



## Further reading

Elias, N. (2000) *The Civilizing Process: Sociogenetic and Psychogenetic Investigations* (Oxford: Blackwell 1st edn 1938). The second large volume of this impressive work deals with the 'sociogenesis of the state'.

Lachmann, R. (2010) *States and Power* (Cambridge: Polity Press). A valuable interpretation of many phenomena considered in this chapter, mostly from a perspective at some variance from that adopted here.

Poggi, G. (1978) *The Development of the Modern State: A Sociological Introduction* (Stanford: Stanford University Press). A compact and accessible statement, ranging from the Middle Ages to the contemporary era.

Tilly, C. (ed.) (1975) *The Formation of National States in Western Europe* (Princeton: Princeton University Press). A very influential collection of major contributions to its theme, including its military, fiscal, and economic aspects.

Weber, M. (1994) 'Politics as a Profession and Vocation' (1919), in *Weber: Political Writings*, ed. P. Lassman and R. Speirs (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press) 309–69. A compact but most illuminating and provocative discussion of the nature of politics and the modern state by one of the most significant modern social theorists.



## Web links

<http://www.pipeline.com/~cwa/TYWHome.htm>  
Webpage about the Thirty Years' War which gave rise to the modern states after the Peace of Westphalia (1648).

<http://www.arcaini.com/ITALY/ItalyHistory/ItalianUnification.htm>  
Webpage about Italian unification, independence, and democratization.

<http://www.americancivilwar.com>  
Webpage about the American Civil War.



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[www.oxfordtextbooks.co.uk/orc/caramani4e/](http://www.oxfordtextbooks.co.uk/orc/caramani4e/)



## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> One often speaks, today, of 'failed' states (see Chapter 25).

<sup>2</sup> The same rules of delimitation apply to the sea.

<sup>3</sup> However, they mostly do that without depriving those individuals and bodies of their private resources and their status advantages.

<sup>4</sup> Since not only more significant faculties and responsibilities correspond to higher offices, but also greater material and status rewards, the hierarchical structure we have talked about also constitutes a career system. It is a ladder which office-holders can climb to satisfy their legitimate ambitions.

## CHAPTER 5

## Democracies

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## Reader's guide

Democracy is the most legitimate form of government in our contemporary era, but the meaning of democracy is still highly contested. This chapter explores the defining elements of modern democracy and traces the origins of this form of government. It also describes different models of democracy (presidential and parliamentary, democracies oriented towards consensus or majoritarian rule), and it analyses the conditions—economic and political, domestic and international—that allow some countries to become democratic but preserve others under the rule of dictatorships. It finally discusses the future of democracy, and the challenges that lie ahead for new generations of citizens.



## Introduction

What is democratic rule? Are all democracies equal? Why can some societies achieve democracy while others cannot? How shall democracies evolve in the twenty-first century? These questions shape policy debates throughout the world, from pubs and coffee shops to parliaments and international organizations. These questions defy any simple answers but we cannot ignore them. Democracy is the dominant principle of legitimacy for governments in our historical era, and rulers everywhere—even the most despotic ones—claim democratic credentials as justification for their power.

In this chapter we will address four crucial issues. First, what do we mean by democracy in the field of Comparative Politics? Contemporary democracy is an amalgam of political institutions and practices that originated in different historical periods and regions of the world. Moreover, the term ‘democracy’ describes an ideal as much as the reality of certain forms of government; for this reason, democratic practices are permanently evolving.

Second, we will explore the diversity of democratic regimes. Although all democratic systems share some common characteristics, democracies differ in important ways—and some democracies arguably work better than others. The diversity of this family of regimes has increased over time, as the number of democracies expanded in the late twentieth century. By 1974, only 35 countries in the world (about 26 per cent of all independent states) could consider themselves democratic; by 2014, some 95 countries (57 per cent of all states) displayed democratic characteristics.

The expansion in the number of democracies prompts our third topic: what variables facilitate the **democratization** of dictatorships, and what factors place democracies at risk of becoming authoritarian regimes? The question of regime change—how dictatorships transit into democracy, and vice-versa—connects this chapter with the discussion of authoritarian systems in Chapter 6.

Finally, if the survival of democracy is not guaranteed, we are forced to address the future of our favourite form of government. What are the main problems of contemporary democracy? How can democracy be reformed without being endangered in the process? These are the great challenges for generations to come.

### KEY POINTS

- This chapter will address the meaning of democracy, types of democracy, the causes of democratization, and the future of democracy.
- Democracy is the dominant principle of legitimacy in our historical era.
- The number of democracies in the world expanded in the late twentieth century.

## What is democracy (and who created it)?

The term democracy is used in daily life with multiple meanings. Democracy is, first and foremost, an ideal for social organization, a desired system in which—depending on who is speaking—social equality is pursued, freedoms are treasured, justice is achieved, and people respect each other. ‘Government of the people, by the people, for the people,’ famously asserted US President Abraham Lincoln, commemorating the battle of Gettysburg in 1863. When used in this way, the term becomes an ‘empty signifier,’ a carrier for our normative desires and concerns for the political system. This flexibility in meaning has allowed **social movements** to push the boundaries of democracy for over two hundred years (Markoff 1996). But this expansive use also implies that different people will invoke democracy to highlight different dreams and demands at different times. We shall return to this issue in the last section of the chapter.

There is also a historical meaning, since the term—combining the Greek words for ‘people’ and ‘power’—originated in Athens in the sixth century before the Christian era. Athenian democracy would be a strange form of rule for any modern observer: it was *direct* democracy, in the sense that major decisions were made by citizens meeting at a popular **assembly**; only a very small minority of the city’s population was granted **citizenship** (women, slaves, former slaves, foreigners, and minors were excluded), there was no constitutional protection of individual rights, and all citizens were expected to participate in the assembly. As a result, the system did not scale-up well beyond the size of an independent city, and popular decisions were often arbitrary and inconsistent. Ancient commentators criticized the Athenian regime as the rule of an uninformed mob and argued in favour of ‘mixed’ forms of government combining principles of monarchy, aristocracy, and democracy (an inspiration for later ideas about separation of powers). The term ‘democracy’ thus carried a negative connotation for most educated readers until well into the eighteenth century.

The third and most common usage refers to ‘really existing’ democracies, the political regimes that rule in many contemporary societies. This form of government, which emerged during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, can be best described as a *mass liberal republic*. Modern democracies are built on republican arrangements: most policy decisions are not made directly by citizens, but they are delegated to representative legislatures (Chapter 7) and executive leaders (Chapter 8) who are accountable to the electorate. Moreover, modern democracies are built on the liberal principles of the eighteenth century. Political rights are recognized for all citizens; social and human rights are recognized for non-citizens as well. The government is expected to respect

such rights and to protect individuals when their rights are threatened by other actors, such as criminals or corporations (Chapter 9).

Liberal republics already existed before the industrial era, often under the guise of a constitutional monarchy, to represent the interests of a small aristocratic minority. For example, political scientist Samuel Finer described Great Britain in the eighteenth century as a ‘crowned, nobile, republic’ (Finer 1997: 1358). However, the past two centuries have witnessed an enormous expansion in the scale of political systems—both democratic and non-democratic—to incorporate large segments of the population into the political process. Modern societies achieved this mostly by progressively expanding the right to vote: to men without property, to women, to excluded ethnic groups, and to younger adults. Today, over eight hundred million people are eligible to vote in any Indian election, an impressive feat considering that this number of eligible voters is larger than the total population of Europe and more than two and a half times the population of the United States.

The historical result of this process is the familiar system of government commonly called ‘Western democracy,’ ‘liberal democracy,’ or plainly ‘democracy’ in our daily parlance. As the system evolved during the twentieth century, social scientists struggled to understand its defining characteristics. In 1942, economist Joseph

Schumpeter argued that modern democracy is the ‘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’ (Schumpeter 1947: 269). This definition emphasizing competitive elections has been praised for its simplicity but also criticized for its limited understanding of the democratic process. In 1971, Robert Dahl extended this idea to argue that modern democracy is defined by the combination of open contestation for power and inclusive political participation. Dahl renamed this system as ‘**polyarchy**’ (the government of the many) to distinguish really-existing democracies from any abstract democratic ideal. Dahl argued that this system requires a minimum set of procedures and guarantees to work, namely: (1) freedom of organization, (2) freedom of expression, (3) the right to vote, (4) eligibility for public office, (5) the right of leaders to compete for support, (6) alternative sources of information, (7) free and fair elections, and (8) institutions that make policies dependent on voters’ preferences (Dahl 1971).

Schumpeter’s ‘minimalist’ definition and Dahl’s conception of polyarchy have shaped in one way or another most definitions of democracy currently used in Comparative Politics. Those definitions vary in their details, but they generally acknowledge four principles identified in Box 5.1: free and fair elections, universal



### BOX 5.1 DEFINITION Four defining attributes of modern democracy

1. **Free and fair elections.** National government is exercised by a legislature—parliament, congress, or assembly—and by an executive branch typically led by a prime minister or president. The legislature (at least a significant part of it) is elected by the people, while the head of the government can be elected by the people or selected by the majority in parliament. The electoral process leading to the formation of new governments is recurrent (elections take place every few years), free (candidates are allowed to campaign and voters to participate without intimidation), and fair (votes are counted without fraud, and the government does not create an unequal playing field against the opposition).
2. **Universal participation.** The adult population enjoys the rights to vote and to run for office without exclusions based on income, education, gender, ethnicity, or religion. Modern democracies may exclude some adults from participating based on their place of birth (foreigners are not allowed to vote in most elections) or their criminal record (although many countries allow incarcerated populations to vote). Moreover, all democracies exclude minors from participating. Standards of inclusion have expanded over time: most ‘democracies’ did not allow women to vote until well into the twentieth century, and the age for active citizenship has declined over time from 21 to 18, and even 16 years in many countries.
3. **Civil liberties.** Democratic governments do not commit gross or systematic human rights violations against their citizens, do not censor critical voices in the mass media, and do not ban the organization of legitimate political parties or interest groups (with ‘legitimate’ understood in a broad sense). Modern democracies usually codify citizen rights and government authority in a written constitution, and rely on an independent judiciary and other institutions of accountability (such as constitutional courts, independent comptrollers, and investigative agencies) to protect citizens’ rights against government encroachment.
4. **Responsible government.** Once elected, civilian authorities can adopt policies unconstrained by the monarch, military officers, foreign governments, religious authorities, or other unelected powers. To protect civil liberties, some decisions may be overturned by a constitutional court. Interest groups intervene in the policy-making process, but executive leaders respond for their actions to the elected representatives in the legislature, and both executive leaders and elected representatives are ultimately responsible to voters for their policies.

Source: Adapted from Mainwaring *et al.* (2007).



participation, respect for civil liberties, and responsible government. All conditions must be simultaneously present for a country to be called democratic; if one of the conditions is conspicuously absent, the political system will fail—for one or another reason—to meet contemporary standards of democratic rule.

The four general conditions presented in Box 5.1 may be implemented in practice through diverse institutional arrangements. Two implications follow from this. The first one is that, if we look at their specific features, modern democracies can be quite different from each other. This topic will be explored in the next section of the chapter. The second implication is that no society has truly ‘invented’ modern democracy. Existing democracies combine institutions that originated in different countries and historical periods. John Markoff (1999) has shown that democratic innovations often emerge in peripheral countries that are not the great powers of the era. For example, the idea that political parties are necessary for democratic life—and not just selfish factions—probably gained root in the United States by the early 1820s. The requirement that voting is conducted in secret using a standard ballot was first adopted by British colonies in Victoria and South Australia in the mid-1850s. By 1825, most states in the US allowed all white men to vote without imposing property requirements; Switzerland eliminated income requirements for voters at the national level in its 1848 constitution, and several Latin American nations did so during the nineteenth century. New Zealand was the first democracy to guarantee women the right to vote in national elections by 1893. These innovations were progressively embraced by other societies, and today they are part of our standard repertoire of democratic practices.

## How do we know if a country is democratic?

A working definition of democracy is crucial for research in Comparative Politics. We may want to establish, for example, if the economy grows faster in democracies or in dictatorships, if democracies invest more in health or education than authoritarian regimes, or if democratic countries are less likely to experience terrorism or other forms of political violence. These questions require an operational definition of democracy precise enough to classify specific countries as we observe them during particular historical periods. Such definition should be able to capture the traits described in Box 5.1 without conflating the concept of democracy with the outcomes that we want to explain (i.e., the ‘dependent variables’; see Chapter 3), such as economic prosperity, social welfare, or political stability.

Some scholars have approached this task by creating a *dichotomous* measure of democracy. Przeworski *et al.* (2000), for example, identified four basic features of

democracy (the chief executive must be elected, the legislature must be elected, multiple parties must compete for office, and alternation in power must be possible), and collected information to document these features in 141 countries every year between 1950 and 1990. Countries matching these four conditions by 31 December were classified as democracies during that year, and those missing at least one condition were classified as dictatorships.

Most scholars, however, have embraced an understanding of democracy as a *continuous* variable. Because the four conditions introduced in Box 5.1 can be present to different degrees, societies may become more or less democratic over time. Implicit in this approach is the idea of a continuum ranging between situations of blatant dictatorship, on one pole of the spectrum, and full democracy, on the other, with several intermediate stages (e.g., ‘semi-democracies’) in between those extremes. Some **threshold** along this imaginary continuum marks the point above which countries can be considered fully democratic.

Several research projects have created continuous measures of democracy for multiple countries over time. The Polity project (initiated by Ted Robert Gurr in the 1960s) provides an annual score ranging between –10 (institutionalized autocracy) and 10 (institutionalized democracy) for all countries with a population greater than half a million since 1800. Freedom House, an organization based in New York, has created yearly ratings for Civil Liberties and Political Rights for 195 countries and 15 territories since 1972. Each rating ranges between 1 (most democratic) and 7 (least democratic). More recently, the Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem) project, based at the University of Gothenburg in Sweden and the University of Notre Dame in the United States, has provided annual measures for different understandings of democracy (Electoral, Liberal, Egalitarian, Participatory, Deliberative) ranging between 0 (least democratic) and 1 (most democratic) for 173 countries and territories since 1900. The information generated by these projects is open to the public and easily available online.

Although the specific definitions of democracy vary in each case, these projects follow a common strategy: they disaggregate the meaning of democracy into sub-components or dimensions (e.g., civil liberties and political rights), they score country-years on each dimension based on the information provided by country experts (Freedom House and V-Dem) or trained coders (Polity), and then combine the information for these components to create an aggregate democracy score for each country-year (Munck and Verkuilen 2002). This approach is particularly useful to understand controversial countries: it is easy to classify extreme cases such as Switzerland or North Korea using a dichotomous scale, but complex cases such as Hungary under Viktor Orbán, Turkey under Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, or Venezuela under Hugo Chávez resist a binary classification and require a more nuanced understanding of democracy.

## Hybrid regimes

To conceptualize political regimes that fall ‘somewhere in between’ full democracy and overt dictatorship, scholars have used a wide range of categories. For example, based on its ratings for Civil Liberties and Political Rights, Freedom House classifies countries every year as Free, Not Free, and Partly Free.<sup>1</sup> David Collier and Steven Levitsky identified hundreds of diminished subtypes employed by scholars to describe imperfect democracies, labels such as ‘oligarchical democracy’, ‘restrictive democracy’, or ‘tutelary democracy’ (Collier and Levitsky 1997). Diminished subtypes paradoxically add an adjective (e.g., ‘oligarchical’) to indicate that one of the defining attributes of democracy (e.g., universal suffrage) is weak or partly missing.

Some of these labels refer to regimes that generally meet the basic attributes of democracy presented in Box 5.1, but display a distinctive weakness. For example, Guillermo O’Donnell coined the term delegative democracy to describe a type of democratic regime in which the executive branch concentrates excessive power and is hardly accountable to other branches of government such as the legislature or the judiciary. ‘Delegative democracies rest on the premise that whoever wins election to the presidency is thereby entitled to govern as he or she sees fit, constrained only by the hard facts of existing power relations and by a constitutionally limited term of office’ (O’Donnell 1994: 59). Other labels refer to ‘democracies’ in which some constitutive attributes are so weak that it is dubious whether the regime truly meets the requirements presented in Box 5.1. For instance, Fareed Zakaria used the term illiberal democracy to describe regimes that display multi-party elections and universal participation, but generally fail to respect civil liberties and the rule of law (Zakaria 2007).<sup>2</sup>

### KEY POINTS

- References to modern democracy, intended to describe a contemporary form of government, must be distinguished from normative uses of the term intended to denote an ideal and from references to government in classical Athens.
- Empirical definitions of democracy used in Comparative Politics usually connote free and fair elections, universal suffrage, civil liberties, and responsible government.
- No single society created democracy; representative and participatory institutions emerged in multiple places and disseminated during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.
- The most commonly used measures of democracy—by Freedom House, Polity, and the V-Dem projects—provide yearly scores for a large number of countries.
- Defective democracies are often characterized with labels such as delegative democracy or illiberal democracy.

## Types of democracy

In contrast to the ‘diminished’ subtypes discussed in the previous section, fully democratic regimes always display the four attributes presented in Box 5.1. However, the fact that all democracies share these fundamental characteristics does not mean that all democracies look alike. Democratic systems can be quite different in many regards. What are their main differences? Are some democracies *better* than others?

### Parliamentary or presidential?

The most important difference among democracies involves the distinction between parliamentary and presidential systems. **Parliamentary democracies** emerged from the historical transformation of absolutist monarchies into democratic regimes. Their characteristic features are:

1. Citizens vote to elect members of the legislature (parliament), and the majority in parliament in turn determines who becomes the head of the government (i.e., the prime minister or chancellor). If no party has a majority in parliament, multiple parties must form a coalition to appoint the new government. This usually requires that several parties craft an agreement about future policies and share the ministerial positions in the cabinet (see Chapter 8).<sup>3</sup>
2. The prime minister and other ministers in the cabinet are, in most parliamentary systems, members of parliament as well. Even though there is a clear separation of functions between the executive and the legislature, there is no explicit separation of powers among these individuals.
3. Because parliamentary democracies emerged from the transformation of monarchies, there is a separation between the head of the government (the prime minister) and the head of state (the monarch). The principle of responsible government (Box 5.1) implies that the elected prime minister commands the administration; the political role of monarchs in modern parliamentary democracies is weak and oriented towards the preservation of national unity. Although Belgium, Japan, the Netherlands, Spain, the United Kingdom, and other democracies officially preserve—and love—their monarchs to this day, these regimes are effectively republics in disguise. Some parliamentary countries, such as Germany, India, and Italy, have adopted an explicitly republican constitution and appoint a president to perform the duties of head of state. This president is elected indirectly, by parliament or by an electoral college. For instance, the head of state is appointed by a college formed by the lower house of parliament and delegations of the states in



Germany, by the two houses of parliament and state legislatures in India, and by both houses of parliament and delegations of the regions in Italy. Irrespective of the election procedure, these presidents are politically weak figures.

4. Although parliamentary systems are mandated to call elections at certain intervals (for instance, every five years in the United Kingdom), an election can take place sooner than expected if the prime minister clashes with parliament. In agreement with the head of state, the prime minister can in most cases request the dissolution of parliament and call for a new election in the middle of the term. Alternatively, the majority in parliament can support a vote of no-confidence against the government, forcing the prime minister and the cabinet to resign. If the government considers a particular policy crucial for its legislative agenda, it can also present a motion of confidence to parliament. If parliament votes against the government's motion of confidence, the prime minister and the cabinet must resign; parliament must then appoint a new administration or the head of state must schedule a new election.

**Presidential democracy** originated in the United States' efforts to create a continental republican government in 1787. This constitutional model spread to Latin America in the nineteenth century and to parts of Africa (e.g., Ghana, Zambia) and Asia (South Korea, the Philippines) in the twentieth century. Under presidential systems:

1. Voters participate in separate electoral processes to elect members of the legislature (congress) and the head of the government (president). These elections may happen concurrently on the same day, but they are separate contests. Popular votes cast for congress members are typically tallied and aggregated at the local level, to elect representatives for particular districts; votes cast for the president are typically tallied and aggregated at the national level, to elect the country's chief executive.<sup>4</sup>
2. The president and (in most presidential regimes) the members of the cabinet are not members of congress. This creates a strict **separation of powers** between the two elected branches. Coordination among the executive and the legislature is achieved only to the extent that the president and some members of congress belong to the same political party, or if the president is able to form a coalition with members of other parties.
3. The elected president plays simultaneously the role of head of the government and head of state.
4. Once the president and the members of congress are elected, they are expected to serve in office for a fixed period until the end of their terms. The president has no constitutional power to dissolve congress and

congress cannot issue a vote of no-confidence against the president.<sup>5</sup> Executive re-election is usually constrained. In the United States, for example, the president's term lasts four years, with a single possibility of immediate re-election. Representatives (members of the lower house of congress) last in office for two years, and senators for six years, with the possibility of indefinite re-election. In Uruguay, the president's term lasts five years but immediate re-election is banned—the person may return to the presidency only after a period out of office. Uruguayan representatives and senators are elected for a period of five years, concurrent with the president's term. Legislative re-election is allowed, but while more than 80 per cent of incumbent US congress members return to office in any given election, only 50 to 70 per cent of Uruguayan legislators are typically reelected (Altman and Chasquetti 2005).

Some countries have institutional arrangements that blend elements of presidentialism and parliamentarism. **Semi-presidential regimes** combine a directly elected president who serves in office for a fixed term and a prime minister who is responsible to parliament (Elgie 1999). Such arrangements are common in Western Europe (e.g., Austria, France, Ireland, Portugal), Eastern Europe (e.g., Bulgaria, Poland, Romania, Turkey since 2007, Ukraine), Africa (e.g., Cape Verde, Mali), and Asia (e.g., Mongolia, South Korea, Taiwan). However, the powers accorded to the president in such regimes vary considerably. Some semi-presidential regimes, such as Austria or Ireland, have very weak presidents and effectively operate as **parliamentary systems**. Others, like South Korea or Taiwan, grant considerable authority to the head of state and effectively function as presidential systems (Schleiter and Morgan-Jones 2009).

The literature in Comparative Politics sometimes refers to these as hybrid constitutions, but this concept of 'hybridity', used to depict a democracy that is in part parliamentary and in part presidential, must be clearly distinguished from the concept of hybrid regimes discussed in the previous section, intended to describe regimes that are in part democratic and in part authoritarian. Hybrid constitutions are discussed more extensively in Chapter 8.

Which constitutional arrangement is better for democracy? Not surprisingly, people disagree about this. About two decades ago, Juan Linz argued that presidential constitutions make the political process 'rather rigid'. Three institutional features of presidentialism are, in this view, dysfunctional for democracy. First, presidential elections are winner-take-all contests in which the prize (the president's seat) cannot be shared by multiple parties. As a result, electoral competition encourages political polarization. Second, because the president simultaneously serves as head of state and head of the government, he or she may claim to be the only true representative of the



### BOX 5.2 FOR AND AGAINST Some arguments for and against presidentialism

Characteristics of presidentialism	Advantages	Disadvantages
The head of the government is elected by a popular election.	Voters have greater choice.	Winner-takes-all election induces political polarization.
President is head of state and head of the government.	Voters have more clarity about who controls the executive. Better government accountability.	President may adopt 'plebiscitarian' style and claim to be the only true representative of the people.
President and legislators have fixed terms in office.	Legislators have greater independence; they do not fear dissolution of parliament.	Dual legitimacy; executive-legislative deadlock.

Sources: Elgie (2008); Linz (1990a); Mainwaring and Shugart (1997)

people, embrace a 'plebiscitarian' style of government, and dismiss all criticisms by the opposition. Finally, because the president and congress members are both elected independently and serve for fixed terms in office, disagreements between the two branches of government may lead to paralysis in the policy-making process. Without the possibility of anticipated elections or a vote of no-confidence, presidential constitutions create a system of dual legitimacy (Linz 1990).

Challenging this view, Scott Mainwaring and Matthew Shugart argued that, despite some of these problems, presidential systems offer important advantages to voters. Presidentialism gives citizens the choice to support different parties in the legislative and in the presidential election. It also strengthens government responsibility (see Box 5.1). Many parliamentary regimes have coalition governments in which responsibility is shared by multiple parties and therefore blurred across party lines. In a presidential regime, where the head of the government is also head of state, by contrast, voters clearly know which party is in charge of the executive branch, and they can reward the party or vote against it at the next election depending on its performance in office. Finally, legislators have greater independence under presidentialism. Because presidential regimes do not have confidence votes, legislators of the ruling party may oppose the president's policies without fearing the fall of the administration. Similarly, legislators of the opposition may challenge the president's policies without fearing the dissolution of congress (Mainwaring and Shugart 1997). Box 5.2 provides a comparison of the arguments in favour and against presidential constitutions.

#### Majoritarian or consensus?

A second set of differences among democratic systems involves the distinction between majoritarian and consensus democracies. This classification originates in the

work of Arend Lijphart (1984, 1999, 2012), who argues that some democratic regimes are organized to facilitate majority rule, while others are designed to protect minorities (and thus promote decision-making by consensus). Such different conceptions of the democratic process effectively translate into unique constitutional features. For example, **majoritarian democracies**:

1. Adopt a disproportional electoral system for the election of legislators. Voters in the United Kingdom or in the United States, for instance, elect only one legislator (the candidate with the largest number of votes) to represent each district. Such an electoral system discourages voters from supporting smaller parties, and it makes it easier for the largest party to win a majority of seats in the parliament or congress, even when the largest party does not win a majority of the vote at the national level. For example, in the 2015 British election the Conservative Party obtained 37 per cent of the national vote and 51 per cent of the seats in parliament. Chapter 10 provides a more detailed explanation of how majoritarian electoral systems work.
2. Unwilling to 'waste' their votes on smaller parties with little chance of winning, voters will concentrate their support on the two largest parties, sustaining a **two-party system** (see Chapter 13).
3. Under a two-party system, it is very likely that the party winning the election will have a majority in the legislature. Moreover, if the country has a parliamentary constitution, the majority party will have no need to form a coalition in order to appoint the new government. Therefore, governments in majoritarian democracies are typically run by single-party cabinets (see Chapter 8).
4. If the executive branch is controlled by a single party which also has a majority in parliament (or congress), and if the head of the government is the main leader of this party, it is likely that the executive branch will



dominate the legislature due to the influence of party leadership on most legislators.

In addition to these traits that define the balance of power between the executive branch and the legislative parties, majoritarian democracies also have distinctive characteristics that define the relationship between the central government (representing the national majorities) and the local governments (representing sub-national minorities):

- Majoritarian democracies tend to have unitary and centralized government, such that the institutions representing the majority at the national level will decide on policies at the local or regional level (see Chapters 11 and 15).
- Because local governments are weak and unable to demand equal representation in the legislature, a federal senate is typically not included in the constitution. Thus, legislatures are more likely to be **unicameral** (Chapter 7).
- Because the will of the majority at the national level is expected to define the organization of government at the national and the local levels, the constitution is flexible—that is, relatively easy to change. An extreme example of constitutional flexibility, the United Kingdom does not even have a written constitution; legislative majorities can therefore eliminate or create new institutions—such as the Supreme Court of the United Kingdom, inaugurated in 2009—through a simple act of parliament.
- Since the constitution is flexible, legislative majorities are rarely constrained by the legal interpretation of the constitution exercised by courts. Majoritarian democracies typically have limited **judicial review** (see Chapter 9).<sup>6</sup>

In contrast to this set of arrangements, **consensus democracies** are designed to protect the power of partisan and regional minorities. Therefore, they:

- Adopt **proportional electoral systems** that translate the percentage of votes obtained by each party into a very similar proportion of seats in the legislature. For example, in the 2014 Belgian election the incumbent Socialist Party obtained about 13 per cent of the national vote and gained 15 per cent of the seats in the lower house of parliament.
- Because votes count even when citizens support a small party, electoral rules will sustain a **multi-party system**. For instance, even though the outcome of the 2015 Swiss election was described by the media as a 'landslide victory' for the Swiss People's Party, more than ten parties won seats in the lower house of the Swiss Federal Assembly. The successful Swiss People's Party captured only 29 per cent of the vote at the national level, and about 32 per cent of the seats in the lower house.

- With a large number of parties represented in the legislature, it is unlikely that any single organization will control a majority of the seats. In countries with parliamentary constitutions, several political parties will need to form a coalition to appoint a new government. And in order to achieve broad consensus about future policies, these government coalitions will often include a large number of partners—even small party blocs that are not strictly necessary to form a legislative majority.
- Since coalition governments depend on the agreement of all partners in the legislature to preserve their unity and avoid a vote of no-confidence, consensus democracies provide a balanced relation between the executive and the legislature.

These features make consensus democracy the best option for plural societies, nations divided along ethnic, linguistic, or religious lines. In order to protect regional minorities from the dictates of nation-wide majorities, consensus democracies also:

- Have a federal system with decentralized government, such that local governments (e.g., states in the United States, cantons in Switzerland) enjoy extensive authority to shape policies at regional level.
- Since local communities demand balanced representation in the national legislature, the constitution usually provides for an upper house, such as the United States Senate, the German Bundesrat, or the Swiss Council of States. Thus, legislatures are likely to be **bicameral**.
- To guarantee the autonomy of local communities embedded in the constitution, constitutional reforms require large majorities (e.g., two-thirds of the votes in the legislature) and additional ratification (e.g., public support in a referendum, or approval by a majority of state legislatures). Constitutional rigidity thus discourages national majorities to alter the constitution without extensive consultation.
- Since the constitution is rigid, proper interpretation of the constitution is crucial for the political process. Consensus democracies typically have powerful Supreme Courts or Constitutional Tribunals that exercise strong **judicial review**.

Box 5.3 summarizes the main attributes of majoritarian and consensus democracies. These are ideal types, never found in pure form among really-existing regimes. Real democracies usually involve some combination of majoritarian and consensus elements. The United States, for example, looks majoritarian regarding the first set of features, but it operates as a consensus democracy for the second set of features. Some countries, however, are very close to one of the two ideal types. The United Kingdom generally matches the characteristics of a majoritarian democracy—in fact, this model is also discussed in the



### BOX 5.3 ZOOM-IN Majoritarian and consensus democracies

	Majoritarian	Consensus
Electoral system	Disproportional	Proportional representation
Party system	Two-party	Multi-party
Government	Single-party	Coalitions
Inter-branch balance	Executive dominance	Balanced power
Interest representation	Pluralism	Corporatism
Local government	Unitary	Federal
Legislature	Unicameral	Bicameral
Constitution	Flexible	Rigid
Judiciary	Weak or no judicial review	Strong judicial review
Central bank	Dependent on executive	Independent
Optimal for	Homogeneous societies	Plural societies

Source: based on Lijphart (2012).

specialized literature as the Westminster model of democracy, in a reference to the palace housing the British parliament. By contrast, Belgium and Switzerland are very close to the consensus model.

As in the case of parliamentary and presidential constitutions, scholars have debated the advantages and disadvantages of these models of political organization. Majoritarian democracies are *decisive*: they can make policy changes quickly and effectively, but they are potentially volatile, since policies will shift with the whims of the majority. Consensus democracies, by contrast, are *resolute*: they will agree on major policies and sustain them based on broad agreements (Cox and McCubbins 2001). Decades ago, scholars feared that democratic systems with too many parties would be prone to political unrest, and thus favoured the two-party systems characteristic of majoritarian democracies or at least moderate forms of multipartism (Sartori 1976). More recently, George Tsebelis argued that institutions designed to empower minorities create multiple 'veto players' and encourage policy paralysis (Tsebelis 2002). However, Arend Lijphart has argued that consensus democracies perform at least equally well, and often much better than majoritarian systems when we consider macroeconomic outcomes, social unrest, voter turnout, women's participation in politics, and other indicators of democratic quality (Lijphart 2012).

#### KEY POINTS

- Parliamentarism involves the election of the chief executive by parliament, separation between head of government and head of state, and the possibility of a vote of no-confidence or anticipated elections.

- Presidentialism allows for popular election of the chief executive, a unified head of state and government, and fixed terms in office.
- Majoritarian democracies involve disproportional elections, two-party systems, and single-party governments; unitary government, unicameralism, flexible constitutions, and weak judicial review.
- Consensus democracies involve proportional elections, multi-party systems, and broad coalition governments; federalism, bicameralism, rigid constitutions, and strong judicial review.
- Scholars have articulated arguments in favour of parliamentarism over presidentialism, and of consensus over majoritarian systems, but there is no agreement regarding the 'best' form of democracy.

### Why some countries have democracy and others do not

For many people in the world today, the fundamental question is not what kind of democracy is better, but how to achieve any democracy at all. About half of the world's population still lives under regimes that cannot be considered democratic. This begs an important question: what factors facilitate the process of democratization? How can democracy be established and preserved? For scientific purposes, this issue can be disaggregated into two separate analytical problems. First, countries that suffer a dictatorship may, under the right circumstances, adopt a democratic regime. We call this process a *transition* to democracy. Second, countries that have a



troubled democratic regime may, in unfortunate circumstances, slide back into dictatorship. We call this process a democratic *breakdown*.<sup>7</sup>

This analytic distinction is relevant whether we treat democracy as a continuous or a discrete variable. If we conceptualize political regimes as located in a continuum between full authoritarianism and full democracy, a transition means ‘moving up’ along this continuum, while a breakdown means ‘sliding back’ from the democratic into the authoritarian region. If we conceptualize regime types in a dichotomous way (democracy vs dictatorship), dictatorships constitute a set of political regimes exposed to the probability of democratic transition, while democracies constitute a set of regimes exposed to the risk of breakdown. Explaining the survival of a democratic regime is equivalent to understanding why a breakdown does *not* occur.

No single explanation can account for why some countries enjoy democracy while others do not. In general, theories seeking to explain the causes of democracy—and its downfall—have emphasized four types of variables: structural (social and economic) factors, institutional conditions, the role of political actors (leaders, organizations, and social movements), and international forces.<sup>8</sup> Some theoretical explanations discussed in this section claim to account for transitions as well as breakdowns, while others only seek to explain one of the two outcomes.

### Structural factors

Among social and economic explanations, two have received distinctive attention among scholars. The first one relates to the role of **economic development** as a precondition for democratization. In a classic article published in 1959, sociologist Seymour Martin Lipset claimed that ‘the more well-to-do a nation, the greater the chances that it will sustain democracy’ (Lipset 1959: 75). Lipset was perhaps the most influential of modernization theorists, a group of scholars that emphasized how the social transformations produced by long-term economic development—transformations leading to better living standards, greater urbanization, higher levels of literacy and technical education, the emergence of a middle class, a greater role of industrial activities vis-à-vis traditional agriculture—create conditions that facilitate the emergence of modern democratic politics. Later scholars seeking to test this hypothesis found a strong correlation between economic development and levels of democracy (Cutright 1963; Jackman 1973; Needler 1968), a correlation which is mostly driven by the fact that wealthy countries almost always have democratic regimes. By contrast, poor countries can be democratic or authoritarian—although very poor nations have a greater propensity towards authoritarianism. This pattern is depicted in Figure 5.1, which plots country-years

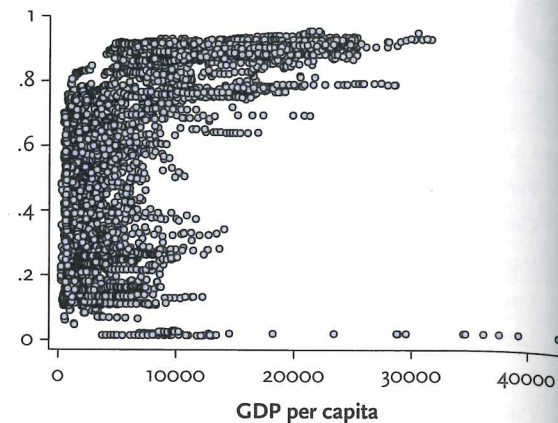


Figure 5.1 Electoral democracy and per capita gross domestic product, 1960–2014

Source: V-Dem Project (v. 5): <https://v-dem.net/en/>.

between 1960 and 2014 according to Per-capita Gross Domestic Product (in the horizontal axis) and V-Dem's Electoral Democracy Score (ranging between 0 and 1).

Figure 5.2 noticeably displays a few countries with annual incomes above \$10,000 dollars per capita which are surprisingly undemocratic (with values close to zero in the vertical axis). These points in the plot correspond to Qatar and Saudi Arabia, major hydrocarbons exporters in the Middle East, for several years after the oil boom of 1973. Michael Ross argues that authoritarian rulers can employ extraordinary revenues from oil exports to expand patronage, reduce taxation, and strengthen repressive security forces, preventing challenges from democratic groups (Ross 2001). In turn Kevin Morrison claims that oil revenues stabilize any regime, democratic or authoritarian, because they minimize the need to collect unpopular taxes (Morrison 2014).

Already during the heyday of modernization theory in the 1960s, some scholars questioned the optimistic view linking development and democracy. Samuel Huntington warned that, in the absence of solid institutions, fast social and economic transformations can cause political turmoil and violence (Huntington 1968); in turn, Barrington Moore noted that in some countries modernization produced fascist or communist dictatorships (Moore 1966). More recently Przeworski *et al.* claimed that the correlation between development and democracy is not driven by a greater rate of *transitions* among wealthy dictatorships, but by a low rate of *breakdowns* among wealthy democracies. In other terms, authoritarian regimes may democratize for a number of reasons, but once democracy is established in a wealthy country, it is very unlikely to backslide into authoritarian rule (Przeworski *et al.* 2000). Moreover, most economists argue that this correlation reflects the reverse causal relationship: development does not cause democracy, but better institutions facilitate economic growth (Acemoglu *et al.* 2008).

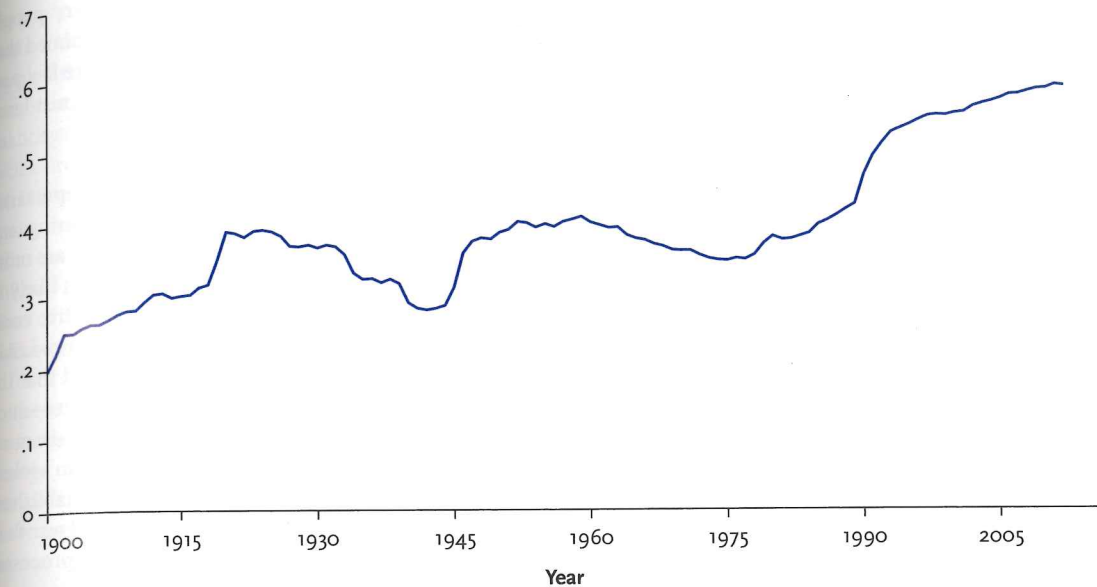


Figure 5.2 Average electoral democracy index worldwide, 1900–2014

Source: data from V-Dem Project (v.5) <https://v-dem.net/en/>.

A second structural condition presumed to influence democratization is the level of social inequality. Proponents of this theory assert that in societies where wealth is very unequally distributed, economic elites resist democratization because democratically elected governments will redistribute income in favour of the poor. The reason for this expectation is that, if a majority of voters are poor, they should demand redistributive policies—that is, higher taxes for the rich and more generous social policies for the poor—in exchange for their electoral support. Based on these assumptions, Carles Boix has argued that, in dictatorships with high levels of inequality, transitions to democracy will be unlikely because powerful elites will resist them. And if democracy is ever established, a democratic breakdown will be likely unless wealthy elites can avoid taxes by taking their assets out of the country (Boix 2003). In a more sophisticated argument, Daron Acemoglu and James Robinson claim that transitions to democracy are unlikely in dictatorships that are highly unequal, because wealthy elites fear democracy, and in those that display very low levels of income inequality, because the poor do not push for democratization (Acemoglu and Robinson 2006).

These arguments have faced criticism for being excessively simplistic. Land inequality, which empowers landowners in the countryside, may have very different effects on democracy than income inequality, which sometimes results from processes of economic modernization (Ansell and Samuels 2014). Moreover, not all dictatorships favour the rich, and not all democracies favour the poor (Levitsky and Mainwaring 2006). Consider, for example, the Soviet Union, Mao Zedong's

China, or Fidel Castro's Cuba. Although undemocratic, those regimes redistributed wealth extensively in favour of the poor. By contrast, even though some democracies have reduced social disparities in the developing world (Huber and Stephens 2012), income inequality has been growing among advanced industrial democracies since the 1970s (Piketty 2014).

### Institutions

The nature of some democratic institutions may also facilitate authoritarian backsliding. Almost three decades ago, Juan Linz argued that presidential democracies are more likely to break down than parliamentary ones because presidential elections encourage political polarization, foster a ‘plebiscitarian’ style of government, and facilitate deadlock between the executive and the legislature (see Box 5.2) (Linz 1990a). Scholars testing this hypothesis with statistical data found that, indeed, presidential systems face a greater risk of breakdown than parliamentary ones (Stepan and Skach 1993). But other studies qualified this finding by noting that not all presidential regimes are equally exposed to the risk of authoritarian reversion. They argued that presidential democracies are more fragile when the constitution gives presidents greater powers over legislation, discouraging negotiations with congress (Shugart and Carey 1992); when the party system is fragmented, such that the president's party is consistently unable to have a majority in congress (Mainwaring 1993); and when military officers have a tradition of political intervention (Cheibub 2007).



Just like some democratic institutions may produce fragile democracies, some authoritarian institutions may also produce fragile dictatorships. Military regimes are more likely to democratize than other types of dictatorship because military officers—unless they anticipate trials for human rights violations—can always return to the barracks and pursue a military career after civilian rulers regain power. Moreover, generals want to preserve military unity and often dislike the factionalism introduced in the armed forces by the exercise of day-to-day government (Geddes 2003). By contrast, authoritarian regimes with stronger ‘representative’ institutions, such as political parties or legislatures, create a stronger base of mass support, coordinate the ambitions of authoritarian elites, and delay transitions to democracy (Gandhi 2010; Magaloni 2006; Svobik 2012).

### Actors and agency

Theories based on structural factors or institutional conditions can offer frustrating lessons for advocates of democracy. Structural factors like economic modernization or income inequality change slowly and over the long run; political institutions can be modified by constitutional reforms and other forms of human action, but institutions tend to be quite enduring and change at a slow pace (Krasner 1984; Mahoney and Thelen 2010). However, these conditions cannot fully explain the dynamics and the timing of regime change. Within the boundaries imposed by structures and institutions, regime change is ultimately triggered by political actors exercising moral choices—that is, agency.

The role of leaders, organizations, and social movements in democratic transitions has been a matter of scholarly concern for decades. Almost fifty years ago, Dankwart Rustow claimed that democracy emerges when leaders of contending factions realize that it is impossible to impose their views unilaterally, and they voluntarily establish an institutional arrangement for sharing power like the one described in Box 5.1 (Rustow 1970). In a similar vein, O’Donnell and Schmitter noted that transitions to democracy occur when the coalition of actors supporting an authoritarian regime faces internal divisions, and democratic leaders engage in a series of pacts to strengthen the project represented by a democratic coalition (O’Donnell and Schmitter 1986).

Seeking to understand the breakdown of democratic regimes, Juan Linz argued that democracies become easy targets of authoritarian forces when moderate leaders abdicate their responsibilities and let ‘disloyal’ politicians—those who use the rules of democracy to pursue authoritarian goals—polarize the electorate (Linz 1978). A similar conclusion was reached by Nancy Bermeo, who showed that social conflict and polarization preceding democratic breakdowns in Europe and Latin America

were driven by political elites, not by ordinary people (Bermeo 2003). In turn, Giovanni Capoccia claimed that democracy survived in inter-war Europe where key parties supported a legal strategy to repress extremist leaders and to incorporate their followers to democratic life (Capoccia 2005).

Recent works have also emphasized the importance of political actors and their choices. Mainwaring and Pérez-Liñán showed that authoritarian regimes are more likely to democratize, and democracies are less likely to collapse, when political leaders express normative commitments to democracy (Mainwaring and Pérez-Liñán 2013). In turn, Chenoweth and Stephan argued that the use of nonviolent strategies by social movements—such as protests, boycotts, and civil disobedience—is more likely to trigger a transition to democracy than violent resistance against authoritarian rule. Once established, the new regime will be less likely to suffer a civil war than democracies emerging from violent transition processes (Chenoweth and Stephan 2012).

### International forces

Explanations based on structural factors, institutions, or local actors focus on domestic variables to understand regime change. But some important forces driving (or hindering) the emergence and survival of democracy originate outside of the country. Chapter 25 shows that the United States, the European Union, and some new democracies such as Poland or the Czech Republic have been active promoters of democracy across the world in recent years.

There is a simple way to visualize the contribution of international factors in processes of democratization. Figure 5.2 shows the average level of democracy for all independent countries in the world between 1900 and 2014, using V-Dem’s Electoral Democracy Index. The series show that the average level of democracy in the world has grown since 1900, but not at a constant pace. During some historical periods consecutive countries adopt democratic practices, and worldwide levels of democracy grow considerably in a relatively short span. In other historical periods, democracy recedes concurrently in multiple places, and the global average declines.

Decades ago, Samuel Huntington described historical cycles of democratic expansion as ‘waves’ of democratization (Huntington 1991). At least three such waves are visible in Figure 5.2. The first one started in the nineteenth century (although data for the figure is available from 1900), when North American, most Western European, and some South American and Pacific countries embraced democratic principles, and lasted until about 1920, when European democracies confronted the threat of fascism. The second wave took off at the end of World War II, when most of Western

Europe re-established democratic practices, India became independent, and some Latin American societies toppled their dictators. It lasted until about 1960, when democracies in Latin America and other regions were challenged by military intervention and fragile democracies broke down in Africa. The third wave of democratization started slowly in the mid-1970s, as Portugal, Spain, and Greece overcame their dictatorships; it took off in the 1980s, as Latin American countries overcame military rule; and accelerated in the 1990s, when the decline of the Soviet Union allowed for democratization in Eastern Europe and democracy spread to important parts of Africa and Asia.

These ‘waves’ of democratization are hard to explain if we focus exclusively on domestic explanations for regime change. Multiple countries would have to experience similar changes in their internal conditions simultaneously (e.g., changes in levels of economic development, income inequality, institutions, or actors’ orientations) to account for convergent patterns of regime change in a short historical period. Because countries—even those located in the same geographic region—can be quite different, this is a rather implausible explanation for most waves of democratization.

A more plausible explanation is that democratization in one country will influence the perceptions and expectations of actors in other countries, triggering democratic ‘contagion’. Several studies have documented processes of democratic diffusion among neighbouring countries or even across geographic regions (Brinks and Coppedge 2006; Gleditsch 2002; Wejnert 2014).<sup>9</sup>

External actors can play important roles in domestic democratization in several ways. Jon Pevehouse has documented that regional organizations, such as the Organization of American States, can oppose authoritarian reversions and promote democracy ‘from above’ (Pevehouse 2005). Finkel *et al.* established that wealthy democracies can promote democratization through foreign aid programmes oriented towards this purpose (Finkel *et al.* 2007). Chapter 25 addresses international support for democracy in greater detail.

However, it is important to keep in mind that external influences ultimately operate through domestic coalitions. John Markoff has shown that social movements play a key role in the process of democratic diffusion (Markoff 1996). Kurt Weyland warns that successful movements against dictators may spread to other countries very fast, but they fail when there are no political organizations able to direct (and moderate) their struggle. This partly explains the disappointing outcomes of the ‘Arab Spring’ in the Middle East after 2011 (Weyland 2014). In the end, external influences can have limited impact in the absence of domestic actors committed to foster a democratic transformation (Mainwaring and Pérez-Liñán 2013).

### KEY POINTS

- To understand the presence of democracy in some countries (and its absence in others) we need to account for the establishment of democracy (democratic transitions) and its survival (i.e., avoidance of democratic breakdowns).
- Structural explanations: modernization theory claims that economic development promotes democratization; theories of inequality underscore that social inequities hinder it.
- Institutional explanations: Critics of presidentialism argue that presidential democracies are more likely to break down than parliamentary ones. Students of authoritarian regimes claim that dictatorships with parties and legislatures are more resilient than military regimes.
- Political actors: Individuals and organizations exercise agency in the transformation of political regimes. Leaders committed to democracy foster transitions and resist breakdowns.
- International forces: External factors influence domestic democratization through contagion (diffusion), through the diplomatic action of international organizations, and because established democracies can use foreign aid to support domestic democratic groups.

### Conclusion: the future of democracy

Democracy is a reality as much as it is an ideal. Because of this reason, democratic regimes are always in flux. The gap between the experience of existing democracy as it is and our expectations for democracy as we would *like it to be* inspires political action in rich and in poor countries, in old as well as in new democracies. The future of democracy will result from the ability of new political actors to expand the frontiers of democratization without undermining the democratic achievements of past generations.

Democratic regimes will be tested by important challenges in the decades to come. Among those challenges are the limits imposed by supra-national institutions (Chapter 23) and globalization (Chapter 24), the resurgence of intolerant nationalism, and the temptation to limit civil liberties in the name of national security. But beyond those issues, crucial for the survival of existing democratic systems, future generations will struggle to redefine the meaning of democracy itself. The contemporary definition presented in Box 5.1 focuses on electoral procedures and civic liberties. Yet, more ambitious conceptions of democracy call for the enrichment of these minimum requirements with additional criteria



such as substantive equality (egalitarian democracy), citizen engagement (participatory democracy), and respectful and reasonable dialogue (deliberative democracy) (Coppedge *et al.* 2011).

Moreover, the history of modern democracy entails the progressive expansion of citizenship to groups previously excluded from the political process. This expansion is always contested because it is not obvious that new groups should have the right to enjoy citizenship. After the process is completed, however, the boundaries of citizenship shift and a new definition of 'the people' becomes entrenched. In the early nineteenth century, most republics considered property and literacy as 'natural' requirements to grant men the right to vote. In the early twentieth century, most democracies still excluded women and ethnic minorities from the electoral process. Such restrictive definitions of the people were widely accepted at the time, but are morally unacceptable for our contemporary observers.

It is certain that the future of democracy will bring the expansion of rights to new groups, but it is hard for us—as it was for any society in the past—to anticipate who the people will be in the future. One possibility is that young individuals, now considered dependent minors, will acquire greater rights. Throughout the twentieth century, democracies reduced the minimum age to participate in politics—from 21 to 18, and later to 16 years of age in many countries—but it is still unclear when individuals should be considered mature enough to exercise full citizenship. Consider, for example, the case of the United States: individuals are considered responsible enough to drive at the age of 16; to vote, join the army, and own handguns at the age of 18; and to drink alcohol only at the age of 21.

Another possibility is that migrants will acquire increasing political rights. Our traditional understanding of democracy assumes that the people were born and raised in a given territory, but human populations are increasingly mobile. By 2015, 244 million people—more than 3 per cent of the total world population—lived outside their countries of origin (United Nations Population Division 2015). This poses two parallel challenges. The first one is to allow greater political participation by citizens who are physically located outside their national territories. A 2007 report by the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance showed that 115

countries and territories currently allow their expatriates to vote from abroad, in most cases with little restrictions (Ellis *et al.* 2007). The second—and more controversial—challenge is to grant representation to foreign residents who are active community members in their host countries. According to David Earnest, at least twenty-four democracies have allowed foreign residents to participate in elections since 1960. Earnest showed that a majority of such democracies grant voting rights to non-citizen aliens only at the local level; just a very small group (eight nations) allows non-citizens to vote at the national level, and in all but two cases—New Zealand and Uruguay—the right to participate in national elections is restricted to migrants from preferred countries (Earnest 2006).

Even more puzzling is the possibility that some kinds of democratic rights will be extended beyond human populations in the future. In June 2008, for example, the Environmental Committee of the Spanish Parliament approved a resolution to grant basic rights to the great apes—orangutans, gorillas, chimpanzees, bonobos, and humans—including the rights to life, individual liberty, and the prohibition of torture. Similar bills were introduced in the US House of Representatives in 2008 and reached the Senate in 2010. Advocates of animal rights, however, argue that even this radical expansion of legal rights would be insufficient to prevent the massive abuse and slaughter of animals raised for human consumption in factory farms (Wolfe 2013: 104–11).

Irrespective of future trajectories, which are hard to anticipate, any real expansion of democratic rights will require building on the foundation of existing democratic achievements. Because of this, readers should remember that modern democracy is a fledgling form of government, with roots that barely extend two hundred years into the past. The Roman Republic lasted for almost 500 years before giving way to imperial rule, the Byzantine Empire survived for 1,100 years before falling to the Ottoman Empire, and the Ottoman Empire in turn lasted for more than 600 years before giving birth to modern Turkey. Such successful regimes—long gone after their heyday—remind us that modern democracy is just a newcomer to the history of political systems; it cannot be taken for granted and it should be carefully nurtured if it is going to survive and thrive.

## Questions

### Knowledge based

1. What are the four traits that define modern democracy? Can a regime be democratic if only one attribute is missing?
2. What are the main differences between the president of a parliamentary democracy and the president of a presidential democracy?

3. Which features distinguish a majoritarian democracy from a consensus democracy?
4. Are theories explaining transitions to democracy also useful to explain democratic breakdowns?
5. Why do democracies emerge in 'waves'?

## Critical thinking

1. Is presidential or parliamentary democracy a better choice for newly democratic regimes?
2. What are the advantages and disadvantages of consensus vis-à-vis majoritarian democracy?
3. Which configuration of conditions (economic, social, institutional, political, and international) would create the most

adverse historical context for the survival of a democratic regime?

4. Which of those conditions would be, in your opinion, the most important factor for the survival of democracy?
5. Provide three reasons for why resident aliens should be granted the right to vote, and three reasons for why they should not be granted the right to vote in a democratic country.



## Further reading

Bermeo, N. (2016) 'On Democratic Backsliding', *Journal of Democracy*, 27(1), 5–19.

Lijphart, A. (2012) *Patterns of Democracy: Government Forms and Performance in Thirty-Six Countries* (2nd edn) (New Haven: Yale University Press).

Linz, J. J. (1990) 'The Perils of Presidentialism', *Journal of Democracy*, 1(1), 51–69.

Markoff, J. (1999) 'Where and When was Democracy Invented?' *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 41(4), 660–90.

Munck, G. L. and Verkuilen, J. (2002) 'Conceptualizing and Measuring Democracy—Evaluating Alternative Indices', *Comparative Political Studies*, 35(1), 5–34.



## Web links

### Freedom House:

<https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/freedom-world-2016>

Website for the organization that produces a report on *Freedom in the World* every year.

### Inter-Parliamentary Union:

<http://www.ipu.org/english/home.htm>

Website of the IPU provides data on legislatures and women in politics across the world.

### International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance:

<http://www.idea.int/>

Website with information on electoral systems, political parties, and the quality of democracy.

### Varieties of Democracy:

<https://www.v-dem.net/en/>

Website provides hundreds of indicators of democracy for all countries, going back to 1900.

### Polity Project:

<http://www.systemicpeace.org/polityproject.html>

Website with information on forms of government in independent states since 1800.



For additional material and resources, please visit the Online Resource Centre at:

<http://www.oxfordtextbooks.co.uk/orc/caramani4e/>



## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Freedom House's ratings for Civil Liberties and Political Rights range between 1 (most free) and 7 (least free). After taking the average for both ratings, the organization classifies countries as Free (if the average rating is between 1 to 2.5), Partly Free (3 to 5), or Not Free (5.5 to 7).

<sup>2</sup> For countries below this threshold, students of Comparative Politics also use similar labels to describe authoritarian regimes that display some democratic attributes, for example 'electoral authoritarianism' (Schедler 2013) or 'competitive authoritarianism' (Levitsky and Way, 2010). For a discussion of this topic, see Chapter 6.



<sup>3</sup> After the election, the head of state (monarch or president) usually 'invites' the leader of the largest party in parliament to form a new government. Many parliamentary systems also require that the parliamentary majority formally supports the new government in a 'vote of investiture' before the new cabinet takes office.

<sup>4</sup> The United States is the only presidential democracy that still preserves an Electoral College to elect the president. Under this indirect procedure, designed in the eighteenth century, votes are tallied and aggregated at the state level in order to appoint a certain number of 'electors' from each state, who then cast their votes for particular presidential candidates. Nowadays, electors pre-commit to support specific candidates and they have no autonomy once appointed. Therefore, the Electoral College is simply an intermediate source of 'noise' between the popular vote and the final selection of the US president.

<sup>5</sup> Few constitutions empower the president to dissolve congress, and they do so only under very restrictive circumstances. More constitutions grant congress special powers to impeach the president, but this action requires evidence that the president has committed serious misdemeanours in office (Pérez-Liñán 2007).

<sup>6</sup> Lijphart also identifies two additional traits of majoritarian democracies: a pluralist system of interest representation, and a central bank dependent on the executive (as opposed to corporatist representation and more independent central banks in consensus democracies), but these characteristics are less clearly related to the other institutional features described in the chapter.

<sup>7</sup> When changes towards authoritarianism occur at a slow pace—sometimes over several years—scholars also refer to *democratic erosion* or *democratic backsliding* to describe the process (Bermeo 2016).

<sup>8</sup> A fifth set of theories emphasizes the role of political culture as an explanatory factor. Those arguments are discussed in detail in Chapter 17.

<sup>9</sup> Besides multilateral diffusion, international powers may in extreme circumstances impose unilateral regime change. For example, domestic political conditions changed abruptly in Western Europe with the expansion of Nazi Germany, and again after the Allies prevailed in World War II.

## CHAPTER 6

# Authoritarian regimes

Paul Brooker

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### Reader's guide

The concept of an authoritarian regime is a residual one that throws all the non-democratic political systems in together. Apart from the fact that they are *not* democracies, these regimes have little in common and, in fact, display a bewildering diversity: from monarchies to military regimes, from clergy-dominated regimes to communist regimes, and from seeking a totalitarian control of thought through indoctrination to seeking recognition as a multiparty democracy through using **semi-competitive elections**. The chapter begins with an introduction to the historical evolution of authoritarian regimes, especially the three-phase modernization of dictatorship in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Then the chapter examines the key questions of who rules an authoritarian regime, why they rule (their claim to legitimacy), and how they rule (their mechanisms of control). Finally, the conclusion discusses whether these regimes are becoming extinct or will come up with some evolutionary surprises.