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ACADEMIC FREEDOM IN ASIA FROM 1900 TO 2021

A QUANTITATIVE OVERVIEW

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How well is academic freedom protected in Asia? Is the situation improving or deteriorating? How does Asia compare to other parts of the world? And how does academic freedom fare in comparison to other liberties in Asia? To answer such questions, we need data that are comparable across time and space.

Empirical research on academic freedom violations faces several obstacles. Most notably, these include efforts to conceal information, a hesitation to report violations and incomplete statistics, reporting biases and other information effects, and shifting standards of assessment.¹ Events data are particularly prone to reporting biases. Additionally, the absence of particular events—such as politically motivated dismissals of academics—is not necessarily a sign of a high degree of freedom. In highly repressive settings, the absence of such events may instead be the result of a chilling effect following earlier encroachments and subsequent self-censorship among academics.

So-called standards-based data, where academics code reports presented by NGOs and governments, are also shaped by information effects and thus are not easily comparable across time and space.² The picture is further complicated by the

fact that not all limitations placed on universities are attacks on academic freedom. Events always need interpretation: Some universities routinely record lectures to facilitate students' access to education, while other institutions use recordings to intimidate faculty and control the content of their classes; a temporary ban on in-person teaching can be either an act of repression or a justified public health measure during a pandemic. Similarly, the letter of the law (*de jure* protection of academic freedom) can differ significantly from the *de facto* reality. To assess the *de facto* protection of academic freedom, we need to contextualize and interpret the available information as well as the gaps in data.³ These brief reflections illustrate that academic freedom is a complex, multifaceted concept, a so-called "latent variable" that escapes direct observation.

This chapter draws on a new data set that assesses academic freedom as a latent variable: the Academic Freedom Index (AFI). It is the most comprehensive, worldwide measure of academic freedom available to date, and it captures five different dimensions: the freedom to research and teach; the freedom of academic exchange and dissemination; institutional autonomy; campus integrity; and the freedom of academic and cultural expression.⁴ The AFI provides data for the period between 1900 and 2021 in 177 countries and territories. Its scores are based on expert-coded data, because only suitably trained—and, typically, locally based—academics can contextualize available (and missing) information on academic freedom. More than 2,050 experts from across the world have contributed to the AFI project so far.⁵ They rate academic freedom on an ordinal scale in line with a detailed codebook.⁶ In other words, the quantitative index depends on qualitative judgments.

Expert assessments come with their own challenges, notably personal predispositions and idiosyncratic errors.⁷ To address these challenges, the AFI relies on a well-established Bayesian measurement model developed by the V-Dem project, which is headquartered at the University of Gothenburg.⁸ This unique data set is informed by item-response theory, and it takes into account coders' potential biases, diverging coding behaviors, and levels of confidence. The methodology also enhances interpersonal comparability by using anchoring vignettes and bridge and lateral coding.⁹ Accordingly, the AFI scores provide the best estimate of the latent variable of interest—academic freedom—alongside an estimate of uncertainty for each data point.¹⁰

This paper provides an overview of academic freedom in Asia by reporting regional trends, developments in select countries, and the correlations between academic freedom and other freedoms, regime types, political polarization, and institutional autonomy. The AFI indicates that the trend of academic freedom in Asia is negative in recent years, though there are important caveats due to the nature of the data. The downward development becomes more obvious when

countries' different population sizes are taken into account; the disaggregated data reveal a serious deterioration in six cases during the last decade.

Regional Trend: Academic Freedom in Asia, 1900-2021

The regional average scores for academic freedom in Asia¹¹ indicate three major shifts in the period between 1900 and 2021—namely, an improvement spurred by decolonization following the end of World War II, short deteriorations in the 1960s and 1970s respectively, and further improvements in the context of democratization in the late twentieth century. In the first decade of the twenty-first century, we can discern that the average score for Asia drops slightly in 2006, 2014, and 2021, though these drops remain within the confidence intervals recorded for 2001. This means that deterioration in the twenty-first century remains statistically uncertain and could be the result of a measurement error.

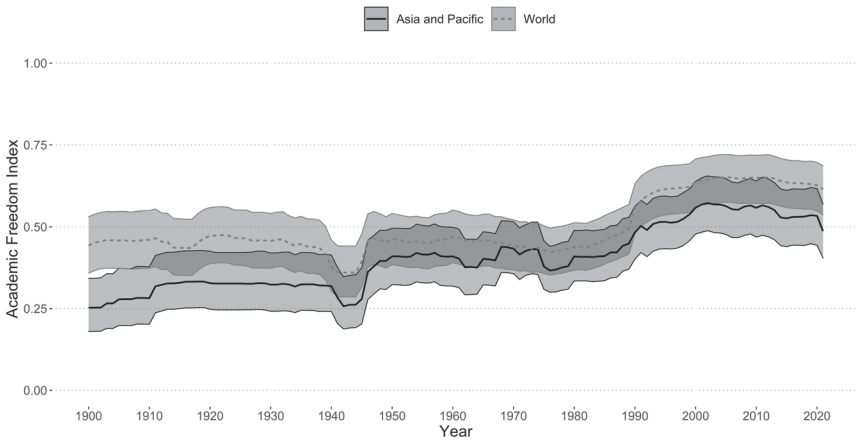


Fig. 1.1. AFI average scores (0–1, low to high) with confidence interval, Asia and Pacific/World, 1900–2021. Data: V-Dem v-12.¹²

The uncertain finding seems to challenge the claim that academic freedom in Asia has markedly deteriorated in recent years.¹³ There are several possible reasons for the discrepancy in assessment. One explanation could be that academic freedom has become a pertinent topic in scholarly as well as public debate, not least because of concerted advocacy efforts. This, in turn, has raised awareness over academic freedom violations. If we do not control for this increase in awareness, our perceptions may suggest a deteriorating situation, when, in reality, we simply have more information at our disposal. Similarly, we know from human rights research that a negativity bias can lead to heightened

attention for violations, possibly overshadowing more positive developments or, indeed, stagnation over time.¹⁴ Another explanation may be that some academic disciplines get more restricted than others, i.e. observers who focus on academic freedom violations in the humanities and social sciences might come to a different conclusion than the AFI, which seeks to take all disciplines into account. The chapter on academic freedom in Singapore by Cherian George, Chong Ja Ian, and Shannon Ang in this volume is one of the first studies to quantitatively capture the specific situation of social scientists, using a survey that partly builds on, and extends beyond, the indicators developed for the AFI. It is highly plausible that the social sciences are at greater risk of infringements than the natural sciences—even if no discipline appears immune to interference by non-academic actors.

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Despite the caveats, the AFI data underscore a concern about academic freedom infringements in Asia. The regional average score remains consistently below the world average and, indeed, it is on the lower half of the AFI scale. There are good reasons, therefore, that academics in Asia have raised alarm about ongoing limitations placed on their work.

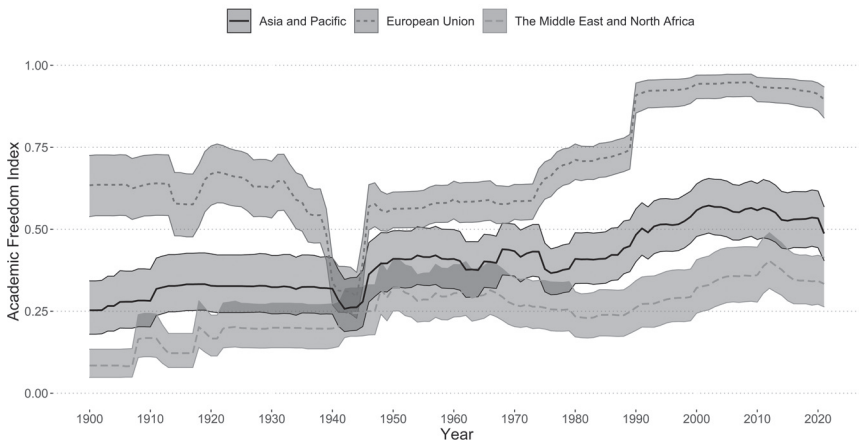


Fig. 1.2. AFI average scores for Asia in comparison to MENA and the EU. Data: V-Dem v-12.

Only one of the world's regions scores lower than Asia on academic freedom, and that is the Middle East and North Africa (MENA, see figure 1.2). All other regions score higher on average than Asia, although there remains room for academic freedom improvements throughout the world. To illustrate this, figure 1.2 includes not only the average scores for Asia and the MENA regions but also for the European Union, whose AFI scores are high overall, though not at the top of the scale, and whose scores point to a continuous decline in recent years.

Figure 1.3 compares the AFI scores with V-Dem data on civil liberties, freedom of religion, and civil society robustness in Asia; it shows that the regional averages for all these indicators remain fairly constant during the past decade, though they show a declining tendency. The correlation between them is highly plausible; at the same time, it is interesting to note that the regional average for academic freedom is the lowest, well under freedom of religion but also under civil society robustness and civil liberties more generally.¹⁵ Even if the ordinal scales of these different indexes are not strictly identical, this comparative finding deserves further investigation. Is it correct that intellectual elites in Asia are under greater political pressure than society at large? If so, what may be the reasons? Do intellectual elites present a particular challenge to governments? Do those who hold power seek to control universities as institutions because they are not only places of learning and critical inquiry but also social spaces that facilitate the organization of mass movements?

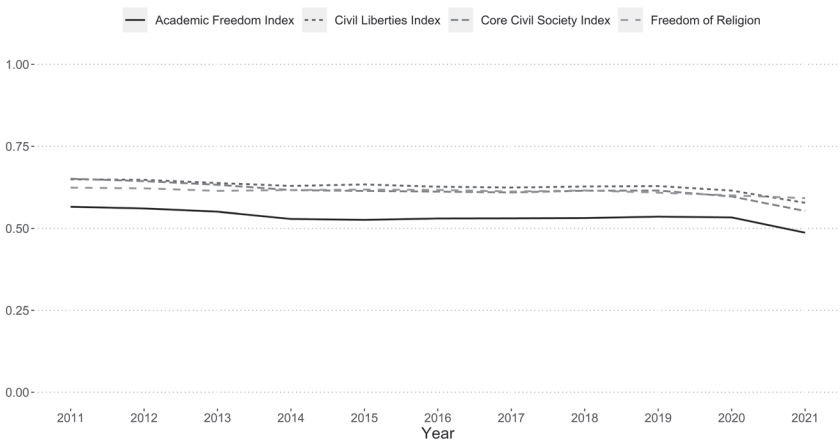


Fig. 1.3. Various average scores for Asia in comparison (2001–2021). Confidence bounds have been removed for clarity due to overlap. Data: V-Dem v-12.

As we reflect on universities as places where the intellectual elites of a country get educated and socialized, it is important to highlight that country-based averages, like the ones presented in figures 1.1 to 1.3, gloss over the different populations of various countries. I find the country-based average important because it reflects the responsibility of governments to protect and promote academic freedom; as such, it tells us something about the robustness of the norm. At the same time, it matters how many people enjoy academic freedom, and it is highly instructive to look at population-weighted averages for Asia as well. Taking this perspective, we detect a significant deterioration of academic freedom during the last decade (see figure 1.4). The chapters in this book that provide further details on academic freedom in populous countries, such as China and Indonesia, are pertinent in this regard.

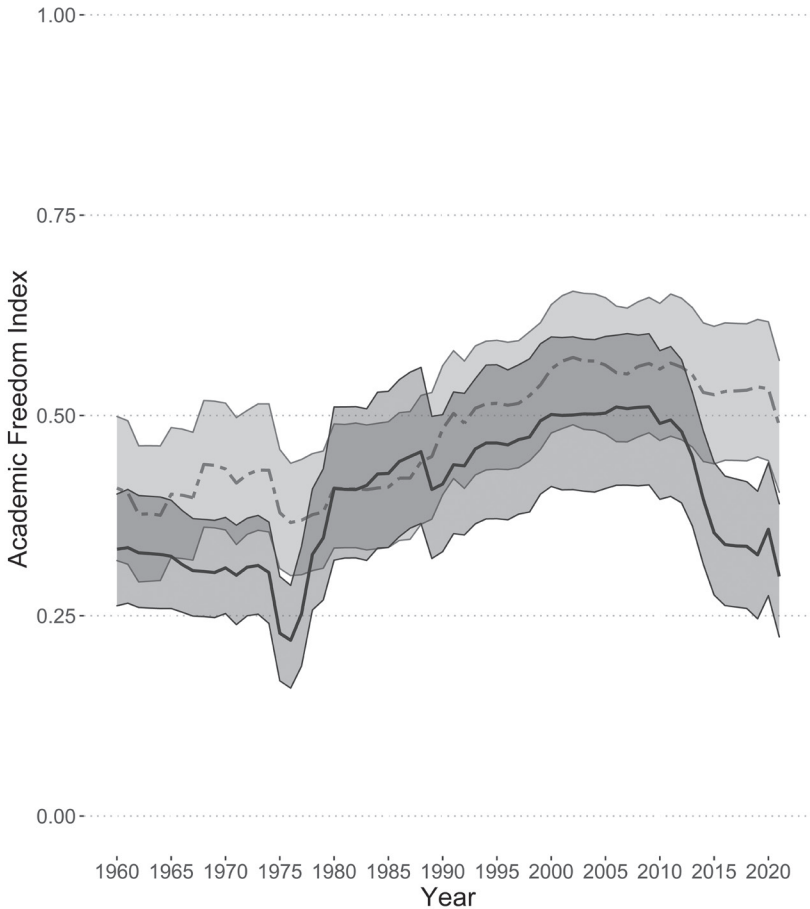


Fig. 1.4. AFI average scores for Asia, country-based versus population-weighted, 1960–2021.
Data: V-Dem v-12 and WDI population data.

Noteworthy Improvements and Deteriorations, 2011-2021

Since regional averages gloss over significant differences at the country level (and the subnational level for that matter), I will now turn to positive and negative developments in select countries' protection of academic freedom. Figure 1.5 identifies those countries and territories in Asia where academic freedom in 2021 fared better (upper left section) or worse (lower right section) than in 2011. Significant changes outside the respective confidence interval are highlighted in bold, and these include only deteriorations and no improvements.¹⁶

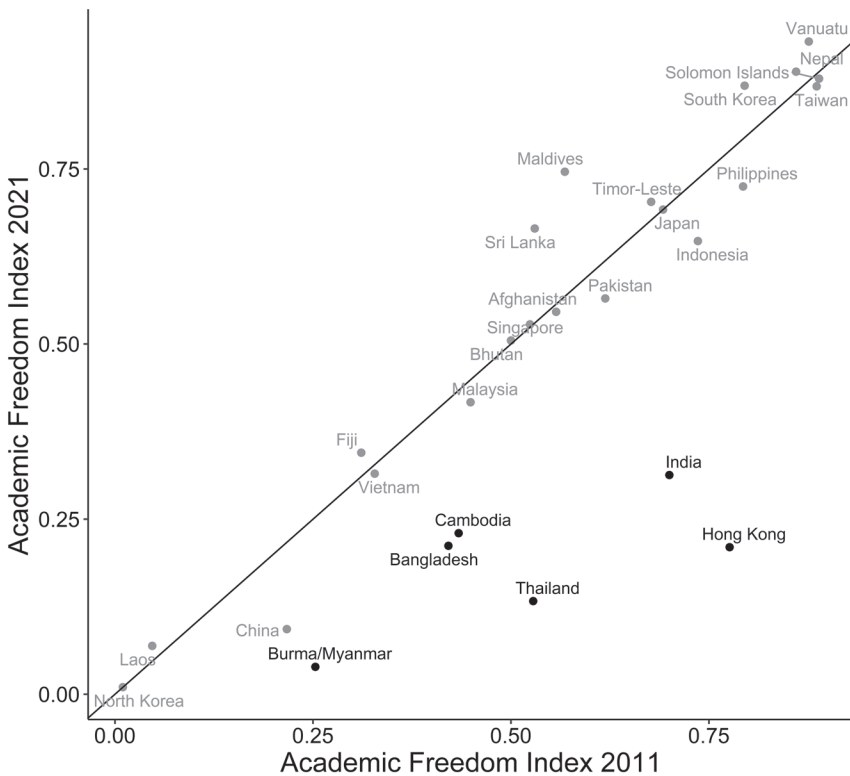


Fig. 1.5. Improvements/deteriorations of academic freedom in Asia, 2011–2021. Data: V-Dem v-12.

Disaggregated data can help us better understand the deteriorations that stick out: Bangladesh, Burma/Myanmar, Cambodia, Hong Kong, India, and Thailand. The starkest deterioration occurred in Hong Kong, which started with high scores at the beginning of the century. In the past decade, scholars in Hong Kong experienced a steady decline of their academic freedom (see figure 1.6).

The situation stagnated between 2015 and 2018 and then turned into another sharp decline from 2019 onward. This latest deterioration occurred against the backdrop of a protest movement in which students played an important role, and the eventual adoption, in Beijing, of a new National Security Law for Hong Kong.

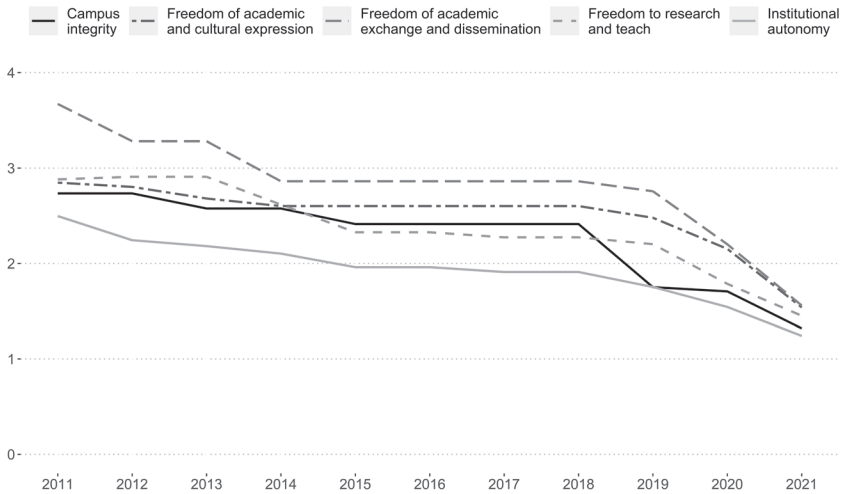


Fig. 1.6. Disaggregated AFI data for Hong Kong (2011–2021) on an ordinal scale of 0–4 (see V-Dem Codebook). Confidence bounds have been removed for clarity due to overlap. Data: V-Dem v-12.

Academic freedom also declined sharply in Thailand and Burma/Myanmar (see figure 1.7, left side). Both declines are linked to coups d'état that occurred in May 2014 and February 2021, respectively. In the case of Burma/Myanmar, this is particularly tragic because the country was one of the few cases in the world with significant improvements in academic freedom during recent years. By comparison, the decline of academic freedom in Bangladesh appears less obvious, but it is still outside of the confidence bounds and thus a robust finding (see figure 1.7, right side). Mubashar Hasan, a Bangladeshi political scientist who has himself come under severe pressure and who now lives abroad, has argued that this deterioration is linked to clientelist politics, meaning it is not only the government that exerts pressure on academics but rather a range of different actors.¹⁷

In the case of Cambodia, Kimkong Heng has argued that restrictions were focused mainly on “(very) sensitive topics.”¹⁸ Heng bases this assessment on his own experience and interviews he conducted with Cambodian academics in 2019,

though it is not clear how many interviews he conducted and how he selected the interviewees. His argument that restrictions were mainly related to academics' freedom of expression does not explain developments in 2021, however, where other AFI indicators decline, notably the freedom to research and teach, institutional autonomy, and the freedom of academic exchange and dissemination.

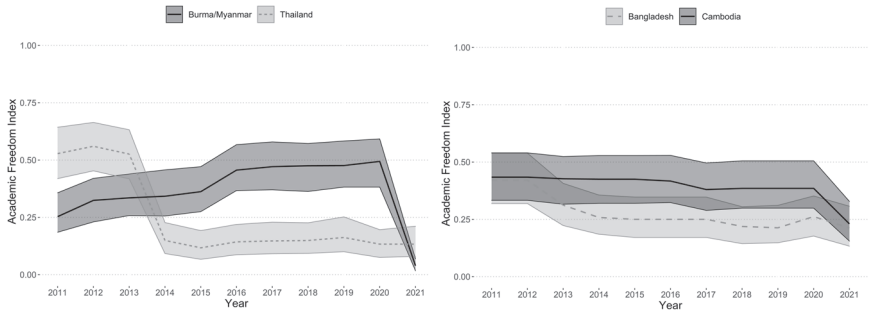


Fig. 1.7. Deteriorating trends in academic freedom (2011–2021) in four countries on an ordinal scale of 0–4 (see V-Dem Codebook). Data: V-Dem v-12.

The case of India deserves special attention. Figure 1.8 shows how academic freedom evolved in India from independence in 1947 until today. We see that the situation of scholars and higher education institutions in India deteriorated significantly after Narendra Modi from the Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party became prime minister in 2014. India has long been recognized as the world's largest democracy, but the Modi government has put India's democratic institutions under severe pressure. In light of these developments, the V-Dem Institute no longer categorizes India as an electoral democracy but as an electoral autocracy instead.¹⁹ Shreeya Pillai and Staffan I. Lindberg point out that India's autocratization follows a typical pattern also found in other autocratizing countries during the past ten years: "a gradual deterioration where freedom of the media, academia, and civil society were curtailed first."²⁰ The Indian sociologist Nandini Sundar provided detailed information about growing restrictions and the subversion of university autonomy in a 2020 status report.²¹ It is surprising and somewhat puzzling, then, that the 2020 AFI score for India suggests a small improvement in 2020 compared to 2019.

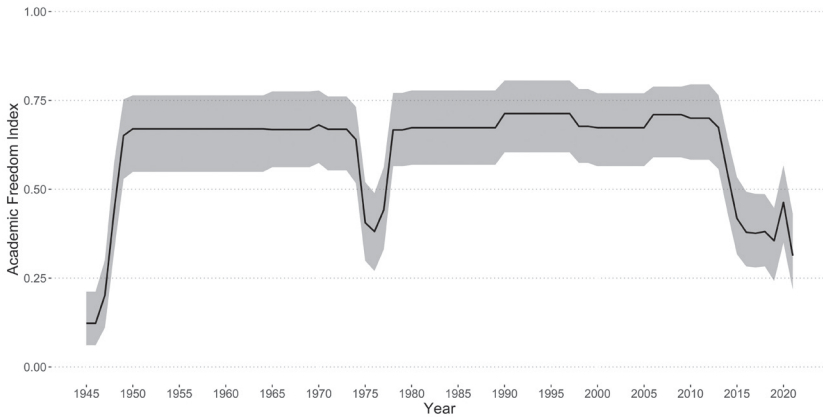


Fig. 1.8. Country-level data on academic freedom in India since independence (AFI scale 0–1). Data: V-Dem v-12.

This is a good reminder that the AFI confidence interval must be taken seriously. The upward turn in figure 1.8 is statistically uncertain; it only shows that the AFI score shivers within the confidence interval, and it remains at a rather low level overall. This shivering can be explained by experts’ differing views or by their access to different kinds of information. In a country as large as India, there are also significant subnational differences. Therefore, we must assume that the *de facto* enjoyment of academic freedom can diverge substantially within the country. A disaggregation of the AFI data provides further insights.

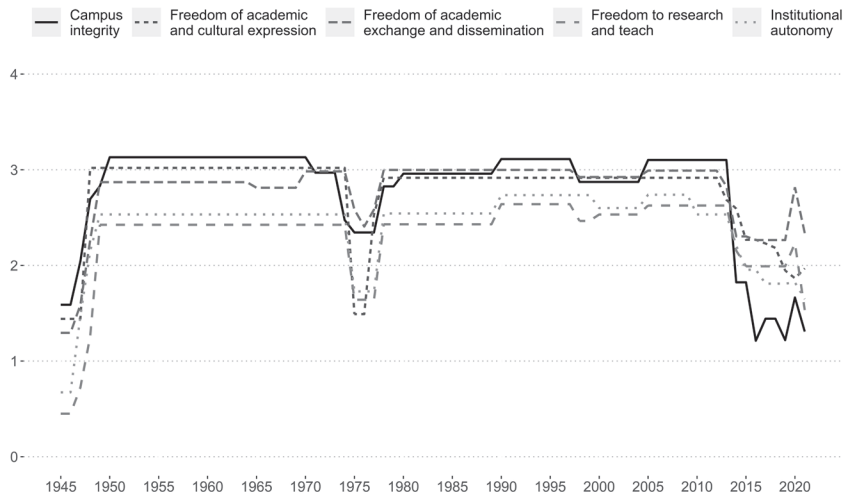


Fig. 1.9. Disaggregated data on academic freedom in India since independence (ordinal scale 0–4, see V-Dem Codebook). Confidence bounds have been removed for clarity due to overlap. Data: V-Dem v-12.

In 2020, minimal improvements in India's scores were registered on three dimensions: the freedom to research and teach, the freedom of academic exchange and dissemination, and campus integrity. They were not registered on freedom of academic expression or institutional autonomy, however. On the issue of campus integrity (the absence of surveillance and physical security violations), the apparent improvement may reflect a bounce back from a particularly low point in 2019, which involved large-scale, peaceful protests against a new citizenship law, accompanied by violent clashes between police and university students, and raids of university campuses. It is worth reflecting here on a possible effect of recency bias in the data because the coding for 2019 was done in January 2020. At that time, coders were perhaps influenced by a violent, widely publicized event that occurred at Jawaharlal Nehru University on January 5. In the words of Meenakshi Ganguly, the South Asia director of Human Rights Watch: "Students and teachers begged the police to intervene during the attack at Jawaharlal Nehru University, but the police simply stood and watched the attackers walk away."²² This event was not the only violent incident, but it was perhaps the most dramatic one. The protests and violent responses eventually ended with the COVID-19 lockdown.

When Indian universities shifted to online forms of communication in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, the government tried to institute new forms of control. Notably, the Ministry of External Affairs issued guidelines in January 2021 that required professors and administrators in public universities to seek prior approval for international online conferences and seminars that discuss India's "internal matters" or matters of "national security."²³ As Alka Acharya, professor at Jawaharlal Nehru University pointed out, "Everything can potentially have implications for security and organisers will be under great pressure to also screen participants who are known to have critical positions."²⁴ Such restrictions in the digital sphere are captured in the definitions for the AFI indicators and can therefore lead to deteriorating scores. In the case of India, however, the controversial order was withdrawn after several weeks.²⁵ This turn of events highlights the ability of Indian academics to organize and push back against infringements. In the longer run, such repressive orders may nevertheless have a chilling effect because digital events are very easy to monitor and record. Considering the larger political context in India, it is no surprise that the AFI value shivered downward again in 2021.

Finally, it is instructive to compare the recent AFI data for India with the scores for earlier periods. Here we see that the AFI score for 2021 (0.31) falls below the AFI score for 1976 (0.37), when Prime Minister Indira Gandhi had declared a state of emergency and suspended civil liberties. Taking the confidence bounds into consideration, we can conclude that academic freedom in India today is roughly as limited as it was during the Emergency in the mid-

1970s. The government of Narendra Modi has systematically undone the much greater freedom enjoyed by Indian academics in the period between 1978 and 2013. This is a very worrying finding. Figure 1.10 illustrates that the rollback of freedom in India is multifaceted and that the academic and civil society sectors are particularly vulnerable.

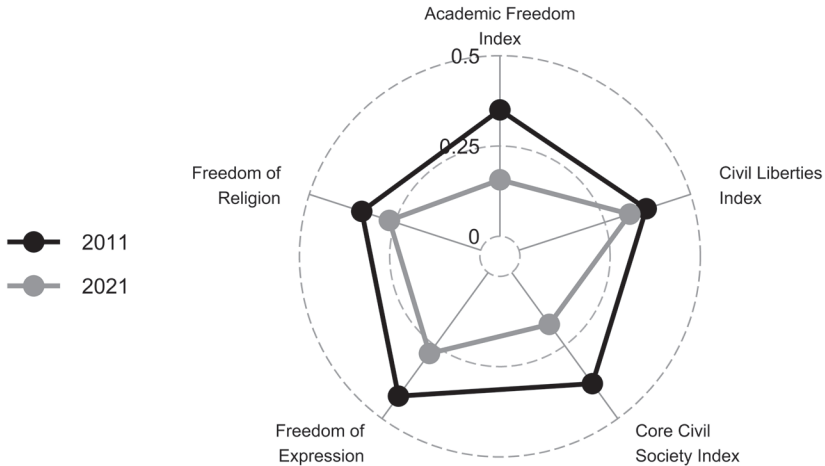


Fig. 1.10. Deteriorating freedom in India—2021 in comparison to 2011. Data: V-Dem v-12.

Regime Type, Political Polarization, and Institutional Autonomy

The findings discussed so far suggest that power transitions and, more specifically, democratization or autocratization processes plausibly explain shifts in academic freedom. Indeed, a scatterplot that maps Asian countries’ academic freedom scores against their regime type further substantiates the connection. Figure 1.11 illustrates that autocracies tend to have the lowest level of academic freedom, electoral democracies fare better, and liberal democracies have comparatively high levels of academic freedom, though they are not always the highest compared to their regional peers.

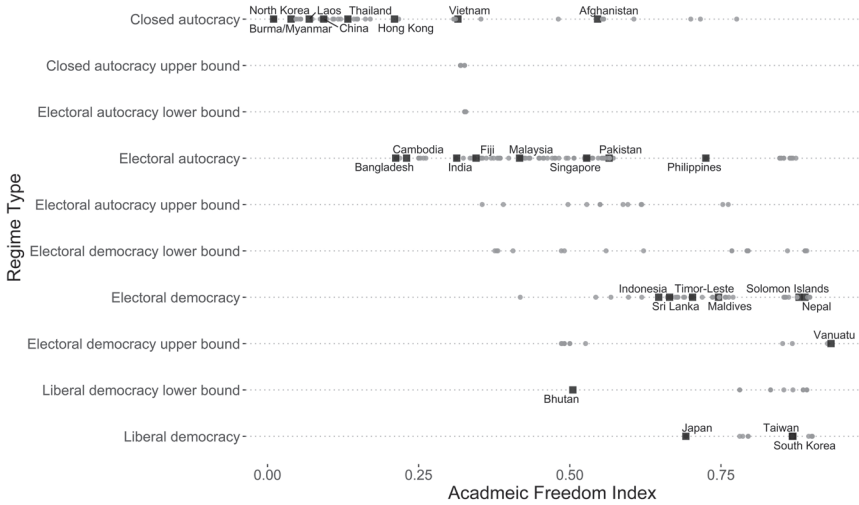


Fig. 1.11. Scatterplot mapping Asian countries' AFI scores against regime type (v2x_regime_amb), 2011–2021. Country labels are for 2021 scores. Data: V-Dem v-12.

This illustration supports the argument that regime type is a plausible determinant of academic freedom levels. Afghanistan is a noteworthy outlier in the upper right corner of figure 1.11. Considering the reported killings of scholars, violent attacks against higher education institutions, and an exodus of academics from the country after the Taliban coup in August 2021, this country assessment deserves a critical review. It could very well be an erroneous result related to coder attrition after the displacement of Afghan academics. In light of recent events in the country, I consider it highly likely that the AFI score for Afghanistan will deteriorate in the future, meaning this outlier case does not give reason to question the observed correlation and the suggested causal relationship between regime type and academic freedom.

Figure 1.11 also illustrates that regime type is not the only explanatory factor for academic freedom levels. For example, Japan, a liberal democracy, scores lower on the AFI than South Korea and Taiwan, lower than some electoral democracies, and even lower than the Philippines (an electoral autocracy). Ensuring the accuracy of cross-country comparisons is, of course, one of the biggest challenges in quantitative research of this kind, and it is useful to openly debate these findings. I should also stress again that confidence bounds (not depicted in figure 1.11) must be taken into account. At the same time, scholars should reflect on possible intervening variables, such as managerialism, the

marketization of higher education, or political polarization. On this latter aspect, I provide figure 1.12, which illustrates that high levels of polarization tend to correlate with lower academic freedom levels, notably the freedom of academic and cultural expression.

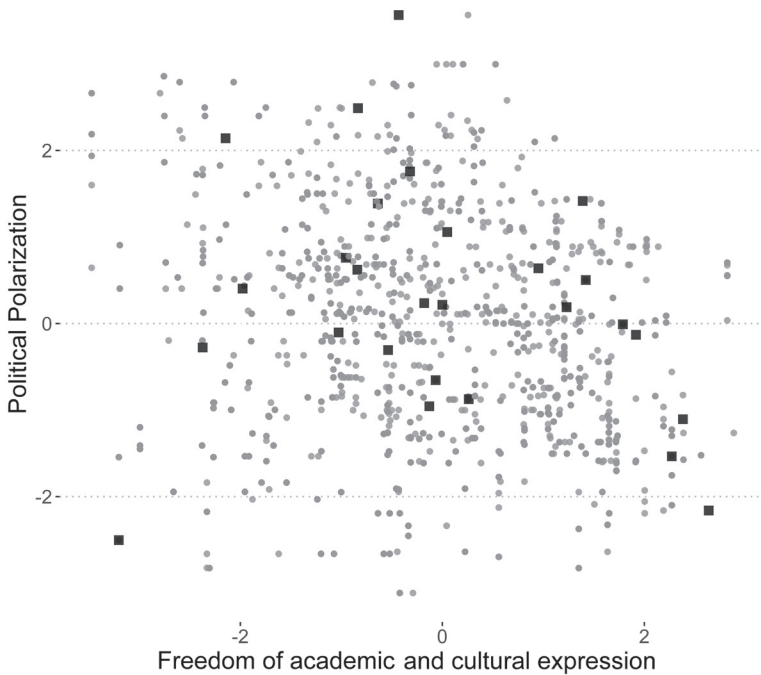


Fig. 1.12. Scatterplot mapping political polarization in Asia against the freedom of academic and cultural expression, 1900–2021 with 2021 scores highlighted. Data: V-Dem v-12.

In highly polarized societies in Asia, academics are not free to contribute their scholarly expertise on politically pertinent issues. We find the same pattern in other world regions; this underlines that it is not just governments that can restrict academics' freedom of expression. Other nonacademic actors can use intimidation tactics to silence academics who engage in so-called "extramural" speech as well.²⁶ Indeed, if we single out this indicator—the freedom of academic and cultural expression on political issues—the list of deteriorations in Asia between 2001 and 2021 is even longer than the one discussed above for academic freedom in all its dimensions. Significant deteriorations in academics' freedom of expression, notably on politically salient issues, were recorded in Afghanistan, Burma/Myanmar, China, Hong Kong, India, Nepal, Pakistan, the Philippines, Kyrgyzstan, and Thailand.

Finally, it is instructive to think about how different dimensions of academic freedom—notably, the institutional and individual dimensions—relate to each other. Figure 1.13 indicates a clear linear correlation between universities’ autonomy and Asian scholars’ freedom to research and teach. In countries where universities enjoy *de facto* autonomy, individual academics tend to freely pursue their core professional duties: higher education and scientific research. This is not only true in Asia but across the world.



Fig. 1.13. Scatterplot mapping universities’ institutional autonomy against the freedom to research and teach in Asia, 1900–2021. Data: V-Dem v-12.

It seems to me that the very clear correlation between the institutional and the individual dimensions of academic freedom is remarkable and worthy of further discussion. The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) has called institutional autonomy a “necessary precondition” for individual academic freedom.²⁷ AFI data underscore this claim. Nevertheless, autonomous institutions may not be a sufficient guarantor of individual freedom because universities can place institutional restrictions on research and teaching. In fact, they do so all the time—for example, when they try to improve teaching

through various quality assurance measures, when they withhold ethical clearance for research projects, or when they make decisions on how to allocate resources, thereby routinely advancing some research agendas while limiting others. There is potential for abuse in all these procedures. In this sense, it is an important and encouraging empirical finding that a high degree of academic self-governance tends to result in decisions that, by and large, appear to protect individuals' freedom to research and teach.

Conclusion

This study finds that Asia's regional average in *de facto* academic freedom remains lower than the world's average. The AFI scores for Asia further suggest a negative trend over the last decade, though this finding remains uncertain. Considering that the country-based regional average has shivered within the confidence interval over the past two decades, I conclude somewhat optimistically that the average government in Asia has not significantly changed its attitude toward the protection of academic freedom. At the same time, population-weighted data point to a serious deterioration, reflecting negative developments in populous countries. Moreover, Asian countries on average appear to restrict academic freedom even more than other liberties—a preliminary but concerning finding that deserves further attention. The risk is real that deteriorations in academic freedom will consolidate across more countries in the region, while there are no signs of robust improvements.

I explored possible explanatory variables for shifting academic freedom levels in Asia, notably regime type, political polarization, and institutional autonomy. I argue that each of these factors – autocracy and autocratization, highly divided political camps, and universities without self-rule – threaten scholarly work both on and off campus. The suggested relationships require further study, notably regarding specific causal mechanisms. Future analysis should control for other plausible determinants, such as the degree of public financing for universities, academics' economic security (tenure or functional equivalents), the size of the academic sector, and countries' size and overall level of economic development.

By providing a quantitative overview on academic freedom in Asia, I intended to offer a first point of reference and orientation, but I inevitably only scratched the topic's surface. Disaggregated data allowed me to discuss some differences across the region, yet the AFI cannot do justice to important subnational differences. Therefore, this quantitative overview should be read in combination with the more in-depth, qualitative studies in this volume.

Acknowledgments

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Notes

¹On shifting standards of assessment, see Fariss, C. J., “Respect for Human Rights Has Improved Over Time: Modeling the Changing Standard of Accountability in Human Rights Documents,” *American Political Science Review* 108, no. 2 (2014), 297–318. For a comprehensive discussion of the challenges related to events data, see Ball, P., “The Bigness of Big Data: Samples, Models, and the Facts We Might Find When Looking at Data,” in *The Transformation of Human Rights Fact-Finding*, eds. Alston, P. and Knuckey, S. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), 425–440.

²For information effects in standards-based measures, see Clark, A. M. and Sikkink, K., “Information Effects and Human Rights Data: Is the Good News about Increased Human Rights Information Bad News for Human Rights Measures?” *Human Rights Quarterly* 35, no. 3 (2013), 539–568.

³For more information on various data sources, see Spannagel, J. “The Perks and Hazards of Data Sources on Academic Freedom,” in *Researching Academic Freedom*, ed. Kinzelbach, K. (Erlangen: FAU University Press, 2020), available open access at https://opus4.kobv.de/opus4-fau/files/15031/Researching_Academic_Freedom_OPUS.pdf, accessed Apr. 24, 2021; DOI: 10.25593/978-3-96147-370-0.

⁴The AFI dimensions are in line with state obligations under international law, notably article 15(3) of the International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights, which has been ratified by 171 states. It obliges signatory states to protect “the freedom indispensable for scientific research.” See UN Committee on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights (CESCR), “General comment No. 25 on science and economic, social and cultural rights (article 15 (1) (b), (2), (3), and (4) of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights),” UN document no. E/C.12/GC/25 (Geneva: United Nations, 2020), <https://undocs.org/E/C.12/GC/25>, accessed March 19, 2022. For more information on the conceptualization of the AFI indicators, see Spannagel, J., & Kinzelbach, K. (2022). The Academic Freedom Index and Its indicators: Introduction to new global time-series V-Dem data. *Quality & Quantity*, 1–21.

⁵The V-Dem Institute at the University of Gothenburg selects the experts for the AFI, in line with the rules that are applicable to the V-Dem project as a whole. Experts typically have a PhD and live in the country that they code. Academics interested in contributing to the AFI as coders are invited to apply. See Call for Country Experts: Be part of the largest ever data collection project on democracy (<https://forms.office.com/Pages/ResponsePage.aspx?id=ZUjeHQMjPUqYF45I1pke6kHjjs51L>

VBNptbcKz7DVUxUN0FYNlpQNzkzRDVRWFpISEpNUE42OFQyRy4u), accessed March 19, 2022.

⁶ Coppedge, M. et. al., “V-Dem Codebook v12,” Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem) Project (2022), available at: <https://www.v-dem.net/static/website/img/refs/codebookv12.pdf>, accessed March 19, 2022.

⁷ See, for example, Marquardt, K. L., “How and How Much Does Expert Error Matter? Implications for Quantitative Peace Research,” *Journal of Peace Research*, 57, no. 6 (2020), 692–700.

⁸ The author is part of the global V-Dem team: https://www.v-dem.net/global_team.html. For more on the AFI, see https://www.v-dem.net/academic_freedom.html and <https://www.pol.phil.fau.eu/academicfreedom>, accessed March 19, 2022.

⁹ On latent traits, see Marquardt, K. L. and Pemstein, D., “Estimating Latent Traits from Expert Surveys: An Analysis of Sensitivity to Data Generating Process,” University of Gothenburg, Varieties of Democracy Institute: Working Paper No. 83 (December 2018). On anchoring vignettes, see Hopkins, D. and King, G., “Improving Anchoring Vignettes: Designing Surveys to Correct Interpersonal Incomparability,” *Public Opinion Quarterly* (2010), 1–22.

¹⁰ See Pemstein et al. “The Vx-Dem Measurement Model: Latent Variable Analysis for Cross-National and Cross-Temporal Expert-Coded Data”. In: V-Dem Working Paper No. 21. 7th edition. University of Gothenburg: Varieties of Democracy Institute. 2022. Available online: https://v-dem.net/media/publications/Working_Paper_21.pdf, accessed April 24, 2021. Also see Coppedge, M. et al. “The Methodology of ‘Varieties of Democracy’ (V-Dem)” in *Bulletin of Sociological Methodology*, July 2019, available online: <https://doi.org/10.1177/0759106319854989>, accessed April 24, 2021.

¹¹ In line with V-Dem’s background factor *e_regionpol_6C*, which groups countries in politico-geographic categories, this study focuses on countries in the Asia and Pacific region, excluding Australia and New Zealand.

¹² All charts in this chapter can be reproduced using the V-Dem data set, which is freely available for download at <https://www.v-dem.net/vdemds.html>, accessed March 19, 2022.

¹³ See, for example, Asia Centre, *Academic Freedoms Deteriorate as Autocracy Strengthens in Asia* (2021), available online at <https://asiacentre.org/academic-freedoms-deteriorate-as-autocracy-strengthens-in-asia>, accessed April 24, 2021.

¹⁴ On negativity bias and human rights, see Sikkink, K., *Evidence for Hope: Making Human Rights Work in the Twenty-First Century* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2017), 161.

¹⁵ A high score in the civil liberties variable reflects the absence of physical violence committed by government agents and the absence of constraints on private liberties and political liberties by the government.

¹⁶ Worldwide, the only two countries for which the AFI registered statistically significant improvements in the period between 2011 and 2021 are the Gambia and Uzbekistan. In both cases, an election preceded the improvement. In Uzbekistan (excluded in this chapter

because I rely on V-Dem's politico-geographic category "Asia and Pacific," which does not include Central Asia), *de facto* academic freedom remains at a low level overall.

¹⁷ Hasan M., "Who Suppresses Free Speech in Bangladesh? A Typology of Actors," in *Transnational Othering—Global Diversities*, eds. Eide, E, Orgeret, K. S., and Mutluer, N. (Nordicom, 2019), 155–170. Available online at https://www.researchgate.net/publication/336983963_Who_suppresses_free_speech_in_Bangladesh_A_typology_of_actors, accessed April 24, 2021.

¹⁸ Heng, K., "The State of Academic Freedom in Cambodia," AVI Commentary Issue No. 25 (2020), Asian Vision Institute. Available at: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/343252245_The_State_of_Academic_Freedom_in_Cambodia, accessed March 19, 2022.

¹⁹ Alizada, N. et al. *Autocratization Turns Viral: Democracy Report 2021* (University of Gothenburg: V-Dem Institute, 2021), available online: <https://www.v-dem.net/files/25/DR%202021.pdf>, accessed April 24, 2021.

²⁰ Alizada et al., 20.

²¹ Sundar, N. "Academic Freedom in India: A Status Report," in *The India Forum*, September 2020 issue, available online: <https://www.theindiaforum.in/article/academic-freedom-india>, accessed April 24, 2021.

²² See <https://www.hrw.org/news/2020/01/07/india-police-fail-protect-students>, accessed October 7, 2021.

²³ See <https://thewire.in/education/universities-now-need-govt-approval-for-online-international-events-on-indias-internal-matters>, accessed April 24, 2021.

²⁴ See <https://www.universityworldnews.com/post.php?story=20210203072713445>, accessed March 19, 2022.

²⁵ See <https://science.thewire.in/education/government-withdraws-controversial-order-on-online-international-seminars>, accessed April 24, 2021.

²⁶ See Janika Spannagel's analysis that focuses on academic freedom and polarization in liberal and electoral democracies: "A Perfect Shitstorm," GPPi Web Magazine, *COVID-19 and Academic Freedom*, available at <https://covidacdfreedom.gppi.net/#polarization>, accessed March 19, 2022.

²⁷ UNESCO (1997): Recommendation concerning the Status of Higher-Education Teaching Personnel, § 18 available at: portal.unesco.org/en/ev.php-URL_ID=13144&URL_DO=DO_TOPIC&URL_SECTION=201.html accessed June 19, 2022.