

The Opposition Performance Index —

The Gap Has Two Causes — *and One Goes Unmeasured*

105

COUNTRIES SCORED · APRIL 2026

The civic space an opposition is allowed and the space it actually occupies are rarely the same. The distance between them comes from two sources — an opposition still under development, and surveillance and interference that today's indicators do not capture.

Every country grants its opposition a measurable amount of civic space. The opposition rarely occupies all of it — and the gap between *allowed* and *occupied* has two distinct causes, only one of which the standard measures can see.

The OPI re-sorts V-Dem's opposition indicators — checked against Democracy Perception Index survey data and read through Gamboa's strategy typology — to compare the civic space a country makes available with the space the opposition actually uses. The distance between the two is real and consistent across all 30-plus countries where opposition can still *compete*. But that distance is not a single thing. Part of it is an opposition that has not yet built what the available space would support. Part of it is the space itself being quietly narrowed — by surveillance, monitoring, and interference that leave every formal right intact on paper and so never register in the indicators. An honest account of the gap holds

both: what the opposition has not yet built, and what the state quietly takes back.

THE GAP, DECOMPOSED

Two causes — *one visible, one hidden*

CAUSE ONE

Opposition Under-Development

INTERNAL

MEASURED

The opposition has not yet built the organization the available space would support — thin presence at the local level, a weak party institution, a strategy still being worked out after years out of power.

This is the part of the gap the OPI measures directly: the distance between a country's political space and the opposition's organizational strength. It is real, and it is the opposition's *own work to close*.

Addressed by strategy and organization — the subject of the Gamboa typology, page two.

CAUSE TWO

Surveillance & Interference

EXTERNAL

LARGELY UNMEASURED

The civic space the indicators record as allowed is often less than it appears. Covert monitoring, digital surveillance, legal harassment, and quiet intimidation shrink the space an opposition can safely use.

None of this removes a formal right. Standard V-Dem reading therefore misses it — the rights still exist on paper. This is the *unmeasured half of the gap*.

Addressed by better measurement, digital security, and legal protection — the frontier taken up on page two.

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OF THE 50-COUNTRY CORE

Score below 15 of 100. The opposition has almost no room to operate, whatever it does.

~10

MEDIAN OPI SCORE

The opposition exists, but is barely active. Only five countries score above 25.

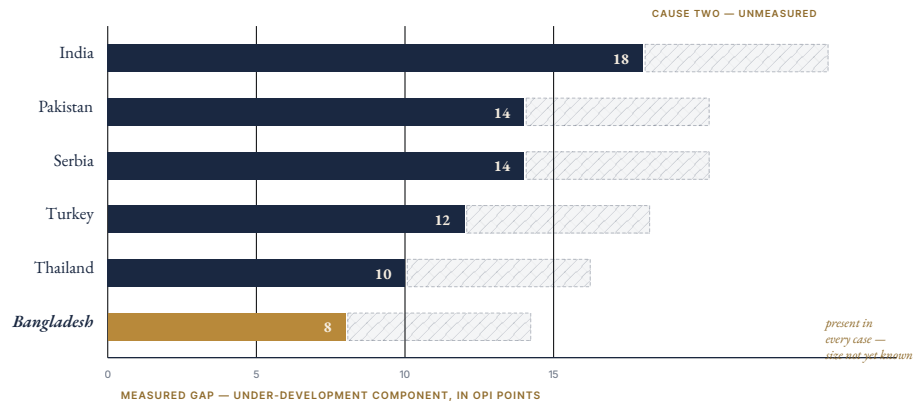
30+

WHERE THE CONTEST IS REAL

Score above 15. The opposition can still compete — and both causes are in play.

THE MEASURED GAP · SELECTED COUNTRIES

What the numbers show — *and what they leave out*



Solid — the measured gap from opposition under-development

□ Hatched — surveillance & interference, illustrative width only

The solid bars are real OPI figures.

The hatched extension marks a second cause that is present in every case but not yet quantified

— so the true gap is wider than the numbers alone show.

*Part of the gap is what the opposition has **not yet built**.
Part of it is what the state **quietly takes back**.
Only the first part shows up in the numbers.*

A search for hard evidence — *where evidence is built to be hidden*

Surveillance and interference are not absent from the world. They are absent from the measurements — and the reason is methodological, not careless. Democracy measurement, V-Dem included, is built on **hard evidence**: coders record what can be documented, observed, and verified. That discipline is what gives the numbers their credibility. But covert surveillance and interdiction produce no documentary record — by design. A government does not publish the monitoring of its opposition. A standard built on hard evidence will therefore always undercount covert activity, because *covert activity is built to defeat exactly that standard*. The formal rights stay intact on paper; the indicators score the space as open; the quiet narrowing never appears.

THE CURRENT STANDARD

Hard Evidence

What it is. Documented, observed, verifiable incidents — court records, reported arrests, monitored legislation, named events with a date attached.

Its strength. High confidence. Each figure can be defended and sourced.

Its limit. Covert activity leaves no record to code. It *undercounts, by design, everything hidden* — and surveillance is hidden by definition.

THE MISSING LAYER

Modelled Measurement

What it is. Statistical estimation of a level that cannot be directly observed — inferred from surveillance-capability data, behavioural proxies, comparative priors, and citizen-experience surveys that register the chilling effect.

Its strength. It can place a value on what hard evidence cannot see.

Its limit. It is an estimate, and must be *reported as one* — clearly labelled, never mixed into the observed figures.

It is time to measure both halves of the gap.

“ Other fields long ago learned to model what they cannot directly observe — epidemiology estimates undetected infection, economics estimates the informal economy, intelligence assessment estimates capability and intent. Democracy measurement has been unusually reluctant to do the same. The OPI’s position is plain: keep hard evidence as the spine, add modelled estimation as a clearly-labelled second layer, and report the two side by side so a user always knows which is which.

Canada's Bill C-22, *and why no democracy is exempt*

Bill C-22 — the *Lawful Access Act*, 2026

OI WORKSTREAM ·
CANADA

The narrowing of opposition space by surveillance is not a problem of fragile democracies alone. Canada's Bill C-22 expands state surveillance powers without removing a single political right. Opposition parties keep every formal freedom — to organize, to assemble, to speak. What they stand to lose is **functional privacy**: the capacity to develop strategy, communicate internally, and prepare policy without the governing party able to observe it.

MEASURED ON HARD EVIDENCE

No change recorded. Every formal opposition right in Canada remains intact on paper, so an indicator-based reading registers nothing.

MEASURED WITH MODELLING

The narrowing registers at once. A modelled account of surveillance capability captures the loss of functional privacy the formal rights conceal.

This is Cause Two in a consolidated democracy. It is why OI's C-22 workstream and the OPI's measurement frontier are *the same argument approached from two ends*. Surveillance-driven narrowing of opposition space is a structural feature of the digital era, and no democracy is exempt. OI's response — a cross-party coalition of opposition parliamentarians treating functional privacy as an institutional requirement of opposition itself — is the practical counterpart to the measurement work on this page.

GAMBOA STRATEGY TYPOLOGY · RESPONDING TO CAUSE ONE

What each opposition *could do about the part it controls*

The under-development gap is the opposition's own to close, and the right approach depends on a country's conditions. **Types A, B, and C** are the competing tier where unused space can still become votes; **Type D** countries are closed autocracies with no real contest.

A · 28%

B · 19%

C · 12%

D · 41%

Type A

28%

Moderate, institutional. Works through parliament, courts, and formal channels. Succeeds on unity and open institutions.

Type B

19%

Moderate, outside formal channels. Civic mobilization, protest, and civil-society pressure to widen the opening.

Type C

12%

Radical, institutional. Legislative confrontation, impeachment drives, and constitutional hardball.

Type D

41%

Survival. A closed autocracy — diaspora-led documentation and international certification remain.

Bangladesh — *an opposition under-developed, a space still contested*

Bangladesh

AFTER THE AUGUST 2024 REVOLUTION · FEBRUARY 2026 ELECTION

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OPI / 100

▲ IMPROVING FASTER THAN ANY OTHER COUNTRY IN THE 105-COUNTRY SAMPLE

CAUSE ONE — WHAT THE OPPOSITION HAS NOT YET BUILT

PARTY STRENGTH ON THE GROUND — THE WIDEST GAP

After 15 years of erosion under the AL, no party has rebuilt a real local-level presence.

OPPOSITION AUTONOMY — MEDIUM

Much improved since the Hasina period; parties now organize freely, but the institution is thin.

ELECTORAL INTEGRITY — MEDIUM

February 2026 was the most credible election since 2008; the system is not yet settled.

CAUSE TWO — THE SPACE QUIETLY NARROWED

INTERFERENCE — VISIBLE & COVERT

16 political killings are the visible tip. Surveillance and quiet intimidation, by their nature, are not counted.

CIVIL LIBERTIES — MEDIUM

Press and assembly rights have largely recovered on paper; lived practice is harder to verify.

INTERNATIONAL LEVERAGE — MEDIUM

Trade access, IMF and World Bank programs, and bilateral aid give real outside leverage on conduct.

Reading: the measured gap is 8 points — space available 20, space used 12. A dual track of legislative work and civic mobilization (Gamboa A + B) fits these conditions.

The caution: the 8-point figure is *Cause One only*. The interference component is real and not yet in the score. The constitutional window is open, and short.

Ranks 2nd of 105 countries by strategic opportunity.

THE FINDING, IN PLAIN TERMS

Read V-Dem twice — once for the civic space a country allows, once for the activity its opposition manages now. The gap has two causes, and the standard reading sees only one. **The remedy is to measure both — hard evidence and modelled estimate, reported side by side.**

AUTHORSHIP & GUIDANCE

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SOURCES & CORRESPONDENCE

Draws on Gamboa (2022), Acemoglu & Robinson (2012 / 2019), Przeworski, Bermeo, Levitsky & Way · V-Dem v16 (2026).
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