

# Academic Freedom Index

Update 2025



This year’s update of the *Academic Freedom Index* (AFI) provides an overview of the state of academic freedom across 179 countries. As in previous years,<sup>1</sup> academic freedom levels vary greatly across the world; please see the world map in Figure 1.

In 2024, elections were held in more than 70 countries. In this year’s analysis, we therefore spotlight the development of academic freedom in countries that hold elections under conditions that range from free to at-least constrained. We excluded closed autocracies from this analysis. Specifically, we explore how the political influence of anti-pluralist parties relates to varying levels of academic freedom.

The analysis shows that countries with anti-pluralist parties in government have lower levels of academic freedom than those where anti-pluralist parties have little-to-no political influence. To further explore the relationship between anti-pluralism and academic freedom, we discuss three illustrative cases: Argentina, Poland, and the United States.

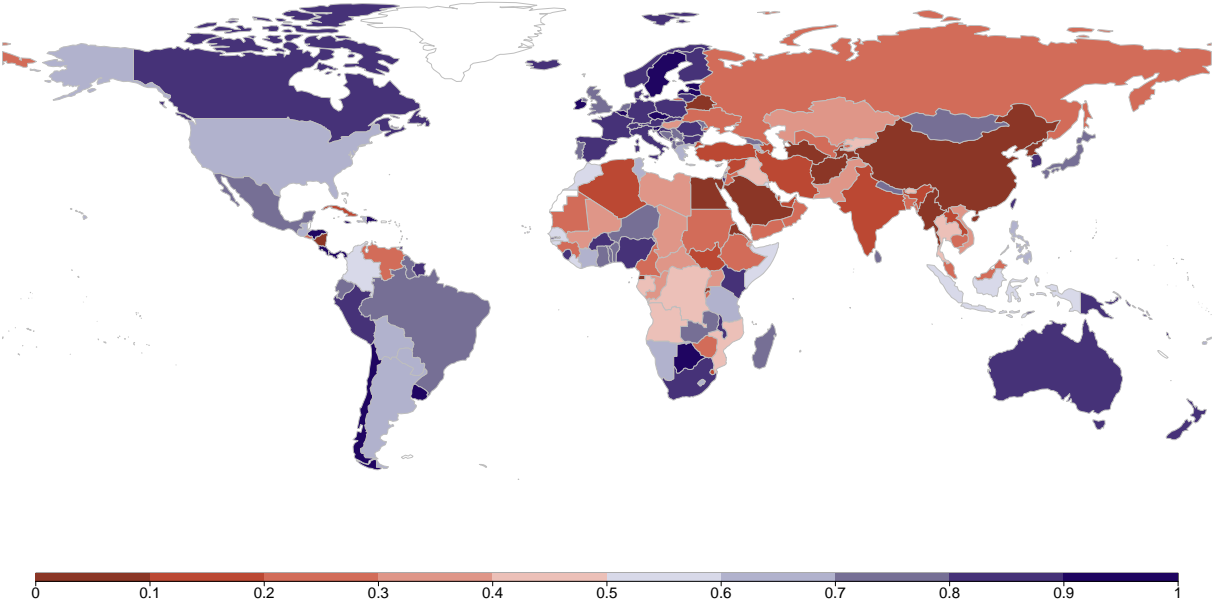


Figure 1: The State of Academic Freedom in 2024 (0–1, low to high)

The AFI world map visualizes *de facto* levels of academic freedom and builds on five indicators that capture distinct dimensions of academic freedom. The AFI is a peer-reviewed approach to conceptualizing and measuring academic freedom worldwide, providing a comprehensive picture of a complex phenomenon.<sup>2</sup> The index is calculated using a customized Bayesian IRT-measurement model, and over one million data points collected at the coder level.<sup>3</sup> It draws on the expertise of 2,363 scholars worldwide and is freely accessible at [academic-freedom-index.net](http://academic-freedom-index.net) and [v-dem.net](http://v-dem.net).

<sup>1</sup> See Katrin Kinzelbach, Staffan I. Lindberg, and Lars Lott, “Academic Freedom Index – 2024 Update,” 2024, doi:10.25593/open-fau-405; Katrin Kinzelbach et al., “Academic Freedom Index – 2023 Update,” 2023, doi:10.25593/opus4-fau-21630.

<sup>2</sup> Janika Spannagel and Katrin Kinzelbach, “The Academic Freedom Index and Its Indicators: Introduction to New Global Time-Series v-Dem Data,” *Quality & Quantity* 57 (2023): 3969–89, doi:10.1007/s11135-022-01544-0; Lars Lott and Janika Spannagel, “Quality Assessment of the Academic Freedom Index: Strengths, Weaknesses, and How Best to Use It,” *Perspectives on Politics*, 2025, 1–23, doi:10.1017/S1537592724001968.

<sup>3</sup> Curated in version 15 of the V-Dem dataset: Michael Coppedge et al., “V-Dem [Country-Year/Country-Date] Dataset V15” (University of Gothenburg: Varieties of Democracy Institute, 2025).

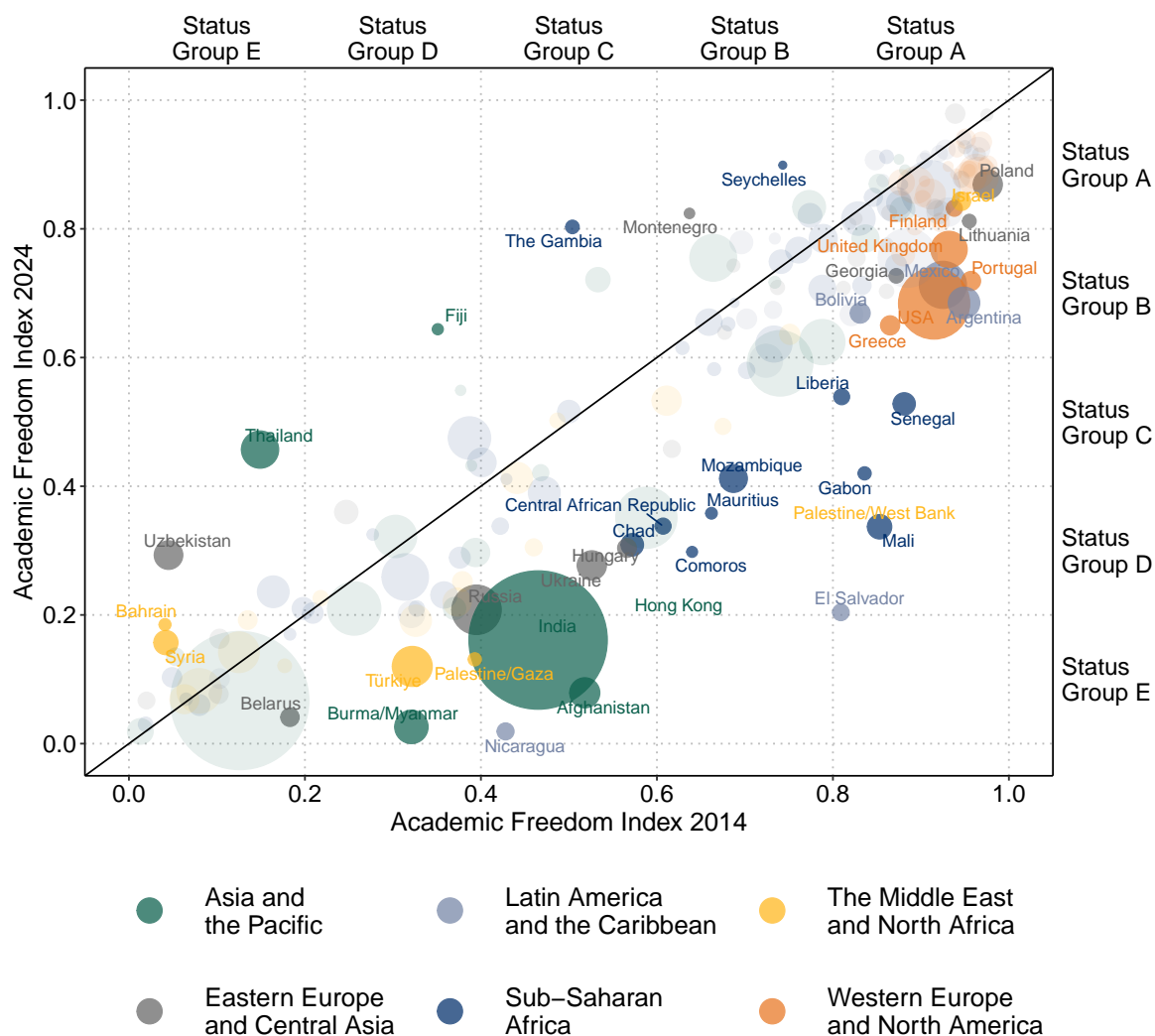


Figure 2: Increasing and Decreasing Scores on the Academic Freedom Index, 2014–2024. Academic freedom increased in countries above the diagonal line and decreased in countries or territories below it. Countries and territories are labelled if the difference between 2014 and 2024 was statistically significant and substantially meaningful. The size of the dots indicates the population size of the countries/territories in 2022 (data from World Bank’s World Development Indicators).

Figure 2 shows countries and territories with substantial and statistically significant declines or improvements in academic freedom over the past ten years.<sup>4</sup> For ease of orientation, we also present five quintiles, or status groups, ranging from fully free (status group A) to completely restricted (status group E). The dots in Figure 2 are proportionate to population size. That is, the dot size indicates how many people are affected in the respective countries or territories. For example, the decline of academic freedom in India impacts a large population, whereas fewer people are implicated in Mozambique, and even fewer in Portugal. Among the 34 cases of declining academic freedom are newly registered decliners, for example Chad, Finland, Georgia, Greece, and Israel, as well as Palestine/Gaza (coded separately from Palestine/West Bank). Figure 8 also includes two more countries where academic freedom declines are statistically significant but not in a substantially meaningful way: Germany and Austria.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>4</sup>Using a simple metric comparing ten-year intervals and controlling for overlapping uncertainty intervals.

<sup>5</sup>In line with previous AFI Updates, we define substantially meaningful changes as positive or negative changes that are greater or equal to 0.1 points.

Eight countries (Bahrain, Fiji, Montenegro, Seychelles, Syria, Thailand, The Gambia, and Uzbekistan) have statistically and substantially significant higher levels of academic freedom in 2024 than in 2014. These improvements occurred at different levels, however, and did not always result in mostly or fully free levels of academic freedom. The dots in lighter colors depict the remaining 137 countries, where academic freedom levels have not changed in a substantially meaningful and statistically significant way.<sup>6</sup> This group includes countries as diverse as Denmark, South Korea, and Tunisia.

Declines in academic freedom occur in very diverse contexts, and there is no single explanation for the 34 cases of decline depicted in Figure 2. In the next section, we explore one of several plausible drivers of academic freedom decline, which is the success of anti-pluralist parties at the ballot box.

## Spotlight: Anti-Pluralism and Academic Freedom

Anti-pluralist parties “lack commitment to i) the democratic process as the legal means of gaining and losing power; ii) the legitimacy of political opponents; iii) peaceful resolution of disagreements and rejection of political violence; and iv) unequivocal support for civil liberties of minorities.”<sup>7</sup> Once in power, anti-pluralist parties tend to deepen differences between political camps, reduce the space for public contestation, and undermine mutual forbearance, as aptly shown by previous research.<sup>8</sup> Consequently, one would expect that anti-pluralist political parties undermine not only freedom of information and expression in general but also academic freedom specifically.

To empirically explore the link between anti-pluralist parties’ access to political power and a potentially related threat to academic freedom, we use data from the AFI and data from the Anti-Pluralism Index.<sup>9</sup> The latter index measures the extent to which political parties commit to democratic norms before elections. It ranges from 0 (not anti-pluralist) to 1 (fully anti-pluralist). Of the 34 cases of decline in academic freedom identified in Figure 2 above, 19 countries had an Anti-Pluralist Parties Index<sup>10</sup> score above 0.3 in 2014.<sup>11</sup> Importantly, the index score at any given time is only indicative, since anti-pluralist parties’ strategies and their access to power develop over longer periods. Figure 3 covers a period of 50 years and visualizes the association between academic freedom and levels on the Anti-Pluralist Parties Index. This figure only includes countries that hold multiparty elections,

<sup>6</sup>Figure 2 plots the development for 179 countries for which data is available for 2014 and 2024.

<sup>7</sup>Juraj Medzihorsky and Staffan I. Lindberg, “Walking the Talk: How to Identify Anti-Pluralist Parties,” *Party Politics* 30, no. 3 (2024): 422–23, doi:10.1177/13540688231153092.

<sup>8</sup>Steven Levitsky and Daniel Ziblatt, *How Democracies Die* (New York: Crown Publishing Group, 2018); Takis S. Pappas, “Populists in Power,” *Journal of Democracy* 30, no. 2 (2019): 70–84, doi:10.1353/jod.2019.0026; Robert C. Lieberman et al., “The Trump Presidency and American Democracy: A Historical and Comparative Analysis,” *Perspectives on Politics* 17, no. 2 (2019): 470–79, doi:10.1017/S1537592718003286; Andrea L. P. Pirro and Ben Stanley, “Forging, Bending, and Breaking: Enacting the ‘Illiberal Playbook’ in Hungary and Poland,” *Perspectives on Politics* 20, no. 1 (2022): 86–101, doi:10.1017/S1537592721001924.

<sup>9</sup>Medzihorsky and Lindberg, “Walking the Talk”; Data for the Anti-Pluralism Index is collected from the V-Party v2 dataset: <https://doi.org/10.23696/vpartyv2>. Data from the V-Party dataset starts in 1970 and ends in 2019.

<sup>10</sup>We use the data from the Anti-Pluralism Index to calculate the Anti-Pluralist Parties Index. The latter index captures anti-pluralism levels at the country-year level, and aggregated at the party-level based on the seat shares anti-pluralist parties gained in the legislature in the most recent national elections. Data at the country-year level is filled up to the next elections within a five-year period. Similar to the Anti-Pluralism Index, the Anti-Pluralist Parties Index ranges from 0 (not anti-pluralist) to 1 (fully anti-pluralist). Compare Fabio Angiolillo, Felix Wiebrecht, and Staffan I. Lindberg, “Democratic-Autocratic Party Systems: A New Index” (V-Dem Institute; V-Dem Working Paper No. 143, 2023), <https://www.v-dem.net/>.

<sup>11</sup>Note that the comparison of 2024 with 2014 is a simple metric that does not detect the start and end dates of declines. For a statistically more sophisticated approach to measuring academic freedom declines, see Lars Lott, “Academic Freedom Growth and Decline Episodes,” *Higher Education* 88 (2024): 999–1017, doi:10.1007/s10734-023-01156-z. Information on the Anti-Pluralist Parties Index was missing for four countries/territories, namely Afghanistan, Belarus, Palestine/West Bank, and Palestine/Gaza.

where at least one opposition party is allowed to compete for government and has a realistic chance of winning the election. However, given that we include electoral autocracies in our country selection, it is important to note that electoral competition may be legally or informally constrained.

Figure 3 shows that high levels of academic freedom often go hand in hand with the absence of strong anti-pluralism in the party system. Moreover, it also indicates that countries where anti-pluralist parties hold a large share of seats in the legislature exhibit substantially lower levels of academic freedom.

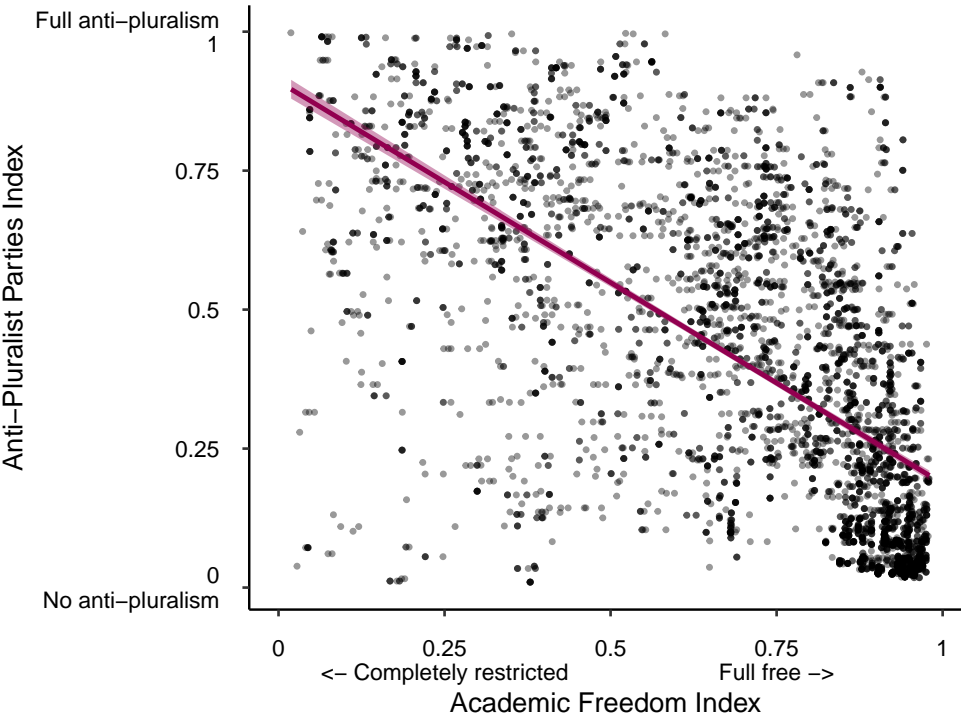


Figure 3: Anti-Pluralist Parties Index and AFI, 1970–2019. The Anti-Pluralist Parties Index captures the extent to which political parties lack commitments to democratic norms prior to elections. The plot shows the data at the country-year level and aggregated at the party-level, based on shares of seats in the most recent national elections. Data is sourced from the V-Dem Party v2 dataset.

### Anti-Pluralist Parties in Power or Opposition

The political power of anti-pluralist parties depends in no small part on their participation in government. Once in power, anti-pluralist parties may enact new laws and regulations that impose their political vision on academia, restricting free science and university autonomy. However, it is potentially not only the direct access to power that allows anti-pluralist parties to impact scholarship. The normalization of radical anti-pluralist discourse<sup>12</sup> may directly and indirectly influence science and higher education policy, for example by inducing science skepticism.<sup>13</sup> To take a differentiated look at anti-pluralist parties in government and in opposition is therefore fruitful.

<sup>12</sup>See Vicente Valentim, *The Normalization of the Radical Right: A Norms Theory of Political Supply and Demand* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2024).  
<sup>13</sup>Sukayna Younger-Khan, Nils B. Weidmann, and Lisa Oswald, "Consistent Effects of Science and Scientist Characteristics on Public Trust Across Political Regimes," *Humanities & Social Sciences Communications* 11 (2024): 1–14, doi:10.1057/s41599-024-03909-2.

Figure 4 explores the relationship between *de facto* levels of academic freedom and anti-pluralist parties' influence in government. It indicates that in countries with full academic freedom (status group A), political parties in government rarely make anti-pluralist claims. In contrast, in countries where academic freedom is severely or completely restricted (status groups D and E), governmental parties rely more extensively on anti-pluralist claims.

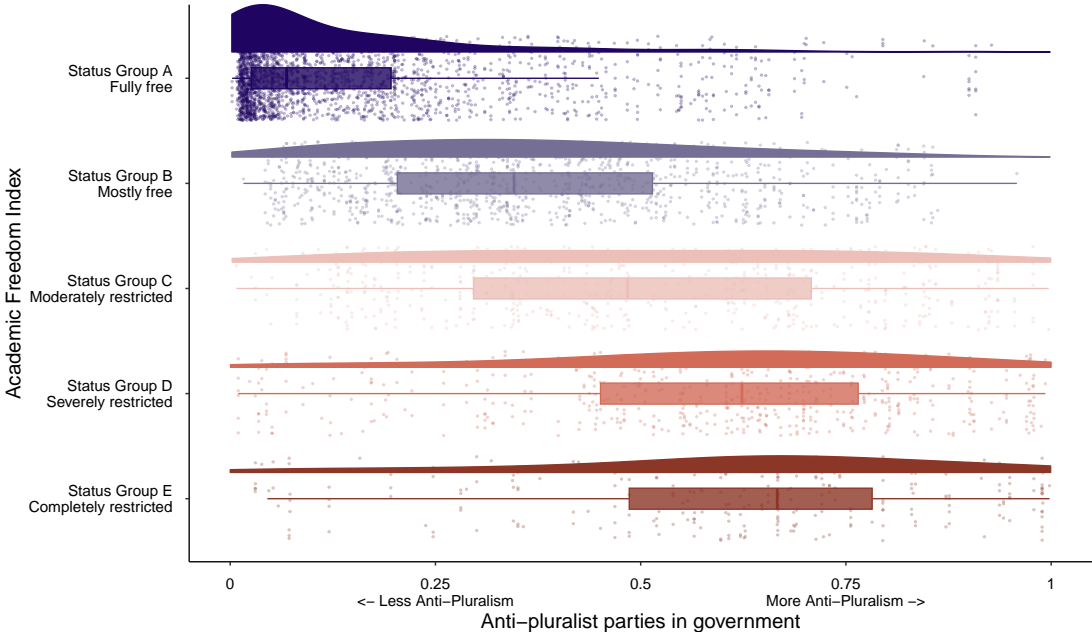


Figure 4: Anti-Pluralist Parties Index for parties in government, and AFI, 1970–2019. The vertical axis reports levels of academic freedom divided among five status groups, ranging from fully free (status group A) to completely restricted (status group E). The horizontal axis refers to the level of anti-pluralism for parties in government, weighted by their seat shares in the most recent elections. Data is sourced from the V-Dem Party v2 dataset.

Unlike arguments that diagnose a normalization of anti-pluralist demands even when their proponents remain in opposition, Figure 5 reveals that the presence of anti-pluralist parties in opposition cannot explain variance in academic freedom. That is, the extent of anti-pluralist claims among opposition parties does not appear particularly salient in driving academic freedom decline.

This finding leads us to the conclusion that it is primarily anti-pluralist parties in government that contribute to the decline in academic freedom. Even if anti-pluralist opposition parties may contribute to a more difficult environment for scientists to engage in public debate of their scholarly findings, notably in relation to politically divisive topics, scholars' freedom to research and teach, as well as universities' autonomy, appear to remain protected until anti-pluralists enter government. Although this finding offers reason for optimism, we caution that a rise of anti-pluralist parties in opposition inevitably increases their chances of eventually reaching government, with potentially dire consequences for free academia.

To further explore the relationship between the electoral success of anti-pluralist parties and academic freedom decline, we now discuss three illustrative cases in greater detail: Argentina, Poland, and the United States.

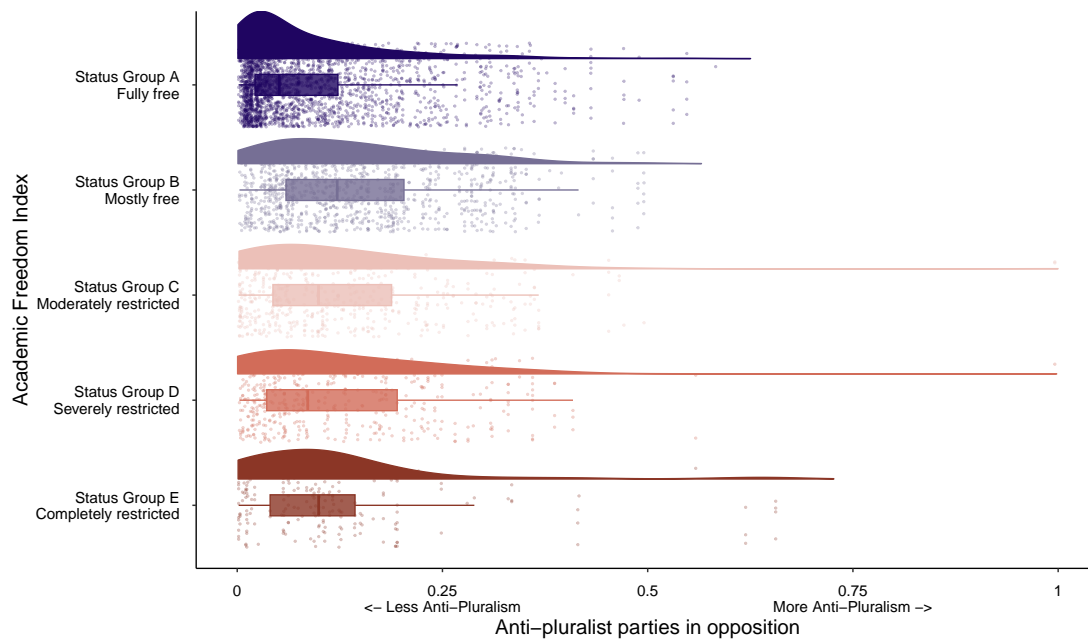


Figure 5: Anti-Pluralist Parties Index for parties in opposition, and AFI, 1970–2019. The vertical axis reports the levels of academic freedom divided among five status groups, ranging from fully free (status group A) to completely restricted (status group E). The horizontal axis refers to the level of anti-pluralism for parties in opposition, weighted by their seat shares in the most recent elections. Data is sourced from the V-Dem Party v2 dataset.

## Case Studies

One new country recorded as declining in the 2025 AFI Update is **Argentina**. As Figure 6 highlights, this decline accelerated after the victory of President Javier Milei and his La Libertad Avanza coalition in the 2023 elections. In line with anti-pluralist characteristics, President Milei’s rhetoric centers around a strong anti-establishment discourse.<sup>14</sup> He sharply criticized opposition parties and portrayed the state as a criminal organization that must be restricted.<sup>15</sup> After the elections, he delegitimized opposition parties as enemies of the will of the majority.<sup>16</sup> Milei has shown generally little commitment to respecting democratic norms and procedures, has exerted heavy pressure on state institutions, and has delegitimized the opposition with hate-filled rhetoric.

Against this backdrop, Figure 6 shows a decline for all academic freedom indicators since 2023. Notably, university autonomy, which has long been a cornerstone of Argentina’s education system,<sup>17</sup> declined substantially. Additionally, Milei’s attacks on university professors and staff – accusing them of political corruption and of serving elite interests – represent a threat to academic reputation and potentially also freedom in the country.

<sup>14</sup>Claudia Zilla, “Javier Milei’s Ideology and Policy: Libertarian Populism in Argentina” (Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik (SWP) Comment No. 37/2024, 2024), <https://www.swp-berlin.org/10.18449/2024C37/>.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid.

<sup>16</sup>Virginia Oliveros and Emilia Simison, “Why Did Argentina Just Elect a Radical Right-Wing Political Outsider?” *Journal of Democracy*, 2023, <https://www.journalofdemocracy.org/elections/why-did-argentina-just-elect-a-radical-right-wing-political-outsider/>.

<sup>17</sup>Andrés Bernasconi, “Latin America: Weak Academic Freedom Within Strong University Autonomy,” *Global Constitutionalism* 14, no. 1 (2025): 96–117, doi:10.1017/S204538172400011X.

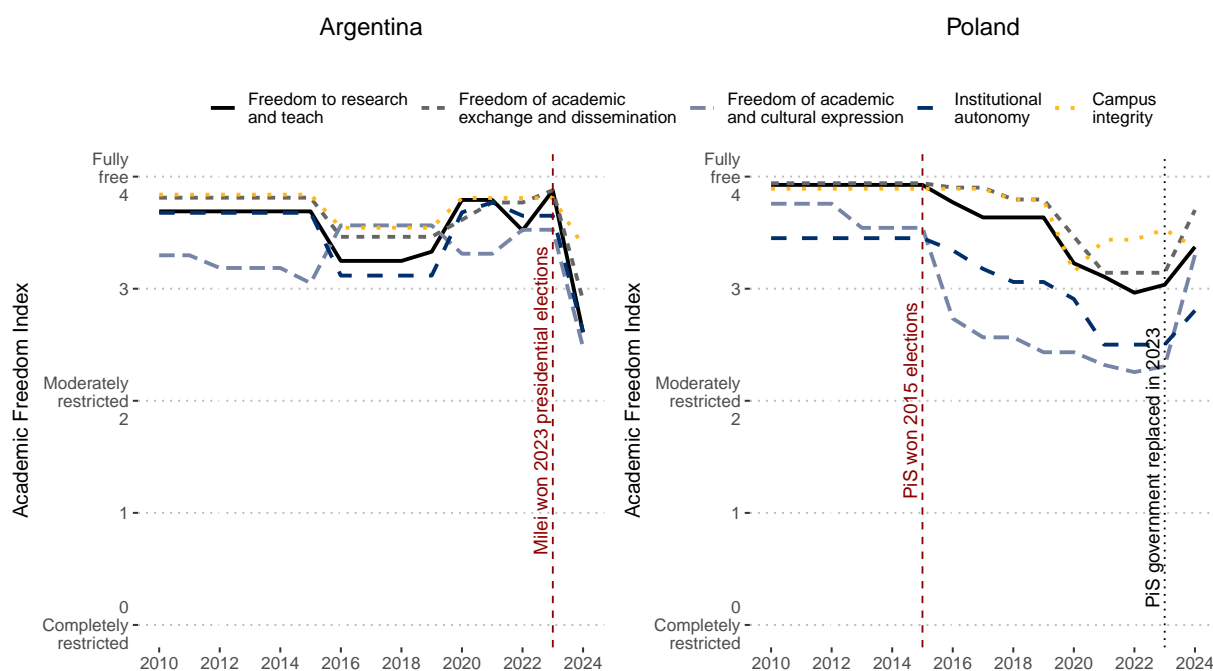


Figure 6: Indicator-level AFI data for Argentina and Poland. Vertical red lines indicate the election year when anti-pluralist parties were elected in the respective countries. The vertical black line indicates the year when PiS left the government.

The relationship between anti-pluralist parties in government and the decline and recovery of academic freedom is also evident in **Poland**. The right-wing, anti-pluralist Law and Justice (PiS) party won both the presidential and parliamentary elections in 2015. Between 2015 and 2019, the PiS government implemented a series of constitutional reforms and legislative acts aimed at undermining judiciary power, checks and balances, as well as civil and political rights. It also attempted to amend the constitution to increase the head of state’s power. What is more, the PiS government reduced the role of the parliament in the legislative process, increased its control over state-owned media, and sought to limit the influence of civil society organizations.<sup>18</sup>

Academic freedom declined during the PiS government’s term, particularly regarding freedom of academic and cultural expression and institutional autonomy, as seen in Figure 6. Despite arguments that higher education is “largely reform-resistant”,<sup>19</sup> the PiS government passed several laws that increased control over academic research and teaching, imposed traditional and conservative values over cultural pluralism, and introduced limitations to scientific curricula, including by cancelling gender studies as a legitimate field of research.<sup>20</sup> This year’s AFI data confirm that academic freedom in Poland improved again after the PiS government was replaced by a new coalition in December 2023.

One of the most consequential elections of the super election year 2024 led to the return of President Donald Trump to the White House. Universities in the **United States** are important academic powerhouses with a global reputation. Since the start of Donald Trump’s second term, they have come under unprecedented pressure. They

<sup>18</sup>Pirro and Stanley, “Forging, Bending, and Breaking”; Zsolt Enyedi and Stephen Whitefield, “Populists in Power: Populism and Representation in Illiberal Democracies,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Political Representation in Liberal Democracies*, ed. Rohrschneider Robert and Thomassen Jacques (Oxford University Press, 2020), 581–98, doi:10.1093/oxfordhb/9780198825081.013.30.

<sup>19</sup>Dominik Antonowicz, Emanuel Kulczycki, and Anna Budzanowska, “Breaking the Deadlock of Mistrust? A Participative Model of the Structural Reforms in Higher Education in Poland,” *Higher Education Quarterly* 74 (2020): 391–409, doi:10.1111/hequ.12254.

<sup>20</sup>Marta Bucholc, “Academic Freedom in Poland,” in *University Autonomy Decline: Causes, Responses, and Implications for Academic Freedom*, ed. Kirsten Roberts Lyer, Ilyas Saliba, and Janika Spannagel (Taylor & Francis, 2022), 119–46, doi:10.4324/9781003306481.



face an administration which includes outspoken science skeptics. They also face massive financial cuts,<sup>21</sup> and threats to their institutional autonomy, including guidelines that undermine established diversity, equity, and inclusion programs in American universities.<sup>22</sup> While the most recent attacks on US universities are of a new quality, the decline of academic freedom in the United States has evolved over a longer period of time. Figure 7 compares the state of academic freedom in 2024 with that in 2014. It shows a notable, statistically significant decline in all dimensions of the AFI compared to ten years ago, which was before Trump's first term in office.

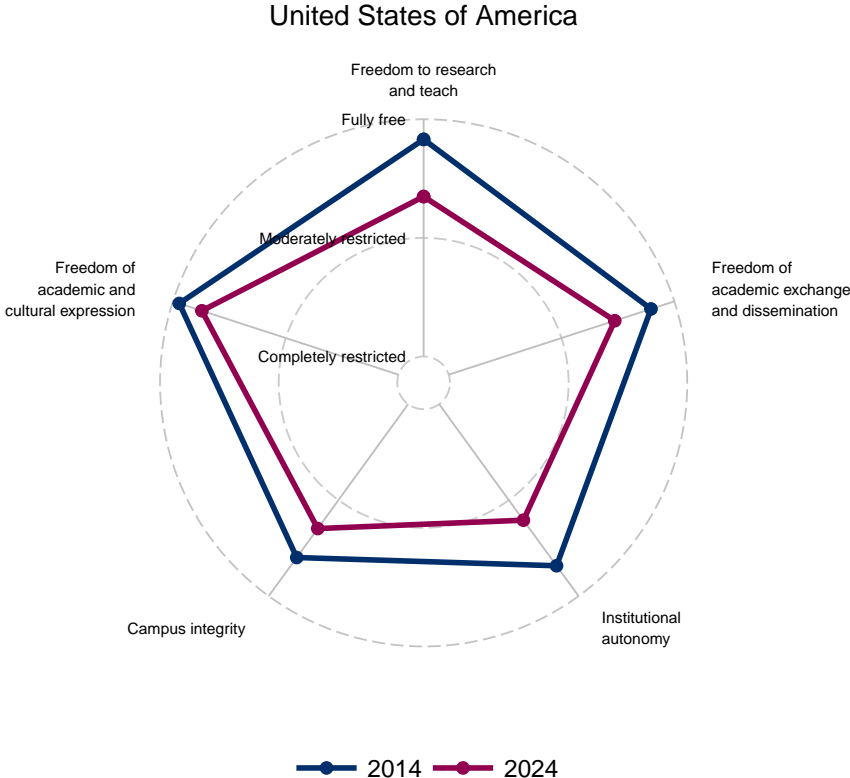


Figure 7: Radar plot: Indicator-level data for the United States

It is worth noting that US higher education governance is decentralized and complex, with key competences distributed across federal, state, and local levels. Politicians with anti-pluralist agendas first introduced restrictive higher education policies at the state level and these particularly affected public universities. In Florida, for example, the American Association of University Professors denounced “a politically and ideologically driven assault unparalleled in US history” that threatens academic freedom, tenure, and shared governance in public colleges and universities.<sup>23</sup> In this context, the teaching of critical race theory has been one major point of contention.<sup>24</sup>

<sup>21</sup> Max Kozlov and Smriti Mallapaty, “Exclusive: NIH to Terminate Hundreds of Active Research Grants,” *Nature*, March 6, 2025, doi:10.1038/d41586-025-00703-1.

<sup>22</sup> Executive Order, “Ending Illegal Discrimination and Restoring Merit-Based Opportunity,” Pub. L. No. 2025-02097 (2025), <https://www.whitehouse.gov/presidential-actions/2025/01/ending-illegal-discrimination-and-restoring-merit-based-opportunity/>; Executive Order, “Ending Radical and Wasteful Government DEI Programs and Preferencing,” Pub. L. No. 2025-01953 (2025), <https://www.whitehouse.gov/presidential-actions/2025/01/ending-radical-and-wasteful-government-dei-programs-and-preferencing/>.

<sup>23</sup> American Association of University Professors, “Report of a Special Committee: Political Interference and Academic Freedom in Florida’s Public Higher Education System” (American Association of University Professors, December 2023).

<sup>24</sup> Scholars at Risk, *Free to Think. 2024. Report of the Scholars at Risk Academic Freedom Monitoring Project* (New York, USA, 2024), 31f, <https://www.scholarsatrisk.org/resources/free-to-think-2024/>; CRT Forward Tracking Project, “CRT Forward Tracking Project. CLA School of Law Critical Race Studies Program,” 2024, <https://crtforward.law.ucla.edu/>; Christopher Mele, “Professor Watchlist Is Seen as Threat to Academic Freedom,” *The New York Times*, November 28, 2016, <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/11/28/us/professor-watchlist-is-seen-as-threat-to-academic-freedom.html>.

The largest declines of academic freedom in the US concern the freedom to research and teach, and the institutional autonomy of universities. However, there is also now a notable deterioration of the freedom of academic and cultural expression. The decline of the latter indicator may be linked to controversial restrictions on protests at US universities regarding the war in Gaza, including the deployment of security personnel and police on campus. The handling of such protests varied depending on local circumstances, institutional leadership, and campus security arrangements; some events – particularly those involving municipal police – resulted in sharp criticism.<sup>25</sup>

The Academic Freedom Monitoring Project of the US-based organization Scholars at Risk has made several reports on interference in individual researchers' freedom to express opinions on gender policies or state higher education policies, among other things.<sup>26</sup> Nevertheless, according to the AFI data, American academia remained mostly free until the end of 2024. However, the longer-term build-up of restrictive higher education policies at state level, together with the more recent, unprecedented attack on free science at federal level, gives rise to serious concern regarding the future of academic freedom in the United States.<sup>27</sup> In light of the prominent role that US academia plays in the global science system, this development impacts not only a large population in the United States, but arguably scholars across the world.

In conclusion, all three country cases support the argument that anti-pluralist politicians, once in power, attempt to extend government control over academia, particularly by reducing institutional autonomy, the freedom to teach, and by de-funding or attacking research that contradicts their political vision.

## Country Overview

Measuring a latent phenomenon like academic freedom is a challenging endeavor. The AFI data meets high academic standards<sup>28</sup> and uses the best available model for aggregating expert assessments.<sup>29</sup>

Figure 8 and Figure 9 present the point estimates (points) and uncertainty intervals (lines) for all assessed countries at year-end 2024. They display every country's academic freedom in order of the most likely point estimate, as well as the change over the last ten years if the difference between 2014 and 2024 is statistically significant. We recommend that users consider the reported **uncertainty intervals** when making comparisons over time or between countries.<sup>30</sup> Whenever the uncertainty intervals of two countries overlap, no definitive statement can be made about which country has greater academic freedom.

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<sup>25</sup>For example, Paul Basken, "Why Has Policing of US Campus Protests Gone so Wrong?" *Times Higher Education (THE)*, May 15, 2024, <https://www.timeshighereducation.com/news/why-has-policing-us-campus-protests-gone-so-wrong>; Mitch Smith et al., "Actions of Police and Counterprotesters Under Scrutiny at U.C.L.A. And Ole Miss," *The New York Times*, May 7, 2024, <https://www.nytimes.com/live/2024/05/07/us/campus-protests>.

<sup>26</sup>Scholars at Risk, *Free to Think. 2024. Report of the Scholars at Risk Academic Freedom Monitoring Project*.

<sup>27</sup>This short country analysis draws on more extensive research conducted by FAU students in the context of a research clinic organized in collaboration with the organization Scholars at Risk (SAR). Their detailed report will be available in due course in the context of the Universal Periodic Review conducted by the United Nations Human Rights Council. For more information on SAR clinics, see <https://www.scholarsatrisk.org/actions/academic-freedom-legal-clinics/>.

<sup>28</sup>Lott and Spannagel, "Quality Assessment of the Academic Freedom Index"; Spannagel and Kinzelbach, "The Academic Freedom Index and Its Indicators."

<sup>29</sup>Daniel Pemstein et al., "The V-Dem Measurement Model: Latent Variable Analysis for Cross-National and Cross-Temporal Expert-Coded Data," V-Dem Working Paper No. 21. 10th edition (V-Dem Institute, 2025), <https://www.v-dem.net/>.

<sup>30</sup>Lott and Spannagel, "Quality Assessment of the Academic Freedom Index."

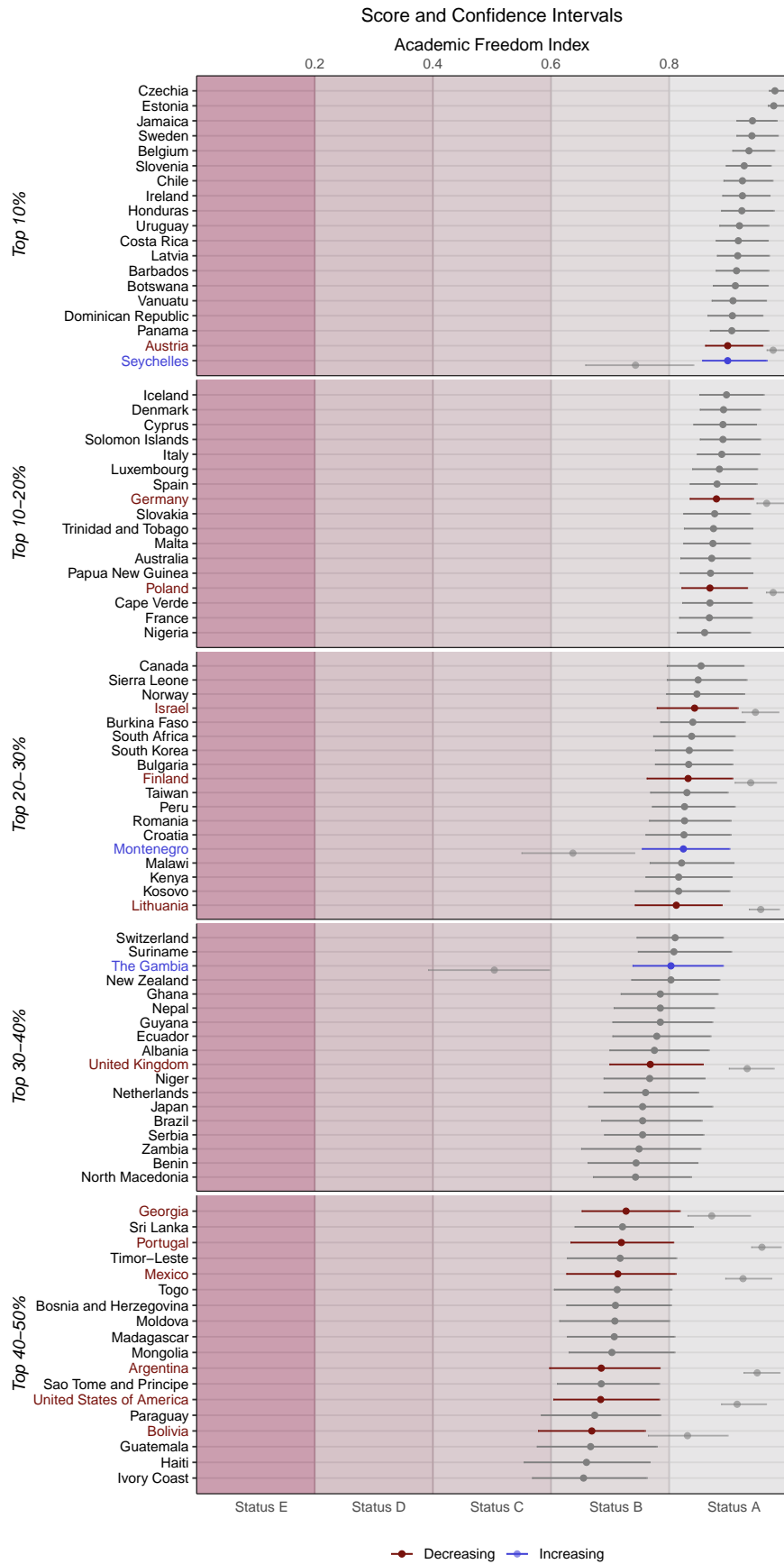


Figure 8: Countries by score, Academic Freedom Index, 2014 compared to 2024. Notes: Red country names indicate cases of statistically significant declining cases of academic freedom over the past ten years. Blue country names indicate cases of statistically significant increasing cases of academic freedom. Horizontal lines indicate the uncertainty intervals around the point estimates drawn from the V-Dem Bayesian IRT method. Status groups represent the quintiles of the AFI. Countries for which the uncertainty intervals go beyond the limits of a status group cannot be clearly assigned to one status group.

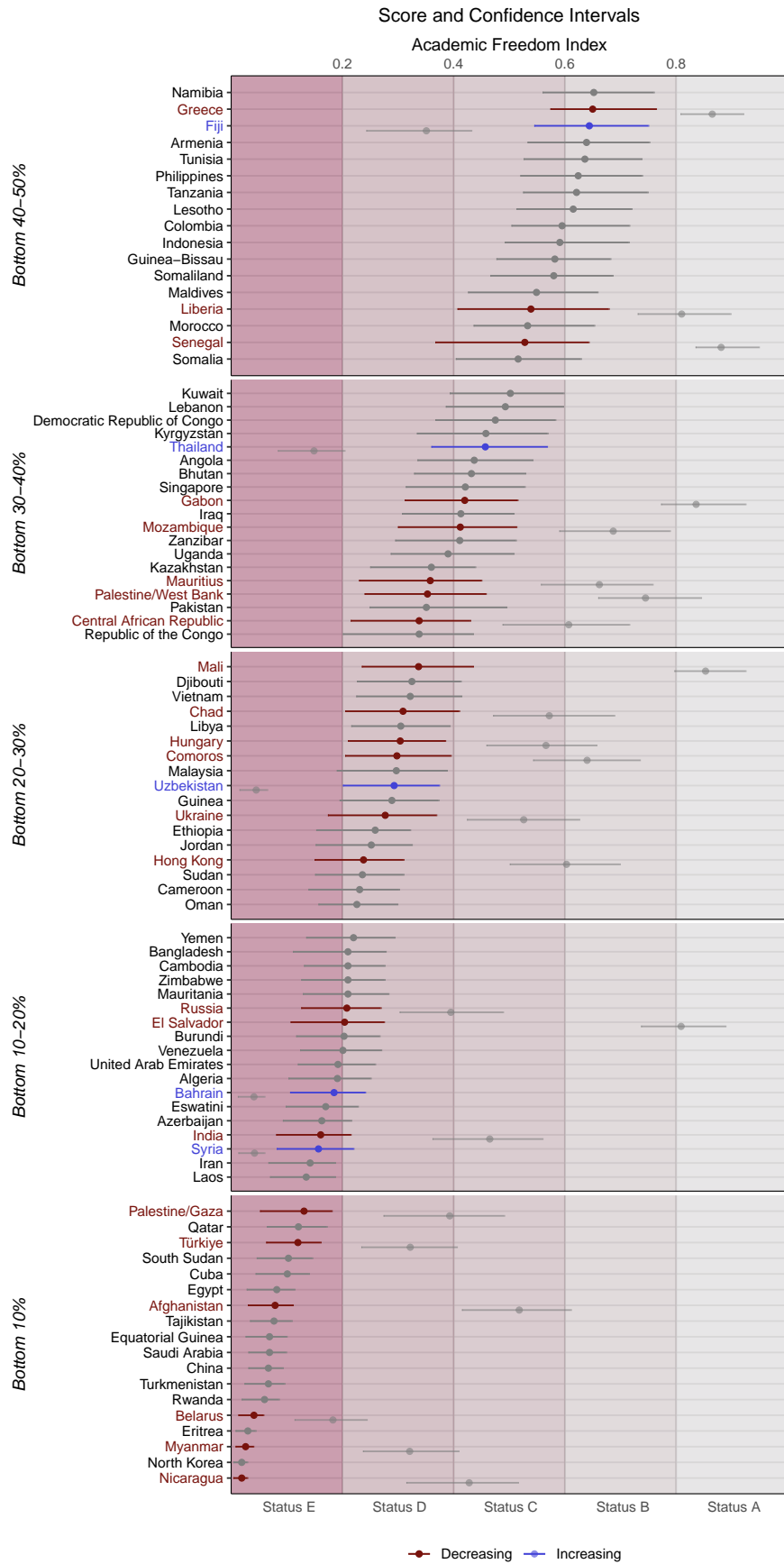


Figure 9: Countries by score, Academic Freedom Index, 2014 compared to 2024. Notes: Red country names indicate cases of statistically significant declining cases of academic freedom over the past ten years. Blue country names indicate cases of statistically significant increasing cases of academic freedom. Horizontal lines indicate the uncertainty intervals around the point estimates drawn from the V-Dem Bayesian IRT method. Status groups represent the quintiles of the AFI. Countries for which the uncertainty intervals go beyond the limits of a status group cannot be clearly assigned to one status group.

Readers may also refer to the index quintiles, or status groups A–E, which are shaded in different colors in Figure 8 and Figure 9. Whenever the uncertainty intervals of countries overlap with the shaded colors representing a status group (see the X-axis), no definitive statement can be made about the status group of that particular country. For example, Greece is categorized in status group B, yet its uncertainty interval overlaps with status group C. This suggests it is likely that Greece belongs with status group B, while statistical uncertainty implies that it is also possible it belongs with status group C. In Figure 8 and Figure 9, the eight cases of significant improvement in academic freedom are highlighted in blue. Highlighted in red are the 36 countries that have undergone statistically significant declines in academic freedom in the last decade.

## Background: Assessing Academic Freedom

This year's *Academic Freedom Index* update is based on data from V-Dem's version 15 release, drawing on assessments made by 2,363 country experts from around the world.

The data cover the period from 1900 to 2024. All data are publicly available and include more than one million data points at the coder level, five indicators, and an aggregate index on academic freedom based on a Bayesian IRT-measurement model.<sup>31</sup> The index defines a range of components “often considered essential to the *de facto* realization of academic freedom based on a review of the literature and in-depth discussions with policymakers, academics and advocates in the higher education field.”<sup>32</sup> The *Academic Freedom Index* rests on five key indicators: the freedom to research and teach; the freedom of academic exchange and dissemination; the institutional autonomy of universities; campus integrity;<sup>33</sup> and the freedom of academic and cultural expression. Through these five indicators, the AFI captures elements of academic freedom “that are (a) comparable across different university systems around the world and (b) specific to the academic sector.”<sup>34</sup>

Users of our data can benefit from the open data approach adopted by the V-Dem project, which also allows for the disaggregation of the AFI. Furthermore, we provide comparative data on additional aspects of academic freedom, notably factual country-year information on constitutional guarantees and commitments to academic freedom under international human rights law.<sup>35</sup>

## What is the Difference between Versions 14 and 15?

V-Dem uses customized Bayesian IRT models to aggregate expert data to indicators and index values.<sup>36</sup> Each year, a new calculation takes all available data into account and optimizes comparability between years and countries. However, comparing absolute values of indicators or the index values between different versions of the dataset can be misleading because (1) experts add data with every annual update; (2) experts may update and change their own previous ratings to account for new information; and (3) for every annual update, additional experts

<sup>31</sup> Pemstein et al., “The V-Dem Measurement Model.”

<sup>32</sup> Spannagel and Kinzelbach, “The Academic Freedom Index and Its Indicators,” 3973.

<sup>33</sup> The absence of security infringements and surveillance on campus, including online learning platforms.

<sup>34</sup> Spannagel and Kinzelbach, “The Academic Freedom Index and Its Indicators,” 3974.

<sup>35</sup> See also Janika Spannagel, “Introducing Academic Freedom in Constitutions: A New Global Dataset, 1789–2022,” *European Political Science* 23 (2024): 421–32, doi:[10.1057/s41304-023-00446-5](https://doi.org/10.1057/s41304-023-00446-5).

<sup>36</sup> Pemstein et al., “The V-Dem Measurement Model.”

are recruited who can also contribute scores for past years. As a general rule, scholars, policymakers, and other interested parties should use the most recent data for information and analysis.

Version 15 of the AFI benefitted from 34 more contributing coders than version 14, bringing the total to 2,363 coders.

## Expert Call and AFI Applications

To continually improve the dataset, we call on scholars with country-specific knowledge and thematic expertise to contribute to the collaborative AFI coding. Please apply to become a new coder by filling out the expert call [here](#).

We also call on higher education policymakers, university leaders, and research funders to promote academic freedom in their own academic institutions as well as abroad. The Global Public Policy Institute and Scholars at Risk have published policy recommendations for how to use the *Academic Freedom Index* data for this purpose.<sup>37</sup>

## About

The views and opinions expressed in this report are those of the authors and do not reflect any official position of the Friedrich-Alexander-Universität Erlangen-Nürnberg, the V-Dem Project, or the V-Dem Steering Committee.

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<sup>37</sup>Katrin Kinzelbach et al., "Free Universities. Putting the Academic Freedom Index into Action," *Global Public Policy Institute (GPPi)*, 2021, [https://gppi.net/media/KinzelbachEtAl\\_2021\\_Free\\_Universities\\_AFI-2020\\_upd.pdf](https://gppi.net/media/KinzelbachEtAl_2021_Free_Universities_AFI-2020_upd.pdf).

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