

# Challenges to Democracy

## Session 2: Concepts

Mirko Wegemann

Universität Münster  
Institut für Politikwissenschaft

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# Syllabus

- Any comments/questions on the syllabus?
- You are warmly invited to join the US election night (5 November), no session next day (field work week); programme of the last event here
- field trip to 'Demokratie-Update' confirmed; though it's not a trip

## Last session



Figure: Summary of last session with GPT-4o

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**\*Prompt:** Please create a graph showcasing the following content:

- democracy is one of the most popular regimes in the world
- however, in recent years, there is increasing evidence for democratic backsliding
- people recognize that democracy is threatened
- they differ, however, in their definition on who/what threatens democracy (e.g., limiting free speech, infringing on the rights of minorities)

## Today's session

- How can we conceptualize democracies?
- Liberal vs. electoral democracies
- Tensions within democratic systems

## An introductory remark by Sartori I

TABLE 1. LADDER OF ABSTRACTION

Levels of Abstraction	Major Comparative Scope and Purpose	Logical and Empirical Properties of Concepts
HL: <i>High Level Categories</i> Universal conceptualizations	Cross-area comparisons among heterogeneous contexts (global theory)	Maximal extension Minimal intension Definition by negation
ML: <i>Medium Level Categories</i> General conceptualizations and taxonomies	Intra-area comparisons among relatively homogeneous contexts (middle range theory)	Balance of denotation with connotation Definition by analysis, i.e. per genus et differentiam
LL: <i>Low Level Categories</i> Configurative conceptualizations	Country by country analysis (narrow-gauge theory)	Maximal intension Minimal extension Contextual definition

Figure: Scope of concepts in the social sciences (Sartori 1970, p. 1044)

## An introductory remark by Sartori II

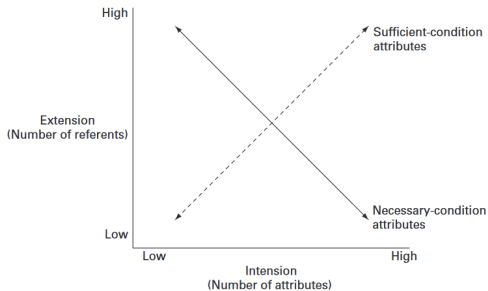


Figure: The idea of intension and extension, visualized by Gerring (2012, p. 123)

# Systems, states, regimes, governments I

*What do you think, what are the differences between systems, states, regimes and governments?*



## Systems, states, regimes, governments II

Conceptual distinctions in transformation research (Merkel 2010, 70ff.)

- **Government:** person or group of people who executes power
- **Regime:** informal and formal norms that define the organization of the political power structure
- **State:** formal structures that enable the organization of the political power structure
- **System:** describes the government, regime, and state and their interactions

## What's a democracy? I

*Form pairs. In your own words and understanding, discuss what constitutes a democracy? [5 minutes]*

## Democracy or autocracy? I

“National sovereignty shall be vested in the people of [...] who shall exercise same either through the President of the Republic and Members of Parliament or by way of referendum. No section of the people or any individual shall arrogate to itself or to himself the exercise thereof. The authorities responsible for the management of the state shall derive their powers from the people through election by direct or indirect universal suffrage, unless otherwise provided for in this Constitution. The vote shall be equal and secret, and every citizen aged twenty years and above shall be entitled to vote.

All powers emanate from the Nation. These powers are exercised in the manner laid down by the Constitution. The exercising of specific powers can be assigned by a treaty or by a law to institutions of public international law. [...] The federal legislative power is exercised jointly by the King, the House of Representatives and the Senate. The federal executive power, as regulated by the Constitution, belongs to the King.

## Democracy or autocracy? II

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**Constitution of Cameroon**

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**Constitution of Belgium**

## A minimalist view on democracy

According to Schumpeter (1942, p. 269), *“the democratic method is that institutional arrangement for arriving at political decisions in which individuals acquire the power to decide by means of a competitive struggle for the people’s vote”*

1. What would Merkel (2004) say about this definition?
2. What does he mean by the term “embedded democracy”?

## Embedded democracies I

- previous conceptualizations (e.g. Freedom House) fail to provide thresholds distinguishing between illiberal and liberal democracies
  - democracies are minimally defined by **free and fair elections**
  - to ensure these criteria, it needs to be embedded in other securing partial regimes
    1. **internally** embedded by institutional rights
    2. **externally** embedded by facilitating factors
- enabling democratic functioning + separation of powers

## Embedded democracies II

**For your background,** Merkel (2004) is not the first to come up with a *mid-range* definition of democracies. He builds on Dahl (1971) who argues that the following rights ensure free and fair elections:

- formulation of their preferences
- signifying preferences
- preferences are equally taken into account by government

There are eight different institutional guarantees required (similar to the ones Merkel (2004) defines).

## Embedded democracies III

*Again, find yourself in pairs of two. How can we define the five partial regimes? Can you find examples? [10 minutes]*



## Embedded democracies IV

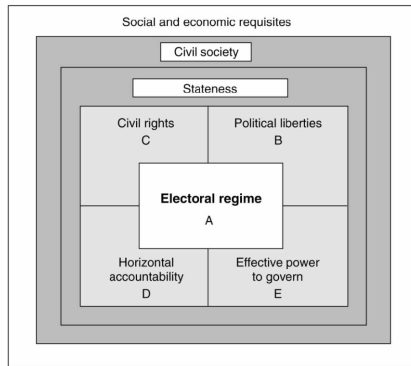


Figure: Concept of embedded democracies by Merkel (2004)

## Embedded democracies V

### The electoral regime

- core regime of a democracy
- **regular, free, general, fair and equal elections** distinguish democracies from autocracies
- necessary but not sufficient condition for a democracy since elections do not guarantee **accountability**
- example: **active** and **passive** suffrage
- example for a violation of this principle: US Disenfranchisement

## Embedded democracies VI

### Political rights

- crucial criteria for electoral regime
- enabling citizens to communicate and organize their interests
- examples: freedom of expression and freedom of association
- example for a violation of this principle: Protester being arrested in Russia

## Embedded democracies VII

### Civil rights

- protecting individual freedom
- prerequisite are independent courts to implement rule of law
- protection from the state (negative freedom)
- example: right to fair trial
- example of violation: Guantanamo Bay

## Embedded democracies VIII

### Horizontal accountability

- distribution of power in the trias of executive, legislative and judiciary → **checks and balances**
- design varies by regime: presidential vs. parliamentary system
- not necessarily trias, checks and balances can be further guaranteed by structures within executive, legislative and judiciary
- examples: veto rights, vote of (no) confidence
  - ministerial portfolios
  - bicameral system
  - more than one chamber in the judiciary
- example of violation: Orbán's sidelining of the courts

## Embedded democracies IX

### Effective power to govern

- those elected are the ones executing power
- extra-constitutional forces exempt from policy enforcement
- counter-examples: military, influential public figures (e.g., businesspeople, former politicians); 'Kapp-Putsch' in the Weimar Republic

# Embedded democracies X

## Liberal Democracies

If all of these regimes are functioning, we can speak of a **liberal democracy**. If partial regimes are not guaranteed, there is a **defect democracy**.

- defects come in different shapes
  - exclusive democracy
  - domain democracy
  - **illiberal** democracy
  - **delegative** democracy

## Are there ideal type democracies?

*Are there not only such things as imperfect democracies? And if so how does one know where to put the limit of acceptance of these imperfections?*



## Freedom and equality – a trade-off?

In small groups, consider the following scenario:

*In the election campaign 2024, the French New Popular Front (left alliance) pledged to introduce a 90% tax on those earning more than €400k a year.*

Is this democratic? Why? Why not?

## Freedom and equality – a trade-off I

There is an inherent tension between freedom and equality as two central pillars of democracies (cf. Pennock 2015, March)

### Freedom/liberty...

- ...highlights the rights of the individual
- ...is central for guaranteeing minority rights

### Equality...

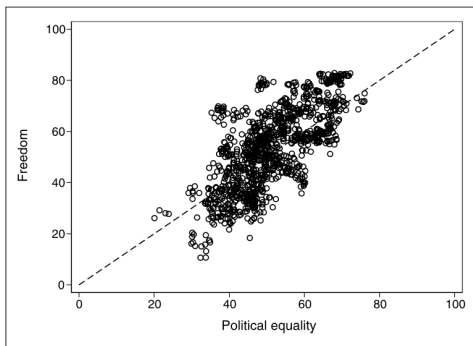
- ...follows a collectivist logic
- ...is concerned about egalitarian pre-requisites to democratic reality

## Freedom and equality – a trade-off II

For a functioning democracy, both are needed. There needs to be a balance between partial regimes; each of them needs to be protected against the infringement by another regime.

## Freedom and equality – a trade-off

On a macro-level, there is not necessarily a trade-off between both logics:



**Figure 1.** Freedom and political equality ( $N = 1141$ ).

**Figure:** Empirical association between freedom and equality

## Coming back to last week...



Figure: 'Is Trump a Threat to Democracy?' asked to MAGA-Supporters (Link)

**So, how does this interview from last week relate to our discussion?**

## Munck's critique I

Munck (2016) summarizes the academic discussion on the *quality of democracy*:

1. no common ground on what constitutes democratic quality
2. little agreement about the attributes to include (processes, intermediary or final outcomes?)
3. how do attributes relate to each other?

## Munck's critique II

Munck (2016) makes a strong point in equating the **quality of democracy** to **democracy**.

*What are the implications of his argument?*

## Munck's critique III

The reconceptualization by Munck (2016) is guided by two core principles

1. political freedom
2. political equality



## Munck's critique IV

**Majoritarian conception**

**Juridicial-constitutional  
conception**

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*What's the difference?*

## Munck's critique V

	<b>Majoritarian conception</b>	<b>Judicial-constitutional conception</b>
<b>Key principle</b>	Majority needs to be able to change status quo	Minority needs to be protected by rule of law
<b>Intermediary outcome</b>	1. fair seat allocation, 2. majority preferences translate into law	checks and balances, extensive veto rights
<b>Best achieved through...</b>	Unicameral parliaments, weak president, flexible constitution	Judicial review (+ strong constitution), bicameral parliaments

## Munck's critique VI

Which position does Munck (2016) favour? Why?

## A maximalist view on democracy... I

*Imagine you did not enjoy formal education and have no money,  
does this influence your experience of democracy?*

## A maximalist view on democracy... II

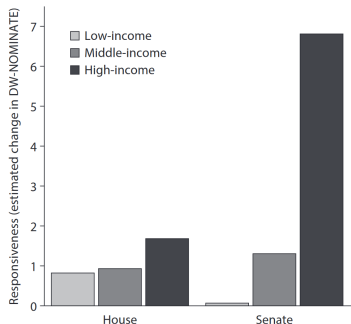


FIGURE 8.3 House and Senate Responsiveness to Income Groups, 2011–2013

**Figure:** Relationship between Income Inequality and Elite Responsiveness (Bartels 2016, September)

## A maximalist view on democracy... III

Therefore, others have emphasized the importance of socio-economic equality among citizens (Sigman and Lindberg 2019).

- that's one example of what's called a maximalist view on democracy; not its input (vote) or throughput (process) but also its output (e.g., equality) matters
- implicitly, Merkel (2004) also accounts for this conception with what he called the external embeddedness
- Munck (2016) is cautious but acknowledges that socio-economic equality needs to be guaranteed to prevent economic inequality from translating into political inequality

## A maximalist view on democracy... IV

- other examples include deliberative or participatory democracy (Morlino 2011, November); among others, enabled by a civil society

## Concluding remarks by Sartori I

*“They result, as we know, from conceptual stretching, which results, in turn, from incorrect ladder climbing: the clumsy attempt to arrive at “travelling universals” at the expense of precision, instead of at the expense of connotation (i.e., by reducing the number of qualifying attributes)” (Sartori 1970, p. 1051)*



## Conclusion

What we have learned today...

- There exist different levels of abstraction in definitions of democracy.
- While democracy is mainly about free and fair elections, it requires more (partial regimes) to thrive.
- Sub-regimes strengthen democracies but there can also be a tension between them.
- The less characteristics we attribute to democracy, the more countries fall under the definition but we risk misclassification.

## To prepare for next week... I

- next session, we will try to trace the current state of democracy, bring your laptops/tables!
- Readings:
  - Fukuyama, F. (1989). The End of History? *The National Interest*, (16), 3–18. Retrieved August 5, 2024, from <https://www.jstor.org/stable/24027184>
  - Boese, V. A., Lundstedt, M., Morrison, K., Sato, Y., & Lindberg, S. I. (2022). State of the world 2021: Autocratization changing its nature? *Democratization*, 29(6), 983–1013. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13510347.2022.2069751>

Optional: Wuttke, A., Gavras, K., & Schoen, H. (2022). Have Europeans Grown Tired of Democracy? New Evidence from Eighteen Consolidated Democracies, 1981–2018. *British Journal of Political Science*, 52(1), 416–428. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0007123420000149>

## To prepare for next week... II

- Optional: Lindberg, S. I., Coppedge, M., Gerring, J., & Teorell, J. (2014). V-Dem: A New Way to Measure Democracy. *Journal of Democracy*, 25(3), 159–169.  
<https://doi.org/10.1353/jod.2014.0040>
- Optional: Lührmann, A., Tannenberg, M., & Lindberg, S. I. (2018). Regimes of the World (RoW): Opening New Avenues for the Comparative Study of Political Regimes. *Politics and Governance*, 6(1), 60–77.  
<https://doi.org/10.17645/pag.v6i1.1214>
- Optional: Holmberg, S., Rothstein, B., & Nasiritousi, N. (2009). Quality of Government: What You Get. *Annual Review of Political Science*, 12(1), 135–161.  
<https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-polisci-100608-104510>

Thank you for your attention!  
Any further questions?

## Literature I

- Bartels, L. M. (2016, September). *Unequal Democracy: The Political Economy of the New Gilded Age - Second Edition*. Princeton University Press.  
<https://doi.org/10.1515/9781400883363>
- Boese, V. A., Lundstedt, M., Morrison, K., Sato, Y., & Lindberg, S. I. (2022). State of the world 2021: Autocratization changing its nature? *Democratization*, 29(6), 983–1013.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/13510347.2022.2069751>
- Dahl, R. A. (1971). *Polyarchy: Participation and opposition* (Repr.). Yale Univ. Press.
- Fukuyama, F. (1989). The End of History? *The National Interest*, (16), 3–18. Retrieved August 5, 2024, from <https://www.jstor.org/stable/24027184>

## Literature II

Gerring, J. (2012). *Social science methodology: A unified framework* (2nd ed). Cambridge University Press.  
OCLC: ocn775022701.

Holmberg, S., Rothstein, B., & Nasiritousi, N. (2009). Quality of Government: What You Get. *Annual Review of Political Science*, 12(1), 135–161.  
<https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-polisci-100608-104510>

Lindberg, S. I., Coppedge, M., Gerring, J., & Teorell, J. (2014). V-Dem: A New Way to Measure Democracy. *Journal of Democracy*, 25(3), 159–169.  
<https://doi.org/10.1353/jod.2014.0040>

## Literature III

- Lührmann, A., Tannenberg, M., & Lindberg, S. I. (2018). Regimes of the World (RoW): Opening New Avenues for the Comparative Study of Political Regimes. *Politics and Governance*, 6(1), 60–77.  
<https://doi.org/10.17645/pag.v6i1.1214>
- Merkel, W. (2004). Embedded and defective democracies. *Democratization*, 11(5), 33–58.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/13510340412331304598>
- Merkel, W. (2010). *Systemtransformation: eine Einführung in die Theorie und Empirie der Transformationsforschung* (2., überarb. und erw. Aufl). VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften.

## Literature IV

- Morlino, L. (2011, November). *Changes for Democracy. Actors, Structures, Processes*. Oxford University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199572533.001.0001>
- Munck, G. L. (2016). What is democracy? A reconceptualization of the quality of democracy. *Democratization*, 23(1), 1–26. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13510347.2014.918104>
- Pennock, J. R. (2015, March). *Democratic Political Theory*. Princeton University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1515/9781400868469>
- Sartori, G. (1970). Concept Misformation in Comparative Politics\*. *American Political Science Review*, 64(4), 1033–1053. <https://doi.org/10.2307/1958356>
- Schumpeter, J. A. (1942). *Capitalism, socialism and democracy*. Harper Torchbooks.



## Literature V

- Sigman, R., & Lindberg, S. I. (2019). Democracy for All: Conceptualizing and Measuring Egalitarian Democracy. *Political Science Research and Methods*, 7(3), 595–612. <https://doi.org/10.1017/psrm.2018.6>
- Wuttke, A., Gavras, K., & Schoen, H. (2022). Have Europeans Grown Tired of Democracy? New Evidence from Eighteen Consolidated Democracies, 1981–2018. *British Journal of Political Science*, 52(1), 416–428. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0007123420000149>