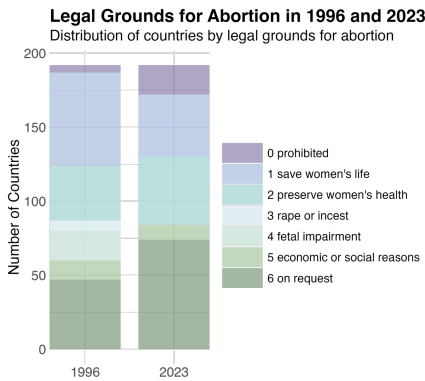


## Abortion Law and Political Regimes

How do changes in the state of democracy shape abortion laws across countries? This study examines global patterns between abortion laws and shifts in democracy and explores how democratic transitions—both backsliding and progress—align with changes in reproductive rights.



The chart shows the distribution of countries by legal grounds for abortion, categorized from 0 (prohibited) to 6 (on request). Data sources: UN World Population Policies Database (1996) and Center for Reproductive Rights (2023).

### Data

This study uses global data from 1996–2023:

**Abortion Laws:** Categorized into six grounds (0 = prohibited to 6 = on request) from the UN Population Policies Database and Center for Reproductive Rights.

**Democracy:** Liberal Democracy Index (LDI) from V-Dem measures democratic governance. The analysis focuses on identifying patterns between legal liberalization or restriction of abortion and democratic shifts.

**Key findings from 1996 to 2023 reveal two trends:**

1. A **global liberalization** of abortion laws, with more countries allowing abortion on request or for social/economic reasons.
2. A simultaneous rise in **abortion prohibition** in some countries.

### Democratic Shifts and Legal Changes

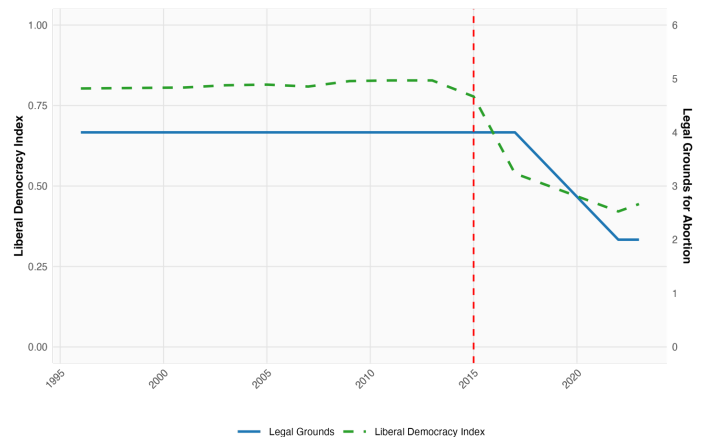
For example, **Poland's** democratic backsliding, evident in the decline of its Liberal Democracy Index since 2015, aligns with severe abortion restrictions. This pattern illustrates how declining democracy can coincide with reduced reproductive rights.

### Polarized global trend

Global shifts in democracy and abortion laws show a sharp divide:

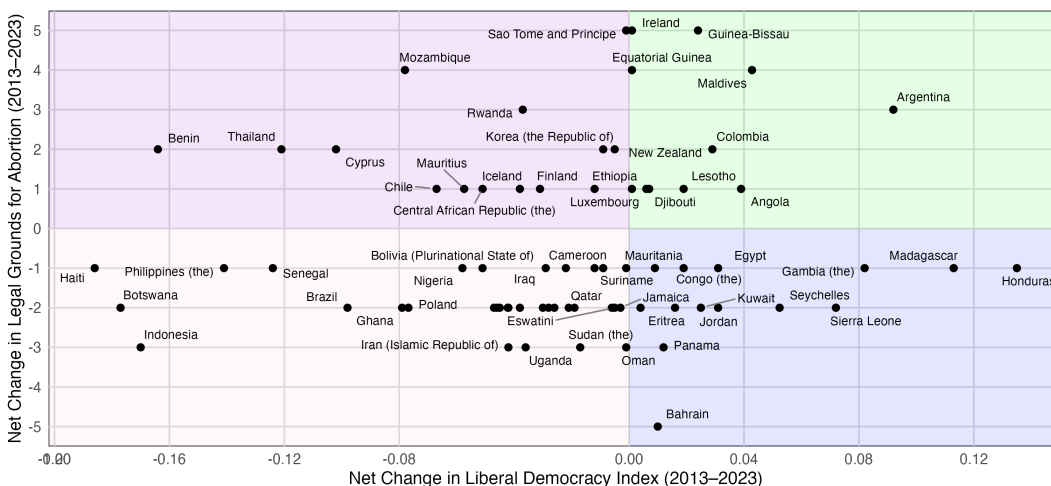
- **Illiberal Liberalization:** Countries like Mozambique see a decline in their LDI with liberalized abortion laws.
- **Progressive Gains:** Countries like Argentina show improvements in both democracy and abortion laws.
- **Restrictive Progress:** Nations like Sierra Leone see an increase in democratic rule paired with restrictive abortion laws.
- **Parallel Backsliding:** Others, like Poland and Brazil, experience democratic decline and increased abortion restrictions.

**Abortion Laws and Liberal Democracy Index in Poland**  
Trends in legal grounds for abortion and liberal democracy index over time



Trends in abortion law and democracy in Poland (1995–2023). The solid blue line represents changes in Poland's legal grounds for abortion (scaled 0–6), while the dashed green line tracks the Liberal Democracy Index (scaled 0–1). Red dashed lines mark the onset of autocratization processes. Data: UN World Population Policies Database and Center for Reproductive Rights (abortion law) and V-Dem (liberal democracy index).

### Changes in Liberal Democracy Index vs. Abortion Laws



Net changes in the liberal democracy index and legal grounds for abortion, 2013–2023. The x-axis represents changes in LDI, while the y-axis reflects shifts in abortion law restrictiveness (ranging from -6, more restrictive, to +6, more liberal). Countries in the green quadrant saw improvements in both democracy and abortion rights (e.g., Argentina), while those in the pink quadrant experienced backsliding in both (e.g., Poland). Blue indicates improved democracy but restricted abortion access, and violet reflects liberalized abortion laws despite democratic decline. The stretched central region highlights minimal changes. Data sources: V-Dem (LDI) and UN World Population Policies Database and Center for Reproductive Rights (abortion laws).

### Conclusion

The relationship between reproductive rights and political regimes is complex and varied. These findings highlight the importance of further investigations into the causal mechanisms of changes in abortion law across countries.

### Contact

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