

# DEMOCRACY REDLINE

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January 2026 formal report



# January 2026 Formal Report

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January concentrated risk around institutional independence, legal constraints, and personnel strain inside government service.

<b>8.2</b> CURRENT	<b>7.9</b> PRIOR	<b>CRITICAL</b> STATUS
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**Bottom line:** Critical-range institutional stress with pressure on federal independence and legal constraints.

<b>Report month</b> January 2026	<b>Direction</b> Worsening +0.3	<b>Coverage</b> December 15, 2025 - January 15, 2026	<b>Biggest move</b> Pressure on independent institutions moved from background concern to central score driver.
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### What changed this month

## The index crossed into a clearer Critical range.

January marked a sharper turn from high-risk pressure into critical-range institutional stress. The month concentrated risk around independence of federal institutions, pressure on legal constraints, and continued personnel strain inside government service.

<b>Five recovered takeaways</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• The administration opened a criminal investigation into Federal Reserve Chair Jerome Powell.</li><li>• The Supreme Court battle over Trump's attempt to remove Fed Governor Lisa Cook tested presidential control over independent institutions.</li><li>• A federal judge dismissed DOJ's lawsuit seeking California voter details.</li></ul>	<b>What moved the meter</b> <p>The score moved higher because risks to institutional independence broadened while legal constraints were repeatedly tested. Court rulings still mattered as countervailing checks, but the overall trajectory remained upward.</p>	<b>Report status</b> <p>This is a backfilled formal report built from recovered archive content, aligned to the current report format.</p>
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**Top score drivers**

# The monthly score rose because several documented stress categories reinforced each other.

Driver	Direction	Interpretation
Institutional independence	Worsening	Pressure involving Federal Reserve leadership made independent institutions a central score driver.
Legal constraints	Worsening	DOJ demands and lawsuits tested boundaries around state records and political adversaries.
Federal service capacity	Worsening	Departures among government lawyers raised concern about institutional capacity and internal restraint.
Judicial checks	Active	Court rulings against some DOJ demands showed checks still functioning in important cases.

**Category scorecard**

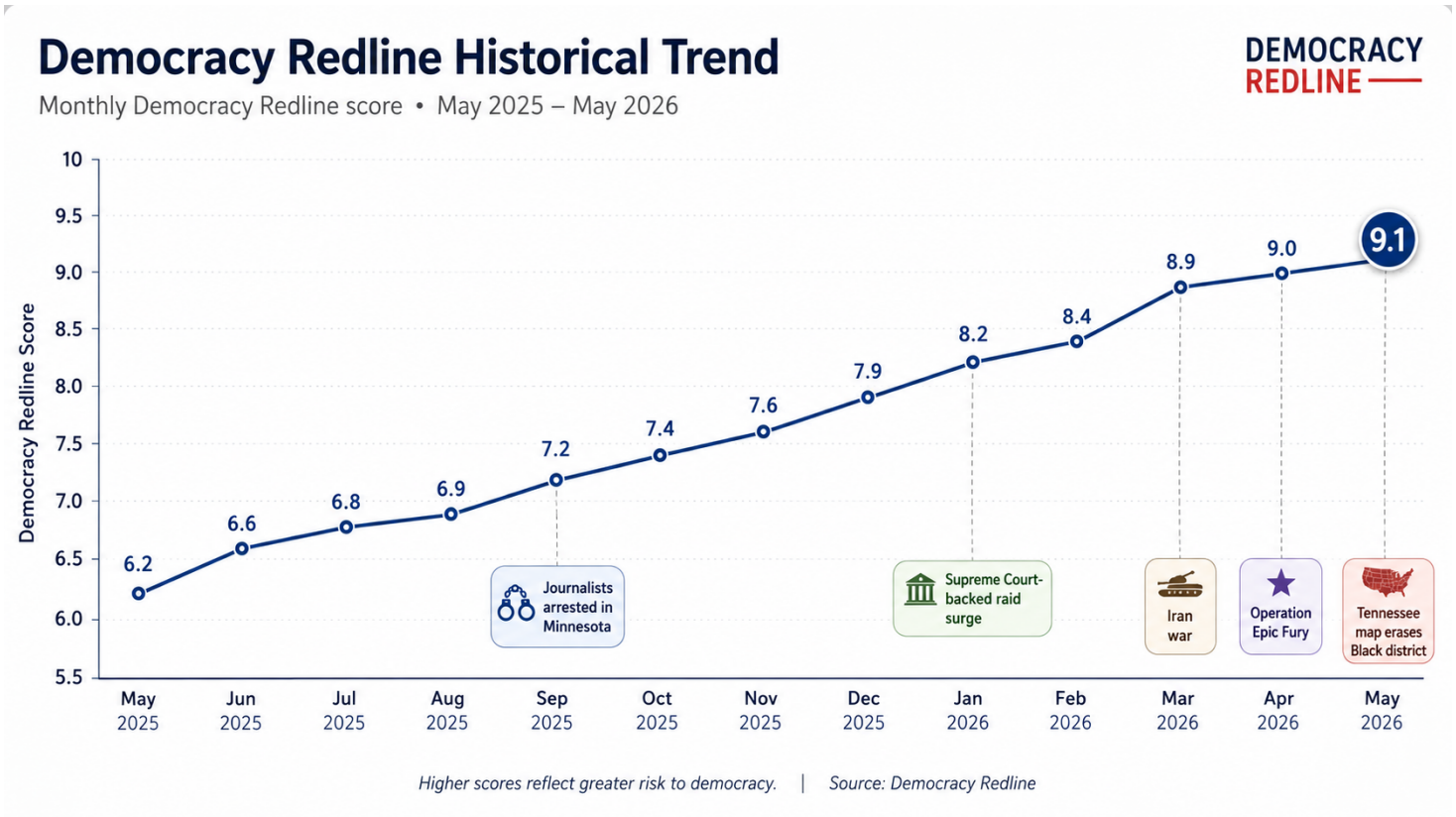
Category	Status	Interpretation
Institutional independence	Critical	Federal Reserve-related pressure made independence of key institutions a primary concern.
Rule of law and due process	Critical	Legal tools and record demands repeatedly tested the boundary between enforcement and pressure.
Executive power and accountability	High	The month showed broader attempts to shape or challenge independent centers of authority.
Election administration and federalism	High	DOJ pursuit of California voter details kept election-administration pressure in view.
Civil service and state capacity	High	Government-lawyer departures suggested strain inside the public-service layer.
Countervailing checks	Active	Federal judges still supplied direct constraints on several legal demands.

**How to read page 2**

Category movement matters most when multiple documented stress signals reinforce one another rather than appearing as isolated disputes.

Historical trajectory context

# January 2026 in the escalation sequence



January 2026 sits between earlier elevated-risk months and the later explicit Red Zone readings. The purpose of the backfill is to show direction, intensity, and accumulation across the monthly record.

Prior score	Current score	Status
7.9	8.2	Critical

**How this score is grounded**

# Evidence, interpretation, and score impact are separated.

The score is a structured civic-risk judgment based on recovered archive content and the public-record source stack described in the methodology. It is not a poll or a prediction.

Fact	Interpretation	Score impact
Observable public actions, court rulings, official statements, documented enforcement activity, and major reporting.	Why those events matter for democratic function, institutional independence, civil liberties, and rule-of-law constraints.	How the evidence affected the monthly risk assessment, especially when categories reinforced one another.

**Key evidence and benchmark events**

The administration opened a criminal investigation into Federal Reserve Chair Jerome Powell.	The Supreme Court battle over Trump's attempt to remove Fed Governor Lisa Cook tested presidential control over independent institutions.	A federal judge dismissed DOJ's lawsuit seeking California voter details.
A federal judge blocked DOJ demands for records tied to Letitia James' lawsuits against Trump and the NRA.	Government lawyers continued leaving federal service in unusually high numbers.	

**Methodology note**

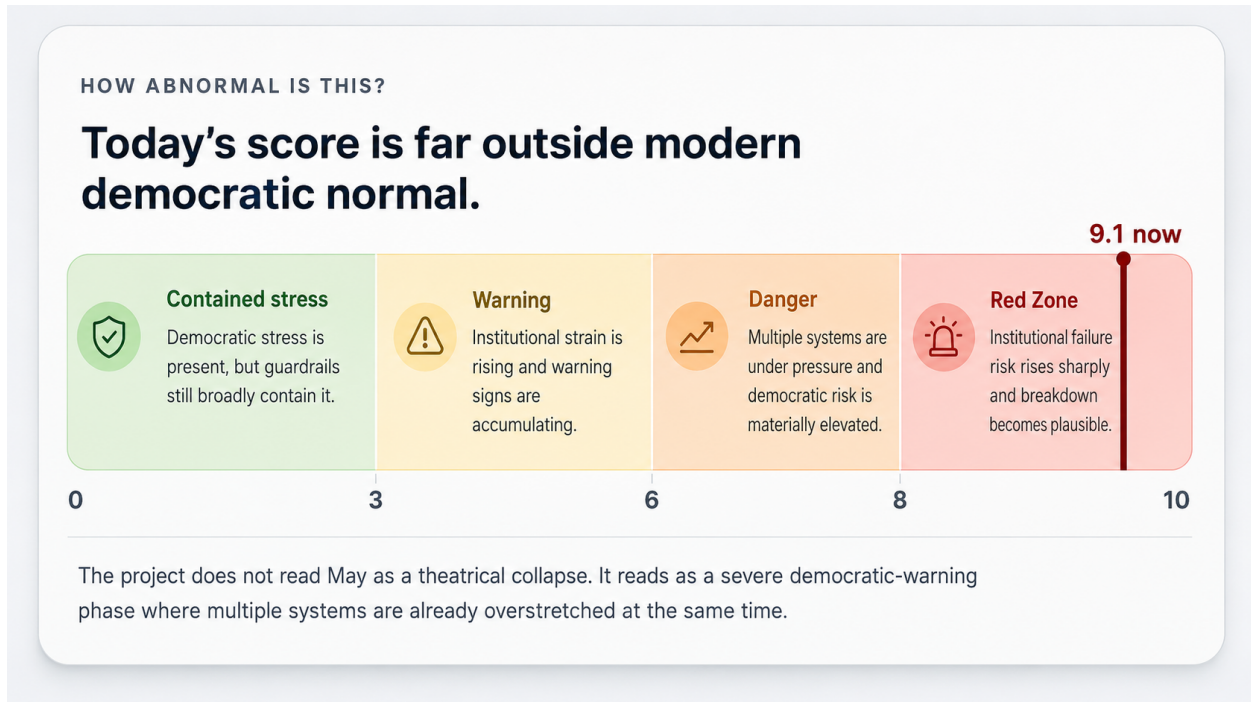
Backfilled formal reports use the current Democracy Redline scoring framework to reconstruct earlier trajectory. Where recovered report text was available, this PDF uses that recovered content. These records are best read as sequence documents that show persistence and accumulation across months.

What to watch next

# Forward indicators for the next reporting period

<p><b>Independent institutions</b></p> <p>Whether pressure on independent federal actors continued or receded.</p>	<p><b>DOJ boundary testing</b></p> <p>Whether lawsuits and record demands kept targeting state or adversarial institutions.</p>	<p><b>Internal legal capacity</b></p> <p>Whether departures from federal service impaired institutional restraint.</p>
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Companion visual



This companion graphic explains why high institutional-stress scores should not be treated as ordinary political volatility.