

The Measurement of Democracy and the Means of History

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Abstract The issue of measurement has seized the public eye more than ever before. The computer, communication, and information revolutions have produced a veritable flood of facts and observations on every imaginable topic and subject from every nook and cranny on earth, and beyond. Information overload challenges both our sensibilities and our abilities to process and organize knowledge; everything must be measured, compared, rated, and ranked. The demand for informational order has grown far faster than the ability to deliver. The public obsession with order and ordering to the minutest detail can be both consuming and obscuring. On the surface, inaccurate and inappropriate measures command the same allusion to mathematical precision as the more accurate and reliable measures. The focus of measurement in the social sciences is on identifying common metrics that accurately capture the essential quality of key factors and attributes that define complex, social phenomena. Objective and subjective assessments must be separated to the degree possible. Similarly, in social processes, means and ends must be distinguished in order to gauge performance. Governance and social order are, to a greater degree than any other social phenomena, based in commonalities of collective action and response. These constitute the means of history and should be distinguished from the ends so we can better understand how the past got us to the present and what we might make of the future. From a secular perspective, the purpose of democracy is to define and refine democratic purpose, the success of which can be measured as a conflict

management function. Factionalism and the polarization of dissent present major impediments to the consolidation of democracy.

Keywords Democracy · Democratization · Governance · Authority · Development · Measurement · Conflict · Complexity · Societal-systems analysis

When it comes to the topic of democracy, there are some things on which most of us can agree: democracy is an essentially contested concept that pertains to a form of governance by “the people” and involves some form of balloting to gauge personal preferences. Both the ancient Aristotle and the more contemporary Alexis de Tocqueville voiced serious reservations concerning this form of governance and both issued dire warnings regarding the tyranny of the (needy) majority inherent in democratic authority. Such “tyranny” has often been equated with populist democracy, particularly in Latin America, or its more radical counterpart “communism,” which first emerged in Eastern Europe, although the question of whether the latter form can be considered democratic remains hotly contested. What appears to have become the model form for democratic governance in the emerging era of globalization is a liberal, representative form of democracy based on the experiences of the Western democracies wherein “the people” (however that may be defined) are “freed” (to some substantial degree) from obligations to governance but whom, collectively, remain its professed beneficiaries. The dynamism of liberal democracy, which necessarily encourages the free expression of complementary, competing, and contentious interests, is channeled through private initiative and enterprise. This dual emphasis on individual freedom (or

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liberty) and the substitution of initiative (or entrepreneurship) for obligation, then, is now generally recognized as fundamentally distinguishing this form of equalitarian “democracy” from that form of equalitarian “communism” (with populism remaining a democratic conundrum). A crucial question in regard to individual liberties is whether the exercise of individual freedom from obligations to governance results in those obligations being delegated to responsible and responsive representatives or whether they are abdicated such that they empower and entrench a political elite (i.e., oligarchy); this latter issue becomes especially acute when private initiative manages to concentrate property and wealth (capital) in support of the political elite.

Development and Enfranchisement

Early architects of liberal, representative democracy recognized the tensions between opposing tendencies in democratic governance toward populism or oligarchy. The tendency toward oligarchy was tempered through the decentralization and deconcentration of governing authority. In the United States, where the first grand experiment in state democracy was initiated by the Declaration of Independence in 1776, this tempering was subsequently accomplished through the preservation of “states rights” and the imposition of “checks and balances” among the three principal institutions of central governance: executive, legislative, and judicial. The tendency toward populism was tempered through formal restrictions on enfranchisement, or suffrage, that limited political participation to key sectors of the general population that could be reasonably relied upon as major stakeholders with vested interests in supporting, maintaining, and defending the general system (and central authority) through the voluntary exercise of (delegated) obligations to governance. Enfranchisement was incrementally expanded over the course of nearly two centuries as societal integration progressed and additional groups of stakeholders demonstrated, petitioned, or sued for inclusion as lawful and positive political participants in the governance system.¹

¹ Initially (1788–89 and 1792) popular voting in presidential elections in the United States involved only about 1.6% of the “free population” with only 6 of 10 states holding popular elections to choose Electors for the Electoral College (a further check on “populism”). Popular vote for the presidency in the United States, even within a highly restricted franchise, did not become the common form of choosing Electors until the 1828 election, when only Delaware and South Carolina chose Electors in their state legislatures (South Carolina continued to hold out until after the defeat of the Confederacy in 1865). In the 1872 presidential election, about 16% of the population cast ballots in the presidential election.

Universal enfranchisement in the United States was only finally accomplished in practice with the Civil Rights Movement in the 1950s and 1960s.² More than anything else, the prior restrictions and later expansions of the franchise demonstrated the importance of a (pro)active and informed public in scrutinizing the exercise of delegated authority and ensuring the accountability of public officials (while protecting private property). Of course, the development of the (pro)active and informed public as guarantor of accountability could only be cultivated and empowered through the complementary evolution of free association, open and public information, and independent media.

It was recognized very early in the “American” democratic experiment that decentralization of governing authority, itself, could present a serious impediment to effective, democratic governance. The deliberation and negotiation of policy and the coordination of action in a decentralized authority system precludes a swift and coherent response to the imperatives of political crisis. The Articles of Confederation, which were designed to constrain executive action, presented a serious obstacle to effective response in crisis situations, such as internal threats posed by the disenfranchised (e.g., Shay’s Rebellion) and external provocations, including the harassment of US shipping, naval impressments, and the continued support of hostile native groups by British authorities. A new, more centralized and flexible, federal Constitution was promulgated in 1787 that enabled executive initiative and response in crisis situations; it also focused central administrative authority in the executive office. Internal threats were largely defused, and the essential social order maintained, by the prospects of societal mobility (empowerment and enfranchisement) underwritten by the largesse of the American “frontier” (vast expanses of untitled land and underdeveloped resources); also important in this regard was the enormous influx of “atomized” immigrants whose mobilization potential was diminished by the relative weakness of their transplanted social networks. Of course, in this context, the repression of dissent was not uncommon but remained largely confined and contained, except for the secession of the Southern Confederacy which began with that of South Carolina on December 20, 1860, and led to the United States’ devastating Civil War.

The world’s second major experiment with democratic governance occurred in France in 1789. Whereas the prior United States’ experiment was established through an elite-led

² Enfranchisement in the United States progressed through a series of Constitutional Amendments, including the 15th (1870), extending the vote to all (male) persons regardless of “race, color, or previous condition of servitude;” 19th (1920), extending the vote regardless of sex; and 24th (1964), prohibiting the denial or abridgement of the right to vote “by reason of failure to pay any poll tax or other tax.”

independence movement, the French experiment was initiated through a mass revolutionary movement against the French aristocracy. French democracy was necessarily established as a populist democracy; universal male suffrage was declared in France in 1792.³ However, the initial experiment in France came under attack from royalists within and from royalist foreign forces and fell into anarchy, culminating in a brutal “reign of terror” and an equally terrible counter-revolutionary *Thermidor*. An effective social order in France was only reestablished as a result of the 18 *Brumaire* military coup and demagoguery of Napoleon Bonaparte in 1799, which enlisted and redirected French populism to the cause of foreign imperialism. This remedy was similarly ill-fated and resulted in the devastation of the French forces and Napoleon’s final defeat at Waterloo in 1815. Democratic governance in France was only finally established and stabilized following its third democratic revolution in 1848. Only about 20% of the population of France cast votes in national elections from 1848 until after the end of World War II (1945).

The notion of “majority rule” in democratic governance facilitates the promulgation of general rule sets and specific public policies by providing an “independent” arbitration mechanism to the decision-making process. Two issues should be highlighted in this regard: one concerns the possibility that a particular constituency that encompasses a majority of the population and is able to maintain member loyalty to group identity and organization over time can persistently dominate outcomes in deliberative, majoritarian politics. This possibility constitutes a second form of the “tyranny of the majority” problem in democratic governance wherein a stable, identity-based majority commandeers the political agenda and enacts policies that consistently favor the majority group. Strict identity loyalty, while more common and stronger in societies at lesser levels of development, is no less evident but weakened in more active and productive societies through the countervailing dynamics of cross-cutting cleavages; multiple interests; issue overlap and linkage; multiple association; and societal mobility, among other similar “non-congruency” or diversity factors. Non-compliance (civil disobedience) remains an important oppositional strategy when dealing with stable majorities and oligarchies alike. This strategy recognizes that the promulgation and implementation of laws and public policies remain distinct and separate activities in the political process and that the withdrawal of constituency support, both from the state and civil society, is a vital check

on the exercise of arbitrary authority in more developed and networked social systems.

Decentralization and local autonomy (or “subsidiarity”) are important features of democratic authority and the integration of constituencies within central authority remains essentially voluntary.⁴ Separation and secession are provocative actions by constituent groups that reject state authority and societal integration. Although “separatist” actions may be defined and initiated through democratic procedure at the local (sub-state) level, they necessitate actions of state and anti-state enforcement and, so, must necessarily be viewed as undemocratic, group responses to territorially-defined disputes leading toward state fragmentation. On the other hand, local autonomy and mobilized non-compliance actions are neutral, selective responses to central authority that are congruent with the principal of subsidiarity and require negotiated outcomes to the demarcation of authority.

Democratic governance distinguishes itself from autocratic governance most critically as it governs primarily through open expression, conciliation, and voluntary compliance with fair, just, and legitimate laws and policies; autocracy depends upon centralized repression and enforcement mechanisms to establish and maintain a biased social order. Elections, themselves, are ritualistic displays of prevailing authority rather than definitions of that authority. They distinguish authority by the manner in which they are conducted and recognized by the state and its various constituencies. Given the democratic content of the election process, elections can serve as a mechanism to propose, or deny, the suitability of certain individuals or groups to claim the capacity to represent a given constituency in the state. “Voting the scoundrel out of office” can also be considered a dramatized ostracism ritual predicated on the accumulated and articulated evidence of transgression, incompetence, or incompatibility. It does not stand independently as either a mechanism of oversight or accountability.⁵

⁴ The principal of “subsidiarity” derives from political economy; it maintains (positively) that administrative authority is most appropriately and efficaciously situated at that level of administration closest to and most knowledgeable of the activity being organized and conducted and (negatively) that higher levels of administration should not take on authority over matters that can be handled efficaciously at lower levels of administration.

⁵ While the societal act of “voting” does not ensure democracy, it does provide critical evidence of the quality of democratic process. Elections stimulate the mobilization and activism of the various constituencies that comprise the society and engage the state in the organization and regulation of mass political activity. Elements of both the state and civil society reveal practical aspects of their organizational and relational nature during the election procedure. In short, there is a reflective confluence of public attention and political observables concentrated in the election period; this is the real value of elections to the definition of authority: elections “open a window to the soul” of a societal-system.

³ Ironically, France was one of the last major countries to adopt universal female suffrage; this took place in 1944 (Switzerland only instituted female suffrage in 1971). Also of interest in this regard is the fact that the defeated Central Powers in 1918 were the first emerging democracies to operate under the tenets of universal suffrage; this, of course, included the German Weimar Republic.

Integration and Representation

The identification of suitable representation and the organization of particular interests into more general policy platforms also pose dilemmas in democratic governance, especially for newly emerging democratic systems where social networking, interests, exchange, and media are underdeveloped and, again, as societies grow increasingly complex, abstract, and “distant” from particular constituencies and the coordination of multiple, divergent interests gains paramount importance. The coherence and consistency of representation in liberal democracies is augmented, and filtered, through the development and institutionalization of political parties and other advocacy organizations. While circumstantial dynamics in complex systems require some flexibility and innovation in response to unusual challenges, the management and maintenance of the system requires continuity and standardization of both structures and agency dynamics. Personalities gain prominence in times of change and uncertainty, whereas common perspectives and incumbency gain prominence in times of continuity and stability. Multiple party structures provide alternative perspectives and interchangeable personnel who stimulate and inform greater reflection, competition, criticism, and accountability in public officials. Alteration in leadership roles ensures broader representation and currency in issue perspectives and better strategic response to existential dilemmas, whether imposed or self-inflicted.

Dissent and conflict are common factors in all societal systems; sociologists, such as Louis Coser, have even suggested that conflict is necessary to energize societal dynamics and stimulate innovation (Coser 1956). Serious problems emerge when incentives to reform and refine the extant system are counterbalanced, or overwhelmed, by incentives to reject and/or discard the current system. Anti-system behavior is induced by structural imbalances (inequity) and perceived injustices (accountability deficits); such “negative participation” produces the most fundamental challenge to democratic governance, especially as constituencies polarize and factionalize around increasingly symbolic and exclusive conceptualizations of group identities, means, and goals. Polar factionalization (symbolic separatism) and polity fragmentation (territorial separatism) actively resist the discovery and articulation of compromise solutions, impede policy implementation, and induce enforcement measures.

Complex, innovative societal-systems find their focal point in the “state;” however, the state is just one of many organizational structures and seats of authority that constitute the societal-system. The state gains prominence through its capacity to regulate activity and manage conflict between and among its constituencies and facilitate greater

interaction densities throughout society and system. Democracy at greater levels of organization is made possible through the preferencing of democracy at lesser levels of organization, demonstrated through non-instrumental (sociational) interactions between constituencies and consolidated through the demonstration of impartiality in the application of legal standards. Necessarily hierarchical authority (autocratic) organizations, such as the military, must be de-politicized in order to minimize their influence on the definition of central authority as they remain structurally predisposed to autocratic rule. Just as it is conditioned by the organizational qualities of internal societal dynamics, the state is also conditioned by external societal dynamics. Democracy at lesser levels of organization is also fostered and reinforced by democracy at greater levels of association. The state, then, provides a nexus and focal point for viewing the complex structure and dynamics of both inner society and outer system.

The principal difficulty in measuring the quality of governance in a particular society or political system stems from the essential non-comparability of societal-systems in the modern (Westphalian) state system, both horizontally (across space) and vertically (across time). Situationally and circumstantially, no two states are the same and no single state stays the same through time. States range in size from 2 km² or less (Monaco and Vatican City) to more than nine million square kilometers (Russia, Canada, China, and the United States); they range in population (currently) from less than 100,000 (several micro-states) to over one billion (China and India). Some countries have existed in their present form for hundreds of years, while many others were established in the past 50 years and some only in the past few years. Some countries are very close to being ethnically homogenous, while most comprise some number of distinct ethnic identity groups, many of whom lay claim to some territorial “homeland” within a larger state. Formal economic activity in the world’s countries ranges from over ten trillion \$US annually (European Union and the United States; 2008 figures) to less than 500 million \$US and, in some countries, informal and uncivil economic activity (particularly drug and sex trafficking) rival the formal economy for political influence. Clearly, variations in characteristics, histories, composition, and constituencies affect authority structures and management prospects. Fortunately, many of these complexities are both inputs and outcomes and can be measured to gauge and “control” for their particular influence on governance. The “non-comparability” issue can actually enrich the analysis of state-level phenomena by infusing the analysis of the state with additional information. The vast array of circumstances and conditions of societies over which states exert governing authority also gives support to the notion that the

state is the natural locus of governance for societal-systems at all levels and scopes of organization, regardless of circumstances.⁶

What many have termed “regime bias” in the discussion of governance relates directly to the structure of the modern state system. Each state in the system is expected to be independent and self-governing, that is, the state must be governed by a “sovereign regime” that directs and administers its constituents and engages with other states in foreign relations. There is a complementary “state bias” in social measurement; the state is the principal unit of measurement and the main producer and consumer of information at that level of measurement. States, sub-state entities, and non-state actors that have a demonstrated need or interest in measurement at non-state levels, and have the resources and capabilities to measure phenomena at that/those level(s), have and will make such measurements. Some states have collected and archived data at all levels of administration; some remain unable to collect data even at the state level. Generally speaking, more affluent states collect more data at more levels with greater accuracy and reliability; poorer states collect less data at fewer levels with more limited accuracy and reliability. Insecure states may suppress, embellish, or, even, fabricate data at any or all levels. Independent data collection efforts attempt to correct for inherent bias in the state system. However, all areas of the world are incorporated in states and, so, there is no present alternative to the state as a form of governance and administration. What many “post-modernists” propose as alternatives to the state, such as transnational issue regimes, multinational manufacturing and service regimes, and international transaction regimes, are also instruments, vehicles, and channels of state-based action in integrated societal-systems at greater levels of organization. Thus, “regime bias” cannot be viewed as structural analytic bias that obscures our understanding of alternatives to the state, as it can be understood to incorporate the entire universe of governance entities, organized both vertically (subsidiarity) and horizontally (territoriality).⁷

⁶ In my own theoretical work, I argue that the “social identity group” is the universal basis for social action, that complex societies are comprised by an integrated network of myriad such associations, and that each group is governed by a “societal elite” who form a “proto-state” that governs that group and defines group relations with other groups. See, Marshall 1999.

⁷ The only current alternatives to states in the world system of states are the supra-state such as the European Union, which is simply a larger state; an international policy regime such as the World Trade Organization, which is simply a specialized administrative mechanism of which states are members; and failed (anarchical) states such as that observed in Somalia currently. See, also note 5 (above).

“Polity” and the Measurement of Authority

All political action results from concerted individual actions, which are ultimately based on individual choice. The organization, direction, and management of political action reside in the state. The measurement of the essential qualities of governance in states over time is foundational in the systematic analysis of societal dynamics. In discussing the measurement of governance this paper focuses on the Polity measurement scheme; the discussion cannot possibly address all the current debates in conceptualization and measurement or alternative techniques.⁸ Most extant measures have very limited horizontal (case) and vertical (time) coverage. Of the very few that have substantial breadth and depth, two can be considered “minimalist” or “categorical” the so-called ACLP data (Alvarez, Cheibub, Limongi, and Przeworski, updated by Cheibub, Gandhi, and Vreeland) and the Polyarchy data (Vanhanen); the ACLP data provide a dichotomous measure of governance indicating either dictatorship or democracy and the Polyarchy data categorize basic type (military, executive dominant, or parliamentary/mixed) and provide two measures of electoral participation (percent of total population casting votes and a herfindahl “concentration” index of party representation). Two other substantial data resources: the World Bank’s Database of Political Institutions and the Institutions and Elections Project (Regan and Clark) database can be considered “maximalist” or “attributional” measures; these databases provide extensive, mainly descriptive, details of governing institutions but no qualitative or aggregate assessment of governance.⁹ The Polity data series should be considered a mid-level measurement scheme as it provides both disaggregated indicators and aggregate indices of governance. Polity covers all major, independent states since 1800 and is ubiquitous in quantitative political science research modeling. It was originally designed by Ted Robert Gurr based on theoretical propositions detailed in his 1975 book, *Patterns of Authority*, written with Harry Eckstein. The Polity measurement scheme was further refined in 2000 by the author of this tract, who continues to direct the, now, Polity IV Project.¹⁰

⁸ Alternative measurement techniques derive from alternative perspectives and these are particularly important sources of cross-validation and illumination in measurement and robustness and greater confidence in analysis in complex systems.

⁹ Freedom House provides broad coverage of political rights and civil liberties in countries and these are often equated with qualities of governance; however, these indicators do not directly assess governance or political institutions.

¹⁰ The Polity IV Project is hosted by the Center for Systemic Peace; materials are accessible online (www.systemicpeace.org/polity/polity4.htm)

Polity presents a unique measure of the qualities and characteristics of governance as it proposes that there are two discreet forms of governing authority, autocratic and democratic, and that institutionalized elements of these two forms can occur concurrently; mixed forms of authority have been termed “incoherent” or “anocratic.” Autocratic forms of authority are based in exclusion and enforced through direct coercion and the threat of force (repression); democratic forms of authority are inclusive and supported by voluntary compliance. In my 1999 book, *Third World War*, the two fundamental forms of authority are termed “instrumental,” which manages conflict through physical force, and “sociational,” which manages conflict through Arendt’s concept of associational “power.”¹¹ Demonstrated forms of institutionalized regime authority are assessed on three principal characteristics: the recruitment of executive authority (i.e., how the chief executive gains office), executive constraints (i.e., checks and balances on executive action), and political competition (i.e., how public preferences are represented). Aggregate patterns of state authority, then, are measured on separate, eleven-point scales (0–10; democratic, DEMOC, and autocratic, AUTOC); the two scales are often combined in a single, twenty-one point “POLITY” scale (–10 to +10) by subtracting the autocracy score from the democracy score, such that “fully institutionalized autocracies” are scored “–10” and “fully institutionalized democracies” are scored “+10.” This practice is not necessarily in accordance with the original theory but presents an analytic convenience while sacrificing some information. This practice also implies that autocracy and democracy are opposite qualities on a unitary “governance” spectrum, rather than distinct, alternative methods of governance.

The Polity data series is best considered a macro-comparative data resource and investigative tool incorporating standardized assessments of observable, complex phenomena, rather than a statistical database compiling measured, objective attributes. In general terms, quantitative analysts must use due caution in drawing conclusions from statistical techniques employing macro-comparative data as it necessarily removes information on key qualities from their existential context. Macro-comparative data resources use numbers to encode and record information relating to complex, social phenomena; however, it requires an unsupportable leap in logic to assume that the numbers used to encode the targeted information, regardless of the quality of the design and construction of the data instrument, necessarily impart objective mathematical qualities to the data. The data “matrix” in macro-comparative analysis provides an organization scheme by which the analyst can expand the number of cases used in an inquiry to search for patterns of commonalities or differences across cases. Once the analyst has established confidence

in particular patterns, those patterns can be used to inform a broader array of relationships in complex systems.

Data analysis of social phenomena is best considered investigational and the results evidentiary, that is, a complementary tool, rather than a substitute or alternative, for knowledge-based, rational inquiry. Social inquiry is, and always will be, about people and the quality of their lives. Data analysis using macro-comparative data resources must be “re-contextualized” in order for it to have real meaning that contributes to knowledge accumulation and can be used to guide policy decisions. In “re-contextualizing” data analysis, the political analyst must be able to apply their “findings” insightfully to explain how these findings inform and affect process narratives and contingent outcomes, using observable situations and plausible scenarios (i.e., they must pass the policymakers’ “giggle test”).¹² One advantage that producers of macro-comparative data have is that their commentary is informed by the broader body of information from which macro-comparative data is distilled, that is, they have intimate and intricate knowledge of how the data relates to the broader context from which it has been taken. In fact, the acquisition of broader and deeper knowledge may be the primary incentive for conducting a large, systematic, data collection enterprise.¹³

Polity was originally designed during the conjunction of the Cold War and Decolonization periods (late 1960s and early 1970s). Its original focus was on “persistence and change” in the nature of regime governance during a time when competition between the interests of opposing, ideological “blocs” exerted varying degrees of influence over both persistence and change in the qualities of governance in individual states populating the world system of states (Gurr 1974). “Western bloc” forms of democracy were clearly considered the more favorable forms of governance in the original Polity conceptual scheme and the coding of democratic authority was clearly less detailed and less critical than was the coding of autocratic authority.¹⁴ The distribution of Polity scores

¹² Shawn Trier and Simon Jackman provide an example of the “giggle test” principle in their 2008 article in the *American Journal of Political Science*, titled “Democracy as a Latent Variable,” in which they claim that by applying “formal, statistical measurement models” to the Polity IV data, they find that the “latent error” in the Polity measure makes it impossible to confidently distinguish the level of democracy in “roughly one-half” of the countries in the world from that of the United States in 2000 (p. 210).

¹³ The Polity IV Country Report series was designed to provide both transparency in the coding of particular cases and a contextual basis for the particular Polity codings. The individual reports include both quantitative and narrative interpretations.

¹⁴ Also of note, the hegemonic one-party authority systems that characterized governance in the “Eastern bloc” countries were considered autocratic in the Polity scheme, despite communist ideological professions of “egalitarianism democracy” and the regular holding of formal elections.

¹¹ See, Hannah Arendt’s 1970 essay “On Violence.”

displays this apparent bias quite strikingly: whereas scores along the autocracy index scale are fairly evenly distributed, scores along the democracy index scale are clustered at the “top” (+10) end of the scale. This clustering was less problematic prior to the end of the Cold War, as there were relatively few democracies and most of these were older and more affluent and consolidated Western democracies.

With the post-Cold War wave of democratization, this lack of variance threatens to render Polity obsolete in the analysis of democracy just as it becomes the preeminent form of governance. In response to this issue, we have systematically reexamined and recoded, to date, about three-quarters the countries covered in the Polity data series over the contemporary period, 1946-present.¹⁵ This research has “recovered” much of the lost criticality of the “democratic camp.” However, in better distinguishing cases of “incomplete” democratic institutionalization and improving the distribution of cases along the democracy index scale, the data refinement process has also verified and confirmed the clustering effect for “fully institutionalized democracies” at the “+10” end of the scale.¹⁶ This clustering could be interpreted as support for the Fukuyama proposition that democracy represents an “end state.” However, this particular interpretation is both controversial and misleading. Alternative interpretations propose that the “+10 democracies” could be re-specified to further distinguish qualities and typologies of democracy and/or differentiate “full democracies” according to their adherence to ethical standards.

¹⁵ We examine only the contemporary period due to constraints on the quality and consistency of information prior to the end of the Second World War and limits on the relevance of historical circumstances to inform our understanding of democratic transition and consolidation going forward. The refinement process has also reexamined the set of consolidated (+10) democracies to reassess whether there have been periods during which the institutionalized use of coercive manipulation by the state and/or civil society had diminished the quality of democratic governance. For example, in reexamining the quality of United States’ governance, we determine that it should be recoded to reflect greater reliance on coercive tactics during the Civil Rights and Anti-War movements in the 1960s and early 1970s when political interaction neared polar factionalism. When completed, the refined Polity data will be released to the public as a new edition in the series, Polity V.

¹⁶ Systematic Polity reexamination and recoding of all countries over the period, 1946-present, using primary source information (*Keesings Online*) is currently progressing; the refined coding will be issued in 2011 as a new edition in the data series, Polity V. Preliminary comparisons of countries completed (seventy-three) show that the refinements result in changes to about 25% of the data points; however, Polity IV and Polity V index scores for this set of cases correlate at 0.974, also confirming the general veracity of the Polity data series.

Means and Ends

In his article, titled “The Measurement of Democracy: Towards a New Paradigm,” Stein Ringen argues in favor of the latter interpretation. He proposes that “the measurement [of democracy] effort should follow through to observations of how the [democratic] potential in the regime is manifested in the lives of citizens” and offers a list of indicators relating to the “potential” and “delivery” of democracy.¹⁷ In assessing patterns of authority in the Polity scheme, great attention is given to both the practice of governance as it is observed over time, that is, to the institutionalized qualities of governance (not the governing and administrative institutions themselves; these are structured applications conditioned by unique, local circumstances that vary almost infinitely among the countries of the world).¹⁸ This approach agrees with the sentiment underlying Ringen’s assertion but differs on how best to incorporate observations regarding “the lives of citizens” in the measurement effort. First, the effects of democracy on the “lives of citizens” cannot be observed except as these effects are expressed by citizens in political action. Second, at least in theory, democracy is designed to enable citizens to voice both their preferences and their complaints regarding quality of life issues. Who is better placed to pass judgment on the manifestations of governance than those persons directly affected by governance? Can we not reasonably expect that the outcomes of fully institutionalized democratic process take into account, to the degree possible, the effects those outcomes will have on the lives of ordinary citizens and, when unintended or unanticipated effects accompany those outcomes, can we not reasonably expect that the democratic process will be responsive and accountable for remedying and/or redressing those effects?

The voice and empowerment of difference and dissent within a complex system of democratic governance may be outwardly characterized by electoral and deliberative procedures but these procedures are predicated upon an underlying, consensual pact among citizens to forego (prohibit) the recourse to force in conflict resolution. This prohibition on the use of force necessarily requires deliberation and negotiated outcomes in disputes among citizens and between constituent groups, among which the “state” must be considered a constituent group that has been delegated authority to regulate and arbitrate disputes, not only between other constituent groups but between constituent groups and

¹⁷ Several of the attributes Ringen lists in these two categories of democracy “delivery” are either not directly observable, such as “strength/durability of democratic consolidation” or the “protection of democratic processes from transgression by economic power,” or unobservable, such as “trust in government” or “confidence in the future of freedom.”

¹⁸ See note 14 (above).

the state itself. Peaceful conflict management within the institutional structures of a compliance-based social order can then be viewed as the primary function of democratic governance and the quality of democratic governance can be gauged by “failures” of conflict management which can be observed as “negative participation” (non-compliance, opposition, and anti-system actions) and measured by acts of defiance, coercion, restriction, repression, and force.¹⁹

Compliance systems require high densities of social organizations, networking, communication, and exchange; these all require sophisticated information media, socialization, productive, and service technologies. Compliance failures raise both incentives and stakes for targeted enforcement. Negotiation failures result in policy stagnation or paralysis and, over time, increase pressures to impose solutions to the impasse. Protracted compliance and/or negotiation failures may result in factionalism, polarization, and/or fragmentation of the polity governed by the state (or, even, the collapse of central authority) and these fractures of the body politic tend to prioritize social order over liberalization, favoring more autocratic forms of governance by justifying “emergency” policies or autocratic “backsliding.” The Polity scheme, then, takes into account the tactics used by the state to regulate the social order, the tactics used by the state and society to constrain executive action, and the tactics used by civil society to “voice” the interests of various constituencies, hold agents of the state accountable for individual action, and express political will.²⁰ At the same time, it assesses the method by which the ruling executive initially gains office and the general quality of the deliberative process.²¹ These characteristics

¹⁹ In discussing “conflict management” as a primary function of governance, we must recognize that “conflict” is an inherent, strategic dynamic in societal-systems, whereas “armed conflict” is a contingent, tactical dynamic. The conflation of these conceptually distinct forms of social interaction underlies many of the claims made by scholars that references to conflict “contaminate” our understanding and measurement of governance; (see, for example Vreeland 2008). The Polity IV measurement scheme considers “armed conflict” as evidence of “polity fragmentation;” as such, groups using armed conflict to reject state authority are considered to operate outside the polity and, so, are not included in the assessment of institutionalized authority “inside” the governance regime.

²⁰ Executive constraints include not only the main governance institutions, legislative and judicial, but also administrative institutions (bureaucratic, military, and police agencies), civil society institutions (political parties, trade unions, business and professional lobbies, interests groups), and, in some cases, informal and uncivil sectors.

²¹ In order to be considered an elected executive in the Polity scheme, an executive must have initially gained office through both a competitive electoral procedure and a peaceful transfer of executive authority. Persons who initially gain executive office by non-electoral means and subsequently retain office following victory in an election are not considered to be an elected official, although they may be denoted as guiding a transition to elected authority. The executive electoral procedure must be substantiated by a peaceful (de facto) transfer of office.

are monitored over time to identify patterns of authority that define the practical nature of state institutions (persistence) and discontinuities in prevailing patterns of authority (change). In essence, observable societal (conflict) dynamics are monitored to assess how governance by the state is manifested in the “lives of citizens” and, in turn, how the “lives of citizens” are incorporated in governance by the state.

Whereas, it would be quite cynical to argue that democratic process will not or should not set high standards of conduct by which its actions can be judged, it is unreasonably idealistic and impracticable to judge the quality of “democratic potential” by measuring its (observable) material shortcomings and imperfections. These negative effects are conditioned by material endowments, circumstances, cultural values, and strategic considerations that together define, often, difficult political trade-offs made in the service of progress shrouded, as it were, by the “shadow of the future.” Both decisions made through the deliberative process and the subsequent implementation of public policy are subjected to oversight by the (pro)active and informed citizenry in a democracy; such oversight is invigorated by the application of ethical standards and can be adjudicated according to legal standards. Self-criticism and transparency in the policy process may enable the state to minimize opposition to governance; however, effective oversight requires an external perspective: first, by those adversely affected by public policy and, second, through impartial judgment based upon the application of ethical standards.

The measurement of conduct and affect is a separate function from the measurement of governance. Democratic process, in particular, is best evaluated according to the means by which decisions are made; democracy itself will evaluate the efficacy of the decisions made and policies implemented. Once it has become fully integrated and institutionalized, democracy governs as a “means state” and engages its potential as a self-actuating, self-organizing, self-regulating, and self-correcting societal-system. This represents a “beginning” for efficacious management in complex, innovative societal-systems. Democracy cannot be viewed as an “end state” as the realization of its inner-potential leads the state to explore ways in which it can improve and refine its own system and better integrate with its external, physical and social environment. In this sense, “fully institutionalized democracies” are consolidated, organic, compliance systems capable of reforming themselves internally to increase their congruence with and effectiveness within the external (global and regional) environment. Democracies, then, can then be measured and distinguished by the quality of their approach to integration and governance with the broader, external system. Whereas consolidated democracies can be expected

to operate democratically in their internal affairs, there can be no presumption that a democratic state can or will necessarily act democratically in its external affairs without first establishing the same open, reflective, and interactive dynamical networking with other states that authenticates its internal democracy among constituencies.²²

A corollary to this assertion concerns observations of how the democratic potential of the “means state” affects the lives of non-citizens, both within and outside the territorial boundaries that define the state. In the development of democratic governance, as discussed earlier in this treatment, we see evidence that the concept of “citizen” was initially tightly constrained in many emerging democracies and only incrementally expanded over the course of decades as the system itself developed the capacity to foster and support a broader distribution of vested “stakeholders” within the system.²³ Such incremental and targeted expansion of the democratic franchise no longer obtains in democratizing states; the contemporary norm requires universal enfranchisement as a necessary condition of authority transition. This ethical standard, while laudable, is indiscriminant as well as non-discriminating and may be the main impediment to democratic transition in developing and reforming states, where problems of conflict management present severe challenges to the management capacity of the state. This “universal” standard certainly favors populist over oligarchic approaches to governance; this, in turn, complicates the organizational necessity of establishing functional coordination and direction within a compliance-based social order or “rule of law” by counter-balancing non-stakeholders and stakeholders in charting the direction of the state. What is critical in this regard is how well the state, societal elites, formal civil society, and informal society are and remain integrated and their interests remain congruent and compatible.²⁴ The systemic incongruencies and inter-constituency tensions

inherent in the “unequal development” of societal sectors fostered by the state’s and society’s interactions with its (more developed) external environment can be, at least partially offset and managed, by expanding the pool of stakeholders through the micro-financing of smallholdings throughout society (see for example Sen 1999; de Soto 2000; Yunus 1999). Resort to coercion and enforcement in conflict management, especially involving violence and regardless its rationalization or justification, undermines trust and compliance in the development of state and civil society relations in very complex and profound ways.

Further complicating democratization efforts have been the imposition of term limits, particularly on the executive office. When there are many competing, and even disjunctive, interests being voiced in the political process and many divergent demands placed on public policy, coherence and continuity in decision making is crucial but difficult to maintain when wholesale changes are mandated by constitutional provisions. Indeed, some of the most commonly appearing challenges to democratic consolidation in the post-Cold War period have involved actions to abrogate term limits for executives and efforts to use incumbency advantages, including fiscal and policy control, direction of service provision, and preferential access to information and media resources to establish one-party dominance over disorganized or decentralized opposition parties. The tensions raised through manipulation of democratic processes by ruling elites has been especially acute during election periods and has focused public attention not only on incumbency advantages but also on the regime’s control of the balloting procedure itself. The presence of independent election observers, while very important in augmenting accountability in “civil” elections, has simply added an additional layer of ambiguity and uncertainty in less civil elections. In many cases, external support and media attention have contributed to opposition decisions to boycott elections and challenge or reject official results. Such actions further polarize the societal-system and impede democratic consolidation.

Autocratic governance appears to be a natural corollary to severe conflict management imperatives that almost always obtain in poorer, less developed, non-integrated, and weakly networked societies.²⁵ By far, most civil wars occur in autocratic states and most of these take place in the poorer autocracies. These empirical observations are consistent with Kenneth Bouldings’ emphasis on the importance of eco-

²² There is a very broad body of research related to the so-called “democratic peace proposition” noting that democracies rarely if ever engage in direct warfare with one-another. Some researchers have suggested that this “empirical law” may be largely due to an alliance of mutual interest and self-preservation during the autocracy-preeminent period in world politics. On the other hand, warfare between autocracies and democracies has been quite common and, often, quite intense.

²³ Contemporary “globalization” has created large, non-citizen, immigrant and refugee populations in many countries; exclusion of these groups is often explained according to presumptions of temporary residence. However, many of these populations are remaining in host countries for extended, and even generational, periods of time, creating large communities of “unenfranchised” persons.

²⁴ The “fifth element” in complex, innovative societal-systems, that is, “uncivil society” does not directly factor into the governance scheme. Criminal and anti-social individuals and groups are separate by the nature of their activities and form of their relationship to both the state and society. The relative strength of “uncivil society” is a function of the quality of relations between the four other elements.

²⁵ There have been some democracies that have emerged in poor countries; these have almost invariably been predicated on a depoliticized and/or unmobilized populace that defers to a, usually, urban elite. In effect, these situations resemble limited, stakeholder political processes that appeared in early democracies. These democracies almost always begin to struggle or fail as the population becomes more politicized and organized.

nomic “viability” in conflict management schemes (Boulding 1962). Enforcement regimes can also be used by groups to control wealth from resource extraction, such as the “national security states” underwritten by external donors and the several “self-supporting” oil emirates in the Persian Gulf region; these states use export or donor wealth to construct a fortress state designed to prevent democratization. A common component of the “fortress state” is the use of repression to enforce the social order; cracks in the fortress invite armed challenges. Enforcement authority tends to reinforce societal divisions and contentious interactions between polarized fractions. Research conducted by the US Government’s Political Instability Task Force (initiated in 1994; formerly known as the State Failure Task Force) has provided strong empirical support for the proposition that (polar) factionalism is, by far, the most powerful factor in explaining setbacks in the democratization process (i.e., mainly “adverse regime changes” toward more autocratic governance but also including onsets of societal warfare); it is also an important factor in stalling democracy consolidation (Goldstone et al. 2010).²⁶

Democratization remains “on track” when the (depoliticized) military and/or police “remain in the barracks” when the state demands a crackdown on the opposition, necessitating a negotiated outcome to the political crisis. In brief, democratization reforms increase the voice of contending constituencies with divergent interests and demands empowered through universal enfranchisement, challenging ruling elites and the established order; militant crackdowns on oppositional activity (temporarily) silence critics and impose a tentative social order. In situations where social networking and information media are weak, such imposed order can persist, at least over the medium term; however, these situations can also provide arenas and support refuges for anti-system activities and elements, encouraging armed rebellion. In the “new world order” characterized by globalization, even the weakest and most isolated populations have recourse to support networks and media attention that constrain the capabilities of states to enforce social order over time. Autocratic governance systems continue to diminish worldwide and may soon become obsolete in all but the most challenging circumstances; at the same time, however, democratic consolidation can be seen to be progressing agonizingly slowly.

Democracy Consolidation and the New World Order

Having been born in ancient times within small and simple societies as a way to include a broader array of viewpoints

and interests among free citizens in a more proactive and enlightened political process, democratic governance has since, in modern times, evolved and come to be recognized as a more effective and efficient way to direct, manage, and promote continuous, general well-being in large, complex, and highly technical societies. Whether the marriage of liberal democracy and free market economics represents the, or even an, “end of history” (as Francis Fukuyama famously asserted) or is simply a contemporary artifact of historical circumstances is a wholly separate debate. What can be observed at present (since the end of the Cold War) is that autocratic forms of governance have transitioned to more democratic forms of governance at an unprecedented rate. We are, for the first time in history, witness to a democracy-preeminent world system of states and the beginnings of a global societal-system. This, of course, cannot be construed to constitute a democratic system at the global level, although some democratic authority characteristics can be observed; the emerging global system is certainly neither anarchic, nor autocratic, although elements of these forms are also evident. In Polity terms, the global system, which is currently, loosely governed by the United Nations Organization, can best be considered an “anocracy” or mixed authority state. Various configurations and alignments of global constituencies have formed and reformed over time and several functional policy regimes have been established. Since 1990, the number of democratic states in the global system has doubled, the number and magnitude of armed conflicts has decreased by a similar margin, and the resilience of global constituencies shows definite signs of both recovery and progress, despite periodic economic downturns (Marshall and Cole 2010). These are all encouraging signs for the future world order.

What we are witnessing in the early years of the Twenty-first Century is a global shift away from the general dynamics of democratic transition and toward a largely uncharted course of democratic consolidation based on and, currently, led by an epistemic constituency of about twenty matured and consolidated Western democracies. A cursory review of the late Twentieth Century democratic transition states presents some very fundamental challenges to the prevalent perspectives on world politics and the global order. Three categories of states account for most of the recent shift toward democratic governance: former-communist countries of Eastern Europe (nineteen new democratic transitions since 1989, from one-party hegemonic systems); former-oligarchic and corporatist countries of Latin America (five new transitions and fourteen reformed democratic systems); and underdeveloped, aid-dependent countries of Africa (fifteen new democratic transitions). Asia accounts for only five democratic transitions; there have been no transitions in the Middle East and North Africa since 1989.

²⁶ The association between civil war and (polar) factionalism is even clearer when one includes autocracies as factionalized polities (the majority of civil wars take place in exclusionary, autocratic states).

The relatively smooth transitions of closed, hegemonic one-party (“communist”) systems to open, multi-party systems in the middle- and upper-income countries of Eastern Europe questions long-held understandings of the role of ideology in authority systems. The depoliticization of the military and the accommodation of populism in the largely middle-income, former “anti-communist” states of Latin America will provide important information on the means and prospects of transitions in the remaining non-democratic countries of the world. Most curious, and perhaps profound, are the democratic transitions that have occurred in low-income countries in Africa and Asia; the prospects of democratic consolidation in low-income countries appears to challenge the fundamental linkage between development and democracy. However, many of the African cases may be considered “aid-dependent transitions” that persist through substantial levels of donor engagement and support. The prospects for persistence in the low-income democracies are problematic and limited by external donor priorities and political will over the near term, although the experience of democratic authority in these countries may lead to fundamental changes in development processes that could increase their prospects over the longer term. Research on the linkages between transitions to and consolidation of democratic governance will be greatly enhanced by the large expansion in the number and variety of cases during the post-Cold War period. This forward-looking research opportunity can be expected to trigger a shift in basic research approaches to better understand the conditions and dynamics of democratic consolidation. This research will be predicated on distinguishing the means of governance from the ends of governance; in doing this, we can maintain an accurate and reliable measurement scheme by which we can gauge general progress toward, or regression from, more consolidated or entrenched forms of democratic governance.²⁷

The question remains largely, empirically unanswerable, at present, as to whether the same forms of liberal democratic governance we have come to associate as an ideal “end state” for the upper-income countries of the (former-imperial) West can be viable as a “means state” for newly independent and developing societies. Early evidence indicates that liberal democracy is struggling in its new role and that innovative, democratizing systems in the less affluent countries are searching for ways to respond to societal order imperatives with more emphasis on compliance methods augmented by more indirect or formalized

enforcement measures.²⁸ The sudden wave of democratic transitions in the late Twentieth Century has created a large pool of consolidating democracies and incomplete transitions for which we have no precedent and little knowledge to temper our expectations or inform public policy choices. What we should expect is that the new, democracy-preminent global system will favor greater deliberation, engagement, and self-reflection in learning from experience and charting its future course. The (further) consolidation of (more) non-Western democracies will alter our understandings of the democratization process and dilute the influence of the Western democracies as the process continues. Of course, the “dark side” of the process is found in the negative influences that continuing social disruption and disorder may have on the consolidated democracies themselves in the era of intensifying globalization.

Institution-building in consolidating democracies will have to be responsive to the country’s unique context and circumstances and innovative in their recognition of the nexus between extant/traditional societal-systemic dynamics and the anticipated needs and aspirations of evolving constituencies defining, and defined by, societal-system development. Institutions are very limited in their capacity to shape societal-system dynamics and the structure of associations; viable, persistent institutions must incorporate and regularize extant dynamics to maintain legitimacy and inform and reform practices and networks incrementally. This will require both patience and perseverance on the part of both internal and external parties to the consolidation process. Attempting to do too much, too quickly will increase the burdens on the donor community and may trigger greater internal constituency demands for disengagement and protectionism. In the interim, what will be the most highly valued inputs are not the more costly, direct interventions but the more efficacious efforts and mechanisms that can be provided by the stronger societal-systems to offset oversight, accountability, and adjudication deficits in the weaker systems that are integral to the consolidation process. Institutional design and conflict management procedures must remain within the creative power of the societal-system itself. “Security guarantees” short of overt enforcement are the logical outcome and continual output of good governance.

In moving from a transitional to a consolidating global system, researchers will need information and approaches that enable greater insight into the workings of complex, innovative societal-systems. The “ends” of societal endeavors are largely circumstantial artifacts. Good governance proactively conditions circumstances to favor sustainable

²⁷ For a discussion of the importance of democratic “entrenchment,” (see Held 1995)

²⁸ The most troubling of such “indirect” enforcement alternatives has been extrajudicial “disappearances” and “unexplained deaths” in apprehension or custody of “criminals.”

well-being and successfully manage societal conflict, without resort to violence, over the long-term. Our learning technologies and innovation techniques must evolve in congruence with the societal-systems under scrutiny. The increasingly technical demands of practical and applied research in the globalization era require more technical and holistic understandings of governance in societal-systems. Theorists and researchers will need to collaborate more closely to map the structural terrain and chart the dynamical processes that underwrite the freedoms we demand. As we deepen the roots of knowledge and comprehension of complex, innovative societal-systems, we will need to move farther away from romantic and idealistic notions of messianic states and mechanistic societies to achieve more practical and practicable understandings of the complex organic systems on which our future well-being depends.

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