FURTHER READING

Bachrach, P. and Baratz, M. (1963), 'Decisions and Non-Decisions', *American Political Science Review*, 57: 632–42.
This is a much-cited critique of the pluralist theory of the state which emphasizes the importance of non-decision-making.

Blowers, A. (1984), *Something in the Air: Corporate Power and the Environment* (London: Harper & Row).
This is an interesting British case study relevant to theories of power.

Crenson, M. (1971), *The Un-Politics of Air Pollution* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press).
This is a study which attempts to put into operation Lukes' critique of the pluralist decision-making methodology.

Dahl, R. (1963), *Who Governs?* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press).
This is the classic example of the decision-making methodology associated with pluralism.

Lukes, S. (2005), *Power: A Radical View* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2nd edn).
This is a celebrated account of power. This repeats the original account published in 1974 but also includes an essay defending it against critics.

Miliband, R. (1978), *The State in Capitalist Society* (New York: Basic Books).
This is the best-known modern defence of the Marxist theory of the state.

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4

DEMOCRACY AND POLITICAL OBLIGATION

POLITICS AND THE STATE

READER'S GUIDE

This chapter has two major aims: first, to explore key aspects of democratic theory, and second, to examine the case for democracy being the major grounding for political obligation. The first objective will be fulfilled by examining the historical evolution of the term, the debate between advocates of the protective theory and the participatory theory of democracy, and the new directions democratic theory has taken in recent years. The second will be fulfilled by outlining why it is that democracy is seen as the major grounding for political obligation, examining alternatives to democracy, and considering the majoritarian implications of democracy.

WHAT IS DEMOCRACY?

Like many other political concepts, democracy is a term with no precise and agreed meaning. Finding a definitional consensus for democracy is not helped by its emotive connotations. Democracy is a 'good' word. It is almost universally regarded in a favourable light. There are few countries in the world that would want to be labelled as undemocratic. Indeed, partly because of the collapse of the old Soviet Union and its satellites: 'Around two-thirds of all the countries in the world have a basic set of democratic institutions built around competitive elections that enable all adult citizens to choose and remove their government leaders' (Stoker, 2006: 7).

This expansion of competitive elections has led to the growing importance of so-called illiberal democracies or, as they are sometimes called, competitive authoritarian regimes or semi-democracies (Levitsky and Way, 2002; Zakaria, 2003). As we saw in Chapter 2, these are regimes in which, while elections are not blatantly rigged, elected rulers pay little heed to the protection of individual rights (such as free speech) once in power, and therefore opposition to rulers, who are able to manipulate electoral outcomes through control of the media and the use of the state apparatus, is difficult. As a result, the turnover of political leaders through competitive elections is small.

→ See Chapter 2 for a description of illiberal democracy.

The existence of illiberal democracies, however, raises a conundrum for students of democracy. For, while it is surely stretching the concept to breaking point if we insist that the label 'democratic' can be applied to, say, one-party states—for example, in China (which describes itself as a 'democratic dictatorship') or in the old Soviet bloc countries—it is not so clear-cut that we should deny the democracy label to competitive authoritarian states.

It is probably the case that democracy does, justifiably, mean different things to different people; the question is, whether there is a core of meaning on which we can all agree. Very basically, democracy refers to a regime whereby political power is widely spread, where power in some way rests with the people. Democracy, then, has something to do with political equality. As Arblaster (2002: 7) points out, this definition is sufficiently vague to allow for a number of interpretations. Lively (1975: 30) suggests seven possibilities:

1. That all should govern, in the sense that all should be involved in legislating, in deciding on general policy, in applying laws, and in governmental administration.
2. That all should be personally involved in crucial decision-making, that is to say in deciding general laws and matters of general policy.
3. That rulers should be accountable to the ruled; they should, in other words, be obliged to justify their actions to the ruled and be removable by the ruled.
4. That rulers should be accountable to the representatives of the ruled.
5. That rulers should be chosen by the ruled.
6. That rulers should be chosen by the representatives of the ruled.
7. That rulers should act in the interests of the ruled.

Lively argues that numbers 1 to 4 are justified in being described as democratic whereas 5 to 7 are not (ibid.: 33–42). The crucial defining characteristic is accountability. The latter three definitions provide no means whereby the rulers can be removed by the ruled and therefore cannot be defined as versions of democracy. Number 7 allows for the inclusion of regimes, such as those subscribing to communism, who claim, despite the lack of competitive elections, to be democratic because the real interests of the many are promoted by rulers who are aiming for social and economic equality (Macpherson, 1966: 12–22).

This claim—that the democratic label can be attached to a regime whose rulers, however they are chosen, govern in the interests of all—is a logical mistake. The outcomes of a political system are separate from the means by which its rulers are chosen. It may be the case, as we will see later, that democracy (in the sense of a political system requiring regular competitive elections) is the most effective way of ensuring that rulers do act in the interests of the ruled. It may also be the case that the achievement of political equality requires a degree of economic equality. Ultimately, though, a benign dictatorship with the interests of her people at heart is not impossible. Many one-party communist states, of course, were far from being benign, arguably precisely because their leaders were not accountable. It is also questionable whether illiberal democracies, where rulers are able to manipulate elections and transfers of power are rare, uphold the accountability rule and can therefore be described as truly democratic. To add an extra layer of complexity, we will see later in the chapter that liberal democracies do not escape criticism from a democratic perspective because of the potential conflict between majoritarian decision-making and the protection of individual rights.

Focusing on the first four of Lively's typology, we are still left with considerable variation. The first two are forms of direct democracy, whereas the latter two are forms of representative democracy. Direct democracy refers to a system whereby the people rule directly. The first definition on Lively's list seems impossible to be realized in anything but a very small-scale society. Even the second raises huge difficulties. Representative democracy is a more realistic proposition. This is where the people choose others to represent their interests. There can also be stronger and weaker versions of representative democracy. British MPs, invoking the great eighteenth-century parliamentarian Edmund Burke (1729–97), for instance, have for long insisted upon their independence from their constituents, so that on at least some issues (mainly moral ones such as capital punishment and abortion) they vote according to their conscience. Of course, it is debatable how far MPs can remain aloof from their constituents' views without negative consequences befalling them at a future election, as the debate over Brexit has illustrated (**see Box 4.1**).

CASE STUDY BOX 4.1
MPs, Brexit, and the EU Referendum

An interesting illustration of competing theories of representation has occurred in the context of the UK Referendum on the European Union. Held in June 2016, the result was a narrow victory for the leave side of the debate. There has been much subsequent debate about the role of Parliament and MPs in the post-referendum climate, and much delay in making a final decision. Theresa May's failure to get Parliamentary approval for a deal negotiated with the EU ultimately led to her resignation. The current position is that the UK has left the EU, under the terms negotiated by Boris Johnson's Government. Many (on the leave side) argued that MPs should simply follow the will of the people irrespective of whether or not a deal could be agreed. Some even suggested that Parliament should have no role in the implementation of the referendum verdict. Others argued that Parliament should have had the final say, at least on the terms of the exit from the EU, if not the actual decision whether or not to leave. A prominent leave supporter took a case to the Supreme Court to establish that Parliament should be involved. Significantly,

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Photo 4.1 Britain's exit from the EU ('Brexit;) raised many questions about representation.
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the vast majority of MPs in both major parties voted to accept the decision to invoke Article 50 allowing the UK to leave the EU despite the fact that a majority of them supported remaining. The fear of an electoral backlash, particularly against Labour MPs (stunningly realized at the 2019 election) was the chief reason for the decision not to go against the popular will by seeking to revoke Article 50. This reveals the limited utility of the Burkean model of representation in a democracy with regular elections. Nevertheless, MPs have remained committed to the view that they should have the final say on what the UK's approach should be.

KEY POINTS

- The concept of democracy has a core meaning. It is about popular rule or the rule of the people. This can be interpreted in a wide variety of ways, although some regimes clearly do not exhibit any characteristics of the people having power, and others limit it extensively.
- Lively suggests that democracy requires the people to make decisions directly, or to choose, and be able to remove, those who make decisions on the people's behalf.

HISTORY

Democracy is a Greek term containing two words: *demos*, meaning the citizens within a city-state, and *kratos*, meaning power or rule (Arblaster, 2002: 15). The term was used to describe the practice of the Greek city-states. Many contemporary democratic theorists and activists look back to the Greek city-states with great affection, regarding them as providing a participatory model of democracy of which modern liberal democracies fall far short. In actual fact, direct democracy was possible precisely because a considerable number of people—most notably women, slaves, and foreigners—were excluded and did a great deal of the work that enabled citizens to engage in politics.

For much of its history, democracy has been regarded in a negative light. The Greek philosophers—Plato and Aristotle, for instance—argued that democracy was synonymous with mob rule and was a perverted form of government, although the latter regarded democracy as the least bad of the three 'deviant' forms of rule: democracy, tyranny, and oligarchy. (**See Box 4.2.**) Much the same picture applied to successive political thinkers. For instance, neither of the key English political theorists of the seventeenth century, John Locke and Thomas Hobbes, were democrats.

The French and American Revolutions

The tide began to turn with the French and American revolutions of the eighteenth century. Both revolutions proclaimed democracy as one of their goals, and both were influenced by the writings of the French political philosopher, Jean-Jacques Rousseau. The Americans endorsed democracy but were still wary of it. The Founding Fathers of the US Constitution, and most notably James Madison (1751–1836), were very keen to rid themselves of the absolute monarchy

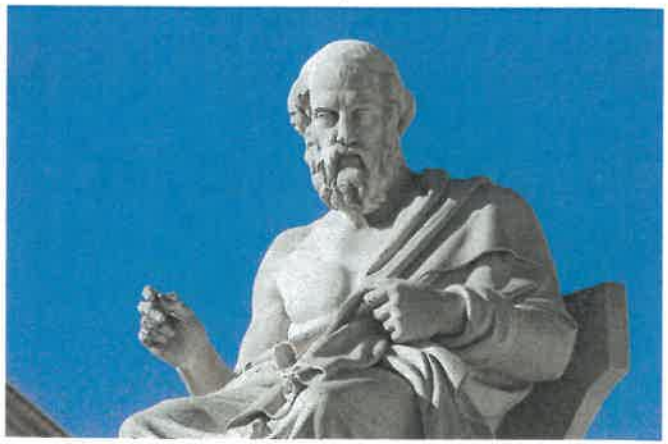

Photo 4.2 Plato was an ancient Greek philosopher did not support democracy.
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democracy as an end in itself; that is, participation is itself enriching. It is not, as for the protective theory, a burden to be undertaken in order to ensure that politicians are accountable. Rather, participation is to be valued for the positive effect it has on individual characteristics. Individuals who participate, it is argued, become more virtuous and intelligent, they understand the need for cooperation, and their own self-worth increases as does their status in the eyes of others.

The antecedents of the developmental model are in the practice of the Greek city-states and the political philosophy of Rousseau, J. S. Mill, and the unjustly neglected British socialist thinker G. D. H. Cole (1889–1959) (Wright, 1979). Support for it began to re-emerge in the 1960s. A new breed of radical democratic theorists began to challenge the elite theory (Duncan and Lukes, 1964; Bachrach, 1967; Pateman, 1970). They argued that, by abandoning the participatory element, the elitist theory of democracy had lost sight of the true meaning of democracy. Any notion of rule by the people had been abandoned. What was needed, then, was the rediscovery of participation in the political process.

Assessing the validity of these competing theories of democracy is a difficult task, not least because the meaning of the concept is disputed. Two observations about these competing models of democracy are pertinent here. One is that if democracy can be defined first and foremost as political equality, then the elite theory of democracy stretches the label to its absolute limits. Schumpeter was, arguably, trying to say that the rule of political elites, albeit in a competitive environment, is for a variety of reasons preferable to mass participation in politics. As a result, democracy ought to be limited in the interests of other goals such as stability and efficiency. In other words, Schumpeter is really espousing a mixed form of government combining democracy with other values. The problem is that, by the time Schumpeter was writing, democracy had such positive connotations that it was difficult for him to admit to wanting to limit it.

On the other hand, we can say that advocates of the developmental model must be able to show that their version of democracy is not undesirable and unrealistic, and this, indeed, is what much of the developmental literature seeks to do. For example, advocates of this model would say that political apathy is not inevitable, that people can be encouraged to participate more and, once they start, they will improve at it. Some may, perhaps, be less likely as a result to exhibit authoritarian values. Political apathy, they would continue, is partly a product of the lack of participation in decision-making in the working environment. Of great importance to the developmentalists, therefore, is industrial democracy (Pateman, 1970). As Lively (1975: 38) astutely remarks, 'it does not follow from the fact that "classical" democracy does not exist that it cannot ever exist; nor does it force us to redefine democracy, for it might just as well lead us to the conclusion that Western systems are not democracies or are only imperfect democracies'.

Finally, advocates of the developmental model have to show that participation is possible (Arblaster, 2002: 84–5). Here, technological developments would seem to be on their side, offering the possibility of greater involvement in politics through, for instance, the use of the Internet and interactive-TV technology. In a large complex society, the use of referendums, whereby all electors vote on a particular issue, is a direct democratic way of increasing involvement. They are used in many countries, particularly Switzerland and the USA, and were used, very successfully, to decide on Scottish independence in 2014.

KEY POINTS

- The modern debate has been between exponents of the elite theory of democracy, on the one hand, and the participatory theory of democracy, on the other.
- In the post-1945 period, the elitist theory, associated above all with Schumpeter, held sway. The classical theory, associated with participation and citizen involvement in decision-making, was regarded as undesirable and unrealistic.
- The elitist theory began to be challenged from the 1960s by a new breed of participationists, eager to show the developmental possibilities of greater citizen involvement. The success of their enterprise depends on showing that greater participation is both desirable and realistic.

WHY IS DEMOCRACY REGARDED AS SPECIAL?

Politics in the West, and, indeed, much of the world, has become synonymous with democracy. Democracy is regarded as indispensable. But why is this? What is it about democracy that is so special? The usual answer to this question is that democracy is regarded as special because it is put forward as the main reason why we should obey the rules and laws of a political system. In other words, if one were to ask why it is that we are obliged to accept and obey the laws of our society, then the answer would be because they are democratically made.

This question of **political obligation**—on what grounds should we obey the laws of the state?—has been one of the central preoccupations of political philosophy. At a more general level, political philosophers ask how can the state be justified, or, to put it another way, what makes the state legitimate? What, that is, is the ideal state which we would recommend for humans to live under? The issue of political obligation is important because of its compulsory nature. If we join a voluntary organization, such as a pressure group or a church, we have to accept the rules of that organization but if we do not like them, we have the option of leaving. For most of us, we do not have the same option when it comes to the state. Some people may be able to go and live somewhere more to their liking, but for most people, that is not an option, and it is certainly not an option to live in a stateless society. Most of us do not have a choice when it comes to accepting the laws of the state, or at least if we choose not to obey the state, then we can expect sanctions to be applied against us.

Democracy seems to offer us the ideal grounding for political obligation because if we make the laws under which we live, then they are likely to be in our interests and therefore we get what we want. In other words, we do not lose anything as a result of being in a political community. Democracy, then, has a strong claim to be the political system that would be chosen by people in the **state of nature** scenario that we saw in Chapter 2 has been a device used by **social contract** theorists. In other words, if a group of people came together to form a political system, the advantages of choosing democratic principles would be that they would all get a say in the laws under which they have to live. Government by consent, then, is an important principle for liberal social contract theorists because it can be argued that, if we consent to the laws under which we live, the freedom existing in the state of nature would be maintained in a democratic political system.

→ See Chapter 2 for a discussion of the liberal social contract tradition.

The concept of consent derives principally from John Locke, the seventeenth-century English political philosopher, who argued that since we have a natural right to freedom, only our consent can justify political power being exercised over us. Of course, we then have to ask, what precisely is it that counts as consent? Political philosophers have got themselves into a bit of a muddle trying to answer this question. Most notoriously, Locke argued that consent need not be expressly given, in the sense that someone has to actually formally register their consent. Instead, Locke argued, consent can also be given tacitly, in the sense that it does not require a formal act. Locke (1690/1988: 177) argues, then, that providing that an individual lives under a particular political jurisdiction, gaining the benefits—whatever they may be—of doing so, then that person can be said to have consented to political rule.

Clearly, this is problematic, not least because for most people there is little choice but to live where they are. Political philosophers tend to argue, therefore, that consent must be expressed. Moreover, it must be continuous, since no subsequent generation can be bound by the consent of their predecessors. But how is this to be achieved? One suggestion is that voting serves this function. That is, when we vote, irrespective of the outcome, we accept—or consent to—the political order under which we live. This clearly provides an option not to consent—by not voting or spoiling a ballot paper. It follows logically that those who do not choose to vote are withholding consent and are not then obliged to obey the state.

There are a number of problems with regarding the democratic procedure of voting as a way in which we can be obligated to the state. The obvious problem here is those who vote are not primarily, if at all, knowingly consenting to the political system. Likewise, many who fail to vote clearly do so for reasons other than registering their lack of consent. Moreover, even if we choose not to vote, we will be forced by the state to obey laws in any case, so non-voting has no purchase in this regard. Voting, by itself then, is not an express act of consent, and incurs the same problem as residence (Hyams, 2015: 12–13). Moreover, it may be that when we vote we find ourselves in a minority. The question then is are we still morally obliged to obey in this circumstance even when we have not got what we want from a decision? (see the discussion later in this chapter). A related question is: are we obliged to obey any decisions provided they are democratically made? Here, it is possible to conceive of a situation where we are so morally opposed to a decision, even if it is made democratically, that we feel unable to obey it. Decisions made on issues such as abortion and the use of animals in scientific experiments fall, for some people, into this category.

ALTERNATIVE SOURCES OF POLITICAL OBLIGATION

It should be recognized that democracy and consent are not the only possible reasons for political obligation. We could also focus on substantive outcomes, on what the state actually does, rather than on the procedures involved in making decisions, in order to determine the state's legitimacy. If we adopt this different approach, there are a variety of possible candidates. Here we can reprise some of the normative accounts of the state provided in Chapter 2:

→ See Chapter 2 for an account of competing normative theories of the state.

We Ought to Obey the State Because it Provides us With Security

This idea, as we saw, is associated with the seventeenth-century British political theorist Thomas Hobbes. To reiterate, Hobbes argues that a sovereign who is strong enough to enforce stability is worth obeying. As soon as the sovereign's power weakens, however, and security can no longer be guaranteed, we have no obligation to obey.

We Ought to Obey the State Because it Protects Our Natural Rights

This idea is associated with another British political thinker, John Locke. He argues that humans possess natural rights, given by God, before they enter into a political community. As a result, for such a political community to be legitimate, it must uphold and protect these rights. If it fails to do so, then we are entitled to revolt against it. Two brief observations at this point can be made about this approach to political obligation. The first is that, although Locke was not a democrat, his theory is not necessarily incompatible with democracy. Most democrats would argue that rights should be protected and would say that this is more likely to happen if the people have an influence on what the state does. There are some problems with this, though, which we will come back to later.

The second observation to note is that the key problem with rights as a grounding for political obligation is that it leaves open the question of *what* rights exist. Locke himself argued that the crucial rights to protect are the rights to liberty, life, and property. The problem with these rights is that they might be used to defend the status quo, to defend inequality and privilege. As we pointed out in Chapter 2, however, it is equally plausible to claim that we have other rights too—the right not to starve, for instance, or the right to a home, or education, or healthcare. Of course, these latter—social and economic—rights may conflict with the negative ones. It may be necessary, for example, to constrain, or even eliminate, property rights in order to generate enough resources to provide free healthcare or education.

More pertinently, from the perspective of the subject matter of this chapter, a democratic decision taken with the will of the majority may lead to the sacrifice of negative rights in favour of the achievement of more positive ones. Alternatively, the achievement of positive rights may be used as a reason, or as an excuse, for a failure to introduce democracy. For example, in China, the political leadership published a White Paper on democracy in 2005 in which the postponement of democratic reforms was justified partly on the grounds that economic development, and the achievement of better standards of living, were a priority (see web links). The upholding of (at least some) rights, then, is not necessarily compatible with democracy. Again, the consequences of this will be explored a little later in the chapter.

We Ought to Obey the State When it Maximises Happiness

From a utilitarian perspective, our obligation to obey the state depend upon the degree to which it maximises happiness. The state should therefore stop individuals causing pain to others through a rigorous system of punishment. Moreover, the state also has a paternalistic role to ensure that individuals do pursue what is in their best interests and therefore maximize their own happiness. Bentham came to think that only if they are accountable to the electorate will rulers seek to maximize the happiness of all, rather than their own happiness. As we saw earlier in this chapter, this forms the basis of the utilitarian theory of democracy.

We Ought to Obey the State When it Pursues the General Will

The idea of the general will has been a popular theme in political theory but it is particularly associated with the eighteenth-century French philosopher, Jean-Jacques Rousseau. For Rousseau, the general will can be contrasted with the selfish, particular, wills of individuals. It is tantamount, then, to the common good, something that is in the general interest of the

Photo 4.3 Jean Jacques Rousseau.
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community, that is, in the collective interests of society. This general will, then, amounts to more than the sum of particular wills. Rather, it is a genuine collective will, irrespective of the particular wills of members of the community. This approach to political obligation holds that if the state pursues this common or general interest—and not particular interests—then we have an obligation to obey it. Hegel adopts a very similar theory, whereby the state pursues the common interest, thereby transcending the particular interests pursued by families and by civil society.

Rousseau's arguments are more complex than has been suggested so far. We can coax them out by looking at what might be regarded as a key problem with his theory. We might respond to Rousseau and other advocates of the general will by asking what is so good about it? Why are we obliged to accept it? Why should I not be selfish and encourage the state to pursue a programme that is in my own selfish interests? We might answer by saying that we ought to obey the general will because it is the right and moral thing to do. The problem with this is that some people may deny the importance of this moral edict and still say 'I'm still not going to obey the general will because, on this occasion at least, it is not in my interests to do it'.

It is at this point that Rousseau's argument becomes a little more complex and contentious, for he wants to claim that not only should we promote the general will, but that this is what we *really* want to do. He even goes as far as to say that if we are forced to accept the general will, then we are being *forced to be free* (Rousseau, 1913). We are being forced to be free because we are being forced to accept what we really want to do.

This is not the place to engage in a sustained critical analysis of Rousseau's political theory. We can say that it is heavily dependent on the very existence of a community's collective will. Some political theorists suggest that that idea is a fiction. Of course, if this is the case, it becomes a potentially dangerous doctrine, open to abuse by a dictator who justifies tyrannical measures on the spurious grounds that they are in the 'public' or 'collective' interest (Talmon, 1952). Here, critics have been particularly scathing about the implications of Rousseau's claim that it is legitimate to

force someone to be free. This aspect of Rousseau's theory relies on a particular conception of freedom and we will return to it in more detail in Chapter 5.

For now, if we accept that Rousseau is right and that we all do really want to pursue the general will, it is important to recognize that he has arguably solved the problem of political obligation. Remember that the study of political obligation is concerned with finding a political system which we can all obey because we want to. If we can do this, then we do not lose any freedom by joining together with others to create a political community. Rousseau (1913: 191) sets out his task as follows.

> **The problem is to find a form of association which will defend and protect with the whole common force the person and goods of each associate, and in which each, while uniting himself with all, may still obey himself alone, and remain as free as before. This is the fundamental problem of which the social contract provides the solution.**

→ See Chapter 5 for a discussion of Rousseau's idea of the general will and its implications for freedom.

Rousseau's answer is that we can all obey a political system that pursues the general will and remain as free as we were before, because the general will is what we all want. In other words, what the state wants to do, if it pursues the general will, can be unanimously accepted as representing the will of all. As we will see later, democracy finds it difficult, if not impossible, to achieve unanimity, and this raises question marks against its claim to provide an ideal form of political obligation.

KEY POINTS

- Democracy is often regarded as the most important source of political obligation. This is because it is a political system that allows people to make decisions under which they can live. The freedom that individuals have in an imaginary state of nature is therefore maintained.
- There are, of course, others reasons we might invoke to explain our political obligation. We might, for instance, want to obey the state because it provides us with security (Hobbes) or because it protects our rights (Locke) or because it promotes the general will (Rousseau) or maximises happiness (Bentham).
- If Rousseau is right that we always really want the state to promote the general will, he has made a case for a solution to the problem of political obligation. This is because even if we oppose the general will, we can be forced to follow it which is tantamount to being forced to be free. Our allegiance to the state, therefore, makes us as free as we were before a political community was created.

IS DEMOCRACY SPECIAL? THE PROBLEM OF MAJORITY RULE

After that detour, we will go back now and, armed with knowledge of alternative approaches to political obligation, further consider democracy's claim to be the ideal form of political obligation. Democracy, as we saw, is regarded as the primary modern ground for political obligation because if we participate in the making of the laws under which we live, these laws are likely to be in our interests and therefore we get what we want. The principal problem with democracy, however, is

that we are very rarely going to arrive at unanimous decisions. As a result, democratic government means, in practice, following the view of the majority.

There are a number of problems with the majoritarian principle. In the first place, it is well documented that where there are more than two alternatives on which voters can have preferences, then it is difficult to reach a majority decision (Lively, 1975: 14–15). Of course, in practice too, many governments in the UK and presidents in the USA are not elected with the majority of votes. This is explained by the use of the first-past-the-post, or plurality rule, electoral system, where the winning candidate merely has to gain more votes than any other candidate. This system is used in the UK, the USA, Canada, Jamaica, and India, although most countries now use electoral systems where there is a more proportional relationship between the seats won and the votes cast. This avoids the discrepancies that can occur in countries using plurality rule voting where there are more than two significant parties.

Even if majority rule can be established, it is far from clear that it is the most appropriate political mechanism. For one thing, pure majority rule leaves open the possibility that a government can be elected with majority support, but which then intends to deny the principle of majoritarianism in the future. The best example of this was in Algeria in 1991 when the Islamic Salvation Front won a majority of the seats (although not the votes) in the country's first multiparty elections. With a doubtful commitment to multiparty democracy, the military intervened, cancelling the second round, and banning all political parties based on religion. This was then followed by a violent civil war. This raises the question whether it is ever justified on democratic grounds to prevent a government with a majority of votes and/or seats from taking power.

Even if the principle of majoritarianism is maintained, however, there is the problem that arises from the fact that some people in every decision made are going to find themselves in a minority. Rousseau's solution to this problem is to say: 'provided that the laws carried are in accord with the general will, everyone unanimously will want to accept them because it is the right or moral thing to do'. For Rousseau, then, there is no problem with the minority. However, Rousseau's assertion that everyone would and should willingly accept the general will is contentious, to say the least. Therefore, if we assume that Rousseau's solution to the minority problem is flawed, then we are still left with the problem of the lack of unanimity; that is, if we accept that democratic decisions are those taken by majority votes, then what happens to those who find themselves in a minority? Do we still expect them to obey the law even though they did not support it and does this not risk the minority being exploited by the majority to the extent that their rights are infringed? **(See Box 4.5.)**

There are some political philosophers who want to suggest that we cannot expect such people to obey a law which they did not support. One such political theorist, Robert Paul Wolff, in his book *In Defense of Anarchism* (1970), argues that those who find themselves in a minority are not obliged to accept the law; and because there is no solution to the majority rule problem, no government can ever be legitimate, requiring everyone to be obligated to it. For Wolff, the only legitimate kind of society is one that preserves individual autonomy. This, for Wolff, is an anarchist society, a society without government.

In practice, of course, we may just have to accept that democracy is not perfect, and console ourselves with the thought that at least a majority rule decision ensures that more people than not are on the winning side. What we can say is that the position of minorities is made much worse if the same people find themselves permanently in a minority. Usually, this does not happen because there are shifting or fluid minorities; that is, everyone can expect to be in a minority from time to time. As a result, the majority in any particular instance is less likely to harm the

CASE STUDY BOX 4.5
Democracy, Rights, and Hunting

One interesting example of the potential conflict between the application of majoritarianism and the protection of rights is the debate about hunting in the UK. The hunting community has used a variety of arguments to support the continuation of hunting, but one recent strategy has been to employ the ideals of liberalism and the protection of individual rights. Here it has been argued that, despite the fact that hunting has been regularly opposed by a majority of British people in opinion polls and a majority of MPs in the House of Commons, it still does not justify a ban because it is illegitimate for a majority to impose its own moral views on the minority. To take such an action is a serious infringement of rights. This rights defence of hunting, however, fell on deaf ears despite the hunting community's attempt to undermine the legislative ban by appealing to the Human Rights Act.

minority's interests fundamentally, because those in the majority know that at some future point, they may find themselves in the minority.

The persecution of a minority is much more likely to take place where there is a permanent majority and a permanent minority. The classic case of this is in Northern Ireland, where traditionally most issues have been decided on ethno-nationalist lines with Protestants in the majority and Catholics in the minority on key issues. Clearly, such a situation is likely to cause problems and it was the persistent discrimination faced by the minority Catholic community that led to the resurgence of the troubles in the late 1960s. A form of rule known as consociational democracy, involving the sharing of power in divided societies, is one possible solution to this problem of entrenched minorities.

→ See Chapter 10 for a further discussion of consociationalism.

KEY POINTS

- The problem with democracy as a source of a political obligation is that few, if any, decisions are going to be made unanimously. As a result, the minority are going to have to accept decisions with which they disagree, thereby reducing their freedom.
- Some political philosophers, most notably Wolff, argue that because of the minority rule problem, no state can ever be legitimate.
- Fluid minorities are less of a problem than permanent minorities. The latter are more likely to lead to the oppression of a minority.

NEW DIRECTIONS IN DEMOCRATIC THOUGHT

Traditionally, thinking about democracy has been based on a number of assumptions (Saward, 2001). Three are particularly important. The first is that democracy only applies to the political unit of the nation state. That is, democracy refers to the character of the political institutions in any particular sovereign state. The second is that democracy is principally about the aggregation of

Griffiths, J. (2019), *The Great Firewall of China: How to Build and Control an Alternative Version of the Internet* (London: Zed books).
An up-to-date analysis of the way the Chinese government tries to tame the Internet

Härdig, A. C. (2014), 'Beyond the Arab revolts: conceptualizing civil society in the Middle East and North Africa', *Democratization* (DOI: 10.1080/13510347.2014.917626).
Read together with Cavatorta's article.

Jordan, G. and Moloney, W. A. (2007), *Democracy and Interest Groups: Enhancing Participation?* (Basingstoke: Palgrave).
This is an enquiry into the ways in which participation in interest groups enhances democracy.

Kaviraj, S. (2001), 'In search of civil society', in Sudipta Kaviraj and Sunil Khilnani (eds), *Civil Society: History and Possibilities* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), pp. 287–323.
A carefully nuanced analysis of the origins of the term and of its partial relevance to politics in the global South, especially India

Moore, M. (2019), *Democracy Hacked: How Technology is Destabilising Global Politics* (London: Oneworld).
An up-to-date analysis of the various challenges that new technologies are posing to political systems and practices, especially democracies

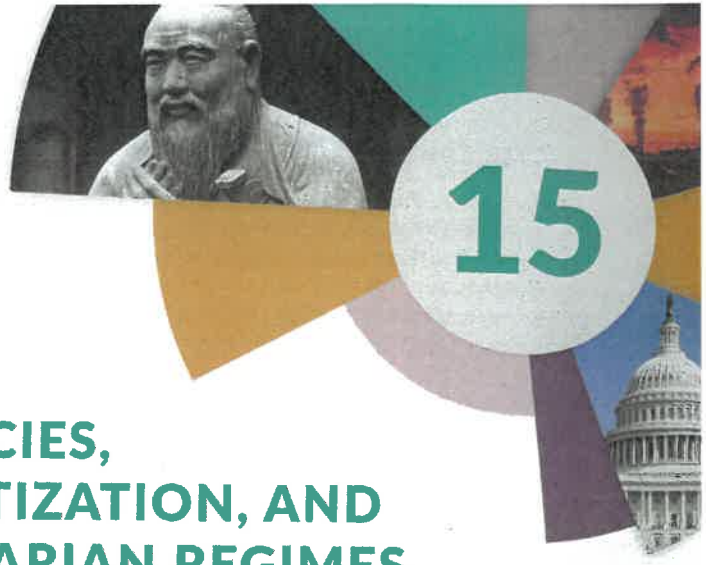
Savoie, D. J. (2010), *Power: Where is it?* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's UP).
Chapter 4 contains an eloquent account of the increasing domination of democratic political life by the media and by political consultants.

Scott, J. C. (1990), *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press).
This is an influential examination of the ways in which ordinary people get around authoritarian rulers.

Street, J. (2010), *Mass Media, Politics and Democracy* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2nd edn).
This is a very good analysis of the relationship between the media and democratic politics.

Wilson, G. K. (1990), *Interest Groups* (Oxford: Blackwell).
This is a well-regarded analysis of interest groups.

For additional material and resources, please visit the Online Resources at:
www.oup.com/he/garner4e



15

DEMOCRACIES, DEMOCRATIZATION, AND AUTHORITARIAN REGIMES

POLITICS AND THE STATE

READER'S GUIDE

Democracy and democratization have long been among the most widely researched and most hotly contested topics in comparative politics. More recently there has been a resurgence in interest in authoritarian systems, as many have survived the wave of democratization that took place in the 1980s and 1990s. This chapter will first outline the main approaches to analysing democratization. It will then consider different analytical models of democracy and indexes to measure democracy. Then it will survey the more recent literature on authoritarian systems and why they persist. The final part of this chapter will discuss the challenges that confront democracy in the face of this authoritarian revival, including that of populism.

THE SPREAD OF DEMOCRACY

According to Freedom House in the USA, there were 122 electoral democracies in the world in 2013, which represented 63 per cent of the 195 countries and territories surveyed. This is an enormous increase compared with the end of the 1980s, when just 41 per cent of 167 states were democracies. The first time that a majority of states in the world were democratic was 1992–3 (Freedom House, 2015). Clearly, the collapse of communist regimes in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union (FSU) was the most important factor in this change, but it was not the only one. Replacement of authoritarian regimes by democracies had already started in the 1970s. According to Huntington (1991), the 'third wave' of democratization began in 1974 with the demise of the long-standing authoritarian regime in Portugal, followed by the end of Franco's dictatorship in neighbouring Spain the following year—**see Table 15.1** for the three waves of democratization.

The World Values survey in 2000 showed that at least 63 per cent of the respondents in seventy-nine out of eighty countries agreed with the proposition that 'democracy may have its problems but it's better than any other form of government'. Nigeria was the sole exception with only 45 per cent agreeing (Inglehart et al., 2004: table E123). All of this suggests that democracy has become the predominant legitimate form of state organization around the world.

DEMOCRATIZATION

→ For a discussion of why democracy is regarded as special, see Chapter 5.

Why do people embrace democracy? According to an important recent study by Welzel (2013), World Values Surveys over more than twenty years show that the aspiration for democracy is part of a more general syndrome of emancipative values—the aspiration to be free from external domination and dependency.

Table 15.1 The three waves of democratization

1828–1926	1943–62	1974–
US	Uruguay	Portugal
UK	Brazil	Spain
France	Argentina	Argentina
Switzerland	Colombia	Brazil
Italy	Peru	Philippines
Argentina	Venezuela	Taiwan
	W. Germany	S. Korea
	Italy	Pakistan
	Japan	E. Europe
	India	FSU
	Sri Lanka	Mexico
	Philippines	Nigeria
	Israel	S. Africa

Source: Huntington (1991: 16–26).

Democracy is conventionally held to have originated in ancient Athens in the fifth century BC. Certainly, the term itself came from classical Greek, designating a different form of rule from that of aristocracy or dictatorship. However, Keane has argued in his magisterial history of democracy (2009) that the practice of communities running their affairs through assemblies is much older—up to two millennia earlier—and can be traced back at least to Persia, India, and the Phoenician Empire. The term 'democracy' may be Western, but the practice has never been exclusively Western.

→ See Chapter 4 for a further discussion of democracy.

Political science has generated an enormous literature to analyse the global rise of democracy over the last thirty years. Basically, it divides into two types of analysis: first, long-term trends of modernization that create preconditions for democracy and opportunities for democratic entrepreneurs; and, second, the sequences of more short-term events and actions of key actors at moments of national crisis that have precipitated a democratic transition—what has sometimes been dubbed 'transitology'. Let us consider these two alternative approaches in turn.

Long-Term Structural Trends (I): Economic Development

One constantly recurring claim has been that the emergence of democracy is part of a broader pattern of modernization. An influential early example of this approach was Lerner's *The Passing of Traditional Society* (1958), which focused mainly on the Middle East. It suggested that modernization led to increasing convergence of social, economic, and political structures as well as ways of life. 'Modern' people around the world had more in common with each other than they did with the remaining 'tradition-oriented' sections of their separate societies. And what had driven this transformation, according to Lerner? Primarily, it was economic change.

This sparked one of the most heatedly debated trends in the study of democratization which continues to the present day: the possible connection between economic development and democratic change. Lipset (1959) argued that the more prosperous a nation, the greater its ability to sustain democracy. Over the last fifty years, this claim has provoked a veritable flood of analyses of evidence for and against. According to Huntington (1991), historical evidence showed that states with a per capita income of at least US$3,000 (in contemporary nominal, not Purchasing Power Parity, terms) were very unlikely to see a successful military overthrow of a democratically elected, civilian government. While this did not explicitly equate to a claim that democracy was assured in states with that level of per capita income, it was very suggestive.

Subsequently, Przeworski et al. (2000) qualified the argument by distinguishing between the role of economic development in launching democratization and its role in strengthening democracy once it had been established. They claimed that there was no persuasive evidence of economic development bringing about democratization, only of it strengthening democracy once established. Soon afterwards, however, Boix and Stokes (2003) rebutted this argument with equally weighty statistical evidence to claim that it did bring about democratization. In any case, whichever was true, no-one could claim there were no exceptions. India is regularly cited as a counterfactual example to both theories, since it has been a functioning democracy almost continuously since independence in 1947, despite the fact that even now its per capita income, at around US$2,000, is still below the level predicted to bring democratic stability. On the other hand, Singapore, with a per capita income estimated by the World Bank in 2018 at US$64,582, still is not a democracy. Even if either explanation could claim validation from the trajectories of most democracies in the world, the most that either of them could demonstrate is correlation, not causation. This raises the question of why economic development should lead to democratic change.

Long-Term Structural Trends (II): The Rise of the Middle Class

Again, it was Lipset (1960) who suggested the first and most influential hypothesis. Economic development depended on the emergence of a middle class, whose interests and ambitions led them to challenge traditional elites and demand a share in national affairs, which could only be satisfied by democracy. This was what the history of Western Europe showed. This too has led to a welter of studies that seek to identify and theorize the political aspirations and activities of middle classes in states around the world. For Barrington Moore (1966: 418), the converse also applied in the past to Russia and China: why had they not democratized? As he put it, 'no bourgeois, no democracy'. Historically, he argued, authoritarian rule there had prevented the emergence of an independent-minded bourgeoisie.

Until the 'third wave' of democracy, this supposition seemed generally plausible. To some extent, Huntington's analysis could be said to have updated this approach, since a higher level of development might be assumed to require a more developed middle class too. It still applies. For example, one of the key factors that led to the refashioning of democracy in Turkey under the Justice and Democracy Party (Adalet ve Kalkinma Partisi—AKP) since 2002 has been the material support and encouragement of Muslim small businessmen in the Anatolian heartland (Bugre and SavasKan, 2014).

But Huntington's analysis is not universally valid. It is difficult to argue that the middle classes played the key role in the downfall of the communist regimes of Eastern Europe and the FSU, or in the 'Arab Spring'. Also, in 'developmental states' (identified in Chapter 3) outside the West, the state has dominated the middle class in directing development. Businessmen there tend to be more dependent on the state for finance, contracts, and favours, so they are more cautious about advocating political and economic liberalization for fear of being penalized by government. For example, in China, where even though per capita income in 2018 was calculated by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank at US$9,771, which puts it at the top end of the range when a transition to democracy might be expected, the state continues to dominate the economy and resist democratization ('Building of democracy in China', 2005; Nathan, 2013; Chen, 2013).

So analysis of the path to democratization in any particular country requires consideration of a wider range of factors.

Short-Term Explanations: 'Transitology'

Other attempts to theorize the reasons for the relative success or failure of democratization have focused on more immediate, short-term factors. The collapse of communist regimes and the rising wave of democratization in the 1990s sparked academic and policy-oriented analysis, which is sometimes called 'transitology'. This sought to identify and disseminate lessons of successful democratic transition after events of a national crisis. Part of its attraction lay in the fact that it offered the hope not only of a smoother, less painful transition for the latecomers to democratization, but also of engineering a successful transition even in states that might lack many of the obvious 'prerequisites' for democracy. In this sense, it was the reverse of the Barrington Moore approach outlined above. Where Moore had suggested that some states were fated to fail at democratization because they had followed the 'wrong' path to modernization, transitology suggested that skilful political statecraft might lead to the triumph of democracy even in the most unfavourable context. Both of these approaches of course suffered from over-simplification. Any

radical political change is bound to be messy and difficult to control. However, the proliferation of democratic experiments in the 1990s led some to offer a more sophisticated conceptual framework to structure successful transitions to democracy.

The best-known example of this approach is the so-called 'pacted' path to democratization (Karl, 1990). According to this principle, once democratic change is accepted on to the national agenda, all the major political players need to agree on the ground rules for that transition, preferably in the shape of a formal pact. Either implicitly or explicitly, they are also to agree to abide by those rules, even if the final outcome does not favour them. This pact establishes democracy as the only game in town. The prototype for this approach occurred during the transition to democracy in Venezuela in 1958, when the leaders of the three main parties signed the Pact of Punto Fijo committing them to respect the outcome of the forthcoming general election. This inaugurated forty years of democracy for Venezuela. As it is located in a region not noted for the longevity of democratic regimes, it often came to be presented as a model for successful democratic transition in general.

It is true that the essentiality of a 'pact' in ensuring a successful democratic transition can be exaggerated. Democratization has certainly taken place in surprising places without pacts in place; for example, in Indonesia after the fall of President Suharto in 1998. Yet successful transitions have taken place in unpropitious circumstances where pacts were in place, while the lack of a 'pact' has scuppered successful democratic transitions. As we can see from **Box 15.1**, pacts are easier to recommend in theory than to agree in the midst of a chaotic systemic crisis, with extremists on all sides trying to derail the whole process.

→ For the later downfall of liberal democracy in Venezuela, see Chapter 12.

CASE STUDY BOX 15.1
Pacts and Democratic Transitions

For successful 'pact'-based democratic transitions, consider Poland and South Africa.

Poland

By the end of the 1980s, many felt that no regime in Eastern Europe had less legitimacy than Poland. The military government of President Jaruzelski had ruled since 1981, pre-empting the alternative of a likely Soviet invasion, but it had repressed Solidarność (Solidarity, a Polish trade union), it was despised by most of the population, it was shunned by the West, and the country was effectively bankrupt. In 1989, the regime and Solidarity finally embarked upon difficult, public, round-table negotiations to try to formulate a way out. This lasted three months and eventually they agreed a formula that would allow Solidarity to stand for election to the parliament for the first time, with some seats reserved for it in a (relatively) free and fair election. Until then the ruling Polish United Workers Party (PUWP) had insisted upon approving all candidates for seats in parliament and took most of them themselves. The PUWP had again reserved 65 per cent of the seats for themselves, but to everyone's surprise Solidarity won all the remaining seats that were contested. Even the Solidarity leaders had not expected this result, let alone the regime. Yet they all accepted the outcome. The PUWP faded away and was dissolved in 1990. Since then, Poland has gone through political reconciliation and gradual transformation that has turned it into one of the most successful democratizers, despite the initial economic trauma of

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