laws intended to reduce social and economic inequality (Sigman & Lindberg, 2015).

Participatory Democracy

A type of democratic governance known as participatory democracy places a strong emphasis on the widespread involvement of citizens in the creation and management of political institutions (Bherer et al., 2016). Compared to traditional representative democracy, it aims for higher levels of citizen participation and direct representation.

Participatory democracy's essential components include (Maboudi, 2020):

- Public Participation: The involvement of citizens in determining the course of collective life. This is a "thick" as opposed to "thin" definition of participation because it involves more political engagement than simple voting.
- Inclusive Processes: Constituent-making processes that are inclusive and participative are more likely to produce democratic outcomes than traditional, elite-led methods.
- Impact on Public Policy: Participatory governance practices have the potential to directly influence significant national public policy decisions.

With origins in ancient Athens, where the notion of direct citizen engagement in decision-making processes initially emerged, participatory democracy has been a concept for centuries (Mueller, 2004).

In conclusion, over time, democracy - a form of governance in which the people hold the power - has taken on many forms, each with its own distinctive characteristics and guiding ideals. Liberal democracy emphasizes equality, freedom, and individual rights while combining democratic and liberal ideas. Free and fair elections, the division of powers, the rule of law, a market economy, universal suffrage, and equal protection of rights are its key features. In contrast, an electoral democracy allows people to exercise their authority through voting. Free and fair elections, the right to vote, universal suffrage, the rule of law, political engagement, and representative government are its most important features. The focus of participatory democracy is on the wide involvement of citizens in the design and functioning of political institutions. It is distinguished by influence on public policy, inclusive procedures, and public participation. The equality of its citizens is emphasized in egalitarian democracies. Equal distribution of resources, equal protection of rights and freedoms, and equal access to power are its defining characteristics. Finally, the necessity of deliberation in decision-making is emphasized by deliberative democracy. It is distinguished by honest discussion, fair and inclusive participation, rational reasoning, and consensus decision-making. Different approaches to governance are provided by each style of democracy, which reflects the different needs and ideals of societies worldwide.

1.2. Democratic Backsliding

Democratic backsliding is the opposition of democratization and is often referred to as democratic erosion or de-democratization (Grumbach, 2022). It is a slow decline of democratic standards. This process may be the outcome of state-led efforts to weaken the political institutions that preserve democracy, including electoral procedures, the rule of law, and individual rights violations (Bermeo, 2016). It entails the breakdown of essential components of a healthy democracy, including free and fair elections, freedom of the press, and the rule of law.

Democratic backsliding can often be identified by the slow, delicate processes that are deteriorating, making it difficult to detect until it is too late. A multitude of circumstances, including shifts in executive power, public opinion, and economic crises, can influence it (Bernhard, 2021; Grumbach, 2022). Democratic backsliding has serious consequences, including a decline in civil liberties and political stability as well as a frequent emergence of authoritarian rule. It is a worldwide problem that needs to be prevented and mitigated by commitment, strong institutions, and engaged citizens.

Democratic backsliding is a phenomenon that became popular in the 2010s, the reason for this phenomenon to gain popularity was that many countries that were regarded as strong democracies began to lose its high democratic indexes. As V-Dem mentioned in its 2023 democracy report, nowadays approximately 42 countries are autocratizing, while only 14 countries are democratizing (V-Dem, 2023). It is mentioned there that disinformation, polarization and autocratization are reinforcing each other.

Democratic backsliding can have negative consequences on a country's political and socioeconomic system. In terms of politics, it may result in a breakdown of democratic norms and institutions, which are the cornerstone of a democracy. This includes limiting civil liberties, undermining free and fair elections, and eroding the checks and balances that keep power from concentrating in one hands (Brusis, 2019). Autocratic rule, in which a small number of people hold all the power, can result from democratic backsliding. This can lead to the marginalization of opposition parties, suppression of criticism, and the silence of the media - all of which are harmful for democracy.

Democratic backsliding can cause instability and uncertainty on a socioeconomic level, which can harm the economy. It may discourage foreign investments, limit economic growth, and result in an inefficient use of resources (Andersen, 2019). Moreover, it has the potential to worsen socioeconomic injustices and cause public dissatisfaction. A lack of public participation in community life can result from a decline in trust in public institutions, which erodes the democratic process even more. Democratic Breakdown can eventually result in a vicious cycle of political unrest and economic stagnation, making it more challenging for countries to succeed in sustainable development and raise the standard of living of their people (Yi & Woo, 2014). Thus, maintaining democracy and advancing social and economic progress depend on avoiding democratic regression.

For this paper, I conceptualize democratic backsliding as a process of regime change towards autocracy that makes usage of power more repressive, while declining the engagement of public in policy making (Cassani & Tomini, 2019).

In summary, democratic backsliding is a serious worldwide problem that undermines the core principles of democracy. It is a slow process that can be started by a number of things, such as changes in the executive branch's authority, changes in public opinion, and financial crises. Reversing course in a democratic process has serious consequences: it erodes political stability, threatens civil freedoms, and frequently results in autocratic rule. It can also worsen social inequality, discourage foreign investments, restrict economic progress, and create socioeconomic instability. Democratic backsliding is a phenomenon that emphasizes how crucial it is to maintain democratic norms and values by continuous monitoring, strong institutions, and engaged public. Therefore, it is essential to recognize and deal with democratic backsliding in order to preserve democracy and advance economic and social development. In this work, democratic backsliding is understood as a process of regime change towards authoritarianism, marked by heightened repression and a decline in public participation in the formulation of public policy. This emphasizes the need for more investigation and practical countermeasures to stop this trend and protect democratic institutions and norms.

1.3. Affective Polarization and Democratic Backsliding

By the 90s of the XX century, most scholars relied only on political preferences to explain society's polarization (Reiljan, 2020). However, in 1991 in his article Bradley M. Richardson analysed how party loyalists (primarily supporters of traditional cleavage parties) vote for their preferred party in subsequent elections. At the same time, they have a long-standing hostility towards other parties and their supporters (Richardson, 1991). Studying affective polarization is essential to understand how the society in a specific country is polarized and what measures can be taken to mitigate enmity between different groups of people (supporters of different parties). To conceptualize this phenomenon, I use the definition of affective polarization as "the propensity of party followers (partisans) to perceive rival parties as despised out-groups while harbouring positive ingroup sentiments for their party" (Iyengar et al., 2012, p. 406).

Thus, from this, it is clear that affective polarization is about hostile relationships between supporters of different parties while maintaining friendly feelings towards their associates.

First, this phenomenon was used to describe the polarization in the United States, the country with the two-party system; the scholars tried to understand to what extent Republicans feel enmity towards Democrats and vice versa. However, after some time, the issues of affective polarization became also popular in Europe. According to recent findings, the level of affective polarization in some European countries (with multi-party systems) was even higher than in the USA (Reiljan, 2020).

Several investigations were conducted to study the relationship of affective polarization and democratic backsliding. Somer et al. (2021) studied the relationship between pernicious polarization (the next level of affective polarization, when polarization begins to violently undermine democratic institutions) and autocratization, at the same time they have included the influence of opposition strategies on pernicious polarization. Haggard and Kaufman (2021) also studied the correlation between polarization and democratic backsliding, they have conducted large-N research to capture this correlation. Finally, Orhan (2022) has studied the relationship between affective polarization and democratic backsliding through comparison of 53 countries, he has found out that there is a strong correlation between affective polarization and democratic backsliding, however there was no correlation between ideological polarization and democratic backsliding. It is now evident from numerous scholarly papers that there exists a significant relationship between affective polarization and democratic backsliding. It is worth noting that many hypotheses proposed by authors to demonstrate the strong correlation between these two phenomena have been confirmed. This underscores the critical role of polarization in the process of democratic backsliding.

1.4. Populism and Democratic Backsliding

Populism has emerged as a central theme in both scholarly and public discourse in recent years. But it is crucial to remember that populism is not a brand-new phenomenon. Populist movements have been successful in winning elections in Europe, Latin America, India, and East Asia even before the current wave of populism in Western democracies (Kaltwasser et al., 2017). Because of this, populist parties have risen to and maintained positions of representation

in both newly formed and existing democracies, and in some cases, they have even taken on positions of authority (Albertazzi & McDonnell, 2008).

The political actors and established norms in contemporary democratic regimes are under threat from populist movements. The impact that populist forces' rise to public office has on the quality of democratic regimes, however, is a topic of disagreement among scholars (Kaltwasser, 2012). According to some scholars, populism threatens liberal democracy's distinctive features, especially its emphasis on horizontal accountability (Plattner, 2010). On the other hand, because populism emphasizes vertical democratic accountability mechanisms like elections or direct democracy, some researchers believe that it can increase political participation and strengthen the representative relationship between politicians and citizens (Laclau, 2005).

For this paper, I conceptualise populism as a set of ideas "that considers society to be ultimately separated into two homogeneous and antagonistic groups, the pure people versus the corrupt elite, and which argues that politics should be an expression of the volontée génrale (general will) of the people" (Mudde, 2004, p. 543).

1.5. Political Corruption and Democratic Backsliding

Political corruption is the abuse of public authority for private benefit (McMann et al., 2017). It is a widespread problem that extends beyond national borders and political systems. There are many different types of corruption, including influence peddling, bribery, lobbying, extortion, cronyism, nepotism, parochialism, patronage, graft, and embezzlement (Morris, 2011). These actions can have profound effects on society and undercut the values of accountability, openness, and good governance.

Political corruption is not just a domestic issue; it has international dimensions as well. The 2023 Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI) by Transparency International illustrates that most countries are failing to stop corruption (Transparency International, 2024). The CPI ranks 180 countries and territories around the world by their perceived levels of public sector corruption, scoring on a scale of 0 (highly corrupt) to 100 (very clean).

Political corruption can have serious and broad consequences. It has the power to weaken democratic institutions, increase income inequality, prevent economic growth, and fuel social dissatisfaction. Therefore, encouraging good governance and sustainable development requires an understanding of consequences of political corruption.

For my thesis, I conceptualize "political corruption" as the abuse of public authority for private benefit (McMann et al., 2017). However, the traditional and narrow definition of political corruption will remain the main focus of my work rather than being expanded to include business corruption, clientelism, and nepotism that does not involve state officials. Also, "public office" can refer to any position held by a member of the public sector, judiciary, legislature, or executive branch.

Yusuf Can and Evan Mann's (2021) groundbreaking paper, "The Nexus of Corruption and Democratic Backsliding", explores the complex connection between political corruption and democratic backsliding. The authors offer a thorough examination of the cyclical feedback loop between these two phenomena, claiming that they are not only related but also reinforce one another Can and Mann's (2021) analysis suggests that a vicious cycle between corruption and democratic backsliding gradually erodes public trust in democratic institutions as well as their ability to function as intended. They believe that this erosion is a continual process that feeds on itself rather than a single case, which causes democratic norms and practices to gradually decline. The writers examine the political environments in Turkey and Hungary in depth to further support their claims. They mention that since 2011, there have been significant increases in both corruption and democratic backsliding in these two countries. The authors were able to offer clear proof of the processes by which corruption may both cause and worsen democratic backsliding by looking at these real-world examples. In Turkey and Hungary, the authors observe a clear pattern of democratic institutions being undermined by corrupt practices. They highlight that this process has been facilitated by a variety of factors, including weak institutional checks and balances, lack of transparency, and the consolidation of power in the hands of a few individuals or groups.

A comprehensive investigation into the complex relationship between political corruption and democratic backsliding is found in Marin Exler's (2020) thesis "Corruption and Democratic Backsliding: A Perplexing Relationship". The traditional belief that corruption has a major role in democratic backsliding is contested by the author. Exler's research begins with the

assumption that there is a relationship between political corruption and the strength of democratic institutions. The study is based on the premise that understanding what causes and facilitates democratic backsliding can be used to help prevent backsliding. Surprisingly, Exler's findings suggest that corruption does not seem to contribute to backsliding. The study shows that significant increases in corruption do not precede backsliding. This finding challenges the traditional view that corruption is one of primary drivers of democratic backsliding. Exler's thesis specifically shows that the use of public office for private gain does not necessarily erode democratic institutions to the point where they cause a democratic breakdown. This finding is significant as it suggests that corruption, while detrimental, may not be the primary factor leading to the erosion of democratic institutions.

Among the large body of political science literature, it is noticeable that surprisingly few thorough research articles are written specifically with the intention of examining the complex relationship between political corruption and democratic backsliding. The relationship between political corruption and democratic backsliding is still largely unstudied, despite the obvious importance of both of these phenomena in determining the political setting of the world. There are a number of reasons for this lack of scholarly attention, such as the complexity and difficulties that come with defining and quantifying political corruption and democratic backsliding, the difficulty of establishing conclusive causal relationships between these two complex concepts, and the delicate nature of these subjects that may discourage researchers from exploring them. As a result, this gap in the literature highlights the urgent need for more thorough and nuanced academic studies that can clarify the ways in which political corruption may worsen or promote the occurrence of democratic backsliding.

1.6. Inflation and Democratic Backsliding

Inflation is a measure of how quickly prices are rising over time (Fernando, 2024). In other words, it quantifies the rate at which money becomes less valuable (O'Neill et al., 2017). The average price increase of a selected basket of goods and services over a one-year period is used to determine the inflation rate. If prices are rising rapidly, it indicates high inflation; if prices are rising more slowly, it indicates low inflation. Deflation is the opposite of inflation and happens when prices fall and buying power rises.

There are several types of inflation, including (Dua, 2024; Williams, 2022):

- Demand-Pull Inflation: This occurs when demand for goods and services exceeds supply, leading to an increase in prices.
- Cost-Push Inflation: This type of inflation occurs when there is an increase in the cost of production for firms, causing aggregate supply to shift to the left.
- Built-In Inflation: This type of inflation is tied to adaptive expectations, the idea that people expect current inflation rates to continue in the future.
- Hyperinflation: This is an extremely high and typically accelerating inflation.
- Stagflation: This is a situation in which the inflation rate is high, the economic growth rate slows, and unemployment remains steadily high.
- Disinflation: This is a decrease in the rate of inflation – a slowdown in the rate of increase of the general price level of goods and services.

Every element of the economy is impacted by inflation, including interest rates, government initiatives, corporate investment, employment rates, and consumer spending. Economists define pricing stability as occurring when yearly inflation stays within two percentage points of the base rate in a healthy economy (Frick, 2023). Inflation at this level can be beneficial because it can increase demand and productivity when the economy is slowing down and needs a boost. It can also promote expenditure. But when inflation exceeds wage growth, it may indicate that the economy is having trouble.

For this paper, I conceptualize inflation as "a measure of how quickly prices are rising over time" (Fernando, 2024).

In their work, Kapstein & Converse (2008), revealed that a strong correlation exists between inflation and democratic backsliding. Their findings indicated that in 74% of cases when democracy was ultimately reversed, inflation in the first five years of democracy had increased in comparison to the five years before. This might be the case since inflation reduces actual incomes, which could negatively impact people. Nevertheless, the information also indicates that hyperinflation does not seem to be associated to the breakdown of young democracies. In fact, from 20 young democracies where the annual change in consumer prices topped 100 percent during the first five years, only five were backslided. While Kapstein & Converse

(2008) primarily investigated young democracies, their research suggests that high inflation could potentially impact the state of democracies.

In their work, Hayo and Voigt (2010) also found that economic instability, approximated by high inflation rates indicative of macroeconomic policy failure, could potentially influence political stability, or trigger political change. Indicating, that high inflation rates can be the potential threat to the democratic regimes. Building upon the foundational work of Hayo and Voigt (2010), Lewkowicz et al. (2022) further explored the relationship between inflation and political stability. Their research uncovered a statistically significant correlation between inflation and what they termed as "pandemic backsliding". The Pandemic Backsliding Index, introduced in their study, measures the extent of democratic regression caused by democratic standards being broken by the government in response to the Covid-19 crisis.

1.7. Hypotheses

In the hypotheses section of this thesis, I will explore the relationships between democratic backsliding and several independent variables: affective polarization, political corruption, and populism. The dependent variable in this study is democratic backsliding, a process of regime change towards autocracy that makes usage of power more repressive, while declining the engagement of public in policy making (Cassani & Tomini, 2019).

The evidence from existing works allow to produce several predictions that can be tested empirically.

For Affective Polarization and Democratic Backsliding:

H1: There is a positive correlation between the score of affective polarization and the occurrence of democratic backsliding. Specifically, as the score of affective polarization increases, the incidence of democratic backsliding also increases. This suggests that higher levels of affective polarization may contribute to a greater risk of democratic erosion in countries.

Specifically, I expect the negative influence of affective polarization on electoral and deliberative dimensions of democracy.

As voters take part in the decision-making in an electoral democracy by choosing representatives who serve as their voice in the political processes. Affective polarization may have a substantial impact on this system.

The perception of election fairness may be impacted by affective polarization. Extremely divided voters could doubt the validity of the election results, particularly if their favored party is not a winner. A fundamental component of electoral democracy, the idea of free and fair elections, may be compromised by this (Druckman & Levy, 2022).

Democratic norms and trust in the government are essential to the rule of law, and they can be undermined by affective polarization. The rule of law, which is based on the idea that all individuals are subject to the same laws regardless of their political affiliations, may be compromised if people see the government through the prism of their party and mistrust its judgments and policies (Kingzette et al., 2021).

Affective polarization has the potential to raise political engagement, but it can also cause people to feel less satisfied with the democratic process. Another important component of electoral democracy may be undermined if people believe that partisanship and extreme viewpoints control the political process. This could lead to dissatisfaction and a withdrawal from political engagement (Chan & Yi, 2024).

Also, in a deliberative democracy, citizens actively participate in the decision-making process through discussion and debate, shaping policies and laws through collective deliberation. Affective polarization can significantly influence this system.

A high affective polarization level may result in a worse standard of political deliberation. Strongly polarized people are more likely to ignore opposing ideas without thinking them through, resulting in less effective conversations and a lack of understanding (Orhan, 2022).
Affective polarization can impact political participation. While it might increase participation due to heightened political engagement, it could also lead to withdrawal from political

processes if individuals feel their voices are not being heard due to the polarized environment (Chan & Yi, 2024).

In a deliberative democracy, choices should be founded on well-informed discussions and arguments. On the other hand, affective polarization can result in biased information processing, where people reject contradicting information and only accept information that confirms their preconceived beliefs. A well-informed decision may be restricted by this (Jenke, 2023).

I would like to higlight that while I expect that affective polarization significantly influence electoral and deliberative dimensions of democracy, it is important to consider that it may also have consequences for other forms of democracy. Specifically, there is a possibility that increasing levels of affective polarization could also contribute to backsliding in egalitarian, participatory, and liberal democratic systems. This is because affective polarization can impact key democratic values such as tolerance, open dialogue, and mutual respect, which are key elements of these forms of democracy.

For Populism and Democratic Backlsiding:

H2: There is a positive correlation between the score of populism and the occurrence of democratic backsliding. Specifically, as the score of affective polarization increases, the incidence of democratic backsliding also increases. This suggests that higher levels of populism may contribute to a greater risk of democratic erosion in countries.

Specifically, I expect the positive influence of populism on liberal dimension of democracy.
As citizens engage in the decision-making process in a liberal democracy by utilizing their rights and freedoms, such as freedom of speech, freedom of assembly, and the right to a fair trial. Populism, however, can have a significant negative impact on this system. By promoting a homogeneous vision of society and marginalizing minority rights, populism can undermine the pluralistic nature of a liberal democracy. Furthermore, by challenging the rule of law and the separation of powers, populism can weaken the institutions that protect individual rights and check the power of the majority. This can lead to democratic backsliding, where the principles and institutions of liberal democracy are gradually destroyed. Thus, understanding the influence of populism is crucial for preserving the integrity of a liberal democracy.

The protection of individual rights is a fundamental tenet of liberal democracy. These rights guarantee that every person can participate fully and equally in society. These rights include the freedom of speech, the right to assemble, and the right to a fair trial. But populist politicians, who frequently state that they speak for the true will of the people, may seriously undermine fundamental liberties. The rhetoric of populist leaders frequently centers on a perceived conflict between the "corrupt elite" and the "pure people". By doing this, they frequently oversimplify difficult societal issues and turn them into black-or-white choices. Because minority groups are frequently depicted as belonging to the "corrupt elite" or as challenges to the uniform identity of the "pure people", this might result in the marginalization of their rights (Mudde & Kaltwasser, 2012). Acts of violence against certain people or discriminatory laws are only a few examples of how this marginalization might appear. Furthermore, populist leaders frequently oppose the institutions that defend individual rights because they see them as impediments to the popular will. As a result of these institutions being damaged or compromised, individual freedoms may be eroded (Brusis, 2019).

A cornerstone of liberal democracy, the division of powers serves to safeguard citizens' rights and liberties while preventing the consolidation of authority. It establishes the legislative, executive, and judicial departments of government, each with specific responsibilities and authority. The state's democracy is maintained by this system of checks and balances, which makes sure that no one branch grows too strong. However, populist leaders pose a serious threat to the separation of powers because they frequently aim to consolidate power (Weyland, 2020). They could take multiple approaches to do this. They might, for example, try to take control over the court in order to weaken its independence and its capacity to serve as a check on the executive branch. In order to achieve their goal, they might also try to control the legislative process by ignoring parliamentary rules and procedures.

Liberal democracy is based on the fundamental idea of pluralism, which is the acknowledgement and support of diversity within a political entity. It guarantees that a wide range of viewpoints are acknowledged and represented, promoting a dynamic and welcoming community. Pluralism, however, can be seriously threatened by populism. A homogeneous image of society, based on a single identity or set of values that they assert reflect the "true" will of the people, is frequently promoted by populist movements. People who do not fit this picture, including minorities or people with different political opinions, are frequently left out.

A polarized and divided society may result from this exclusion, which can take many forms, including discriminating laws and hostile speech. Furthermore, populism has the power to destroy liberal democracy itself by eroding pluralism, which is based on the respectful exchange of opposing viewpoints and the defense of the rights of minorities. Thus, populist movements may encourage political participation and draw attention to justifiable complaints, but they can also have an enormously negative impact on pluralism, resulting in a decline in democracy and a society that is less inclusive (Navin & Nunan, 2020).

For Political Corruption and Democratic Backsliding:

H3: There is a positive correlation between the score of political corruption and the occurrence of democratic backsliding. Specifically, as the score of political corruption increases, the incidence of democratic backsliding also increases. This suggests that higher levels of political corruption may contribute to a greater risk of democratic erosion in countries.

As I am using the fundamental components of different types of democracies as a guide for my own analytical investigation, and I have looked at the reasonable consequences of political corruption in these contexts. According to my expectations, there will be a moderate relationship between the occurrence of backsliding in egalitarian democracies and political corruption. The idea of egalitarian democracy is supported by two essential elements. The first is the Equal Access to Power tenet. This idea creates an atmosphere in which all people and social groups have an equal chance to influence political and governance processes, regardless of their background or status. It is a fundamental component of egalitarian democracy, guaranteeing that power is shared equally across all socioeconomic levels rather than being monopolized by a small number of people. The Equal Distribution of Resources is the second dimension. This principle guarantees that resources are distributed in a way that fosters meaningful participation in political processes by all citizens. Ensuring citizens have access to opportunities and areas that enable them to participate effectively in the democratic process is just as important as distributing money.

Considering these fundamental components of egalitarian democracy, I believe that political corruption may play a major role in the breakdown of democracy. By its very nature, political corruption impacts the allocation of power and resources, which weakens the foundational ideas of egalitarian democracy.

For Inflation:

H4: There is a positive correlation between the score of inflation and the occurrence of democratic backsliding. Specifically, as the score of inflation increases, the incidence of democratic backsliding also increases. This suggests that higher levels of inflation may contribute to a greater risk of democratic erosion in countries.

As I am taking "Inflation" as a control variable and as representation of overall economic stability in countries. I believe that high rates of inflation have a substantial impact on all forms of democracy. Democracies that are liberal, egalitarian, electoral, participatory, and deliberative fall under this category. Consequently, a country's inflation rate - which serves as an indicator of its economic health - may be a key factor in determining the stability and advancement of its democracy.

2. Methodology

2.1. Data and Design

This thesis utilizes three primary datasets: the Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem) dataset, the V-Dem's Party Dataset, and the World Bank's Global Database of Inflation (GDI).
The V-Dem dataset is an important resource that tracks hundreds of factors related to the evolution and condition of democracy globally. It encompasses a wide range of social and political indicators from numerous countries and periods. This dataset offers a sophisticated perspective on the complex idea of democracy.

An addition to the V-Dem project that focuses on political parties is the V-Dem's Party Dataset. It offers comprehensive details regarding the historical development, organizational design, and ideological orientations of political parties across many countries.

A comprehensive source of World Bank-compiled data on global inflation is the GDI. The percentage variations in the price of a basket of goods and services from year to year are provided by the annual inflation rates.

The careful matching of country names, years, and political parties will be necessary for the integration of these three datasets. All datasets cover a large time range, so it is imperative to make sure the data match correctly. A common cross-national country coding method and party identification tools will be used to adress any differences in country names or party names between the datasets.

The primary focus of my work is on understanding the dynamics of democratic backsliding, which is the dependent variable. The independent variables under consideration are political corruption, affective polarization, and populism. Inflation is my control variable that represents economich health of the countries.

The analysis encompasses a time frame from 2006 to 2019 and includes a diverse set of countries: Argentina, Australia, Austria, Barbados, Belgium, Benin, Botswana, Brazil, Canada, Cape Verde, Chile, Costa Rica, Croatia, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Ghana, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, India, Indonesia, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Jamaica, Japan, Latvia, Lesotho, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Mali, Malta, Mauritius, Mexico, Mongolia, Namibia, Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Panama, Peru, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Sao Tome and Principe, Senegal, Serbia, Montenegro, Slovakia, Slovenia, South Africa, South Korea, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Trinidad and Tobago, Ukraine, United Kingdom, United States of America, Uruguay, and Vanuatu.

These 68 countries were selected based on their classification as “Free” by Freedom House in 2006. The choice to focus on “Free” countries is driven by the aim to study democratic backsliding in contexts where democratic norms and institutions are presumably well-established. This allows for a more nuanced understanding of how and why democracies erode over time.

However, out of the 92 countries classified as “Free” in 2006 (Freedom House, n.d.), there was absolutely no data available for any of the variables for 23 countries in the V-Dem database, and for one country in the GDI database. Therefore, the final sample consists of aforementioned 68 countries.

This thesis will employ quantitative methods, specifically regression analysis in R, to test the hypotheses. The use of regression analysis allows for the examination of the relationships between the dependent variable (democratic backsliding) and the independent variables (political corruption, affective polarization, and populism), while controlling for inflation.

It is important to note some possible limitations of this study:

- As mentioned, out of the 92 countries classified as "Free" in 2006, data was not available for 23 countries in the V-Dem database, and for one country in the GDI database. This limitation in data availability may impact the comprehensiveness of the study.
- The findings from this study are based on countries classified as "Free" by Freedom House in 2006. Therefore, the results may not be generalizable to countries with different classifications or to other time periods.
- Another limitation of this study is the small sample size. The final sample consists of 68 countries, which is a relatively small number considering the total number of countries in the world. This small sample size may limit the statistical power of the study and could potentially lead to a failure to prove the hypothesis at the .05 significance level. In other words, even if there is a true effect, the study might not be able to detect it due to the small sample size. This could increase the likelihood of a Type II error (failing to reject a false null hypothesis). Therefore, the results should be interpreted with caution. Future research with larger sample sizes is recommended to confirm these findings.

Despite these limitations, this study aims to provide valuable insights into the dynamics of democratic backsliding, contributing to the broader understanding of this important issue.

2.2. Democratic Backsliding

Bermeo (2016) makes a strong case that democratic backsliding is a gradual process that takes place over time rather than a dramatic, overnight change. Small, nearly undetectable adjustments to a nation's democratic institutions and practices are frequently the first steps in this process. When considered separately, these modifications might not seem like important, but when added together over time, they can cause democracy to erode significantly.

The initial changes in a backsliding democracy are often tricky and may go unnoticed by the majority of the population. These might include modest modifications to election laws, minimal violations of media freedom, or slight changes to the distribution of power between different branches of government. Usually, the government argues that these adjustments are required for effectiveness, national security, or other typically justifiable reasons. On the other hand, they may serve to undermine opposition, weaken checks and balances, and concentrate power in the hands of the ruling party (Bermeo, 2016).

In order measure democratic backsliding, Little & Meng (2024) used a comprehensive approach that included both electoral and non-electoral indices. They adopted what is known as a "quasi-minimalist" understanding of democracy, which relies on the holding of free and fair elections in which the losers accept the outcome. They focused their empirical investigation on electoral competitiveness indices.

Little & Meng (2024) looked at electoral turnover and incumbent leaders' performances in terms of election outcomes. They claimed that these are the most crucial results to investigate if anti-democratic leaders' primary goal is to stay in the power. They discovered that since the late 1990s, the rate of turnover of both ruling parties and individual leaders has stayed largely stable. In addition, recent years have seen a decline in the vote and seat shares of the winners of parliamentary and executive elections, respectively. There is also no decline in the proportion of elections with true multiparty competition.

Little & Meng (2024) took into account media freedom and executive constraints outside of the political sphere. They discovered that since the end of the Cold War, laws that restrict presidential power have remained mostly unchanged, if not somewhat rising. The number of presidents avoiding term limits has not increased, despite some high-profile incidents in recent times. They provided compelling data regarding media freedom by looking at the number of journalists who have been killed and imprisoned. This is a mixed picture: since the early 2000s, there has been a rise in the number of journalists imprisoned for their investigative reporting, but there has also been a decline in the number of journalists killed for doing their job.

The authors also took into consideration the potential for time-varying bias in expert surveys and media environment shifts that could give the impression that, in the absence of a real trend, democracy is eroding globally. They offered proof that media coverage of backsliding has

increased recently and contended that coder bias probably accounts for at least some of the variance (Little & Meng, 2024).

It is clear that democratic backsliding is subject to various conceptualizations and measurements, mostly dependent on the theoretical and methodological tools utilized by different scholars. In this paper, the score for democratic backsliding is calculated by subtracting the value of the democracy index in 2006 from its value in 2019. This approach quantifies democratic backsliding as the change in the democracy index over this specific period. A negative score indicates a decline in democracy (democratic backsliding), while a positive score suggests an improvement in democratic practices and principles. This operationalization provides a clear and quantifiable measure of democratic backsliding, allowing for comprehensive analysis across chosen countries and time period.

V-Dem project offers a rich array of indicators that can be used to measure different aspects of democracy. For this paper, I am focusing on the following indexes: the electoral democracy index, the liberal component index, the participatory component index, and the egalitarian component index (Coppedge et al., 2024). These indexes provide a comprehensive view of the democratic landscape, capturing various dimensions of democratic practices and principles. The decision to focus on these component indexes, rather than the broader democracy indexes (for liberal, participatory, deliberative, egalitarian democracies), results from the desire to isolate the pure elements of these forms of democracies. The broader democracy indexes incorporate the electoral democracy index, which could potentially confuse the analysis. By focusing on the component indexes, I can examine the extent to which each form of democracy principle is achieved, providing a more nuanced understanding of democratic backsliding.
I have to mention that in the original V-Dem dataset, the variables are measured on an interval scale that ranges from a low to a high value.

2.3. Affective Polarization

Affective polarisation's measurement in two-party systems is methodologically quite straightforward, as there are only two competing groups that may perceive each other in a friendly or more hostile way. For example, Iyengar et al. (2012) used the American National Election Studies (ANES) to gather needed information to measure affective polarisation. From

ANES dataset they have taken the exact question where respondents were asked to rate different groups on a thermometer scale ranging from 0 to 100, where a score of 0 meant the respondent feels “cold” toward the group, a score of 50 meant the respondent either doesn't know much about the group (before 1968) or doesn't feel “particularly warm or cold toward” the group (after 1968), and a score of 100 implied the respondent has “warm” feelings toward the group (Iyengar et al., 2012). The degree of affective polarisation was the average in-party/out-party evaluation difference among Republicans and Democrats.

Another method to operationalise the phenomenon was offered by Reiljan (2020). The case for it was that the measurement of affective polarisation in a multi-party context is much more difficult in terms of methodology and counting the exact affective polarisation index. To overcome these problems, Reiljan used Comparative Study of Electoral Systems (CSES) dataset, and to capture the partisan effect has taken the CSES’s question: “I’d like to know what you think about each of our political parties. After I read the name of a political party, please rate it on a scale from 0 to 10, where 0 means you strongly dislike that party and 10 means that you strongly like that party”. Then, he calculated affective polarisation score for each partisan group by subtracting the average evaluations towards out-parties from the average in-party evaluation. The in-party/out-party subtractions were weighted with the vote shares of the out-parties and then summed up. Finally, he weighted these party affective polarisation ratings with the vote shares of the respective party and summed all the scores up to get the weighted average which was the affective polarisation index.

For this work, the concept of “political polarization” from the V-Dem database is employed as a key indicator to measure affective polarization (Coppedge et al., 2024). This indicator is designed to answer the question: “Is society polarized into antagonistic, political camps?”. It specifically refers to the extent to which political differences permeate social relationships beyond political discussions, such as family functions, civic associations, leisure activities, and workplaces. Mainly for this reason, it is a suitable measure for affective polarization.

A scale from 0 to 4 is used to measure the degree of political polarization, with each point indicating a different level of interaction between members of opposing political parties. Friendly relationships are indicated with a score of 0, and generally hostile interactions are indicated by a score of 4. This measure offers an advanced perspective on the degree of affective polarization present in a community.

The choice of this indicator offers several advantages. Firstly, its straightforward and simple nature allows for ready results for analysis. Secondly, the extensive country coverage of the V-Dem database enables a broader comparative analysis than other databases like the Comparative Study of Electoral Systems (CSES). Lastly, despite its name, the "political polarization" indicator primarily measures the level of affective polarization in a country.

However, it is important to acknowledge some limitations of this indicator. It does not account for in-party feelings of partisans, focusing mainly on attitudes towards other parties. Additionally, the scale of the indicator is relatively small, ranging only from 0 to 4, compared to other measurements that range from 0 to 10, such as the like-dislike scale used by Reiljan (2020).

For my analysis, I will calculate the average score of the political polarization index from 2006 to 2019 for each country. This will help me see the general pattern of affective polarization in the countries I am studying over these years.

2.4. Political Corruption

Political corruption, a widespread and lasting global issue, has been operationalized and measured in various ways by scholars.

The need for efficient anti-corruption programs led to the development of survey-based measurements of corruption in the middle of the 1990s. The measurements, which were frequently specialized and ad hoc, included commercial surveys along with indices of accountability, budget transparency, and corruption (Malito, 2014). Notable among these are the Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI), the Bribery Perception Index (BPI), and the Bribe Payers Index by Transparency International. Additional significant measures include the Business Environment and Enterprise Performance Survey (BEEPS) by the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) & the World Bank, the Corruption Experience Index and the Business International Index by Business International, the Open Budget Survey by the International Budget Partnership, and the Voices of the People Survey by Gallup International.

These survey-based measurements offer valuable data about how corruption is perceived and experienced from many angles, which advances our understanding of this complex problem.

A second set of corruption indicators was created in the middle of the 1990s, with an emphasis on governance indices that use corruption as a crucial component to estimate levels of overall governance (Malito, 2014). A number of global indicators are included in this group, including the World Bank Governance Indicators Database (WGI), the International Country Risk Guide (ICRG), the Global Competitiveness Report (GRC), the Executive Opinion Survey, the World Competitiveness Yearbook, the Nations in Transit (NIT), the World Value Survey (WVS), the International Crime Victimization Surveys (ICVS), the Global Integrity, Global Insight, and the WB Country Policy and Institutional Assessment (CPIA). These indicators provide a comprehensive view of corruption from a governance perspective, both globally and regionally.

State-capacity indexes which are intended to assess a nation's performance in areas crucial to preserving governmental integrity, bring the third category of corruption indicators. Since the 2000s, these indicators have become more well-known, and this is in line with the growing emphasis on state capacity in discussions of governance (Malito, 2014). Key indicators in this category include the State Capacity Survey by Columbia University, the State Fragility Index by the Center for Systemic Peace and Center for Global Policy at George Mason University (Goldstone et al., 2009), and the Sovereignty Index, a joint effort by the Brookings Institution, the Institute for State Effectiveness, and the Australian National University (Ghani et al., 2005).

For this paper, I am going to use V-Dem's "political corruption" index to measure political corruption. The V-Dem's corruption index is a comprehensive tool that measures the pervasiveness of political corruption on a scale from low (0) to high (1) (Coppedge et al., 2024). It includes measures of six distinct types of corruption that cover different areas and levels of the polity realm (Coppedge et al., 2024):

- Executive corruption: This measures the frequency with which members of the executive branch or their representatives give privileges in return for bribes, kickbacks, or other tangible rewards. It also quantifies the frequency with which they embezzle, misappropriate, or steal public funds or other resources for their own or their families' benefit.

- Legislative corruption: This kind of corruption takes place in the government's legislative branch. It might entail financial mismanagement or legislators taking bribes to influence legislation.
- Judicial corruption: This relates to judicial corruption, when judges may be paid to change their judgments or abuse their position of authority for private benefit.
- Bribery: This type of corruption occurs when someone in a position of power receives gifts, cash, or other rewards in exchange for influencing their decisions or actions.
- Embezzlement: This is a type of financial fraud where someone misuses the assets entrusted to them.
- "Grand" and "Petty" Corruption: "Grand" corruption is defined by abuses at the highest levels of government, whereas "petty" corruption is the regular misuse of authority by low- and mid-level public officials.

For my analysis, I will calculate the average score of the political corruption index from 2006 to 2019 for each country. This will help me see the general pattern of political corruption in the countries I am studying over these years.

2.5. Populism

Populism is a complex and dynamic phenomenon that has been examined and measured in various ways by different scholars.

In the study of political parties and populism, the idea of "party families" is crucial. This method divides political groups according to names they share. The basic assumption here is that political parties with similar names also have similar political beliefs. This approach offers a simple and natural way to group parties, particularly when studying comparative politics and dealing with a large number of parties from various countries (Mair & Mudde, 1998).

Discourse analysis, particularly of the rhetorical language used in leadership speeches and social media, is a widely employed method for studying populism (Bonikowski & Gidron, 2015). The primary goal of this technique is to identify common themes and patterns that suggest a populist ideology by analyzing the language and rhetoric employed by political parties and politicians (Duina & Carson, 2019).

Discourse analysis's strength is its capacity to reveal the nuanced and frequently hidden ways by which populist ideas are expressed and spread. Through a careful inspection of word choice, metaphors, narratives, and rhetorical methods, scholars can gain a deeper understanding of the fundamental ideologies and belief systems held by political players (Hawkins, 2009). This can disclose these individuals' underlying worldviews and ideas in addition to their visible political positions.

Discourse analysis can be used to detect important populist rhetorical elements in the context of populism, such as the adoration of the "ordinary people", the demonization of the "corrupt elite", and the reference to a pure, uncorrupted past (Hawkins, 2009). These concepts are often communicated through populist discourse's characteristics of emotionally charged rhetoric, binary oppositions, and moralistic judgments.

Furthermore, discourse analysis has become an even more useful technique for researching populism with the rise of social media. Social media sites like Facebook and Twitter have developed into important spaces for political communication, giving politicians a direct line of connection with the ability to organize their supporters (Engesser et al., 2016). Researchers can learn more about the populist methods and tactics employed in the social media posts by examining the language utilized in those posts.

Mass and political elite surveys are essential instruments in the study of populism. These techniques involve questioning people about their political opinions and views from both the general public and those in the political arena (Akkerman et al., 2013; Bailer, 2014). After that, a statistical analysis of the responses is conducted to find any populist tendencies.

Surveys of the political elite usually focus on a particular subset of the population that is involved in politics, such as party members, activists, elected officials, and parliamentary candidates (Bailer, 2014). These people frequently hold influential or powerful positions, and the political conversation and the formulation of public policy can be greatly influenced by their opinions. Through conducting surveys with these individuals, scholars can gain valuable insights on the ideological tendencies of political elites, their policy inclinations, and their perspectives of the political landscape. This can give important details about how populist views are prevalent within the political elite and how they affect political decision-making.

On the other hand, mass surveys focus on the general public. These surveys collect opinions on party positions on issues as well as individual policy preferences from the public. They can offer a wide-ranging summary of public opinion and demonstrate how popular populist ideals are (Akkerman et al., 2013). In addition to offering insights into the social and economic circumstances that may encourage populism, mass surveys can be used to find demographic or socioeconomic factors that are associated with such views.

People are questioned about their political opinions and views in both types of surveys. A broad range of topics from particular policy concerns to more general political beliefs, may be covered by the questions. After that, the answers are coded and statistically examined to find trends and patterns. This might range from straightforward descriptive statistics - like the proportion of respondents who agree with a certain statement - to complex multivariate analyses that investigate the associations between various factors.

In my research, I aim to measure populism using indices derived from the V-Dem party dataset (Lindberg et al., 2022). The two key variables I focus on are:
Populism Index: This measures the extent to which party representatives employ populist rhetoric, narrowly defined. The scale is an interval ranging from low (0) to high (1).
Seat share: This is a numeric variable representing the number of seats (in percentages) a party secured in the lower chamber election.

I have collected data for these variables spanning the years 2000 to 2019. For each country, I calculated a weighted average by multiplying the seat share with the populism score for all parties within that country that appear in the dataset. This was done for each year, and the results were summed to obtain a single value per country.
Before performing the multiplication, I converted the seat share index from percentages to proportions. I also ensured that for each country, the sum of the seat shares of all included parties equals 1.

Although the timeframe of my study is from 2006 to 2019, I chose to include data from 2000 to 2019 for this particular variable. This is because the variables only have values in the years of parliamentary elections. To account for potential bias and to capture the full trend of populism, I decided to include a broader range of years.

By using two variables – populism index and seat share - this method provides a more comprehensive view of populism. It not only considers the rhetoric used by parties but also their actual representation in the lower chamber. Also the use of seat share as a weight ensures that the parties with more representation have a greater impact on the overall populism score. As a result, the measure is more accurate in reflecting the political environment.

2.6. Inflation

Inflation is a complex economic phenomenon that has been measured and explained in a variety of ways by different researchers.

Consumer Price Index (CPI): The Consumer Price Index (CPI) is the most widely used indicator of inflation. This index examines how prices for a variety of goods and services have changed on average over time for customers. Based on a survey of what people and families in urban or metropolitan areas are purchasing, the basket's contents have been created (Hadid, 2023).

Headline vs Core Inflation: Two kinds of indicators are commonly used to describe inflation: headline inflation and core inflation. A measure of headline inflation takes into account the overall inflation in an economy, which includes volatile goods like food and energy. In contrast, core inflation takes these things out of account in order to give an indication of the underlying, long-term inflation trends (Giri, 2022).

In my thesis, I will be utilizing the Headline Consumer Price Index (CPI) inflation data sourced from the GDI provided by the World Bank (A Global Database of Inflation, 2024). This approach allows me to capture the total inflation within an economy, including volatile items such as food and energy, providing a more comprehensive picture of inflation trends.

The reliability and precision of the inflation estimates I am going to use in my research are guaranteed by the World Bank, a respected source of data on the state of the world economy. The database is also routinely updated and freely available, which makes it possible for me to use the most recent data for my study. This method is quite helpful for researching inflation

trends because of its accessibility, reliability, and comprehensive coverage (database covers about 209 countries over the period 1970 - 2023).

For my analysis, I will calculate the average score of the inflation from 2006 to 2019 for each country. This will help me see the general pattern of inflation in the countries I am studying over these years.

3. Analyses

3.1. Descriptive Statistics

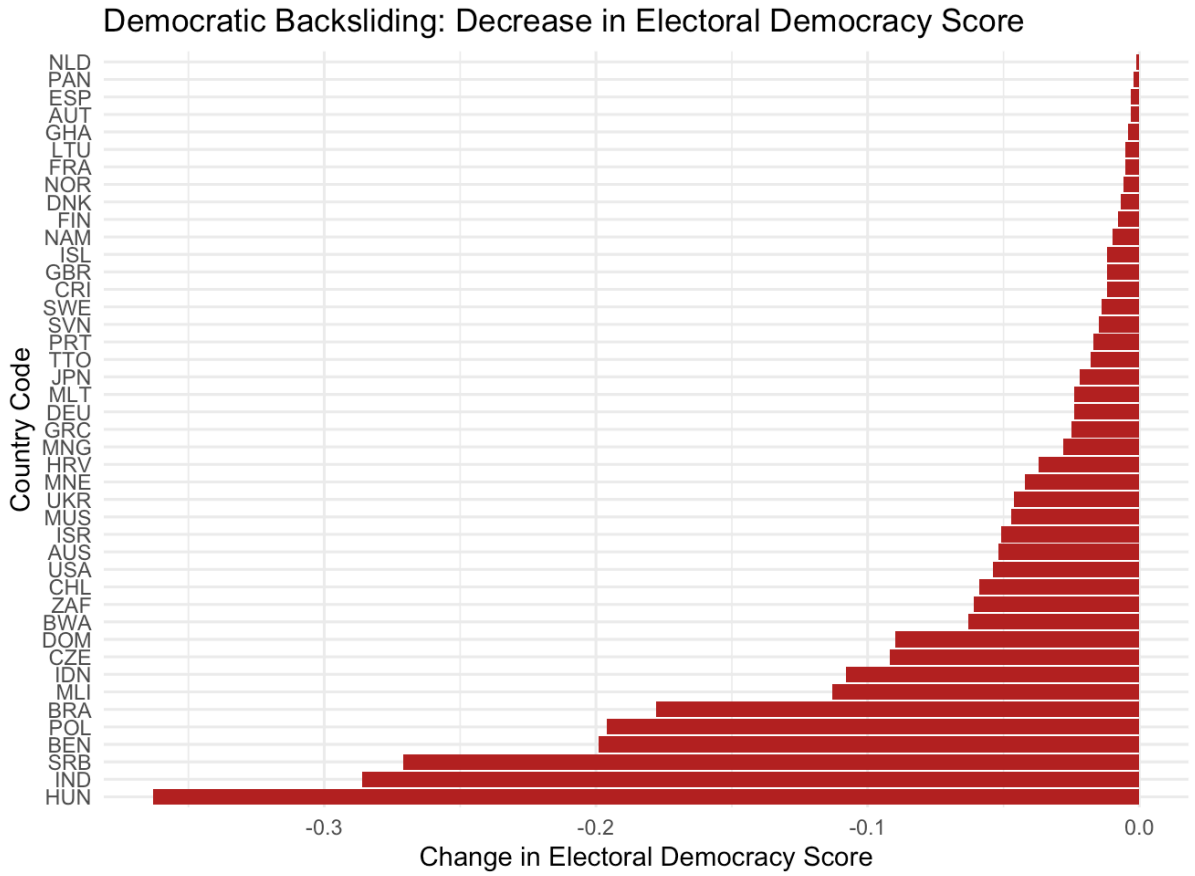

Figure 1. Decrease in Electoral Democracy Score for 2006-2019

From Figure 1, it is clear that several countries have experienced a decline in their electoral democracy scores. The countries with the smallest declines are the Netherlands (NLD) with -0.001, Panama (PAN) with -0.002, Austria (AUT) and Spain (ESP) both with -0.003, and Ghana (GHA) with -0.004. Other countries such as France (FRA), Lithuania (LTU), Norway

(NOR), Denmark (DNK), and Finland (FIN) also showed minor declines ranging from -0.005 to -0.008.

Subsequently, it is evident that the declines become more significant. Countries like Mongolia (MNG), Croatia (HRV), Montenegro (MNE), and Ukraine (UKR) experienced declines ranging from -0.028 to -0.046. The most substantial declines were observed in countries such as Brazil (BRA), Poland (POL), Benin (BEN), Serbia (SRB), India (IND), and Hungary (HUN), with Hungary experiencing the most significant decline of -0.363. These figures indicate a concerning trend of decreasing electoral democracy scores across these countries.

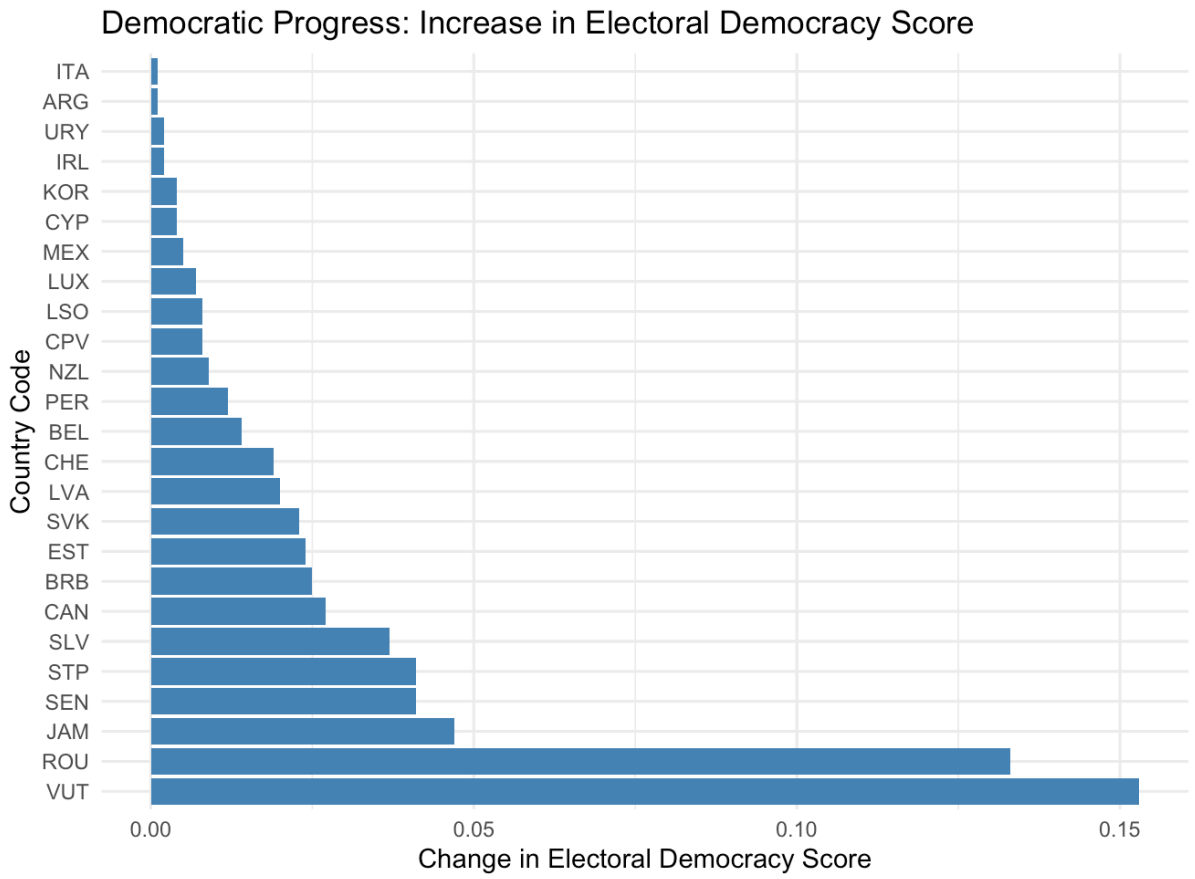

Figure 2. Increase in Electoral Democracy Score for 2006-2019

From Figure 2, it is evident that a number of countries have experienced an increase in their electoral democracy scores. The countries with the most significant increases are Vanuatu (VUT) with 0.153 and Romania (ROU) with 0.133. Other countries such as Jamaica (JAM), Senegal (SEN), and São Tomé and Príncipe (STP) also showed notable increases, with scores ranging from 0.041 to 0.047.

Following, countries like Canada (CAN), Barbados (BRB), Estonia (EST), Slovakia (SVK), and Latvia (LVA) experienced moderate increases in their scores, ranging from 0.02 to 0.027. Towards the lower end of the scale, countries such as Mexico (MEX), South Korea (KOR), Cyprus (CYP), Ireland (IRL), Uruguay (URY), Argentina (ARG), and Italy (ITA) showed minor increases, with scores ranging from 0.001 to 0.005. These increases, regardless of their magnitude, indicate positive developments in the electoral democracy of these countries.

While it is encouraging to see progress in some countries, I need to note that the magnitude of the increase in Electoral Democracy Score is much smaller when compared to the decrease. The biggest increase observed was 0.153, which is much smaller than the largest decrease, a significant 0.363. This means that the problems faced by countries seeing a drop in their Electoral Democracy Scores are more serious than the improvements made by those showing progress. In simple terms, the steps taken towards increasing electoral democracy are being overshadowed by the more dramatic falls. This difference highlights the complexity and difficulty of democratic progression and the serious challenges some countries face in maintaining or improving their democratic values.

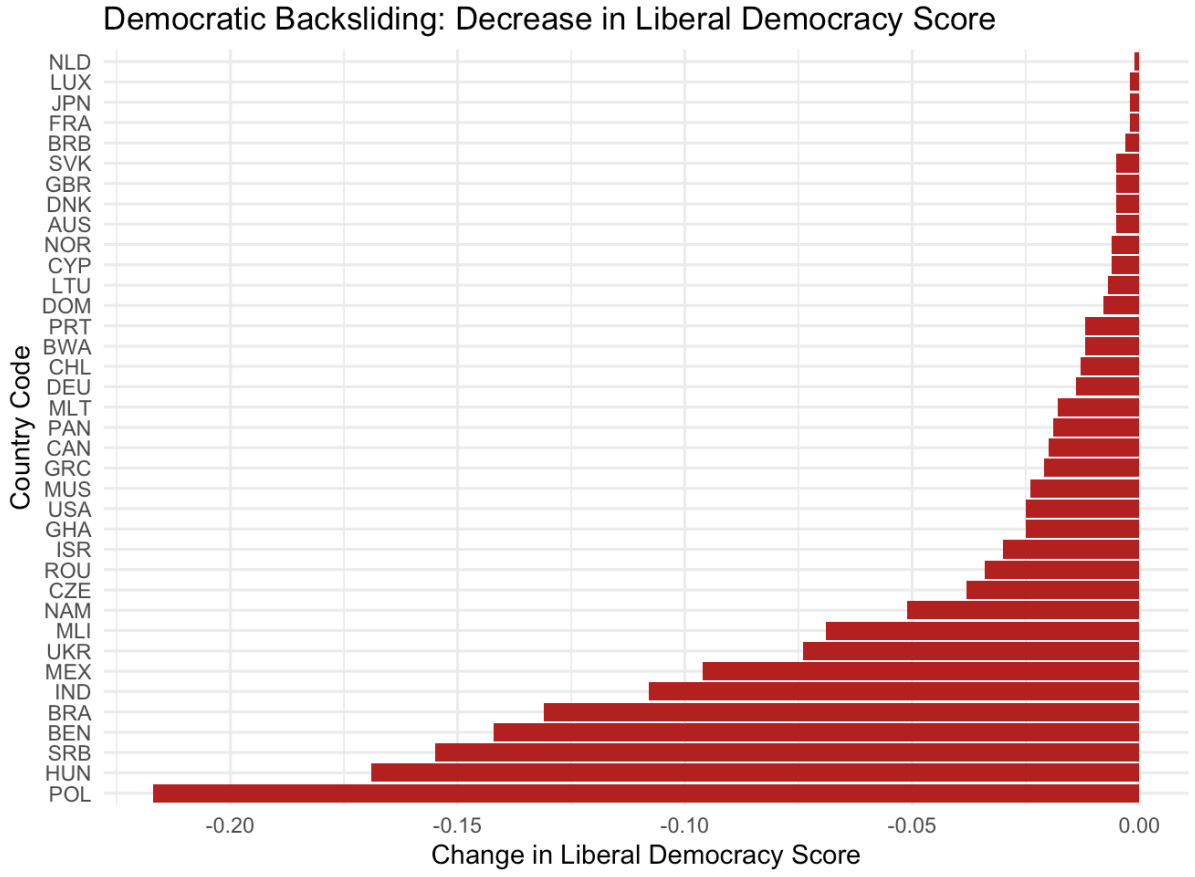

Figure 3. Decrease in Liberal Democracy Score for 2006-2019

From the Figure 3, it is clear that the Netherlands (NLD) experienced a minor decrease of 0.001, while France (FRA), Japan (JPN), and Luxembourg (LUX) all saw a decrease of 0.002. Barbados (BRB) had a slightly larger decrease of 0.003. Australia (AUS), Denmark (DNK), Slovakia (SVK), and the United Kingdom (GBR) all experienced a decrease of 0.005. Cyprus (CYP) and Norway (NOR) had a decrease of 0.006, while Lithuania (LTU) saw a decrease of approximately 0.007. The Dominican Republic (DOM) and Botswana (BWA) had decreases of 0.008 and 0.012, respectively.

Delving deeper into the figures, Portugal (PRT) and Chile (CHL) both experienced a decrease of 0.012, while Germany (DEU) had a decrease of 0.014. Malta (MLT) saw a more significant decrease of 0.018, and Panama (PAN) and Canada (CAN) had decreases of 0.019 and 0.02, respectively. Greece (GRC) and Mauritius (MUS) experienced decreases of 0.021 and 0.024, respectively. The United States (USA) and Ghana (GHA) both saw a decrease of approximately 0.025. Israel (ISR) experienced a decrease of 0.03, while Romania (ROU) and the Czech Republic (CZE) had decreases of 0.034 and 0.038, respectively. Namibia (NAM) and Mali (MLI) saw more significant decreases of approximately 0.051 and 0.069, respectively. The graph concludes with Ukraine (UKR), Mexico (MEX), India (IND), Brazil (BRA), Benin (BEN), Serbia (SRB), Hungary (HUN), and Poland (POL) experiencing the most significant decreases, ranging from approximately 0.074 to 0.217.

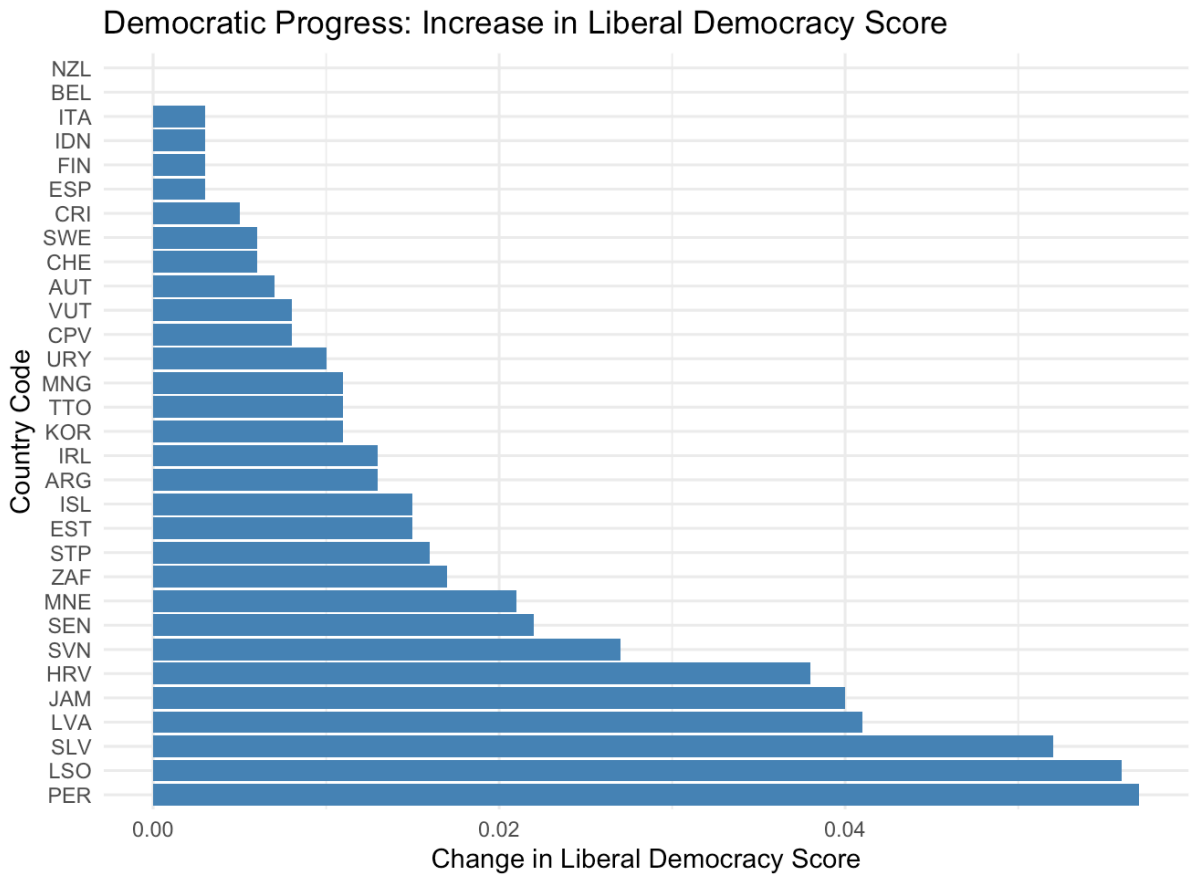

Figure 4. Increase in Liberal Democracy Score for 2006-2019

However, there are some good news. As from Figure 4, it is clear that not all countries experienced a decrease in their Liberal Democracy Score. In fact, several countries have shown a positive trend. For instance, Peru (PER) experienced an increase of approximately 0.057, while Lesotho (LSO) saw a similar increase of 0.056. Other countries like El Salvador (SLV), Latvia (LVA), and Jamaica (JAM) also demonstrated increases in their scores, indicating progress in their democratic values. Countries like Croatia (HRV), Slovenia (SVN), Senegal (SEN), Montenegro (MNE), and South Africa (ZAF) also followed this positive trend.

As I delve deeper into the data, more countries that have made democratic progress are found. Estonia (EST), Iceland (ISL), Argentina (ARG), and Ireland (IRL) all experienced increases in their Liberal Democracy Scores. Further, countries like South Korea (KOR), Trinidad and Tobago (TTO), Mongolia (MNG), and Uruguay (URY) also showed improvements. Even countries like Austria (AUT), Sweden (SWE), Switzerland (CHE), Costa Rica (CRI), Finland (FIN), Indonesia (IDN), Italy (ITA), and Spain (ESP) demonstrated progress, albeit with

smaller increases. Interestingly, Belgium (BEL) and New Zealand (NZL) maintained their scores with no change.

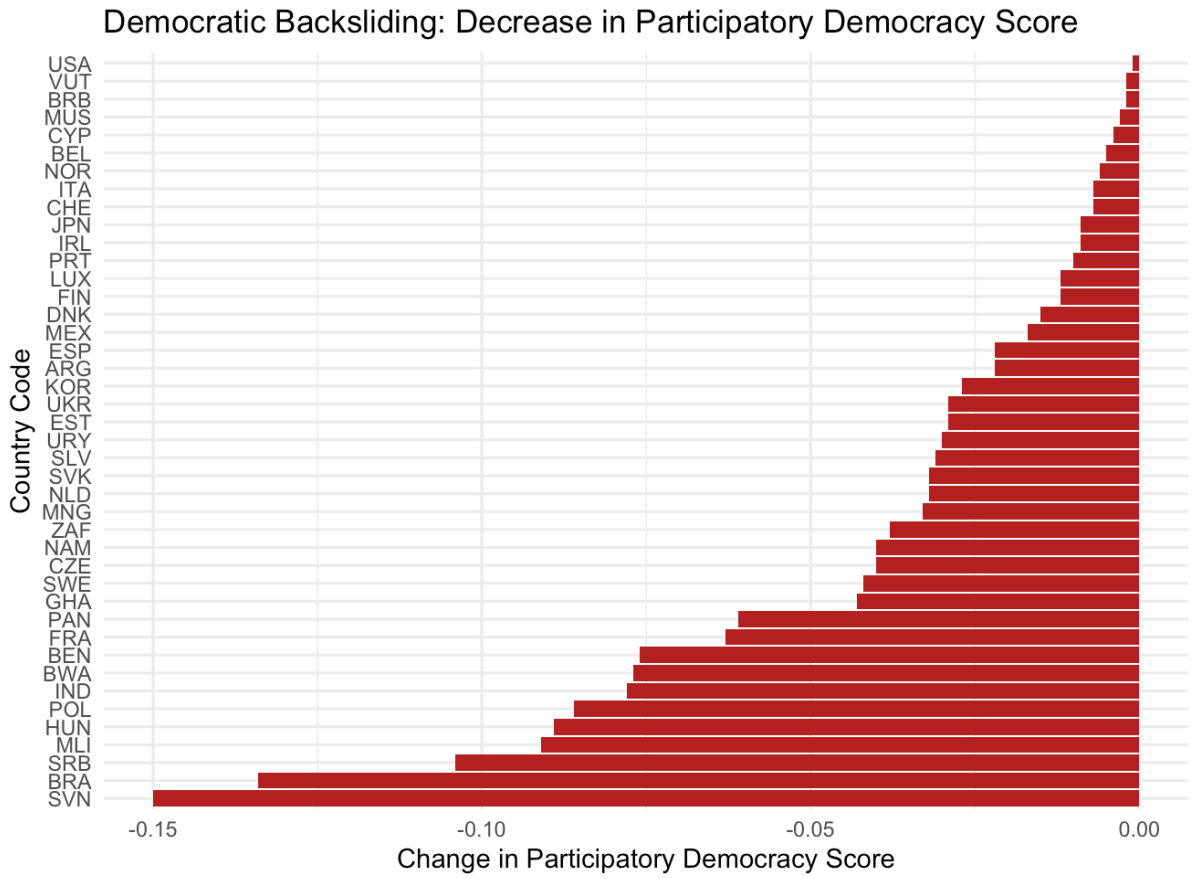

Figure 5. Decrease in Participatory Democracy Score for 2006-2019

From Figure 5, it is clear that a significant number of countries have experienced a decline in their participatory democracy score. The United States (USA) has seen a marginal decrease of -0.001, while Vanuatu (VUT), Barbados (BRB), Mauritius (MUS), Cyprus (CYP), Belgium (BEL), Norway (NOR), Switzerland (CHE), Italy (ITA), Ireland (IRL), and Japan (JPN) have also seen slight decreases in their scores, ranging from -0.002 to -0.009. Portugal (PRT) and Luxembourg (LUX) experienced a decrease of -0.01 and -0.012 respectively. Finland (FIN) and Denmark (DNK) saw decreases of -0.012 and -0.015 respectively.

Next, I see that Mexico (MEX) experienced a decrease of -0.017, Argentina (ARG) and Spain (ESP) both saw a decrease of -0.022. South Korea (KOR) and Ukraine (UKR) saw more significant decreases of -0.027 and -0.029 respectively. Estonia (EST), El Salvador (SLV), Slovakia (SVK), Netherlands (NLD), Mongolia (MNG), South Africa (ZAF), Namibia

(NAM), Czech Republic (CZE), Sweden (SWE), Ghana (GHA), Panama (PAN), France (FRA), Benin (BEN), Botswana (BWA), India (IND), Poland (POL), Hungary (HUN), Mali (MLI), Serbia (SRB), Brazil (BRA), and Slovenia (SVN) also experienced declines in their scores, with Slovenia experiencing the most significant drop of -0.15.

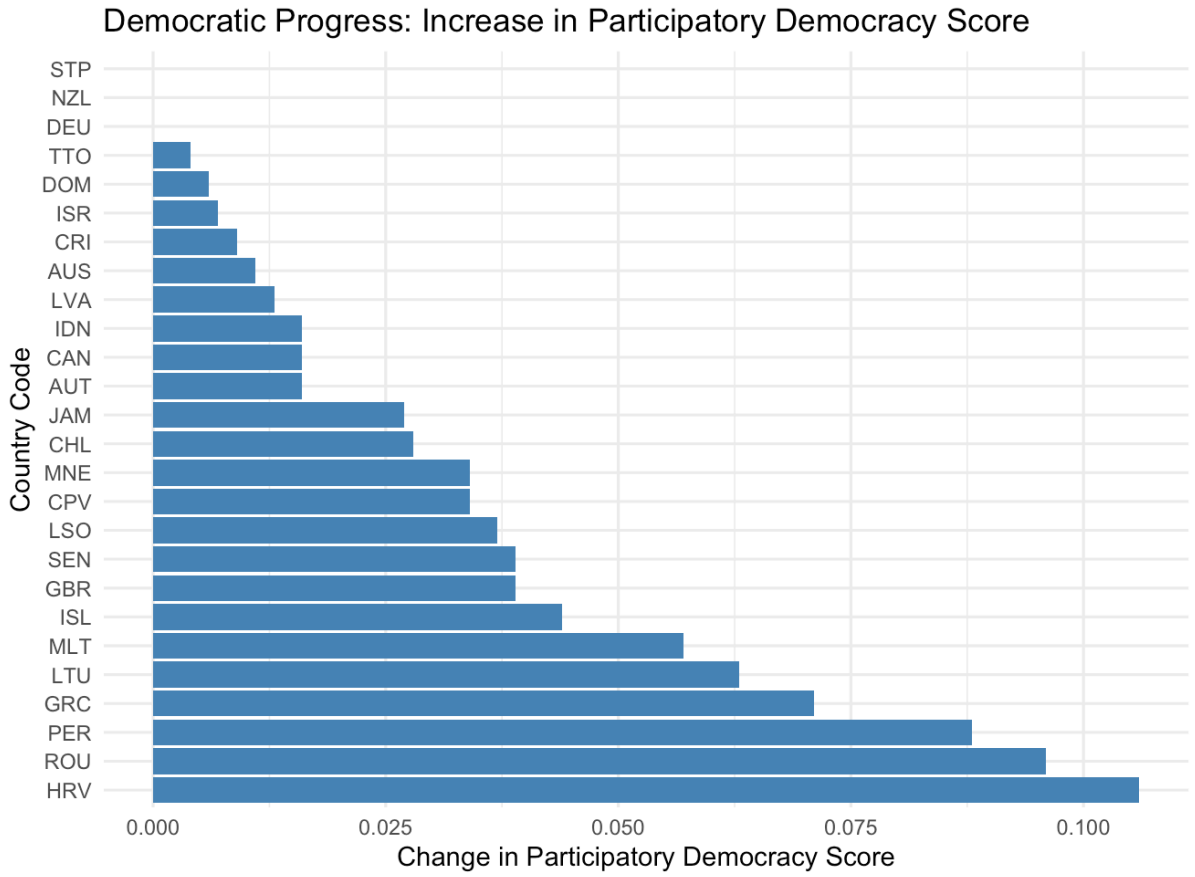

Figure 6. Increase in Participatory Democracy Score for 2006-2019

From Figure 6, it is observed that a number of countries have experienced an increase in their participatory democracy score. Croatia (HRV) has seen the most significant increase of 0.106, followed by Romania (ROU) with an increase of 0.096 and Peru (PER) with an increase of 0.088. Greece (GRC) and Lithuania (LTU) also saw notable increases of 0.071 and 0.063 respectively. Other countries such as Malta (MLT), Iceland (ISL), United Kingdom (GBR), Senegal (SEN), and Lesotho (LSO) experienced increases ranging from 0.057 to 0.039.

In the second group of countries, Cape Verde (CPV), Montenegro (MNE), Chile (CHL), Jamaica (JAM), Canada (CAN), Austria (AUT), Indonesia (IDN), Latvia (LVA), and Australia (AUS) saw increases in their scores ranging from 0.034 to 0.011. Costa Rica (CRI), Israel

(ISR), Dominican Republic (DOM), and Trinidad and Tobago (TTO) experienced smaller increases ranging from 0.009 to 0.004. Interestingly, São Tomé and Príncipe (STP), New Zealand (NZL), and Germany (DEU) did not experience any change in their participatory democracy scores, remaining at 0.

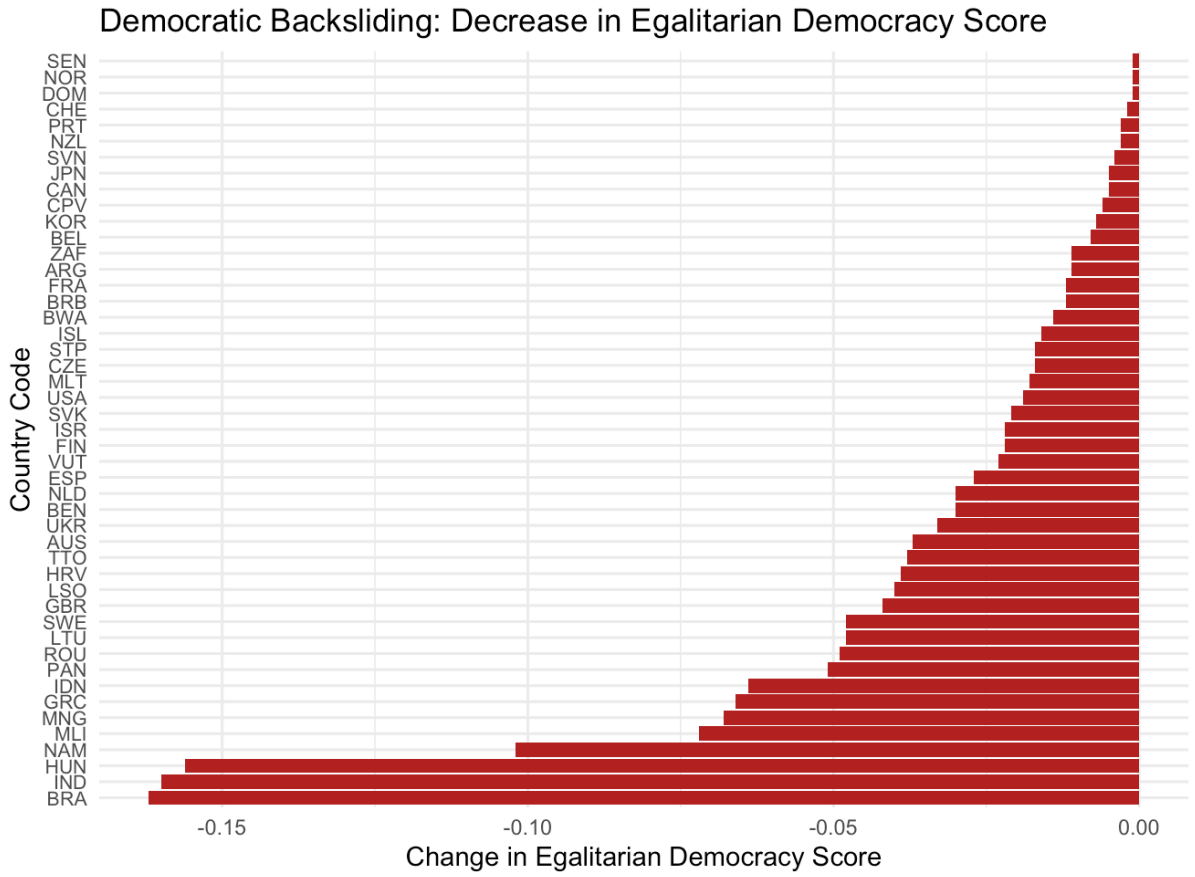

Figure 7. Decrease in Egalitarian Democracy Score for 2006-2019

From Figure 7, it is evident that numerous countries have registered a decline in their egalitarian democracy score. Countries such as Senegal (SEN), Dominican Republic (DOM), and Norway (NOR) have experienced a slight dip of -0.001. A slightly more pronounced decrease of -0.002 is observed in Switzerland (CHE), while New Zealand (NZL) and Portugal (PRT) have recorded a drop of -0.003. Slovenia (SVN), Canada (CAN), and Japan (JPN) have seen their scores shrink by -0.005, and Cape Verde (CPV) has registered a decrease of -0.006.

Moving further down the graph, a group of countries including South Korea (KOR), Belgium (BEL), Argentina (ARG), South Africa (ZAF), Barbados (BRB), and France (FRA) have experienced a decrease ranging from -0.007 to -0.012. Another set of countries, including

Botswana (BWA), Iceland (ISL), São Tomé and Príncipe (STP), Czech Republic (CZE), and the United States (USA), have seen their scores diminish, with changes ranging from -0.014 to -0.019. A notable decrease ranging from -0.022 to -0.027 is observed in countries such as Slovakia (SVK), Israel (ISR), Finland (FIN), Vanuatu (VUT), and Spain (ESP). Countries including Netherlands (NLD), Benin (BEN), Ukraine (UKR), Australia (AUS), and Trinidad and Tobago (TTO) have registered a decrease ranging from -0.03 to -0.037. Lastly, a group of countries including Croatia (HRV), Lesotho (LSO), the United Kingdom (GBR), Sweden (SWE), Lithuania (LTU), Romania (ROU), Panama (PAN), Indonesia (IDN), Greece (GRC), Mongolia (MNG), Mali (MLI), Namibia (NAM), Hungary (HUN), India (IND), and Brazil (BRA) have seen a significant decrease in their scores, with changes ranging from -0.039 to -0.162

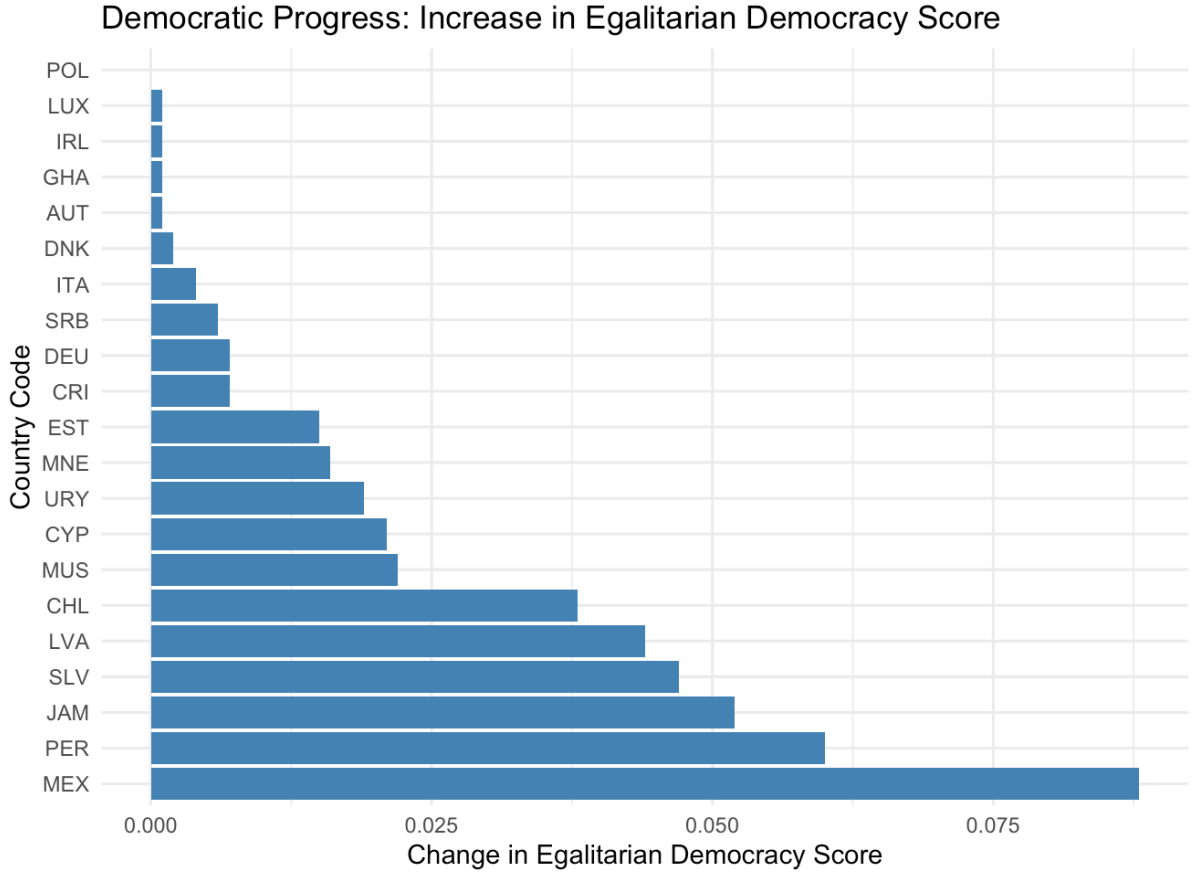

Figure 8. Increase in Egalitarian Democracy Score for 2006-2019

From Figure 8, it is observed that several countries have experienced an increase in their egalitarian democracy score. Mexico (MEX) leads the pack with a significant increase of 0.088. Peru (PER) follows with a notable rise of approximately 0.06. Jamaica (JAM), El Salvador

(SLV), and Latvia (LVA) have also seen their scores increase by 0.052, 0.047, and 0.044 respectively. Chile (CHL) has registered an increase of about 0.038.

At the same time, countries such as Mauritius (MUS), Cyprus (CYP), Uruguay (URY), Montenegro (MNE), and Estonia (EST) have seen their scores rise, with changes ranging from 0.022 to 0.015. Costa Rica (CRI) and Germany (DEU) have experienced a slight increase of approximately 0.007. Serbia (SRB) and Italy (ITA) have seen their scores grow by 0.006 and 0.004 respectively. Denmark (DNK) has registered a marginal increase of 0.002. Countries such as Austria (AUT), Ireland (IRL), Luxembourg (LUX), and Ghana (GHA) have seen a very slight increase of 0.001 in their scores. Interestingly, Poland (POL) has maintained its score with no change.

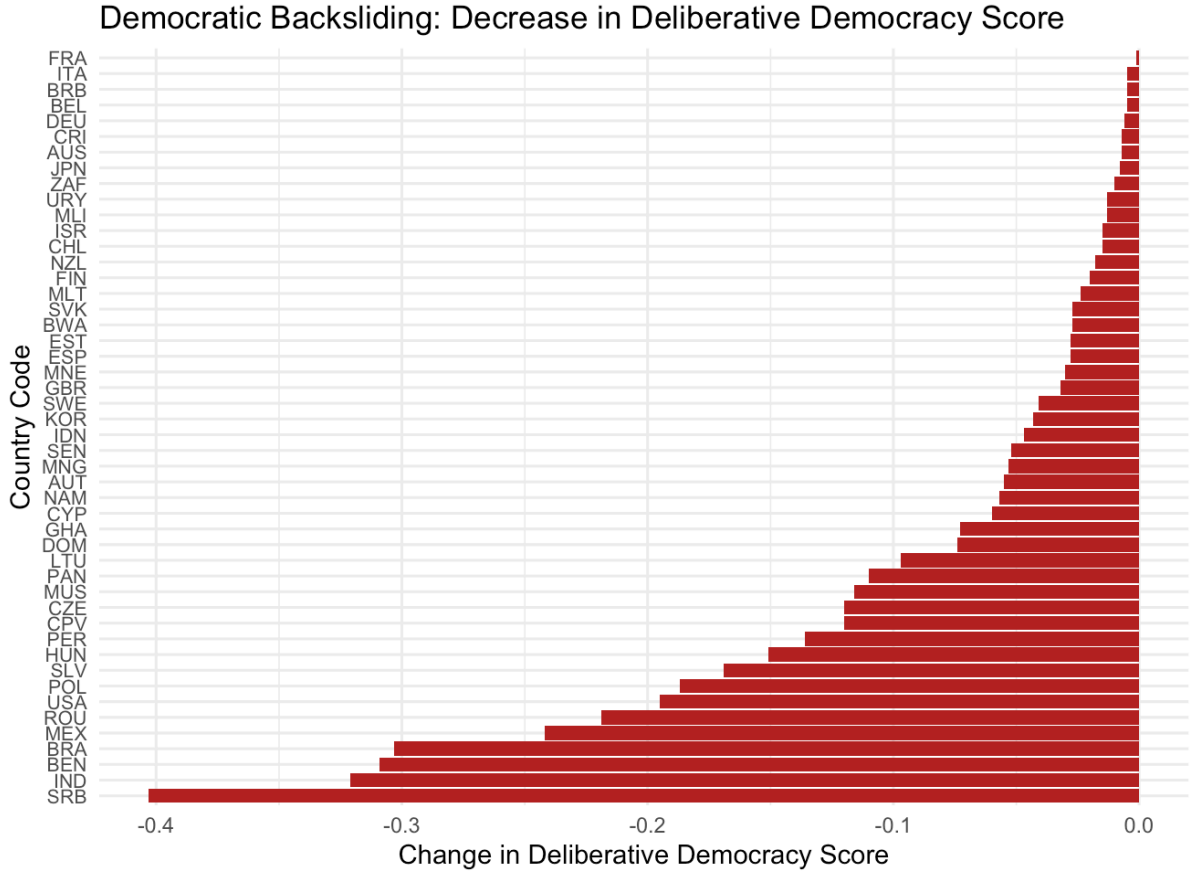

Figure 9. Decrease in Deliberative Democracy Score for 2006-2019

From Figure 9, it is evident that several countries have experienced a decline in their deliberative democracy score. The countries with the smallest decreases are France (FRA), Italy (ITA), Belgium (BEL), Barbados (BRB), and Germany (DEU), with changes ranging

from -0.001 to -0.006. This group is closely followed by Costa Rica (CRI), Australia (AUS), Japan (JPN), South Africa (ZAF), and Uruguay (URY), where the scores have decreased by approximately -0.007 to -0.013.

In the second group of countries, the decline is more pronounced. Starting with Chile (CHL) and Israel (ISR) at -0.015, the decrease continues to deepen reaching -0.187 for Poland (POL) and -0.195 for the United States (USA). The most significant declines are observed in Romania (ROU), Mexico (MEX), Brazil (BRA), Benin (BEN), India (IND), and Serbia (SRB), with changes ranging from -0.219 to -0.403.

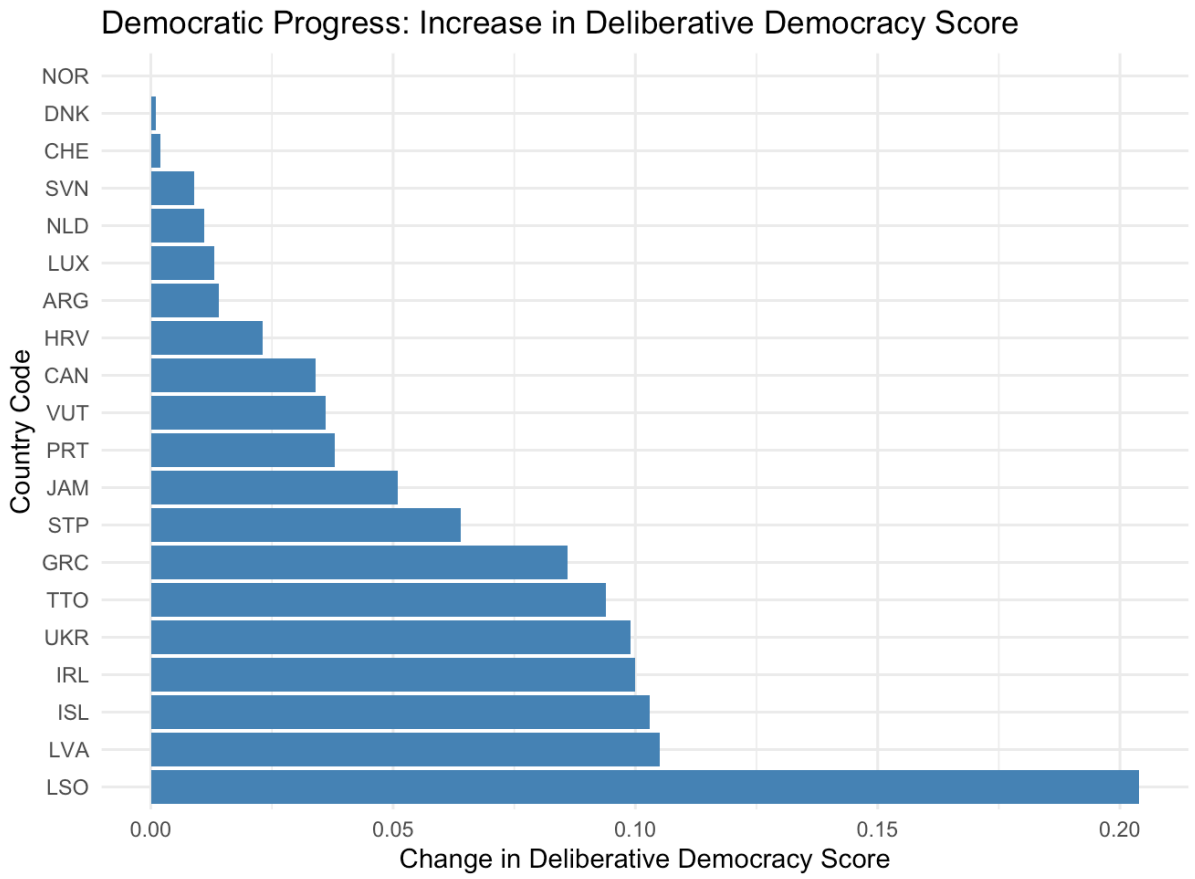

Figure 10. Increase in Deliberative Democracy Score for 2006-2019

From Figure 10, it is clear that several countries have seen an increase or no change in their deliberative democracy score. The countries with the most significant increases are Lesotho (LSO), Latvia (LVA), Iceland (ISL), Ireland (IRL), and Ukraine (UKR), with changes ranging from 0.099 to 0.204. This group is closely followed by Trinidad and Tobago (TTO), Greece

(GRC), São Tomé and Príncipe (STP), Jamaica (JAM), and Portugal (PRT), where the scores have increased by approximately 0.038 to 0.094.

In the second group of countries, the increase is less pronounced, but still noteworthy. Starting with Vanuatu (VUT) and Canada (CAN) at 0.036 and 0.034 respectively, the increase continues to Denmark (DNK) and Norway (NOR) with minimal changes of 0.001 and 0 respectively. The countries in this group, including Croatia (HRV), Argentina (ARG), Luxembourg (LUX), Netherlands (NLD), Slovenia (SVN), and Switzerland (CHE), have changes ranging from 0.002 to 0.023.

In conclusion, it is important to note that while some countries have seen improvements in certain dimensions of democracy, the overall trend indicates a decline. The magnitude of this decline is more pronounced and widespread, affecting a larger number of countries compared to those that have improved.

From the data provided, it is clear that the majority of countries have seen a decrease in their democracy scores across various dimensions. The most significant decreases in liberal democracy scores were observed in Serbia, Hungary, and Poland. In terms of electoral democracy scores, Serbia, India, and Hungary experienced the most substantial declines. For participatory democracy scores, the countries with the most notable decreases were Serbia, Brazil, and Slovenia. In the egalitarian dimension, Hungary, India, and Brazil saw the most significant declines. Lastly, in the deliberative dimension, the countries with the largest decreases were Benin, India, and Serbia.

Interestingly, while some countries have experienced declines in almost all dimensions of democracy, others have shown mixed results - declining in some dimensions while remaining stable or even improving in others. This highlights the complex nature of democratic processes across different countries and regions. It highlights the importance of a delicate understanding of these trends, taking into account the unique political, social, and economic contexts of each country.

Table 1. Correlation Matrix

	Electoral	Liberal	Deliberative	Egalitarian	Participatory
Electoral	1	0.761	0.550	0.503	0.526
Liberal	0.761	1	0.657	0.417	0.539
Deliberative	0.550	0.657	1	0.201	0.370
Egalitarian	0.503	0.417	0.201	1	0.298
Participatory	0.526	0.539	0.370	0.298	1

From Table 1, it can be seen that the dimensions of democracy are positively correlated with each other to varying degrees. The strongest correlation is between the Liberal and Electoral dimensions (0.761), indicating a strong positive relationship. The Deliberative dimension also shows a strong positive correlation with the Liberal dimension (0.657). The Egalitarian dimension, on the other hand, shows a moderate to strong positive correlation with the Electoral (0.503) and Deliberative (0.417) dimensions. The Participatory dimension shows a moderate to strong positive correlation with all other dimensions, with the highest being with the Liberal dimension (0.539). These correlations suggest that changes in one dimension of democracy are associated with changes in the other dimensions, although the strength of these associations differs.

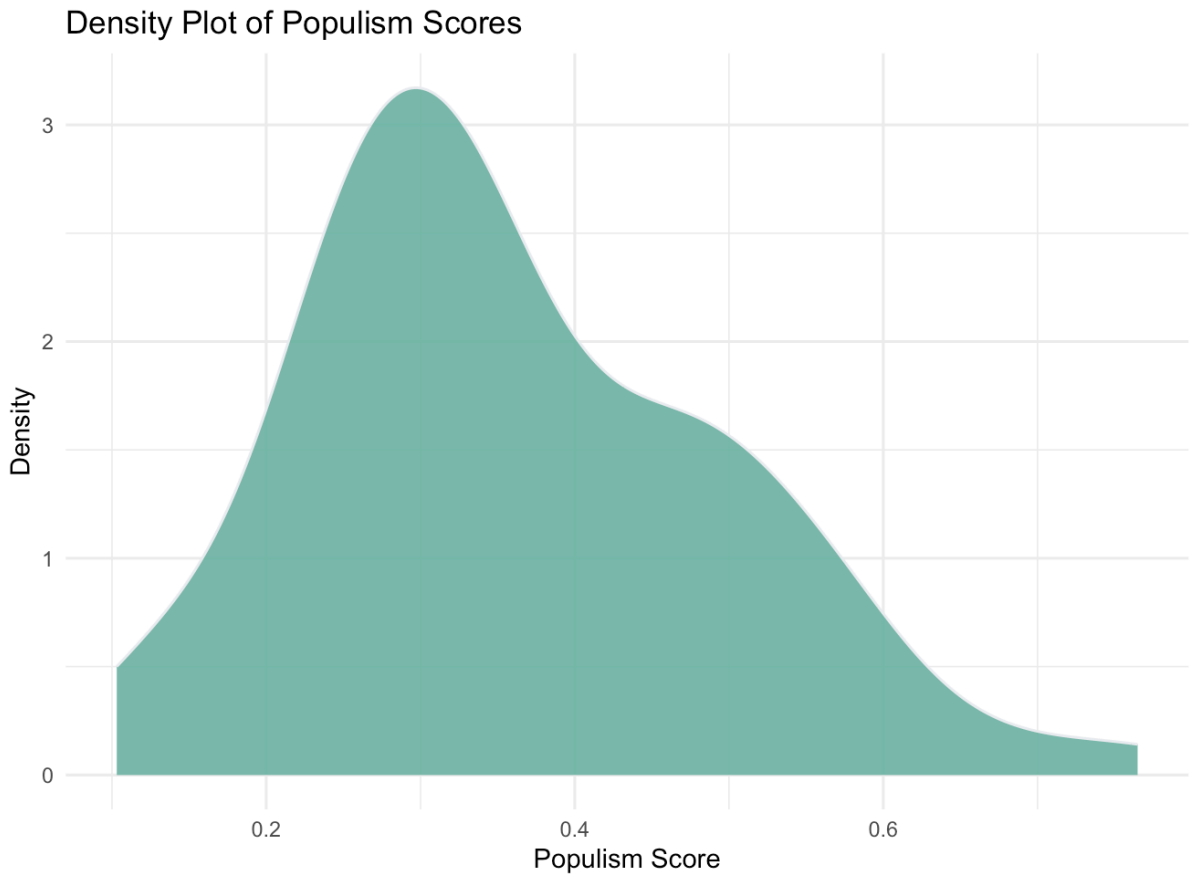

Figure 11. Density Plot of Populism Scores of 68 countries

The density plot (Figure 11) provides a visual representation of the distribution of populism scores across 68 countries. The populism scores, represented on the x-axis, range from approximately 0 to 0.6. The y-axis, on the other hand, represents the density of these scores, which is a measure of how frequently they occur in the dataset. The density values range from 0 to 3.

Figure 11 reveals a unimodal distribution, meaning there is a single peak in the data. This peak occurs at a populism score of approximately 0.3, indicating that this is the most frequent score in the dataset. In other words, among the 68 countries studied, the populism score of 0.3 is the most prevalent.

The shape of the plot in Figure 11 is bell-like, with the densities reducing as the populism scores increase or decrease from the peak value of 0.3. This suggests that most countries have populism scores around 0.3, with fewer countries having very low (closer to 0) or very high (closer to 0.6) populism scores.

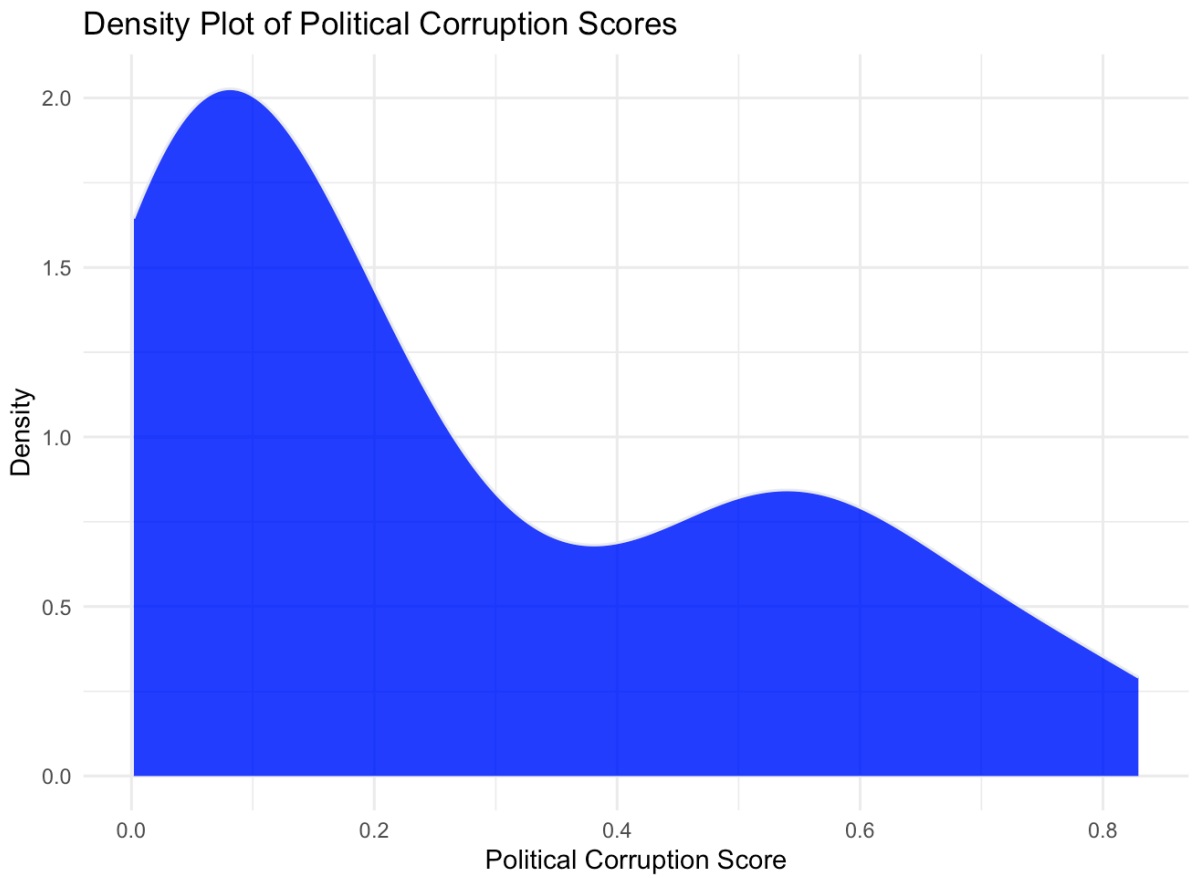

Figure 12. Density Plot of Political Corruption Scores of 68 countries

The density plot (Figure 12) provides a visual representation of the distribution of political corruption scores. The political corruption scores, represented on the x-axis, range from approximately 0 to 0.8. The y-axis represents the density, which ranges from 0 to 2.

The plot reveals a bimodal distribution, meaning there are two peaks in the data. The first and higher peak occurs at a political corruption score of approximately 0.1, and the second, smaller peak occurs at around 0.5. This suggests that there are two groups of countries: one group with low political corruption scores around 0.1, and another group with higher scores around 0.5.

The shape of the plot is such that the densities reduce as the political corruption scores increase or decrease from these peak values. This suggests that fewer countries have very low (closer to 0) or very high (closer to 0.8) political corruption scores.

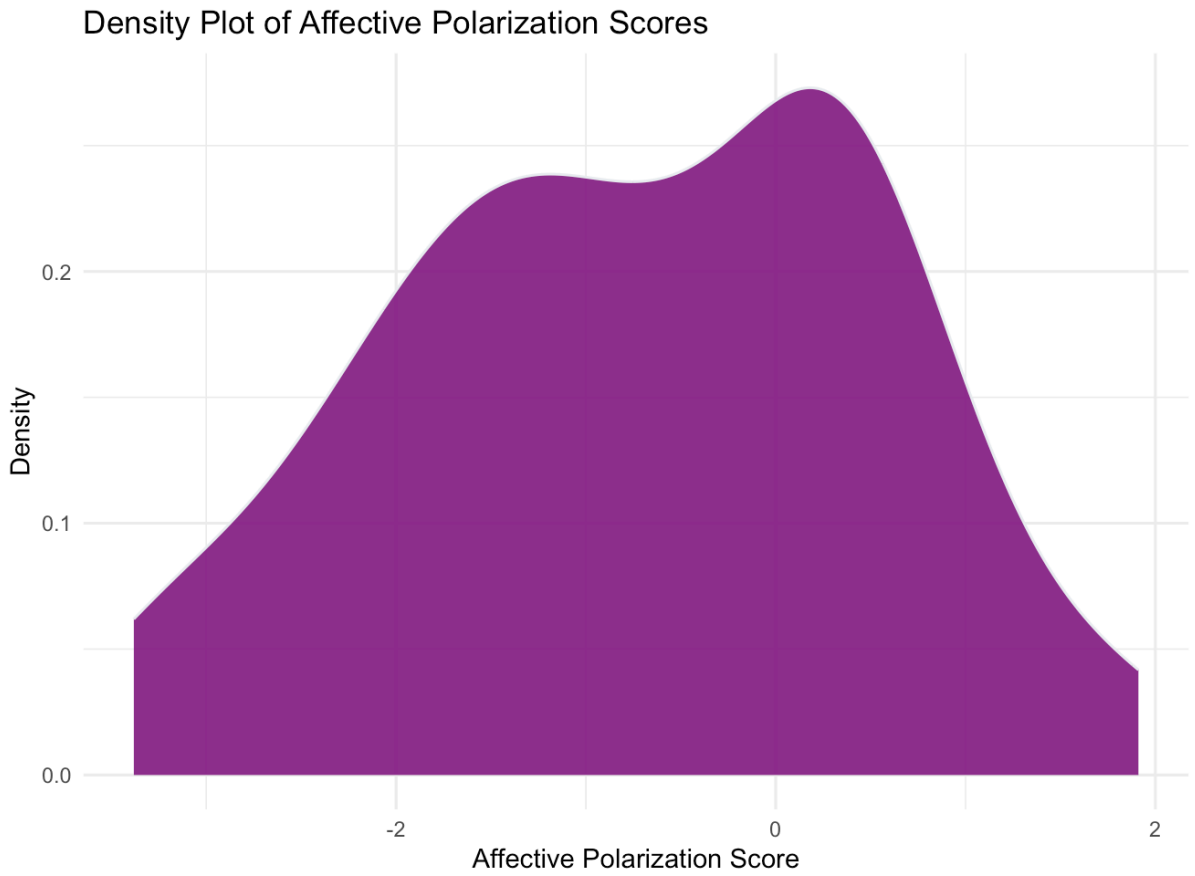

Figure 13. Density Plot of Affective Polarization Scores of 68 countries

The density plot (Figure 13) provides a visual representation of the distribution of affective polarization scores. The affective polarization scores, represented on the x-axis, range from approximately -2 to 2. The y-axis represents the density, which ranges from 0 to approximately 0.25.

The plot reveals a bimodal distribution, meaning there are two peaks in the data. These peaks occur at affective polarization scores of approximately -1.2 and 0.2, indicating that these are the most frequent scores in the dataset. In other words, among the 68 countries studied, affective polarization scores of -1.2 and 0.2 are the most prevalent.

The shape of the plot is such that the densities reduce as the affective polarization scores increase or decrease from these peak values. This suggests that most countries have affective polarization scores around -1.2 and 0.2, with fewer countries having very low (closer to -2) or very high (closer to 2) affective polarization scores.

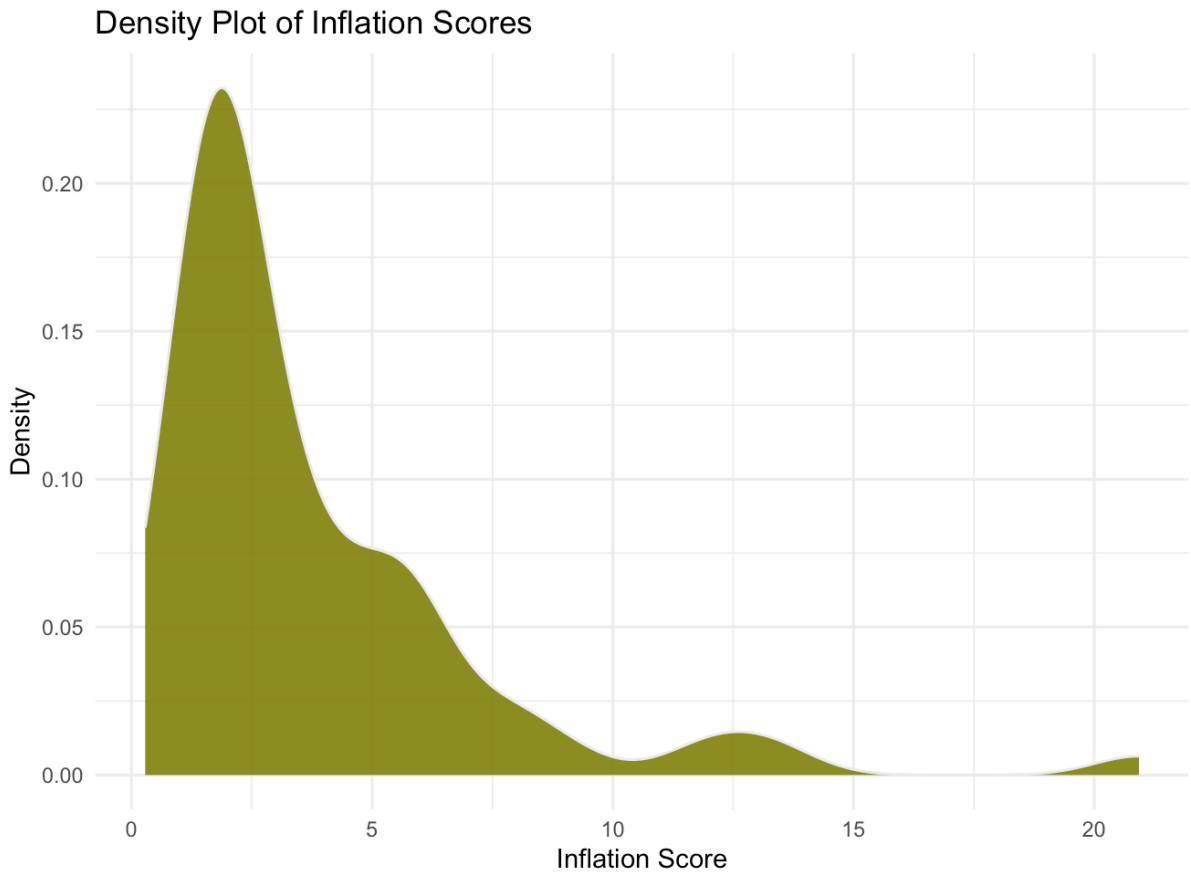

Figure 14. Density Plot of Inflation Scores of 68 countries

The density plot (Figure 14) provides a visual representation of the distribution of inflation scores. The inflation scores, represented on the x-axis, range from approximately 0 to 20. The y-axis represents the density, which ranges from 0 to approximately 0.25.

The plot reveals a unimodal distribution, meaning there is one peak in the data. This peak occurs at inflation score of approximately 2, indicating that this is the most frequent score in the dataset. In other words, among the 68 countries studied, inflation score around of 2 is the most prevalent.

The shape of the plot is such that the densities reduce as the inflation scores increase or decrease from this peak value. This suggests that most countries have inflation scores around 2, with fewer countries having very low (closer to 0) or very high (closer to 20) inflation scores.

In conclusion, it is worth noting why I have opted for density plots to illustrate the descriptive statistics of my independent and control variables. Density plots are particularly advantageous

as they clearly show the frequency of different scores within my variables. This visual representation allows for an immediate understanding of which scores are most prevalent. Moreover, density plots provide a clear and concise overview of the data distribution, making it easier to identify patterns, trends, and potential outliers. Unlike bar charts, which are limited to categorical data, density plots can handle both continuous and discrete data, offering greater flexibility.

3.2. Univariate Regression Analyses

Table 2. Univariate Regression Results of Change in Electoral and Deliberative Democracy on Affective Polarization

	Dependent variable:	
	Electoral	Deliberative
	(1)	(2)
Affective Polarization	-0.024***	-0.030***
	(0.007)	(0.010)
Constant	-0.047***	-0.066***
	(0.011)	(0.014)
Observations	68	68
R^2	0.143	0.128
Adjusted R^2	0.130	0.115
Residual Std. Error (df = 66)	0.077	0.102
F Statistic (df = 1; 66)	11.027***	9.677***
Note:		*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

The regression analysis was conducted to examine the impact of Affective Polarization on the Change in Electoral Democracy from 2006 to 2019 (Model 1, Table 2). The model significantly predicts the dependent variable, $F(1, 66) = 11.027$, $p < .01$, accounting for approximately 14.3% of its variance ($R^2 = .143$).

Affective Polarization has a significant negative effect on the Change in Electoral Democracy ($\beta = -0.024$, $p < .01$). This suggests that for each one unit increase in the Affective Polarization score, the Change in Electoral Democracy score is expected to decrease by 0.024 units, holding all other variables constant.

This indicates that as countries become more polarized (increase in Affective Polarization), there is a decrease in the level of Electoral Democracy (indicating more democratic backsliding). Conversely, countries with lower levels of Affective Polarization (less polarized) are associated with an increase in the level of Electoral Democracy (indicating less democratic backsliding).

Another regression analysis was conducted to examine the impact of Affective Polarization on the Change in Deliberative Democracy from 2006 to 2019 (Model 2, Table 2). The model significantly predicts the dependent variable, $F(1, 66) = 9.677$, $p < .01$, accounting for approximately 12.8% of its variance ($R^2 = .128$).

Affective Polarization has a significant negative effect on the Change in Deliberative Democracy ($\beta = -0.030$, $p < .01$). This suggests that for each one unit increase in the Affective Polarization score, the Change in Deliberative Democracy score is expected to decrease by 0.030 units, holding all other variables constant.

This indicates that as countries become more polarized (increase in Affective Polarization), there is a decrease in the level of Deliberative Democracy (indicating more democratic backsliding). Conversely, countries with lower levels of Affective Polarization (less polarized) are associated with an increase in the level of Deliberative Democracy (indicating less democratic backsliding).

Table 3. Univariate Regression Results of Change in Liberal Democracy on Populism

	Dependent variable:
	Change in Liberal Democracy
Populism	-0.090*
	(0.046)
Constant	0.017
	(0.018)
Observations	68
R^2	0.056
Adjusted R^2	0.041
Residual Std. Error	0.051 (df = 66)
F Statistic	3.883* (df = 1; 66)
Note:	*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

The regression analysis was conducted to examine the impact of Populism on the Change in Liberal Democracy (Table 3). The model predicts the dependent variable, with an F-value of 3.883. However, the p-value is greater than .05, indicating that the model does not significantly predict the dependent variable at the .05 level of significance. It accounts for approximately 5.6% of its variance ($R^2 = .056$).

Populism has a negative effect on the Change in Liberal Democracy ($\beta = -0.090$), but this effect is not statistically significant at the .05 level ($p > .05$). This suggests that while there is a negative relationship between Populism and the Change in Liberal Democracy, I cannot confidently assert this relationship given my chosen level of significance.

This indicates that as countries become more populist (increase in Populism), there may be a decrease in the level of Liberal Democracy. Conversely, countries with lower levels of Populism may be associated with an increase in the level of Liberal Democracy. However, these relationships are not statistically significant at the .05 level.

Table 4. Univariate Regression Results of Change in Egalitarian Democracy on Political Corruption

	Dependent variable:
	Change in Egalitarian Democracy
Political Corruption	-0.033
	(0.021)
Constant	-0.009
	(0.008)
Observations	68
R^2	0.036
Adjusted R^2	0.021
Residual Std. Error	0.044 (df = 66)
F Statistic	2.460 (df = 1; 66)
Note:	*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

The univariate regression analysis was conducted to examine the impact of Political Corruption on the Change in Egalitarian Democracy (Table 4). The model predicts the dependent variable, but it is not statistically significant at the conventional levels ($p < .05$). The model accounts for approximately 3.6% of its variance ($R^2 = .036$).

Political Corruption has a negative effect on the Change in Egalitarian Democracy (β = -0.033), but this effect is not statistically significant at the .05 level. This suggests that while there is a negative relationship between Political Corruption and the Change in Egalitarian Democracy, I cannot confidently assert this relationship given my chosen level of significance.

The F statistic is 2.460 (df = 1; 66), indicating that the overall model fit is not statistically significant at the .05 level. Therefore, while the data suggests a relationship between Political Corruption and the Change in Egalitarian Democracy, I cannot confirm this relationship at the .05 level of significance.

3.3. Multivariate Regression Analyses

Table 5. Multivariate Regression Results of Change in Electoral, Liberal, Deliberative, Egalitarian, and Participatory Democracy on Political Corruption, Affective Polarization, Populism, and Inflation

	Dependent variable:				
	Electoral (1)	Liberal (2)	Deliberative (3)	Egalitarian (4)	Participatory (5)
Political Corruption	-0.035	-0.024	-0.160**	-0.011	-0.008
	(0.050)	(0.032)	(0.063)	(0.028)	(0.032)
Affective Polarization	-0.017*	-0.009	-0.015	-0.005	-0.001
	(0.009)	(0.006)	(0.012)	(0.005)	(0.006)
Populism	-0.116	-0.050	-0.023	-0.024	-0.068
	(0.079)	(0.051)	(0.100)	(0.045)	(0.050)
Inflation	0.002	0.001	0.008*	-0.0003	-0.001
	(0.003)	(0.002)	(0.004)	(0.002)	(0.002)
Constant	0.002	-0.002	-0.033	-0.009	0.017
	(0.033)	(0.021)	(0.042)	(0.019)	(0.021)
Observations	68	68	68	68	68
R^2	0.181	0.128	0.221	0.063	0.058
Adjusted R^2	0.129	0.073	0.172	0.004	-0.002
Residual Std. Error (df = 63)	0.077	0.050	0.098	0.044	0.049
F Statistic (df = 4; 63)	3.481**	2.319*	4.477***	1.063	0.967
Note:					*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

The multivariate regression analysis was conducted to examine the impact of Political Corruption, Affective Polarisation, Populism, and Inflation on the Change in Electoral Democracy (Model 1, Table 5). The model predicts the dependent variable, and it is statistically significant at the conventional levels ($p < .05$), with an F statistic of 3.481 ($df = 4; 63$).

The model accounts for approximately 18.1% of its variance ($R^2 = .181$), with an adjusted R^2 of .129. This adjusted R^2 value indicates that about 12.9% of the variation in the Change in Electoral Democracy can be explained by the model, after adjusting for the number of predictors.

The coefficients for each predictor are:

- Political Corruption has a negative effect on the Change in Electoral Democracy ($\beta = -0.035$), but this effect is not statistically significant at the .05 level (standard error = 0.050).
- Affective Polarisation has a negative effect on the Change in Electoral Democracy ($\beta = -0.017$), but this effect is not statistically significant at the .05 level (standard error = 0.009).
- Populism has a negative effect on the Change in Electoral Democracy ($\beta = -0.116$), but this effect is not statistically significant at the .05 level (standard error = 0.079).
- Inflation has a positive effect on the Change in Electoral Democracy ($\beta = 0.002$), but this effect is not statistically significant at the .05 level (standard error = 0.003).

The multivariate regression analysis reveals that Political Corruption, Affective Polarisation, Populism, and Inflation collectively account for about 12.9% of the variation in the Change in Electoral Democracy. However, none of these factors individually have a statistically significant impact at the .05 level.

The multivariate regression analysis was conducted to examine the impact of Political Corruption, Affective Polarisation, Populism, and Inflation on the Change in Liberal Democracy (Model 2, Table 5). The model predicts the dependent variable, but it is not statistically significant at the conventional levels ($p < .05$).

The model accounts for approximately 12.8% of its variance ($R^2 = .128$), with an adjusted R^2 of .073. This adjusted R^2 value indicates that about 7.3% of the variation in the Change in Liberal Democracy can be explained by the model, after adjusting for the number of predictors.

The coefficients for each predictor are:

- Political Corruption has a negative effect on the Change in Liberal Democracy ($\beta = -0.024$), but this effect is not statistically significant at the .05 level (standard error = 0.032).
- Affective Polarisation has a negative effect on the Change in Liberal Democracy ($\beta = -0.009$), but this effect is not statistically significant at the .05 level (standard error = 0.006).
- Populism has a negative effect on the Change in Liberal Democracy ($\beta = -0.050$), but this effect is not statistically significant at the .05 level (standard error = 0.051).
- Inflation has a positive effect on the Change in Liberal Democracy ($\beta = 0.001$), but this effect is not statistically significant at the .05 level (standard error = 0.002).

The F statistic is 2.319 (df = 4; 63), indicating that the overall model fit is not statistically significant at the .05 level. Therefore, while the data suggests relationships between these predictors and the Change in Liberal Democracy, I cannot confirm these relationships at the .05 level of significance.

The multivariate regression analysis was conducted to examine the impact of Political Corruption, Affective Polarisation, Populism, and Inflation on the Change in Deliberative Democracy (Model 3, Table 5). The model predicts the dependent variable, and it is statistically significant at the conventional levels ($p < .05$), with an F statistic of 4.477 (df = 4; 63).
The model accounts for approximately 22.1% of its variance ($R^2 = .221$), with an adjusted R^2 of .172. This adjusted R^2 value indicates that about 17.2% of the variation in the Change in Deliberative Democracy can be explained by the model, after adjusting for the number of predictors.

The coefficients for each predictor are:

- Political Corruption has a negative effect on the Change in Deliberative Democracy ($\beta = -0.160$), and this effect is statistically significant at the .05 level (standard error = 0.063).

- Affective Polarisation has a negative effect on the Change in Deliberative Democracy (β = -0.015), but this effect is not statistically significant at the .05 level (standard error = 0.012).
- Populism has a negative effect on the Change in Deliberative Democracy (β = -0.023), but this effect is not statistically significant at the .05 level (standard error = 0.100).
- Inflation has a positive effect on the Change in Deliberative Democracy (β = 0.008), but this effect is not statistically significant at the .05 level (standard error = 0.004).

The regression analysis shows that Political Corruption, Affective Polarisation, Populism, and Inflation together explain about 17.2% of the variation in the Change in Deliberative Democracy. Among these factors, only Political Corruption has a statistically significant negative impact on the Change in Deliberative Democracy at the .05 level.

The multivariate regression analysis was conducted to examine the impact of Political Corruption, Affective Polarisation, Populism, and Inflation on the Change in Egalitarian Democracy (Model 4, Table 5). The model predicts the dependent variable, but it is not statistically significant at the conventional levels ($p < .05$), with an F statistic of 1.063 ($df = 4; 63$).

The model accounts for approximately 6.3% of its variance ($R^2 = .063$), but the adjusted R^2 is 0.004. This adjusted R^2 value indicates that after adjusting for the number of predictors, the model does not explain the variation in the Change in Egalitarian Democracy.

The coefficients for each predictor are:

- Political Corruption has a negative effect on the Change in Egalitarian Democracy (β = -0.011), but this effect is not statistically significant at the .05 level (standard error = 0.028).
- Affective Polarisation has a negative effect on the Change in Egalitarian Democracy (β = -0.005), but this effect is not statistically significant at the .05 level (standard error = 0.005).
- Populism has a negative effect on the Change in Egalitarian Democracy (β = -0.024), but this effect is not statistically significant at the .05 level (standard error = 0.045).
- Inflation has a negative effect on the Change in Egalitarian Democracy (β = -0.0003), but this effect is not statistically significant at the .05 level (standard error = 0.002).

The multivariate regression analysis indicates that Political Corruption, Affective Polarisation, Populism, and Inflation together do not significantly explain the variation in the Change in Egalitarian Democracy. None of these factors individually have a statistically significant impact at the .05 level.

The multivariate regression analysis was conducted to examine the impact of Political Corruption, Affective Polarisation, Populism, and Inflation on the Change in Participatory Democracy (Model 5, Table 5). The model predicts the dependent variable, but it is not statistically significant at the conventional levels ($p < .05$), with an F statistic of 0.967 ($df = 4$; 63).

The model accounts for approximately 5.8% of its variance ($R^2 = .058$), but the adjusted R^2 is -0.002. This adjusted R^2 value indicates that after adjusting for the number of predictors, the model does not explain the variation in the Change in Participatory Democracy.

The coefficients for each predictor are:

- Political Corruption has a negative effect on the Change in Participatory Democracy ($\beta = -0.008$), but this effect is not statistically significant at the .05 level (standard error = 0.032).
- Affective Polarisation has a negative effect on the Change in Participatory Democracy ($\beta = -0.001$), but this effect is not statistically significant at the .05 level (standard error = 0.006).
- Populism has a negative effect on the Change in Participatory Democracy ($\beta = -0.068$), but this effect is not statistically significant at the .05 level (standard error = 0.050).
- Inflation has a negative effect on the Change in Participatory Democracy ($\beta = -0.001$), but this effect is not statistically significant at the .05 level (standard error = 0.002).

The multivariate regression analysis indicates that Political Corruption, Affective Polarisation, Populism, and Inflation together do not significantly explain the variation in the Change in Participatory Democracy. None of these factors individually have a statistically significant impact at the .05 level.

3.4. Discussion

Univariate Models

The results of the univariate regression analyses provide valuable insights into the relationships between Affective Polarization, Populism, Political Corruption, and various forms of Democracy. While the significance level of .05 was not achieved for some of the relationships, the trends observed in the data are noteworthy and provide a foundation for further research.
The analyses reveal that Affective Polarization significantly predicts changes in both Electoral and Deliberative Democracy. Specifically, an increase in Affective Polarization is associated with a decrease in the level of both Electoral and Deliberative Democracy. This supports Hypothesis 1 (H1), suggesting that as countries become more polarized, they are more likely to experience democratic backsliding. This finding aligns with the broader literature, which has highlighted the potential dangers of political polarization for democratic stability.

The analysis examining the impact of Populism on the Change in Liberal Democracy, however, did not yield statistically significant results. While there was a negative relationship between Populism and the Change in Liberal Democracy, this relationship was not statistically significant at the .05 level. This does not provide support for Hypothesis 2 (H2), suggesting that while there may be a trend towards democratic backsliding in more populist countries, this trend is not statistically significant at the conventional levels. This finding invites further research to explore the conditions under which populism might undermine liberal democracy.
Finally, the analysis examining the impact of Political Corruption on the Change in Egalitarian Democracy also did not yield statistically significant results. While there was a negative relationship between Political Corruption and the Change in Egalitarian Democracy, this relationship was not statistically significant at the .05 level. This does not provide support for Hypothesis 3 (H3), suggesting that while there may be a trend towards democratic backsliding in countries with higher levels of political corruption, this trend is not statistically significant at the conventional levels. This finding suggests that the relationship between political corruption and democratic backsliding may be more complex and warrants further investigation.

The analyses were conducted with a dataset comprising 68 countries over a period from 2006 to 2019. The limited number of observations may have contributed to the inability to achieve

the .05 level of significance for some of the relationships. However, the observed trends are consistent with theoretical expectations and provide a basis for further investigation.
Future research could benefit from expanding the dataset to include more countries and a longer timeframe. This would increase the number of observations and potentially lead to more robust findings. Additionally, future studies could consider incorporating other variables that might influence democratic backsliding, such as institutional strength, and cultural factors.

Multivariate Models

The multivariate regression analyses provide a comprehensive examination of the impacts of Political Corruption, Affective Polarisation, Populism, and Inflation on various forms of Democracy. While the models for Liberal, Participatory, and Egalitarian Democracy were not statistically significant at the conventional levels ($p < .05$), the models for Electoral and Deliberative Democracy were significant, providing a mixed picture of the relationships between these predictors and democratic change.

Across all models, Political Corruption, Affective Polarisation, and Populism generally had negative coefficients, suggesting that increases in these factors are associated with decreases in the respective forms of Democracy. However, these effects were not statistically significant at the .05 level in any of the models, indicating that while these relationships may exist, they are not strong enough to be confirmed given the current dataset and chosen level of significance. I have to mention that in the model for Deliberative Democracy, Political Corruption was found to have a significant effect. Unlike the other models, where the effects of Political Corruption, Affective Polarization, and Populism were not statistically significant at the .05 level, in this model, Political Corruption showed a statistically significant relationship at the .05 level. This suggests that within the context of deliberative democracy, increases in Political Corruption are associated with decreases in the level of democracy.

Inflation, which was used as a control variable in these analyses, also showed mixed effects across the different models. While it had a positive coefficient in the models for Liberal and Electoral Democracy, suggesting that increases in inflation are associated with increases in these forms of Democracy, these effects were not statistically significant at the .05 level. Conversely, Inflation had a negative coefficient in the models for Participatory and Egalitarian Democracy, but again, these effects were not statistically significant.

Interestingly, in the model for Deliberative Democracy, which was statistically significant at the conventional levels ($p < .05$), Inflation had a positive coefficient, although this effect was not statistically significant. This suggests that while inflation may not have a direct impact on Deliberative Democracy, it may interact with other factors in the model to influence this form of Democracy.

Model Fits and Adjusted R-Squared Values

The adjusted R-squared values provide a measure of how well the model explains and, ideally, I want these values to be as high as possible. Here are the adjusted R-squared values for each of the models:

1. Electoral Democracy: The model for Electoral Democracy has an adjusted R^2 of .129. This indicates that about 12.9% of the variation in the Change in Electoral Democracy can be explained by the model, after adjusting for the number of predictors. This is a moderate effect size, indicating that the predictors have some explanatory power.
2. Liberal Democracy: The model for Liberal Democracy has an adjusted R^2 of .073. This suggests that about 7.3% of the variation in the Change in Liberal Democracy can be explained by the model, after adjusting for the number of predictors. However, it is important to note that this is a relatively small effect size.
3. Deliberative Democracy: The model for Deliberative Democracy has an adjusted R^2 of .172. This adjusted R^2 value indicates that about 17.2% of the variation in the Change in Deliberative Democracy can be explained by the model, after adjusting for the number of predictors. This is a moderate effect size, indicating that the predictors have some explanatory power. However, it is important to note that this effect size, while moderate, is the largest among all five dimensions of democracy examined in this study.
4. Egalitarian Democracy: The model for Egalitarian Democracy has an adjusted R^2 of 0.004. This adjusted R^2 value indicates that after adjusting for the number of predictors, the model does not explain the variation in the Change in Egalitarian Democracy. It suggests that there are other factors that not included in the model that could play an important role in influencing Egalitarian Democracy.
5. Participatory Democracy: The model for Participatory Democracy has an adjusted R^2 of -0.002. This adjusted R^2 value indicates that after adjusting for the number of predictors, the model does not explain the variation in the Change in Participatory

Democracy. It suggests that there are other factors that not included in the model that could play an important role in influencing Participatory Democracy.

Despite the limitations, this study contributes to the literature on democratic backsliding by highlighting the potential impact of Political Corruption, Affective Polarisation, Populism, and Inflation on various forms of Democracy. The findings underscore the complexity of democratic backsliding and the need for further research in this area. As democratic backsliding continues to be a pressing issue in many parts of the world, understanding these dynamics is of primary importance.

Conclusion

This thesis has explored the dynamics of democratic backsliding, focusing on the potential impacts of affective polarization, populism, and political corruption, with inflation as a control variable. The study utilized three primary datasets: the Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem) dataset, the V-Dem's Party Dataset, and the World Bank's Global Database of Inflation (GDI), and conducted both univariate and multivariate regression analyses.

The findings reveal that affective polarization significantly predicts changes in both electoral and deliberative democracy, supporting the hypothesis that increased polarization can lead to democratic backsliding. However, the relationships between populism and liberal democracy, and political corruption and egalitarian democracy, were not statistically significant at the conventional levels.

The multivariate models provided a mixed picture, with the models for electoral and deliberative democracy being significant, while the models for liberal, participatory, and egalitarian democracy were not. Across all models, political corruption, affective polarization, and populism generally had negative coefficients, suggesting that increases in these factors are associated with decreases in the respective forms of democracy. However, these effects were not statistically significant at the .05 level, excluding Political Corruption in the model for Deliberative Democracy. This suggests that while Affective Polarization and Populism may not have a strong enough relationship with the forms of Democracy to be confirmed at the .05

level of significance, Political Corruption showed a significant relationship in the context of Deliberative Democracy.

The study was conducted with a dataset comprising 68 countries over a period from 2006 to 2019. The limited number of observations may have contributed to the inability to achieve the .05 level of significance for some of the relationships. However, the observed trends are consistent with theoretical expectations and provide a basis for further investigation.

Despite these limitations, this study contributes to the literature on democratic backsliding by highlighting the potential impact of political corruption, affective polarization, populism, and inflation on various forms of democracy. The findings underscore the complexity of democratic backsliding and the need for further research in this area. As democratic backsliding continues to be a pressing issue in many parts of the world, understanding these dynamics is of primary importance.

Future research could benefit from expanding the dataset to include more countries and a longer timeframe. This would increase the number of observations and potentially lead to more robust findings. Additionally, future studies could consider incorporating other variables that might influence democratic backsliding, such as institutional strength, and cultural factors.
In conclusion, this thesis underscores the importance of understanding the dynamics of democratic backsliding and the factors that contribute to it. It highlights the need for continued research in this area, with the ultimate goal of preserving and strengthening democratic institutions around the world. The findings of this study serve as a stepping stone towards achieving this goal.

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