

# Report on **Business**

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## Only democracy can clean up the planet

Save the ballot box and save the world.



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It should be easy to demonstrate that democracy (however defined) is better for the environment than dictatorship (however defined) - and it is.

Here's one way: Take a reputable environmental ranking of the countries of the world and superimpose it on a reputable democracy ranking.

For the environmental ranking, let's use the Yale University-Columbia University Environmental Performance Index 2009, a scorecard that bases its grades on 25 environmental indicators. For the democracy ranking, let's use Democracy Ranking 2009, an academic Vienna-based scorecard that bases its grades on six democracy indicators (including political, social and economic standards).

The Environmental Performance Index (EPI) puts Switzerland in first place out of 149 countries. The Democracy Rating Index (DRI) puts it fifth.

The EPI puts Norway in second place; the DRI puts it second as well.

The EPI puts Sweden in third place; the DRI puts it first.

The EPI puts Finland in fourth place; the DRI puts it fourth as well.

The EPI puts Costa Rica in fifth place - leading to the first statistical disconnect. The DRI puts Costa Rica 24th, still honourably democratic (between Estonia and Greece).

The EPI puts Austria in sixth place; the DRI puts it eighth.

The EPI puts New Zealand in seventh place; the DRI puts it seventh as well.

The EPI puts Latvia in eighth place - a second disconnect. The DRI puts Latvia 27th, just behind Costa Rica.

The EPI puts Colombia in ninth place - a third and more dramatic disconnect. The DRI puts Colombia 55th (between South Africa and India).

The EPI puts France in 10th place; the DRI puts it 17th.

And so on. Among the top 25 environmentally ranked countries, none is an overt dictatorship; all are democracies of one kind or another. With only infrequent disconnects, each country's

democracy indicators match up closely with each country's environmental indicators. (The EPI puts Canada in 12th place, by the way; the DRI puts it in 13th.)

The conclusion is inescapable: Either democracy is closely associated with superior environmental performance - or superior environmental performance is closely associated with democracy.

As for doomsday environmentalist Maurice Strong's beloved China, the world's pre-eminent dictatorship, the EPI puts it in 105th place - with a warning that China's environmental performance is more likely worsening than improving. In its China assessment, the Yale-Columbia index notes that, according to the World Bank, half of China's 1.3 billion people still drink contaminated water. The DRI doesn't score China at all, of course - because it scores zero in its democracy indicators.

In a recent controversial essay, Mr. Strong argues that the human race faces "a real and imminent" threat of extinction, in part because democracies do not have the "discipline and control" necessary to reverse global warming. Further, he argues that only by "modify[ing] ballot-box democracy" can this threat be lessened. But he neglects to disclose why the political system with the world's worst environmental record is the political system that will save humanity. According to a recent study published in the journal *Nature Geoscience*, China accounted for roughly 75 per cent of the world's increase in carbon emissions last year.

Presumably most people would freely endorse Mr. Strong's arguments - assuming only, for the moment, that his Faustian deal would avert an Armageddon event. It would appear extremely short-sighted to do otherwise. But his arguments rest on an outrageous fallacy: That too much democracy on the ground was the cause of too much carbon in the atmosphere.

Although they are in no way persuasive, his arguments are not necessarily without consequences. It is a simple fact that a certain percentage of people, either by conscious choice or by random inclination, favours authoritarian governments. Historically, some of these people have been prepared to swap their ballot for a government that could make trains run on time.

Mr. Strong's affinity for suppressive Chinese one-party governance provides an example. In his essay, he concedes that China has become the world's No. 1 source of carbon emissions. But he argues that people are wrong to blame China. He insists that China has done more ("has undertaken greater measures") to reduce emissions than has the United States. Criticism of China's record, he says, is "exaggerated and undeserved."

Yet why, then, do so many Chinese bike to work with masks on their faces? It isn't H1N1. It's PM - particulate matter, the microscopic bits of burned carbon that kills Chinese people in large numbers. China concedes that air pollution kills 300,000 of its people annually; the World Health Organization puts the number at 650,000.

In 2007, the World Bank published a definitive ranking for ambient-air pollution in 110 of the world's largest cities. Of the 25 worst, five cities were in India, a country with ballots; 17 were in China, a country without ballots. The message again is self-evident. Save the ballot box and save the world.