

Measuring Democracy

Clark, et al. (2009) pp. 147-167

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Motivation

Democracy is probably the single most important concept in political science.

Democracy in History

- ▶ Today, the word “democracy” and “democratic” carry positive connotations.
- ▶ On the other hand, “tyranny,” “authoritarianism,” and “undemocratic” carry negative connotations.
- ▶ But it has not always been this way.

Democracy in History

- ▶ Most think of the ancient Greeks as the inventors of democracy.
- ▶ In Athens, what we think of as the legislature consisted of all citizens.
- ▶ Positions in the government were chosen by lot.

Modern View of Democracy

- ▶ Modern thinking does not consider “direct democracy” to be very practical.
- ▶ Most people use the word “democracy” to mean “representative democracy” in which citizens elect representatives.

Measuring Democracy

Definition

measure (or **indicator**) - a quantification of the concept in which we are interested

In order to test the hypothesis that increased individual wealth leads to increased democracy, I need to...

1. measure individual income (GDP per capita)
2. measure democracy (how?)

Measuring Democracy

The first step in measuring a concept is to define the concept well.

Concepts: The Building Blocks of Measures

We use many words to describe entities in politics. We might describe a state as...

- ▶ democratic
- ▶ rich
- ▶ Islamic

Defining “Concept”

Definition

concept - a word used to describe a political entity. Might range from concrete (e.g. a party's vote share) to abstract (e.g. a party's ideology).

conceptualization - the process of refining and specifying concepts.

Concepts are important because allow us to communicate and reason precisely and accurately about political events. They will never be perfect, but we should always push ourself toward more precision and clarity.

Building well-defined concepts is extremely important. It is insufficient to “get the gist of” what a democracy is. You need to be able to define it.

Types of Concepts

To make our discussion a little easier, we might categorize concepts as follows.

- ▶ well-defined - precise, agreed-upon meaning (e.g. height, party's vote share)
- ▶ ill-defined - vague, argued-over meaning (e.g. individual's ideology, democracy)

Concepts in political science tend to be more abstract and ill-defined. It is essential to define our concepts as precisely as possible. Before we can answer questions about our concepts, we must know what our concepts mean!

Exercise

What does “democracy” mean? What does it mean for a country to become “more democratic”? What does it mean to say that one country is “more democratic” than another?

Dahl's View of Democracy

Robert Dahl. (1971). *Polyarchy*.

Democracy consists of two dimensions:

1. contestation
2. inclusion

Definition

contestation - captures the extent to which citizens are free to organize themselves into competing blocs in order to press for the policies and outcomes they desire

inclusion - has to do with who gets to participate in the democratic process

Dahl's View of Democracy

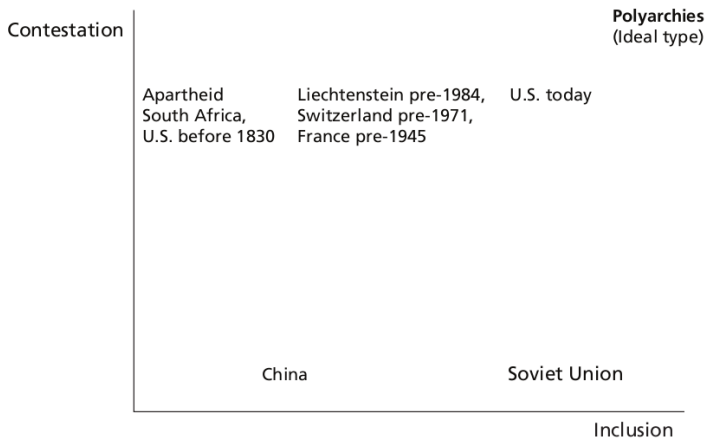
Dahl recognized that modern states could never be truly democratic, so he used the term polyarchy.

Definition

polyarchy - a political regime with high levels of both contestation and inclusion.

While Dahl's ideas about contestation and inclusion have proven highly important and influential, the term polyarchy didn't last.

Dahl's View of Democracy



Measures of Democracy

- ▶ In order to measure a concept, we must first clearly articulate that concept.
- ▶ Dahl offers a clear definition of democracy (or “polyarchy”).
- ▶ Dahl’s view is the most common in comparative politics.
- ▶ Given Dahl’s view, how can we measure democracy?

Levels of Measurement

One component of validity is the level of measurement. We prefer that our levels of measurement reflect our concept as closely as possible.

Definition

nominal measure - observations are classified into discrete, unordered categories that are mutually exclusive and collectively exhaustive

ordinal measure - observations are classified into ordered, categories

interval measure - observations are placed on a scale so that we can tell how much more or less of the thing being measured each observation exhibits

Other Ways to Characterize Measures

Definition

dichotomous measure - a measure that has only two discrete categories or values

continuous measure - a measure that can take on any intermediate value within a given range.

PACL Measure

Adam Przeworski, Michael Alvarez, Jose Cheibub, Fernando Limongi. (2000). *Democracy and Development: Political Institutions and Well-Being in the World, 1950-1990*.

Definition

PACL provide a dichotomous measure of democracy. Countries are classified as a democracy or dictatorship.

PACL Measure

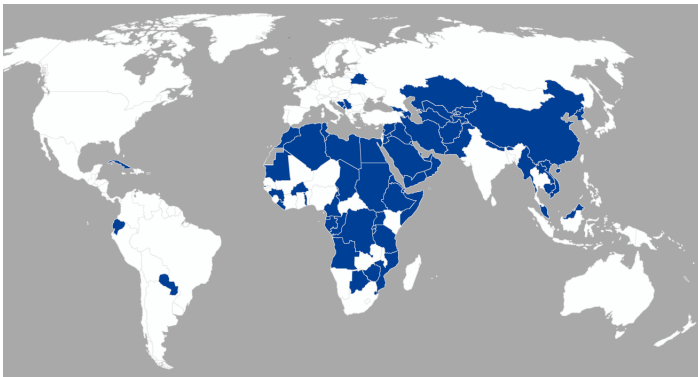
Countries are classified as a democracy if *all* of the following are true:

1. The chief executive is elected
2. The legislature is elected
3. There is more than one party competing in the election
4. An alternation in power under identical electoral rules has taken place.

Otherwise, countries are coded as dictatorships.

Question: Does this measure capture the two dimensions of Dahl's "polyarchy"?

PACL Measure



Countries colored white are coded as democracies and countries colored dark blue are coded as dictatorships.

Evaluating Measures

We start with a conception of democracy (say, Dahl's polyarchy). In order to evaluate our measure we must consider its

1. validity
2. reliability

Definition

validity - refers to the extent to which our measures correspond to the concepts they are intended to reflect

reliability - refers to the extent to which the measurement process repeatedly and consistently produces the same score for a given case

An Illustration of Validity and Reliability

FIGURE 5.3

Comparing the Reliability and Validity of Three Measures

