Power and Democracy

Charles Tilly

The democracy-monitoring organization Freedom House considers a regime to be an electoral democracy if it maintains established competitive parties, more or less universal adult suffrage, contested elections, and free access of parties to the voting public. By these criteria, no electoral democracies existed in 1900; no country anywhere had yet enacted female suffrage, although Finland would do so in 1906. As of mid-century, Freedom House retroactively counts 22 of the world’s 80 then independent regimes as electoral democracies: 28 percent of all regimes, accounting for 31 percent of the world’s population. By century’s end (1999), decolonization and the shattering of socialist federations had expanded the total number of independent states to 192. Of them, Freedom House rated 120 (63 percent) as democratic; they included 58 percent of the world’s population (Karatnycky 2000: 7–8).

Of course a number of reversals occurred after 1900; just think of how European regimes Austria, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Portugal, Romania, Spain, and Russia de-democratized between 1900 and 1950, or how military regimes took over previously more or less democratic Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Venezuela, plus numerous other Latin American states, at various points between 1950 and 2000. Yet Freedom House tallies indicate, on the average, a net increase of 1.6 new democratic regimes per year between 1900 and 1950, a net increase of 0.8 new democratic regimes per year between 1950 and 2000. The figures project a vision of vigorous, if unevenly distributed, democratization throughout the century.

Since 1972, Freedom House has performed a great service by evaluating the democratic credentials of every independent regime each year. It has gone further, using detailed checklists to rate each regime separately from 1 (high) to 7 (low) on political rights and civil liberties year by year. Qualified by the difficulties that raters based in the United States face in arriving at equally informed judgments about the undemocratic or democratic functioning of, say, Canada and Myanmar, of France and Vanuatu, Freedom House
 evaluations thus document a zigzag but upward advance of political rights, civil liberties, and electoral democracy across much of the world for decades. Looked at more closely, furthermore, they display the concentration of democratization in bursts such as the movement of many former European colonies into democratic independence during the 1970s and the transformation of multiple former state socialist regimes into democracies after 1989.

Nevertheless, analysts of democracy, democratization, de-democratization, and power cannot settle simply for quantitative indicators, much less for the quick conclusion that democracy may take a while, but eventually becomes irresistible. Too much is at stake. Neither classifications of electoral democracy nor ratings of political rights and civil liberties tell us much about the processes that produce democratization and de-democratization, the general relationship between democracy and power, or the conditions under which the exercise of power undermines democracy.

This chapter brings some order and connection into those three issues. More precisely, it addresses these questions:

1. How can we arrive at theoretically, politically, and substantively satisfactory models of power, democracy and democratization?
2. How do democratization and de-democratization actually occur?
3. What parts do changing forms and exercises of power play in democratization and de-democratization?

By the end, it should at least be clear that static yes/no criteria for democracy – this regime is democratic, that one isn’t – will only carry us a short distance toward satisfactory understanding of how democracies wax and wane, and what their waxing and waning has to do with the exercise of power. We are asking questions about unceasing dynamic changes, not about static conditions.

**POWER**

To answer those questions, we must know about power. Whatever else it involves, democracy entails a distinctive and historically unusual form of power, one in which the bulk of the population living under the jurisdiction of some authority exercise substantial collective control over how that authority behaves. As a definition of democracy, that simple statement will not do, but it highlights the centrality to democracy of power relations between central authorities and the populations nominally subordinate to them.

Let us work with an elementary and familiar conception of power: a relation of outputs to inputs. Begin with a pair, A and B. For simplicity, we can think of A as an actor that exerts an effort on B. B can be another actor, but B can also be a situation from which some output could emerge. A has power over B to the extent that B's input of effort - resources, coercion, persuasion, what have you - elicits a compliant response from B. (We can gauge compliance either in terms of correspondence to demands A makes or by conformity to our evaluation of A's interests.) The greater B's response for a given unit of effort, the greater A's power. This means, of course, that the power relation between A and B describes not a point but a curve. It also means that any power curve abstracts
from multiple observed interactions over time; it offers a dynamic, not static, image of power.

Figure 4.1 sketches three alternate situations: A has no power over B, A has circumscribed power over B, and A has great power over B. The ranges 0 to 1 describe minima and maxima: if, for example, B offers no response whatsoever to A’s overture, we set the response at 0; if B yields every resource under his control, we set B’s response at 1. If A has no power over B, then, no matter how much effort A puts in B fails to respond. If A has circumscribed power over B, up to a limit B yields or conforms increasingly to A’s augmented inputs, but beyond that point B’s response falls off. That happens, for example, when B has a limit of tolerance, and starts resisting A’s demands or overtures beyond that limit. Finally, A has
great power if B’s response increases rapidly with A’s increased input, and that response never declines until B’s resources run out.

This simple scheme accommodates the conventional distinction between 'power over' and 'power to'. In power over, both A and B are actors, either individual or collective. In power to, B is a situation that A can hope — or, if A is powerless, cannot hope — to alter. It will accommodate Michael Mann’s distinctions among ideological, economic, military, and political sources and organizations of power (Mann 1986: 22–27). These sorts of power differ fundamentally in the means by which A (now conceived of as a network of relations among persons and groups) produces responses from B (now conceived of as many, many people within the same society).

Mann’s equally famous distinction between despotic and infrastructural forms of power rests on the contrast between directly coercive means and elicitation of cooperation. On the whole, Mann portrays despotic control as forcing reluctant cooperation, hence no significant increase in a population’s collective capacity. In contrast, the cooperation associated with infrastructural power adds to a population’s collective capacity. As Mann sums up:

Power is most fruitfully seen as means, as organization, as infrastructure, as logistics. In the pursuit of their myriad, fluctuating goals, human beings set up networks of social cooperation that imply both collective and distributive power. Of these networks, the most powerful in the logistical sense of being able to bring forth cooperation, both intensively and extensively, over definite social and geographical space, are ideological, economic, military, and political power organizations. Sometimes these organizations appear in societies as relatively specialized and separate, sometimes as relatively merged into each other. Each attains its prominence by virtue of the distinct organizational means it offers to achieve human goals (Mann 1986: 518).

In these terms, democracy brings together ideological, economic, and military power organizations in configurations that affect political power organizations in a distinctive way: through cooperation, they subordinate those political power organizations to popular will. So doing, they increase the whole population’s collective capacity. How can we identify the conditions and processes that produce such a distinctive — and historically exceptional — historical outcome?

MODELS OF DEMOCRACY AND DEMOCRATIZATION

We can start by recognizing that democracy has meant very different forms of politics to different thinkers and peoples. What Athenians sometimes called demokratia differed deeply from the democratic political arrangements Karl Marx imagined for true communism. We are looking for analyses of democracy that accomplish four things: (1) allow us to decide whether existing regimes do or don’t match the representation at hand; (2) permit us to array regimes with regard to their degree of democracy; (3) facilitate examination of the same regime at different points in time to determine whether it is becoming more or less democratic; (4) specify what features and changes of regime valid accounts of democratization and de-democratization must explain. In these pursuits, observers of democracy and democratization generally choose, implicitly or explicitly, among five main types of definition: ideal, constitutional, procedural, substantive, and process-oriented (Andrews and Chapman 1995; Collier and Levitsky 1997; Engelstad, and Østend 2004;

Ideal definitions combine prescriptions and descriptions that match ideas of the institutions that would produce democratic outcomes, specifications of those outcomes, and indications of existing instances (if any) the models are supposed to match. David Held has heroically disciplined the entire ideal history of democracy into a very limited number of types: classical democracy in the Athenian form, two varieties of republicanism, two varieties of liberal democracy, two varieties of socialist democracy, plus six twentieth-century variants:

- competitive elitist democracy
- pluralism (with classic and neo-pluralist variants)
- legal democracy
- participatory democracy
- democratic autonomy
- cosmopolitan (internationally oriented) democracy

To give the flavor of Held's distinctions, Box 4.1 summarizes the key features Held attaches to what he calls the 'classic' models.

Box 4.1 Key Features in David Held's Alternative Classic Models of Democracy

**Classical Democracy**: direct participation of citizens in legislative and judicial functions; assembly of citizens has sovereign power; scope of sovereign power to include all the common affairs of the city; multiple methods of selection of candidates for public office (direct election, lot, rotation); no distinctions of privilege to differentiate ordinary citizens and public officials; with the exception of positions connected to warfare, the same office not to be held more than twice by the same individual; short terms of office for all; payment for public services.

**Protective Republicanism**: balance of power between 'the people', aristocracy and the monarchy linked to a mixed constitution of missed government, with provision for all leading political forces to play an active role in public life; citizen participation achieved via different possible mechanisms, including election of consuls, or representatives to serve on ruling councils; competing social groups promoting and defending their interests; liberties of speech, expression and association; rule of law.

**Developmental Republicanism**: division of legislative and executive functions; direct participation of citizens in public meetings to constitute the legislature; unanimity on public issues desirable, but voting provision with majority rule in the event of disagreement; executive positions in the hands of 'magistrates' or 'administrators'; executive appointed either by direct election or by lot.

**Protective Democracy**: sovereignty ultimately lies in the people, but is vested in representatives who can legitimately exercise state functions; regular elections, the secret ballot, competition between factions, potential leaders or parties and majority rule are the institutional bases for establishing accountability of those who govern; state powers must be impersonal, i.e. legally circumscribed, and divided among the executive, the legislature and the judiciary; centrality of constitutionalism to guarantee freedom from arbitrary treatment and equality before the law in the form of political and civil rights or liberties, above all those connected to free speech, expression, association, voting and belief; separation of state from civil society, i.e. the scope of state action is, in general, to be tightly restricted to the creation of a framework which allows citizens to pursue their private lives free from risks of violence, unacceptable social behavior and unwanted political interference; competing power centres and interest groups.
match ideas of the of those outcomes, of match. David Held very limited number republicanism, two six twentieth-century

The types do not exhaust all possibilities. As Held says, for example, they neglect anarchist visions of democracy and a number of other utopias. They do, however, cover the range of possibilities that compete for the attention of today’s power holders when they attempt to shape democracies. They differ significantly with respect to the division of labor between officials and ordinary citizens as well as with respect to the organizational mechanisms governing relations between officials and ordinary citizens; but they all pivot on methods for ensuring that a body of citizens exercises collective control over some central executive. In that sense, they all describe forms of power. To that extent, they imply a very broad definition of democracy: any system that does, indeed, ensure collective citizen control over a national executive. The trouble, obviously, starts there: how will we know that effective control exists? Recognizing that difficulty, most analysts of democracy settle for narrower definitions.

When it comes to democratization and de-democratization, ideal definitions provide hardly any descriptive or explanatory leverage. We might imagine that one of Held’s ideal types comes into being—hence democratization occurs—when an elite or a people decides that a given model appeals to them. Similarly, we might reason that de-democratization occurs when a model democratic regime collapses from popular disillusion, internal contradictions, or external conquest. However, such sketches provide no way of arraying regimes according to their degree of democracy, tracking changes in a given regime’s democratic performance, or explaining how change and variation occur.

A narrower constitutional approach concentrates on laws concerning political activity a regime enacts. Thus we can look across history and recognize differences among oligarchies, monarchies, republics, and a number of other types by means of contrasting legal arrangements. Within democracies, furthermore, we can distinguish between constitutional monarchies, presidential systems, and parliament-centered arrangements, not to mention such variations as federal vs. unitary structures. For large historical comparisons,
constitutional criteria have many advantages, especially the relative visibility of constitutional forms. Alas, almost all the world's contemporary constitutions declare their regimes to be democracies, including the vast majority of the 72 regimes that Freedom House declared undemocratic in 1999. Large discrepancies between announced principles and daily practices often make constitutions misleading.

Constitutional definitions of democracy, to be sure, greatly simplify the description of democratization and de-democratization: we watch for the moments when regimes adopt or suspend formally democratic sets of laws. In addition to the difficulty of knowing whether laws on the books actually give power to the people, however, such criteria beg the questions of how, when, and why moves toward more fully or less fully democratic legal systems occur. They will not serve our purposes well.

Advocates of procedural definitions single out a narrow range of governmental practices to determine whether a regime qualifies as democratic. Most procedural observers center their attention on elections, asking whether genuinely competitive elections engaging large numbers of citizens regularly produce changes in governmental personnel and policy. If elections remain a non-competitive sham and an occasion for smashing governmental opponents, procedural analysts reject them as criteria for democracy, but if they actually cause significant governmental changes, they signal the procedural presence of democracy. (In principle one could add or substitute other consultative procedures such as referenda, recall, petition, and even opinion polls, but in practice procedural analysts focus overwhelmingly on elections.)

Freedom House evaluations incorporate some substantive judgments about the extent to which a given country's citizens actually enjoy political rights and civil liberties, but when it comes to judging whether a country is an 'electoral democracy', Freedom House looks for mainly procedural elements:

1. A competitive, multiparty political system
2. Universal adult suffrage for all citizens (with exceptions for restrictions that states may legitimately place on citizens for criminal offenses)
3. Regularly contested elections conducted in conditions of ballot secrecy, reasonable ballot security, and in the absence of massive voter fraud that yields results that are unrepresentative of the public will.
4. Significant public access of major political parties to the electorate through the media and through generally open political campaigning (Piano and Puddington 2004: 716).

When Freedom House raters looked more closely at political rights and civil liberties in 2003, however, they decided that 29 of their 117 electoral democracies failed to qualify as 'free'. In those 29 regimes, significant deficits existed in rights and liberties (Piano and Puddington 2004: 5). Here, then, is the trouble with procedural definitions of democracy, democratization, and de-democratization: despite their crisp convenience, they work with an extremely thin conception of the political processes involved.

Substantive approaches focus on the conditions of life and politics a given regime promotes: does this regime promote human welfare, individual freedom, security, equity, social equality, public deliberation, and peaceful conflict resolution? If so, we might be inclined to call it democratic regardless of how its constitution reads. Two troubles follow immediately, however, from any such definitional strategy. First, how do we handle tradeoffs among these admirable principles? If a given regime is desperately poor but its citizens enjoy
rative visibility of
sions declare their
times that Freedom
announced principles

by the description of
en regimes adopt or
of knowing whether
the democratic legal systems
en enment practices
central elections engaging
ntal personnel and
ion for smashing
or democracy, but if
procedural presence
v procedures such
procedural analysis

v about the extent to
1 liberties, but when
edom House looks

s may legitimately place
le ballot security, and in
the public will.
nd through generally

d and civil liberties in
ies failed to qualify
lities (Piano and
ions of democracy,
nce, they work with
ics a given regime
om, security, equity,
If so, we might be
Two troubles follow
we handle tradeoffs
but its citizens enjoy

rough equality, should we think of it as more democratic than a fairly prosperous but fiercely unequal regime?

Second, focusing on these possible outcomes of politics undercuts any effort to learn whether some political arrangements – including democracy – promote more desirable substantive outcomes than other political arrangements. What if we actually want to know under what conditions and how regimes promote human welfare, individual freedom, security, equity, social equality, public deliberation, and peaceful conflict resolution?

In principle, nevertheless, substantive definitions of democracy could yield valuable approaches to describing and explaining democratization and de-democratization. One could imagine setting out a set of performance criteria on the model of the United Nations’ Human Development Index (UNDP 2005), going beyond Freedom House by directly measuring a wide variety of rights, freedoms, and resolutions of conflict. Existing comparisons of performance among different sorts of welfare systems (e.g. Goodin et al. 1999) suggest that it might be possible. Coupled with adequate theories of how such rights, freedoms, and resolutions of conflict wax and wane, substantive approaches could thus contribute powerfully to our understanding of democratization and de-democratization.

As Las, no investigator so far has come close.

Process-oriented approaches to democracy differ significantly from ideal, constitutional, procedural, and substantive accounts. They identify some minimum set of processes that must be continuously in motion for a situation to qualify as democratic. In a classic statement, Robert Dahl stipulates six distinctive institutions: elected officials; free, fair, and frequent elections; freedom of expression; alternative sources of information; associational autonomy; and inclusive citizenship (Dahl 1998: 85; Dahl 2005: 188–189). The final standard – inclusive citizenship – ironically rules out many cases that political philosophers including David Held have regularly taken as great historical models for democracy: not only Greek and Roman politics but also Viking crews, village assemblies, and some city-states. All of them built their political deliberations by means of massive exclusion, most notably of women, slaves, and paupers. Inclusion of all (or almost all) adults basically restricts political democracy to the last few centuries.

Notice how Dahl’s criteria differ from ideal, constitutional, procedural, and substantive standards for democracy. Dahl abstains from describing the structure of consent and control. He specifies no constitutional forms or provisions. Dahl’s criteria do include the procedure of free, fair, and frequent elections, but the list as a whole describes how a regime works, not what techniques it adopts to accomplish its goals. He carefully avoids building social prerequisites or consequences into the definition. His scheme of ‘polycharchal democracy’ describes an interlocking set of political processes.

Yet there is a catch. Basically, Dahl provides us with a static yes-no checklist: if a regime operates all six institutions, it counts as a democracy. If it lacks any of them, or some of them aren’t really working, it doesn’t count as a democracy. For an annual count of which regimes are in or out, such an approach can do the job even if critics raise questions about whether elections in such places as Jamaica are free and fair. Suppose, however, that we want to use process-oriented standards more ambitiously. We do not merely want to count the democratic house at a single point in time. Instead, we want to do two more demanding things: first, to compare regimes with regard to how democratic they are; second, to follow individual regimes through time, noticing when and how they become more or less democratic.
constitutional criteria have many advantages, especially the relative visibility of constitutional forms. Alas, almost all the world’s contemporary constitutions declare their regimes to be democracies, including the vast majority of the 72 regimes that Freedom House declared undemocratic in 1999. Large discrepancies between announced principles and daily practices often make constitutions misleading.

Constitutional definitions of democracy, to be sure, greatly simplify the description of democratization and de-democratization: we watch for the moments when regimes adopt or suspend formally democratic sets of laws. In addition to the difficulty of knowing whether laws on the books actually give power to the people, however, such criteria beg the questions of how, when, and why moves toward more fully or less fully democratic legal systems occur. They will not serve our purposes well.

Advocates of procedural definitions single out a narrow range of governmental practices to determine whether a regime qualifies as democratic. Most procedural observers center their attention on elections, asking whether genuinely competitive elections engaging large numbers of citizens regularly produce changes in governmental personnel and policy. If elections remain a non-competitive sham and an occasion for smushing governmental opponents, procedural analysts reject them as criteria for democracy, but if they actually cause significant governmental changes, they signal the procedural presence of democracy. (In principle one could add or substitute other consultative procedures such as referenda, recall, petition, and even opinion polls, but in practice procedural analysts focus overwhelmingly on elections.)

Freedom House evaluations incorporate some substantive judgments about the extent to which a given country’s citizens actually enjoy political rights and civil liberties, but when it comes to judging whether a country is an ‘electoral democracy’, Freedom House looks for mainly procedural elements:

1. A competitive, multiparty political system
2. Universal adult suffrage for all citizens (with exceptions for restrictions that states may legitimately place on citizens for criminal offenses)
3. Regularly contested elections conducted in conditions of ballot secrecy, reasonable ballot security, and in the absence of massive voter fraud that yields results that are unrepresentative of the public will.
4. Significant public access of major political parties to the electorate through the media and through generally open political campaigning (Piano and Puddington 2004: 716).

When Freedom House raters looked more closely at political rights and civil liberties in 2003, however, they decided that 29 of their 117 electoral democracies failed to qualify as ‘free’. In those 29 regimes, significant deficits existed in rights and liberties (Piano and Puddington 2004: 5). Here, then, is the trouble with procedural definitions of democracy, democratization, and de-democratization: despite their crisp convenience, they work with an extremely thin conception of the political processes involved.

Substantive approaches focus on the conditions of life and politics a given regime promotes: does this regime promote human welfare, individual freedom, security, equity, social equality, public deliberation, and peaceful conflict resolution? If so, we might be inclined to call it democratic regardless of how its constitution reads. Two troubles follow immediately, however, from any such definitional strategy. First, how do we handle tradeoffs among these admirable principles? If a given regime is desperately poor but its citizens enjoy
utive visibility of institutions declare their regimes that Freedom announced principles by the description of ten regimes adopt or of knowing whether they beg the questions of cratic legal systems; environmental practices of elections engaging in the personnel and fiction for smashing or democracy, but if procedural presence of procedures such procedural analysts is about the extent to Liberties, but when Freedom House looks s may legitimately place the ballot security, and in the public will and through generally and civil liberties in liberties failed to qualify liberties (Plato and institutions of democracy, as, they work with a given regime om, security, equity, If so, we might be two troubles follow we handle tradeoffs but its citizens enjoy rough equality, should we think of it as more democratic than a fairly prosperous but fiercely unequal regime?

Second, focusing on these possible outcomes of politics undercuts any effort to learn whether some political arrangements — including democracy — promote more desirable substantive outcomes than other political arrangements. What if we actually want to know under what conditions and how regimes promote human welfare, individual freedom, security, equity, social equality, public deliberation, and peaceful conflict resolution?

In principle, nevertheless, substantive definitions of democracy could yield valuable approaches to describing and explaining democratization and de-democratization. One could imagine setting out a set of performance criteria on the model of the United Nations’ Human Development Index (UNDP 2005), going beyond Freedom House by directly measuring a wide variety of rights, freedoms, and resolutions of conflict. Existing comparisons of performance among different sorts of welfare systems (e.g., Goodin et al. 1999) suggest that it might be possible. Coupled with adequate theories of how such rights, freedoms, and resolutions of conflict wax and wane, substantive approaches could thus contribute powerfully to our understanding of democratization and de-democratization. Alas, no investigator so far has come close.

Process-oriented approaches to democracy differ significantly from ideal, constitutional, procedural, and substantive accounts. They identify some minimal set of processes that must be continuously in motion for a situation to qualify as democratic. In a classic statement, Robert Dahl stipulates six distinctive institutions: elected officials; free, fair, and frequent elections; freedom of expression; alternative sources of information; associational autonomy; and inclusive citizenship (Dahl 1998: 85; Dahl 2005: 188–189). The final standard — inclusive citizenship — ironically rules out many cases that political philosophers including David Held have regularly taken as great historical models for democracy: not only Greek and Roman politics but also Viking crews, village assemblies, and some city-states. All of them built their political deliberations by means of massive exclusion, most notably of women, slaves, and paupers. Inclusion of all (or almost all) adults basically restricts political democracy to the last few centuries.

Notice how Dahl’s criteria differ from ideal, constitutional, procedural, and substantive standards for democracy. Dahl abstains from describing the structure of consent and control. He specifies not constitutional forms or provisions. Dahl’s criteria do include the procedure of free, fair, and frequent elections, but the list as a whole describes how a regime works, not what techniques it adopts to accomplish its goals. He carefully avoids building social prerequisites or consequences into the definition. His scheme of ‘polyarchal democracy’ describes an interlocking set of political processes.

Yet there is a catch. Basically, Dahl provides us with a static yes-no checklist: if a regime operates all six institutions, it counts as a democracy. If it lacks any of them, or some of them aren’t really working, it doesn’t count as a democracy. For an annual count of which regimes are in or out, such an approach can do the job even if critics raise questions about whether elections in such places as Jamaica are free and fair. Suppose, however, that we want to use process-oriented standards more ambitiously. We do not merely want to count the democratic house at a single point in time. Instead, we want to do two more demanding things: first, to compare regimes with regard to how democratic they are; second, to follow individual regimes through time, noticing when and how they become more or less democratic.
Like Freedom House raters of relative political rights and civil liberties, we can reasonably ask whether some regimes rank higher or lower than others, if only to see whether those rankings correlate with other factors such as national wealth, population size, recency of independence, or geographic location. If we want insight into causes and effects of democratization or de-democratization, we have no choice but to recognize them as continuous processes rather than simple steps across a threshold in one direction or the other. In short, for purposes of comparison and explanation we must move from a yes-no checklist to one or more crucial variables.

Most of Dahl’s standard democratic institutions – elected officials; free, fair, and frequent elections; freedom of expression; alternative sources of information; associational autonomy; and inclusive citizenship – lend themselves awkwardly to comparison and explanation. We might, of course, ask how free, fair, and frequent elections are, and so on down the list; but the more we do so, the more we will recognize two drawbacks of Dahl’s criteria when it comes to the work at hand:

1. Together, they describe a minimum package of democratic institutions, not a set of continuous variables; they do not help much if we are asking whether Canada is more democratic than the US, or whether the US became less democratic last year.

2. Each of them operates within significant limits, beyond which some of them conflict with each other; working democracies often have to adjudicate deep conflicts, for example, between freedom of expression and associational autonomy. Should a democracy muzzle animal rights organizations because they advocate attacks on associations that hold dog shows or support animal experimentation?

Again, the autonomy of powerful elitist, racist, sexist, or hate-mongering associations regularly undermines the inclusiveness of citizenship. Should a democracy let well-financed pressure groups drive punitive anti-immigrant legislation through the legislature? To enter fully into comparison and explanation, we will have to improve on Dahl’s criteria while remaining faithful to their process-oriented spirit.

**ELEMENTS OF DEMOCRACY, DEMOCRATIZATION, AND DE-DEMOCRATIZATION**

How can we move ahead? Before identifying process-oriented criteria for democracy, democratization, and de-democratization, let us clarify what we have to explain. In order to do so, it will help to simplify radically. Let us adopt three simple ideas.

First, we start with a state, an organization that controls the major concentration of coercive means within a substantial territory, exercises priority in some regards over all other organizations operating within the same territory, and receives acknowledgement of that priority from other organizations, including states, outside the territory. You begin to see the complications: what about federal systems, civil wars, warlord-dominated enclaves, and rival factions within the state? For the time being, nevertheless, we can pose the problem of democracy more clearly by assuming a single, fairly unitary state.

Second, we lump everyone who lives under that state’s jurisdiction into a catch-all category: citizens. Again complications immediately come to mind: what about tourists, transnational corporations, members of the underground economy, and expatriates? Most historical regimes have lacked full-fledged citizenship, which plays a crucial part in democracy, but for a start, calling everyone who lives under a given state’s jurisdiction a citizen of that state will clarify what we have to explain. Democracy will then turn
out to be a certain class of relations between states and citizens, democratization and de-democratization to consist of changes in those sorts of relations.

Dahl’s principles already imply such a step: even associational autonomy, for example, depends on state backing of associations’ right to exist rather than the sheer presence of many, many associations. Let us call a set of relations between states and citizens a regime, with the understanding that we will eventually have to complicate that idea by including relations among major political actors (parties, corporations, labor unions, organized ethnic groups, patron-client networks, warlords, and more) in regimes as well.

In the meantime, notice that the second step breaks sharply with a common (and at first glance appealing) notion. It rejects the widespread idea that if only existing holders of power agree on how they want a regime to operate they can decide on democracy as a more attractive – or less disagreeable – alternative to existing political arrangements. In this view, workers, peasants, minorities, and other citizens may cause enough trouble to make some concessions to representation and inclusion less costly to elites than continuing repression, but the citizenry at large plays only a marginal role in the actual fashioning of democratic politics. Such a view underlies the policy of exporting democracy from the US or the European Union by making attractive deals with national leaders – or, for that matter, by coercing leaders to adopt democratic institutions. On the contrary, this analysis of democratization (and of de-democratization as well) centers on state-citizen struggle. Even a conquering military power such as the western Allies in Japan and Germany after World War II must bargain extensively with citizens to create a new democratic regime where authoritarians previously ruled.

Third, let us narrow our analytic range to public politics: not all transactions, however personal or impersonal, between states and citizens but only those that visibly engage state power and performance. Public politics includes elections, voter registration, legislative activity, patenting, tax collection, military conscription, group application for pensions, and many other transactions to which states are parties. It also includes collective contention in the form of coups d’état, revolution, social movements, and civil war. It excludes, however, most personal interactions among citizens, among state officials, or between state officials and citizens.

Some of public politics consists of consulting citizens about their opinions, needs, and demands. Consultation includes any public means by which citizens voice their collective preferences concerning state personnel and policies. In relatively democratic regimes, competitive elections certainly give citizens voice, but so do lobbying, petitioning, referenda, social movements, and opinion polling. This time the missing complications are obvious: bribes, patron-client chains, favors to constituents and followers, kinship connections among officials, and similar phenomena blur the boundary between public and private politics. What is more, any close student of democracy soon discovers that she can’t make sense of public politics by focusing on citizen-state interactions alone, but must examine coalitions, rivalries, and confrontations among major political actors outside of the state as well. For the moment, we scrutinize public political interactions between states and citizens for signs of democracy, democratization, and de-democratization.

What do we look for in those interactions? One more simplification can guide us. Judging degree of democracy, we return to the core conception of democratic power: we assess the extent to which the state behaves in conformity to the expressed demands of its citizens. Gauging democratization and de-democratization, we assess the extent to which
that conformity is increasing or decreasing. So doing, we set aside venerable alternatives in democratic theory. We do not ask whether the state is enhancing its citizens’ welfare, whether it behaves in accordance with its own laws, or even whether ordinary people control the levers of political power. (Nothing bars us from asking later or elsewhere whether democratization thus understood enhances popular welfare, entails the rule of law, or depends on citizens’ direct empowerment.)

Judging conformity of a state’s behavior to its citizens’ expressed demands necessarily involves four further judgments: how wide a range of citizens’ expressed demands come into play; how equally different groups of citizens experience a translation of their demands into state behavior; to what extent the expression of demands itself receives the state’s political protection; and how much the process of translation commits both sides, citizens and state. Call those elements breadth, equality, protection, and mutual binding.

In this simplified perspective, a regime is democratic to the degree that political relations between the state and its citizens feature broad, equal, protected, mutually binding consultation. Democratization means net movement toward broader, more equal, more protected, and more binding consultation. Depoliticization, obviously, then means net movement toward narrower, more unequal, less protected, and less binding consultation. In Germany, we can reasonably say that the formation of the Weimar Republic in the German Empire’s ruins after World War I introduced a measure of democratization, while Hitler’s seizure of power in 1933 pushed the country brutally back into de-democratization. In Japan, we can reasonably treat the buildup of militarized state power during the 1930s as a time of de-democratization while treating the period of Allied conquest, occupation, and reconstruction as a start of democratization.

The terms broad, equal, protected, and mutually binding identify four partly independent dimensions of variation among regimes. Here are rough descriptions of the four dimensions:

1. **Breadth**: from only a small segment of the population enjoying extensive rights, the rest being largely excluded from public politics, to very wide political inclusion of people falling under the state’s jurisdiction (at one extreme, every household has its own distinctive relation to the state, but only a few households have full rights of citizenship; at the other, all adult citizens belong to the same homogeneous category of citizenship)

2. **Equality**: from great inequality among and within categories of citizens to extensive equality in both regards (at one extreme, ethnic categories fall into a well defined rank order with very unequal rights and obligations; at the other, ethnicity has no significant connection with political rights or obligations and largely equal rights prevail between native-born and naturalized citizens)

Together, high levels of breadth and equality comprise the crucial aspects of citizenship: instead of a mosaic of variable relations to the state depending on particular group memberships, all citizens fall into a limited number of categories – at the limit, just one – whose members maintain similar rights and obligations in their interactions with the state. By themselves, breadth and equality do not constitute democracy. Authoritarian regimes have often imposed undemocratic forms of citizenship from the top down, but in the company of protection and mutually binding consultation, breadth and equality qualify as essential components of democracy.

3. **Protection**: from little to much protection against the state’s arbitrary action (at one extreme, state agents constantly use their power to punish personal enemies and reward their friends; at the other, all citizens enjoy publicly visible due process)
4. *Mutual binding*: from non-binding and/or extremely asymmetrical to mutually binding (at one extreme, seekers of state benefits must bribe, cajole, threaten, or use third-party influence to get anything at all; at the other, state agents have clear, enforceable obligations to deliver benefits by category of recipient)

Net movement of a regime toward the higher ends of the four dimensions qualifies as democratization. Net movement toward the lower ends qualifies as de-democratization. When, for example, Freedom House put downward arrows on Jamaica’s political rights and civil liberties ratings for 2004, it was warning that Jamaica ran the risk of de-democratizing (Freedom House Jamaica 2005: 2). In terms of our four dimensions, it called special attention to Jamaica’s increases of inequality and decreases of protection.

**STATE CAPACITY AND REGIME VARIATION**

So far I have omitted an important feature of regimes, whether democratic or undemocratic: the state’s capacity to enforce its political decisions. Power figures crucially in this regime feature. No democracy can work if the state lacks the power to supervise democratic decision-making and put its results into practice. That is most obvious for protection, where a very weak state may proclaim the principle of shielding citizens from harassment by state agents, but can do little about harassment when it occurs. Very high capacity states run the opposite risk: that decision-making by state agents acquires enough weight to overwhelm mutually binding consultation between government and citizens.

State capacity has already entered our discussion indirectly. Some of the Freedom House political rights and civil liberties, for example, would mean nothing without substantial state backing. Note these detailed questions that Freedom House raters are supposed to answer for each regime (Karatnycky 2000: 524–525):

- **PR # 3**: Are there fair electoral laws, equal campaigning opportunities, fair polling, and honest tabulations of ballots?
- **PR # 4**: Are the voters able to endow their freely elected representatives with real power?
- **CL # 5**: Does the rule of law prevail in civil and criminal matters? Is the population treated equally under the law? Are police under direct civilian control?
- **CL # 10**: Are property rights secure? Do citizens have the right to establish private businesses? Is private business activity unduly influenced by government officials, the security forces, or organized crime?

We see Freedom House evaluators trying to find a middle ground between too little and too much state capacity, on the implicit assumption that either one hinders political rights and civil liberties. That assumption generalizes: extremely high and extremely low state capacity both inhibit democracy.

State capacity means the extent to which interventions of state agents in existing non-state resources, activities, and interpersonal connections alter existing distributions of those resources, activities, and interpersonal connections as well as relations among those distributions. (State-directed redistribution of wealth, for example, almost inevitably involves not only a redistribution of resources across the population but also a change in the connection between the geographic distributions of wealth and population.) In a high-capacity regime, by this standard, whenever state agents act their actions affect
citizens’ resources, activities, and interpersonal connections significantly. In a low-capacity regime, state agents have much narrower impacts no matter how hard they try to change things.

We begin to see the value of distinguishing capacity from democracy before relating them analytically. Clearly capacity can range from extremely low to extremely high independently of how democratic a regime is, and democracy can appear in regimes that vary markedly with regard to state capacity. Figure 4.2 schematizes the field of variation. It identifies some distinctly different zones of political life marked by varying combinations of capacity and democracy.

On the vertical axis, state capacity varies from 0 (minimum) to 1 (maximum). Although we could think of capacity in absolute terms, for comparative purposes it helps more to scale it against the histories of all states that have actually existed within a given era. Over the period since 1900, for example, the dimension might run from Somalia or Congo-Kinshasa in 2006 (minimum) to colossal Nazi Germany on the eve of World War II (maximum). On the horizontal axis, we find the familiar range from minimum democracy at 0 (for which the authoritarian rule of Stalin’s Russia might be a candidate) to maximum democracy at 1 (where today’s Norway would certainly be in the running).

For many purposes, another radical simplification will aid our attempt to describe and explain variation in regimes. Figure 4.2 identifies the four crude regime types implied by our more general map of regimes. It reduces the space to four crude types of regime: low-capacity undemocratic, high-capacity undemocratic, high-capacity democratic, and low-capacity democratic. Examples of each type in the diagram include:

**High-capacity Undemocratic:** Kazakhstan, Iran
**Low-capacity Undemocratic:** Somalia, Congo (Kinshasa)
**High-capacity Democratic:** Norway, Japan
**Low-capacity Democratic:** Jamaica, Belgium

Over human history regimes have distributed very unevenly across the types. The great bulk of historical regimes have fallen into the low-capacity undemocratic sector. Many of the biggest and most powerful, however, have dwelt in the high-capacity...
undemocratic sector. High-capacity democratic regimes have been rare and mostly recent. Low-capacity democratic regimes have remained few and far between.

Over the long run of human history, then, the vast majority of regimes have been undemocratic; democratic regimes are rare, contingent, recent creations. Partial democracies have, it is true, formed intermittently at a local scale, for example in villages ruled by councils incorporating most heads of household. At the scale of a city-state, a warlord’s domain, or a regional federation, forms of government have run from dynastic hegemony to oligarchy, with narrow, unequal citizenship or none at all, little or no binding consultation, and uncertain protection from arbitrary governmental action.

Before the nineteenth century, furthermore, large states and empires generally managed by means of indirect rule: systems in which the central power received tribute, cooperation, and guarantees of compliance on the part of subject populations from regional power-holders who enjoyed great autonomy within their own domains. Even in supposedly absolutist France, for example, great nobles only started to lose their regional power during the later seventeenth century, when Louis XIV undertook a sustained (and ultimately successful) effort to replace them with government-appointed and removable regional administrators. Before then, great lords ran their domains like princes, and often took up arms against the French crown itself.

Seen from the bottom, such systems often imposed tyranny on ordinary people. Seen from the top, however, they lacked capacity; the intermediaries supplied soldiers, goods, and money to rulers, but their autonomous privileges also set stringent limits to rulers’ ability to govern or transform the world within their presumed jurisdictions.

Only the nineteenth century brought widespread adoption of direct rule: creation of structures extending governmental communication and control continuously from central institutions to individual localities or even to households, and back again. Creation of direct rule commonly included such measures as uniform tax codes, large-scale postal services, professional civil services, and national military conscription. Even then, direct rule ranged from the unitary hierarchies of centralized monarchy to the segmentation of federalism. On a large scale, direct rule made substantial citizenship, and therefore democracy, possible. Possible, but not likely, much less inevitable: instruments of direct rule have sustained many oligarchies, some autocracies, a number of party- and army-controlled states, and a few fascist tyrannies. Even in the era of direct rule most regimes have remained far from democratic.

Location in one or another of the four quadrants makes a powerful difference to the character of a regime’s public politics (Tilly 2006). Here are preliminary descriptions of the kinds of politics that prevail in each quadrant:

High-capacity Undemocratic: little public voice except as elicited by the state; extensive involvement of state security forces in any public politics; regime change either through struggle at the top or mass rebellion from the bottom

Low-capacity Undemocratic: warlords, ethnic blocs, and religious mobilization; frequent violent struggle including civil wars; many political actors including criminals deploying lethal force

High-capacity Democratic: frequent social movements, interest group activity, and political party mobilizations; formal consultations (including competitive elections) as high points of political activity; widespread state monitoring of public politics combined with relatively low levels of political violence

Low-capacity Democratic: as in high capacity democratic regimes, frequent social movements, interest group activity, and political party mobilizations plus formal consultations (including competitive elections) as high points of political activity, but less effective state monitoring, higher involvement of semi-legal
and illegal actors in public politics, and substantially higher levels of lethal violence in public politics.

These are, of course, 'on the average' descriptions. Within the high capacity undemocratic quadrant, for example, we find some regimes whose states' monitoring and intervention extend throughout the whole territory and population: Iran fits the description; but we also notice others in which the state has nearly the same control over its central territory but has edges or enclaves that largely escape control; Morocco, with authoritarian rule in its main territory but a long-running civil war with independence-minded Polisario forces in the former Spanish Sahara, belongs to this subset of regimes.

**PROCESSES THAT CAUSE DEMOCRATIZATION AND DE-DEMOCRATIZATION**

Can we specify any necessary conditions for movement into the high-capacity democratic quadrant of Figure 4.3 from the other three quadrants? What about exits from the high-capacity democratic quadrant? Once you rule out conditions that belong to democratization and de-democratization by definition, I do not believe that any necessary, much less sufficient, conditions for either one exist. Comparison of otherwise similar cases in some of which democratization or de-democratization occurs and in others doesn’t can clarify what we have to explain, but it will not identify universal conditions. At least no one has identified such conditions so far.

I do think, however, that some necessary processes promote democratization, and that reversals of those processes promote de-democratization. For the moment, let us neglect de-democratization, and concentrate on democratization, to make this line of argument clear. For democratization to develop in any regime, changes must occur in three areas: trust networks, categorical inequality, and autonomous power centers.

‘Trust networks’ are ramified interpersonal connections, consisting mainly of strong ties, within which people set valued, consequential, long-term resources and enterprises at risk to the malfeasance, mistakes, or failures of others. Trading diasporas, kinship groups, religious sects, revolutionary conspiracies, and credit circles often comprise trust networks. Over most

![Figure 4.3 Crude regime types](image)
of history, participants in trust networks have carefully shielded them from involvement in political regimes, for justified fear that rulers would either seize their precious resources or subordinate them to the state’s own programs.

So long as they remain entirely segregated from regimes, however, trust networks constitute obstacles to democratization; their segregation blocks members’ commitment to democratic collective enterprises. Democratization becomes possible when trust networks integrate sufficiently into regimes that they provide the means of mutual binding – the contingent consent of citizens to programs proposed or enacted by the state (Tilly 2005). Two large processes affecting trust networks therefore underlie democratization: (1) dissolution or integration of segregated trust networks and (2) creation of politically connected trust networks.

Within the two processes appear a series of recurrent mechanisms, for example:

- disintegration of existing segregated trust networks e.g. decay of patrons’ ability to provide their clients with goods and protection promotes withdrawal of clients from patron-client ties
- expansion of population categories lacking access to effective trust networks for their major long-term risky enterprises e.g. growth of landless wage-workers in agrarian regions increases population without effective patronage and/or relations of mutual aid
- appearance of new long-term risky opportunities and threats that existing trust networks cannot handle e.g. substantial increases in war, famine, disease and/or banditry visibly overwhelm protective capacity of patrons, diasporas, and local solidarities

Each of the three mechanisms just listed promotes the dissolution of segregated trust networks and the creation of politically connected trust networks (Tilly 2005).

What of categorical inequality? The term means organization of social life around boundaries separating whole sets of people who differ collectively in their life chances, as is commonly the case with categories of gender, race, caste, ethnicity, nationality and religion, and is sometimes the case with categories of social class. To the extent that such inequalities translate directly into categorical differences in political rights and obligations, democratization remains impossible. Any democratization process depends not necessarily on diminution of categorical inequality but on insulation of public politics from categorical inequality. Two main processes contribute to that insulation: equalization of the categories themselves in some regards, and buffering of politics from the operation of those categories.

Here are the sorts of mechanisms that operate within the broader processes of equalization and buffering:

- equalization of assets and/or welfare across categories within the population at large e.g. booming demand for the products of peasant agriculture expands middle peasants
- reduction or governmental containment of privately controlled armed force e.g. disbanding of magnates’ personal armies weakens noble control over commoners, thereby diminishing nobles’ capacity to translate noble-commoner differences directly into public politics
- adoption of devices that insulate public politics from categorical inequalities e.g. secret ballots, payment of officeholders, and free, equal access of candidates to media forward formation of cross-category coalitions

All three of these mechanisms operated widely, for example, in the waves of democratization that Europe experienced during the nineteenth century (Tilly 2004).
Autonomous power centers operate outside the control of public politics, of regular citizen-state interactions. They can include all those interpersonal connections that provide political actors—both individuals and segments of the citizenry—with the means of altering (or, for that matter, defending) existing distributions of resources, population, and activities within the regime. Sometimes they exist within the state itself, most obviously when the military run the state or operate independently of civilian authorities. The configuration of lineages, religious congregations, economic organizations, organized communities, and military forces in a given regime strongly affects the possibility that the regime’s public politics will move toward broad, equal, protected, and mutually binding consultation. It does so both because that configuration shapes what sorts of political actors are readily available, and because it affects which segments of the citizenry are directly available for participation in public politics. To the extent that power centers, especially those controlling autonomous coercive means, remain detached from public politics, democratization remains difficult or impossible.

Democracy-promoting processes involving autonomous power centers include (1) broadening of political participation, (2) equalization of access to political resources and opportunities outside the state, and (3) inhibition of autonomous and/or arbitrary coercive power both within and outside the state. Although their weights and timing vary from one case of democratization to another, to some degree all three must occur for democratization to happen.

Mechanisms within these processes include:

- coalition formation between segments of ruling classes and constituted political actors that are currently excluded from power e.g., dissident bourgeois recruit backing from disfranchised workers, thus promoting political participation of those workers
- central co-optation or elimination of previously autonomous political intermediaries e.g., regional strongmen join governing coalitions, thus becoming committed to state programs
- brokerage of coalitions across unequal categories and/or distinct trust networks e.g., regional alliances form against state seizure of local assets, thus promoting employment of those alliances in other political struggles

All these mechanisms reduce the autonomy of coercive power centers. They thereby increase popular control over the whole of public politics, and the influence of public politics over state performance. In all these regards, they promote democracy.

Obviously larger changes in social life lie behind these crucial alterations of trust networks, categorical inequality, and non-state power. Eventually we will have to pay attention to transformations of economic organization, mass communications, population mobility, and education. The three democracy-promoting processes nevertheless remain crucial to the effects of economic organization, mass communications, population mobility, and education. By themselves, all of them may equally promote democracy or autocracy. The intervening transformations of trust networks, categorical inequality, and non-state power fundamentally affect the possibility of democratization.

Democratization and de-democratization do not occur in perfect symmetry. Disaffected elites, for example, play significant parts in de-democratization, which often occurs rapidly when elites defect. In contrast, democratization generally moves more slowly, and depends more heavily on organized popular support (Bermeo 2000, 2003; Karatnycky and Ackerman 2005; Schock 2005). Nevertheless, the three major democracy-promoting
politics, of regular sections that provide the means of altering, and activities obviously when thei. The configuration of communities, and the regime’s public consultation. It does are readily available, for participation trolling autonomous or arbitrary coercive acting vary from one for democratisation

actors that are currently workers, thus promoting e.g. regional strongmen s e.g. regional alliances in other political matters. They thereby influence of public ocracy. ns of trust networks, to pay attention to population mobility, is remain crucial to action mobility, and y or autocracy. The nd non-state power asymmetry. Disaffected which often occurs more slowly, and 2003; Karatnycky nocracy-promoting processes have negative counterparts. Withdrawal of integrated trust networks from public politics, insertion of categorical inequalities directly into public politics, and acquisition of new autonomy by coercive power centers all promote de-democratisation powerfully when they occur.

At least this brief survey underlines the value of adopting a process approach to democracy, democratisation, and de-democratisation. It establishes the necessity of giving full attention to processes involving the exercise of power.

REFERENCES


Schmitter, Philippe C. and Terry Lynn Karl (1991) 'What democracy is ... and is not', Journal of Democracy 2: 77-88.


