

How to classify hybrid regimes? Defective democracy and electoral authoritarianism

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(Received 30 April 2008; final version received 22 August 2008)

The ‘third wave’ of democratization has resulted in the proliferation of regimes that are neither fully democratic nor classic authoritarian. To capture the nature of these hybrid regimes, the democratization literature has come up with a wide variety of adjectives as descriptors of different forms of democracy and authoritarianism. This article reviews two of the most systematic recent approaches, centring on the concepts of ‘defective democracy’ and ‘electoral authoritarianism’. An important limitation of both approaches is that each covers only one side of the spectrum. Where they meet in the middle, confusion arises. As a remedy, the article suggests to embed the concepts of defective democracy and electoral authoritarianism in a ‘double-root strategy’ that maps the full range of contemporary regimes from both sides of the political spectrum.

Keywords: democracy; authoritarianism hybrid regime; typology

Introduction

The end of the ‘third wave’ of democratization and increasing scepticism about the outcome of many transitions in the 1990s have stimulated theorizing about the democratic grey zones and hybrids that seem to dominate much of the non-Western world.¹ Observers have noted ‘the unprecedented growth in the number of regimes that are neither clearly democratic nor conventionally authoritarian’.² A clear need is felt to unpack the category of ‘hybrid’ regimes and to map more precisely the terrain between liberal democracy and dictatorship.³

The result has been a proliferation of adjectives that serve to qualify democracy.⁴ Some of the most influential new terms are ‘delegative democracy’, referring to a minimally democratic country with a lack of horizontal accountability, and illiberal democracy, denoting an electoral democracy in which civil liberties are compromised.⁵ More recently, scholars have come to view post-transition regimes not as flawed democracies, but as weak forms of authoritarianism. This

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has led to a proliferation of adjectives to describe forms of authoritarianism. Some of the best-known examples are 'semi-authoritarianism', 'competitive authoritarianism' and 'liberalized autocracy'.⁶ Adding adjective to adjective, Guliyev even coined the term 'sultanistic semi-authoritarianism'.⁷ In addition, several attempts have been made to devise new regime typologies that include intermediate categories between full democracy and outright dictatorship.⁸ However, these typologies in their present formulation are barely more than rough sketches in which types are not fully defined, boundaries are not clearly specified and coding decisions seem arbitrary. More than 30 years after the beginning of the 'third wave' of democratic transitions, and 10 years after scholars started to wonder about its end, the study of the outcomes of these transitions is marred by an abundance of diminished subtypes of democracy and authoritarianism, a lack of common ground in terms of definitions and empirical measurement, and the absence of an overarching framework that clarifies the relationship between the various (sub)types.⁹

This article aims to make a contribution to our knowledge of the construction of regime types in two ways. First, through an analytical review of two of the most systematic recent approaches to the study of democratic hybrids, revolving around the concepts of 'defective democracy' and 'electoral authoritarianism' respectively. The German-language literature on 'defective democracy' has received limited attention so far in international political science and no overview of these important contributions exists to date. Second, by sketching a strategy to overcome the limitations of these concepts, which shortcomings are seen most clearly when (re)viewed in combination. Current approaches to the study of hybrid regimes are limited by their focus on a single root concept. The concepts of defective democracy and electoral authoritarianism are explicitly understood as diminished subtypes.¹⁰ One takes democracy as the root concept, the other authoritarianism. Each approach covers one side of the spectrum, but neither is complete, and confusion arises where they meet in the middle. As a remedy, the article suggests embedding the concepts of defective democracy and electoral authoritarianism in a 'double-root strategy' that maps contemporary regimes from both sides of the spectrum.

In search of a synthesis, the article starts with a review of Lauth's proposal for a measure of democracy that captures both the type of regime and the degree to which a given polity and its various dimensions correspond to it.¹¹ Lauth's framework has the potential for providing a theoretically grounded and empirically useful typology of regimes. The article then reviews the literature on 'defective democracies'. Merkel and his collaborators have developed a typology of democratic defects, grounded in a specific conception of democracy.¹² Four types of defective democracies are distinguished: exclusive democracy, delegative democracy, illiberal democracy and democracy with reserved domains. These terms are not new. The added value of the concept of defective democracy and the typology of defective democracies is that they provide an integrated framework of analysis superior to the often *ad hoc* and a-theoretical types and typologies prevalent in the

existing literature. A second advantage is that the derivation and operationalization of indicators for each type of defective democracy facilitates empirical research and comparisons. Next, the article reviews the work on 'electoral authoritarianism' by Schedler and the contributors to his edited volume.¹³ This book approaches the grey zone from the authoritarian end and ideally should be a complement to the work on defective democracies. Unfortunately, the concept of electoral authoritarianism suffers from ambiguous operationalization and is not embedded in a regime typology or theory of authoritarianism.

After this assessment of the state-of-the-art in the study of hybrid regimes, the article identifies several core issues in the construction of new regime types. These are the underlying conception of democracy, the variable of the state, the derivation of subtypes of defective democracy, their empirical identification, and the limitations of a 'single-root strategy' that focuses exclusively on either democracy or authoritarianism. Instead, the article argues the need for a 'double-root strategy' that maps regimes on the full spectrum between liberal democracy and dictatorship.

Defective versus functioning democracy

The term 'defective democracy' was coined by Lauth.¹⁴ In a major theoretical and methodological study, Lauth sets himself the task of developing a measure of democracy that is theoretically grounded and operationally valid and that captures differences among established democracies as well as political systems that are in some sense incompletely democratic.¹⁵ Akin to Dahl, democracy is not understood as a value in itself, but more as a combination of other values.¹⁶ The three dimensions or central norms of democracy are freedom, equality, and control or the limitation of political power. The inclusion of control as a full-fledged dimension of democracy, on a par with freedom and equality, deliberately sets apart Lauth's conceptualization from many other theories and measures of democracy, although the issue of horizontal accountability has received more attention of late.¹⁷ For a functioning democracy, all three dimensions are considered equally important and they should be in balance. In addition to the three dimensions of democracy, Lauth identifies five democratic institutions: decision-making; intermediation; communication; legal guarantees (*Rechtsgarantie*); and rule-making plus implementation. These institutions correspond closely to the classic functions of a political system. The five institutions and the three dimensions on which they are manifested form a matrix with 15 fields, which is used to identify regime type and measure the degree of democracy.

Lauth proposes to measure each of the 15 fields in the matrix of democracy on a metric five-point scale ranging from the full presence of the feature to insufficient presence, in other words, insufficient for democracy. Cut-off points are at the level of individual features, not at the aggregate level. Lauth's notion that each regime type has a distinctive and coherent operating logic (*Funktionslogik*) means that a democracy has to be at least 'sufficiently' democratic for all 15 criteria.¹⁸ In that

case, it is a defective democracy. To be a functioning democracy, no score can be poorer than 'satisfactory'. When a country has the poorest value (insufficient) in even one feature, it is deemed authoritarian. In other words, a country needs 15 (very) good scores to be rated a functioning democracy but only one (very) poor score to be a defective democracy or non-democracy. Scores of two and one differentiate further among functioning democracies. Although Lauth is not interested in measuring degrees of non-democracy, the scale could be extended at the non-democratic end.

An advantage of Lauth's matrix is its versatility in terms of employment. Depending on the research purpose, scholars can use all 15 criteria or a selection. Criteria can be aggregated by institution, by dimension, or overall. For the selected criteria, scholars can choose how many of the respective indicators they use, a decision likely to be shaped by the availability of information. However, several factors complicate empirical application of the framework. First, because the distances between the scores are considered equal, only the democratic and authoritarian poles for each of the 15 features are described. If the assumption of equal distance does not hold, a full description of all five levels for all 15 criteria is needed. Such a list would add to the already 20 pages of admittedly non-exhaustive descriptions and amount to a veritable coding book.¹⁹ Separate indicators to determine when a feature is 'satisfactory' or 'sufficient' would help to distinguish functioning from defective democracies and defective democracies from authoritarian regimes respectively. Second, scores between dimensions are not always independent. Each of the five democratic institutions is evaluated three times, each time on a separate dimension: freedom, equality, and control. An institution that is low on freedom will not score high on equality either, Lauth predicts, but the reverse is not true.²⁰ A measurement that tends to double or triple weigh democratic deficits will produce a clustering of empirical cases in the lower range of values and more spread among the higher ranges.

Unfortunately, Lauth does not offer an empirical application of his framework. We will never know whether this five-point scale adequately distinguishes between authoritarian regimes, defective, and functioning democracies and within the latter category measures degree of democracy, until it is applied.²¹ Finally, although Lauth recognized early on the need to construct 'ideal subtypes' within the category of defective democracies, so far he has not gone beyond suggesting the labels of 'illiberal democracy' (lack of freedom), 'inegalitarian democracy' (lack of equality) and 'uncontrolled democracy' (lack of control).²²

Defective democracy

The project of Merkel and his collaborators on defective democracies takes off where Lauth stops.²³ Starting with a conceptualization of democracy, they develop a typology of defective democracies that is applied in empirical analysis. The results have been published in a series of articles and three books: two collaborative volumes on the theory of defective democracy and case studies

respectively, a monograph on three defective democracies in Asia, plus a special issue of this journal.²⁴ Their framework is complex and ambitious. Six features of government (legitimacy, access, monopoly, structure, scope, and exercise) are combined into three dimensions, which are divided into five partial regimes, which are in turn divided into ten criteria, and operationalized with the help of 34 indicators, resulting in five types of democracy, one functioning and four defective.

Merkel et al.'s concept of democracy has three dimensions: vertical legitimacy; horizontal accountability plus rule of law; and effective government. Vertical legitimacy pertains to the relationship between citizens and rulers through elections and political rights. The horizontal dimension encompasses liberal constitutionalism and horizontal accountability. Effective government means that only duly elected representatives can make authoritative decisions. In addition to the three dimensions, there are five partial regimes (*Teilregime*) or democratic components: elections; political participation rights; civil rights; horizontal accountability; and effective government. These five components translate into 10 criteria, which can be understood as conditions. Democratic elections require active suffrage, passive suffrage, free and fair elections, and elected officials. Political participation implies freedom of opinion, press and information as well as freedom of association. Civil rights demand individual protection against state and private actors and the right to equal access to and treatment by courts. Finally, horizontal accountability and effective government mandate just that, horizontal accountability and effective government.²⁵ When any of these criteria of democracy are violated, we are dealing with a defective democracy. A defective democracy is a regime defined by 'a largely functioning democratic electoral regime for the selection of rulers that, however, through disruptions in the operating logic of one or more of the other components, loses the complementary buttresses which in a functioning democracy are indispensable for securing freedom, equality and control'.²⁶

Like Lauth, Merkel and his collaborators stress the interdependence of their dimensions of democracy. Their term 'embedded democracy', which is meant to emphasize both the multidimensionality of democracy and the intrinsic connection between the constitutive partial regimes, is potentially misleading as it directs attention outward to the context in which democracy functions instead of inwards to its internal logic.²⁷ Differently from Lauth, Merkel et al. prioritize the electoral component and offer the possibility of compensation. The first four criteria, pertaining to the electoral regime, can be violated without making the regime authoritarian, provided two additional conditions are met: firstly, meaningful elections, with real choice and the possibility of turnover; and secondly, that other elements, especially political rights, horizontal accountability, and independent courts are present.²⁸ Still, the theoretical problem remains that a violation of the defining feature of democracy should not lead to a defective subtype, but to a classification as authoritarian.²⁹ This affects especially regimes with contestation but restricted voting rights such as the USA and European countries before the introduction of

universal suffrage. Johnson labels these regimes ‘pluralist authoritarian’, whereas Merkel et al. categorize them as ‘exclusive democracies’.³⁰

Like Lauth, Merkel and his collaborators seek to define the border between defective and functioning democracy on the one hand, and defective democracy and autocracy on the other. Thresholds are determined for each of the five democratic components and indicators are listed for all 10 criteria. The indicators are formulated negatively, operationalizing functioning democracy through the absence of defects. Merkel et al. list a total of 34 indicators divided over five partial regimes. The number of indicators varies from three for civilian control of the military to 11 for the electoral component. No guidelines are given on how to aggregate the values by partial regime, nor is it said whether some indicators are perhaps more important than others and should be weighted. As so often in measures of democracy, the aggregation rules suffer from relative neglect.³¹ Moreover, the borders between defective democracy and autocracy are underspecified, casting doubt over whether some defective democracies are democracies at all.³²

Merkel et al.’s main contribution is that they offer a theoretically grounded typology of less-than-fully democratic regimes. Four types of defective democracies are distinguished: exclusive, illiberal, delegative, and democracy with reserved domains. These types correspond to defects in particular democratic components: elections and political participation rights (exclusive democracy); civil rights (illiberal democracy); horizontal accountability (delegative democracy); and effective government (tutelary democracy or democracy with reserved domains). These are pure types and in the real world mixed forms are expected. Their typology of defective democracies incorporates and systematizes some of the most frequently used existing diminished subtypes of democracy.³³ This congruence should facilitate adoption. The only difference is with their term ‘exclusive’ democracy, which covers not just suffrage restrictions, but any limitation to democratic elections and political participation rights.

Case studies of defective democracy

To illustrate the empirical usefulness of their typology of defective democracies, Merkel et al. present an overview of democratic defects in Asia, Eastern Europe and Latin America, which leads them to nine conclusions.³⁴ First, most new democracies are defective democracies. Second, defective democracies are not necessarily a transitional phase to full democracy, with Slovakia and Estonia as the only defective democracies to have transformed into liberal democracies. Third, there is no reverse wave: the number of defective democracies that have regressed into full authoritarianism at any time is very small (Belarus, Pakistan and Peru). Fourth, among defective democracies, illiberal democracies dominate, and these illiberal traits are often combined with delegative practices. Fifth, defective democracies oscillate in the nature of their defects. Between their founding election and 2001, most defective democracies remained defective but the kind of defect changed. Many started out as a democracy with reserved domains and

turned into illiberal and/or delegative democracies when the role of the military was curtailed in the years after the transition. Sixth, exclusive democracies are becoming ever more rare. Seventh, undecided classifications are rare. Eighth, the existence of regional trends and recurring combinations of defects suggests a contagion and demonstration effect among defective democracies and among defects within a democracy. Ninth, within each region some particular defects show themselves to be persistent.

More detailed analysis of the development of democratic deficits, their causes, conditions and consequences, can be found in the case studies.³⁵ The second volume edited by Merkel et al. contains nine case studies from three regions: Peru, Argentina, and Mexico from Latin America; the Philippines, South Korea, and Thailand from East Asia; and Russia, Slovakia and Albania from post-communist Eastern Europe. With the exception of Peru and Slovakia, all cases were defective democracies for the whole period under investigation. The inclusion of authoritarian regimes and functioning democracies would have helped to determine more precisely the boundaries between regime types.³⁶

The case of Slovakia raises the question whether democratic defects are durable enough to constitute a regime, or whether they are a phase. Slovakia is one of the few success stories where a defective democracy became a functioning democracy, if it ever was a defective democracy. Eicher and Beichelt suggest there was only an 'attempt' to establish a delegative democracy and maybe not even that and Henderson refuses to call Meciarism a 'regime', as democratic defects in Slovakia disappeared with the politician responsible for them.³⁷

Another problem with the empirical determination of defect profiles is that most cases have defects across the board. They are classified as a particular type of defective democracy on the basis of the relative concentration of defects within a particular dimension, not because their scores on other dimensions are perfect.³⁸ This implies that to get the complete picture of the state of democracy in a country, one should look beyond the main defect and use the full information from all criteria.

Defective democracy as (in)dependent variable

McMann complains that analysts devote more time to coining new terms than to explaining the proliferation of hybrid regimes.³⁹ Merkel and his collaborators do both: they develop a typology of defective democracies and then proceed to explain the occurrence of democratic defects, using a wide range of factors taken from the literature on democracy and democratization: development, culture, previous regime type and mode of transition, state- and nation-building, and international context. For each factor, lists are made with favourable and unfavourable factors. In a next step, six hypotheses are formulated that link particular (clusters of) factors to specific democratic defects. For example, majoritarian democracy and presidentialism are argued to favour the emergence of exclusive and delegative democracy respectively.

Most of the literature on the causes of democratization takes as its dependent variable either the presence/absence of democracy or the quality of democracy, normally measured with time-series data from Freedom House or Polity.⁴⁰ Instead, Merkel and his collaborators aim to explain the occurrence of particular democratic defects. Moreover, they develop different causal stories for different defects. In this way, the causal analysis can be more precise and nuanced. Drawing conclusions across the three regions, Merkel et al. note that democratic defects typical for illiberal democracy and democracy with reserved domains are inherited from the undemocratic past, while delegative democracy is created in the transition process and the subsequent reconfiguration of political institutions.⁴¹ The same key variables used in the explanation of democratic defects are also employed for making predictions about the future of democracy in these countries. In general, the forecast is that democracies will remain defective, although the nature of the defects may change over time.

Democratic defects have consequences as well as causes. Croissant takes up the argument that delegative democracies may be more effective in pushing through badly needed socio-economic reforms.⁴² He qualifies this claim for South Korea and very much doubts that delegative democracy could have the hoped for effects in the Philippines, due to the absence of other conditions, such as the state's capacity to act. In the still growing literature that takes democracy as its independent variable, the typology of defective democracies has the potential of refining hypotheses and tests.⁴³ In sum, the concept of defective democracy does not merely help to classify regimes between full democracy and authoritarianism, it also serves as an independent and dependent variable that helps to explain more precisely the causes and the consequences of incomplete transitions.

Electoral authoritarianism

For Merkel et al. and Lauth, there is only one root concept: democracy. Given the proliferation of adjectives to describe various forms of democracy, it can be said that this is the dominant strategy in the literature. In contrast, Linz advises us to focus on the root concept of authoritarianism, claiming many of the so-called new democracies are not even minimally democratic.⁴⁴ These mixed regimes are best identified with adjectives attached to authoritarianism, such as 'electoral authoritarianism', or 'centre authoritarianism with subnational democracy'. Levitsky and Way take up this suggestion with their type of 'competitive authoritarianism', conceived as a diminished subtype of authoritarianism.⁴⁵ Diamond, in turn, distinguishes between three types of authoritarianism: competitive, hegemonic electoral, and politically closed.⁴⁶ Finally, Ottaway chooses the term 'semi-authoritarian' for regimes that maintain the appearance of democracy without exposing themselves to the political risks that free competition entails.⁴⁷ The distinguishing feature of contemporary authoritarian regimes is the combination of multi-party elections with the absence of democracy.⁴⁸ Although some disagree this is a new phenomenon, it is generally agreed that it is more common than before.⁴⁹

The volume edited by Schedler on 'the dynamics of unfree competition' aims to capture and examine contemporary hybrid regimes through the lens of electoral authoritarianism, said to be 'the modal type of political regime in the developing world'.⁵⁰ The concept of electoral authoritarianism is based on the idea that many of the world's new regimes are not really democratic despite elections and are in fact 'new forms of authoritarianism behind electoral façades'.⁵¹ Electoral authoritarian regimes hold regular elections for the chief executive and national parliament. These elections are 'broadly inclusive (they are held under universal suffrage), minimally competitive (opposition parties, while denied victory, are allowed to win votes and seats), and minimally open (opposition parties are not subject to massive repression, although they may experience repressive treatment in selective and intermittent ways)'.⁵² However, overall 'electoral contests are subject to state manipulation so severe, widespread, and systematic that they do not qualify as democratic'.⁵³ Electoral authoritarian regimes are different from competitive oligarchies, Bonapartist regimes, traditional monarchies, single-party regimes, and other forms of closed authoritarianism, on the one hand, and from electoral democracies on the other.

The identification of electoral authoritarian regimes is not based on a common operationalization of the above-mentioned criteria, but on Freedom House ratings. Unfortunately, the three contributors to Schedler's volume who use Freedom House scores all use them in different ways. Consequently, there is no agreement on the universe of electoral authoritarian regimes. For Schedler, all countries with multiparty elections and average Freedom House political rights scores between four and six are electoral authoritarian regimes. No indication is given over which time period scores should be averaged. No reasons are given for the cut-off points, which do not correspond with Freedom House's own concept of electoral democracy. Thus it can happen that Schedler classifies a country as electoral authoritarian on the basis of Freedom House scores while Freedom House itself judges the country an electoral democracy.⁵⁴ In the same volume, Clark, in his analysis of military intervention, and Lindberg, in his analysis of election boycotts, establish their own derivation of Freedom House scores, deviating from the editor.⁵⁵ As both cover Africa, the reader can easily verify how different coding rules lead to rather different classifications.

Such externalization of regime classifications using general measures of democracy to operationalize one's own regime types is a convenient short-cut, but fraught with difficulties due to the lack of correspondence between the concept's defining features and the criteria on which the general measure is based. As a consequence, there is no agreement on the boundaries between electoral authoritarian regimes and electoral democracies on the one hand and between electoral authoritarian and closed authoritarian regimes on the other hand, and any thresholds are in the end arbitrary.

Differences among electoral authoritarian regimes may give cause for further subdivisions. Highlighting the degree of personalism in decisions to steal elections, Thompson and Kuntz propose the subtype of 'electoral sultanism'.⁵⁶

As Snyder notes, to understand the full spectrum of non-democratic regimes, other regime dimensions need to be taken into account as well, not just the electoral regime focused on by Schedler.⁵⁷

Democracy and the state

The derivation of diminished subtypes crucially depends on the root concept. The definitions of democracy in the work of Lauth and Merkel et al. share two peculiarities. First, both start with Dahl's classic definition of polyarchy, but add a dimension to capture the element of democratic control or horizontal accountability.⁵⁸ Polyarchy is explicitly rejected as root concept because it lacks the control dimension and cannot detect delegative democracies.⁵⁹ This suggests the root concept was defined in interaction with the diminished subtypes. To highlight the difference between liberal and illiberal democracies, Merkel et al. include liberalism in their root concept of democracy, even though they acknowledge the liberal component is not part of democracy 'in a narrow sense'.⁶⁰ The second peculiarity is the emphasis on statehood and the rule of law, standing in a German tradition.⁶¹ Lauth's short definition of democracy as 'a *Rechtsstaat* plus free and fair elections', reveals the pre-eminence of rule of law and the state in his root concept of democracy.⁶² Likewise, for Merkel the root concept is liberal constitutional (*rechtsstaatliche*) democracy.⁶³ This re-conceptualization has the advantage of linking commonly perceived defects of third wave democracies directly to a broadened definition of democracy, but the relevance and appropriateness of liberal democracy as a benchmark for the analysis of non-Western democracies has been questioned.⁶⁴ Certainly, the historic sequence of state-building, constitutionalism, rule of law, and democracy characteristic of political development in the Western world is likely to be different in many new democracies.⁶⁵

It is said that, 'In the absence of a state, there is no regime', and therefore no regime classification.⁶⁶ But how to deal with the 'spatial unevenness of democracy'?⁶⁷ How to evaluate a country where the state of democracy differs from one part of the country to the next? How to assess a country where that state has lost control over part of its territory? In other words, how do measures and classifications of democracy cope with what O'Donnell calls 'brown areas', that is areas where the state has no or very little territorial and functional presence, within what are commonly termed weak states, failed states, and collapsed states?⁶⁸ The literature on defective democracies is ambivalent. Lauth and Merkel et al. regard a sovereign territorial state as a precondition for democracy, but also treat the state as a variable in determining regime type.⁶⁹ For Lauth, lack of state control over a country's territory violates the requirement of effective democratic government, leading to its classification as authoritarian.⁷⁰ Different geographic intensities of rights, depending on spread and seriousness, can also disqualify a country as democratic.⁷¹ Merkel et al. are more likely to regard such states as defective democracies, more precisely democracies with reserved domains.⁷² Although this classification can be justified with reference to the

undemocratic limitations to government, it ignores the wider effects, clouds the category of reserved domains, and is in any case half-hearted as the subsequent operationalization of effective government as civilian control of the military ignores brown areas and state failure.⁷³ Failing legality and public order have multiple defects. If a state loses control over part of its territory, the population in the affected area(s) most likely cannot participate in elections, cannot exercise its rights through the courts, and is subject to uncontrolled forms of power, among other tribulations. Other scholars on defective democracy show more sensitivity to the multi-faceted nature of brown areas and state failure. In their analysis of defective democracy in Brazil, Munoz and Thiery write about 'illiberal domains' leading to exclusive democracy.⁷⁴ Croissant makes much the same point in his analysis of democratic defects in the Philippines, adding that what matters is that civil rights are violated, not who is responsible for them.⁷⁵

Scholars are beginning to take serious the territorial dimension of democratization and are starting to identify and examine 'subnational authoritarianism'.⁷⁶ The challenge is not only to develop 'a territorially disaggregated, geographically nuanced perspective on political regimes, one that captures variation in the reach of the central state as well as in the forms of rule at the subnational level', but also to integrate this into existing regime typologies.⁷⁷ One solution is to view O'Donnell's 'democracy with brown areas' as a separate type of defective democracy.

How many types of defective democracy?

Arguably the main contribution of Merkel et al. is that they have grouped widely used diminished subtypes of democracy into a typology and grounded this in a deeper theoretical understanding of democracy.⁷⁸ Still, this link can take several shapes, resulting in different typologies of defective democracy. Originally each type of defective democracy was linked to one of the three dimensions of democracy: vertical legitimacy (exclusive democracy); horizontal accountability plus rule of law (anti-liberal democracy); and effective government (domain democracy).⁷⁹ The anti-liberal type was subsequently subdivided into delegative and illiberal democracy, an indication that democratic defects did not correspond perfectly with democracy dimensions. As we have seen, in its current form, the typology of defective democracy links diminished subtypes to democratic components or partial regimes. Again, the match is not perfect, because exclusive democracy covers two partial regimes: elections and political rights.⁸⁰ A separate type for democracies where press freedom and freedom of organization are threatened but not abolished recommends itself, not only for conceptual clarity but also for empirical reasons. In South Korea, for example, the indicators for exclusive democracy show a bifurcation of the electoral component (four criteria, no significant defects) and political rights (two criteria, both indicating a significant defect). Concretely, the defects are cooptation of journalists and limits to the freedom of organization, especially of labour unions.⁸¹ Another example is McMann's

analysis of differences in the quality of democracy at the provincial level in Russia and Kyrgyzstan. She argues that the key difference lies not in the electoral regime, but in the observance of political rights. The type of exclusive democracy cannot handle divergent tendencies in the two democratic components it encompasses and should be split.

In principle, there is no need to stop at five types. A more fine-grained typology of democratic defects could be derived from the ten criteria used to assess the state of the democratic components. Or, one could take the six features of government (*Herrschaftskriterien*) as a starting point for deriving defective subtypes. Alternative conceptions of democracy will result in different defective subtypes.⁸² In the end, empirical more than theoretical considerations are likely to decide this matter.

Summarizing the discussion so far, Table 1 maps regimes from functioning democracies to totalitarian regimes and the 'grey zone' in between. The distinction between three (democracy, authoritarianism and totalitarianism) or possibly four (hybrid) regimes follows Lauth, Linz, and Merkel.⁸³ The distinction between functioning and defective democracy is based on Lauth and Merkel, whereas the distinction between electoral and closed authoritarianism follows Schedler. Those distinctions are conceptualized, following these authors, as classic versus diminished subtypes. For purposes of illustration, the table also includes some well-established classic subtypes of democracy and authoritarianism.⁸⁴

Double-root strategy

The work on electoral authoritarianism and defective democracies ideally should be complementary. However, there are two problems. First, Schedler appears to promote the concept of electoral authoritarianism at the expense of defective democracies.⁸⁵ Claiming that most regimes in the non-Western world are new forms of authoritarian rule, it follows that they should not be analysed as diminished democracies but as instances of non-democratic government. Moreover, because the concept of electoral authoritarianism is not properly operationalized, there is no agreement on which cases are in fact electoral authoritarian. Second, the independent pursuit of alternative single-root strategies, one focusing on democracy, the other on authoritarianism, bears the danger of yielding classifications that are not mutually exclusive. A regime could then be classified with equal validity as a defective democracy or a limited form of authoritarianism. For example, Ottaway sees Croatia and Venezuela as semi-authoritarian, whereas Merkel et al. classify these regimes as defective democracies. Case treats Thailand and the Philippines as electoral authoritarian regimes, whereas Croissant analyzes them as defective democracies.⁸⁶ As noted before, many cases that the contributors to Schedler regard as electoral authoritarian based on Freedom House scores, Freedom House itself considers electoral democracies.⁸⁷

To avoid such confusion, a double-root strategy recommends itself, in which *the root concepts of democracy and autocracy are defined in relation to each other and cases are classified with a view to both*. A double-root strategy would benefit

Table 1. An overview of regime types.

Regime	Democracy	(Hybrid)	Authoritarianism	Totalitarianism
Subtype	Classic	Diminished	Diminished	Classic
Qualifier	Functioning	Defective	Electoral	Closed
Examples	Majoritarian vs. Consensus democracy	Exclusive Delegative Illiberal Democracy with reserved domains	Electoral authoritarianism	Military dictatorship One-party state Personalist rule

Note: Based on Merkel et al., *Band 1: Theorie*; Lauth, *Demokratie und Demokratiemessung*; Schedler, *Electoral Authoritarianism*; Lijphart, *Patterns of Democracy*; Brooker, *Non-Democratic Regimes*.

from the construction of polar types, with democracy and totalitarianism as the endpoints of a common scale, as proposed by Munck.⁸⁸ By giving diminished subtypes of both authoritarianism and democracy a place in a comprehensive regime classification, a double-root strategy would help to more adequately capture and differentiate contemporary regime types.

Most conceptual energy has been invested in deriving diminished subtypes from respective root concepts. By consequence, the relationship between the diminished subtypes of democracy and autocracy has not received due attention. In fact, from both sides there is a tendency to ignore diminished subtypes on the other side of the political spectrum. For Merkel et al., when a country is not a democracy or defective democracy, it is an autocracy. For Schedler, when a country is not democratic or closed authoritarian, it is electoral authoritarian. Although Levitsky and Way recognize the need to distinguish competitive authoritarian regimes from ‘unstable, ineffective, or otherwise flawed types of regime that nevertheless meet basic standards of democracy’, they too focus exclusively on the distinction with closed authoritarianism.⁸⁹ A double-root strategy alerts the analyst to the existence of diminished subtypes of both democracy and authoritarianism and encourages him/her to examine politics in a country with a view to both types.

The added value of a double-root strategy is most easily appreciated when examining the boundary between diminished subtypes of democracy and authoritarianism. Multi-party elections are a necessary, but not a sufficient condition of democracy. A key insight from the work of Merkel et al. and Lauth is that a regime can be(come) undemocratic in multiple ways. More clearly than Schedler, Levitsky and Way make the same point with regard to their concept of competitive authoritarianism. Therefore, scholars working on authoritarianism-with-multi-party-elections and scholars working on defective democracy agree that the difference between the two does not lie exclusively in the quality of these elections.

A double-root strategy can build on the work of both Lauth and Merkel. From Merkel it takes the conceptualization of democracy, its diminished subtypes, and their criteria. From Lauth it takes the idea to identify not merely the threshold between defective and functioning democracy, but to extend the scale upwards and downwards to encompass the full spectrum of regimes. For our purposes, this means that for all five partial regimes (elections, political rights, civil liberties, horizontal accountability, and effective government) criteria should be determined that distinguish between defective democracy, electoral/competitive authoritarianism, and closed authoritarianism. To give an example: Merkel et al. specify four criteria in the partial regime of elections: active and passive voting rights, free and fair elections, and elected office holders. The boundary between defective democracy and authoritarianism is crossed when suffrage restrictions are determined arbitrarily, when elections are manipulated to secure the position of those in power, and when a majority or significant number of office holders is not democratically legitimated.⁹⁰ The threshold separating competitive and full-scale authoritarianism, following Levitsky and Way, is the possibility for the opposition to participate in elections.⁹¹

It may not always be so clear what distinguishes a defective democracy from a competitive authoritarian regime. Concerning the media, for Merkel et al. a regime becomes a defective democracy when the media are economically dependent on the state and organizations and individuals are selectively repressed. A defective democracy becomes authoritarian when those in power monopolize the public sphere.⁹² Working from the other end of the spectrum, Levitsky and Way assert that in 'full-blown autocracies, the media are entirely state-owned, heavily censored, or systematically repressed . . . In competitive authoritarian regimes, by contrast, independent media outlets are not only legal but often quite influential and journalists, though frequently threatened and periodically attacked – often emerge as important opposition figures'.⁹³

A systematic extension of the criteria for the five democratic partial regimes to diminished and full authoritarian regimes, an exercise that falls outside the scope of this analytical review article and is difficult at the present stage of scholarship on electoral and competitive authoritarianism, may well reveal that some criteria have more discriminatory power than others. This could help in specifying the characteristic cluster of features for electoral or competitive authoritarianism and assist in identifying possible subtypes. Table 2 presents the analytical framework for a double-root strategy of regime classification. Its novelty and added value lies in the combination of the partial regimes of democracy identified by Merkel et al. with the entire range of regime types from functioning democracy to totalitarianism. For each regime type, for each partial regime, criteria and indicators have to be specified. The number of partial regimes could be extended if, following the discussion above, media and stateness are treated as separate dimensions leading to distinct defects.

The case of Russia may help illustrate the need for and potential of a double-root strategy that combines the literatures on diminished subtypes of democracy and authoritarianism. Merkel and his collaborators view Russia as a delegative democracy in the first year after the founding elections and an illiberal democracy in 2001.⁹⁴ In addition, there are problems with political participation (exclusive democracy) and limits to effective government caused by corruption and state capture, especially under president Yeltsin (democracy with reserved domains).⁹⁵ At least until 2003, the electoral process is judged minimally free and fair until, but as Beichelt notes, similarities with autocratic Belarus have been growing.⁹⁶ In contrast, for Schedler and Levitsky and Way there is no doubt that Russia is an electoral or competitive authoritarian regime. A double-root strategy would encourage the simultaneous application of both diminished subtypes, integrated in a common framework of analysis based on five or even seven partial regimes. Such an approach could track the development of democratic defects and specify the point at which they become so severe that they change the nature of the regime into an electoral authoritarian regime.

Does it matter whether one treats Russia, or any other country in the grey zone, as a defective democracy or electoral authoritarian regime? The answer is clearly yes. First, if there is any validity in the notion of an operating logic characteristic of

Table 2. A double-root strategy of regime classification.

Regime type	Partial regimes of democracy				
	Elections	Political participation rights and media	Civil rights	Horizontal accountability	Effective government and stateness
Functioning democracy	Criteria and indicators				
Defective democracy		Criteria and indicators			
Electoral authoritarianism			Criteria and indicators		
Closed authoritarianism				Criteria and indicators	
Totalitarianism					Criteria and indicators

Note: based on Merkel et al., *Band 1: Theorie*; Lauth, *Demokratie und Demokratiemessung*; Schedler, *Electoral Authoritarianism*; Merkel, 'Totalitäre Regimes'; Croissant and Thiery, 'Von defekten und anderer Demokratien'.

a particular type of regime, then it is important to determine this to understand its nature and dynamics. Second, the research questions are different. Studies on electoral authoritarianism focus on the conditions under which elections serve to stabilize the authoritarian regime. The concept and typology of defective democracy shift attention to the origins, conditions, trajectories, institutionalization, and consequences of democratic defects, opening a new line of research. Third, strategies for democracy promotion will be different. In electoral authoritarian regimes, efforts to bring about regime change should focus on strengthening the democratic opposition and improving their access to the 'arenas of democratic contestation'.⁹⁷ In defective democracies, efforts to improve the quality of democracy should target the specific defects characteristic for the regime in question.

A double-root strategy will still leave cases that cannot be classified, but this class will be small in number and restricted to pure hybrids, which following Lauth are most fruitfully conceived as a residual category: 'Hybrid regimes are neither a subtype of autocracies nor of democracies but a regime type on their own, encompassing those political systems that on plausible grounds cannot be classified as either autocracy or democracy'.⁹⁸ Hybrid regimes are not to be confused with regimes in transition. Hybrid regimes are a particular type of regime whereas a regime in transition is precisely that, a regime changing from one type to another.⁹⁹

Conclusion

Warnings have been sounded about a 'terminological Babel' in democratization studies caused by 'inconsistent definitions of the various types and subtypes, producing a taxonomical system with blurred boundaries'.¹⁰⁰ Embedding existing notions of defective democracy into a theoretically grounded typology, Merkel et al. help to create order. On the authoritarian side of the spectrum, there is as yet no equivalent attempt at systematization and recent work on electoral authoritarianism lacks conceptual and empirical precision. A double-root strategy is necessary to integrate research on the grey zone between democracy and dictatorship. This article has made a first attempt to sketch the contours of such an integrated framework of analysis for contemporary regimes.

During the 1990s, it looked as if studies of democracy and democratization would be dominated by the embryonic disciplines of transitology and consolidology for the foreseeable future.¹⁰¹ In the new millennium the outlook has changed. The studies reviewed here agree that defective democracies and electoral authoritarianism are not transitional phases, but regime types. All regard democratic consolidation as a distant prospect of marginal relevance to contemporary analysis, and when describing democratization, emphasize its partial character, culminating more often than not in defective democracies or even electoral authoritarian regimes. Some of the issues covered in the consolidation literature are recurring in the examination of democratic defects, but the research question is bound to change from 'how do new democracies consolidate and what factors facilitate this process?' to 'how do

democratic defects develop and what are the prospects and possibilities for further democratization?’

Notes

1. Huntington, *Third Wave*; Diamond, ‘Is the Third Wave Over?’.
2. Diamond, ‘Thinking About Hybrid Regimes’, 25.
3. McFaul, ‘Fourth Wave of Democracy and Dictatorship’; Epstein et al., ‘Democratic Transitions’.
4. Collier and Levitsky, ‘Democracy with Adjectives’.
5. O’Donnell, ‘Delegative Democracy’; Zakaria, ‘Illiberal Democracy’.
6. Ottaway, *Democracy Challenged*; Levitsky and Way, ‘Rise of Competitive Authoritarianism’; Brumberg, ‘Trap of Liberalized Autocracy’.
7. Guliyev, ‘Post-Soviet Azerbaijan’.
8. Diamond, ‘Thinking About Hybrid Regimes’; Walle, ‘Africa’s Range of Regimes’.
9. Huntington, *Third Wave*; Diamond, ‘Is the Third Wave Over?’.
10. Collier and Levitsky, ‘Democracy with Adjectives’.
11. Lauth, *Demokratie und Demokratiemessung*.
12. Merkel et al., *Band 1: Theorie*; Merkel et al., *Regionalanalysen*.
13. Schedler, *Electoral Authoritarianism*.
14. Lauth, ‘Dimensionen der Demokratie’. All translations from German are by the author.
15. Lauth, *Demokratie und Demokratiemessung*, 22.
16. Dahl, *Democracy and its Critics*.
17. Lauth, ‘Die Kontrolldimension’; Schedler, Diamond and Plattner, *Self-Restraining State*.
18. In contrast, Storm assesses the state of democracy through the presence of what she sees as its three ‘core elements’, speaking of ‘one element democracy’, ‘two element democracy’, etc. Because each element is sufficient but not necessary for democracy, a country can be democratic when it has civil liberties without meaningful elections. Storm, ‘Elemental Definition of Democracy’.
19. Lauth, *Demokratie und Demokratiemessung*, 330–50.
20. *Ibid.*, 339.
21. For an analysis of democratic deficiencies in the USA, see Lauth, ‘Deficient Democracies’. For other efforts to assess the quality of democracy, see: Beetham and Weir, *Political Power and Democratic Control*; Diamond and Morlino, *Assessing the Quality of Democracy*.
22. Lauth, *Demokratie und Demokratiemessung*, 117.
23. Merkel, ‘Defekte Demokratien’.
24. Croissant, *Transition zur defekten Demokratie*; Merkel et al., *Band 1: Theorie*; Merkel et al., *Regionalanalysen*; Croissant and Merkel ‘Consolidated or Defective Democracy?’.
25. Puhle adds minority rights and protection as an eleventh criterion, falling under the rubric of rule of law. Puhle, ‘Probleme demokratischer Konsolidierung’.
26. Merkel et al., *Band 1: Theorie*, p. 15. Keman’s conceptualization and operationalization of what he terms ‘defected democracies’ is much looser. Keman, ‘Polyarchy & Defected Democracy’.
27. Merkel, ‘“Eingebettete” und defekte Demokratien’; Merkel, ‘Embedded and Defective Democracies’.
28. Krennerich, ‘Weder Fisch noch Fleisch?’; Merkel et al., *Band 1: Theorie*, 66–7.
29. Krennerich, ‘Weder Fisch noch Fleisch?’; Rüb, ‘Hybride Regime’.
30. Johnson, ‘Pluralist Authoritarianism’; Merkel et al., *Band 1: Theorie*, 239–40.

31. Berg-Schlosser, 'Messungen und Indices'; Munck and Verkuilen, 'Conceptualizing and Measuring Democracy'.
32. Rüb, 'Hybride Regime', 102; Heinemann-Grüde, Review of *Defekte Demokratien: Band 1: Theorie* by Merkel et al.; Mainwaring, Brinks and Pérez-Liñán, 'Classifying Political Regimes', 41.
33. O'Donnell, 'Delegative Democracy'; Larkins, 'Judiciary and Delegative Democracy'; Ziegler, 'Transitioning from Delegative Democracy'; Panizza, 'Beyond "Delegative Democracy"'; Peruzzotti, 'New Argentine Democracy'; Zakaria, 'Illiberal Democracy'; Karatnycky, 'Decline of Illiberal Democracy'; Valenzuela, 'Democratic Consolidation'. Merkel et al.'s type of 'exclusive democracy' is broader than Remmer's concept of 'exclusionary democracy', but more narrow than Lawoti's notion of 'exclusionary democratization'. Remmer, 'Exclusionary Democracy'; Lawoti, 'Exclusionary Democratization in Nepal'.
34. Merkel et al., *Band 1: Theorie*; The findings are likely to be somewhat different for Africa. See Bogaards, 'Demokratie in Afrika südlich der Sahara'.
35. Croissant, *Transition zur defekten Demokratie*; Merkel et al., *Regionalanalysen*.
36. Beichelt, 'Autocracy and Democracy'.
37. Merkel et al., *Regionalanalysen*, 365, 380; Henderson, 'Slovak Republic'.
38. Merkel et al., *Regionalanalysen*, 468.
39. McMann, *Economic Autonomy and Democracy*, 176.
40. See: Freedom House, <http://www.freedomhouse.org>; Polity IV Project, <http://www.systemicpeace.org/polity/polity4.htm>
41. Merkel et al., *Regionalanalysen*, 476.
42. Croissant, 'Legislative Powers'.
43. Carbone, 'Do All Good Things Go Together?'.
44. Linz, *Totalitarian and Authoritarian Regimes*; Maćków, 'Systemen der gescheiterten Demokratisierung'.
45. Levitsky and Way, 'Rise of Competitive Authoritarianism'.
46. Diamond, 'Thinking About Hybrid Regimes'.
47. Ottaway, *Democracy Challenged*.
48. Wigell's type of 'electoral-autocratic regimes' deviates from this consensus as it captures regimes that organize democratic elections, but fall short on civil liberties. Such regimes are commonly referred to as illiberal democracies. Wigell, 'Mapping "Hybrid Regimes"'.
49. Brownlee, *Authoritarianism*.
50. Schedler, 'Logic of Electoral Authoritarianism', 3.
51. Ibid.
52. Ibid.
53. Ibid.
54. For example, Albania 1996–2000, Bangladesh 2002–2006, Nigeria 1999–2005, and Guatemala 2002–2006.
55. Clark, 'Armed Arbiters'; Lindberg, 'Tragic Protest'.
56. Thompson and Kuntz, 'After Defeat'.
57. Snyder, 'Beyond Electoral Authoritarianism'; Wiest, 'Beschränkter Pluralismus'.
58. Dahl, *Polyarchy: Participation and Opposition*.
59. Croissant and Thiery, 'Von defekten und anderen Demokratien', 18.
60. Merkel and Croissant, 'Formale und informale Institutionen', 7; Merkel and Croissant, 'Defective Democracies', 33.
61. Böckenförde, *Recht, Staat, Freiheit*.
62. Lauth, *Demokratie und Demokratie-messung*, 101. See also O'Donnell, 'Democracy, Law, and Comparative Politics'.
63. Merkel and Croissant, 'Good and Defective Democracies', 201.

64. Köllner, Review of Croissant, *Transition zur defekten Demokratie*.
65. Rose and Shin, 'Democratization Backwards'.
66. Snyder, 'Beyond Electoral Authoritarianism', 224.
67. Snyder, 'Scaling Down', 101.
68. O'Donnell, 'On the State, Democratization'.
69. Lauth, 'Dimensionen der Demokratie', 44; Merkel et al., *Theorie*, 58–9.
70. Lauth, *Demokratie und Demokratiemessung*, 338.
71. Lauth briefly discusses 'brown areas' in the context of informal institutions. *Ibid.*, 215–6.
72. Merkel et al., *Band 1: Theorie*, 71.
73. *Ibid.*, 95.
74. Muno and Thiery, 'Defekte Demokratien in Südamerika'.
75. Croissant, *Transition zur defekten Demokratie*.
76. Gibson, 'Boundary Control'.
77. Snyder, 'Scaling Down', 228–9.
78. The framework is being further developed to measure the quality of established democracies. See Bühlmann, Merkel and Weßels, *Quality of Democracy*.
79. Merkel and Croissant, 'Formale und informale Institutionen'; Merkel and Croissant, 'Defective Democracies'; Croissant and Thiery, 'Von defekten und anderen Demokratien'.
80. Puhle treats defects in political participation rights as evidence of a particular type of illiberal democracy, simply called 'illiberal democracy (1)' versus 'illiberal democracy (2)' for defects in the rule of law. Puhle, 'Probleme demokratischer Konsolidierung', 131.
81. Croissant, *Transition zur defekten Demokratie*, 127–33.
82. Wigell, for example, identifies four democratic subtypes. However, little is gained from introducing yet another typology and terminology. In fact, much may be lost when delegative democracy is relabelled as 'electoral democracy' and democracy with reserved domains as 'constitutional democracy'. Wigell, 'Mapping "Hybrid Regimes'.
83. Merkel, 'Totalitäre Regimes'; Croissant and Thiery, 'Von defekten und anderen Demokratien', 9–32.
84. Lijphart, *Patterns of Democracy*; Brooker, *Non-Democratic Regimes*.
85. Schedler, *Electoral Authoritarianism*, 4.
86. Case, 'Manipulative Skills'; Croissant, *Transition zur defekten Demokratie*.
87. Schedler, *Electoral Authoritarianism*.
88. Munck, 'Drawing Boundaries'.
89. Levitsky and Way, 'Rise of Competitive Authoritarianism'; Way, 'Competitive Authoritarianism in Ukraine'.
90. Merkel et al., *Band 1: Theorie*, 79–80.
91. Levitsky and Way, 'Rise of Competitive Authoritarianism', 55.
92. Merkel et al., *Band 1: Theorie*, 84–5.
93. Levitsky and Way, 'Rise of Competitive Authoritarianism', 57.
94. *Ibid.*, p. 16.
95. Mangott, *Zur Demokratisierung Russlands*, 199–200.
96. Merkel et al., *Regionalanalysen*, 306; Beichelt, 'Autocracy and Democracy', 129. See also Gel'Man, 'Post-Soviet Transitions'; White, 'Rethinking Postcommunist Transition'.
97. Levitsky and Way, 'Rise of Competitive Authoritarianism'.
98. Lauth, 'Die empirische Messung demokratischer Grauzonen'. The 'hybrid regimes' in Central America described by Karl most likely would be classified as defective democracies rather than pure hybrids. Karl, 'Hybrid Regimes'.

99. For example, it is not clear whether Diamond's category of 'ambiguous regimes' encompasses hybrid regimes, transitional regimes, or both. Diamond, 'Thinking About Hybrid Regimes'.
100. Armony and Schamis, 'Babel in Democratization Studies', 114.
101. Schmitter, 'Proto-Science of Consolidology'.

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