

# Rule of Law – Decay or Renovation?

THE WORLD IS BECOMING FREER, GREENER, RICHER – WHY THEN DO WE FEEL POORER IN FREEDOM?

Lately, there have been many negative reports about the rule of law, and sometimes certainly justifiably so. Nevertheless, in the call for papers, we explicitly stated that other voices are also welcome. Perhaps this column is contrary due to the optimistic tone.

The World Justice Project Rule of Law Index shows a slight global decrease: in the most recent measurement, 68% of the countries saw a small decrease (average  $-1.07\%$ ), often due to increasing corruption or polarization in some regions. But at the same time, 32% of the countries did improve, with an average increase of  $+0.52\%$ . Countries such as Poland, Senegal, Brazil and Thailand climbed in the rankings thanks to concrete reforms in justice and corruption-control. Important, because a stronger rule of law is related to higher welfare.

Meanwhile, extreme poverty is steadily declining (from 40% in 1990 to around 10% in 2025), Hunger is declining in large parts of the world. The planet is getting greener. Air pollution is declining worldwide. Oil spills are with down by more than 90% since the 1970s. Child mortality has halved since 1990. More than 100 million children have been born since 1990 extra saved through health advance gang. Since 2000, 88% have been due to vaccines fewer deaths from measles this century is there a 90% decrease in preference for male babies.

Armed conflicts and *battle deaths* are lower than in most 20th-century decades, and there are more democracies than ever in an absolute sense.

All this happens not despite, but partly thanks to economic growth and thanks to economic freedom. And economic Freedom is only possible with that modern world-a miracle of an economic transaction.

A transaction only takes place if there is the getting married is that both parties the condition-honor part of the transaction. Therefore is

strong legal protection needed via own-domestic rights, enforceable contracts and free movement of market players. But right-protection is also the protection of freedom of expression: the right to express ideas without top-down censorship.

Musk prevents freedom of speech. At least, that is a commonly heard claim. But is this really the case? The facts speak for themselves. otherwise. The Twitter Files exposed how the old Twitter collaborated with government agencies to under-content printing – think of the Hunter Biden-Laptop story in 2020. Musk bought it. platform and turned it around with Community Notes: crowdsourced truth-finding significantly curbs viral disinformation (reposts  $-46\%$ , likes  $-44\%$ ). Collective checks by diversity in voices, not centralized sed 'experts' or government pressure

Take the 'fine people' hoax around Charlottesville (2017): Trump condemned neo-Nazis explicitly, but the narrative was widely shared as the core of the 2020-campaign – despite the unedited video showed the opposite. Or think to the BBC who a clip from January 6, 2021 edited so that it looked as if Trump was direct called for violence. Thanks to open discussion and Community Notes become such misrepresentations debunked faster: more freedom of speech, fairer debate, more justice.

Whatever we may think of Trump: his The approach was deregulation, which made markets freer. creates and strengthens property rights. Burdensome rules were rolled back, costs for real estate and construction decreased,

Fiscal incentives fueled growth. Energy, tech and financial sectors flourished due to less bureaucracy.

News is always bad news. It is not news when no accident happens for a day, It is no news if the world again becomes a bit richer, and it is not news when there is another day with fewer children mortality is. Pessimism and doomsday scenarios are indeed news. Paul Ehrlich is better known than Julian Simon of Borlaug. The Club of Rome is more famous than Hans Kahn. Malthus is better known than Boserup. But it is unknown Not incorrect. The progress is real. Let us cherish, protect and to grow. The rule of law – supported by freedom of expression and free markets – remains its engine.

Is the rule of law under pressure? Is above-Standing too optimistic? The discussion is Welcome, share your opinion.

Tjitsger Hulshoff RBA

