The Lexical Index of Electoral Democracy (LIED) Dataset (v6.8)

LIED is the most comprehensive dataset on democracy in terms of country-years. It covers all independent countries and most semi-sovereign polities and overseas colonies, protectorates, etc. within the 1789 to 2020 timespan. Scores have also been assigned to the units in the case of short-term foreign occupation. Scores for each indicator reflect the status of a country on the last day of the calendar year (31 December) and are not intended to reflect the mean value of an indicator across the previous 364 days. Coding decisions are based on country-specific sources. All original coding has been done by Svend-Erik Skaaning (skaaning@ps.au.dk).

The dataset consists of 14 original indicators and original two indices. The LIED dataset offers indicators on whether legislative elections are on track (legislative_elections), whether (direct or indirect) executive elections are on track (executive_elections), whether multiple parties are able to run for legislative elections (multi-party_legislative_elections), whether there is universal male suffrage (male_suffrage), and whether there is universal female suffrage (female_suffrage),[1] whether elections are genuinely contested (competitive_elections), whether political liberties in the form of freedom of expression, assembly, and association, are respected (political_liberties), whether countries experienced democratic transition in a given year (democratic_transition), the mode of democratic transition (transition_type), whether countries experienced democratic breakdown in a given year (democratic_breakdown), the mode of democratic breakdown (breakdown_type), whether elections led to a government turnover (turnover_event), and whether a period of competitive elections has been characterized by at least one government turnover (turnover_period). Finally, the data are used to construct two indices, i.e., the Lexical Index of Electoral Democracy (lexical_index) and an extended version called Lexical Index of Electoral Democracy+ (lexical_index_plus).

Variable descriptions

Countryn: Name of the polity.

Cow: Correlates of War country ID. Note that we have made up additional COW codes for countries not covered by the COW project.

Vdem: Varieties of Democracy country ID.

Male_suffrage: Indicates whether virtually all male citizens are allowed to vote in national elections. Legal restrictions pertaining to age, criminal conviction, incompetence, and local residency are not considered. Informal restrictions such as those obtaining in the American South prior to 1965 are also not considered. 1=present, 0=absent.

[1] These indicators are inspired by similar variables developed by Adam Przeworski et al. in connection to the initially in the Political Institutions and Events (PIPE) dataset (i.e., LEGSELEC, EXSELEC, OPPOSITION, MALE SUFFRAGE, and FEMALE SUFFRAGE).

Female_suffrage: Indicates whether virtually all female citizens are allowed to vote in national elections. Similar coding rules apply. 1=present, 0=absent.

Executive_elections: Indicates whether the chief executive is either directly or indirectly elected (i.e., chosen by people who have been elected). This indicator takes into account whether executive power is responsible to an elected parliament if the executive is not directly elected, a situation generated by a series of historical and contemporary monarchies and principalities. Episodes of international supervision or domination following international interventions, occupation, or colonization, meaning that the polity does practice exercise self-government, are also understood as disqualifying. 1=present, 0=absent.

Legislative_elections: Indicates whether a legislative body, a parliament, issues at least some laws and does not perform executive functions. The lower house (or unicameral chamber) of the legislature is at least partly elected. The legislature has not been closed. 1=present, 0=absent.

Multi-party_legislative_elections: Indicates whether the lower house (or unicameral chamber) of the legislature is (at least in part) elected by voters facing more than one choice. Specifically, parties are not banned and (a) more than one party, including opposition parties, are allowed to compete or (b) candidates run without party labels but represent distinct political positions. 1=present, 0=absent.

Competitive_elections: The chief executive offices and seats in the effective legislative body are filled by elections characterized by uncertainty, meaning that the elections are, in principle, sufficiently free to enable the opposition to gain power if they were to attract sufficient support from the electorate. This presumes that control over key executive and legislative offices is determined by elections, the executive and members of the legislature have not been unconstitutionally removed, and the legislature has not been dissolved. With respect to the electoral process, this presumes that the constitutional timing of elections has not been violated (in a more than marginal fashion), non-extremist parties are not banned, opposition candidates are generally free to participate, voters experience little systematic coercion in exercising their electoral choice, and electoral fraud does not determine who wins. With respect to the outcome, this presumes that the declared winner of executive and legislative elections reflects the votes cast by the electorate, as near as can be determined from extant sources. Incumbent turnover (as a result of multi-party elections) is regarded as a strong indicator of competition, but is neither necessary nor sufficient. In addition, we rely on reports from outside observers (as reported in books, articles, and country reports) about whether the foregoing conditions have been met in a given election. Coding for this variable does not take into account whether there is a level playing field, whether all contestants gain access to funding and media, whether media coverage is unbiased, whether civil liberties are respected, or other features associated with fully free and fair elections. 1=present, 0=absent.

Lexical_index: We operationalize electoral democracy as a series of necessary-and-sufficient conditions arrayed in an ordinal scale. The resulting Lexical Index of Electoral Democracy (LIED). In this fashion, we arrive at an index that performs a classificatory function, each level identifies a unique and theoretically meaningful regime type, as well as a discriminating function. To generate the lexical index from the six binary variables described above, a country-year is assigned scores (0 to 6) based on the following criteria:

0: legislative_election=0 & executive_elections=0 (regime type: non-electoral autocracies)

1: legislative_elections=1 or executive_elections=1 & multi-party_legislative_elections=0 (regime type: one-party autocracies, few cases where executive elections are on track but there is no functioning elected parliament)

2: legislative_elections=1 & multi-party_legislative_elections=1 & executive_elections=0 (regime type: multiparty autocracies without elected executive – generally because a monarch influences government appointment and removal or foreign powers dominate political decision-making or has significant veto powers)

3: legislative_elections=1 & multi-party_legislative_elections=1 & executive_elections=1 & competitive_elections=0 (regime type: multiparty autocracies)

4: legislative_elections=1 & multi-party_legislative_elections=1 & executive_elections=1 & competitive_elections=1 & male_suffrage=0 (regime type: exclusive democracies)

5: legislative_elections=1 & multi-party_legislative_elections=1 & executive_elections=1 & competitive_elections=1 & male_suffrage=1 & female_suffrage=0 (regime type: male democracies)

6: legislative_elections=1 & multi-party_legislative_elections=1 & executive_elections=1 & competitive_elections=1 & male_suffrage=1 & female_suffrage=1 (regime type: electoral democracies)

Political_liberties: Freedom of expression, freedom of assembly, and freedom of association are respected. All groups, which are not openly anti-democratic, are allowed to organize freely and to assemble peacefully, and free speech, including critique of government and state-authorities, is tolerated and practiced freely by individuals and groups, including private as well as public media outlets. 1=present, 0=absent.

Lexical_index_plus: This index, LIED+, add an extra layer to the upper-end of LIED in the form of political liberties. This is done to distinguish between electoral democracies and polyarchies. The meaning of the scores from 0 to 5 are identical to LIED, whereas 6 and 7 refer to the following configurations of indicator values:

6: legislative_elections=1 & multi-party_legislative_elections=1 & executive_elections=1 & competitive_elections=1 & male_suffrage=1 & female_suffrage=1 & political_liberties=0 (regime type: electoral democracies)

7: legislative_elections=1 & multi-party_legislative_elections=1 & executive_elections=1 & competitive_elections=1 & male_suffrage=1 & female_suffrage=1 & political_liberties=1 (regime type: polyarchies)

Democratic_transition: Indicates whether a democratic transition took place in a given year as signified by a change in the competitive_elections indicator from 0 in the previous year to 1 in the current year. 1=present, 0=absent.

Transition_type: For all country-years with democratic transitions, we have coded the mode of transition based on a distinction between: 1=conversion (incumbent-led), 2=cooperative (pact between incumbents and opposition/balanced influence), 3=collapse (opposition-led), 4=foreign supervision (imposition by foreign power based on intervention or highly asymmetrical – partial or full – decolonization), 5=foreign liberalization (democracy reemerges after occupational power has lost war to foreign powers). Country-years without democratic transitions are scored 0.

Democratic_breakdown: Indicates whether a democratic breakdown took place in a given year as signified by a change in competitive_elections indicator from 1 in the previous year to 0 in the current year. 1=present, 0=absent.

Breakdown_type: For all country-years with democratic transitions, we have coded the mode of transition based on a distinction between: 1=implicit regression induced by incumbents, 2=military coup, 3=foreign occupation, 4=self-coup (incumbents close down parliament unduly and take full political control), 5=coup or civil conflict headed by opposition party/movement, 6=coup headed by monarch. Country-years without democratic breakdowns are scored 0.

Turnover_period: Indicates whether a particular country-year is part of a period between an initial electoral government alternation (as indicated by a turnover event, see below) in a multi-party electoral regime and an interruption of the same multi-party electoral regime (as indicated by a score of 0 on executive elections or multi-party_legislative_elections, see above). If another turnover event happens later in the same polity, a new turnover period begins. 1=present, 0=absent.

Turnover_event: Indicates whether partisan control over government power alternated from an elected chief executive to another party/coalition/candidate representing the opposition as a consequence of a multi-party election in a particular country-year. Multi-party legislative and (direct or indirect) executive elections are considered necessary conditions for a genuine turnover. 1=present, 0=absent.

Two_turnover_period: Indicates whether a particular country-year is part of a period between a second electoral government alternation (as indicated by a turnover event, see below) in a multi-party electoral regime and an interruption of the same multi-party electoral regime (as indicated by a score of 0 on executive elections or multi-party_legislative_elections, see above). If two turnover events happens later in the same polity under a new multi_party electoral regime, a new two-turnover period begins. 1=present, 0=absent.

Sovereign: Indicates whether a polity/country is a separate unit in the international system of states (1) or subjected to foreign colonization or occupation with formal loss of autonomy (0).

For the theoretical background and motivation, some descriptive overviews, comparisons with extant datasets, etc., associated with LIED, see Skaaning, Svend-Erik; John Gerring & Henrikas Bartusevicius (2015). "A Lexical Index of Electoral Democracy." Comparative Political Studies, Vol. 48, No. 12, pp. 1491-1525. Henrikas Bartusevicius was in charge of the coding linked to an inter-coder reliability test described in the dataset paper. Note that minor revisions of scores are

sometimes made from version to version based on new information, meaning that users are advised always to use the newest version.