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When Autocratization is Reversed:
Episodes of Democratic Turnarounds since 1900

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Abstract

The world is currently undergoing a ‘wave of autocratization’. Yet, autocratization is not an end in itself but can be halted and, most importantly, reversed. This paper introduces “democratic turnarounds” as a new type of regime transformation episode in which autocratization is closely followed by and inherently linked to subsequent democratization. It provides a comprehensive conceptualization with an accompanying operationalization of this new type of episode between 1900-2022, complementing the existing Episodes of Regime Transformation (ERT) framework. It also presents the first-ever systematic empirical overview of patterns and developments of democratic turnarounds. A key finding is that 48% of all episodes of autocratization become democratic turnarounds, which increases to 70% when focusing on the last 30 years. The vast majority of democratic turnarounds (93 percent) lead to restored or even improved levels of democracy. The new data on democratic turnaround episodes opens up new avenues for research on autocratization and democratization that were previously treated as distinct processes and promises answers to new questions such as why some episodes of autocratization lead to stable autocracies while others result in democratic turnarounds. Answering that question promises to be of tremendous importance for the world that is currently in its deepest-ever wave of autocratization.

Keywords: Democracy, Autocratization, Democratization, Resistance, Turnaround, U-turn

When autocratization results in democratization?

Zambia's fifth President Michael Sata took office on September 23, 2011 and died while in office on October 28, 2014. Before passing away, President Sata and his Patriotic Front (PF) clamped down on the freedoms of assembly and expression initiating an episode of autocratization (Hinfelaar, Rakner, and van de Walle, 2023). Despite this, the ruling PF and its Defense and Justice Minister Edgar Lungu narrowly won the January 20, 2015 presidential by-election and Zambia's sharp decline in democratic levels continued. While seemingly a secure electoral authoritarian regime by 2021, Lungu's rule was upended by an unlikely win for the pro-democratic opposition led by the United Party for National Development's Hakainde Hichilema in the general elections. This was the outcome of an "underground" mobilization in direct response to PF's autocratization in the previous years (Resnick, 2022). Zambia's dramatic democratic upturn and re-democratization episode countered previous years' derailments to restore freedoms and rights. Although the existing literature and available quantitative measures typically would treat developments in Zambia as two distinct cases of autocratization and democratization respectively, we should ask ourselves: Are these two episodes not part of the same episode of regime transformation, in which a process of autocratization fueled a process of subsequent democratization?

We propose a new type of regime transformation: "democratic turnaround." It entails an episode of autocratization closely followed by an episode of democratization, and that the two are parts of one process. In this paper, we offer four main contributions. First, we provide a comprehensive conceptualization of democratic turnaround episodes as a distinct case of regime transformation that connects existing findings on autocratization (Bermeo, 2016; Lührmann and Lindberg, 2019; Medzihorsky and Lindberg, 2023; Wiebrecht et al., 2023), resistance to autocratization (Cleary and Öztürk, 2022; Gamboa, 2022; Laebens and Lührmann, 2021; Tomini, Gibril, and Bochev, 2023), democratization (Lindberg, 2009; Linz and Stepan, 1996; O'Donnell and Schmitter, 1986), and authoritarian instability (Carothers, 2009; Levitsky and Way, 2010). Most research treats changes that occur in one or the other direction (i.e., towards or away from democracy) as cases of distinct phenomena whether in terms of gradual upward and downward movements (e.g., Acemoglu and Robinson, 2006; Coppedge et al., 2023;

Teorell, 2010), discrete transitions (e.g., Boix and Stokes, 2003; Linz, 1978; O’Donnell and Schmitter, 1986; Przeworski, 2000), or episodes (e.g., Maerz et al., 2023).¹ Building on the episodes approach, this paper suggests that when autocratization and subsequent democratization are inherently linked they constitute a hereto unrecognized type of regime transformation of democratic turnaround. Several recent cases of reversions following episodes of backsliding illustrate this hereto unrecognized type of regime transformation including Ecuador, The Maldives, and North Macedonia (Wiebrecht et al., 2023). As such, our concept speaks to research that also takes a more comprehensive approach to studying regime changes such as cycles and ceilings (Hale, 2005; Hur and Yeo, 2023), but differs from it in that we clearly identify episodes of autocratization followed by episodes of democratization as defining elements of democratic turnarounds.

Second, we develop an operationalization of democratic turnarounds as a distinct episode of regime transformation supplementing the Episodes of Regime Transformations (ERT) methodology (Maerz et al., 2023) which is based on changes in the V-Dem’s Electoral Democracy Index (Coppedge et al., 2023; Pemstein et al., 2022). We provide a systematic capturing of all episodes of democratic turnarounds from 1900 to 2022. This data opens new research avenues in the study of autocratization and democratization (such as why some countries halt and revert autocratization, while others do not), which is concealed when just studying autocratization and democratization as individual processes.

Third, we present the first empirical overview of patterns and developments of democratic turnaround episodes. We systematically describe a sample of 98 episodes of democratic turnarounds that occurred in 65 countries between 1900 and 2022, highlighting the significance of studying this phenomenon. Significantly, we find that almost half – 48 percent – of all autocratization episodes since 1900 are “false positives” in the sense that they did not establish stable authoritarian regimes but rather transformed into democratic turnarounds. We also find that democratic turnarounds have never been more frequent than during the last 30 years - the period of the “third wave of autocratization” (Lührmann and Lindberg, 2019) - during which

¹There are examples in the literature discussing competitive authoritarian regimes fluctuating between more and less democratic characteristics (Levitsky and Way, 2010; Hale, 2005); newly transitioned democracies reverting into autocracies (Linz and Stepan, 1996); and shifts to civilian rule in the wake of military coups (Thyne and Powell, 2016).

70 percent of all autocratization episodes have been turned around within maximum five years from their end.

Fourth, we show that there is a significant heterogeneity of pathways for turnarounds that start in liberal- and electoral democracies, or electoral (or even closed) autocracies. Regardless, 95 percent of turnarounds involve a period of autocracy at the "bottom" of the curve, including also the ones that started out as democracies. Out of the 44 cases where autocratization started in a democracy, democracy broke down for a short period in 39 cases before the turnaround. Notably, almost all of them became democracies again. In other words, a democratic breakdown does not necessarily prevent a swift return of democracy, especially if autocratization is halted and reversed relatively swiftly – the average turnaround happens with around 5 years after the start of autocratization.

Furthermore, we discuss the "average" dynamics of a democratic turnaround episode, and distinguish three distinct patterns based on the episode outcome: U-shaped, J-shaped, and L-shaped democratic turnarounds. While U-shaped turnarounds restore a country's pre-episode democracy levels, J-shaped turnarounds yield substantially higher democracy levels, and L-shaped substantially lower democracy levels than at the onset.² We find that U-shaped and J-shaped turnarounds together constitute 93 percent of all episodes of democratic turnarounds, meaning that the vast majority of democratic turnarounds result in either restored or improved levels of democracy.

Below, we first discuss the scholarship on regime change and regime instability to review existing ideas on democratic turnarounds. Next, we provide a comprehensive conceptualization of democratic turnarounds. Third, we describe operationalization rules used to identify democratic turnarounds from 1900 onwards. In the final section, we provide the first-ever systematic analysis of patterns and trends regarding democratic turnaround episodes. We conclude by outlining a new research agenda opening up for scholars of democratization and autocratization alike, highlighting some of the potential applications of this approach for future research.

²These facts were important considerations when choosing between terms to describe the core concept here. Options like "re-democratization" or "bouncing back" are misleading since they imply that all cases lead to restoring previous levels whereas that is far from always the case.

One- and Two-Directional Regime Transformations

Quantitative approaches to regime changes are often distinguished by the use of either categorical, discrete regime distinctions (e.g., Alvarez et al., 1996; Boix, Miller, and Rosato, 2013; Cheibub, Gandhi, and Vreeland, 2010; Lührmann, Tannenber, and Lindberg, 2018) or continuous measures of change (e.g., Bollen and Jackman, 1989; Coppedge et al., 2023; Teorell, 2010). In either case, conventional studies conceptualize regime transformation as moving to or towards democracy, alternatively autocracy, and typically focus on only one of the two directions. This unidirectionality is dominant in the study of liberalization (e.g., O'Donnell and Schmitter, 1986), democratic transitions (Linz and Stepan, 1996; O'Donnell and Schmitter, 1986), democratic deepening (Maerz et al., 2023), democratic erosion (Haggard and Kaufman, 2021; Mainwaring and Bizzarro, 2019), democratic breakdown (Linz, 1978), and autocratic regression (Maerz et al., 2023).

The conceptual consensus in the current literature is that episodes of regime change (variously labelled as processes of change, liberalization, erosion, transition, breakdown, etc.) end once the movement in one direction ceases. In many cases, this one-directional regime transformation of autocratization and democratization fits well. For example, many protracted and incumbent-led democratizations (Acemoglu and Robinson, 2006; Riedl et al., 2020; Ziblatt, 2017) are not instances in which democratization necessarily follows and is intertwined with an immediately previous period of autocratization. Similarly, most cases of democratic breakdown followed by a durable authoritarian regime such as that of fascist Italy, Pinochet's military rule in Chile, and Marco's dictatorship in the Philippines, are all examples of autocratization bringing down the democratic regimes largely unrelated to a previous period of democratization. Several recent examples of gradual autocratization episodes, such as Russia under Putin, Venezuela under Chavez, and Turkey under Erdogan, can also reasonably be studied as one-directional regime transformations. Those are and should be studied as processes of change that originate mainly exogenously from a previous process of change in the other direction, just like the existing literature has done.

Nevertheless, existing research typically does not consider the possibility that one process of regime transformation can be two-directional: a country goes through autocratization and

then democratization in one interlaced process. There are in fact a substantial number of instances of regime transformation that are characterized by contention and movements down and then up again along the regime spectrum where the latter change is at least in part endogenous to the first. Admittedly, a country's future development is to some extent always intertwined and influenced by all previous events and processes. Hence, we are in reality seeking to distinguish between inter-dependencies that are directly consequential and tangible, and those that are distant and indirect.

While two-directional regime change has not been conceptually developed, several studies point toward the idea that regime transformations may be more complicated and that regimes' trajectories toward and away from democracy may be linked. The most well-known are episodes of liberalization and transitions that fail and revert to autocracy. O'Donnell and Schmitter (1986) for example emphasize the unpredictability and frailty of liberalization processes, where the initial momentum caused by an opening up of society and relaxation of repression in autocracies can fail and lead to a slump back to an autocratic setting. Studies on the challenges of democratic consolidation similarly show that newly transitioned democracies are often fragile and quickly revert to autocracy (Linz and Stepan, 1996; Mainwaring and Bizzarro, 2019; Svobik, 2008; Svobik, 2015). More recently, Hur and Yeo (2023) introduced the notion of "democratic ceilings" that certain countries reach and, following that, decline again in their levels of democracy.

Another example of two-directionality discussed in the literature is fluctuating regime change under competitive authoritarian regimes (Levitsky and Way, 2010; Carothers, 2018). The blend of democracy and autocracy, especially under relatively weak states and party systems, leads to a contentious relationship between relatively pro- and anti-democratic groups (Levitsky and Way, 2010; Angiolillo, Wiebrecht, and Lindberg, 2023). For example, Way (2015) discusses the third-wave democratizers in the former Soviet Union, positing that "cases of pluralism by default are often characterized by significant instability in regime type — slipping back and forth between more open democratic and more authoritarian rule" (p.8). This resonates with other studies that refer to cyclical changes in political regimes. Hale (2005, p.134), for instance, discusses "regular and reasonably predictable cycles of movement both toward and

away from ideal types of democracy or autocracy” in the context of post-communist regimes. These cycles can also be episodes of two-directional regime change if they are substantial enough in both directions to reasonably be considered democratization and autocratization.

Existing scholarship has discussed instances where autocratization is, at least partially, offset by subsequent democratization. Linz (1978) outlines the related concept of re-equilibration, which is a “political process that, after a crisis that has seriously threatened the continuity and stability of the basic democratic political mechanisms, results in their continued existence at the same or higher levels of democratic legitimacy, efficacy, and effectiveness” (Linz, 1978, p. 87). Re-equilibration, however, is a wider concept than that of autocratization followed by democratization, as it includes crises that do not constitute autocratization, such as the change from the Fourth to the Fifth Republic in France.

Autocratization can swiftly follow democratization after military coups (Marinov and Goemans, 2014; Thyne and Powell, 2016). In other instances, authoritarian incumbents’ miscalculations can lead to liberalization, labelled “democratization by mistake” by Treisman (2020). Costa Rica is a case in point, where a short period of autocratization due to a civil war that burst out as a result of the incumbent’s “mistake” of invalidating the electoral results in 1948, in turn, led to a swift episode of democratization from 1949 to 1954 in the aftermath of the conflict. The extensive comparative case-literature emphasizing uncertainty and mistakes, not seldom leading to surprising losses of opposition momentum, incumbent power, or prolonged contention between groups of relatively equal power (O’Donnell and Schmitter, 1986; Przeworski, 1991; Rustow, 1999; Schedler, 2013; Treisman, 2020). Allowing for episodes of regime transformation to involve more than one direction of change lines up with these insights on how regime change takes place.

The Costa Rica example also illustrates that what has hereto been treated as two separate instances of regime transformation can in fact be two sides of the same process – and could, maybe even should, be studied as such. Separating the two introduces a risk of “false positives” in a sample of autocratization episodes, since autocratization episodes that were quickly reversed would be studied as if they had led to a durable authoritarian regime.

Identifying cases of “democratic turnarounds” is further important for studies of how the wave of contemporary autocratization can be reversed. Emerging research on democratic resilience focuses on actors’ resistance, opposition strategies, and institutional characteristics that are associated with succeeding or failing in removing autocratizing incumbents from power (Boese et al., 2021; Laebens and Lührmann, 2021; Tomini, Gibril, and Bochev, 2023; Cleary and Öztürk, 2022; Gamboa, 2022), but their analyses typically do not go beyond the point when autocratization is halted. The concept and identification of democratic turnarounds draws attention to a potential subsequent reversal, which is typically overlooked in the literature.³

Recently, Maerz et al. (2023) developed a unified architecture to detect processes of regime changes, the “Episodes of Regime Transformation” (ERT), identifying five possible paths and outcomes of episodes of democratization and autocratization respectively. While a significant advancement, it mostly still applies a unidirectional definition of regime change. Four of the ERT paths involve a slight bend upward or downward but only so far as to determine that an episode in one of the two principal directions has ended. When identifying outcomes of autocratization, Maerz et al. (2023) include “averted regression” for democracies registering some decline but in short order recoup, and “preempted democratic breakdown” for democracies with substantial declines that just barely avoid a breakdown and regain some amount of lost democratic qualities. While potentially being two-directional changes, such transformations are still treated as essentially one-directional processes. We aim to complement this conceptual framework by adding two-directional episodes.

Democratic Turnaround Episodes

We regard regime transformations as substantive moves along a democracy-autocracy continuum that may or may not involve transitions between regime types (Maerz et al., 2023; Lührmann and Lindberg, 2019).⁴ While autocratization is defined as “episodes that result in a sustained and substantial decline of democratic attributes,” democratization refers to “episodes

³It’s worth noting though that Merkel and Lührmann (2021, p. 872) include “the ability to recover after initial damage and disorder” as one of the components of democratic resilience.

⁴Democracy is conceptualized according to the Dahlian definition of democracy as “polyarchy”: universal suffrage, officials elected in free and fair elections, alternative sources of information and freedom of speech, and freedom of association (Dahl, 1971).

that exhibit substantial and sustained improvement of democratic institutions and practices” (Maerz et al., 2023, p.5).

“Democratic turnarounds” is an additional and hereto unrecognized type of episode in which democratization is born out of the initial autocratization making it meaningful to view both processes as a single episode. Such episodes constitute a single regime transformation in the sense that democratization is a reaction against autocratization leading to more or less successful attempts to restore the regime’s pre-episode democraticness. Hence, we define a democratic turnaround as a *period of substantive two-directional regime transformation along a democracy-autocracy continuum, in which autocratization is closely followed by and inherently linked to subsequent democratization.*

This definition has the benefit of being wide enough to allow us to identify a broad set of cases, and not prematurely exclude potentially relevant cases, while at the same time being restrictive enough to not include cases of a more short-term nature such as regular government turnovers. Importantly, while we call such episodes “*democratic* turnarounds,” our conceptualization of these episodes pertains not only to democracies. Regime transformations of that kind may start in countries across most of the democracy-autocracy spectrum.⁵ The “democratic” in the label simply signifies an upward movement on the scale.

We thus conceive of democratic turnarounds as episodes in which autocratization is shortly followed by democratization. Bridging our conceptual definition with an empirical discovery, we define three important elements to capture democratic turnarounds. First, to qualify as a two-directional regime transformation movements in *both* directions should be substantial. This means that a slight bend upward towards democracy after an autocratization episode (Maerz et al., 2023) or smaller regime fluctuations (Way, 2015; Hur and Yeo, 2023) are not identified as democratic turnarounds.

Second, the interlinkage between autocratization and democratization is an essential part of a democratic turnaround episode. Not only must autocratization be followed by democratization but the latter must be endogenously interlinked with autocratization to a substantial

⁵Naturally, some closed autocracies, such as North Korea and Eritrea, cannot undergo a democratic turnaround due to the “floor effect”: they never had much possibility to become worse in the first place.

extent.⁶ The interlinkage entails human agency intervening and changing the course of actions such as by citizen mobilization, electoral processes, elites coalescing to oust the incumbent, missteps of an incumbent that ultimately backfire, and similar actions. The opening case of Zambia exemplifies how opposition mobilization and the subsequent re-democratization were endogenously linked to the preceding episode of autocratization. Greater time difference makes such links weak. It would, for example, be difficult to argue that Ghana's democratization episode that started in 1992 was in any substantive way intertwined with its last instance of autocratization following the coup staged on the 31st of December 1981 by Flt. Lt. Jerry Rawlings. The coup of 1981 successfully established a new regime and Rawlings' Provincial National Defense Council ruled Ghana relatively unopposed for over a decade. The institutions were reshaped, power and opportunity structures for actors shifted and a return to the prior situation in terms of democracy became increasingly unfeasible (see Linz (1978) for a similar argument). In other words, with the passing of time, the connection to the regime in place before autocratization withers.

Third, democratic turnarounds can also result in a country eventually becoming substantially more or substantially less democratic than at the onset of autocratization. Therefore, by looking at countries' pre-episode and post-episode levels of democracy, we outline three possible outcomes that democratic turnaround episodes can have: U-shaped, J-shaped, and L-shaped. While U-shaped turnarounds *restore* the regime's pre-episode democraticness, J-shaped turnarounds result in a substantial *increase* in democratic traits, and L-shaped turnarounds result in a substantial *decline* in democratic levels.

To summarize, during democratic turnaround episodes (i) a country experiences a two-directional regime transformation - first away from and then back towards democracy, (ii) autocratization and democratization processes are interlinked and constitute a single interlaced episode, and (iii) the outcome of the transformation is a successful turnaround, or a reversal, in the sense that regime is substantively transformed in both directions. These three conceptual points serve as guidelines for the more technical operationalization issues discussed below.

⁶While we cannot provide detailed evidence for the inherent link between episodes of autocratization and democratization for all cases of democratic turnarounds, our empirical operationalization ensures that they are linked temporally, maximising the likelihood of an endogenous link.

Operationalization

Operationalization of democratic turnarounds and their subsequent classification requires three sets of decision rules: (i) rules to identify episodes of autocratization and democratization (i.e., episodes of one-directional regime transformation), (ii) interlinkage rules, and (iii) rules for distinguishing patterns with distinct episode outcomes.

Rules to identify one-directional regime transformations: To identify episodes of autocratization and democratization, we utilize the ERT R-package (Maerz et al., 2020) with default parameters as suggested by (Edgell et al., 2020). The script detects one-directional substantial and sustained changes in democratic institutions and practices based on changes in the V-Dem Electoral Democracy Index (EDI, *v2x-polyarchy*) (Coppedge et al., 2023)⁷ and provides information on the start and end years of autocratization and democratization episodes.

Interlinkage rules: Following the ERT logic for operationalizing episodes of regime transformation, we consider the process of regime transformation as ongoing if it has an annual change of at least ± 0.01 in one out of five consecutive years. Thus, we code episodes of democratic turnarounds as episodes of autocratization that are followed by episodes of democratization within the time span of no more than five years. The script measures this time span as a difference between the final year of the autocratization episode and the first year of the democratization episode.

The choice of five years as an interlinkage rule is arbitrary but a reasonable and intuitive choice for three reasons. First, a five-year time period is a normal election cycle for the majority of countries (Inter-Parliamentary Union, 2020). The rule thus allows most countries to hold at least one election after the final year of autocratization so that actors resisting autocratization could potentially coordinate their actions against autocratization around “critical events” (Knutsen, Nygård, and Wig, 2017; Schedler, 2013). Second, the five-year cut-off point is high enough to identify a broad set of cases of democratic reversals and not to limit ourselves

⁷Episodes of regime transformation are coded based on (i) an initial annual change in the EDI score of at least ± 0.01 (or 1 percent on a scale from 0 to 1), followed by (ii) an overall change of at least ± 0.10 (at least 10 percent of the possible range of the variable) over the duration of the episode (i.e., “substantial” change); and ending with (iii) the last year in which there was an annual change of at least ± 0.01 after episode onset and immediately prior to experiencing one of the termination rules. Episodes are marked as terminated if one of the following conditions is met: (i) there is a reverse annual change of 0.03 or greater in the EDI, (ii) there is a cumulative reverse change of 0.10 over a five-year period, or (iii) there are no annual changes of at least ± 0.01 in the EDI within five consecutive years.

to cases of a more short-term nature such as military coups followed by immediate elections. But it is also low enough to rule out cases of autocratization and democratization that are not substantively intertwined. Third, five years is the maximum length of the interlinkage period for which we can guarantee that the regime remains in stasis (i.e., no movements above 0.01 on the EDI in either direction) ⁸ The “interlinkage period” thus graphically always constitutes the “bottom” of a democratic turnaround.

Rules for identifying episode outcome: We code episode outcomes based on the magnitude of difference between pre-episode and end-of-episode EDI scores. Following the ERT logic, we distinguish between episode outcomes that lead to substantial increase or substantial decline in democratic regime traits and episodes that revert back to pre-episode democracy levels. For the identification of substantial differences, we use the ERT-conventional cut-off point of 0.10 on the EDI. When the difference is less than 0.10 the outcome of the episode is coded as a U-shaped turnaround. Episodes with a substantial increase in the EDI score by the end of the episode are coded as a J-shaped turnaround (more democratic at the end of the episode than at the onset). Substantial decline in the EDI score by the end of the episode results in an L-shaped turnaround (less democratic by the end of the episode than at the onset).

Validity checks: Coding rules are always debatable. We mostly follow the established ERT logic when adding new parameters. The extensive validation process of the ERT parameters provides some assurance that those are the soundest to identify episodes of regime transformation (Maerz et al., 2023). However, we also conduct multiple face validity and sensitivity tests to ensure that meaningful changes to the exact parameters used for the identification of democratic turnarounds do not significantly affect the results and that we measure what we want to measure. Specifically, we run validation tests manipulating parameters that could lead to changes in the composition and characteristics of democratic turnaround episodes: the default ERT parameters, interlinkage parameter, and parameter for the classification of episode outcomes. These along with the R-code are available upon request. For additional transparency and to demonstrate face validity, we provide the visualization of all episodes of democratic turnarounds in the Appendix.

⁸This follows the operationalization rules of the ERT: any annual change in the EDI score above ± 0.01 would have been included in either autocratization or democratization episode. See Edgell et al. (2020) for details.

Argentina: Face Validity

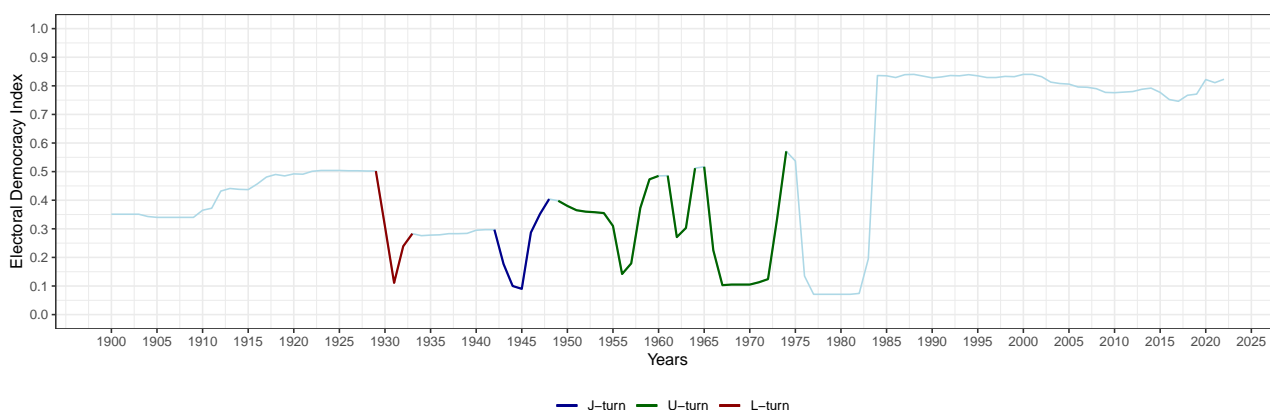
By way of face validation, we illustrate the value of our concept using the example of the only country that has had all three subtypes of democratic turnarounds: Argentina. Figure 1 shows all democratic turnarounds in Argentina's history between 1900 and 2022. Argentina had an L-shaped turnaround between 1930 and 1933, a J-shaped turnaround between 1943 and 1948, and three U-shaped turnaround episodes in the intervals between 1950 and 1960, 1962 and 1964, and 1966 and 1974. This period is sometimes described as cyclical (Jones, Lauga, and León-Roesch, 2005; Cavarozzi, 1986)⁹. Argentina thus serves as a good case for validation of the concept and coding of democratic turnaround episodes since the term "cyclical" suggests that these episodes are connected in one process rather than in distinct episodes as we suggest.

First, an L-shaped turnaround occurred in Argentina between 1930 and 1933. Having emerged as a fairly democratic multiparty parliamentary system in 1912 with the Sáenz Peña electoral law, the Argentinian political system eventually faced mounting crises in the late 1920s, not least due to increasingly personalistic and nepotistic rule (Jones, Lauga, and León-Roesch, 2005). In response to these crises, the military staged a coup in 1930, abolishing elections and banning several parties. On the EDI, Argentina moved from 0.5 in 1930 to 0.11 in 1931. The return of elections, though not very competitive, led to an increase up to 0.28 on the EDI by 1933. Yet, elections were far from free and fair, and civil and political rights remained restricted. The 1930 coup and its aftermath thus constituted an L-shaped turnaround episode where a relatively democratic regime broke down and was eventually replaced with a less competitive and more repressive regime.

Argentina remained autocratic for a decade until in 1943 three military coups in quick succession (Romero, 2015) again abolished elections and Argentina hit a low of 0.1 on the EDI in 1945. Multiparty elections were reinstated in 1946, leading to Juan Perón winning the presidency. The return of elections and their relatively competitive nature was the starting point of the reversal, and the subsequently less repressive environment after Perón's victory led to a move up to 0.4 on the EDI in 1948. In other words, Argentina was in a more democratic

⁹Contending groups of roughly similar strength vie for different regime types, with the country going through crises that see the respective end and return of parliamentary and military rule over half a century (Romero, 2015).

Figure 1. Democratic Turnaround Episodes in Argentina, 1900-2022



situation by 1948 than before the coups of 1943 constituting a J-shaped democratic turnaround episode.

Following the new Peronist constitution of 1949, Argentina gradually autocratized under Peron's increasingly personalistic rule (Romero, 2015). A military coup installed a military dictatorship in September 1955 and the EDI fell from 0.4 in 1950 to 0.14 in 1956. A constitutional assembly elected in 1957 issued a new constitution setting the stage for the 1958 general elections in which the biggest party, the Peronists, were not allowed to run (Jones, Lauga, and León-Roesch, 2005). Still, Argentina democratized between 1957 and 1960 reaching a high of 0.48. The scores on the EDI in 1950 and 1960 are similar (and less than 0.1) - 0.4 and 0.48 respectively - making it a U-shaped democratic turnaround episode.

The 1962 coup marked the return of military rule (Romero, 2015), setting in motion the shortest democratic turnaround in Argentina. New parliamentary elections (again banning Peronists) in 1963 and the military yet again stepping down from power ended the democratization phase in 1964. Argentina's score on the EDI fell from 0.49 in 1962, to 0.27 in 1963, and then went up to 0.51 in 1964, thus constituting yet another U-shaped turnaround.

This iteration of parliamentary rule ended after three years with yet another coup (Romero, 2015) and autocratization in 1966-67 that corresponds to a drop from 0.52 to 0.1 at its lowest. The reactive re-democratization set off in 1972 and general elections of 1973 led to Perón's return to the presidency. From 1972 to 1974, Argentina's EDI increased from 0.1 to 0.57, meaning that the total move from 0.5 in 1966 to 0.57 in 1974 corresponds to a third U-shaped turnaround episode. We contend that it is more fruitful to view these episodes as a series of

democratic turnarounds than 50+ years of a single cyclical process. Especially, the three successive U-turns show that the demise and return of parliamentary rule can be viewed as single processes that “restart” as the next U-turn sets in.

It may be worth noting that the last U-shaped democratic turnaround has the maximum length of the “interlinkage period”, i.e., five years. This stands in contrast to the subsequent development in Argentina, where the last and most repressive military dictatorship took power in a coup in 1976 and ended in 1983 (Romero, 2015). The respective military regimes lasted roughly the same length (seven years), yet the distance between autocratization and democratization was six years in the latter case. While the former rule was gradually dismantled, with democratization starting a year before the military stepped down, the latter constituted a sudden breakdown of the regime.

Below we provide the first-ever descriptive analyses of democratic turnarounds and distinguish three different patterns with distinct outcomes that these episodes can take. We thereby seek to demonstrate that the identification of democratic turnarounds provides new, important descriptive knowledge about our world. We also seek to show that it opens up avenues for addressing new research questions such as why some countries manage to revert autocratization and others do not, as well as enabling more nuanced answers to old questions by distinguishing between how “pure” democratization is different from democratization that is part of a democratic turnaround.

Descriptive Results

We find a total of 98 episodes of democratic turnarounds from 65 countries over the period from 1900 to 2022. For reference, during the same period, there were 204 finished and 40 “censored” (meaning that they are still ongoing and one cannot yet tell if they will become democratic turnarounds, or not) autocratization episodes and 410 democratization episodes. Two observations immediately stand out. First, nearly half (48 percent) of all finished episodes of autocratization end up with swift re-democratization, meaning that they were successfully

reversed within no more than five years after an autocratization episode ended.¹⁰ This is an unexpectedly high rate of reversals of autocratization, and a novel finding in itself. A first implication of this finding is that consolidating and sustaining an emerging authoritarian rule is perhaps more difficult than the existing literature sometimes posits. A second implication is that democratizing agents stand a decent chance of turning the development around in the face of ongoing autocratization. This opens up new research questions on why some autocratization episodes become democratic turnarounds and others do not. Notably, 36 percent of countries in the world have experienced at least one episode of democratic turnaround since 1900, which further highlights the significance of studying this phenomenon systematically.¹¹

What is Different About the Current Period?

Figure 2 shows the first-ever overview of democratic turnarounds against the backdrop of autocratization and democratization episodes, from 1900 to 2022. The green line with light green stacked area shows the yearly number of countries that were in episodes of democratic turnarounds. The solid red line with light red shaded area visualizes the number of episodes of autocratization that have finished, while all censored (yet indeterminate) episodes of autocratization are depicted with a dashed dark red line with dark red shaded area appearing towards the end of the period. The blue line delineates the number of countries that were in a democratization episode in any particular year.¹²

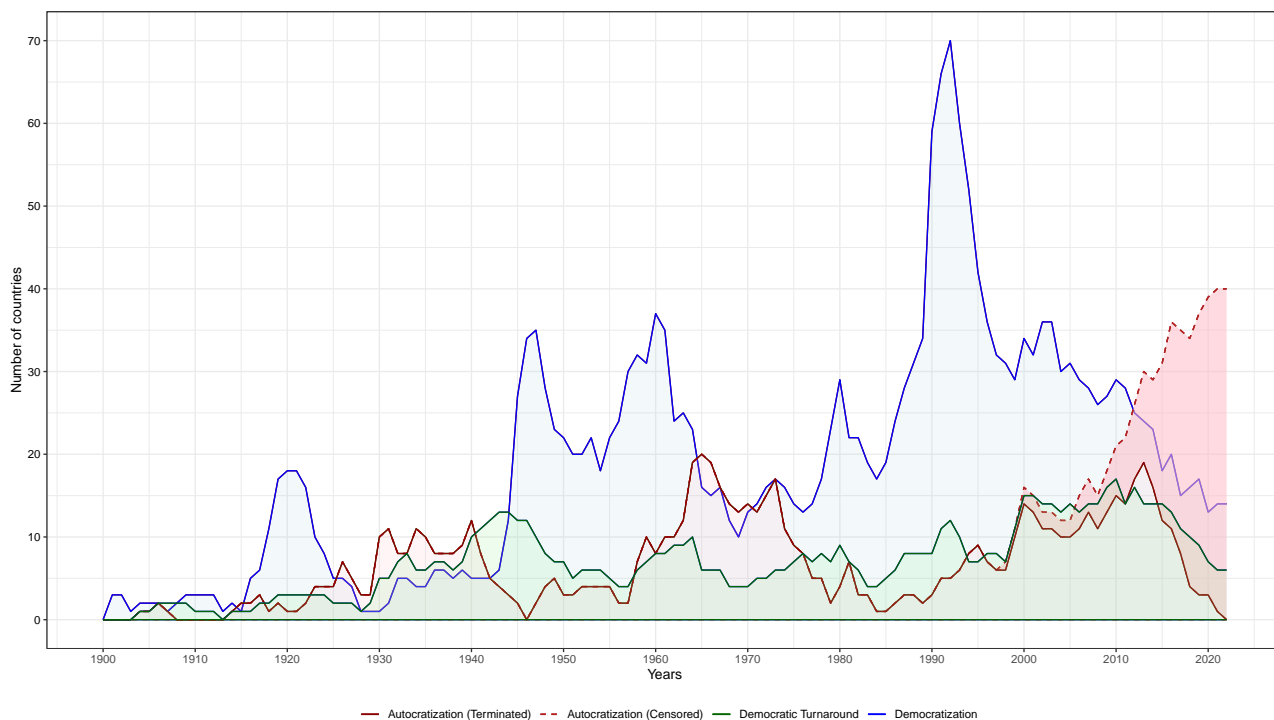
Focusing first on the relationship between the red- and green-shaded areas, Figure 2 shows a systematic difference in democratic turnaround development across the three waves of autocratization and democratization. The first wave of autocratization that concluded with the end of the World War II produced a clearly visible spike of democratic turnaround episodes. The number of turnarounds increased rapidly from 1 in 1928 to 13 in 1944 before dropping back in the late 1940s when many of the episodes concluded. Many of these turnaround episodes were European countries that were first occupied by Nazi Germany and its allies, and then regained

¹⁰The estimate is 40 percent if we include the 40 “censored” autocratization episodes in the calculations, but that would assume that none of those become democratic turnarounds.

¹¹This number is calculated as the total number of countries with democratic turnaround episodes ($N=65$) divided by the total number of countries in the V-Dem dataset from 1900 to 2022 ($N=183$).

¹²For democratization episodes we do not demarcate censored ones because it has no bearing on the identification of democratic turnarounds.

Figure 2. Episodes of Democratization, Autocratization, and Democratic Turnarounds, 1900-2022



their democratic levels after liberation. By contrast, the second wave of autocratization followed by the large third wave of democratization (Huntington, 1993) did not result in an equivalent spike in the absolute number of democratic turnarounds. Rather, the number of countries undergoing democratic turnarounds was relatively stable through the 1960s and into the mid-1990s, with some annual fluctuations that seem to largely average out over the longer term. The democratization spike in 1990s in Figure 2 is mainly the result of the collapse of the Soviet Union as well as transformations in a long series of countries in Africa and Asia that had also been autocracies for a long time. This created the opportunity for “pure” democratization rather than reactions to the second wave of autocratization (Levitsky and Way, 2010; Bunce, 2003; Bunce and Wolchik, 2006).

Zooming in on the developments of the recent period, Figure 2 shows for the first time that democratic turnarounds have never been more frequent than during the last 30 years - the period of the “third wave of autocratization” (Lührmann and Lindberg, 2019). In absolute terms, the highest annual number of countries undergoing a democratic turnaround was recorded in 2010

with a total of 17, closely followed by 2009 and 2012 with a total of 16 democratic turnaround episodes each.¹³

More importantly, the *share of* autocratization episodes that ended up as democratic turnarounds has changed significantly over time (see the relationship between the green and light red shaded areas). During the second wave of autocratization and into the beginning of the third wave of democratization, relatively few autocratization episodes developed into democratic turnarounds. Many autocratizers of the time successfully established durable autocratic regimes, such as Marcos in the Philippines and Pinochet in Chile. The relative lower share of democratic turnarounds during this period is also suggestive of the importance of a constraining international environment increasing chances for sustained authoritarian rule (Levin, 2016; Dukalskis, 2021). The Cold War and the way in which it tended to lend support to authoritarian incumbents seems to have limited the opportunity for turning autocratization around.

Since the early inception of the third wave of autocratization by mid-1990s (Lührmann and Lindberg, 2019), almost 70 percent of the finished autocratization episodes have *already* been turned around: 32 out of 46.¹⁴ In stark difference, during the period from 1900 to 1994 (i.e., until the third wave of autocratization), only 42 percent of autocratization episodes ended up as democratic turnarounds: 66 out 158.

The blue line with blue shaded area shows a worrying pattern in the current period documented also by (Lührmann and Lindberg, 2019) (see (Wiebrecht et al., 2023) for discussion of the most recent trends). The number of democratizing countries keeps falling ($N=14$ in 2022), which could be indicating that making democratic turnarounds is becoming more challenging. At the same time, the red dashed line with dark-red shaded area in Figure 2 shows that by the end of 2022 there were 40 ongoing (censored) episodes of autocratization. This means that there is a record number of autocratization episodes for which we still do not know if they will become democratic turnarounds. There is thus not yet any evidence of a slowing down of the

¹³Figure A2 in Appendix shows the total number of countries that were in a democratic turnaround episode each year compared to the percentage of countries that this number represents. We are therefore certain that the described trends are not driven by the increase in the number of countries over time.

¹⁴We are aware of two additional episodes of “potential” democratic turnarounds that have already reverted autocratization and are very close to crossing the “substantial” criterion for change on the EDI and thus be classified as democratic turnaround episodes: Slovenia and Bulgaria.

current wave of autocratization, much less change of direction. At the same time, should the trend from the first part of the third wave of autocratization continue, around 28 of the current 40 ongoing autocratization episodes could possibly end with democratic turnarounds. That would make a remarkable change from the current state of affairs.

In sum, this first-ever comprehensive overview of democratic turnarounds since 1900 shows that (i) around half of all episodes of autocratization become democratic turnarounds – this outcome of autocratization is much more common than the current literature suggests; (ii) democratic turnarounds have become much more common and even the dominant outcome of autocratization episodes since the mid-1990s; (iii) the world is in uncharted territory with an unprecedented number of autocratization episodes with yet indeterminate outcomes; however, if the current trend of democratic turnarounds continues we should expect to see almost 30 episodes of ongoing autocratization to be reverted in the coming years.

Democratic Turnarounds Are Increasingly Common

Figure 3 provides a different perspective on global trends in episodes of democratic turnarounds using the “Regimes of the World” (RoW) typology (Lührmann, Tannenber, and Lindberg, 2018) (and a cautionary reading of the post-2010 period due to censored cases is advised, naturally). The entire stacked area in this figure still shows the number of countries in a democratic turnaround episode each year (equivalent to the green line and light green shaded area in Figure 2), but episodes are now colored by the regime type they had by the onset of the autocratization phase of a turnaround episode.

Notably, Figure 3 reveals that during the “third wave of autocratization” democratic turnaround episodes happen predominantly in reaction to autocratization starting in electoral democracies (66%, 21 out of 32 episodes). This finding coheres with Lührmann and Lindberg (2019)’s original observation. Only one-third (10 out of 32) of democratic turnaround episodes start in electoral autocracies. This stands in sharp contrast to the period before the third wave of autocratization when roughly two-thirds (44 out of 66) of all turnarounds started in autocracies (the period around the World War II being the only noticeable exception).¹⁵ This

¹⁵See Figure A5 in Appendix for details.

Figure 3. Democratic Turnarounds by Regime Types, 1900-2022

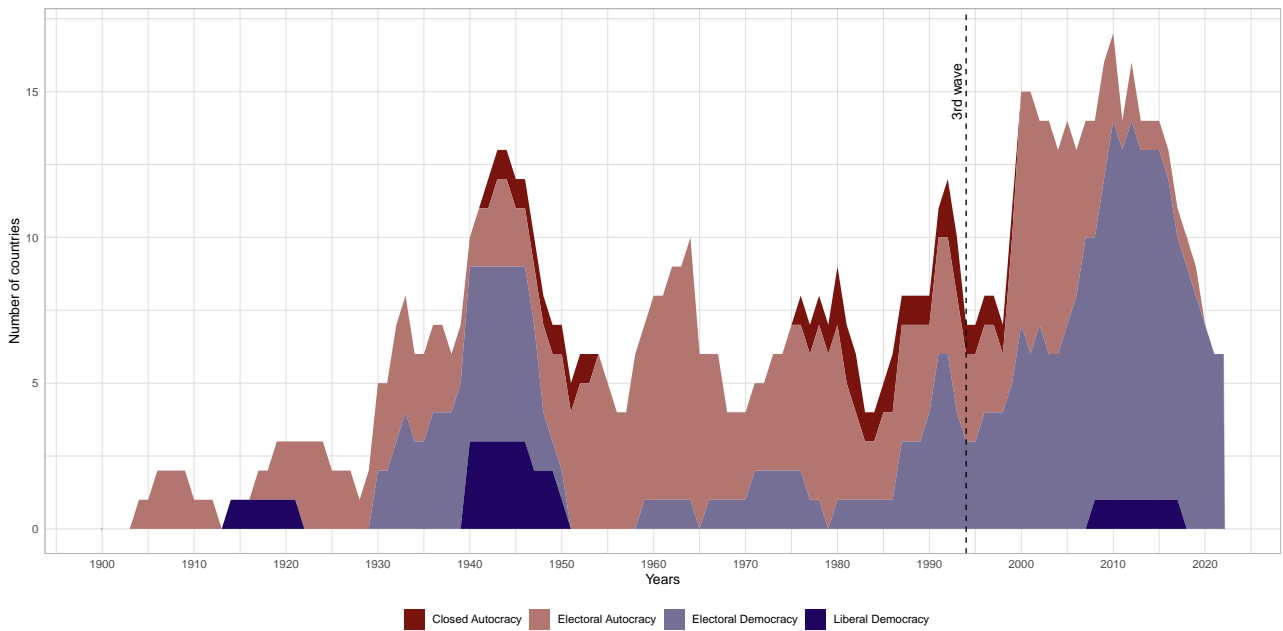
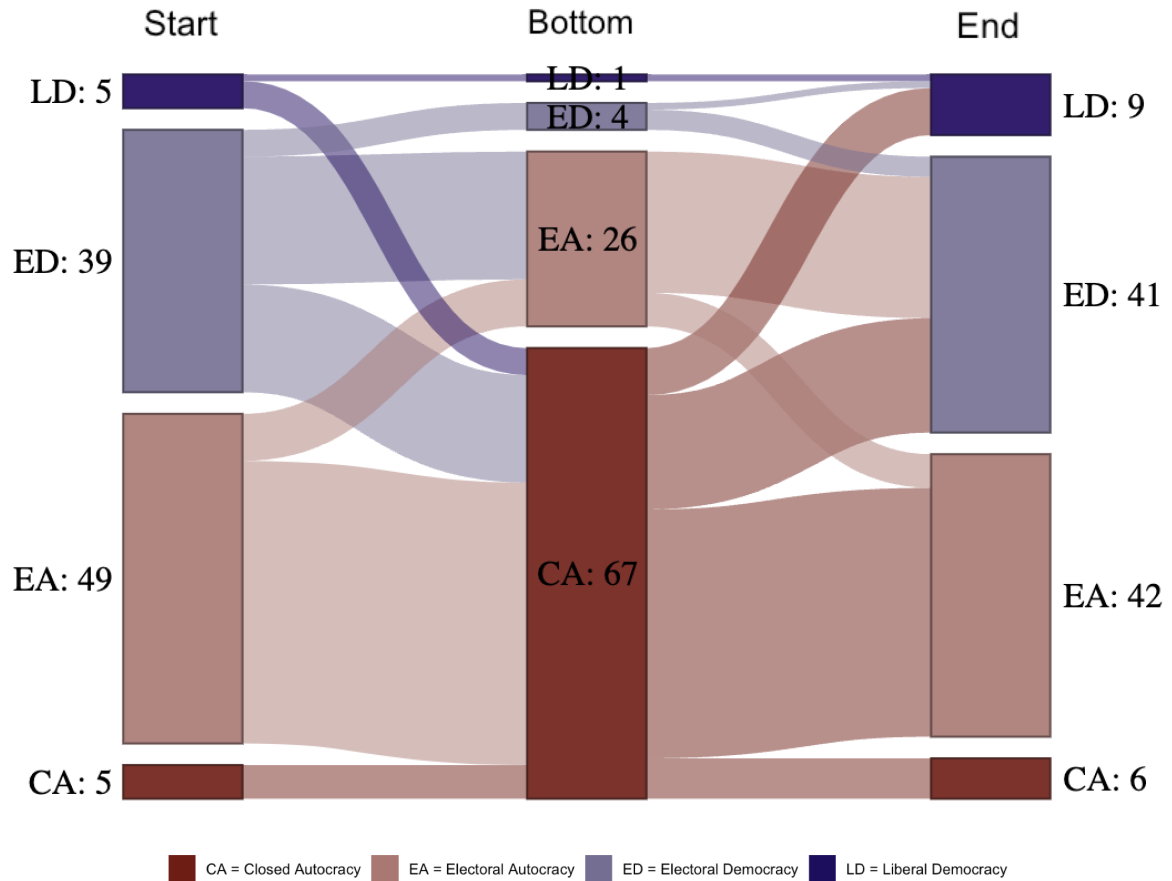


Figure 4. Pathways of Democratic Turnaround Episodes by Regime Types, 1900-2022



underscores that contemporary democratic turnaround episodes occur in a very different context from before. Most countries have at least some experience with democratic institutions and those that do not have at least some experience with emulating them as electoral autocracies.

Figure 4 plots pathways of all democratic turnaround episodes since 1900 using the RoW typology. Three findings stand out. First, 95 percent of all episodes ($N=93$) become an autocracy at the “bottom” (i.e., interlinkage period) of the episode and most of those – 68 percent ($N=67$) – are even closed autocracies for a short while. An initial “worst case” scenario thus does not mean that “all things are lost.”

Second, the distribution in terms of regime types is quite similar at start and end-points of democratic turnaround episodes with a tendency toward resulting in more democracies. Democratic turnarounds started with autocratization phase in 44 democracies and 54 autocracies and ended after re-democratization with 50 democracies and 48 autocracies.

Third, Figure 4 displays the significant heterogeneity of pathways. This points to the importance of not only studying democratic turnarounds as a distinct case of regime transformation, but also analysing variations of their pathways and outcomes in future research. For example, a successful democratic turnaround that happens in a liberal democracy that never falls out of the liberal democracy category is likely to be very different from a turnaround beginning in an electoral autocracy with deterioration to closed autocracy at the “bottom” of the episode. These processes most likely have different drivers as well as consequences.

A First Anatomy of a Democratic Turnaround Episode

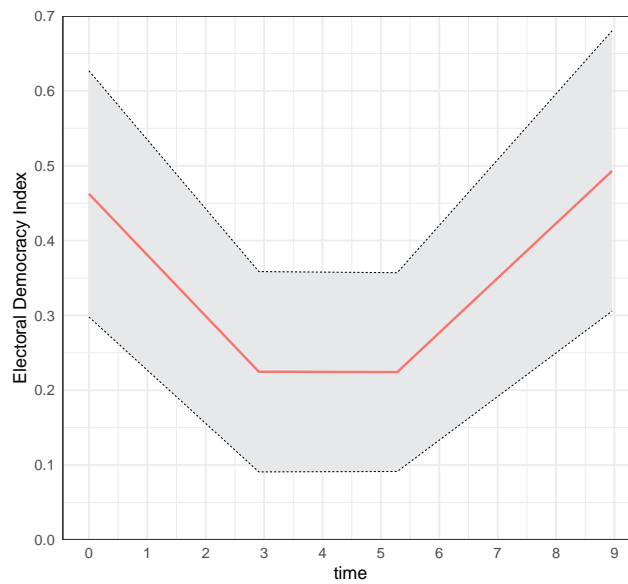
Although causes and consequences of democratic turnaround episodes in comparison to “free-standing” episodes of autocratization and democratization fall outside of the scope of this paper, we provide some initial descriptive analyses on the constitutive parts – the anatomy – of democratic turnarounds.

Figure 5 visualizes the “average” dynamics of a democratic turnaround episode by focusing on its development along its two main dimensions: *level of democracy* and *time*. Panel A in this figure shows changes in average democracy levels across all episodes of democratic turnarounds from 1900 to 2022 at four “critical” points: (i) onset and (ii) end years of autocra-

tization, and (iii) onset and (iv) end years of democratization. The x-axis of panel A represents the “average” time (in years, counted from the onset) at which these four “critical” points take place, and the y-axis represents the level of democracy. The grey shaded area represents the 95% confidence interval. Panel B in Figure 5 displays the distribution of turnaround episode duration.

Figure 5. Anatomy of a Democratic Turnaround Episode

A. Average Changes in EDI Levels Across Democratic Turnaround Episodes



B. Duration of Democratic Turnaround Episodes

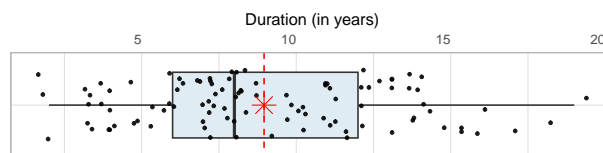


Figure 5 illustrates that an average democratic turnaround episode tends to follow a very distinct U-shaped path. Initial and substantial worsening in democratic levels (autocratization) lasts on average 2.9 years and results in a total decline in EDI level of 0.24 (or 24 percent of the possible range of the variable). It is then followed by a stasis period, which lasts, on average, 2.4 years. The “reversal” part (democratization) lasts, on average, 3.7 years and results in a total increase in EDI level of 0.27. An average democratic turnaround episode thus (i) lasts 9 years, (ii) restores a country’s pre-episode democracy level, and (iii) the process of autocratization is one year faster than the process of subsequent re-democratization. This “aggregate” lens reveals a general anatomy of democratic turnaround episodes, which we interpret in three ways.

First, a deterioration of democracy levels requires twice as much time to revert to similar levels (2.9 vs $2.4+3.7=6.1$ years) suggesting that turnarounds are possible, but they require a substantial effort. A possible reason for this skew is that incumbents' attacks on diagonal, vertical, and horizontal accountability can take place in rapid succession (Sato et al., 2022), while re-instating accountability measures takes a collective effort from different political institutions (Angiolillo, Wiebrecht, and Lindberg, 2023). The nature of autocratization is also likely to impact the speed of turnaround. For example, a military coup that suspends key institutions like parliament, electoral management bodies, and courts can, if short-lived, be relatively swiftly upended by reinstalling these without substantial loss in institutional memory or functioning. However, a more thorough autocratization with gradual dismantling of democratic institutions or turning them into instruments of the autocratic government, along with more repressive control of society that leads to sustained losses in organizational capacity, should be more time-consuming to revert.

Second, successful resistance to autocratization episodes does not generally result in immediate democratic comebacks. There is a clear "stasis" period where levels of democracy are relatively low and stable. During this period, different regime preferences are typically emerging domestically and actors involved in this development (e.g., the autocratizing incumbent and resisting actors) are likely pulling in different directions. An example is North Macedonia during the 2010s, where the autocratizing incumbent Nikola Gruevski faced growing opposition from different social groups that mobilized in favor of democracy, despite growing repression against civil and social organizations (Wiebrecht et al., 2023; Coppedge et al., 2023).

Third, the broad confidence intervals across the entire U-shaped line signal that democratic turnarounds are possible along the whole democracy-autocracy spectrum.¹⁶ The historical minimum EDI level at the onset of the episode is 0.185, while the historical maximum is 0.852. While it is not immediately visible in the graph, the confidence intervals at the end of the episode are slightly wider than at the onset implying that the episode does not necessarily result in the restoration of the initial democracy levels.

¹⁶The density of the EDI distribution across time is illustrated in Figure A3 in Appendix.

Subtypes of Democratic Turnarounds

Figure 6 replicates Figure 5 by distinguishing between three distinct subtypes of democratic turnarounds: J-, U-, and L-shaped turnarounds. As before, the top panel shows the “average” dynamics of the episode subtype, while the bottom panel displays the distribution of the subtype duration. While in this paper we do not go beyond the identification and description of these subtypes, we encourage other scholars to analyze their causes and characteristics in detail.

A *J-turnaround* is found when the extent of democratization exceeds that of autocratization, meaning that the country is more democratic at the end of the episode than it was at the beginning. A *U-turnaround* is a turnaround that restores roughly the same level of democracy as the country had before the episode. Finally, in an *L-turnaround* the extent of autocratization exceeds the magnitude of democratization, meaning that the country is less democratic at the end of the episode than it was at the onset of the episode.

Figure 6. Patterns of Democratic Turnarounds. 1900-2022

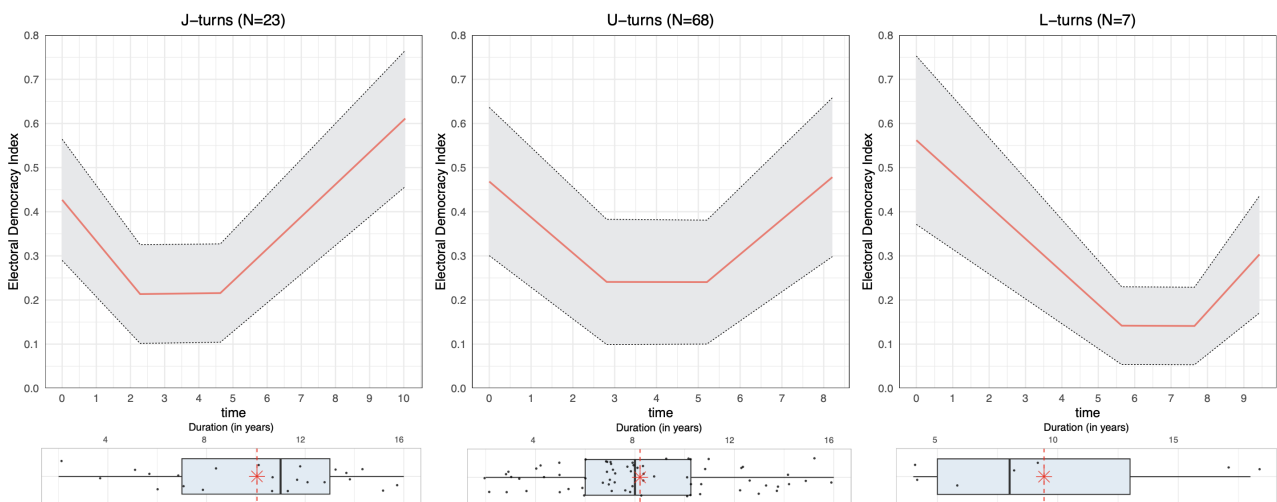


Figure 6 shows the average trajectories of each subtype regarding change in democracy levels over time and the distribution of J-, U-, and L-turnarounds’ duration. We highlight that J- ($N=23$) and U-turnarounds ($N=68$) together constitute the vast majority of all democratic turnaround episodes ($N=91$), meaning that 93 percent of turnaround episodes result in either restored or improved levels of democracy.

Another observation is that subtypes of democratic turnarounds have, on average, distinct durations and movements along democracy levels. U-shaped turnaround is the most common subtype and its characteristics resemble the overall average pattern discussed above. It is also the shortest episode subtype, with both mean and median duration of about 8 years. This category includes a variety of cases such as coups (e.g., Turkey 1980-1983); states of emergency (e.g., India 1975-1977); re-instatement of democracy after wars or invasions (e.g., Denmark 1940-1946, Kuwait 1986-1993); as well as more common contemporary cases of push-back on executive aggrandizement such as in North Macedonia (2005-2019) and Moldova (2013-2022).

The other two subtypes stand out in several ways. In J-turn episodes, the initial phase of autocratization is almost a sign of the promise of a “success story.” J-shaped turnarounds typically have their onset in electoral autocracies or low-quality electoral democracies (average onset at 0.427 on the EDI); the phases of autocratization and “stasis” tend to be relatively short (on average 2.3 years each); and the subsequent phase of democratization lasts on average 5.4 years. The result is relatively higher-quality democracy than at the onset (average end at 0.611 on the EDI). A brief period of autocratization, especially when setting off in an electoral autocracy, thus can often be turned around and lead to a successful democratic transition. Several of J-turns are conflict-related, either following civil wars or coups d'état. Liberia, for example, first fell into civil war in the early 2000s before it reinstated elections that subsequently also became freer and fairer. Guinea-Bissau also had to recover first from a coup in 2012 before its democracy levels increased again above its pre-coup levels. Although this is not to say that all conflicts result in J-turns, several other cases underline this tendency including Thailand (1976-1989; 1991-2001), Niger (1999-2005), and Myanmar (1942-1953).

Finally, there are only seven cases of L-shaped turnarounds. They are characterized by a longer and slower period of autocratization (5.6 years on average) resulting in substantial declines on the EDI (from 0.562 to 0.141), and ending at significantly lower levels compared to the onset of the episode (average of 0.303 compared to 0.562). The latter part of the episode - a slight democratization - is often the result of actors gaining power that are not (fully) committed to democracy or that are otherwise constrained in their capacity to push for democracy, but nevertheless effectuate an improvement compared to the end of the autocratization phase.

The Gambia provides an example where, following the 1994 coup, presidential elections were held again in 1996 but they were not nearly as free and fair as the pre-coup ones. While an ongoing episode of democratic turnaround (meaning that it can still be re-classified in the future), Bolivia is another example of an L-turn. Here, the long period of autocratization under President Morales was halted in 2019 and the country has recently improved again slightly on the EDI (Wiebrecht et al., 2023). These cases illustrate that despite government turnover and leadership changes, decisive moves toward democracy are not a given.

Conclusion

This paper introduces a new type of regime transformation, “democratic turnarounds:” a two-directional process where autocratization is closely followed by democratization and the two are parts of one process. With the first-ever systematic identification of democratic turnarounds, we show that there were 98 such episodes of regime transformation between 1900 and 2022. The analysis also demonstrates that democratic turnarounds are common - 48 percent of all autocratization episodes transmuted into turnarounds within no more than five years after their end. Even more notable perhaps, the share of democratic turnarounds has increased to 70 percent during the contemporary “third wave of autocratization.”

Dissecting the varying paths democratic turnaround episodes take, our analyses demonstrate that 95 percent of all cases is an autocracy at the “bottom.” This holds true also for the subset of the sample starting out as democracies. In 39 of the 44 these cases, democracy broke down for a short period before autocratization was reversed, and almost all of them became democracies again in the end. In other words, a democratic breakdown does not necessarily prevent a swift return of democracy, especially if autocratization is halted and reversed relatively soon after – the average time for turnarounds is slightly more than 5 years after onset of autocratization.

Moreover, we distinguish three different subtypes of democratic turnarounds based on the episode outcome. Most turnarounds are U-shaped (N=68) where the initial level of democracy is restored, and relatively many are J-shaped (N=23) where the level of democracy substantially improves compared to the initial level. Only a handful (N=7) are L-shaped democratic

turnarounds that result in a substantial decline in democracy level, but even they serve as evidence that autocratization can be reversed and at least moderate democratic progress can follow. Noteworthy, 93 percent of all democratic turnarounds result in either restored or improved levels of democracy.

These very first descriptive findings show that autocratization often fails to establish a durable authoritarian regime. It is also striking that nearly all of the cases in the sample of turnarounds are autocracies at the “bottom”. Autocratization is far from irreversible even after democracy breaks down or authoritarian rule deepened, if forces of resistance can turn things around within a few years. Thus, while one might suspect that the window of opportunity closes after democracy breaks down, our descriptive analysis shows that this is not the case. It is an important insight given an unprecedented number of ongoing episodes of autocratization at present.

This paper lays the foundation for addressing many important research questions that remain unanswered. We conclude by outlining some avenues of future research that our contribution descriptive exploration of democratic turnarounds opens up, with promises to extend knowledge of when and how autocratization can be turned around.

First, a deeper understanding of how and why episodes of democratic turnarounds unfold will require a closer study of the individual cases. Such research can tackle issues such as how episodes of autocratization turn into democratization; why time spent at the “bottom” varies across cases; which actors are able to influence turnarounds; if there are typical features or events that tend to accompany democratic turnarounds; or what has been important for democratic turnarounds in specific countries (“lessons learned”) and how they can enhance further theory building.

Second, scholars of regimes and regime changes can now employ quantitative approaches to look further into causes and consequences of democratic turnarounds that are possibly distinct from drivers and effects of episodes of “pure” autocratization and democratization. For example, are there differences between democratic turnarounds and episodes of autocratization that are not reversed? Why do some episodes of autocratization lead to authoritarian stability while others trigger (re-)democratization – are causes of democratic turnarounds and of democ-

ratization the same or do we need to look for new explanations? Democratic turnarounds also open up avenues for studying their consequences on growth, health provision, education, and the like, and whether the effects of democratic turnarounds differ in any way from the effects of “pure” autocratization and democratization.

Finally, the data on democratic turnarounds can be used for more fine-grained empirical analysis that re-evaluates prior research findings based on samples assuming the existence of only one-directional regime transformation. We need to know to what extent existing findings on causes and consequences of both autocratization and democratization are influenced by the inclusion of democratic turnarounds in both samples. For example, has the lack of distinction between “true” autocratization episodes and those that are part of turnarounds masked some patterns and relationships by inclusion of “false positives”? If, for example, drivers of autocratization that lead to authoritarian stability are different from the drivers of autocratization that trigger a democratic turnaround, then the existing findings in the literature at best underestimate real effects but it is also possible that distinct drivers have been averaged out and remain unknown.

Further research into democratic turnarounds thus holds the promise of shining new light on one-directional democratization and autocratization, in addition to extending our knowledge of how they can come together in a two-directional episode.

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Online Appendix:
Episodes of Democratic Turnarounds

List of Episodes of Democratic Turnarounds, 1900-2022

Table A1. Episodes of Democratic Turnarounds

country	start year	end year	interlinkage	subtype
Algeria	1992	1999	3	U-turn
Argentina	1930	1933	1	L-turn
Argentina	1943	1948	1	J-turn
Argentina	1950	1960	1	U-turn
Argentina	1962	1964	1	U-turn
Argentina	1966	1974	5	U-turn
Bangladesh	1975	1980	1	U-turn
Bangladesh	1981	1992	3	J-turn
Bangladesh	2002	2010	2	U-turn
Belgium	1914	1921	3	U-turn
Belgium	1940	1950	3	J-turn
Bolivia	2006	2022	1	L-turn
Burkina Faso	2014	2016	1	U-turn
Burma/Myanmar	1942	1953	2	J-turn
Burundi	1987	1993	4	U-turn
Central African Republic	1999	2006	1	U-turn
Chile	1924	1937	4	U-turn
Comoros	1999	2005	2	U-turn
Costa Rica	1917	1924	1	U-turn
Costa Rica	1948	1954	2	J-turn
Cuba	1904	1909	2	U-turn
Cuba	1929	1944	2	J-turn
Czechia	1930	1947	5	L-turn
Denmark	1940	1946	1	U-turn
Dominican Republic	1964	1967	2	L-turn
Dominican Republic	1987	2000	4	J-turn
Ecuador	1906	1912	5	U-turn
Ecuador	1932	1939	2	U-turn
Ecuador	1960	1969	3	U-turn
Ecuador	1970	1980	5	J-turn
Ecuador	2007	2022	3	U-turn
Egypt	1952	1964	3	U-turn
Estonia	1932	1939	3	L-turn
Estonia	1991	1993	1	U-turn
Fiji	1987	1997	4	U-turn
Fiji	2000	2003	1	U-turn
Finland	1939	1950	5	J-turn
France	1936	1948	4	J-turn
Ghana	1958	1971	3	U-turn
Greece	1922	1924	1	U-turn
Greece	1925	1927	1	U-turn
Guinea-Bissau	2012	2019	1	U-turn

Table A1. Episodes of Democratic Turnarounds

country	start year	end year	interlinkage	subtype
Haiti	1992	1997	1	J-turn
Haiti	2001	2012	2	U-turn
Hungary	1919	1923	1	U-turn
India	1971	1978	2	U-turn
Ivory Coast	2000	2001	1	U-turn
Kuwait	1976	1982	5	U-turn
Kuwait	1986	1993	5	U-turn
Lesotho	2015	2022	1	U-turn
Liberia	1980	1986	4	U-turn
Liberia	2003	2010	1	J-turn
Luxembourg	1940	1947	4	J-turn
Madagascar	2009	2015	3	U-turn
Malawi	1999	2013	4	U-turn
Malaysia	1969	1975	2	U-turn
Maldives	2012	2022	2	U-turn
Mali	2007	2014	1	U-turn
Malta	1930	1933	1	U-turn
Malta	1959	1964	3	U-turn
Moldova	1998	2011	4	U-turn
Moldova	2013	2022	2	U-turn
Nepal	2000	2009	3	J-turn
Nepal	2012	2016	1	J-turn
Netherlands	1940	1949	4	U-turn
Niger	1999	2005	1	J-turn
Niger	2009	2012	1	U-turn
North Macedonia	2000	2004	2	U-turn
North Macedonia	2005	2019	5	U-turn
Norway	1940	1946	3	U-turn
Pakistan	1999	2010	2	U-turn
Peru	1948	1957	1	U-turn
Peru	1990	2002	4	J-turn
Philippines	1941	1947	2	U-turn
Republic of Vietnam	1963	1968	2	U-turn
Rwanda	1973	1982	5	U-turn
Seychelles	1972	1980	1	L-turn
Solomon Islands	2000	2004	1	U-turn
South Korea	1961	1964	1	U-turn
South Korea	2008	2017	2	U-turn
Sri Lanka	2005	2018	4	U-turn
Sudan	1958	1965	5	U-turn
Suriname	1975	1976	1	J-turn
Suriname	1991	1992	1	U-turn
Syria	1949	1955	1	U-turn
Syria	1958	1962	2	U-turn
Thailand	1976	1989	2	J-turn
Thailand	1991	2001	1	J-turn

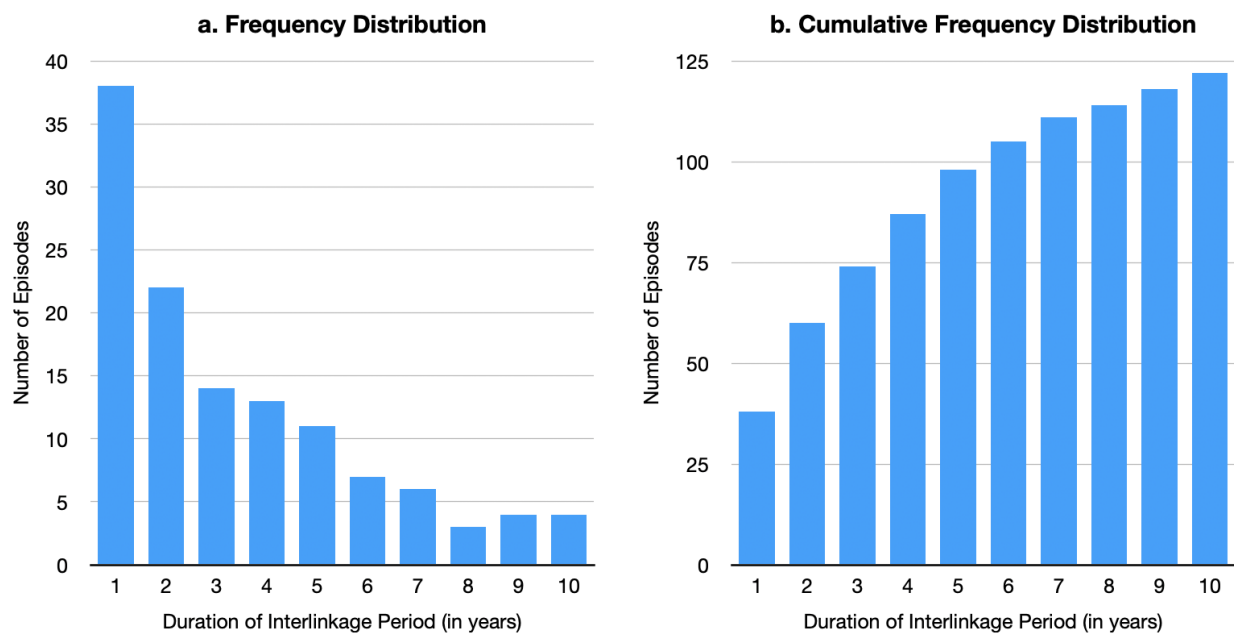
Table A1. Episodes of Democratic Turnarounds

country	start year	end year	interlinkage	subtype
Thailand	2005	2012	1	U-turn
The Gambia	1993	1998	1	L-turn
Turkey	1954	1967	1	J-turn
Turkey	1980	1992	2	U-turn
Uganda	1985	1991	3	U-turn
Ukraine	1996	2007	1	U-turn
Ukraine	2010	2020	5	U-turn
Uruguay	1933	1947	2	J-turn
Zambia	2010	2022	4	U-turn
Zimbabwe	1978	1981	1	J-turn

Distributions with Different Interlinkage Parameters

Figure A1 shows distribution of number of democratic turnaround episodes depending on the duration of the interlinkage period. Interlinkage parameter defines the number of years an episode of democratic turnaround is allowed to remain in stasis (i.e., no more movements larger than 0.01 on the EDI in any direction) between the end of autocratization and the start of democratization. We set the default interlinkage parameter to 5 years because it is the typical amount for an electoral cycle for most countries.

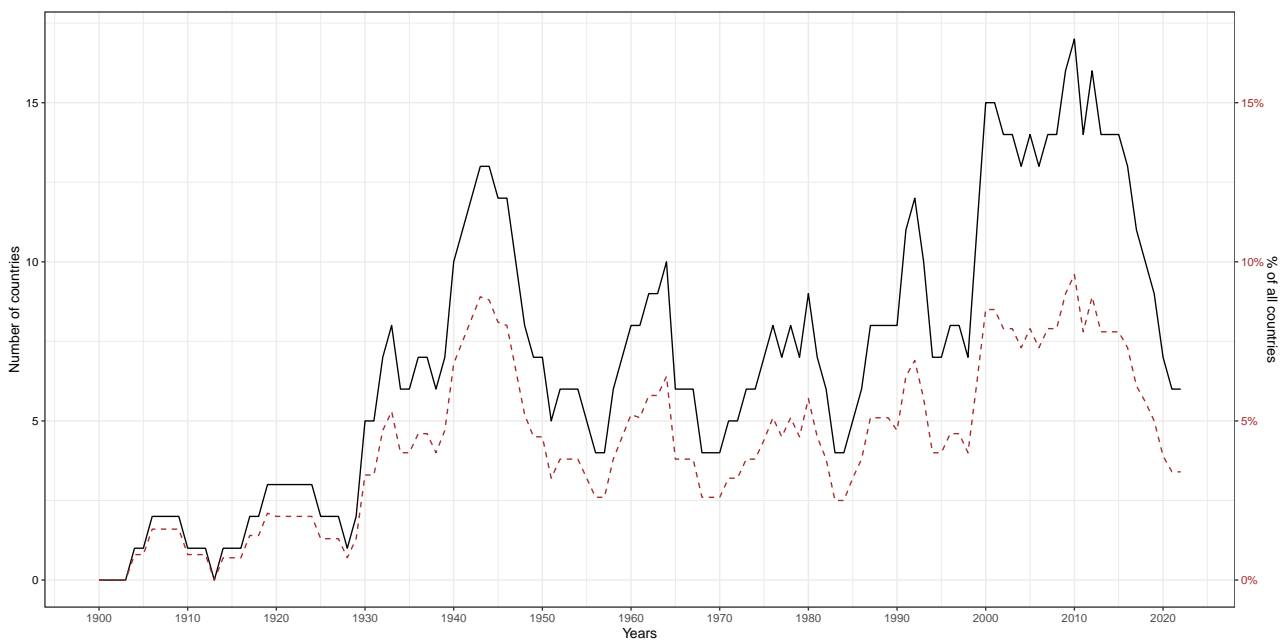
Figure A1. Number of Episodes by Interlinkage Parameter



Episodes of Democratic Turnarounds, 1900-2022

Figure A2 shows the historical distribution of democratic turnarounds in time since 1900. The black solid line represents the absolute number of countries that underwent a democratic turnaround episode each year (left y-axis), while the red dotted line indicates the percentage of countries that this number represents (right y-axis). The latter line is added to the graph to confirm that presented historical trends are not driven by the increase in the number of countries over time. To illustrate, 9% of all countries (13 out of 147) experienced a democratic turnaround during the noticeable peak in 1944, while 10% across all countries (17 out of 178) underwent a democratic turnaround during another noticeable peak in 2010.

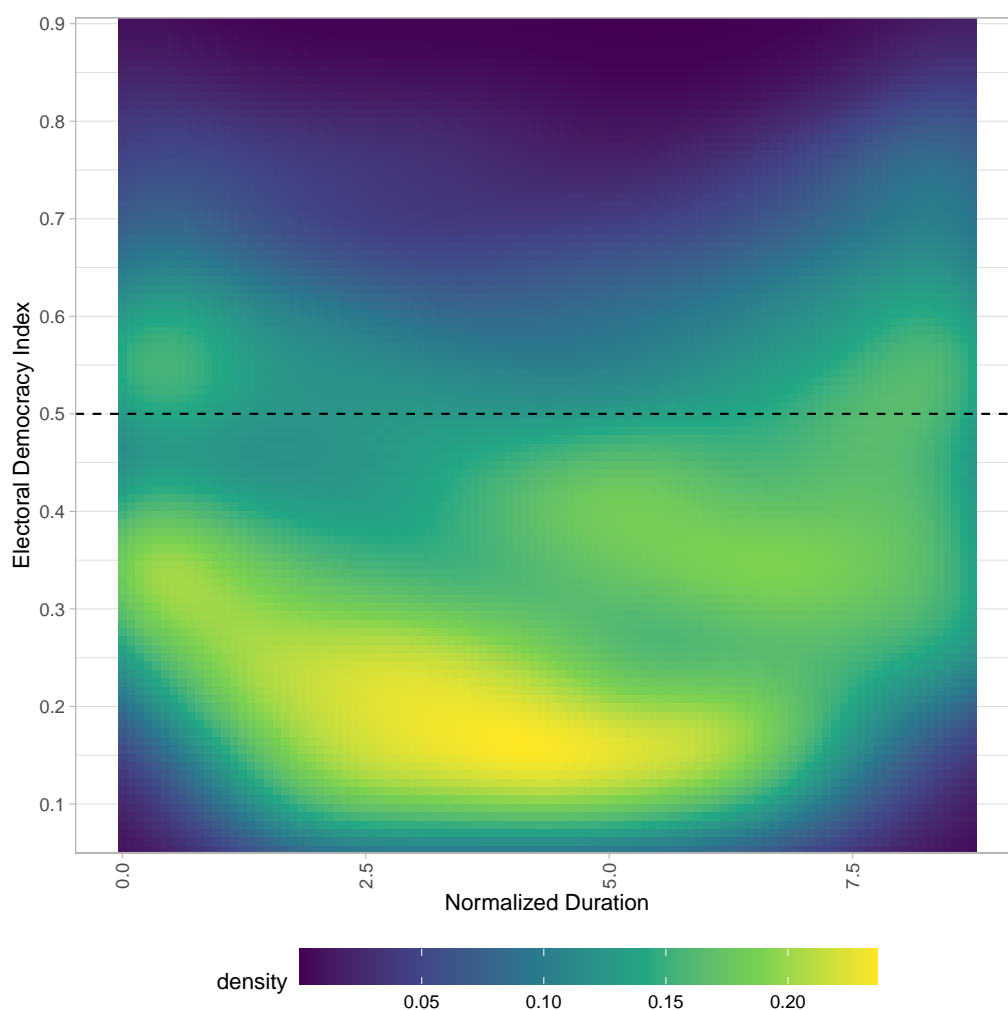
Figure A2. Episodes of Democratic Turnarounds, 1900-2022



Changes in EDI during Democratic Turnarounds

Figure A3 depicts the development of a democratic turnaround episode across the Electoral Democracy Index and time. Colors visualize the density of the EDI distribution across time. Time is normalized to an average duration of a democratic turnaround ($t=8.72$ years). This figure illustrates that democratic turnaround episodes tend to follow a very distinct U-shaped path.

Figure A3. Density Plot - Electoral Democracy Index during Average Democratic Turnaround



Democratic Turnarounds of the Current Period

Figure A4 compares an average democratic turnaround of the current period (the ongoing “third wave of autocratization”, $N=32$) to an average democratic turnaround before 1993 ($N=66$). Democratic turnarounds are split into two groups based on the episode start year. Figure A4 reveals that “modern” democratic turnarounds (i) start and end at higher EDI levels (0.54 vs. 0.43 and 0.57 and 0.46, respectively), and (ii) last longer than their predecessors (9.3 years vs. 8.4 years, respectively). Additionally, the autocratization phase of a “modern” democratic turnaround lasts longer than before (3.9 years vs. 2.4 years), while the duration of the democratization phase remains relatively unchanged (3.3 years vs. 3.6 years).

Figure A4. Average Democratic Turnarounds, 1900-1993 vs. 1994-2022

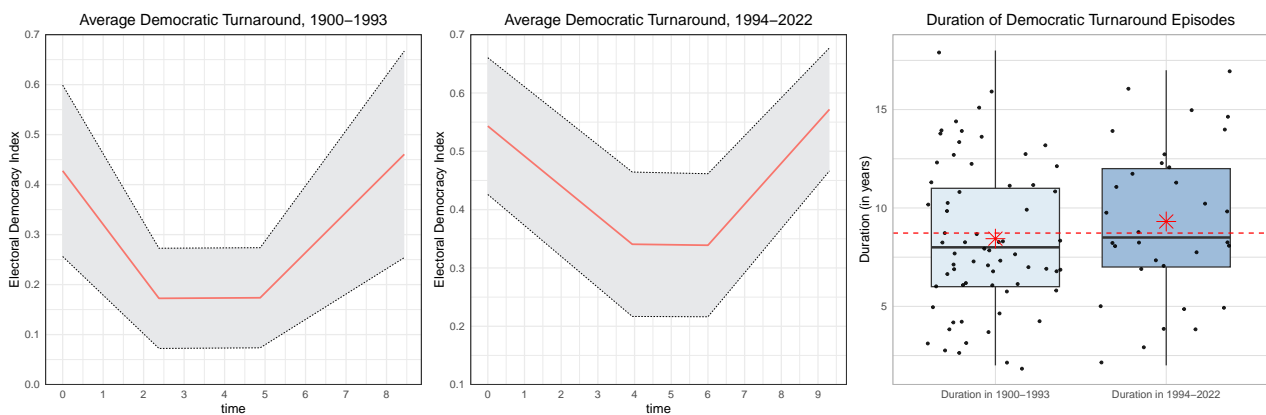
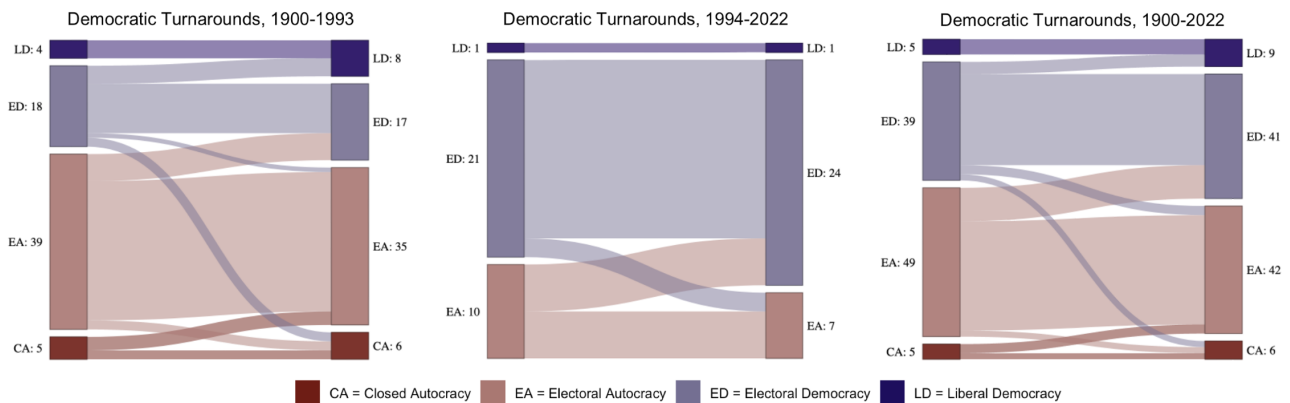


Figure A5 shows differences between democratic turnarounds of the “third wave of autocratization” and their predecessors using the Regimes of the World typology. This figure is similar to Figure 4, however, now only start and end points are shown. The distribution in terms of regime types is quite similar at start and end-points of democratic turnaround episodes in both periods. However, “modern” democratic turnarounds predominantly start in electoral democracies (21 out of 32), while before the current period they predominantly started in autocracies (44 out of 66).

Figure A5. Democratic Turnarounds by Regime Types, 1900-1993 vs. 1994-2022



Subtypes of Democratic Turnarounds, 1900-2022

Figure A6 and Figure A7 show the frequency of subtypes of democratic turnarounds. U-shaped turnarounds were the only existing subtype until the late 1920s when J- and L-shaped turnarounds occurred for the first time. J-shaped turnarounds were the most common subtype in the 1940s, during the World War II when many European countries were first occupied by Nazi Germany and its allies, and then regained their independence. As Figure A6 also suggests, for most of the time after 1950 there is relatively little variation in subtype distribution across time, and U-shaped turnarounds remain the most common subtype, while J- and L-shaped turnarounds are relatively rare. Figure A7 provides the count for subtypes before the “third wave of autocratization” and during the current period.

Figure A6. Subtypes of Democratic Turnarounds, 1900-2022

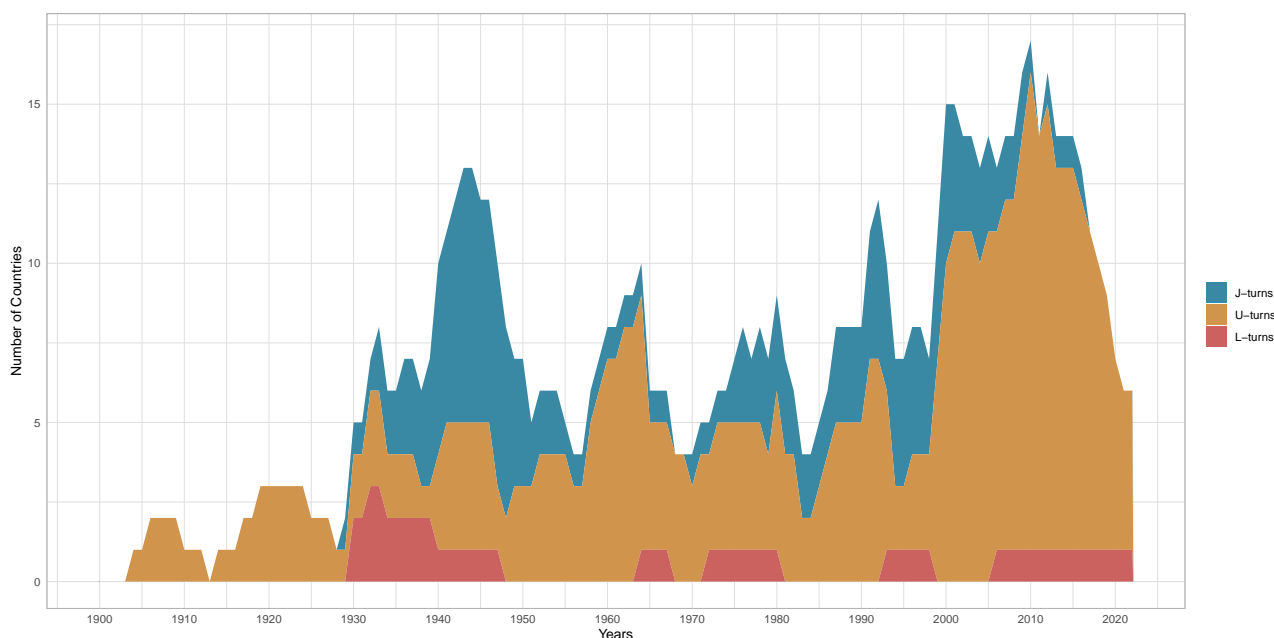
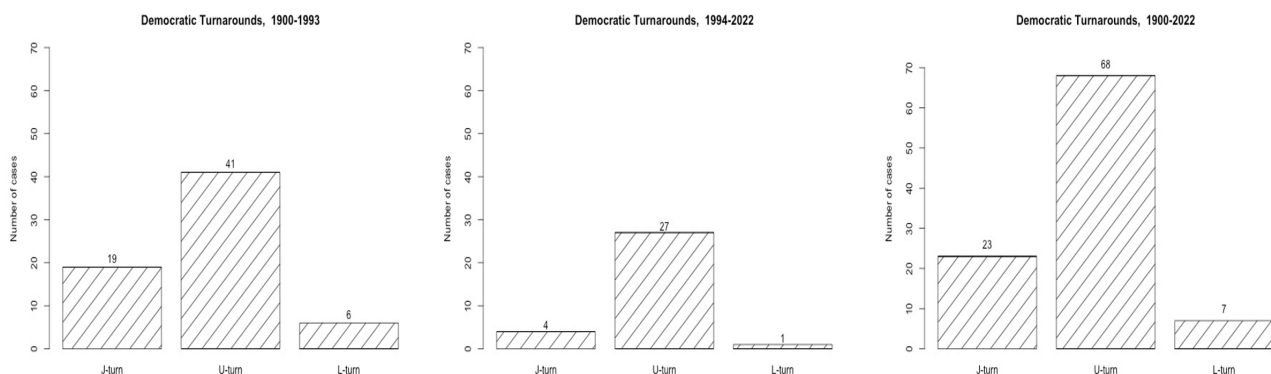


Figure A7. Frequency of Subtypes of Democratic Turnarounds, 1900-1993 vs. 1994-2022



Subtypes of the Current Period

Figure A8 and Figure A9 show differences between subtypes of democratic turnarounds of the current period and period before the “third wave of autocratization”. J-turns of the past, on average, lasted 3.5 years longer than “modern” J-turns, while U-turns of the past, by contrast, were shorter than “modern” ones. There is only one L-turn episode in the current period (thus no confidence interval around the line), and it is a censored cased (meaning that it can be reclassified in the future).

Figure A8. Anatomy of Subtypes, 1900-1993

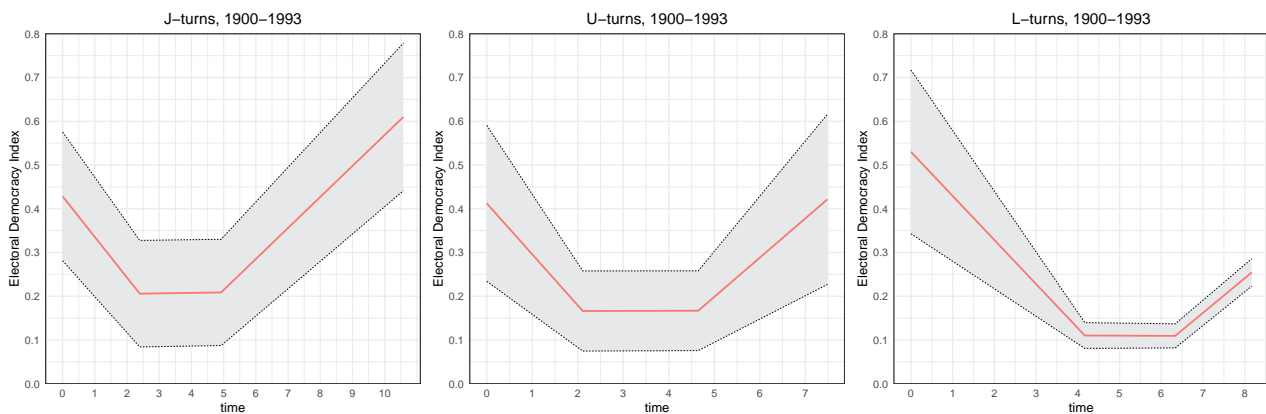
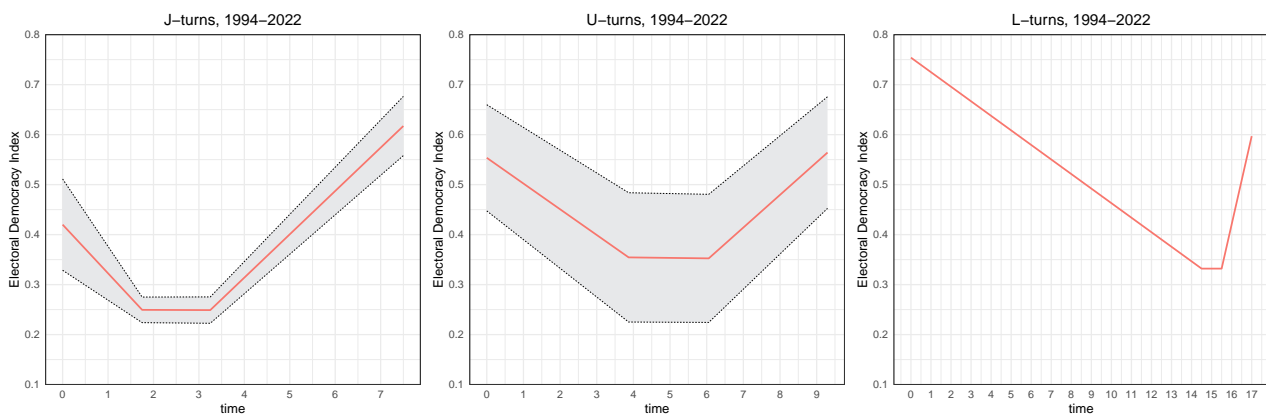


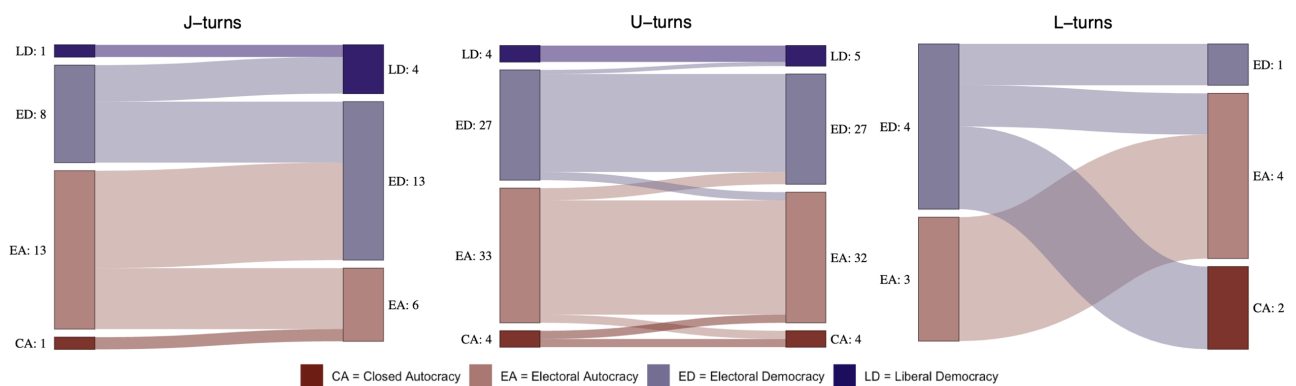
Figure A9. Anatomy of Subtypes, 1994-2022



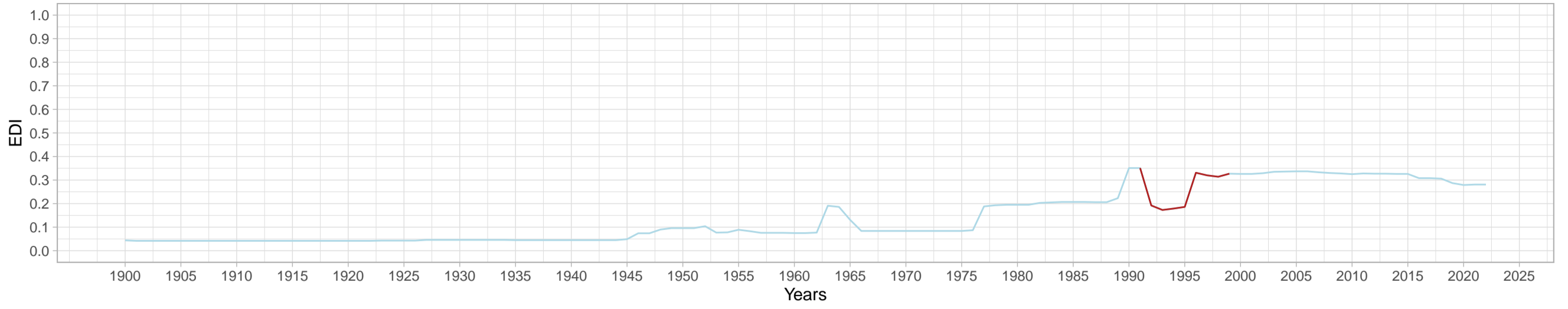
Subtypes by Regime Types, 1900-2022

Figure A10 shows how subtypes' start- and end-points are distributed across Regimes of the World. Similar to Figure A5, only start and end points are shown. J-turns show the expected "upward" movement: most episodes start in autocracies – 14 out of 23 – while a majority ends up as democracies, with 17 out of 23. U-turns also have the expected pattern: almost all U-shaped episodes end up in the same regime type as they start. Finally, the few L-turns show an expected "downward" pattern, with four out of seven being democracies at the start, but only one out of these seven remaining democracy at the end of the episode. Two L-turns start as electoral democracies and end up as closed autocracies.

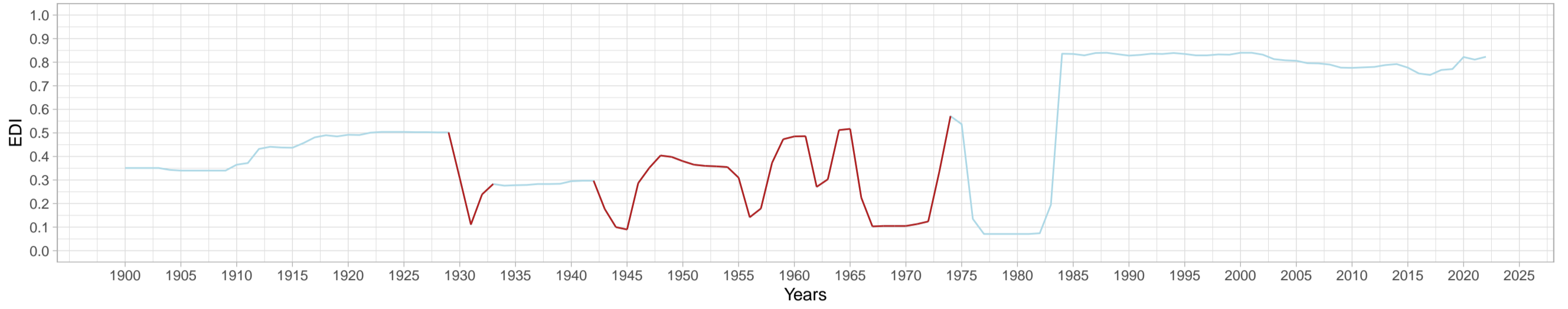
Figure A10. Subtypes of Democratic Turnarounds by Regime Type



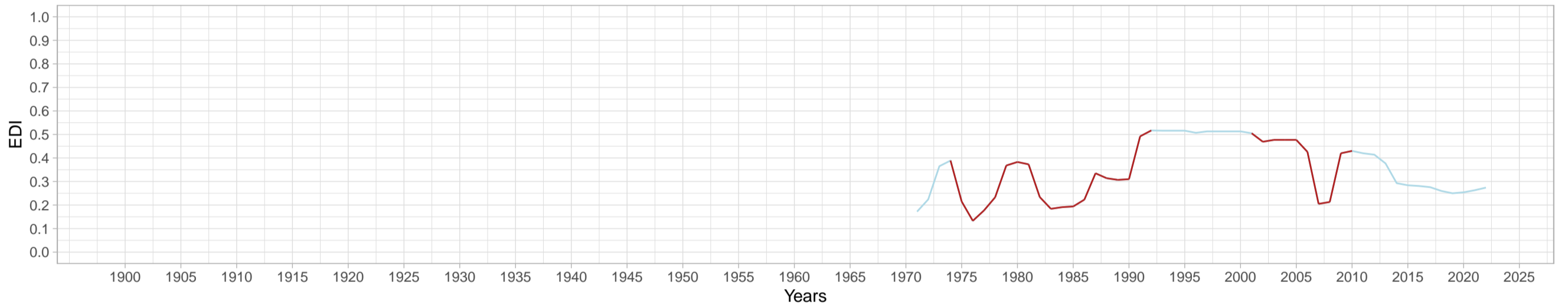
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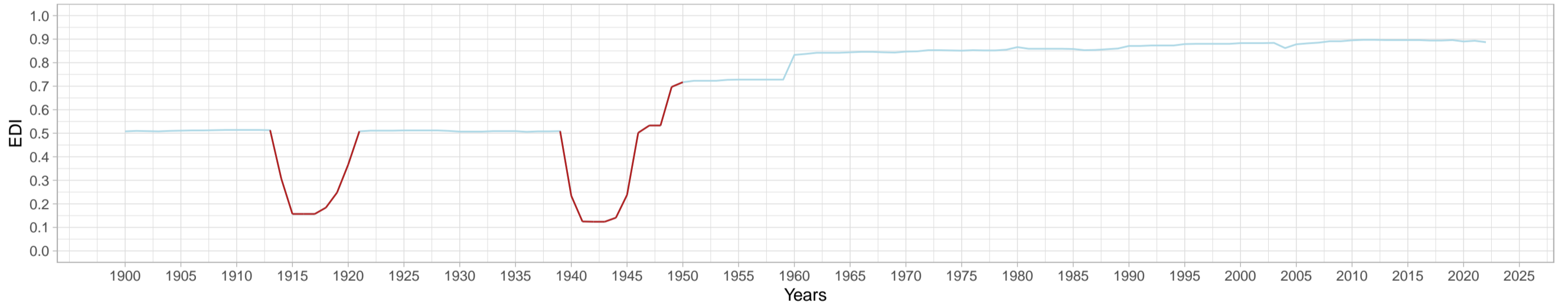
Argentina



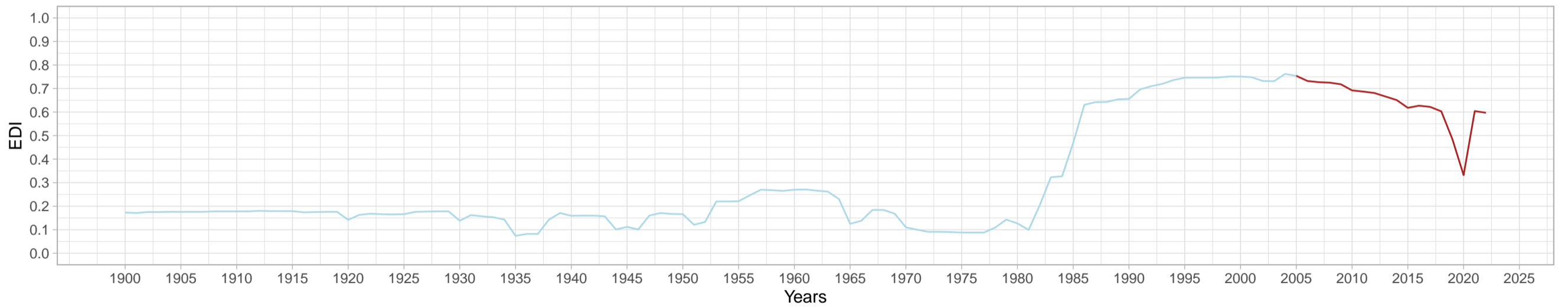
Bangladesh



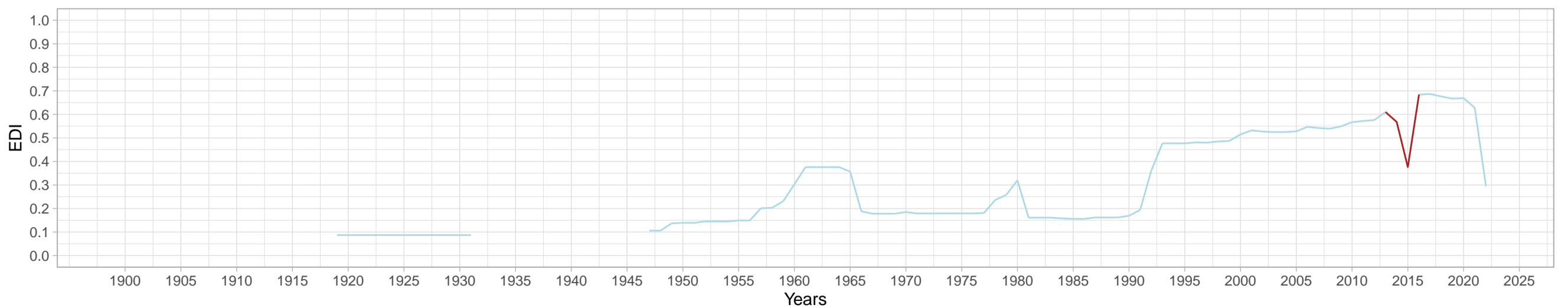
Belgium



Bolivia

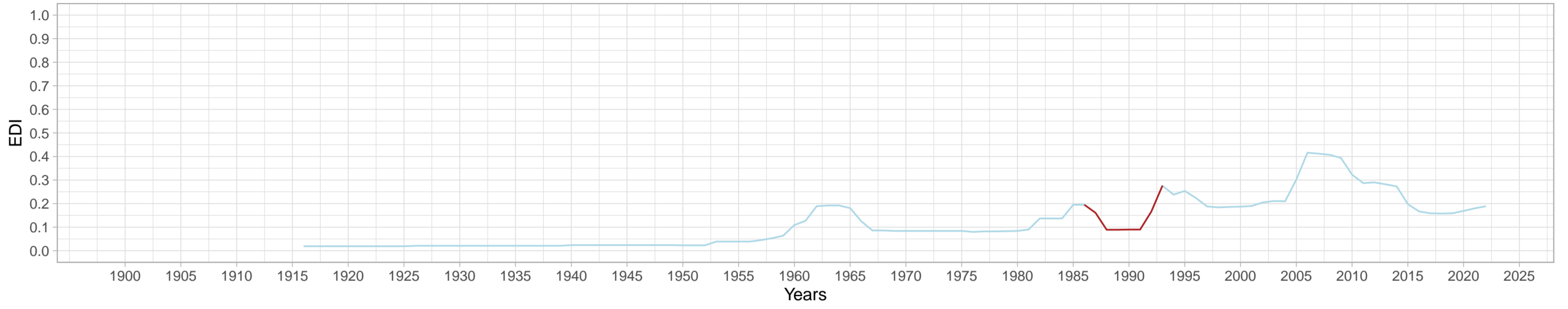


Burkina Faso

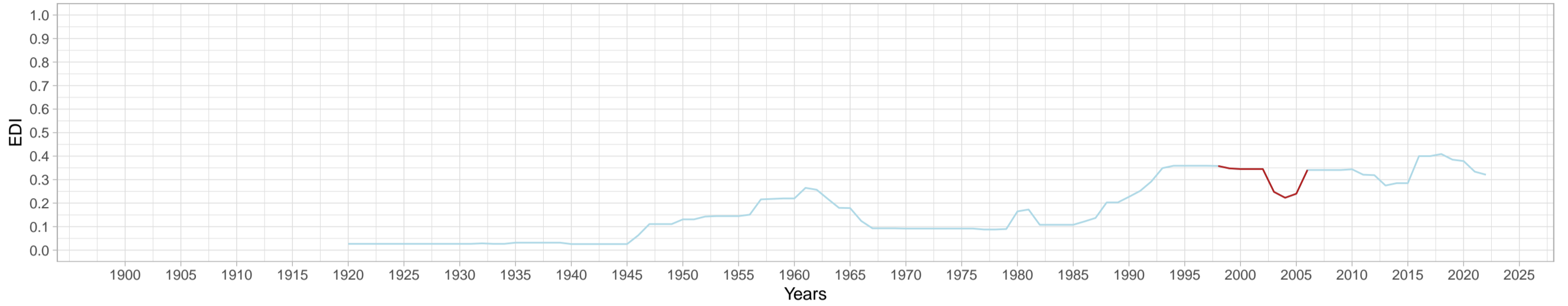


Democratic Turnarounds: — FALSE — TRUE

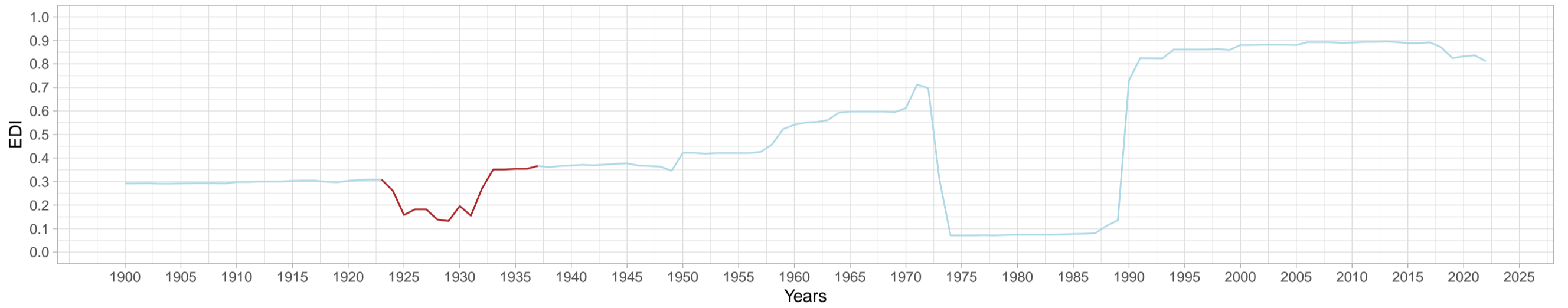
Burundi



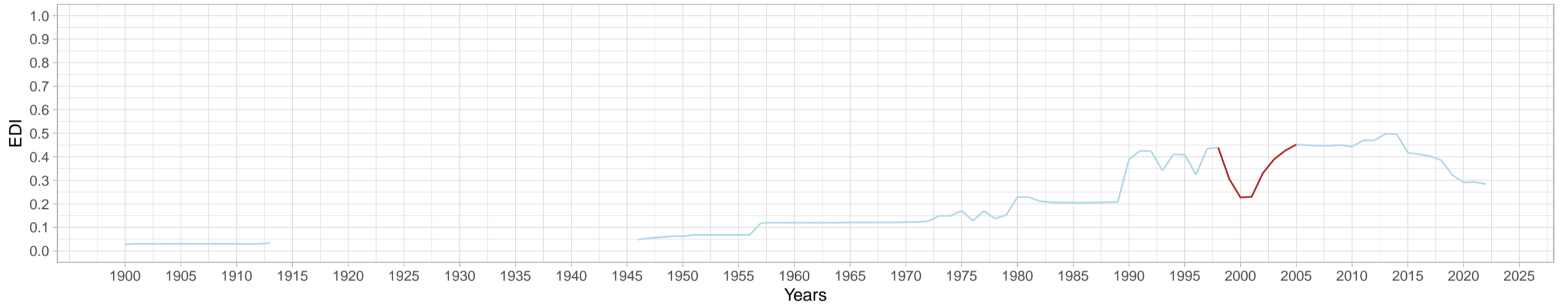
Central African Republic



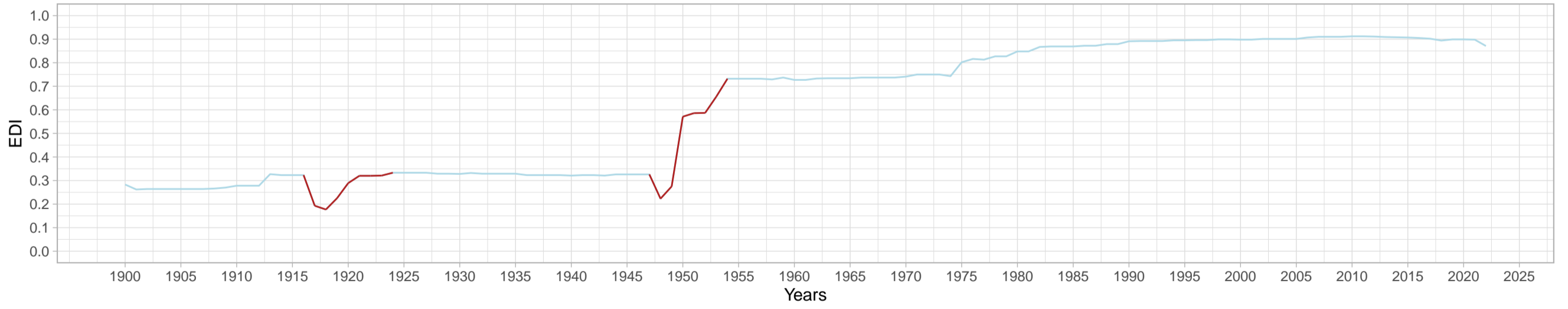
Chile



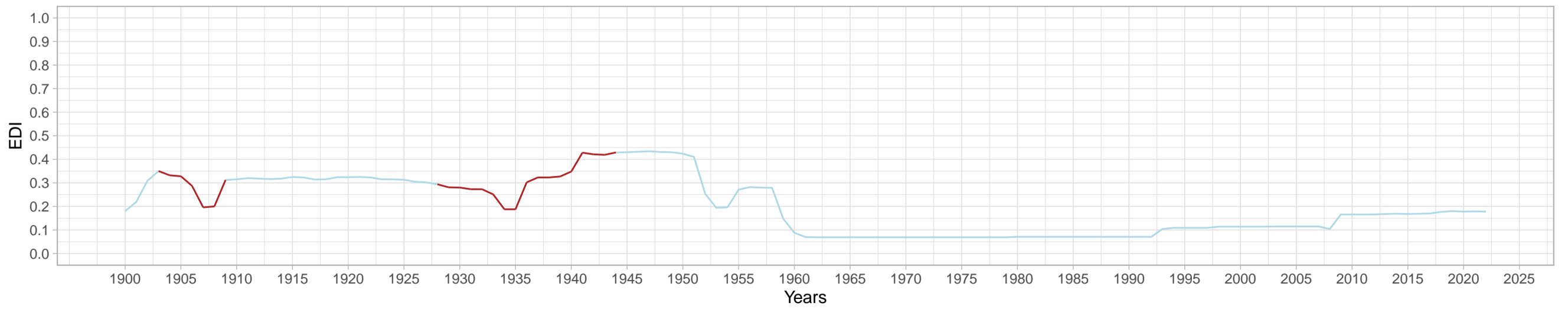
Comoros



Costa Rica

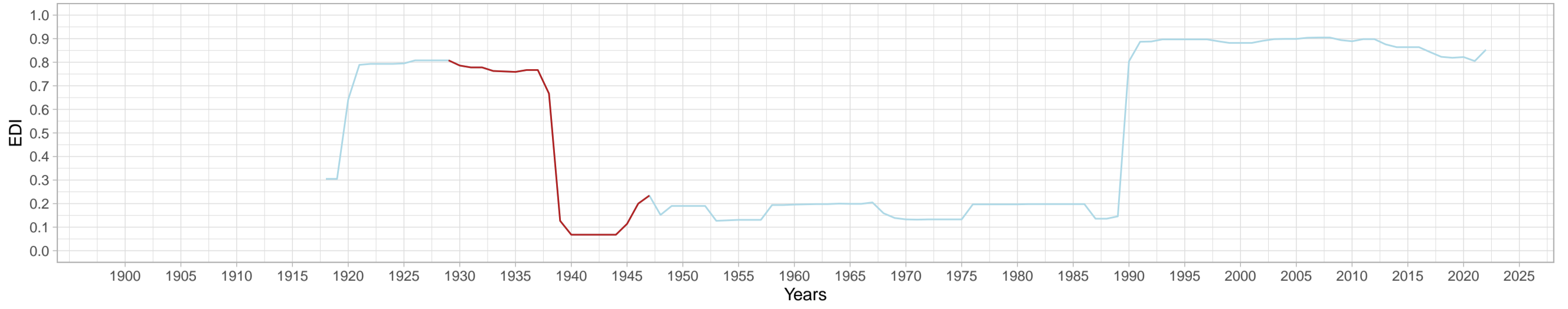


Cuba

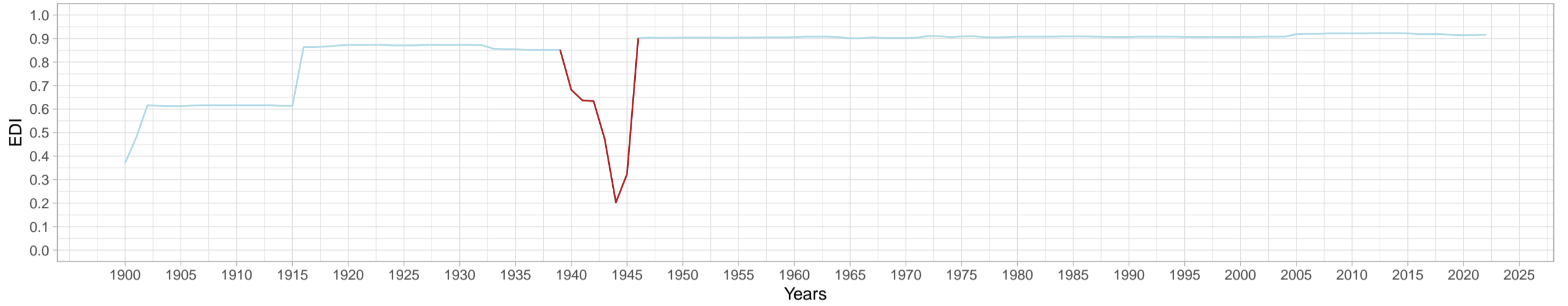


Democratic Turnarounds: — FALSE — TRUE

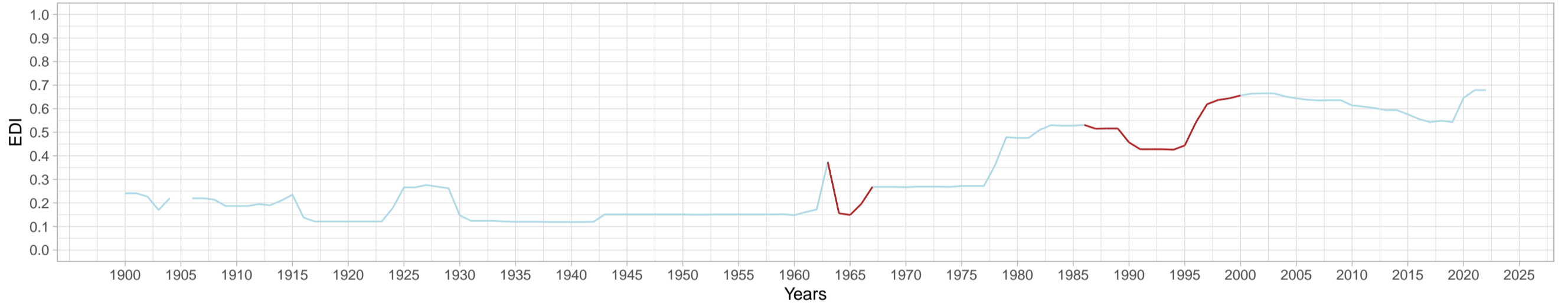
Czech Republic



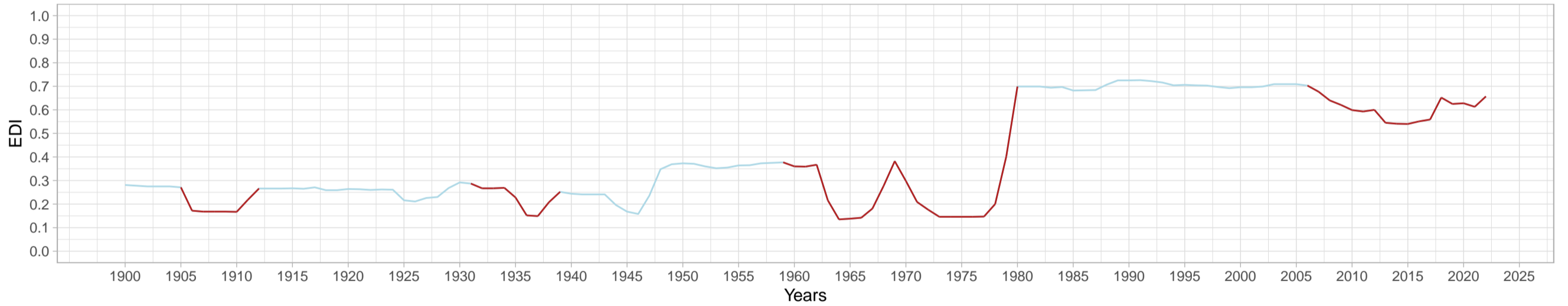
Denmark



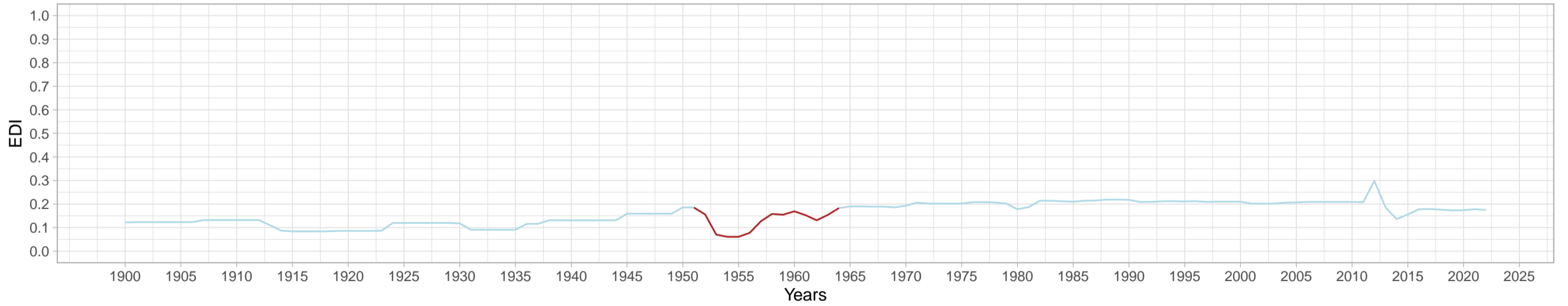
Dominican Republic



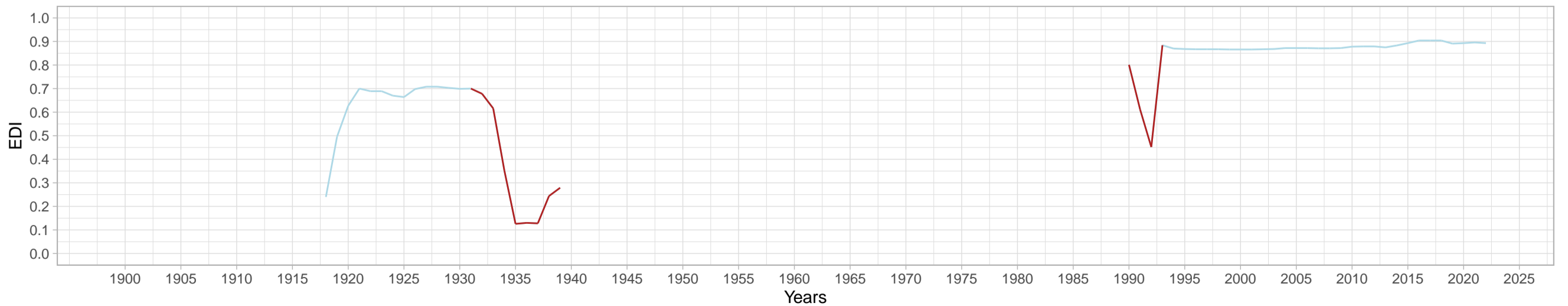
Ecuador



Egypt

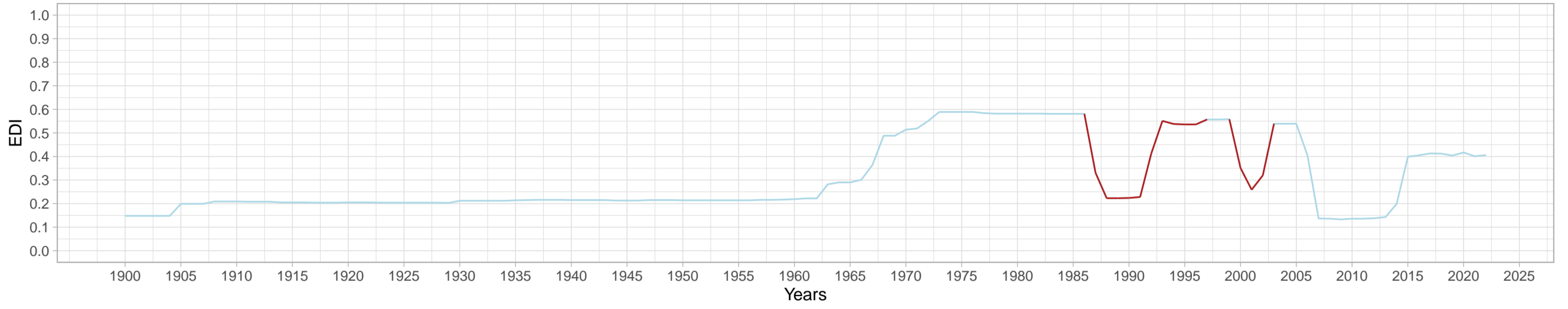


Estonia

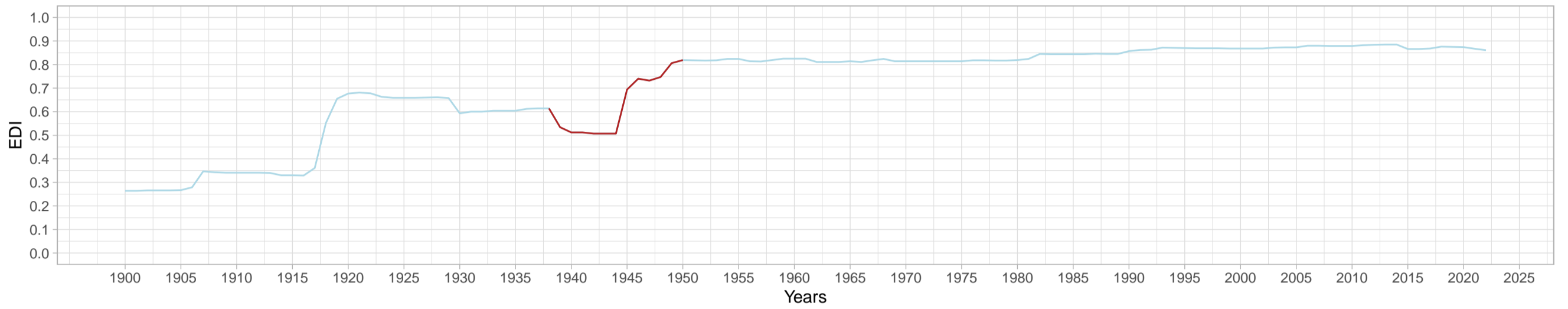


Democratic Turnarounds: — FALSE — TRUE

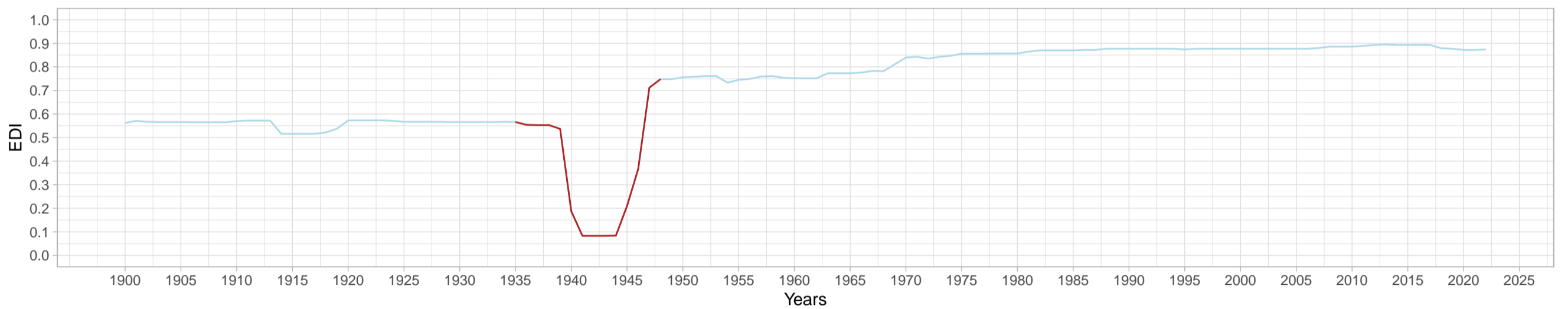
Fiji



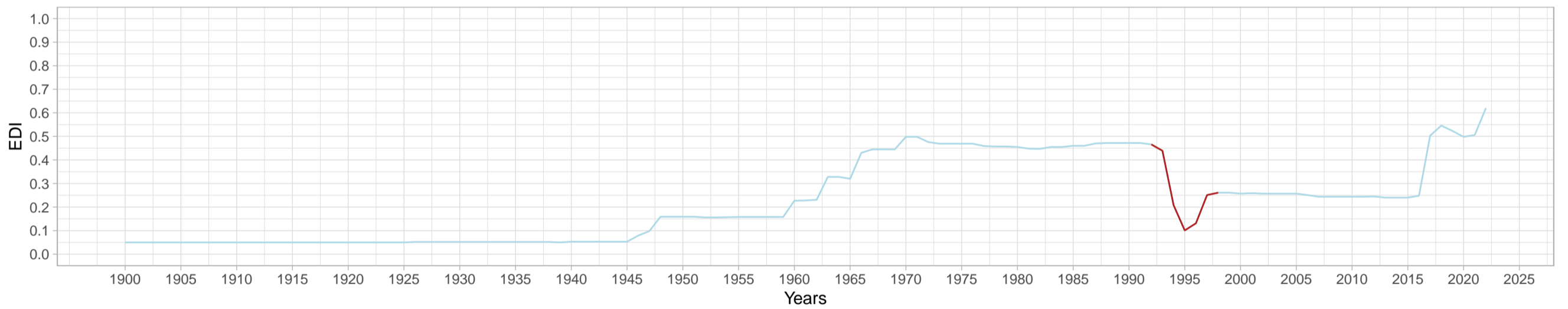
Finland



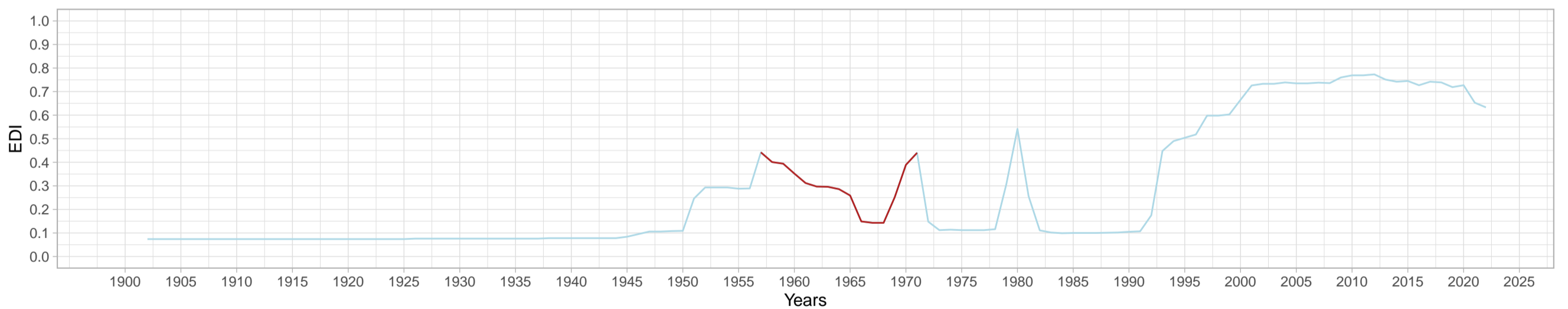
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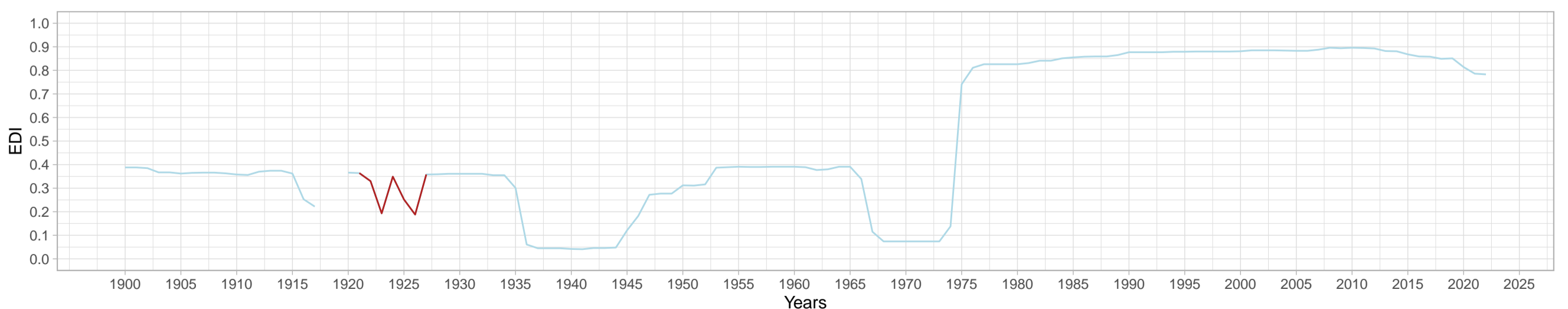
Gambia



Ghana

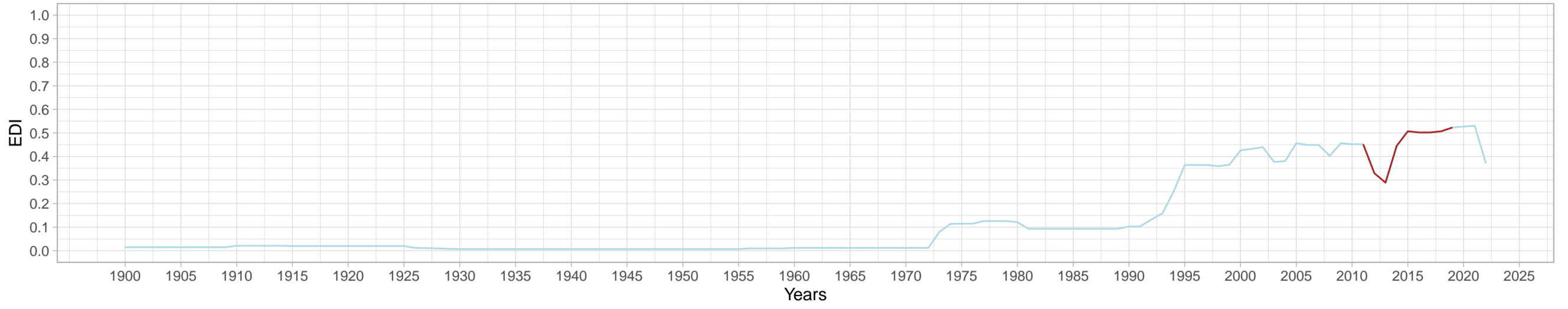


Greece

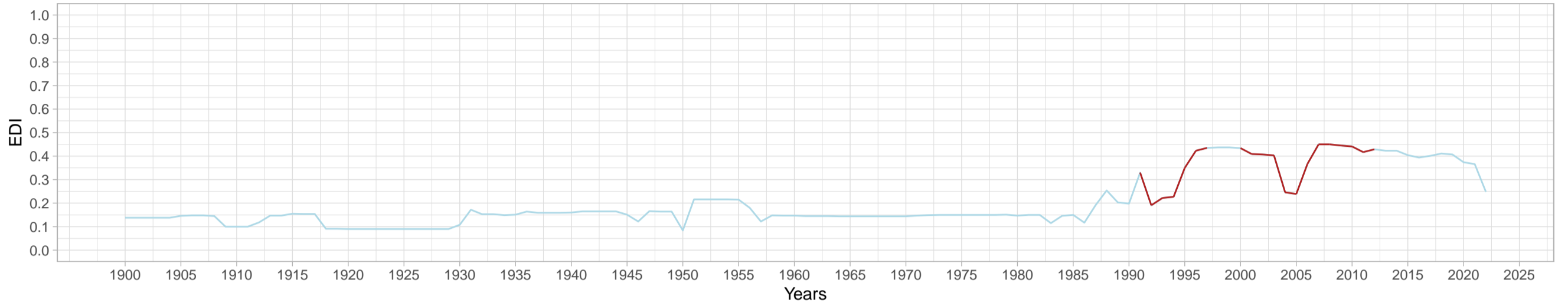


Democratic Turnarounds: — FALSE — TRUE

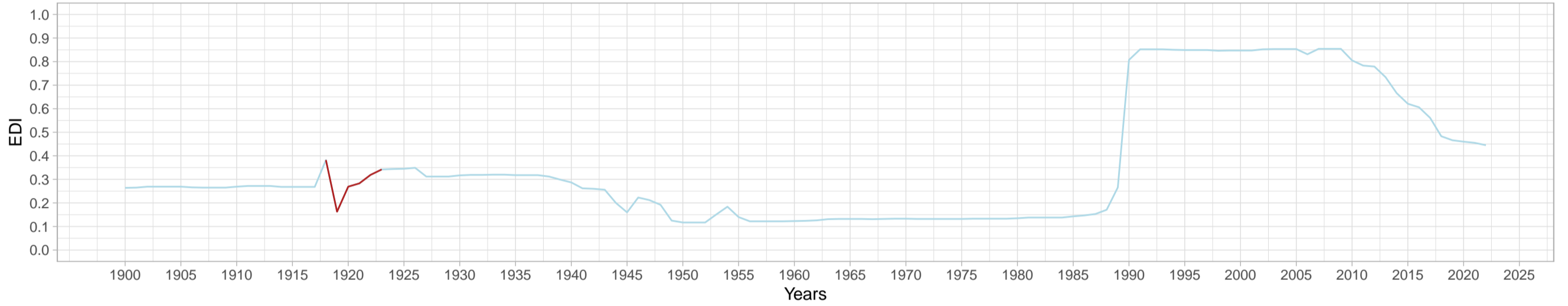
Guinea-Bissau



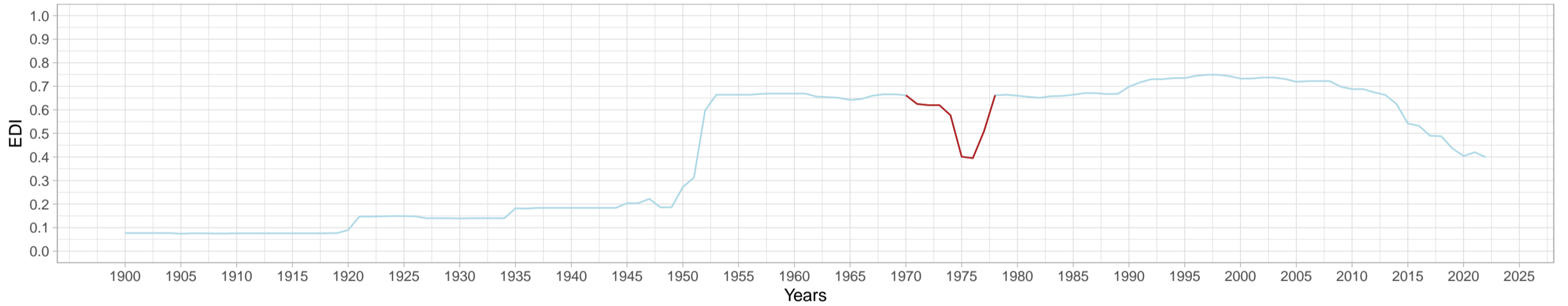
Haiti



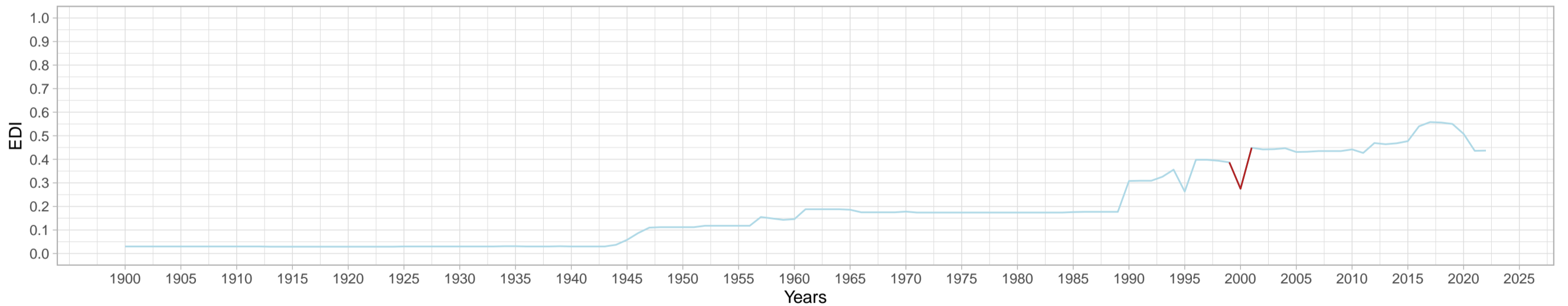
Hungary



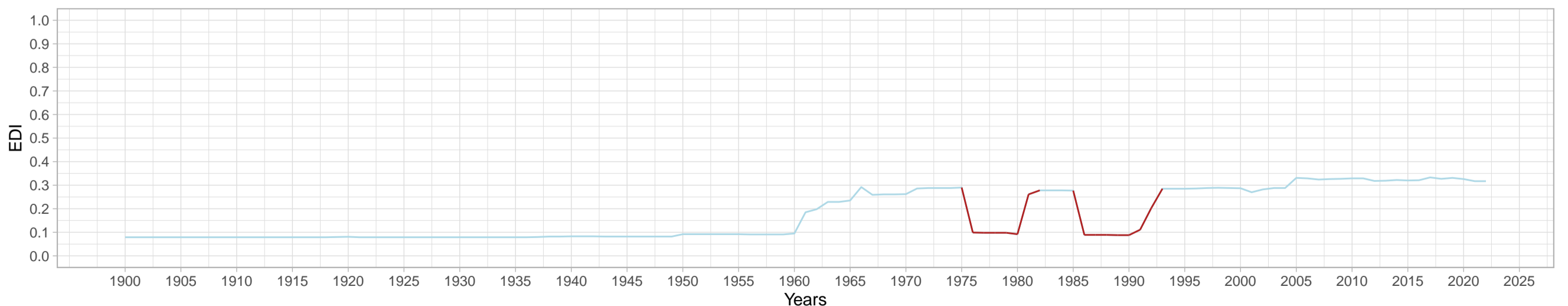
India



Ivory Coast

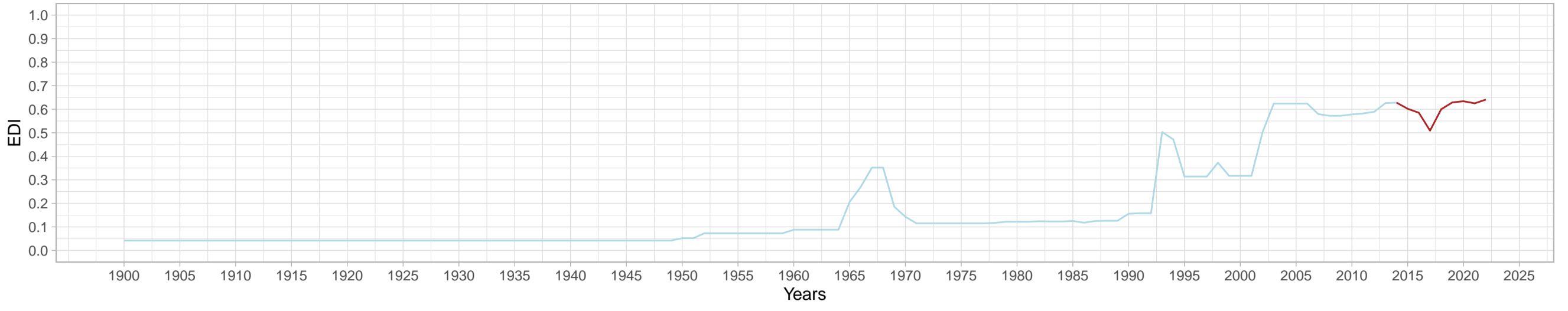


Kuwait

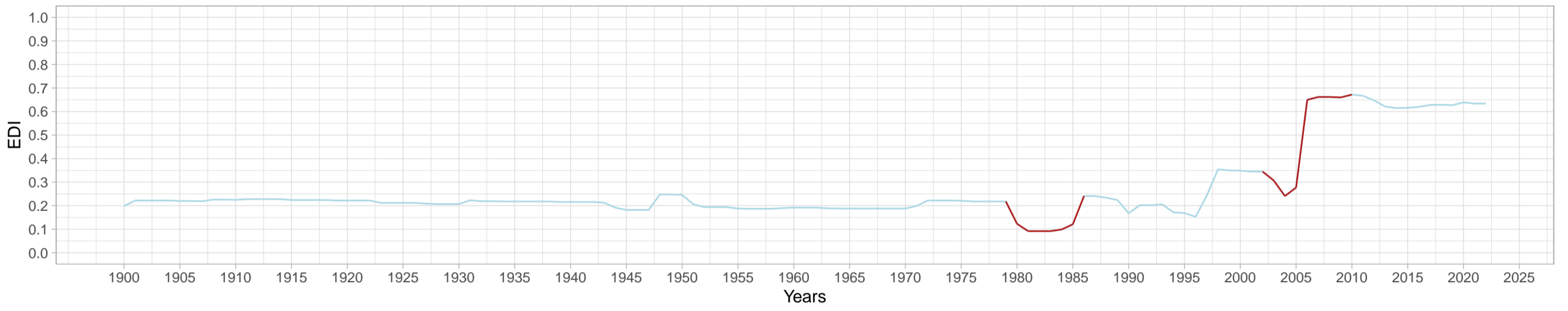


Democratic Turnarounds: — FALSE — TRUE

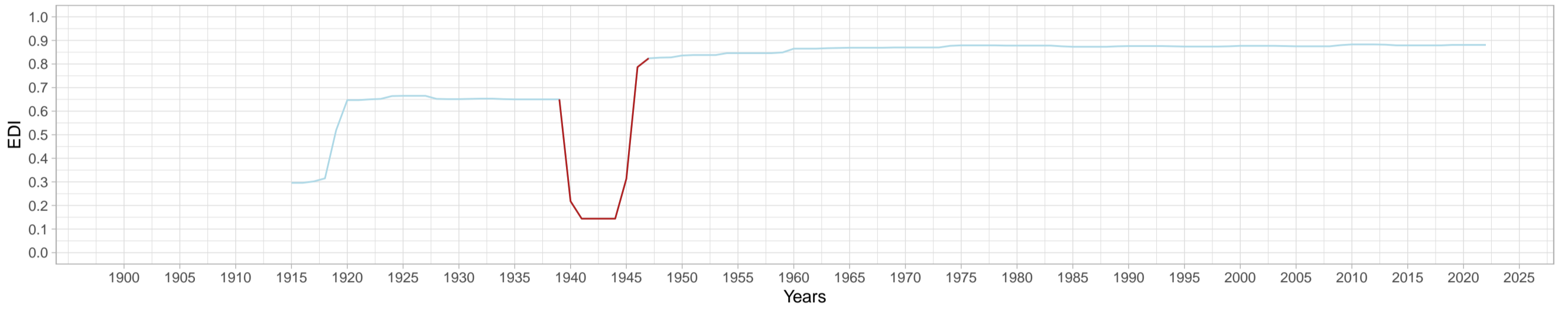
Lesotho



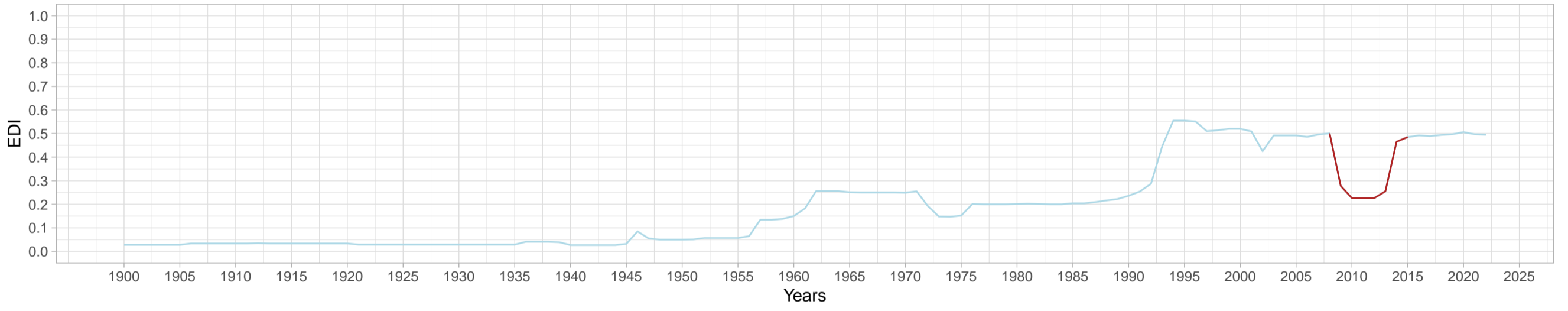
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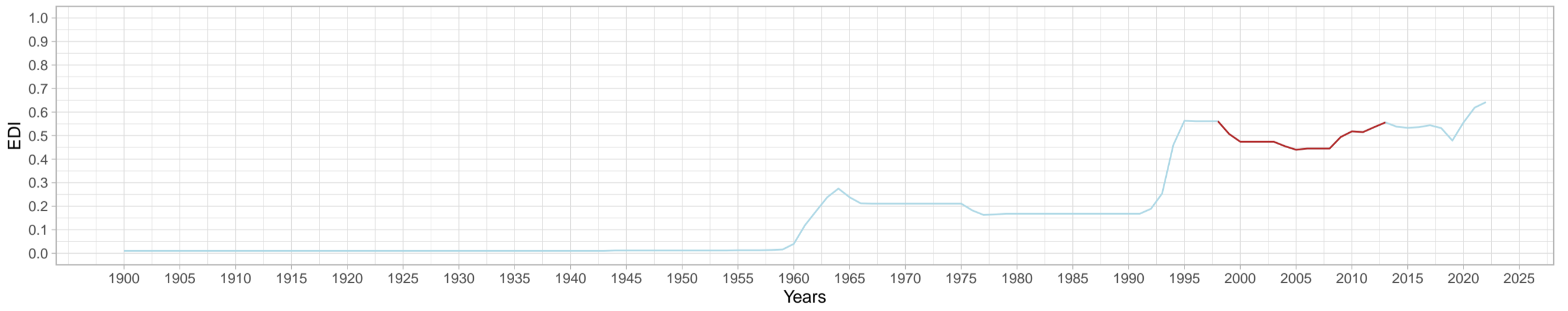
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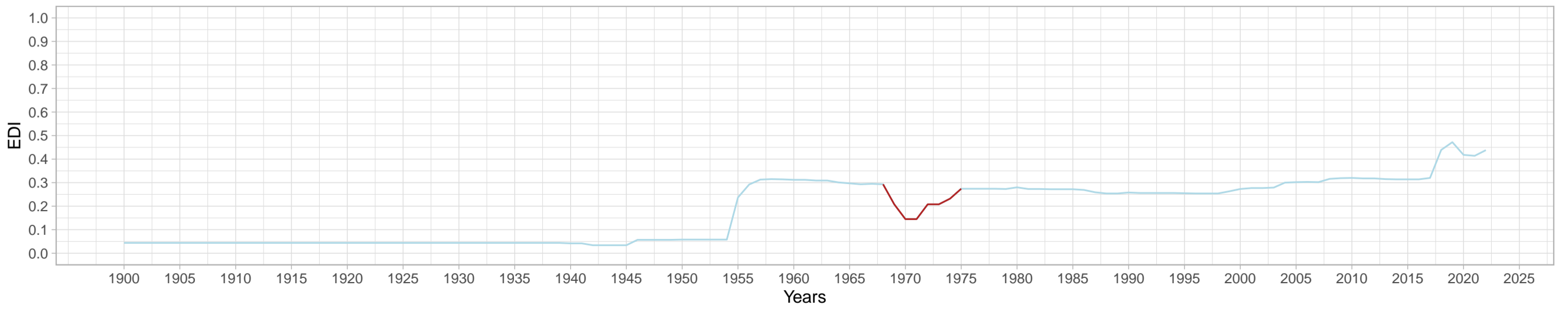
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Malawi

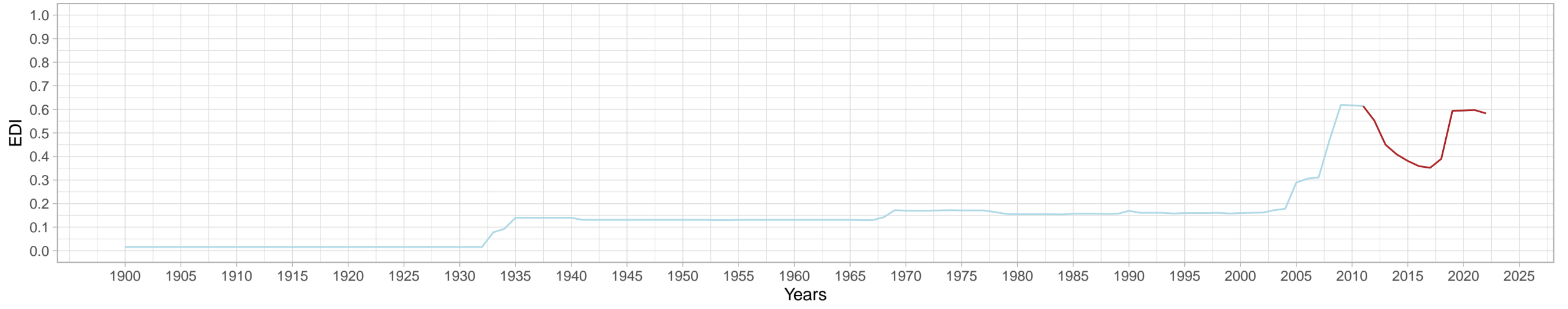


Malaysia

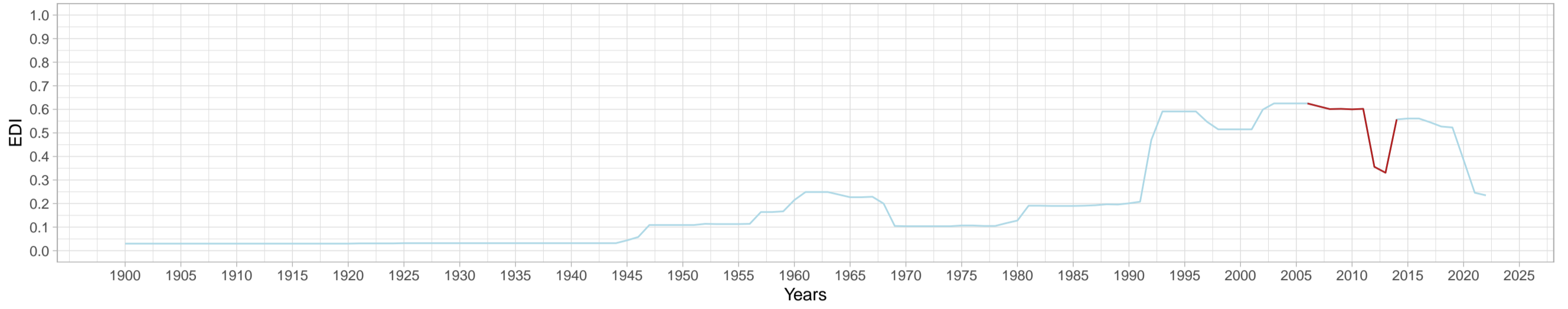


Democratic Turnarounds: — FALSE — TRUE

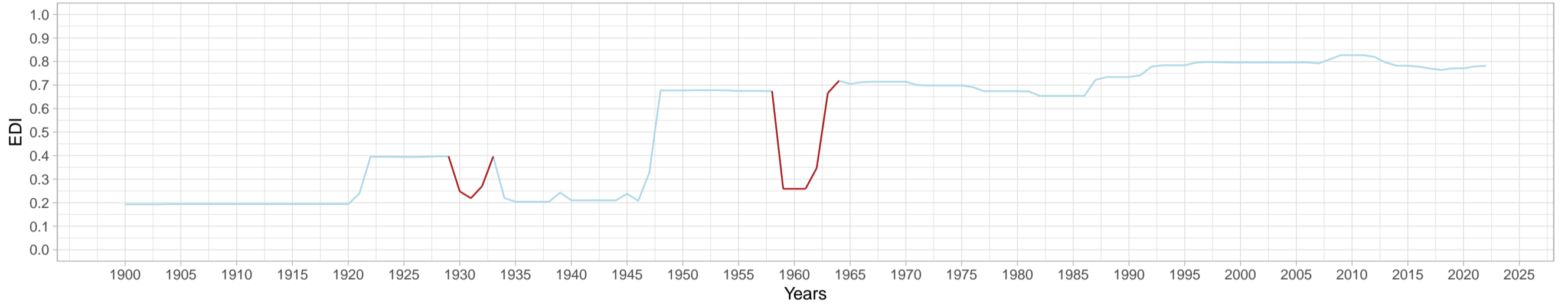
Maldives



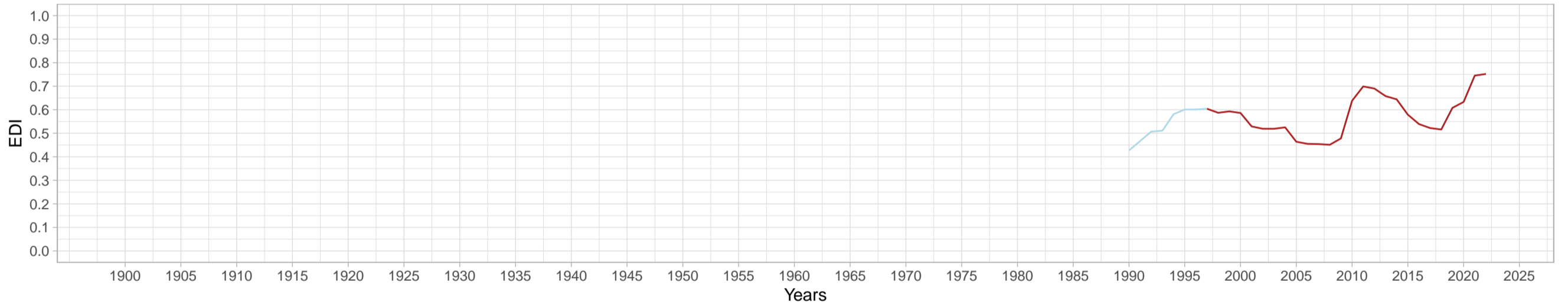
Mali



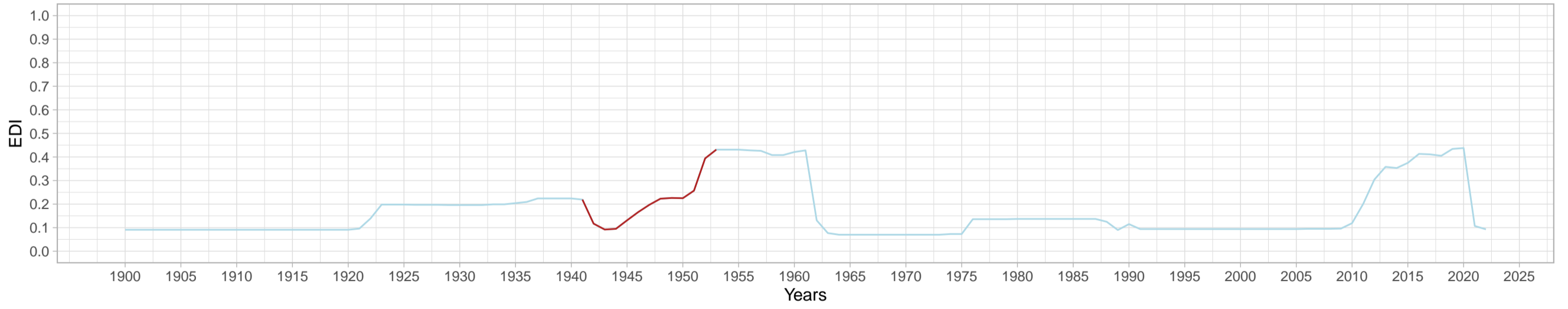
Malta



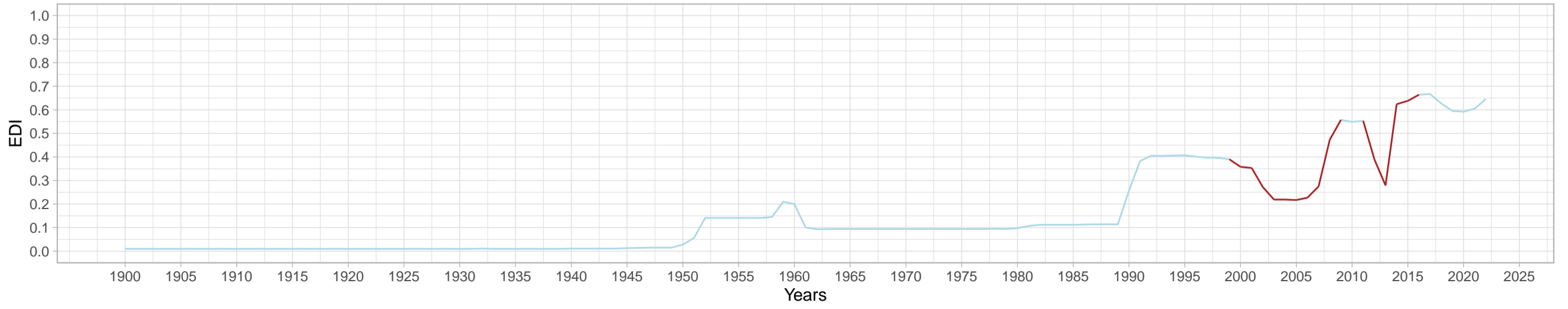
Moldova



Myanmar

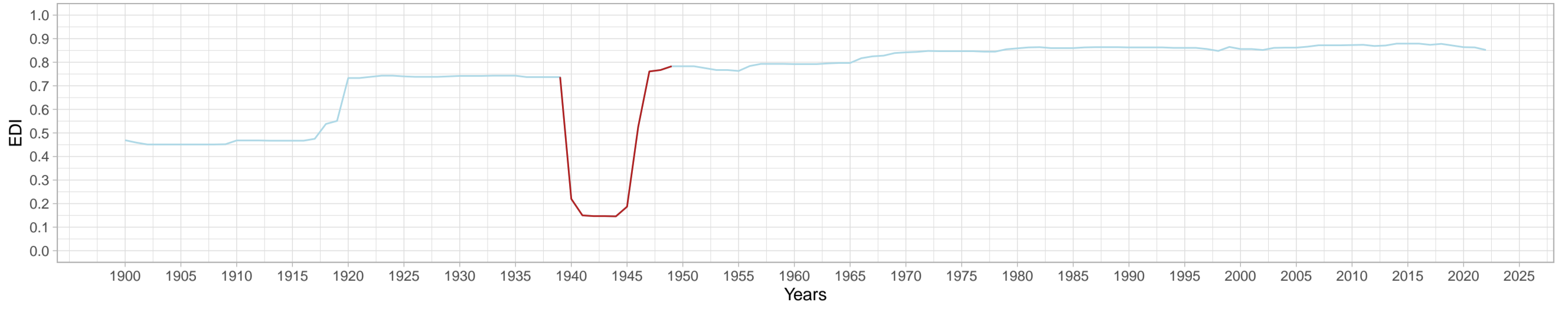


Nepal

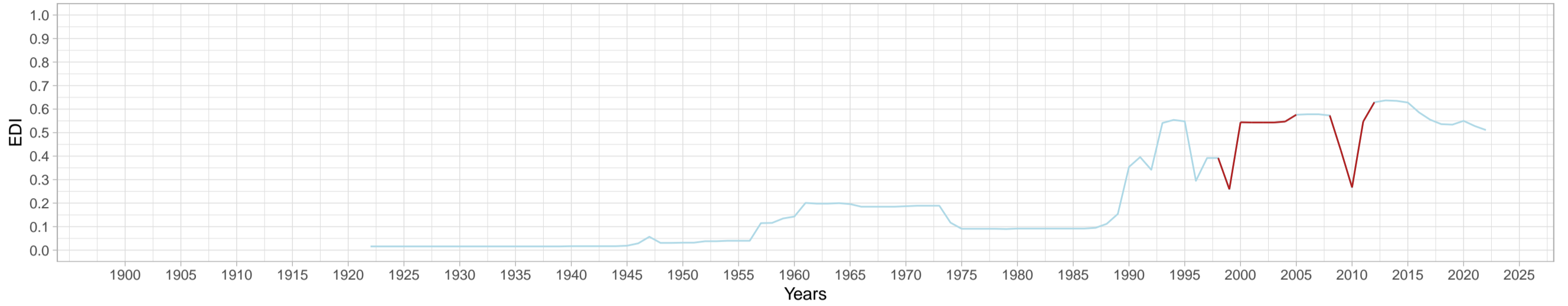


Democratic Turnarounds: — FALSE — TRUE

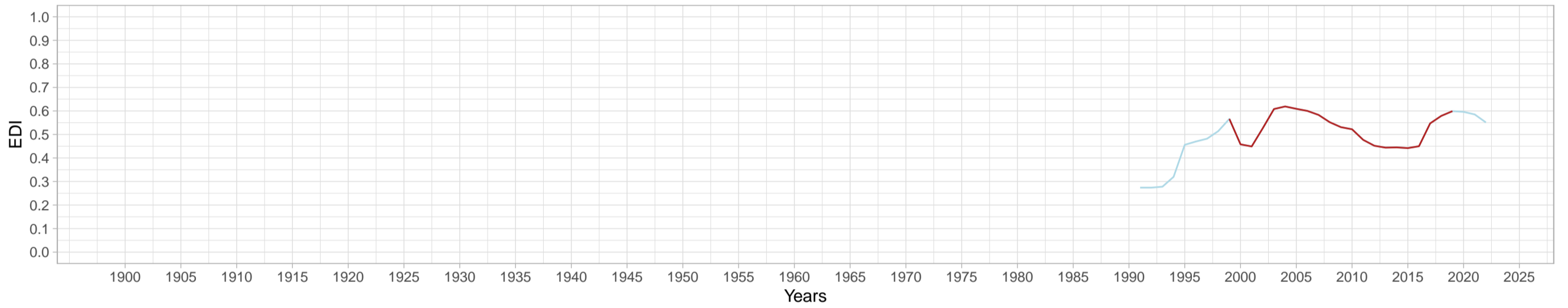
Netherlands



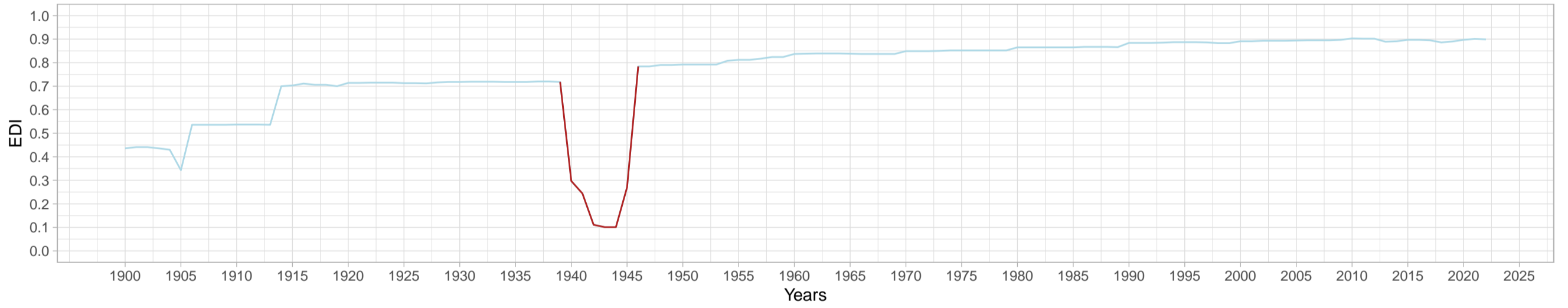
Niger



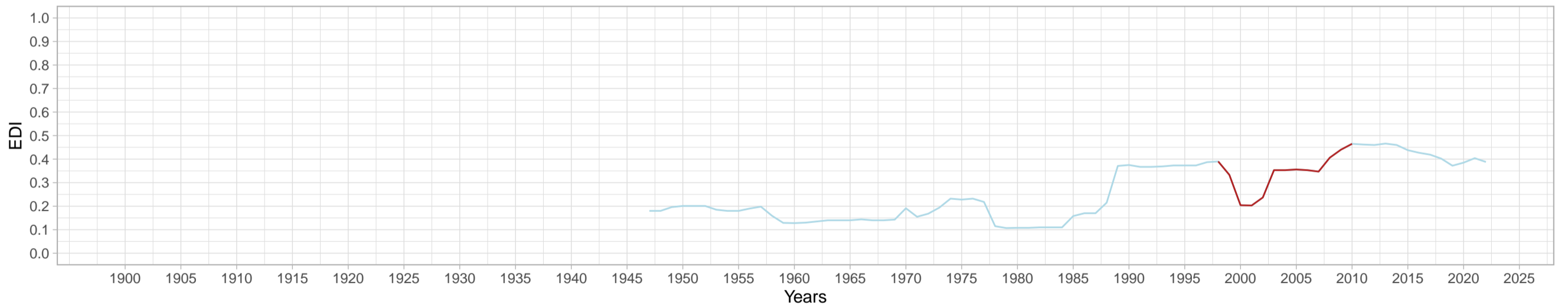
North Macedonia



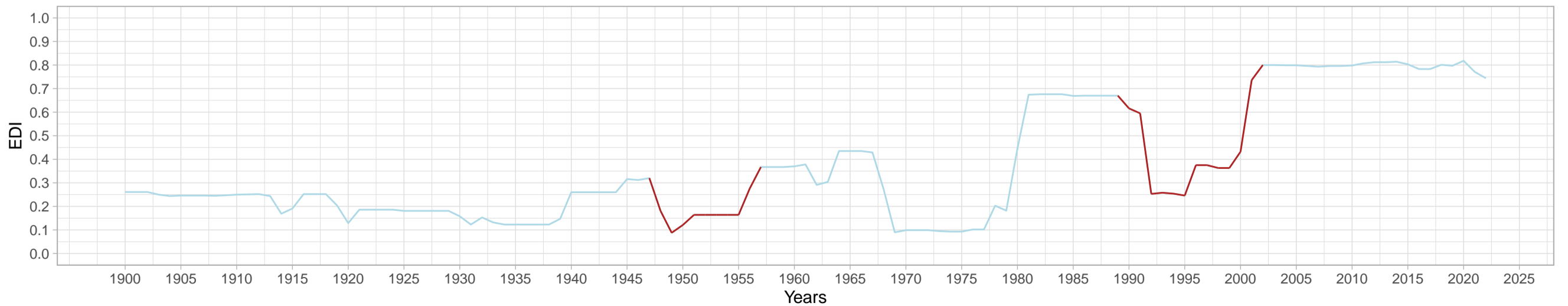
Norway



Pakistan

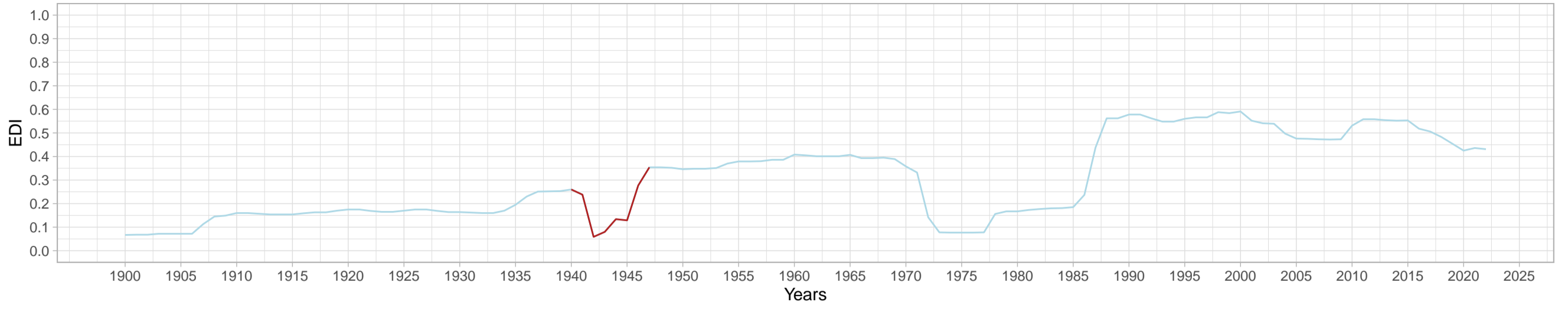


Peru

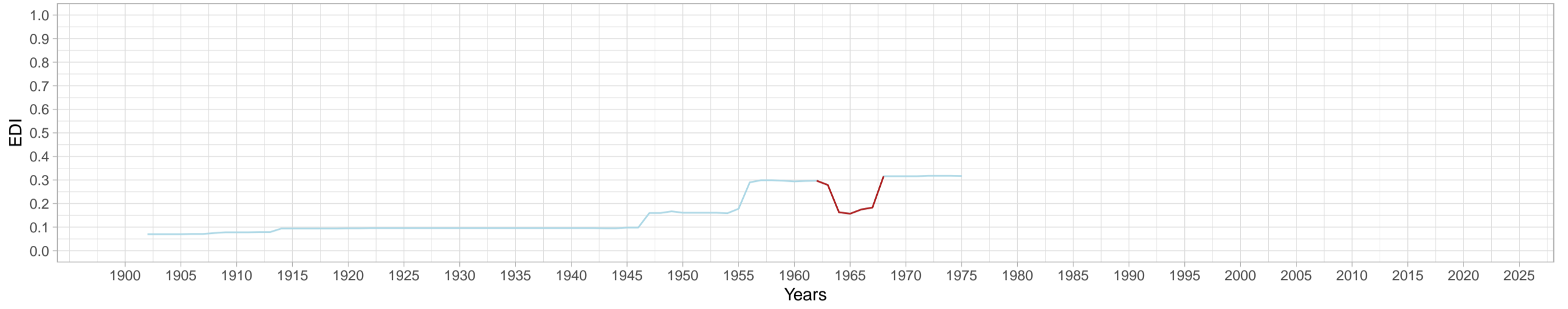


Democratic Turnarounds: — FALSE — TRUE

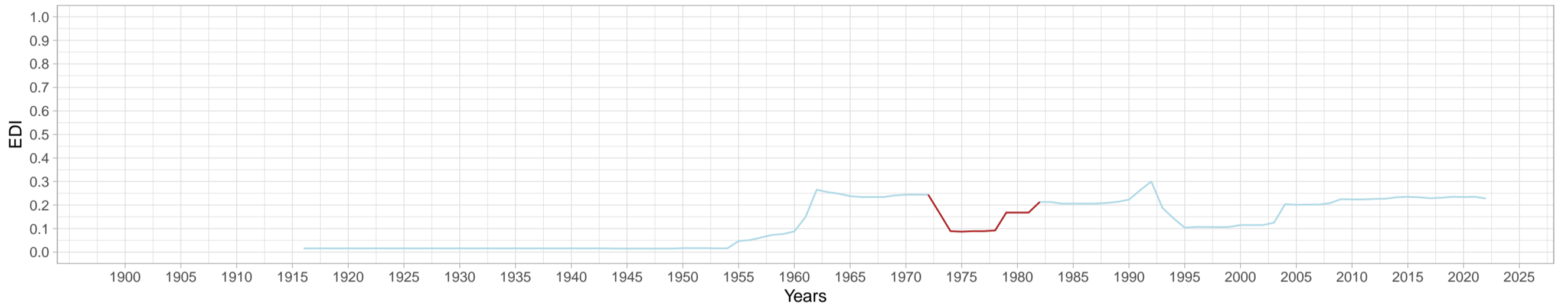
Philippines



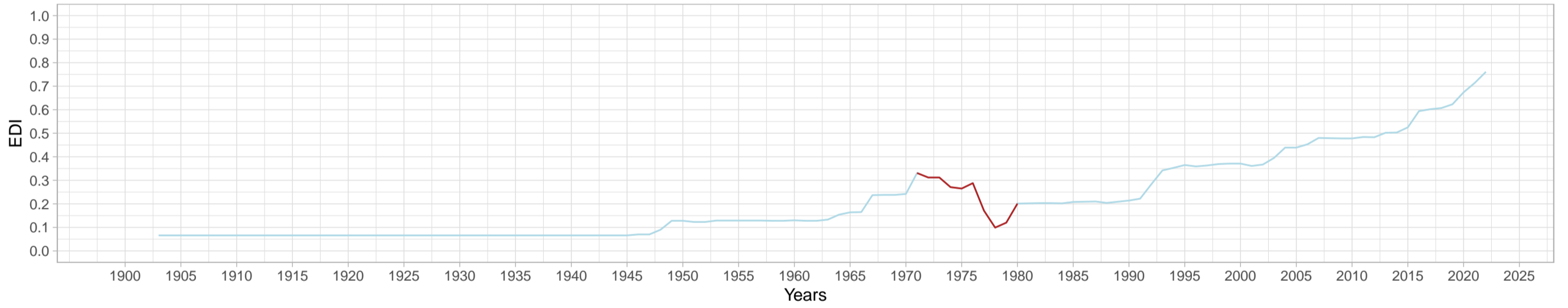
Republic of Vietnam



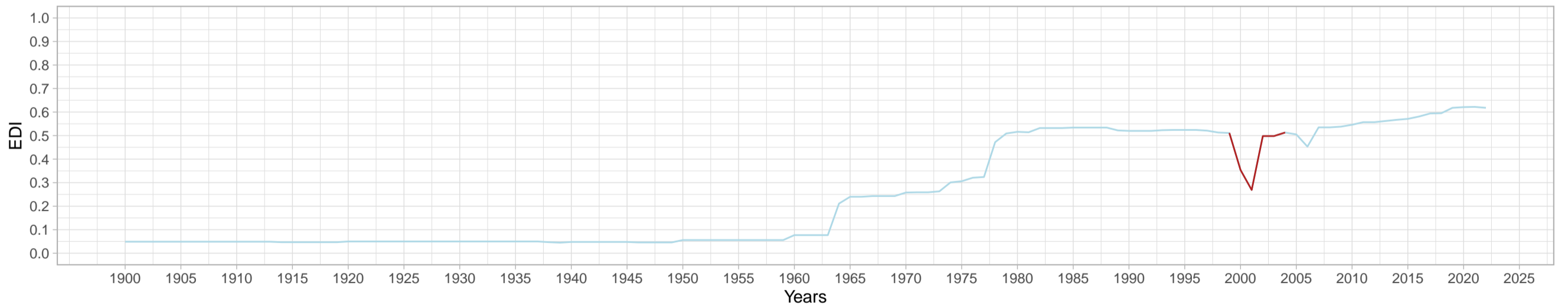
Rwanda



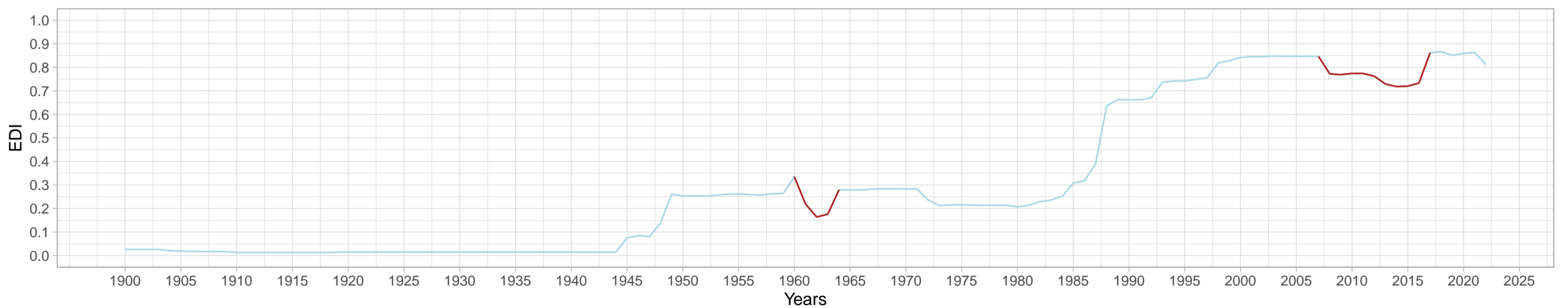
Seychelles



Solomon Islands

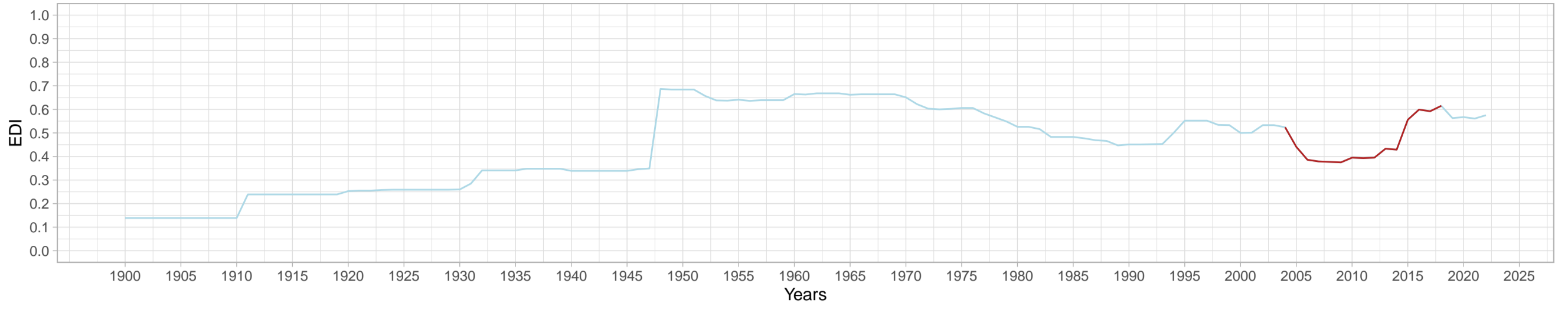


South Korea

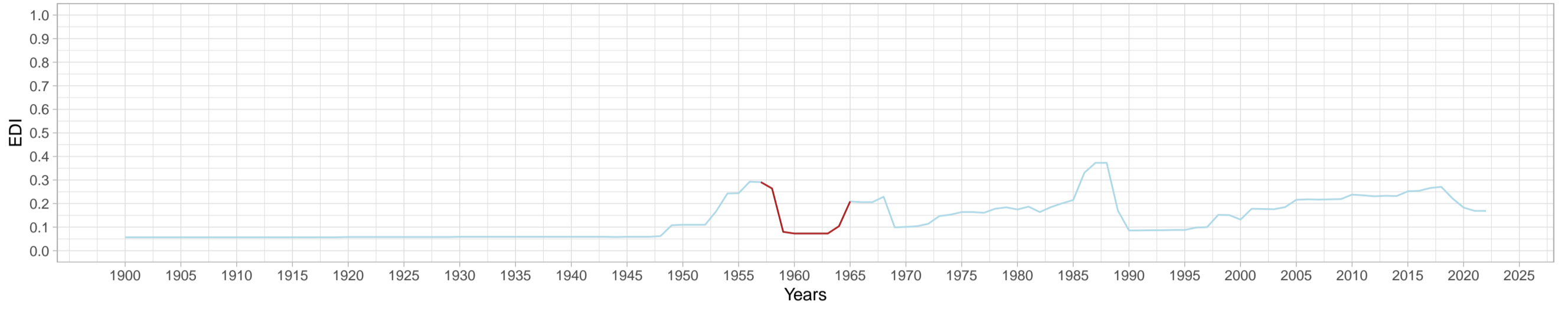


Democratic Turnarounds: — FALSE — TRUE

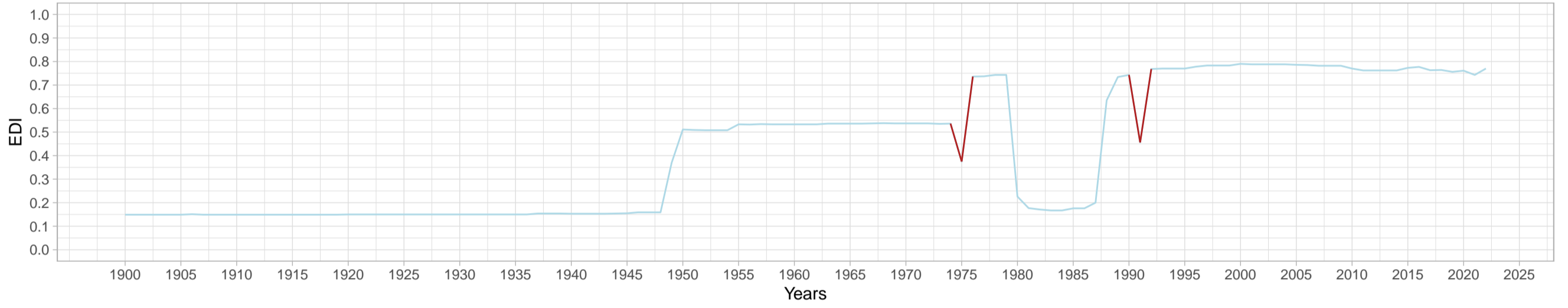
Sri Lanka



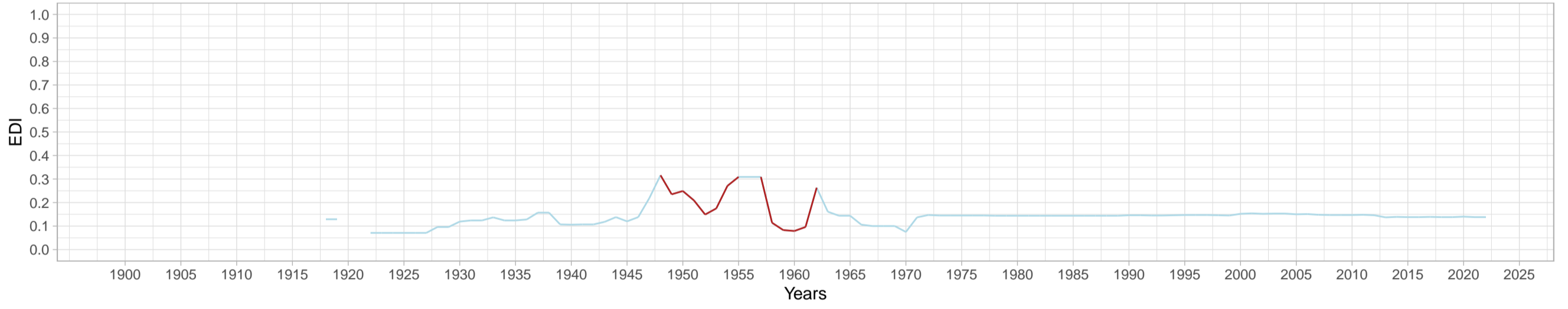
Sudan



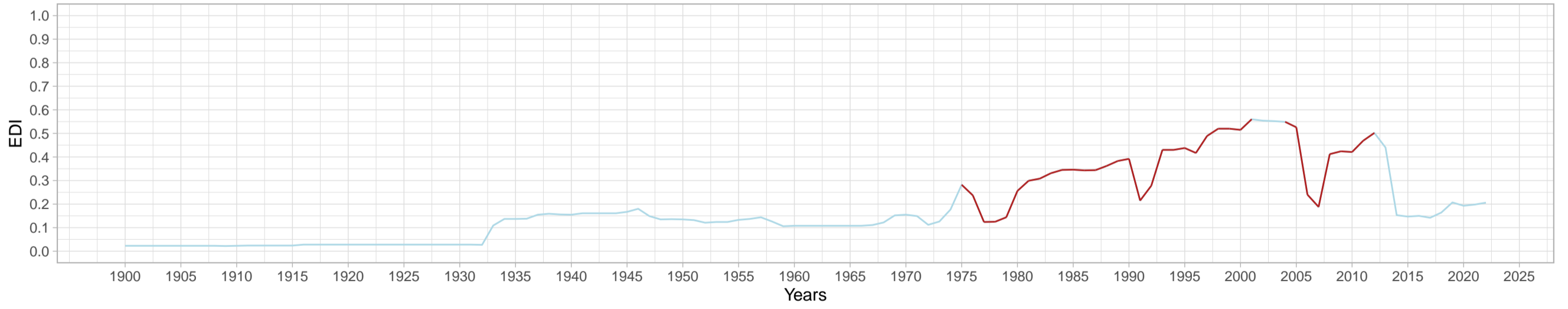
Suriname



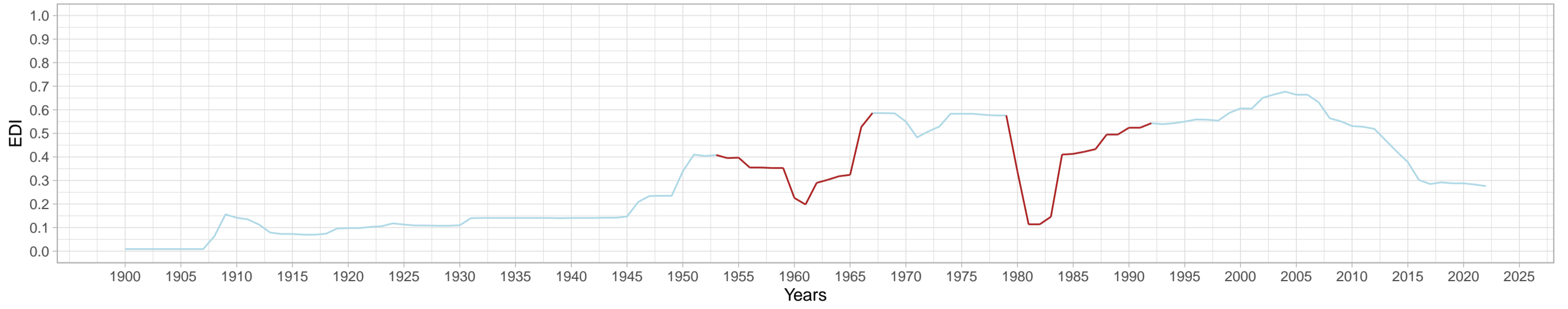
Syria



Thailand

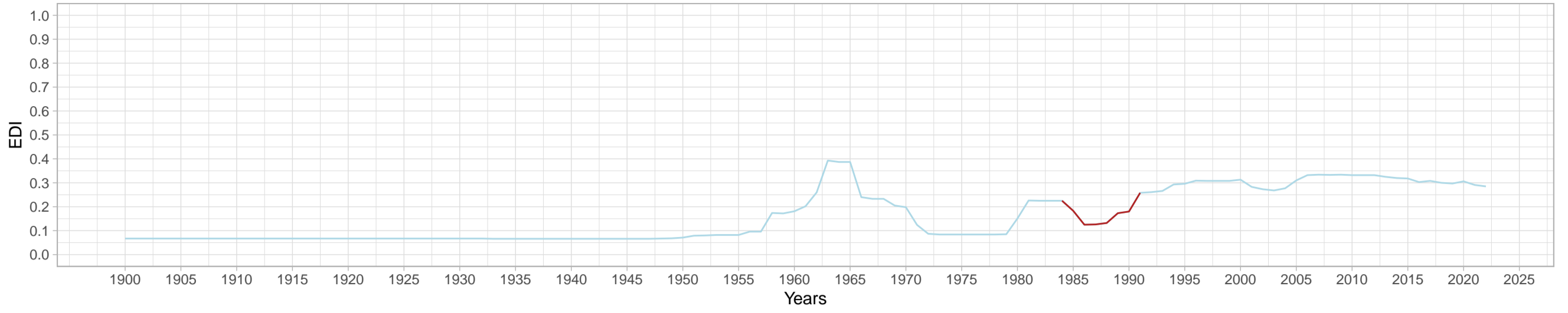


Turkey

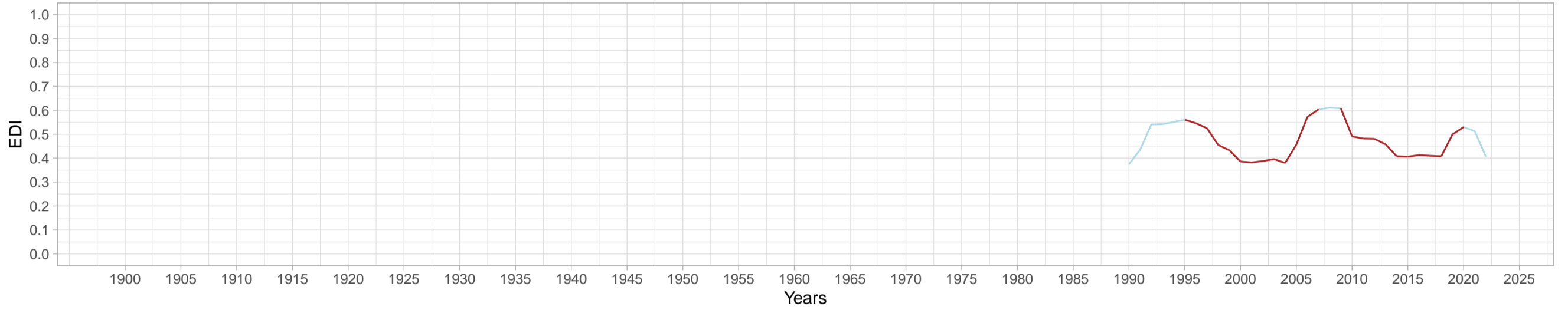


Democratic Turnarounds: — FALSE — TRUE

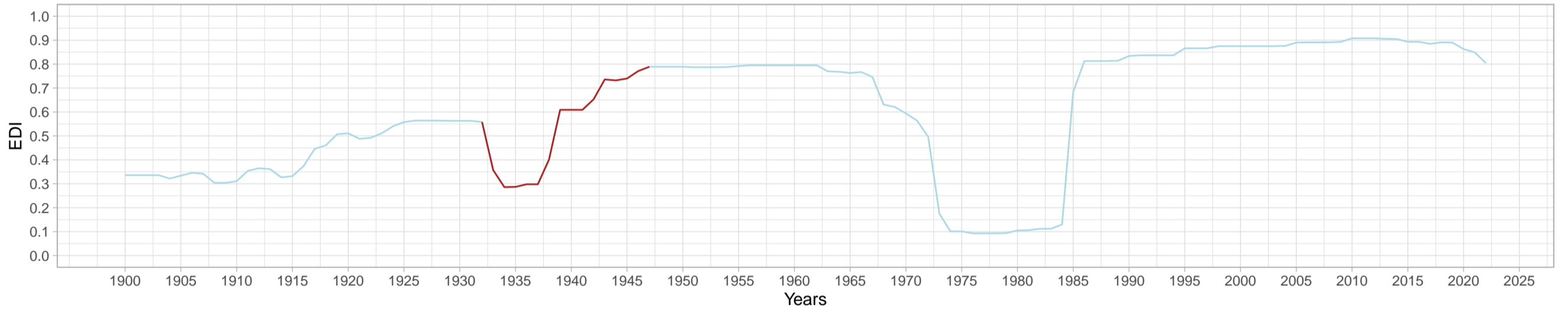
Uganda



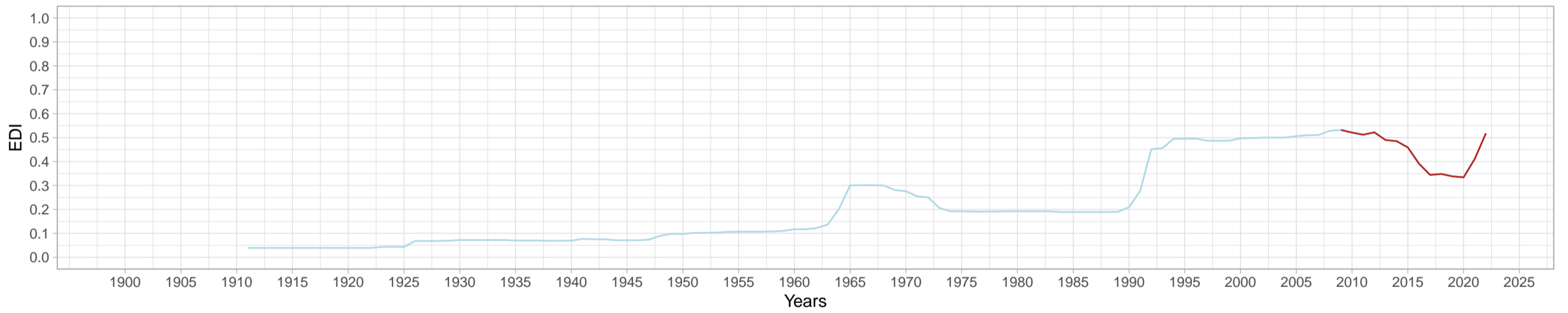
Ukraine



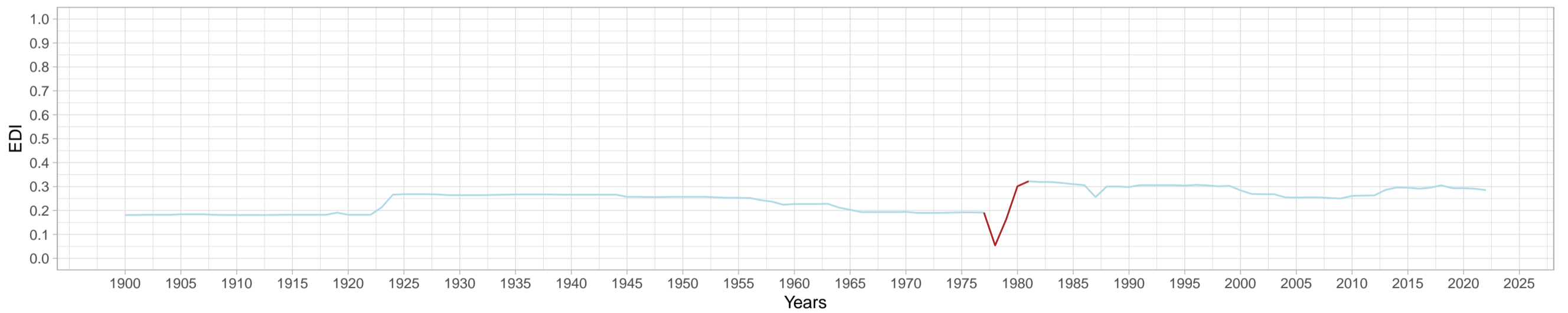
Uruguay



Zambia



Zimbabwe



Democratic Turnarounds: — FALSE — TRUE