

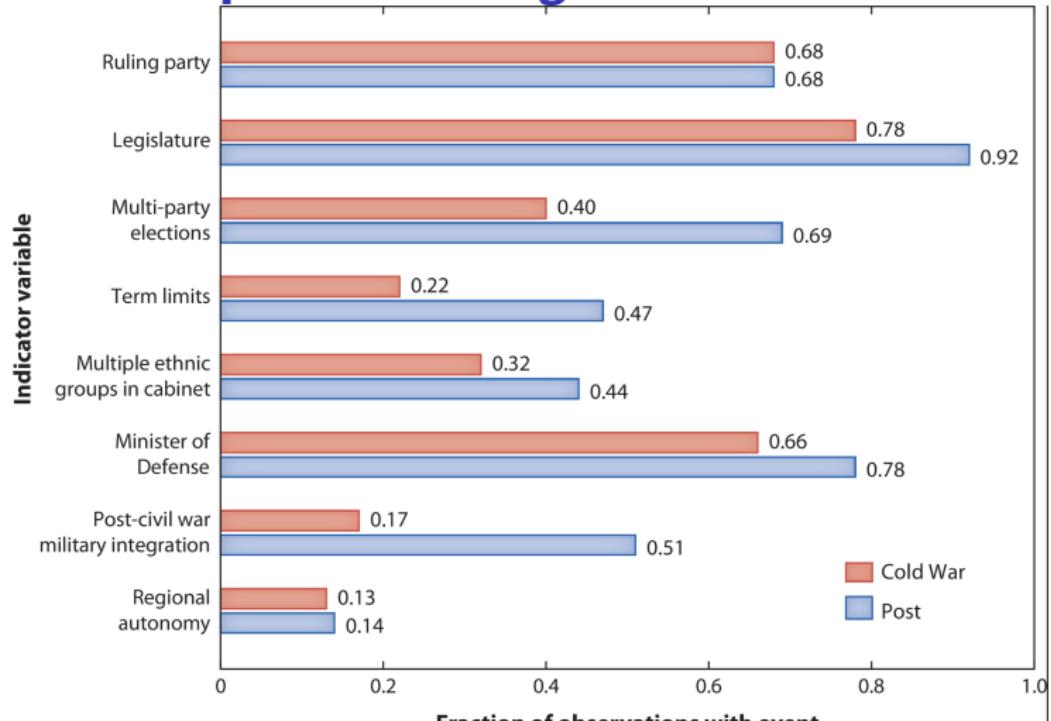
DEMOCRACY, DEMOCRATIZATION, AND SURVIVAL

Comparative Politics

Guillermo Toral

IE University

Review on authoritarian governance: the problems of control and power-sharing



What are we covering today?

- What is democracy?

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- What is democracy?
- Exercise: Unpacking measures of democracy

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- Exercise: Unpacking measures of democracy
- How do democracies emerge?
- How do democracies erode?

What is democracy?

We often refer to very different notions of democracy

- Democracy as direct participation

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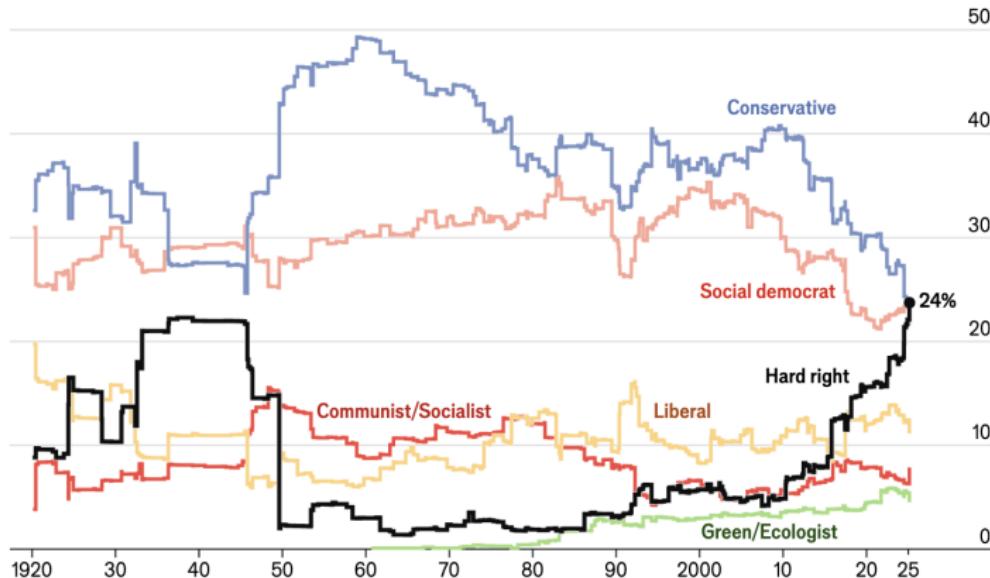
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 - The concept is open and its (collective) meaning evolves through competition

Case in point: The rise of the far right in Europe

The hard rise

European democracies*, average vote share[†] by party type, %



*Including 27 members of the European Union, Britain, Iceland, Norway and Switzerland. Countries are included only for years they are considered to be democracies †Most recent election in all countries, population-weighted

Sources: National elections; Our World in Data; ParlGov; The PopuList; *The Economist*

The polisci approach to conceptualizing democracy

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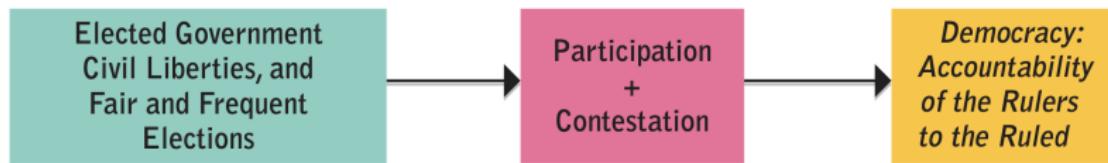
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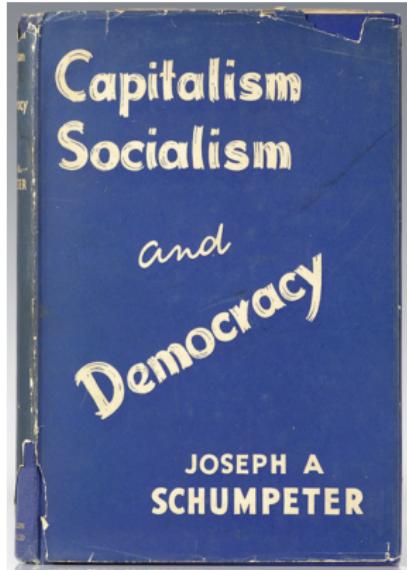
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 - **Substantive definitions:** focus more on issues of fundamental freedoms, equity, social rights, etc.
 - **Procedural definitions:** focus on formal or informal processes, how elites get to and exercise power

Substantive definitions often emphasize rights, government accountability, and citizens' agency

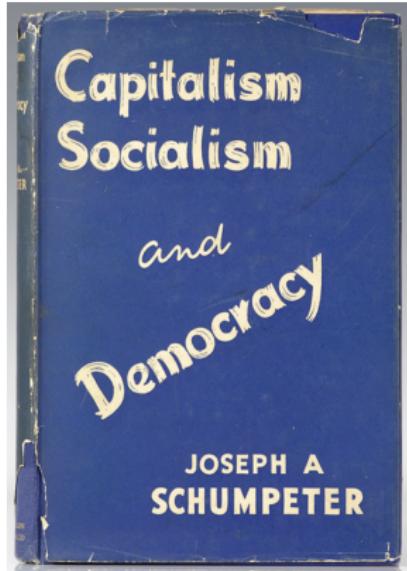


Schumpeter: Democracy as elite competition

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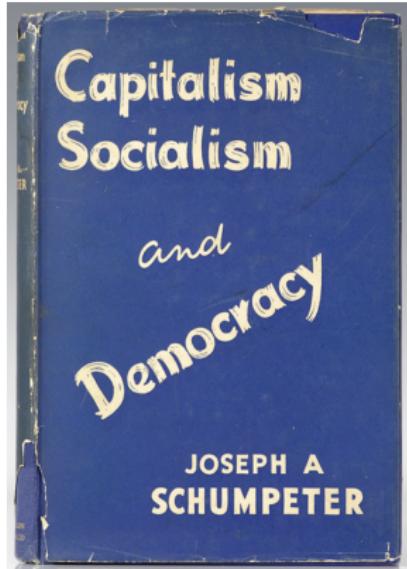


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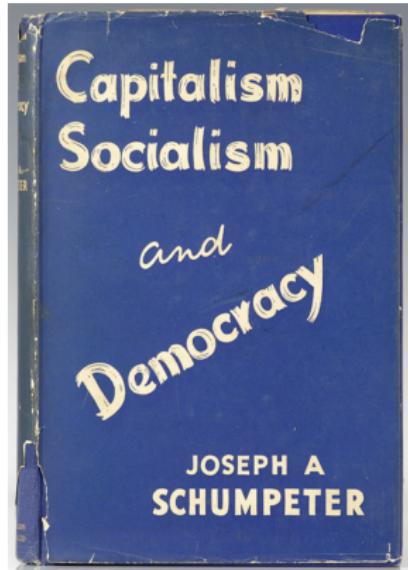
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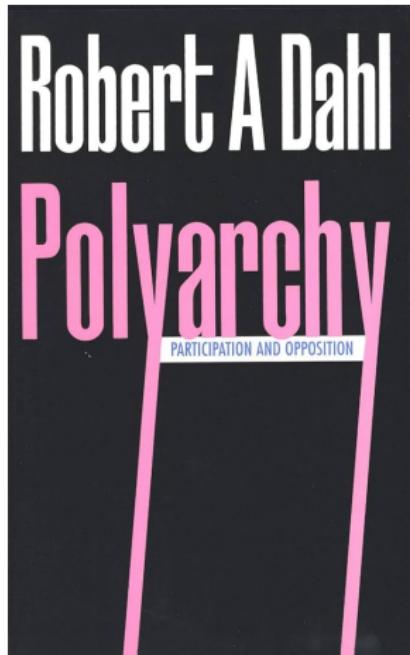
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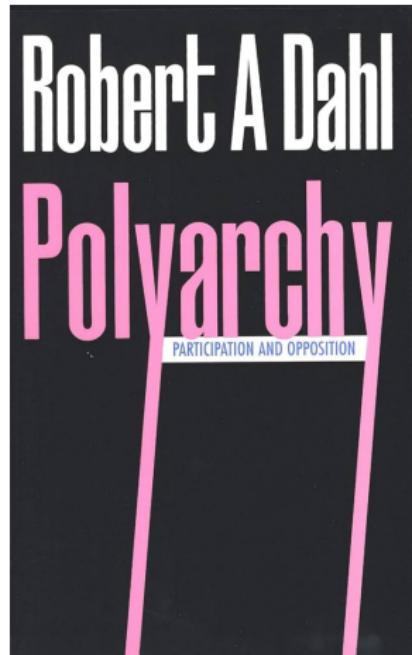
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- From his perspective, the political boss or party broker is a central to democratic politics

Dahl: Democracy versus polyarchy



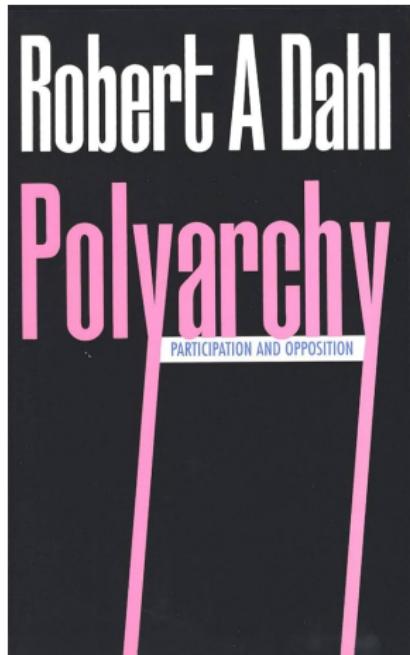
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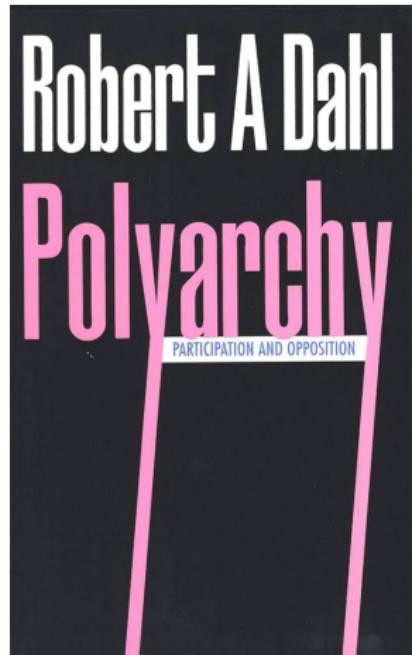
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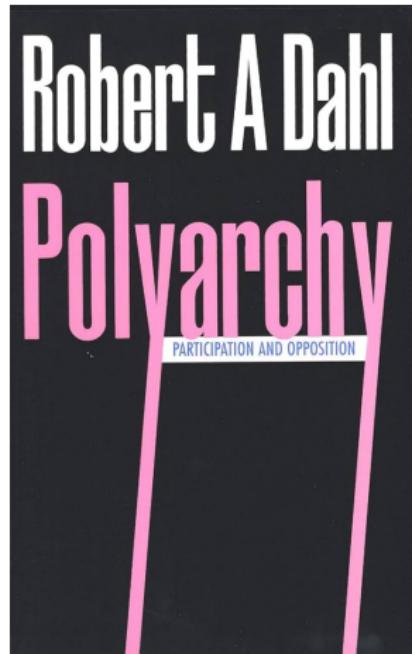
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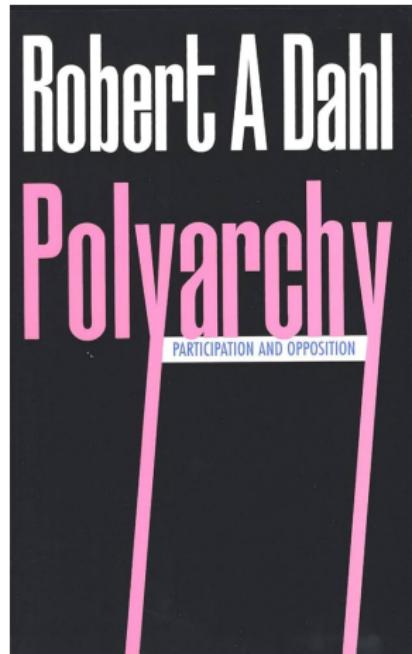
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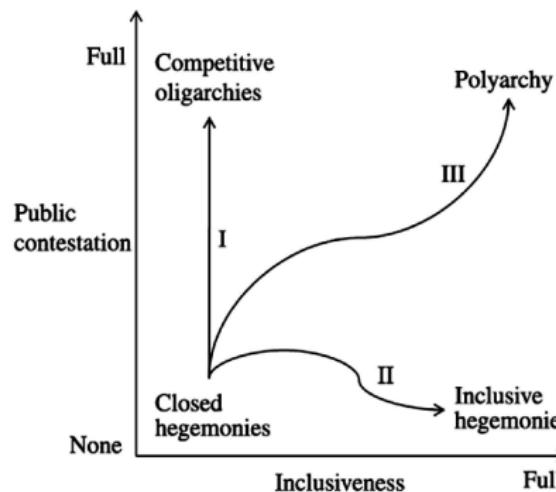
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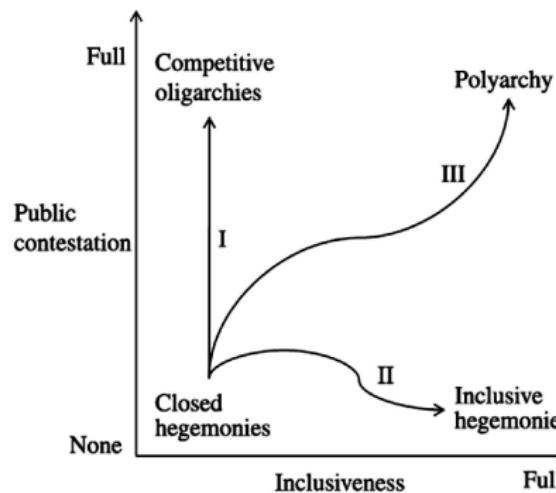
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Dahl on democratization



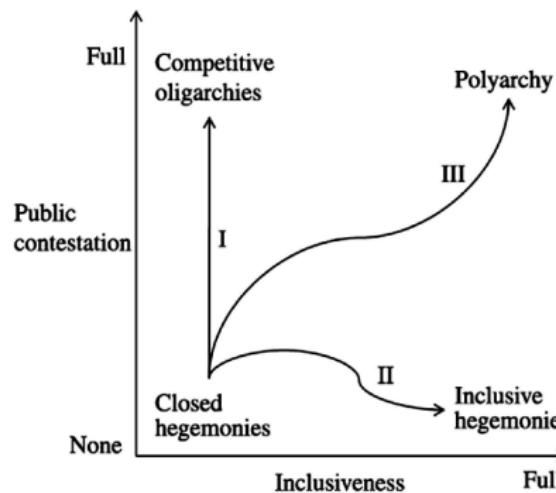
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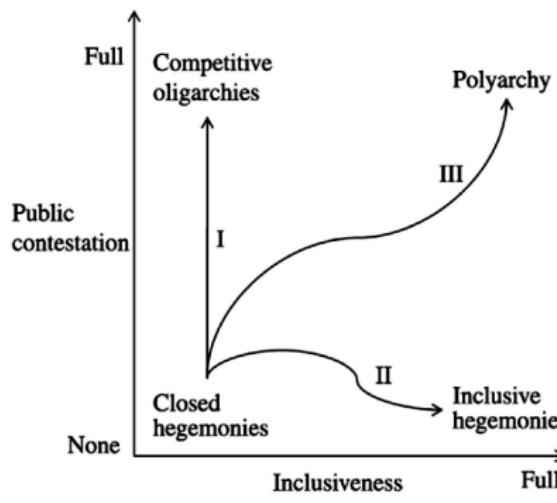
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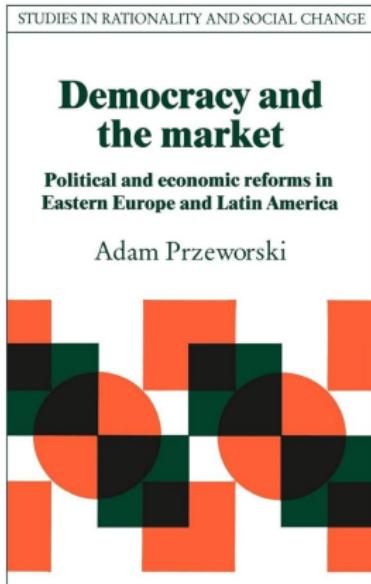
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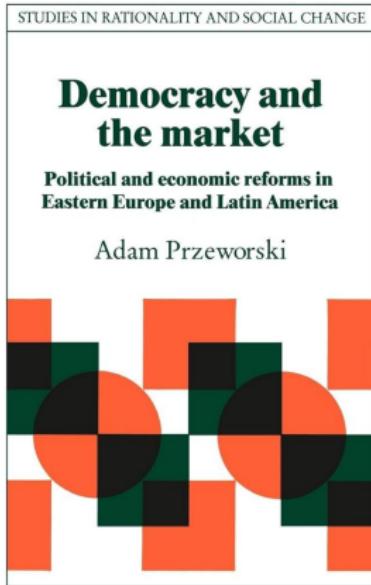
- Two-dimensional space leading to 4 regime types:
 - Level of public contestation
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- Polyarchy as **the actually existing regimes combining high inclusiveness and competitiveness**

Przeworski: Democracy as uncertainty

- “Democracy is a **system in which parties lose elections.**” Uncertainty is central: the outcomes of competition are not known *ex ante*

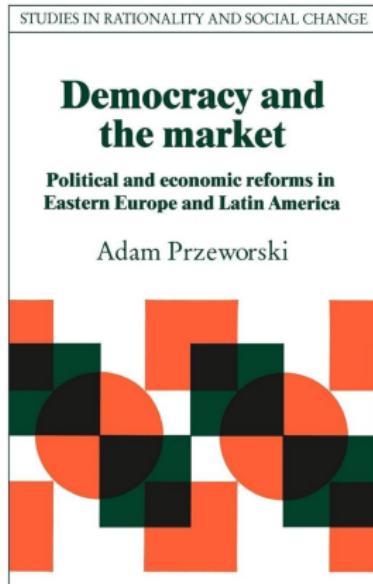


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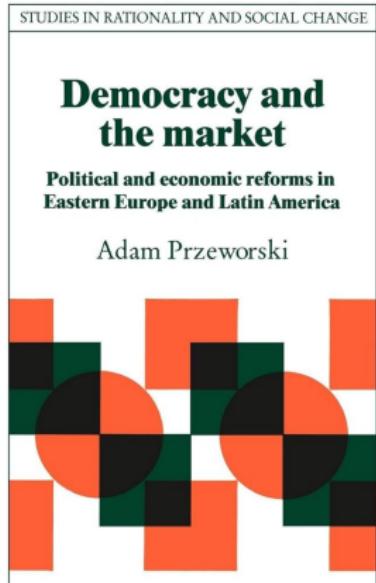
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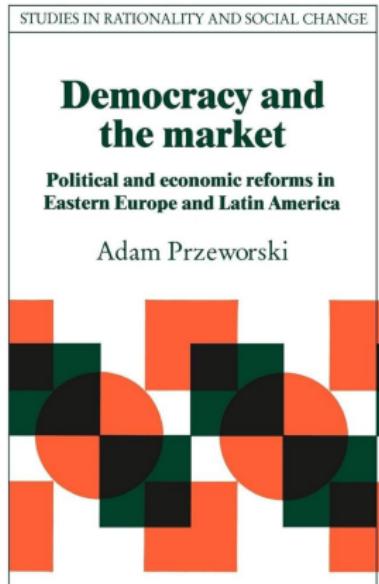
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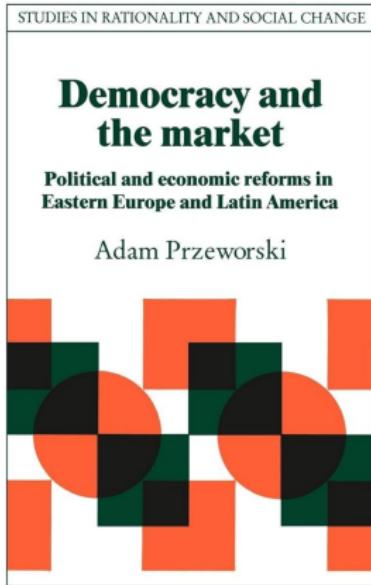
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 - Political parties and their nature as coercive organizations are key

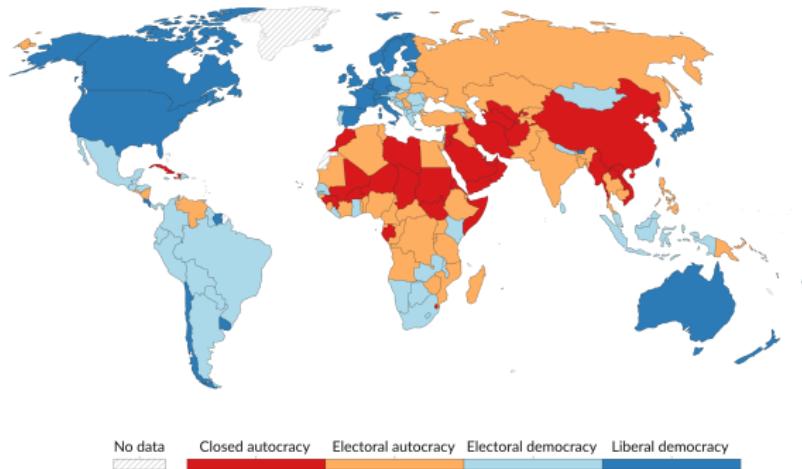
Exercise: Unpacking measures of democracy

Political regimes around the world

Political regime, 2023

Based on the classification¹ by Lührmann et al. (2018) and the estimates by V-Dem²'s experts.

Our World
in Data



Data source: V-Dem (2024)

OurWorldinData.org/democracy | CC BY

Note: The Chart tab uses numeric values, ranging from 0 for closed autocracies to 3 for liberal democracies.

1. Regimes of the World's regime classification: Closed autocracy: citizens do not have the right to choose either the chief executive of the government or the legislature through multi-party elections. Electoral autocracy: citizens have the right to choose the chief executive and the legislature through multi-party elections; but they lack some freedoms, such as the freedoms of association or expression that make the elections meaningful, free, and fair. Electoral democracy: citizens have the right to choose the chief executive and the legislature in meaningful, free and fair, and multi-party elections. Liberal democracy: electoral democracy and citizens enjoy individual and minority rights, are equal before the law, and the actions of the executive are constrained by the legislative and the courts. [Read more](#) in our article: The 'Regimes of the World' data: how do researchers measure democracy?

2. V-Dem: The Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem) project publishes data and research on democracy and human rights. It relies on evaluations by around 3,500 country experts and supplementary work by its own researchers to assess political institutions and the protection of rights. The project is managed by the V-Dem Institute, based at the University of Gothenburg in Sweden. Learn more: Democracy data: how do researchers measure democracy? The 'Varieties of Democracy' data: how do researchers measure democracy? The 'Varieties of Democracy' data: how do researchers measure human rights?

Measuring democracy: Why it matters

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- Efforts at measuring democracy, or at elucidating how different measures work, can be **helpful to clarify our own concepts of democracy**

Measuring democracy: Why it is hard

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- We **lack clear aggregation rules** for collapsing different indicators into a single measure of democracy (e.g., what weight should each component have?)

Measuring democracy: How it is done

- Different measurement strategies reflect different **concepts** of democracy, rely on different **data sources**, have different **coverages** (of countries and/or years), and use different **aggregating methods**, and even different **goals** of the measurement exercise (e.g., detecting small changes versus classifying countries in broad categories)

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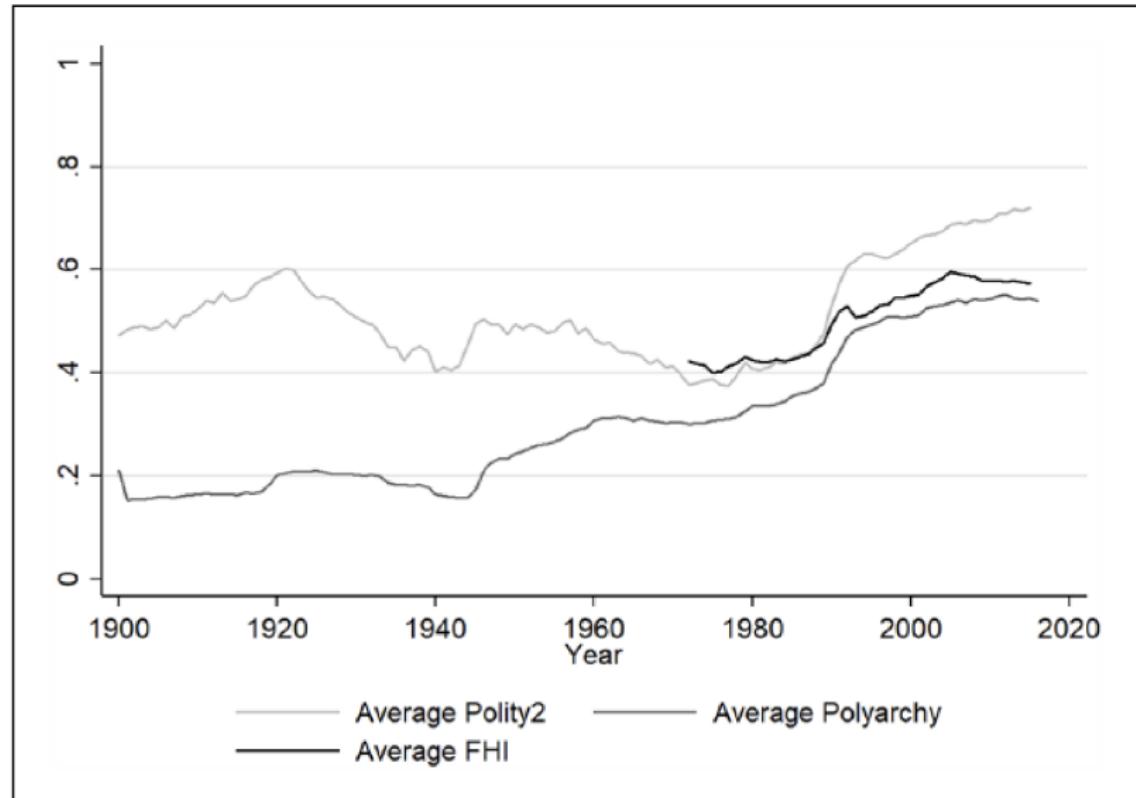
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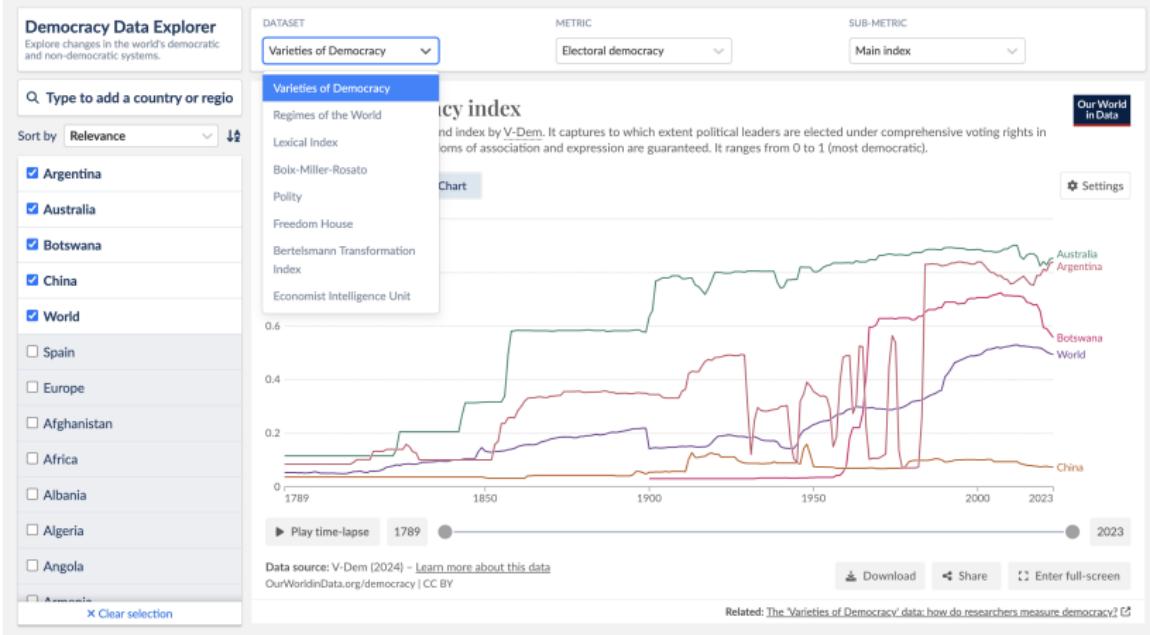
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 - Bertelsmann Stiftung's Transformation Index

Different measures are positively correlated, but meaningful differences remain



“Our World in Data” lets you explore measures

Explore Data on Democracy



www.ourworldindata.org/explorers/democracy

Group exercise in Blackboard

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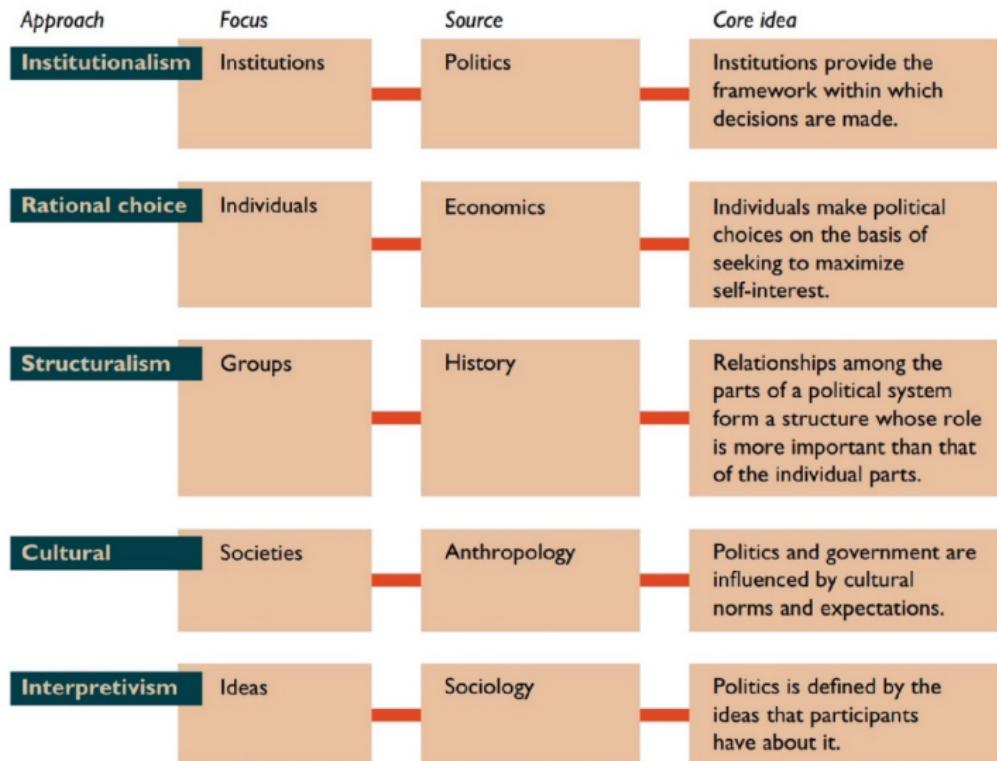
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5. The **deliverable is a 1-page memo (single space)** with your conclusions from steps 2-4. Make sure to justify your strengths and weaknesses and your proposal. Submit your work as a PDF file on Blackboard.

How do democracies emerge?

Theorizing the emergence of democracy, from different perspectives



Major families of explanations about the origins of democracy

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- **Group-based theories:** ethnic and religious groups drive democratization

Back to the data on authoritarian survival

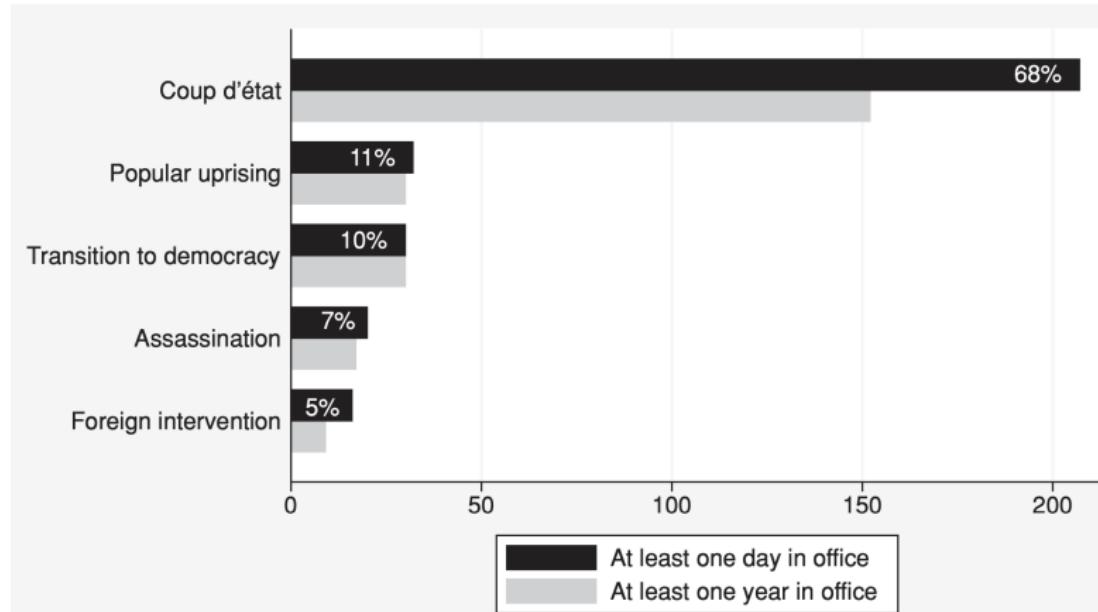
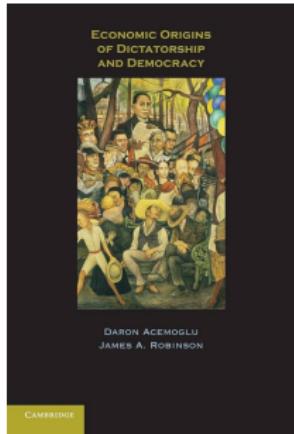


FIGURE 1.1. Nonconstitutional exits from office of authoritarian leaders, 1946–2008.
Note: Percentages refer to a category's share of all nonconstitutional exists. Exits of interim leaders are not included. Unambiguous determination of exit was not possible for thirteen leaders.

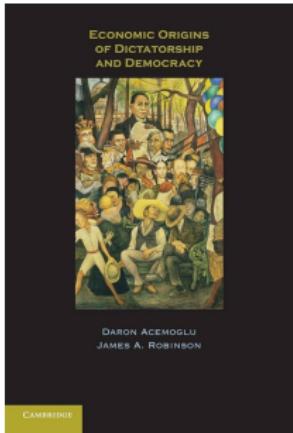
Acemoglu and Robinson: A theory of regime change

- They theorize **society as split between elites and citizens** (against vs pro redistribution)



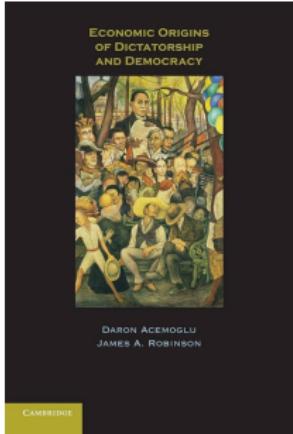
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- Democratization as enfranchisement and thus an increase in redistribution. It happens when citizens, with a revolutionary potential, get **democracy as a way to lock in their power** through formal institutions
- Whether there is democratization (and whether it is stable) depends on: **civil society** (costs of collective action and repression); **economic shocks** and crises (affecting economic power, coups); **wealth inequality** (affects probability of revolution, and the elite's fear of democracy); **types of wealth** (e.g., land is not mobile)



Acemoglu and Robinson: Suggestive evidence

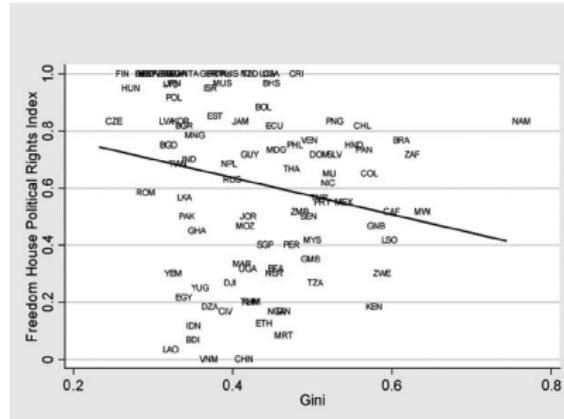


Figure 3.15. Democracy and Inequality 1990s.

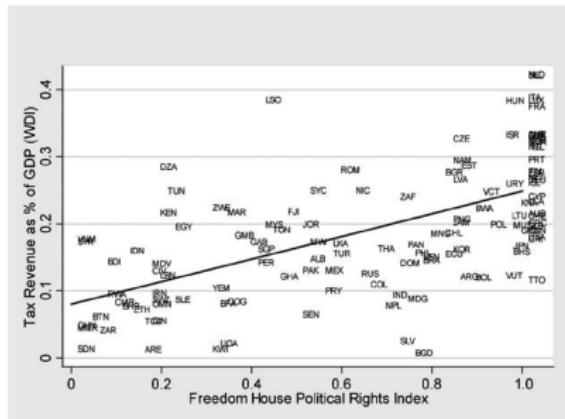
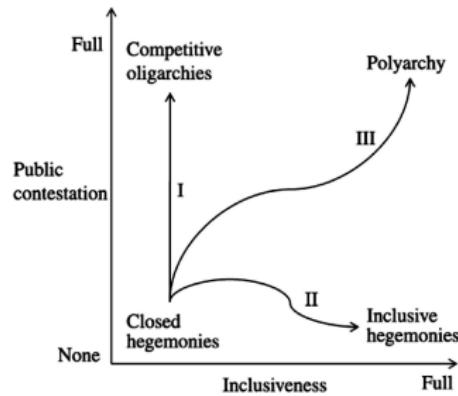


Figure 3.17. Democracy and Tax Revenue 1990s.

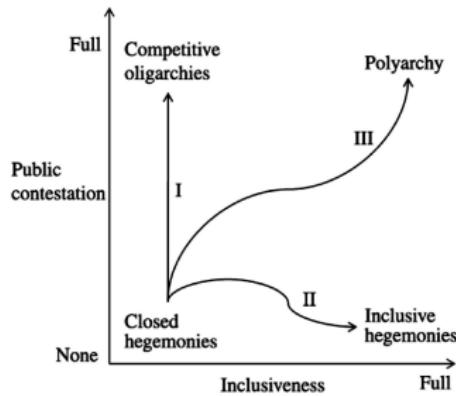
Back to Dahl's theory of the polyarchy

- Central in Dahl are **costs of tolerating and repressing dissent**

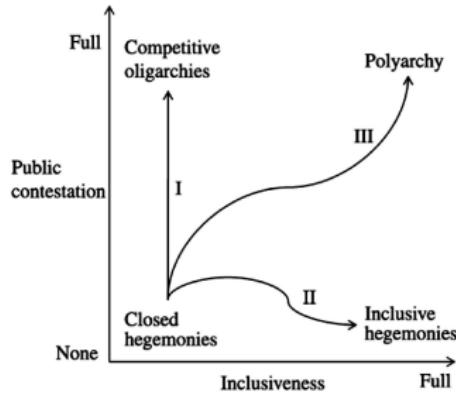


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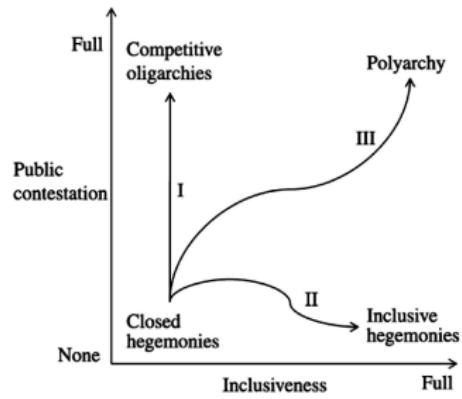


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- This is consistent with the experience of England and other early adopters, where the franchise was progressively expanded

Challenges to explain the drivers of democratization

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 - Key implication: Theories may need *scope conditions* or clarification on where the theory applies best

Waves of democratization and reversal

Waves of Regime Change			
Wave	Time Period (Approximate)	Democracies as Percent of Total Number of Countries	Examples of Regime Change
First Wave of Democratization	1825–1925	22/67 (33%)	US, UK, France, Germany
First Reverse Wave	1925–1945	16/71 (23%)	Germany (1933)
Second Wave of Democratization	1945–1960	34/110 (31%)	Germany, Italy, Japan (~1945)
Second Reverse Wave	1960–1974	36/140 (26%)	Brazil (1964), Chile (1973)
Third Wave of Democratization	1974–1995	76/160 (48%)	Brazil (1985), Chile (1989)

Source: Center for Systemic Peace, 2011. "Polity IV Annual Time-Series 1800–2010." Available at <http://www.systemicpeace.org/inscr/inscr.htm>, July 10, 2011.

Exercise: Sketching a theory of democratization

1. Think of a factor that you believe could have an effect on a country democratizing or not

Revisiting the slides or the handout from sessions 2-3 may be useful for this exercise

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How do democracies erode (and sometimes collapse)?

Democratic backsliding: The concept

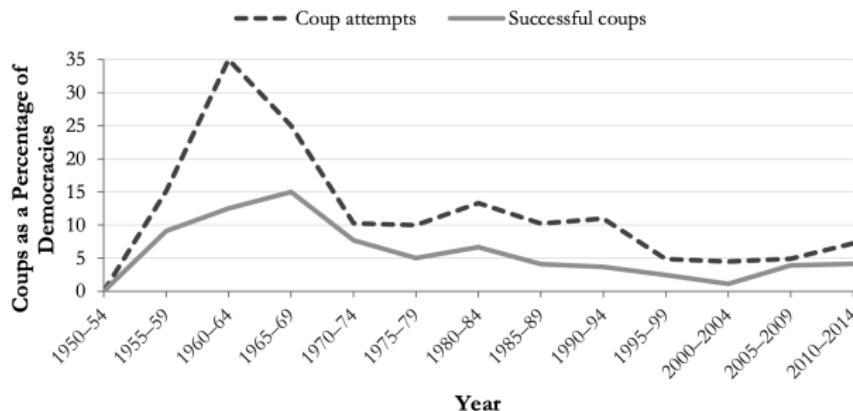
- Democratic backsliding has been defined as “***the state-led debilitation or elimination of any of the political institutions that sustain an existing democracy***” (Bermeo 2016)

Democratic backsliding: The concept

- Democratic backsliding has been defined as “***the state-led debilitation or elimination of any of the political institutions that sustain an existing democracy***” (Bermeo 2016)
- Backsliding is at the core of contemporary debates about democracy, because we see many cases of backsliding around the globe, including in wealthy countries that used to be considered consolidated democracies

Nowadays we see less military coups and less executive coups (“auto-golpes”)

FIGURE 1—COUP FREQUENCY IN DEMOCRACIES, 1950–2014



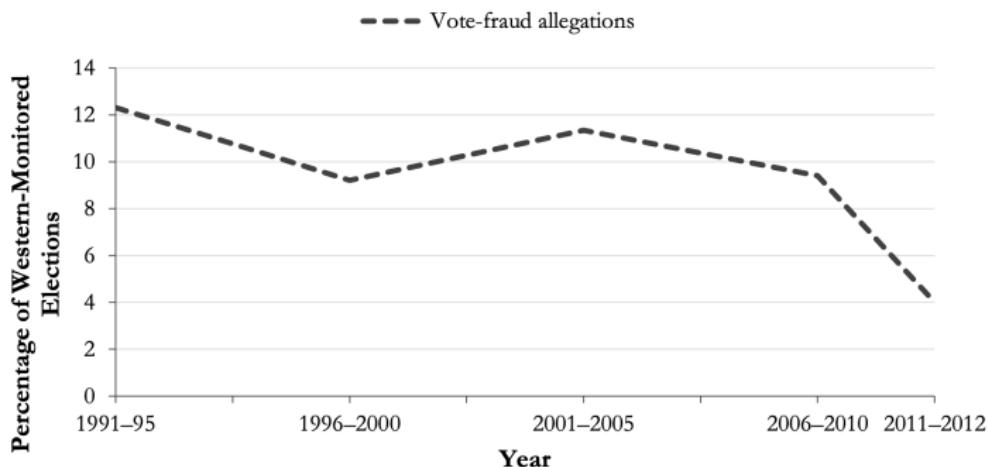
Source: Regime data are from Polity IV, supplemented with Polity IV data modified by Kristian Skrede Gleditsch (see endnote 6). Coup data are from Jonathan Powell and Clayton Thyne's "Coups d'état, 1950 to Present" dataset (www.uky.edu/~clthyne2/coup_data/home.htm). A detailed explanation of the axes for this figure and how the data sources were used may be found at www.journalofdemocracy.org/articles/supplemental-material.

From a study available at

www.guillermotoral.com/cp/bermeo.pdf

Nowadays we see less election-day fraud

FIGURE 2—VOTE-FRAUD ALLEGATIONS BY WESTERN MONITORS IN POST-1975 DEMOCRACIES, 1991–2012



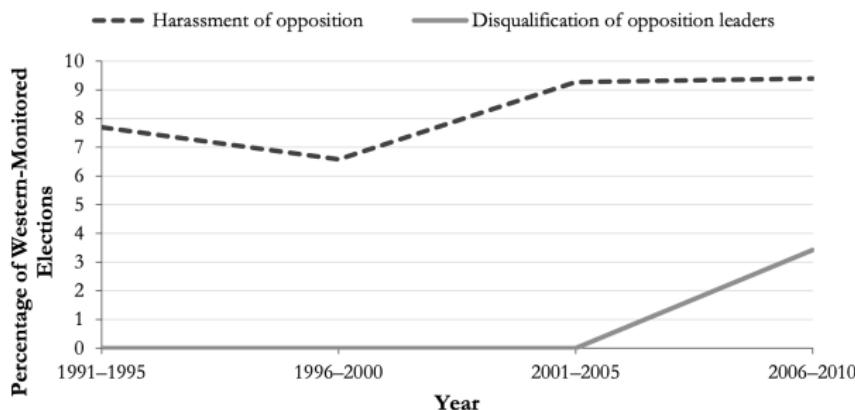
Source: See source note in Figure 1. Additional election data are from Susan Hyde's NELDA project (<http://hyde.research.yale.edu/nelda/>). A detailed explanation of the axes for this figure and how the data sources were used may be found at www.journalofdemocracy.org/articles/supplemental-material.

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But we see more strategic harassment and disqualification of opposition leaders

FIGURE 3—OPPOSITION HARASSMENT AND LEADER DISQUALIFICATION,
1991–2010

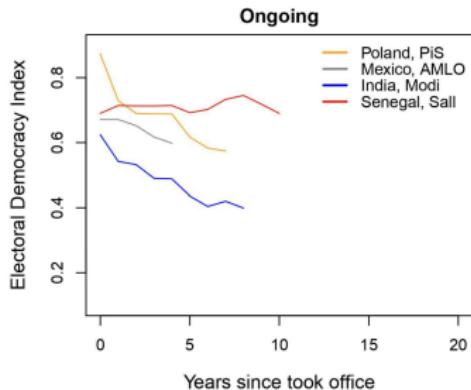
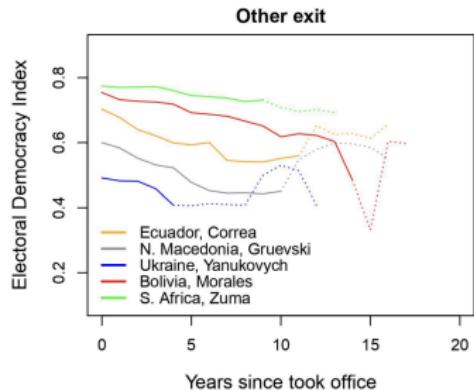
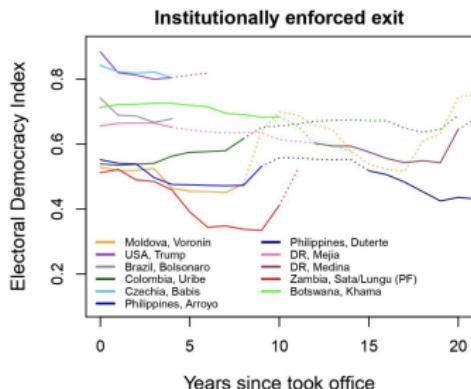
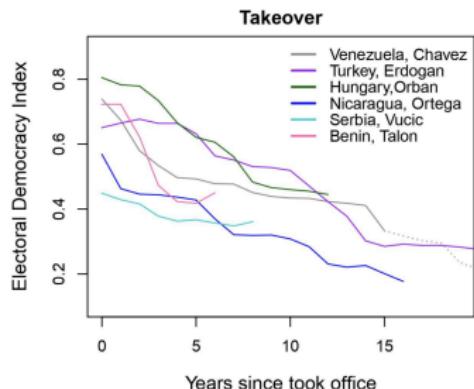


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We also see more acts of executive self-aggrandizement



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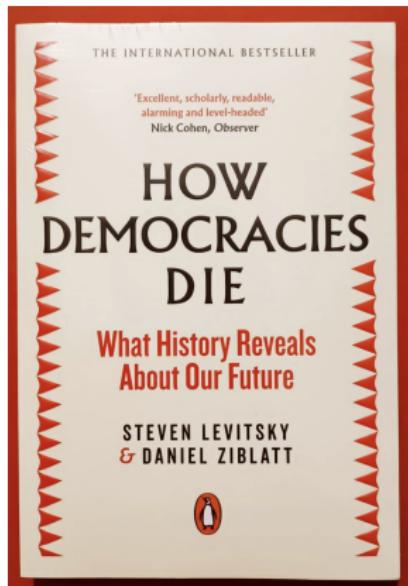
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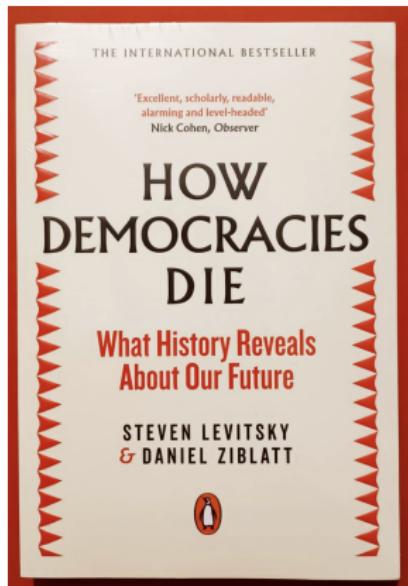
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- Wanna-be authoritarian leaders likely know that, and adjust their strategies accordingly

The role of elites in promoting and resisting backsliding



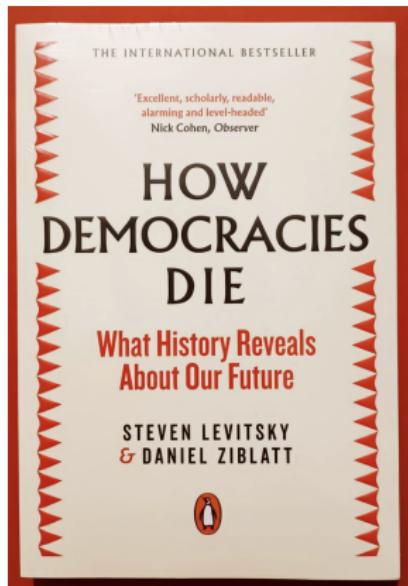
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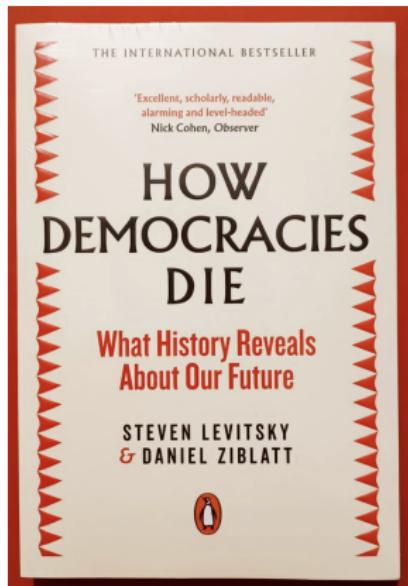
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- **Law and culture are key tools in protecting democracy**, and in weakening autocracy

Case study: Democratic backsliding in the US states

American Political Science Review (2023) 117, 3, 967–984

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Laboratories of Democratic Backsliding

JACOB M. GRUMBACH *University of Washington, United States*

The Trump presidency generated concern about democratic backsliding and renewed interest in measuring the national democratic performance of the United States. However, the US has a decentralized form of federalism that administers democratic institutions at the state level. Using 51 indicators of electoral democracy from 2000 to 2018, I develop a measure of subnational democratic performance, the State Democracy Index. I then test theories of democratic expansion and backsliding based in party competition, polarization, demographic change, and the group interests of national party coalitions. Difference-in-differences results suggest a minimal role for all factors except Republican control of state government, which dramatically reduces states' democratic performance during this period. This result calls into question theories focused on changes within states. The racial, geographic, and economic incentives of groups in national party coalitions may instead determine the health of democracy in the states.

American states, which were once praised by the great jurist Louis Brandeis as “laboratories of democracy,” are in danger of becoming laboratories of authoritarianism as those in power rewrite electoral rules, redraw constituencies, and even rescind voting rights to ensure that they do not lose.

—Levitsky and Ziblatt, How Democracies Die (2018, 2)

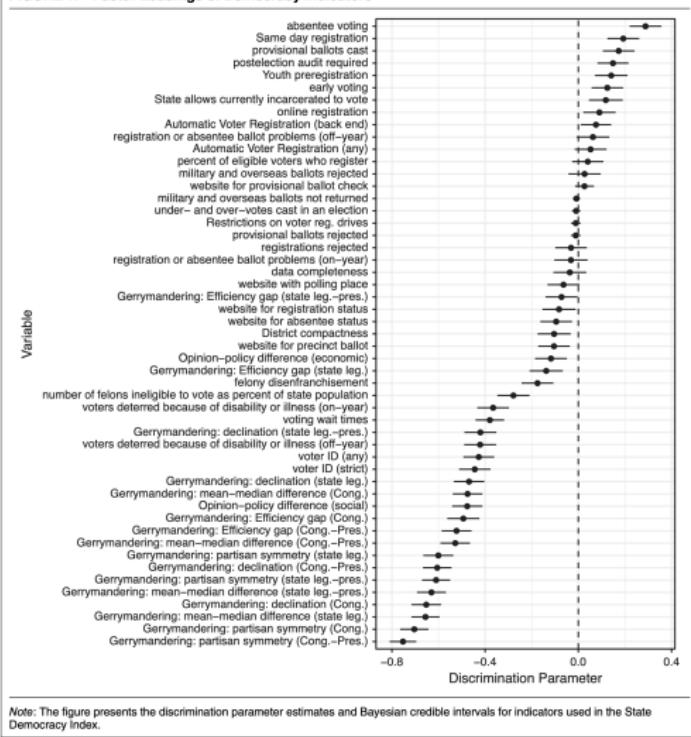
(DuBois 1935; Foner 1988). Many scholars do not consider the United States a democracy prior to the national enforcement of the Voting Rights Act of 1965 (VRA) against state governments (King 2017; Mickey 2015)—enforcement made more difficult by the U.S. Supreme Court’s decisions in *Shelby County v. Holder* (2013) and *Brown v. Democratic National Committee* (2021). Troubling stories abound in recent

The paper is available at

www.guillermotoral.com/cp/grumbach.pdf

Variables contributing to the State Democracy Index

FIGURE 1. Factor Loadings of Democracy Indicators

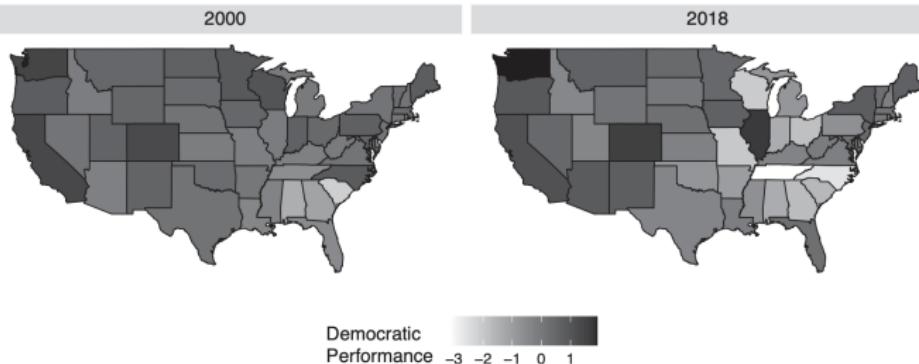


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Changes in the State Democracy Index

FIGURE 2. Democracy in the States, 2000 and 2018

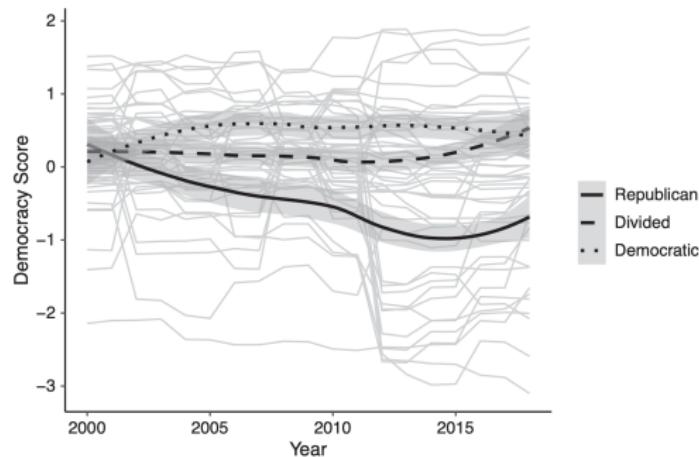


Note: Left panel shows State Democracy Index scores for the year 2000. Right panel shows State Democracy Index scores for the year 2018.

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Changes in the State Democracy Index, by party controlling the state government

FIGURE 4. Democracy in the States by Party Control of Government



Note: Plot shows average State Democracy Index scores for states under unified Democratic (dotted line), divided (dashed line), and unified Republican (solid line) control. Shaded ribbons are 95% confidence intervals.

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www.guillermotoral.com/cp/grumbach.pdf

Changes in the State Democracy Index: Regression results

TABLE 1. Explaining Dynamics in State-Level Democracy

	Outcome: State Democracy Score						
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5	Model 6	Model 7
Competition	0.200 (0.107)			0.170 (0.099)	0.194 (0.099)	0.169 (0.106)	0.134 (0.114)
Polarization		0.017 (0.131)		0.024 (0.119)	0.037 (0.111)	0.027 (0.126)	0.028 (0.121)
Republican			-0.462** (0.162)	-0.444** (0.159)	-0.435** (0.162)	-0.443** (0.154)	-0.475** (0.183)
Competition × Polarization				0.082 (0.066)			
Polarization × Republican						-0.013 (0.198)	
Competition × Republican							0.110 (0.206)
Constant	-0.707*** (0.068)	-0.683*** (0.116)	-0.532*** (0.093)	-0.535*** (0.134)	-0.544*** (0.136)	-0.533*** (0.139)	-0.532*** (0.135)
State FEes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Year FEes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
N	833	833	833	833	833	833	833
R ²	0.683	0.676	0.699	0.704	0.706	0.704	0.705
Adj. R ²	0.656	0.648	0.673	0.679	0.680	0.678	0.679

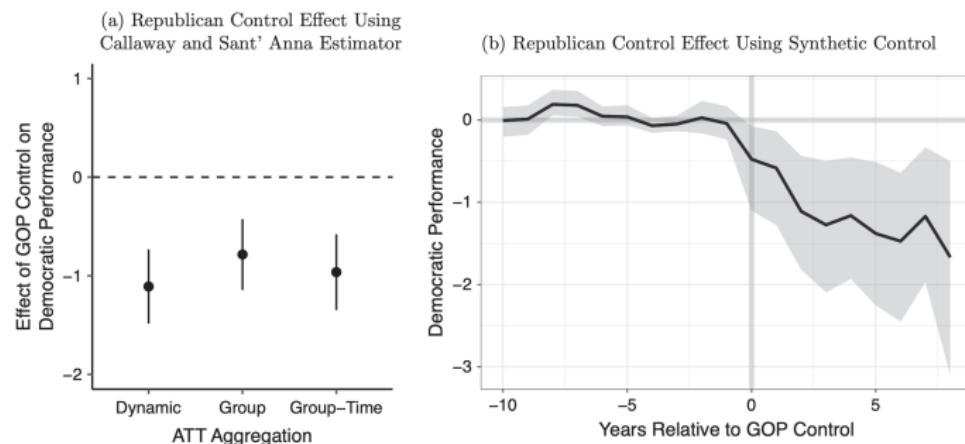
Note: * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$.

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Changes in the State Democracy Index: Quasi-experimental results

FIGURE 5. Effect of Republican Control on Democratic Performance



The paper is available at
www.guillermotoral.com/cp/grumbach.pdf

Wrap-up

Taking stock of what we saw today

- What is democracy?

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- Exercise: Unpacking measures of democracy

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- There are many approaches to measuring democracy – they throw different scores or classifications of countries because their conceptual, measurement, and aggregation strategy differ.
- The emergence and erosion of democracy can be theorized from different perspectives, but as usual with (political) science we have got to subject our theories to empirical testing
- Rigorously testing theories about democracy is hard but not impossible

Exit ticket

Go to the Discussion page on Blackboard and enter 2-3 sentences with your response to the following question:

In what way has your own idea of democracy changed after today's class, and why? If it has not, explain why.

Next steps

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 - *Foundations of comparative politics* – chapter 10