

How Democracies Fail: Implications for the U.S.

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1

1. Democracy defined and trends in
democratic government

2

Representative democracy defined

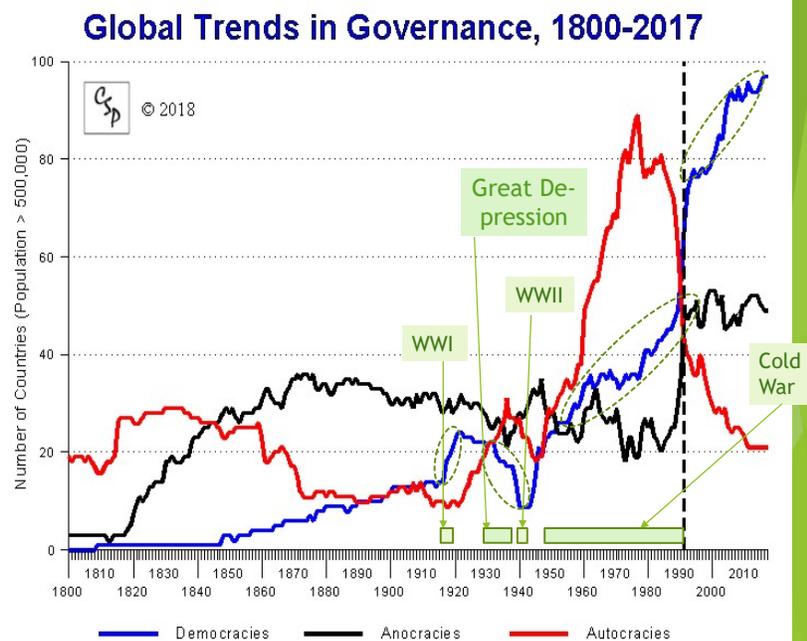
Democracy is variable, not an either-or state

Key features of democracies

- Effective participation by (almost) all adult citizens
- Voting equality (opportunity and weight of vote)
- Media and information freedom
- Rule of law
- Elite and mass culture of compliance with democratic rules of the game (legitimacy)

3

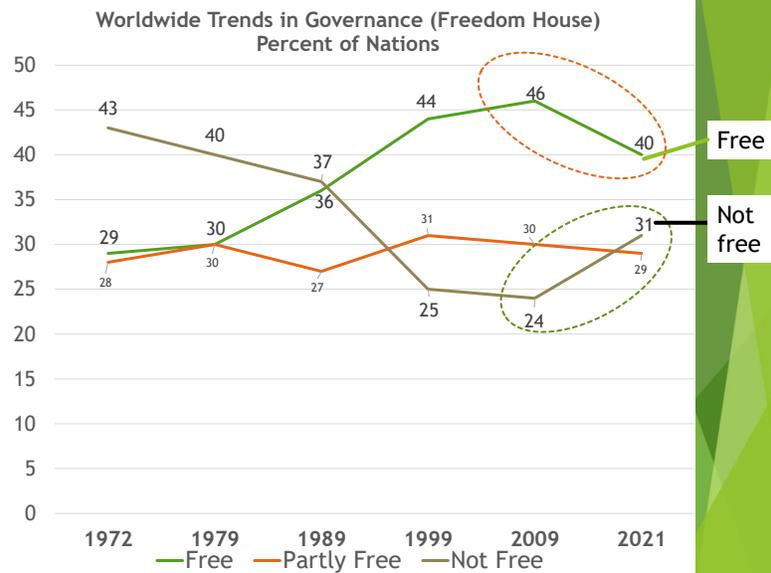
Long term trends in democracy 1800-2017 (Polity Project)



4

Trends in democracy since 1972 (Freedom House, 2021)

Percent of countries that are free, partly free and not free



5

2. Formation and survival of democracies

6

Why autocratic elites relinquish power to non-elites

- ▶ **Modernization**
 - ▶ Expanding economic resources give masses more political tools
 - ▶ Intellectual resources (education) distribute critical action skills
 - ▶ Organizational resources (civil society, unions)
- ▶ **Culture change** - rise of democratic values among masses and especially elites
- ▶ **Actions of external actors** (other nations)

7

How democracies form (processes)

- ✓ Organically (among hunter-gatherers)
- 🏛️ Reform by extant elites (writing new rules)
- 💡 Replacement by force (victorious rebellion)
- 🤝 Negotiated settlement of internal conflict
- 👤 Imposition by a foreign power
- 🔗 Withdrawal of an external power

8

Conditions favoring democracy's survival

- ▶ Economic growth (increases legitimacy)
- ▶ Social homogeneity (ethnicity, religion, etc.)
- ▶ Political culture and system legitimacy
 - ▶ **Mass public acceptance of the system**
 - ▶ **Widespread elite acceptance of**
 - ▶ **The formal rules and institutions of democracy,**
 - ▶ **The inherent uncertainty of democracy, and**
 - ▶ **Informal “guardrails of democracy”:** inter-elite mutual toleration and forbearance
- ▶ External actors' support or opposition, regime types

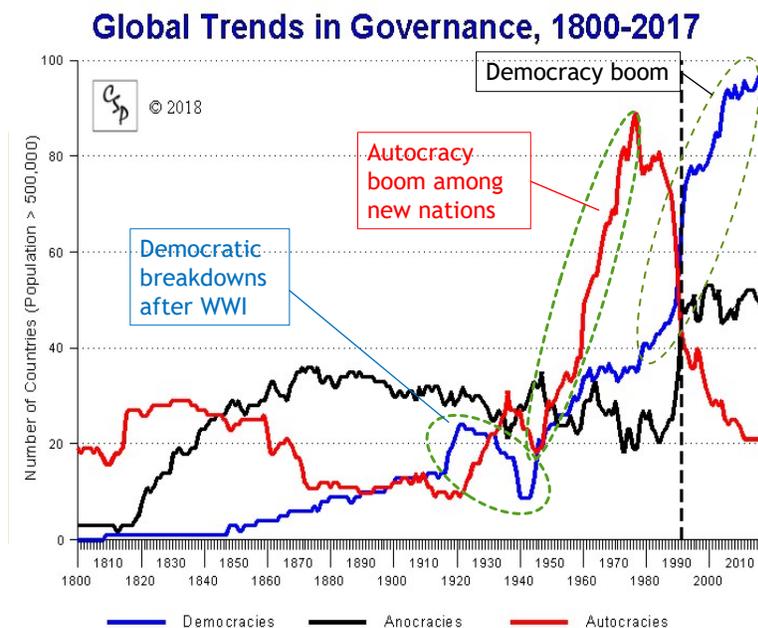
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The historic record 1800-2017

Key
democracies = blue line)

anocracies (neither
democracy nor autocracy)
= black line

autocracies = red line



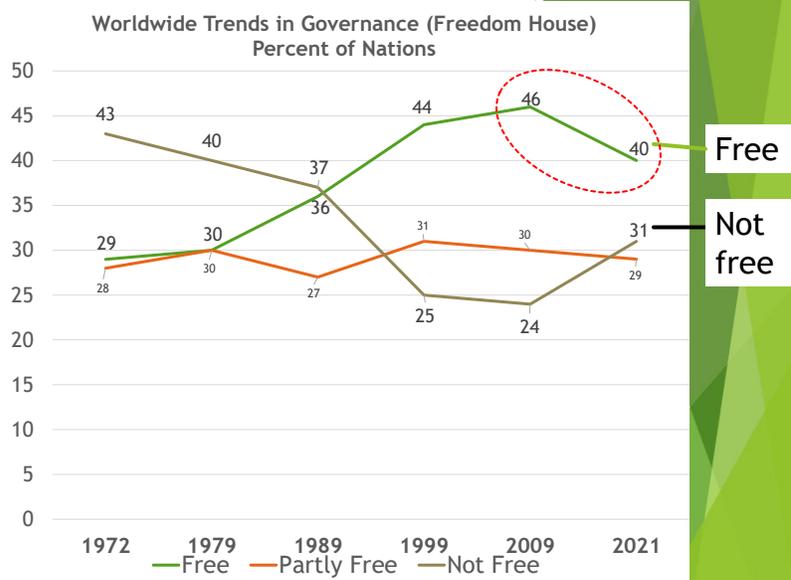
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3. But now after 7 decades of growth, democracies are presently in decline or weakening, including the United States

11

World trends in democracy since 1972 (Freedom House, 2021)

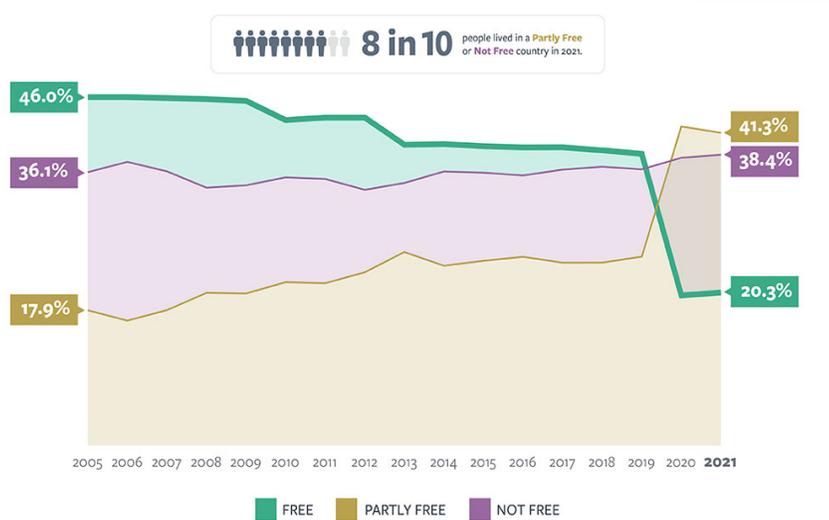
Percent of countries that are free, partly free and not free



12

Living in a less free world - percent of world's population (Freedom House)

The percent of the world's population living in "free" countries has fallen from 46% to 20% since 2005



13

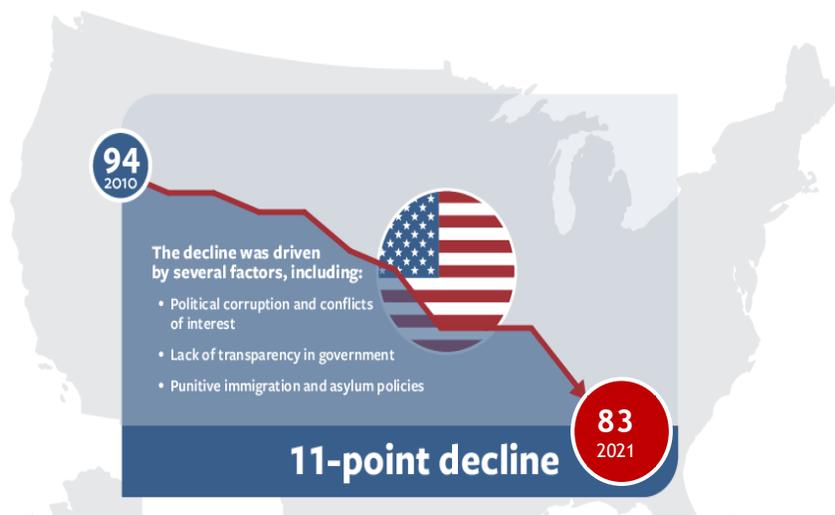
United States' democracy score has declined since 2010

Score range 0-100

Source: Freedom House, *Freedom in the World 2021 and 2022*

United States in Decline

Over the past 10 years, the United States' aggregate *Freedom in the World* score has declined by 11 points, placing it among the 25 countries that have suffered the largest declines in this period.



14

Key components of a working democracy

1. Formal rules of the political game
 - ▶ Constitution
 - ▶ Laws
 - ▶ Regulations
2. Institutions and governmental structures
 - ▶ Legislature
 - ▶ Executive branch
 - ▶ Administrative agencies
 - ▶ Security forces
 - ▶ Courts
3. Public compliance and cooperation (attitudes and actions) of
 - ▶ Elites (in government and interest groups)
 - ▶ Mass public

The state

Actors

15

Maintenance of a democracy

- ▶ The keys to regime stability lie in elite and mass compliance and cooperation with the state
- ▶ Main sources of compliance and cooperation
 1. **Political legitimacy** = voluntary acceptance & compliance by engaged mass public, elites and interest groups
 2. **Indifference** of some actors
 3. **Coercion of resisting elite and mass actors - a risky tool**
- ▶ A loss of legitimacy among engaged elites and mass publics can cause regime breakdown (**a failure of democracy**)

16

4. Why and how some democracies have failed

17

Why democratic regimes have failed - observed causes of lost legitimacy

- ▶ **Economic crisis** (Germany 1930s, Chile 1973)
- ▶ **Losing a war** (Germany 1920s)
- ▶ **Ethnic and religious divisions** (Lebanon 1975-90 civil war; Yugoslavia 1990s)
- ▶ **Extreme party polarization** (Spain 1936-39, Chile 1973)
- ▶ **Malign external forces** such as invasion - (Poland 1939, France 1940)

18

Why democratic regimes have failed - observed causes of lost legitimacy (cont.)

- ▶ **Bad leadership** - (demagoguery, authoritarianism)
 - ▶ **Corrupt and predatory leadership** - (Venezuela 1958-2000s)
 - ▶ **Disloyal/antidemocratic elites** - (subversion from within - Italy's Mussolini 1925, Germany Hitler's 1932, Peru's Fujimori 1992)
 - ▶ **Institutional authoritarianism**
 - ▶ Security forces overthrow democracy (Chile 1973, Spain 1936-39; Thailand 2019, Myanmar 2021)

19

How democracies fail - processes that have ended democratic regimes

- ▶ **Military coup** (common - e.g., Chile 1973, Thailand several since 1932, Myanmar 2021)
- ▶ **Foreign interference** (invasion or subversion -common - e.g., USSR's intervention in E. Europe late 1940s)
- ▶ **Anti-democratic behavior by leader(s)** (common - e.g., Germany's Hitler 1932, Peru's Fujimori 1992, Venezuela's Chávez mid-2000s)
- ▶ **Domestic insurrection** (popular uprisings - rare - e.g., Fascists and army in Spain 1936-1939)

20

5. US democracy is at risk

21

Context: Factors now affecting US regime legitimacy

- ▶ **Social divisions**
- ▶ **Sharp partisan/ideological divisions.** US parties have grown apart
- ▶ **Malign external actors** stoking ethnic/partisan divisions
- ▶ **Lower support for democratic rules and practice among political elites**
 - ▶ Decline of mutual tolerance
 - ▶ Decline of forbearance - injudicious use of power
 - ▶ DJT's rejection of 2020 election outcome
 - ▶ 6 Jan 2021 attempted coup
- ▶ **Economic conditions** - the COVID recession, erratic recovery, inflation

All of these have tended to reduce citizens' trust in the U.S. political system (its legitimacy)

22

Americans' trust in government (a common measure of legitimacy)

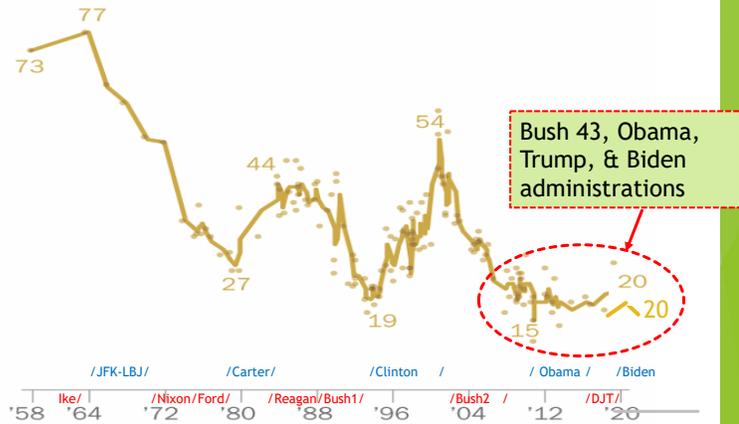
(1958-August 2022)

Note: From 1976-2020 the trend line represents a three-survey moving average.
 Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted July 27-Aug. 2, 2020.
 Trend sources: Pew Research Center's American Trends Panel (2020), Pew Research Center phone surveys (2019 and earlier), National Election Studies, Gallup, ABC/Washington Post, CBS/New York Times, and CNN polls.

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Public trust in federal government near historic lows for more than a decade

% who say they trust the federal government to do what is right just about always/most of the time



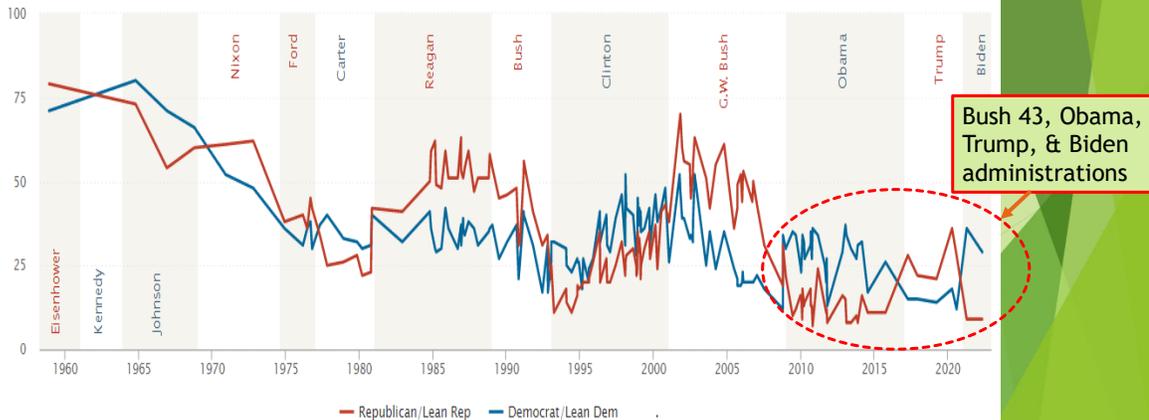
23

Trust in US government 1958-2022, by party

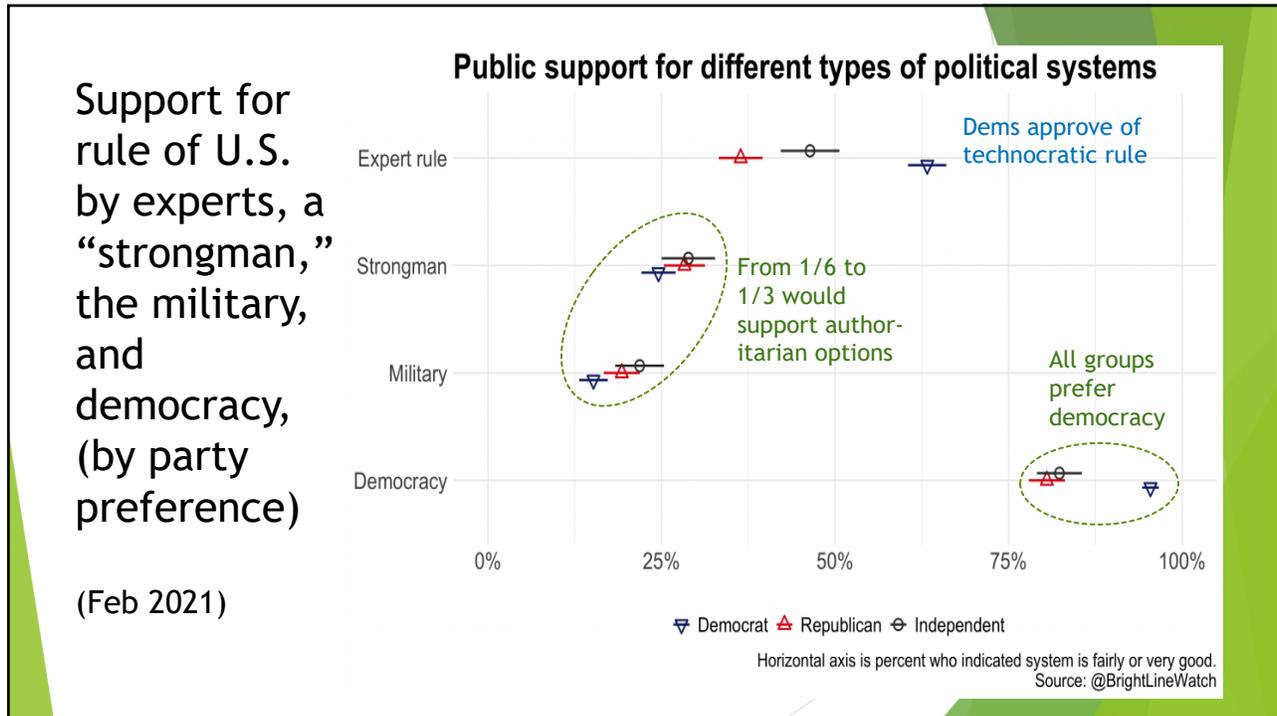
Trust in government higher among members of party that controls presidency

Chart Data Share

CLICK AND DRAG IN THE PLOT AREA TO ZOOM IN



24



25

6.The really hard questions about our future:

Where are we headed?
Will U.S. democracy survive?

26

Features of representative democracy that have already been affected in the U.S.

Democracy is variable, and has already been diminished

Essential features of democracies

- Effective participation by (almost) all adult citizens
- Voting equality (opportunity and weight of vote)
- Rule of law
- Elite and mass culture of compliance with democratic rules of the game (legitimacy)
- Media and information freedom

27

Stressors on U.S. democracy that have contributed to other nations' democratic breakdowns...

28

U.S. system stressors 2022-2025

	High	Moderate	Low	Prospects
Extreme party polarization	Yes			Continue/grow
Malign external actors	Yes			Continue/grow
Anti-democratic peak elites	Yes			Continue
Anti-democratic elites (mid-level and local)	Yes	Yes		Grow
Ethnic/religious divisions		Yes		Continue
Economic crisis (pandemic)		Yes		Decrease (?)
Institutional authoritarianism (military)			No	No
Lost war			No	No

29

Government responses to 6 Jan 2021 insurrection and attempted coup

- ▶ Congressional investigation is wrapping up - has made its case against DJT but **has not moved public opinion**.
- ▶ Executive Branch DOJ investigation and prosecutions (a bottom-up strategy) are **an appropriately deliberate and moderate response**
- ▶ DJT endorsing state/local officials and candidates who might control election apparatus in future elections
- ▶ States controlled by Rs are already changing laws
 - ▶ Making it harder to vote
 - ▶ Gerrymandering

30

Might U.S. democracy fail in the near or middle term?

Ongoing concerns

- ▶ Formal rules - already de-democratizing
- ▶ Elite political culture
- ▶ Elections of 2022 and 2024

31

Concerns about elite political culture and behavior

- ▶ While many public officials remain compliant with democracy, **other political elites do not embrace democratic norms**
 - ▶ DJT has dominated Republican Party
 - ▶ Some parts of Republican Party act anti-democratically, for example:
 - ▶ Majority of R House members voted not to certify 2020 EC result even after attack
 - ▶ Rs have subsequently withdrawn criticism of 6 Jan 2021 coup & attack on the Capitol

32

Concerns about general political culture and behavior

- ▶ **Domestic terrorism** is rising - DJT has cultivated various violent groups such as Three Percenters, Proud Boys, Oath Keepers
- ▶ **Mass public** - divided by partisanship, race and religion, **legitimacy of the system is eroded**

33

The 2022 and 2024 elections and their aftermaths

- ▶ 2022 - No matter which party controls each house of Congress after November 2022 election, **the likelihood is for increasing partisan hostility**
- ▶ 2024 election outcome scenarios
 - ▶ **If DJT is nominated by Republicans and wins** and Rs control Congress, I expect
 - ▶ Extensive protests by Dems + repression
 - ▶ Subsequent decline of rule of law and new restrictions on voting, etc., further rollbacks of rights
 - ▶ **If DJT is nominated by Rs but loses** general election and EC -- he will claim fraud and encourage insurgent violence (possible civil war)

34

7. Conclusions in the form of a political risk analysis

35

Chances are for one of three outcomes by 2025 and beyond

1. Economy and inflation cool off, **DJT isn't nominated in 2024**, democracy survives - 30% probability
2. **DJT nominated and wins in 2024**; democratic decline or breakdown ensue during second Trump administration - 30% probability
3. **DJT nominated but loses in 2024**, massive protest and insurrection ensue - 40% probability with an even chance for any of the following outcomes:
 - ▶ Pro-DJT protests eventually cool off if government response is not excessive, democ. survives - 10% prob.
 - ▶ Insurrection becomes civil war, nation fragments, full democratic breakdown - 10% probability
 - ▶ Insurrection becomes civil war, rightist victory, eventual autocratic government - 10% probability
 - ▶ Insurrection/civil war end in negotiated settlement, eventual partial democratic restoration - 10% prob.

36

Discussion and questions?

37

Thank you!

38