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RESEARCH DATASET

Classifying political regimes 1800–2016: a typology and a new dataset

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Abstract In the present text, we introduce a classification scheme where we decompose democracies and autocracies into several categories. Based on this classification scheme, we create a global dataset covering the time period 1800–2016. In the dataset, we make yearly observations for all countries that have been independent at any point in time since the Second World War. Regarding democracies, we first distinguish between republics and monarchies. We then split the category of republics into presidential, semi-presidential, and parliamentary systems. Within the category of monarchies, almost all systems are parliamentary, but a few countries are conferred to the category semi-monarchies. Authors differ markedly in terms of how autocratic regimes should be classified. In the present dataset, we classify autocratic countries into the following main categories: absolute monarchy, military rule, party-based rule, personalist rule, and oligarchy. Within the categories party-based rule and oligarchy, we also identify a number of subcategories.

Keywords Autocracy · Democracy · Global dataset · Political regimes

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Introduction

During the last two or three decades, we have witnessed a growing interest in historical comparative analysis, and a number of new global datasets on political regimes have emerged (e.g., Alvarez et al. 1996; Cheibub et al. 2010; Boix et al. 2013; Coppedge et al. 2017). Another trend in recent years is that authoritarian regimes have received a growing amount of attention at the same time as there are indications that less research efforts are devoted to democracies and democratization (Goode and Ahram 2016: 823–824). These trends have revitalized the question how political regimes in general, and authoritarian ones in particular, should be defined and classified.

Although the dominating strategy of categorizing political regimes still appears to be to separate democracies from non-democracies, either qualitatively or quantitatively, a number of authors have chosen to account for regime varieties within the respective categories. However, it is striking that whereas a number of scholars (e.g., Marshall et al. 2014; Vanhanen 2013; Boix et al. 2013) have assessed the democracy–autocracy dimension for the latest two centuries, there is still, to our knowledge, no dataset in which democratic and autocratic regimes have been subclassified according to regime types for the same period of time.

The ambition with the present database is to provide researchers with a longitudinal dataset on democratic and autocratic regime characteristics which extends further back in time than any comparable database. It contains yearly observations for all countries that have been independent at any point in time between 1946 and 2016. The fact that the dataset provides a subclassification of authoritarian regimes is of particular importance; whereas the overwhelming majority of the countries were authoritarian before the end of the First World War, existing databases (Geddes et al. 2014; Cheibub et al. 2010; Hadenius and Teorell 2007; Kailitz 2013) only provide classifications of authoritarian regimes for the last 70 years or so.[1]

Defining and classifying political regimes

The authors of the three most cited datasets on political regimes differ widely in their conceptualization of regimes. In the present work, our point of reference is Hadenius and Teorell who presented a first version of their dataset a decade ago (Hadenius and Teorell 2007) and a slightly revised and updated one 6 years later (Wahman et al. 2013). Their categorization of regimes is based "on the institutions on which …elites rely in order to regulate the access to and maintenance of public authority" (Wahman et al. 2013: 21). An important consequence of applying this

[1] The extensive V-dem dataset (Coppedge et al. 2017) is a highly welcomed contribution as it contains data on a wide range of regime variables from the year 1900 onward. This dataset is currently being complemented (historical V-dem), with data for the time period 1800–1920 (Knutsen et al. 2016). However, neither of these databases provides a qualitative categorization of the regimes of the countries (although some of the variables contained in the datasets are extremely valuable as a source for making such classifications).

definition is that institutions and not leadership are crucial for determining when a regime change has occurred. The focus on institutions means that "[t]he identity or longevity of dictators is left out of the picture, as are the ideological stance of the regime and its source of legitimation…" (Wahman et al. 2013: 20). Geddes et al. (2014: 314), in their dataset, chose a different strategy, where emphasis is on "the rules that identify the group from which leaders can come and determine who influences leadership choice and policy." An important practical consequence of these different approaches is that whereas Geddes et al. sometimes identify several regimes during a period where the regime type remained the same (Geddes et al. 2014: 315, 323), a regime change in Hadenius and Teorell's dataset always presupposes a change from one regime category to another.

Following Geddes et al. (2014) as well as Cheibub et al. (2010), we consider the holding of contested elections to be the central criterion when separating democracies from autocracies. In line with a number of authors we also stipulate that the criterion of competition must be complemented with a criterion of participation (e.g., Dahl 1971; Vanhanen 1990; Munck and Verkuilen 2002; Geddes et al. 2014). As pointed out by Munck and Verkuilen (2002: 11), the inclusion of this criterion is particularly important in datasets which extend far back in time since "a key feature of the experience with democratization in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries as opposed to the late twentieth century … [was] the gradual expansion of the right to vote."

Since it is our ambition to subclassify democratic and autocratic regimes, the two categories must be separated using a qualitative scale. To do so, we rely on the dataset by Boix et al. (2013), who make use of a dichotomous qualitative scale, classifying 213 countries as either democracies or autocracies on a yearly basis for the time period 1800–2010. Focusing on elections, Boix et al. separate democracies from autocracies. Following Dahl (1971), their measure also encompasses two dimensions of elections, competition, and participation.

Since the dataset by Boix et al. does not cover the period 2011–2016, we add these years following the classification of Boix et al. as much as possible. The V-dem electoral democracy index (v2x_polyarchy) corresponds very well with Boix et al.'s conception of democracy. We use this source as the most important one for our classifications. In addition, we compare values with the scores countries have received on the political rights dimension in Freedom House (www.freedomhouse.org) and also on the Polity 2 scale in the Polity IV-dataset (Marshall et al. 2014).

In Fig. 1, we provide an illustration of how the regimes are classified in the dataset. We base the classifications on the situation prevailing on December 31 each year. Within the category of democracies, we make a primary distinction between constitutional monarchies and republics. We thereafter split up the category of republics into presidential, semi-presidential, and parliamentary systems. Within the category of constitutional monarchies, almost all systems are parliamentary, but we confer a few countries to a category labeled semi-monarchic systems.

When classifying authoritarian systems into categories, our point of departure is the four broad categories Geddes et al. operate with, namely *monarchy, military*, *dominant party,* and *personalist*. However, we differ in our distinction of, the criteria of inclusion in the respective categories from Geddes et al., and we also treat hybrid regimes differently. We treat *Oligarchies* as a category of its own, and we

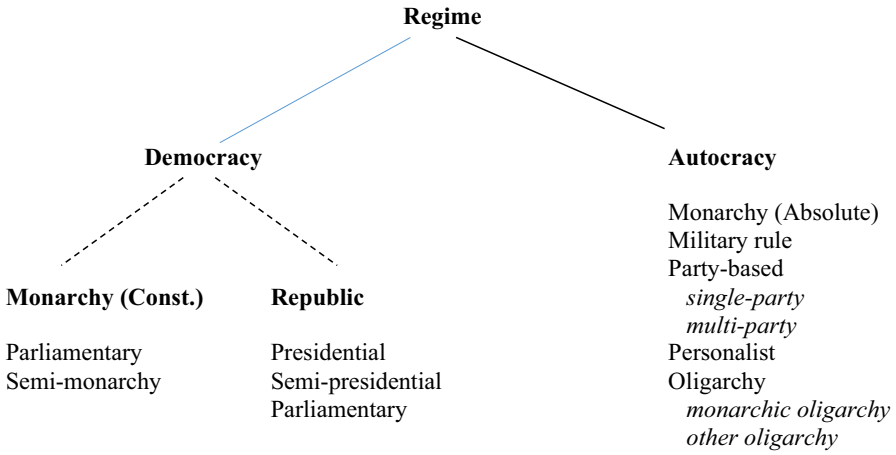

Fig. 1 Structure of the database

also identify a separate subcategory of this regime type, labeled *monarchic oligarchies*. In addition, we use the term party-based regime (which is the one Geddes et al. use in their codebook) instead of dominant party and split up this category into single-party and multi-party authoritarian regimes.

The distribution of the regimes is presented in Table 1. Among the democratic countries, we note that the vast majority of the cases are republics, and within this category, the parliamentary form of government is almost as popular as the presidential one. The semi-presidential form of government occurs less frequently, although it has become increasingly popular during the last three decades. Among monarchies almost all cases are, naturally, parliamentary systems, whereas semi-monarchies are quite rare. Among autocracies, the category of monarchies contains the largest number of cases, followed by military regimes. The number of party-based regimes and personalist regimes is approximately the same, whereas oligarchies occur less frequently.

Democracies

Presidentialism

Most authors agree that at least three criteria should be met in order for a system to be presidential, namely that the president (or rather the chief executive) is elected by popular vote; the government cannot be dismissed by a parliamentary vote of no confidence; and the president appoints and directs the government (e.g., Shugart and Carey 1992: 19; Sartori 1997: 83–84).

In the dataset, we apply this minimal definition of presidentialism. However, for the sake of parsimony, we ease the criterion of popular election of the president to some extent. There are, for instance, countries like the USA and Bolivia, where

Table 1 Regime types in the world 1800–2016

Democracies	6175
Constitutional monarchies	2193
Parliamentary	1962
Semi-monarchy	231
Republics	3959
Parliamentary	1439
Presidential	1639
Semi-presidential	881
Hybrid	23
Parliamentary (Andorra)	23
Autocracies	11,467
Absolute monarchy	3068
Military rule	2904
Party-based rule	2109
Single-party rule	1280
Multi-party rule	829
Personalist rule	2014
Oligarchic systems	1372
Monarchic oligarchy	797
Other oligarchy	575
Occupation, civil war, otherwise unclear	552
Total	18,194

presidents occasionally have been elected by parliament and currently Micronesia, Suriname, and Switzerland have presidents elected by parliament, while they otherwise function in accordance with the principles of presidentialism. In line with, for instance, Cheibub et al. (2010), we consider these countries presidential. Since some authors likely prefer a stricter application of the criterion of popularly elected presidents, the database includes information also on whether the president has been popularly elected or not.

Parliamentarism

The central feature of parliamentarism is that the government is dependent on the legislature for its survival. We also add another important defining characteristic, suggested by Budge et al. (1997: 238), namely that there is "no popularly elected president with real political powers." This criterion is important since it separates parliamentary systems from semi-presidential ones. Here, however, we substitute "popularly elected president" with "head of state." The crucial issue is whether or not relations between the executive and the legislature are affected by a powerful "third actor," not by how this actor is titled or how he or she comes

to power. (There are, for instance, countries where the monarch has more or less the same position as a president in a semi-presidential system.)

Semi-presidentialism

A minimal definition of semi-presidentialism stipulates that executive powers are shared by a president and a prime minister, who is responsible to parliament. In addition, most authors add the requirement that the president is popularly elected (e.g., Duverger 1980: 166; Shugart and Carey 1992: 23–27; Sartori 1997: 131; Shugart 2005). The question how much power a president must possess in relation to the prime minster has been a subject of controversy among authors throughout the last three to four decades. One strategy is to disregard the power dimension altogether and define as semi-presidentialism all systems where there is a popularly elected president alongside a prime minister and government responsible to the legislature (Elgie 1999: 13; Schleiter and Morgan-Jones 2010: 1418; Cheibub et al. 2010: 81). Although such a strategy has the advantage of making classifications easier, it has the disadvantage of blurring the distinction between parliamentary systems and semi-presidential systems, since, in the end, the crucial criterion of classification boils down to how a (powerless) head of state is selected.

We therefore argue that a definition of semi-presidentialism must also include the criterion that executive power is shared by the prime minister and the head of state. In order to separate semi-presidential systems from parliamentary systems, we use Siaroff's (2003) measure of presidential powers. However, not all powers are of relevance when separating semi-presidentialism from parliamentarism. The crucial issue is that the president is in possession of important explicit *executive* powers, at least one of the following Siaroff's criteria should be met: (1) *the president has the power to chair cabinet meetings,* (2) *is in charge of foreign policy,* (3) *has a central role in government formation* (and/or dissolution), or (4) [has the] *ability … to dissolve the legislature at will*.

Admittedly, the power to dissolve the legislature does not fall explicitly within the executive sphere, but it is a very powerful tool for a president to indirectly affect government formation and termination (e.g., Shugart 2005: 334–335; Neto and Lobo 2009). As in the case of presidentialism, we have eased the criterion that the president must be popularly elected for the sake of parsimony (compare with Anckar 1999; O'Neil 1993). However, the vast majority of countries where the president is in possession of executive powers also have popularly elected presidents. Since some authors may wish to include the popular election of the president as a necessary criterion of semi-presidentialism, the database also provides information on whether the president was popularly elected or not. The inclusion of this additional variable makes it possible to apply a wider definition of semi-presidentialism, which disregards the criterion that the president must share executive powers with the president.

Semi-monarchy

Executive power sharing mechanisms are of much less relevance in constitutional monarchies than in republics, and it is consequently not surprising that this issue has received very little scholarly attention. However, some countries have been classified as democracies by most of the authoritative sources despite the fact that a hereditary monarch has, or has had, more or less the same position as a president in a semi-presidential system. We choose to label such systems *semi-monarchic systems.* In all, the number of semi-monarchic systems has been quite limited in the world. Generally, they have existed for short periods of time in former absolute monarchies immediately after the countries in question have surpassed the threshold of democracy, for instance in Italy 1919–1921 and Sweden 1911–1916. However, there are also countries that have experienced longer periods of semi-monarchic rule, notably Liechtenstein, where the regime form continues to be in use.

Autocracies

Absolute monarchy

There tends to be little disagreement among authors regarding the defining characteristics of a monarchy. Hadenius and Teorell (2007: 146) regard as monarchies "those regimes in which a person of royal descent has inherited the position of head of state in accordance with accepted practice or the constitution." In the present work, we shall apply the definition by Hadenius and Teorell. Admittedly, it is not always clear what we mean by "accepted practice." It happens that rulers are ousted from office by members of their own family, something that happened in Qatar in 1995 and in Saudi Arabia in 1975, when king Faisal was assassinated by his nephew Faisal bin Musaid (Cheibub et al. 2010: 85). Therefore, we apply a generous definition of "accepted practice" and accept instances where the monarch is ousted of office and replaced by family members as hereditary succession. At the same time, it is important to emphasize that "accepted practice" does not mean that all cases where power is passed from father to son count as monarchies (Hadenius and Teorell 2007: 146). For instance, in Syria, Bashar al Assad succeeded his father Hafez al-Assad as president in 2000, but he did not inherit the position of president; rather, he was approved for the position in a public referendum according to the constitutional provisions of the country.

Furthermore, we concur with the view of Hadenius and Teorell that a monarchy does not emerge simply because a political leader proclaims him- or herself king, queen, emperor etc. Rather, the crucial question is whether or not the monarch was installed by himself/herself or by other actors. In Europe, during the time period in question, parliaments generally installed new monarchical dynasties. In such cases we regard the regime as a monarchy despite the fact that the new regent did not inherit his or her position. The same strategy applies to countries where a monarch was (s)elected by parliament or third parties at the time the country received its independence

However, we do not consider a person who puts himself in power, for instance as a consequence of an act of treason, a rebellion or a civil war, as a monarch. The fact that a hereditary monarchy has been formally proclaimed by the regime does not alter this conclusion. We regard the notion of "accepted practice" fulfilled only when the new ruler has been succeeded by a member of the same family, and consider the regime a monarchy from that point in time.

Military rule

Following Nordlinger (1977: 2), Hadenius and Teorell define military regimes as instances "in which military officers are major or predominant actors by virtue of their actual or threatened use of force," and where "the armed forces may exercise political power either directly or indirectly by controlling civilian leaders" (Hadenius and Teorell 2007: 146). This definition is more inclusive than the one proposed by Geddes et al. (2014: 319), who define military rule as "rule by an officer constrained by other officers" and less inclusive than the definition used by Cheibub et al. (2010: 88) who stipulate that "[t]he effective head of government is a military ruler if he is or was a member of the institutionalized military prior to taking power."

The only drawback with the definition used by Hadenius and Teorell is a practical one. It is often rather difficult to determine how much control the military should exercise in order for the regime to be regarded as a military regime. Another issue of concern is the inherent notion of the military regime as an exceptional form of government, which often means that in situations where the military is reluctant to give up its powers, it tends to transform itself to a civilian government. The tricky question is to determine when a military regime is turned into something else. The fact that the military establishes a party which prevails in a fraud election does not turn a military regime into a one-party regime and neither does the fact that a general puts on a suit and assumes the office of president turn the system into personalist rule. These problems are of course aggravated by the fact that the dataset covers more than 200 years. We use the simple rule that a regime is considered a military regime if the country has been uninterruptedly ruled by the same person who came to power in a military coup. In addition, the country must have remained autocratic during this period. However, this is not a rule without exceptions. Especially in cases where a military leader has transformed himself or herself into a civilian leader and stayed in power for an extensive period of time, it is likely that his or her power base has shifted from the military to another institution.

Party-based rule

In line with Geddes (2003: 51), we define party-based rule as systems where "access to political office and control over policy are dominated by one party, though other parties may exist and compete as minor players in elections." Most countries that do not meet the requirements of democracy have political parties and conduct elections on a regular basis. However, this category of countries includes a wide variety of political systems. In the most extreme cases, such as the Soviet Union and

currently Laos, only one party is legally allowed. At the other side of the spectrum, we find countries where real opposition parties are allowed to exist and participate in elections, but the dominant party makes sure it has the support of a majority of the members in parliament.

Hadenius and Teorell (2007) originally made a distinction between four categories of authoritarian regimes with elected assemblies. However, they subsequently found it more reasonable to operate with only three, namely no-party, one-party, and multi-party regimes (Wahman et al. 2013). As it turns out, no-party regimes are extremely difficult to find. One-party regimes are "authoritarian regimes with only one legal party (formally or de facto)" (Wahman et al. 2013: 26). However, the category also includes systems where "satellite parties," i.e., parties "that are independent in name but [that] do not take oppositional positions" exist. In multi-party regimes "at least a minimal level of competition is allowed and some opposition candidates (although not necessarily all) are allowed to participate in national elections" (Wahman et al. 2013: 27). Thereby "[multi-party regimes should] normally have more than one party represented in the parliament" (although this might not be the case if the opposition chooses to boycott the elections) (Wahman et al. 2013: 27).

We follow this line of reasoning and split the category of party-based rule into the subcategories *single-party systems* and *multi-party authoritarian systems*. This makes it possible for users of the dataset to either adopt a broad definition of one-party rule or not.

Personalist rule

Basing their argument on Brooker (2000), Hadenius and Teorell (2007: 149) dismiss the notion of personalist regimes. Instead, they consider personalism to be a characteristic which, to varying extents, denotes all authoritarian systems. Geddes et al., on their part, argue that personalist regimes are "autocracies in which discretion over policy and personnel are concentrated in the hands of one man, military or civilian" (Geddes et al. 2014: 319). This definition resembles the one proposed by Huntington (1991: 111) who defines personal dictatorship as a system where "the individual leader is the source of authority and [where] power depends on access to, closeness to, dependence on, and support from the leader." In line with Geddes et al. we find it relevant to consider personalism a regime type of its own. Hadenius and Teorell base their classification on three modes of power access and maintenance: hereditary succession in monarchies, military force in military regimes, and popular elections in party-based regimes. However, this classification disregards systems where the power holder lacks a strong institutional backing and secures his or her position on personal power.

Here, we define personalist regimes according to Linz' (2000: 151–155) definition of sultanism [which is based on Weber's (1968) definition]. According to Linz, sultanism is characterized by a fusion of the personal and public sphere, where "[t]he ruler exercises his power without restraint at his own discretion and above all unencumbered by rules or by any commitment to an ideology or value system"

(Linz 2000: 151–152). The lack of an ideology is of particular importance when separating personalist regimes from party-based regimes. Although ruthless leaders in one-party regimes can behave much in the same respect as leaders in personalist regimes, their power is exercised with reference to an ideological totality. In a sultanistic society, on the other hand, if anything resembling an ideology exists, it has emanated from, and is consistent with, the person in power. In other words, as Linz and Stepan (1996: 53) argue, "there could be questions raised as to whether Stalin's practices and statements were consistent with Marxism–Leninism, but there would be no reason for anyone to debate whether Trujillo's statements were consistent with Trujilloism."

Another distinctive feature of sultanism (and personalist rule) is a low degree of institutionalization and organization. Public office holders receive their positions from the ruler in person, and since their careers are completely dependent on the capriciousness of the ruler, they are loyal to the ruler in person, not the office (Linz 2000: 152–153). Furthermore, the persons who receive the highest positions in the regime "are neither "disciples" nor old fighters of a movement party or conspiratorial group," but rather "men who would not enjoy any prestige or esteem in the society on their own account … [and] whose power is derived exclusively from the ruler" (Linz 2000: 151–152), quotation marks in original.

Oligarchy

In line with Geddes et al. (2014: 318), we classify systems which meet the criteria of democracy with regard to public contestation (i.e., with free and fair elections and with an executive responsible either to the legislature or to the people) but where only a minority (here less than half of the adult male population) has the right to vote as oligarchies. However, in contrast to Geddes et al., we do not find it relevant to collapse oligarchies into the party-based category since the countries classified as oligarchies are not necessarily dominated by one single party (although this was indeed the case in South Africa from 1948 to 1994, with the *Nationalist Party* in power). In many oligarchies, two (or sometimes more) parties compete for power in fair elections and election results determine the composition of government. Furthermore, a handful of other types of political systems also qualify as oligarchies. Currently, for instance, in Iran power effectively resides in the hand of the religious clergy.

Within the category of oligarchies, we also extract a separate regime category labeled *monarchic oligarchy*. Especially for countries where the process of democratization is slow and extends over many decades, it makes sense to pay regard to the relationship between, on the one hand, the monarch and the legislature and the government on the other. Britain during the time period 1800–1884 constitutes a good example. Although it was far from always clear how the powers between the monarch and the prime ministers were divided, it was equally evident that the powers of the monarch were significantly greater than those of a purely ceremonial head of state. The political system of Britain, therefore, was a special variant of oligarchy. The term monarchic oligarchy is consequently used in order to describe systems

where a hereditary monarch shares power with a parliament and government in a country where elections are free and fair, but where franchise is restricted to such an extent that the country does not qualify as a democracy.

Conclusion

Despite the fact that there has been a growing interest in conducting global comparative research with historical data, there is still a shortage on historical data on regime characteristics. Particularly with regard to autocratic systems, this is problematic, since the share of autocratic countries tends to increase, the farther back in time we go. In order to remedy this shortcoming, the present article introduces a new global dataset, which subclassifies democratic and autocratic regimes into a number of categories for the period 1800–2016. As there is far from any agreement on how authoritarian regimes should be classified, we have, to a very large extent, based the categorization on existing pioneering works in the field. In addition, the database contains a number of variables and subcategories of regimes which allow authors to apply different definitions of controversial regime types like semi-presidentialism, one-party rule, and oligarchy.

The database is likely to advance research on a number of topics in political science. For instance, in peace and conflict studies, the democratic peace argument has been widely debated. However, whereas authors have paid a lot of attention to how democratic institutions affect the propensity for external and internal conflicts, they have directed much less attention toward the question whether the propensity for conflicts varies between different types of authoritarian regimes. So, far large N-studies regarding the association between different authoritarian regime types and conflicts have been rare, and either covered, at maximum, only the period after the Second World War (e.g., Peceny et al. 2002; Ishiyama et al. 2008; Fjelde 2010; Conrad and Souva 2011) or, in cases where the time periods under study have been longer, paid attention to regime similarity in terms of degree of autocracy (or democracy) rather than on qualitative differences in regime types (e.g., Bennett 2006). The present dataset, however, makes it possible to conduct such analyses very far back in time, thus making it possible to detect time—(as well as region)—specific patterns of variable relations.

The dataset can also make a significant contribution to research concerning questions such as whether certain regime types are more stable than others and whether certain regime types are more likely to be succeeded by a specific regime type than others. The empirical evidence at hand suggests that military regimes tend to be the most unstable authoritarian regime type (Geddes 1999, 2003: 78; Smith 2005; Brownlee 2009; Magaloni 2008), whereas one-party regimes and monarchies are the most stable authoritarian regime types (Geddes 1999, 2003; Smith 2005: 78; Hadenius and Teorell 2007; Brownlee 2009; Magaloni 2008). However, these studies cover, at most, the period after the Second World War. The database presented here makes it possible to expand the time period extensively, which is important since a phenomenon like regime breakdowns tends to occur infrequently.

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