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Researcher: World facing era 'where democracy is on the defensive'



Los Angeles/DNA (ots) -

An alternative model to Western democracy seems to be emerging, data from the newly released Berggruen Governance Index shows. Yet, the report's principal investigator does see bright spots for democracy, many of them in Africa.

Los Angeles (DNA) - In a year with expected record worldwide voter participation in elections, the newly released 2024 Berggruen Governance Index (BGI) shows a decline in measurable benchmarks of democratic accountability.

Compiling data on 145 countries, the report was produced in collaboration by the Luskin School of Public Affairs at the University of California Los Angeles (UCLA), the Berggruen Institute, a Los Angeles-based think tank, and Hertie School in Berlin, Germany.

BGI principal investigator Helmut Anheier is a sociologist teaching at the Luskin School and a former president of the Hertie School. He spoke with the Democracy News Alliance ahead of the report's launch on May 15.

Question: What are the origins and goals of the Berggruen Governance Index?

Anheier: The idea started about 2017 or thereabouts with a concern among some people in academia, but also policy makers, that the available indicators on governance are not giving us the deeper insights that we actually need. They gave us one number, but one number is usually very abstract for a country as a whole, and there are many, many dimensions that you could possibly imagine that bear on that number.

But how do you then make sense of it in the end, if you're a policymaker, for example? So we had a series of discussions with experts - at the World Bank and other UN agencies and colleagues - and developed what became known as the Governance Triangle, where we see governance as resulting from the interplay between three dimensions.

One is the question: How democratic is the country? We call it the quality of democracy. What is the capacity of the state to deliver? It's called state capacity. And then the delivery of public goods like adequate healthcare, infrastructure, education and clean environment.

So we understand governance as how well countries do in solving public problems, and that question leads you to look at these three elements: quality of democracy, quality of government, and quality of life.

Q: The report finds that the score for democratic accountability, averaged across 145 countries, fell from 2010 to 2021, from 67 on a 100-point scale to 65 points. The dip nearly erased an average gain of three points from 2000-2010. The decline from 2010-2021 is even steeper if accounting for population. What does that mean?

Anheier: People should take away from it that we need a new realism. We will probably have a longish period ahead of us where

democracy is on the defensive. It is not necessarily on the defensive in the developed part of the world. In [the United States], of course, we are on the defensive. But most other developed countries are more or less doing okay - they're not doing great - when it comes particularly to their democracy.

But what concerns us is that there seems to be, emerging, an alternative model, and that is epitomized by countries such as Russia, the Arab Emirates, China and others. And they are positioning themselves to be the alternative to the West. They do not value democracy, and they have no intention of becoming democratic.

What is the problem here? If they are successful in providing a quality of life that over time may approach what we have in the West, we are going to be even more on the defensive than we are now. That is what emerges in the data very clearly.

Q: What are the bright spots?

Anheier: The gains are in Africa. And that is, I think, a big chance, right? So we should realize that Africa is not only the bad news continent. There is a potential there, and that's where I think the international community would have to wake up and say, hey, these countries are very open to democracy, and let's help them along.

Q: The report's last data is from 2021, mid-pandemic. If you had data for the last three years, what do you think it might show?

Anheier: I think we probably see the trends that we observe [in the report] continue when it comes to democratic accountability - so continued erosion, with a few exceptions. Poland is coming back. [Globally,] with the state capacities (...) Covid-19 revealed many of the weaknesses that we have. (...) Public goods provision is probably going to be stable. That's my hunch.

More information: www.berggruen.org/projects

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Prof. Helmut K. Anheier speaks on stage during the 2024 Berggruen Governance Index at UCLA Luskin School of Public Affairs on Wednesday, May 15, 2024, in Los Angeles. The forum aims to foster discussions on best governance practices and explore sustainable solutions for strengthening democratic governance and promoting global stability. (Jordan Strauss/AP Images for Democracy News Alliance) / More information via ots and www.presseportal.de/en/nr/174021 / The use of this image for editorial purposes is permitted and free of charge provided that all conditions of use are complied with. Publication must include image credits.



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