

**DISAGGREGATING POLITICAL REGIME:
Conceptual Issues in the Study of Democratization**

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ABSTRACT

The increasingly global scope of democratization has challenged comparativists to engage in crossregional research as part of a collective enterprise. The response to such a challenge, however, hinges upon their ability to both base their research on a set of clear concepts, a prerequisite for theory-building, and clarify their method of case selection, a prerequisite for theory-testing. While these conceptual issues have yet to be fully resolved, I show how the work of a group of 'regime analysts' provides the best starting point for scholars interested in this enterprise. For this purpose, I show how the disaggregation of the concept of political regime provides the basis for a distinction among three analytically separable problems, the process of transition, the outcome of this process of transition, and the process of consolidation, and for more nuanced distinctions in terms of modes of transition, regime types and subtypes, and degrees of consolidation. I also show how the problem of conceptual stretching is avoided by regime analysts in the course of case selection through the vertical organization of their concepts along a ladder of generality and the application of a simple rule. Finally, I show how the study of political regimes on the basis of quantitative indices of democracy fails to avoid the problems of conceptual conflation and conceptual stretching.

RESUMEN

El cada vez mayor alcance global de la democratización ha alentado a los comparativistas a participar en investigaciones interregionales como parte de un proyecto colectivo. Sin embargo, la respuesta a este reto depende, por un lado, de su capacidad de basar su investigación en un conjunto de conceptos claros, lo cual constituye un prerequisite para la formulación teórica y, por el otro, de aclarar su método de selección de casos, lo cual constituye un prerequisite para la comprobación de la teoría. Aunque estas cuestiones conceptuales están aún por resolverse completamente, me permito mostrar como el trabajo de un grupo de 'analistas de régimen' proporciona el mejor punto de partida para los estudiosos interesados en este proyecto. Para este propósito, muestro como la desagregación del concepto de régimen político proporciona la base para distinguir entre tres problemas analíticamente separables, el proceso de transición, el resultado de este proceso de transición y el proceso de consolidación, y para introducir matices en términos de modos de transición, tipos y subtipos de regímenes y grados de consolidación. También muestro como los analistas de régimen evitan el problema del alargamiento conceptual en el proceso de la selección de casos mediante la organización vertical de sus conceptos a lo largo de una escala de generalidad y la aplicación de una regla sencilla. Finalmente muestro como el estudio de los regímenes políticos a partir de índices cuantitativos de democracia no logra evitar los problemas de la combinación conceptual y del alargamiento conceptual.

The study of democratization presents comparativists with a unique opportunity for theory-building, inviting scholars to understand and explain processes of political regime change and functioning through increasingly broad comparisons, not only encompassing Southern Europe and Latin America, as has been the case in some of the best comparative studies (Linz and Stepan 1978; O'Donnell, Schmitter, and Whitehead 1986), but also incorporating cases from Eastern Europe, the former Soviet Union, East Asia, and certain areas of Africa. To seize such an opportunity, however, comparativists need both a set of clear and shared concepts that would serve as the foundation for such a research agenda and a simple set of rules concerning how to engage in conceptual 'traveling,' the use of concepts to study new cases, without falling in the trap of conceptual 'stretching,' the use of a concept that does not fit the new cases (Sartori 1970; Collier and Mahon 1993).

These conceptual issues have not been fully resolved by comparativists, but there is a group of scholars who have made significant contributions to such an agenda in the course of studies that, over a span of thirty years, have sought to account for the breakdown of democracies, the nature of authoritarian regimes, the transitions from authoritarian rule, and the process of democratic consolidation.¹ It is useful, thus, to take this literature as a starting point. But it is crucial to also acknowledge some important limitations of this literature, since the concepts that give coherence to an agenda of research that could be labeled 'political regime analysis' or simply 'regime analysis' have not been the subject of much scrutiny. Outside of the pioneering work of David Collier (Collier and Mahon 1993; Collier and Levitsky 1994) and the important efforts by Philippe Schmitter to systematize and extend regime analysis as a research programme (Schmitter 1988; Schmitter and Karl 1992; Schmitter with Karl 1994), regime analysts have rarely stepped back and taken stock of the concepts that have framed their analysis nor have they addressed their avoidance of the problem of conceptual stretching.²

The need for such a conceptual analysis is most evident in light of the resistance among specialists on Eastern Europe and the Soviet and post-Soviet cases to embrace the agenda

¹ While this research that has been advanced by dozens of researchers throughout the world, there is a smaller number of outstanding scholars who deserve a special mention. The key names include David Collier, Robert Dahl, Manuel Antonio Garretón, Arend Lijphart, Juan J. Linz, Guillermo O'Donnell, Adam Przeworski, Philippe Schmitter, Alfred Stepan, and Laurence Whitehead.

² Throughout this article the term 'regime analyst' is used to refer to researchers who operate with a similar conceptual framework, rooted in a shared definition of the term 'political regime,' and who jointly advance the agenda of research of 'regime analysis.'

regime analysts developed on the basis of their studies of Southern Europe and Latin America.³ There are no doubt a number of reasons for such resistance, but part of the problem appears to be that lack of clarity concerning the key concepts of regime analysis and uncertainty about how to avoid the problem of conceptual stretching has obscured the precise lines along which comparisons are to be carried out. That is, confusion over the concepts that serve to structure and organize comparisons has led many authors to prematurely reject comparisons between the East and the South on the mistaken grounds that the democratization process in Southern European and Latin American is not comparable to the Eastern European and Soviet/post-Soviet experiences. If a dialogue among specialists focusing on different regions and countries, an essential precondition for the accumulation of knowledge, is to be possible and if the study of democratization is to deliver the theoretical rewards it appears to offer, it is necessary, therefore, to clarify these conceptual issues.⁴

This paper seeks to contribute to the task of conceptual clarification. Beginning with a reconstruction of the concept of political regime, the paper shows, through a review of the definitions of political regime offered by regime analysts, that these scholars have operated with a two-dimensional concept of political regime and that these two dimensions, a procedural and a behavioral one, have provided the basis for a disaggregated approach to the study of such complex phenomena as democratization. Such a disaggregation is carried out by means of two secondary concepts, those of transition and consolidation, which serve to distinguish between problems of regime change and regime functioning, a distinction that provides the basic organizing principle of the semantic field of regime analysis.

The advantages of such a conceptualization are directly evident in the way in which it has allowed regime analysts to formulate a series of a complex, yet conceptually precise, questions that offer the potential of important theoretical payoffs, as well as in the way in which it has enabled

³ While the basis for such broad comparisons is advanced in Schmitter with Karl (1994, 177–79) and Przeworski (1991, 139–44), this comparative agenda has been rejected by Terry (1993), McFaul (1993), and Bunce (1995).

⁴ The lack of an such an explicit conceptual analysis has not been an obstacle to the generation of knowledge until now, in large part due to small number of scholars who have advanced the agenda, the constancy of the cases studied, and the ever-moving object of study. As the potential to expand the cases considered has become a reality, however, the need to draw out elements that are either implicit or not clearly stated in the literature, to bring together and show the connections among issues usually treated separately, and to address positions that are either inconsistent or contradictory has become more imperative. Simultaneously, due to the gradual elaboration and refinement of concepts over time, this is also a particularly opportune moment to carry out such a task of synthesis. One would expect and hope that a clarification of the precise lines along which comparisons would be made would assuage the resistance of specialists on the East to the agenda regime analysts are proposing.

researchers to avoid the problem of conceptual stretching. The merit of such a conceptualization, indeed, is evident in the quality of the contributions regime analysts have made to the study of authoritarianism and democracy over the last three decades, studies that include such agenda-setting works as O'Donnell's and Schmitter's *Transitions from Authoritarian Rule* (1986). But the usefulness of the concept of political regime advanced by regime analysts can also be seen through a consideration of alternative approaches to the study of political regimes. To clarify the advantages of the concept of political regime advanced by regime analysts, thus, this paper considers two alternative conceptualizations of regime, focusing particularly on the frequently used quantitative indices of democracy.

Political Regime as a Two-Dimensional Concept

The basic reason why regime analysis constitutes a coherent agenda is that it has, for the most part, formulated a variety of concepts that have retained a common overarching concept: the concept of political regime. That is, whether analysts have focused on the study of democracy or authoritarianism, on problems of transition or consolidation, their work has been conceived with reference to a broader and more encompassing notion of political regime or some other concept, such as form of government, system of government, or system of governance, which has been used interchangeably with political regime.⁵ Nonetheless, very rarely do regime analysts stop to define what they mean by political regime and even more rarely do they actually consider how the definition of political regime they implicitly or explicitly adopt can serve as a tool to organize their inquiries. Before showing just how the concept of political regime plays this organizing role, a key concern of this paper, it is necessary to consider the logically prior question: how to define a political regime.

On the basis of a reconstruction of the concept of political regime offered in the appendix, it is possible to identify five attributes that recur in the definitions that have been proposed by regime analysts. Moreover, further consideration indicates that it is possible to go beyond the simple enumeration of attributes and show that these attributes actually form two neat groups. What emerges from the collection and organization of definitions, indeed, is a two-dimensional concept, consisting of a procedural and a behavioral dimension.

⁵ One way in which the overarching concept is alluded to is by clarifying the domain to which the analysis refers. Thus, the statement that one is discussing political democracy as opposed to industrial democracy, economic democracy, or world democracy is an implicit acknowledgment that one is conceiving as democracy as a political regime. On the 'domains-of-experience principle,' see Lakoff (1987, 92–96).

The first, or *procedural*, dimension concerns a set of rules or procedures, an aspect that regime analysts have addressed when they state precisely what issues these procedural rules determine. This is a relatively uncomplicated aspect of the conceptualization of political regime. For if there is a slight variation in terms of the specific issues these rules structure, there is an overall consensus that part of what defines a political regime are the procedural rules that determine: 1) the number and type of actors who are allowed to gain access to the principal governmental positions, 2) the methods of access to such positions, and 3) the rules that are followed in the making of publicly binding decisions.⁶

As a point of clarification, it bears stressing that these procedural rules may be formal or informal and explicit or unstated. Procedural rules are contrasted, thus, not to the informal ways in which political power is sometimes actually accessed and exercised, at times despite legal procedures and at other times due to gaps in legal procedures. Rather, procedures are counterposed to outcomes. This is an important point because the inclusion of informal rules as part of the definition of political regime provides a conceptualization that is not restricted to formal-legal analysis but that seeks to address actual practices, whether they are legally sanctioned or not and whether they correspond to formal political institutions or not.⁷

If this first and procedural dimension is generally seen as the central aspect of a definition of political regime, to the extent that procedural rules concerning the establishment and conduct of government are sometimes emphasized to the exclusion of any other factors, there is also a *behavioral* component to the concept of political regime. This second dimension draws attention to the importance of actors and to a simple but extremely consequential point: that procedural

⁶ These three issues can be seen as structuring the establishment and conduct of government, or the vertical and horizontal dimensions of government, that is, the link between government authorities and the population at large and the link among governmental authorities respectively. It is worth noting that definitions of political regime frequently fail to stress the horizontal dimension of government.

⁷ The importance of considering the informal rules that structure politics is particularly relevant in studying politics in the South and the East, where the discrepancy between formal rules and the informal rules that actually pattern politics can be quite great. Indeed, the prevalence among current cases of democratization of regimes that are formally quite democratic, in part due to the widespread international pressure toward conformity with democratic rules, but much less so in practice, highlights the importance of not restricting the notion of regime to formal rules that are explicit in texts such as constitutions or laws. Because of their very alegal nature, the informal rules that actually structure the politics in many new democracies have a tendency toward authoritarianism that is, moreover, more insidious than explicitly nondemocratic elements such as electoral proscriptions and restrictions upon the power of elected authorities enshrined in formal rules. On the importance of often ignored informal rules, see Riggs (1990, 207–09) and O'Donnell (1996).

rules structure and shape the conduct of politics only inasmuch as actors accept or comply with these rules.⁸

This point, though quite straightforward, actually demands further consideration, for much hinges upon just which actors are considered relevant to the process whereby procedural rules become institutionalized and the precise meaning given to the term 'acceptance.' Of these two issues, the definition of who is a relevant actor appears to involve few complications. Indeed, there is a prevailing consensus that holds that for institutionalization to occur it is necessary that institutional rules are accepted by all major political actors (Stepan 1978, 292; Przeworski 1991, x, 26, 39–39; Schmitter and Karl 1991, 76; O'Donnell 1992, 48–49; Mainwaring 1992, 296; Gunther, Puhle, and Diamandouros 1995, 7–8). A thornier issue is raised, however, by the term 'acceptance.' Though most authors do not explicitly define what they mean by acceptance, the general thrust within the literature has been to advance a minimal and instrumental view of the notion. This is the position expressed by Przeworski (1991, 24, 13–14, 19–26, 28), when he argues that "the assumption of self-interested strategic compliance" provides a basis that is both "plausible and sufficient" to think about the problem of institutionalization. It is not necessary, in short, to consider whether actors have any normative commitment to the rules they accept and comply with.

While the economy of such an approach is a clear advantage, such a narrow criterion entails a problem in that it does not allow us to recognize the peculiarity of a situation whereby an actor's decision to strategically play by the rules of the game may lead, if this actor does not have a normative commitment to these rules, to the change, and not the institutionalization, of these rules.⁹ Indeed, in such a situation a narrow definition of acceptance would lead us to think that the institutional rules in question are being institutionalized precisely at the moment when they are likely to be changed. The solution to this conceptual ambiguity, fortunately, is not too complex. All we must do is state explicitly what a purely instrumental approach implicitly assumes: that institutionalization hinges upon the strategic or instrumental acceptance of a set of procedural rules by all major actors and, while certainly not the normative acceptance of these rules by all

⁸ These procedural and behavioral dimensions correspond to the structural and behavioral dimensions discussed by Linz, Stepan, and Gunther (1995, 79) in their definition of democratic consolidation. While these authors add a third, attitudinal, dimension, it is unclear that this dimension adds anything to the behavioral one. The reason why the attitudinal dimension is less important than the behavioral one is that it measures individual-level dispositions which, as Przeworski (1986, 54, 50–53; 1991, 28, 54) argues in his critique of common uses of the notion of legitimacy, have little impact on the stability of a regime. Attitudes become important only when and inasmuch as they inform the behavior of actors constituted as such.

⁹ Cases such as the rise of Hitler and the Nazis to power or the Chilean opposition to Pinochet in 1987–88 exemplify this situation.

major actors, at least the lack of normative rejection of these rules by any major actor.¹⁰ That is, we must acknowledge the importance of the relative weight of actors holding different normative preferences, in light of the fact that the increased political weight of actors who have a normative preference that goes counter to the procedural rules at stake has a direct impact on the institutionalization of these rules, whether they strategically process their interests through the existing procedural rules or not.

By way of summary, then, the concept of a political regime that underpins the agenda of regime analysis is defined, on the one hand, by the procedural rules, whether formal or informal, that determine the number and type of actors who are allowed to gain access to the principal governmental positions, the methods of access to such positions, and the rules that are followed in the making of publicly binding decisions, and, on the other hand, by the strategic acceptance of these rules by all major political actors and the lack of normative rejection of these rules by any major political actor.¹¹

Disaggregating the Concept of Political Regime

As is the case with any multidimensional concept, the two-dimensional nature of the concept of political regime used by regime analysts has the potential of conflating distinct phenomena and generating confusing analysis. But regime analysis have escaped such a pitfall by disaggregating their most critical concept. This conceptual disaggregation has been carried out through the introduction of two secondary concepts, those of transition and consolidation, which help to isolate the procedural and behavioral dimensions of regimes and allow analysts to focus on the distinctive issues raised by the procedural dimension, which draws attention to rules, and the behavioral dimension, which hinges upon the actions of actors, as well as on the connection between these distinct dimensions. Such a disaggregation of the concept of political regime has played a fundamental role, thus, in the ability of regime analysts to develop and

¹⁰ One of the few attempts to grapple with this issue and to explicitly state this assumption is provided by O'Donnell, who states that "in order to advance toward the consolidation of democracy...democratic actors must at least...neutralize those actors who are unconditionally authoritarian, either by isolating them politically or by turning them into fragmented sects which cannot threaten the survival of the regime" (1992, 21, see also 19-24, 48).

¹¹ There is one key element that this definition of political regime, as all the definitions it draws upon, assumes: a national state. Indeed, it would be more accurate to use the term 'national political regime' instead of political regime. What this means is that regime analysis takes the national state, which defines both where power is located and over whom it is exercised, as a given. The implications of this tight connection between the concept of the national state and political regime has not been given much attention, but some significant reflections on this issue are provided by O'Donnell (1993) and Przeworski (1995, Chapter 2).

organize a semantic field within which a complex, yet conceptually precise, agenda of research could be outlined (see Figure 1).

The concept of *transition*, defined as “the interval between one political regime and another” during which “the rules of the political game are not defined” (O’Donnell and Schmitter 1986, 6),¹² along with the concept of *consolidation*, defined, by way of contrast, as the period that opens when a set of rules has been defined and closes when these rules cease to be operative, introduces a first and fundamental distinction, by differentiating between processes in which the very emergence of rules is at stake from those in which such rules are taken for granted. This broad distinction is useful, as shown by the way the concept of consolidation delimits a process that hinges entirely on one analytical issue, the acceptance or rejection of these established rules by actors. Indeed, this distinction is at the basis of the common reference to the discreteness of the issues of transition as opposed to those of consolidation, or of the peculiarity of the the problems

¹² To take one example, a democratic transition “begins with the breakdown of the former authoritarian regime and ends with the establishment of a relatively stable configuration of political institutions within a democratic regime” (Gunther, Puhle, and Diamandouros 1995, 3; see also Linz, Stepan, and Gunther 1995, 78).

of regime change in counterposition to those of regime functioning (Mainwaring, O'Donnell, and Valenzuela 1992; Linz and Stepan forthcoming).

But regime analysts have actually moved beyond this broad counterposition, rooted in the classic concepts of change and order, by acknowledging that the notion of transition hides two aspects that deserve separate treatment. As in the case of the concept of consolidation, there is *process* of transition, which invites a diachronic form of analysis centered on the shaping of new rules by actors. But unlike the case with the concept of consolidation, there is also an *outcome* to the process of transition—the new rules themselves—which lives on independently of it and calls for a synchronic form of analysis. Thus, acknowledging these two separate analytical issues, regime analysts have made a point of distinguishing between the process and the outcome of transitions or the process and outcome of regime change. In sum, as shown in Figure 1, regime analysis consists of three broad areas of inquiry which are characterized by distinct analytical issues: the creation of new rules by actors, the central feature of the process of transition; the rules themselves, the central outcome of the process of transition; and the acceptance or rejection of the rules defined by actors during the transition phase, the core characteristic of the process of consolidation.

Starting with this general framework, which disaggregates the elements that are part of the definition of political regime at a high level of abstraction, regime analysts have proceeded to elaborate concepts suited for the conduct of comparative inquiry into each of these three areas or problems. A discussion of the more grounded concepts of modes of transition, regime types and subtypes, and degrees of consolidation, thus, will show how regime analysts have sought to advance a theoretically oriented enterprise through empirical research.

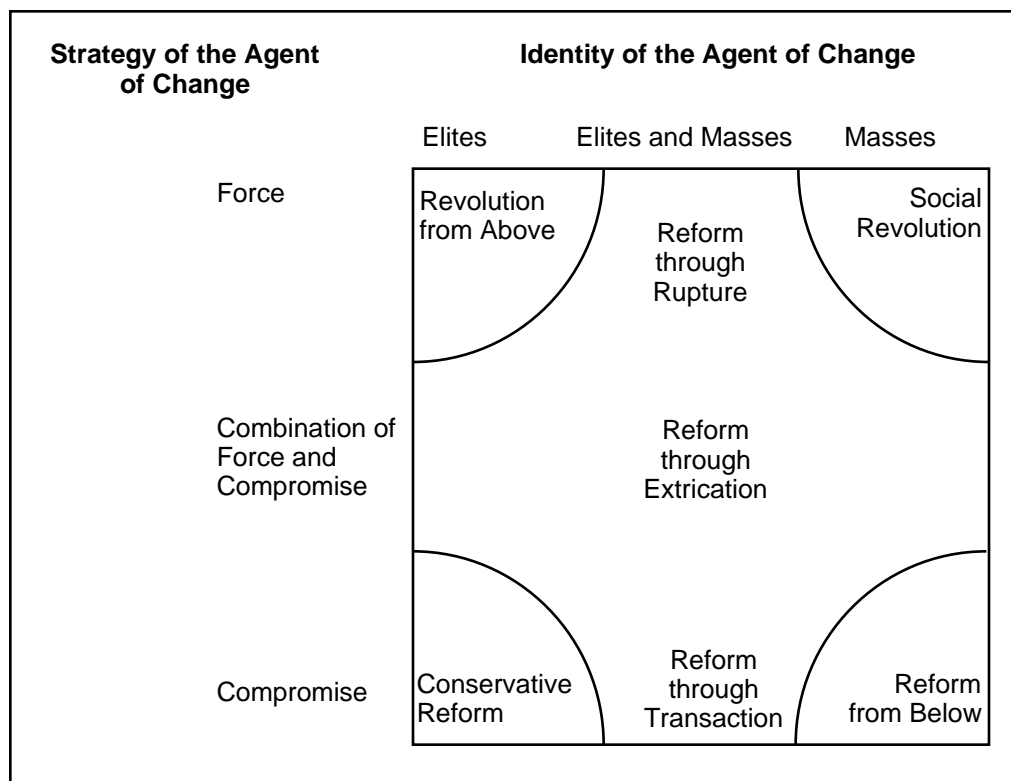
Modes of Transition

Inquiry into the process of transition or regime change, a concern that has recently blossomed in the context of the study of democratization, starts with a basic question: Has a transition occurred or not, that is, have actors broken with the old rules and designed new institutional rules? Much of the recent work on democratic transitions, however, has rapidly gone on to stress the different manners in which a process of transition can occur, a distinction that has been captured through the concept of *modes of transition* (Mainwaring 1992, 317–26). Some of the original efforts to define this concept stressed the degree of control over the transition process by the outgoing rulers, a factor that led Juan Linz (1990, 150–52) to distinguish between transitions that take place through a 'reform' of, or a 'rupture' with regard to, the *ancient régime*,

and that led other authors to propose a slightly more complex tricotomous distinction including transitions ‘through transaction,’ ‘through extrication,’ and ‘through regime defeat’ (Mainwaring 1992, 322–23; see also Huntington 1991, 114–15). But it was Terry Karl’s work that made a fundamental contribution which had the virtue of allowing for the conceptualization of a variety of modes of transition beyond the ones that have been at the center of the recent debate on the Third Wave of democratization (see Figure 2).

Figure 2

Modes of Transition¹³



Karl (1990) highlighted two criteria that are rooted in the very nature of the process of transition. Acknowledging that the process of transition is spearheaded by actors, one of the criteria is the *identity* of the actors who lead the transition, which she distinguishes in terms of their

¹³ The labels used for specific modes of transition in this figure are slightly different from the ones Karl (1990) proposes. Though offering a slightly different conceptualization of the two basic criteria that structure this figure, a parallel effort to map modes of transition is provided by Valenzuela (1992, 73–78).

elite or mass nature. The other criterion, which recognizes that transitional processes are moments in which the lack of rules gives primacy to the interaction among actors, is the *strategy* of actors vis-à-vis each other, which she distinguishes in terms of the degree to which it is based on compromise and force. Crossing these two criteria, a conceptual space is generated within which the fairly narrow range of the modes of transition highlighted in the recent literature on democratization along with other important modes of transition, such as revolutions from above and social revolutions, can be located.¹⁴ In sum, this conceptualization of modes of transition both captures the uniquely fluid nature of the process of transition and provides the basis for comparing empirical cases by showing how very diverse modes of transition are actually located on the same conceptual space.

Regime Types and Subtypes

Following an analysis of modes of transition, the subsequent logical step is to study the very rules that emerge from the process of transition. The analysis of institutional rules, that is, the procedural dimension of regimes, presents a distinct challenge to regime analysts in that it calls for a synchronic form of analysis. Turning away from the diachronic form of analysis employed in addressing the other issues regime analysts have tackled, researchers have sought to acknowledge the diversity of possible institutional rules through complex typological constructs, one of the richest areas of conceptualization in regime analysis. At the highest level of generalization, such typologies have mapped out all possible regimes through a typology of regimes types that explicitly or implicitly use the attributes that jointly define the procedural dimension of regimes as a matrix (see Figure 3).¹⁵ Such typologies, constructed at a high level of generality, constitute however only the first step in the analysis of institutional rules. Indeed,

¹⁴ The problem with earlier discussions of modes of transition is that it stressed one criterion: the degree of control over the transition process by the outgoing rulers, which is actually a determinant of the strategies of actors who lead the transition, while ignoring the identity of the actors, a factor that was fairly constant across most recent cases of democratic transitions. By making explicit this second criterion, Karl's conceptual map provides a foundation for recognizing, for example, the supplementary nature of the literature on revolutions and transitions, something scholars of revolution such as Skocpol (1994, 334–35) have acknowledged, and for integrating bodies of literature that have developed in relative isolation from each other.

¹⁵ Because most regime typologies do not begin with a clear definition of political regime, they have an artisanal quality that stresses the particular procedural aspects a researcher chooses to highlight. Because such a practice can obscure the logical grounds for comparing cases, it is crucial that regime analysts find a way to balance the desirability of having individual researchers fashion typologies in quite idiosyncratic ways, given the need for typologies that creatively incorporate changing realities, and the desire for organization, which facilitates comparative research but which leads all too often to sterile formalism.

moving to a lower level of generality and seeking to provide for a more nuanced understanding of the peculiarities of each case, regime analysts have generated a large number of regime subtypes that apply to smaller subsets of cases (Collier and Mahon 1993, 849–52; Collier and Levitsky 1994).

While it is beyond the scope of this paper to give a sense of the variety of subtypes in the literature, it is possible nonetheless to highlight some of the main ways in which these subtypes have been generated. One common strategy has been to conceptualize subtypes through a process of *neutral specification*, that is, by adding a new attribute that specifies the particular

Figure 3

Types of Political Regimes¹⁶

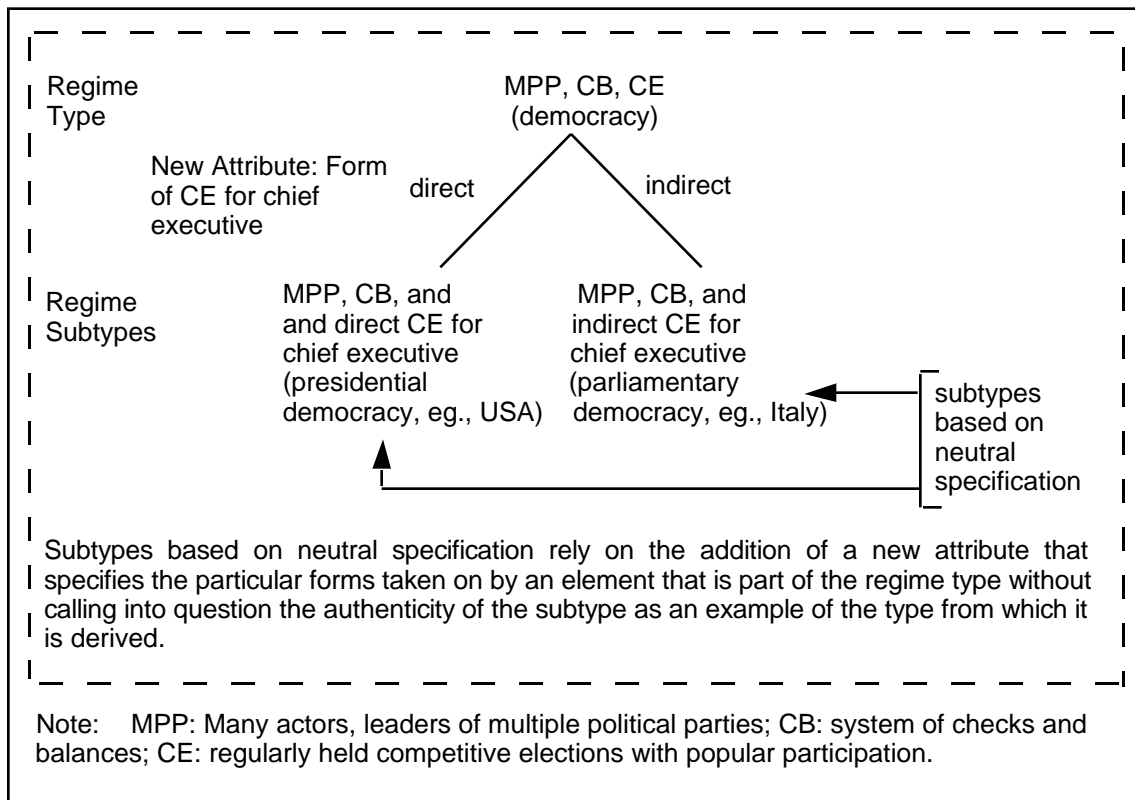
Regime Types	Attributes	Number & Type of actors allowed access to power	Methods of access to power	Rules for making publicly binding decisions
Democratic		Many actors: leaders of multiple political parties	regularly held competitive elections with popular participation	system of checks and balances
Authoritarian		Few actors: leaders of military and business elites	decisions within the military	bounded arbitrariness
Totalitarian		One actor: leaders of single party	decisions within the single party	unbounded arbitrariness

forms taken on by an element that is part of the regime type without calling into question the authenticity of the subtype as an example of the type from which it is derived. Such is the case of the distinction between presidential and parliamentary democracy, a distinction that depends upon the introduction of a new attribute that calls for the specification of the form in which

¹⁶ This figure, which owes much to Linz (1975), entails a vast amount of oversimplification. For example, while there are forms of authoritarianism that are not based on military rulers, this form is emphasized due to its paradigmatic status. The point of this figure is to illustrate how a typology of regimes can be built on the basis of the definition of regime advanced in this article. A point worth raising with regard to this typology is that some authors have suggested a typology of regimes based on a distinction between two regime types, democracies and dictatorships, rather than the more standard three-way division. In that case, totalitarianism and authoritarianism would be seen as subtypes of dictatorships. It should be noted that these alternative classification schemes do have significant implications. For example, the two-way typology would classify a transition from totalitarianism to authoritarianism as a case of a transition between regime subtypes instead of a transitions between regime types. The distinction between transitions between regime types as opposed to transitions between regime subtypes is a potentially fruitful distinction, not only in the study of totalitarianism but also in the analysis of current democracies. Though it remains an unexplored topic, one would expect that transitions between subtypes of same type of regime would represent a process that is fairly distinct and less dramatic compared to a transition between regime types because, as is discussed below, regime subtypes are sometimes distinguished by differences of degree while regime types are distinguished by broad qualitative differences.

competitive elections for the chief executive officer are held. The two subtypes thus generated, parliamentary democracies, distinguished by the indirect manner in which Prime Ministers are elected, and presidential democracies, distinguished by the direct election of Presidents, moreover, constitute equally good or authentic examples of the regime type democracy (see Figure 4).¹⁷

Figure 4
Regime Subtypes Based on Neutral Specification



Other subtypes have been generated through a process of *hybridization*, that is, by adding a new attribute that introduces a new element that is foreign to the basic regime type and that calls into question, therefore, the authenticity of the subtype as an example of the type from which it is derived.¹⁸ These subtypes are more complex than the subtypes based upon neutral

¹⁷ On the notion of degrees of membership and prototypical cases, see Lakoff (1987, 12–13, 15, 153, 287–88).

¹⁸ This way of generating subtypes differs in part from the way suggested by David Collier (Collier and Levitsky 1994, 6, 9–12), who states that all subtypes are ‘derivative’ concepts that are

specification, for they allow for many different combinations. While foreign elements coexist with other elements from a different system in all these subtypes, this coexistence takes on different forms. These foreign elements may, on the one hand, clearly *displace* elements that define a type, as in the case of Chile, where several Senators are designated and not elected. On the other hand, there are cases in which foreign elements overlap and *compete* with elements that define a type, as in the Brazilian case, where certain formal rules do exist to structure key aspects of the regime but in which informal practices diverge from such formal rules (see Figure 5).¹⁹

Degrees of Consolidation

Compared to the complex and multidimensional manner in which regime analysts have discussed the process, as well as the outcome of the process, of transition, a fairly simple approach has dominated the study of problems of consolidation that begin with the installation of new institutional rules that ends a transition and that, as a matter concerning the behavioral dimension of regimes, hinges upon the acceptance by actors of preestablished rules.²⁰ From

“formed with reference to, and as a modification of, some other concept,” and that the generation of these more specific versions of a core concept can be carried out either by a process of ‘addition’ which increases the information already conveyed by the root concept by adding an attribute beyond those contained in the root concept, as in the case of classical subtypes, or by a process of ‘subtraction,’ that is, through the weakening or elimination of some of the attributes of the core or original concept, when generating radial subtypes. In the case of subtypes based on neutral specification, which resemble classical subtypes, the process is essentially the same, except that the new attribute is not fully unrelated to the attributes that define a regime type but rather a less abstract manifestation of an attribute that is already part of the matrix of attributes that defines a regime type such democracy. Such a procedure contrasts with Collier’s proposal to define a parliamentary democracy by adding an attribute to those used to define democracy (Collier and Levitsky 1994, 10) and is closer to the method used by Linz (1975, 179–80, 265, 269, 277–81) in generating subtypes of authoritarianism. In the case of subtypes based on hybridization, which resemble radial subtypes, the procedure followed in this paper differs significantly from that suggested by Collier. As in the case of subtypes based on neutral specification, these subtypes are also generated by adding a new attribute that is drawn from the matrix of attributes defining all regime types. The difference is that the new attribute introduces an element that is foreign to, rather than fully compatible with, the basic regime type and that this new element reduces, therefore, the authenticity of the subtype as an example of the overall type. In other words, we can think of hybrid subtypes as being generated by the addition of negative elements, while subtypes based on neutral specification result from the addition of neutral elements.

¹⁹ Another significant form of hybrid regime is based on the acknowledgment that the pervasive assumption in regime analysis, to the effect that a national state enforces a uniform form of rule throughout a national territory, is not always met. Thus, relaxing this assumption, analysts such as Fox (1994), have characterized cases such as Mexico in terms of a peculiar combination of national and subnational regimes.

²⁰ This temporal divide is given by the simple fact that there can be no acceptance of rules until these rules have been established. While various authors argue that there is a temporal overlap between the processes of transition and consolidation (Diamandouros and Gunther 1995, xii;

the start, indeed, regime analysts have been concerned with the conceptually uncomplicated task of distinguishing cases in terms of the degree to which their institutional rules have been consolidated, that is, accepted by all major political actors. This is the rationale for Linz's (1973, 235) distinction between 'political regimes' and poorly institutionalized 'political situations,' as well as for Leonardo Morlino's (1990, 101; 1992, 152) more developed distinction among those polities where the attempt at consolidation has directly collapsed and led to an outright 'crisis,' cases that have avoided such a crisis but have fallen short of successful consolidation and are characterized by 'unstable persistence,' and cases that have been successful in consolidating their procedural rules and are characterized by 'stable persistence.'²¹

Such a conceptualization has the virtue of clarity and has been quite useful. Thus, it has served as the basis for crossnational distinctions in terms of the degree of consolidation of new democracies and it has also provided the criteria for longitudinal studies that distinguish a process of consolidation, which indicates an increase in the degree of consolidation, from a process of deconsolidation, which refers to a decline in the degree of consolidation (Diamandouros and Gunther 1995, xiii–xiv; Gunther, Puhle, and Diamandouros 1995, 15, 18), and a process of crisis and reequilibration, which captures the sense in which a country faces a crisis of regime, but averts a transition through a reconsolidation of its old institutional rules (Linz 1978, 86, Chapter 5; Linz 1990, 147–48; O'Donnell and Schmitter 1986, 23–24).²²

Such nuances are clearly relevant to the discussion of current democracies. But there remains more to be done in this area. Indeed, it is possible to move beyond the very broad and sometimes vague assessments formulated in terms of degrees of consolidation. One such avenue would be to be more precise by assessing consolidation in terms of the identity and strength of the actors in a national society and the degree to which different actors display both strategic and normative acceptance or rejection of institutional rules (Gunther, Puhle, and Diamandouros 1995, 8). As in the case of the development of regime subtypes discussed

Gunther, Puhle, and Diamandouros 1995, 423–24), the point they make is actually one concerning the impact of a distinct mode of transition on the subsequent process of consolidation, that is, concerning the importance of the method whereby rules are designed to the likelihood that such rules will be accepted by all major political actors.

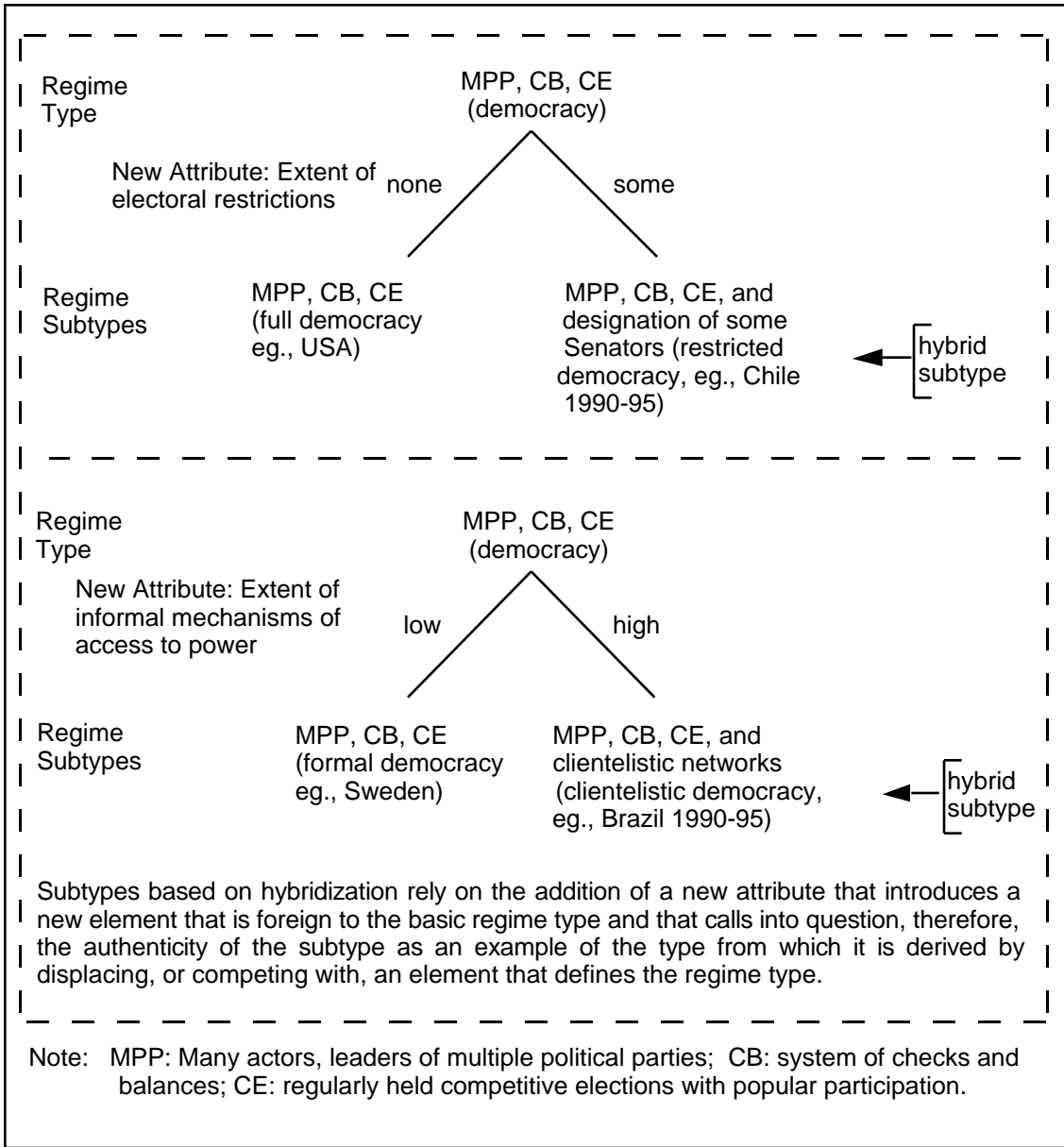
²¹ As Collier and Levitsky (1994) show, students of democratization have come up with a large number of terms to acknowledge the less than fully institutionalized nature of politics in new democracies. They have referred, for example, to 'fledgling,' 'fragile,' 'insecure,' and 'unstable' democracies.

²² The difference between a crisis, which entails the failure to consolidate a set of established rules, and a transition, which entails the design of new rules, hinges upon the distinction between actors' rejection of a set of rules, a negative disposition that leads to a crisis of the existing institutional rules, and actors' ability not only to reject certain rules but also to advance an alternative to existing rules and shape new rules, a positive disposition that leads to a transition.

above, such assessments would do much to provide a more complex and nuanced analysis than is commonly the case in current studies. Another avenue would be to incorporate Schmitter's (1992) notion of 'partial regimes,' so as to break with the fairly rigid and not always accurate assumption that the entire set of institutional rules that constitute a regime are installed at a single point in time. In terms of the analysis of the process of consolidation, this would allow the analyst to focus on and characterize the extent to which different aspects of a regime have been consolidated rather than having to assess the consolidation of the regime as a whole.²³

Figure 5
Regime subtypes Based on Hybridization

²³ The ability to think in terms of partial regimes should be of particular relevance when considering the informal institutions that O'Donnell (1996) stresses in his typology of democracies and that, unlike the cases of constitutionally defined structures, are not likely to emerge all at once or at the same time as parallel formal institutions.



The Uses of the Semantic Field of Regime Analyses

The usefulness of these conceptual elaborations, which define the rich semantic field within which regime analysis is advanced, deserves to be highlighted. First of all, this conceptual map provides students of political regimes with clear criteria to distinguish among analytically distinct problems, a desideratum with vast implications for the task of theory-building. The broadest distinction in this sense is between the study of institutional rules in themselves, which calls for a synchronic form of analysis, and the processes of transition and consolidation, which call for a diachronic form of analysis. Going beyond this distinction, moreover, regime analysts have also distinguished between processes in which the rules of the game are not defined, thus making politics hinge around the very definition of a new set of rules, and processes in which such rules are taken as givens. While this distinction, which underpins the contrast between processes of transition or regime change and consolidation or regime functioning, is fairly simple, its importance for theory-building has been quite impressive. Thus, as various authors have stressed in the context of studies on democratization, this distinction has enabled scholars to recognize the different dynamics involved in the processes of democratic transition as opposed to that of democratic consolidation and to show that the actors, strategies, and conditions that facilitate a democratic transition do not necessarily overlap with those that make democratic consolidation likely (Rustow 1970, 339–45; O'Donnell and Schmitter 1986, 3–5; Schmitter with Karl 1994, 173–77; Schmitter 1995, 12–13).²⁴

²⁴ Going beyond this distinction between the politics of transition and the politics of consolidation, the editors of a recent volume on Southern Europe seek to introduce a distinction between a politics of consolidation and a politics of postconsolidation, arguing that “the basic character of politics within consolidated democracies is different from political interactions within unconsolidated systems” and that the “key explanatory variables” we should use to account for these distinct processes “may differ significantly” (Diamandouros and Gunther 1995, xiii; Gunther, Puhle, and Diamandouros 1995, 9, 3). Some issues that they see as pertaining to the politics of democratic postconsolidation, such as “the performance of its political institutions” and the nature of the regime subtype (Diamandouros and Gunther 1995, xiii–xiv, xviii, xxiv), pertain quite clearly, however, to the process of consolidation. Indeed, as a long tradition of research has shown, both the performance or efficacy of democracy, as well as the particular institutional design of democracy, affect the very likelihood of consolidation. Other issues, such as the deepening of democracy and changes in the ‘quality’ of democracy, a fuzzy term various authors have used (Gunther, Puhle, and Diamandouros 1995, 8, 22), pertain to the politics of transition, with the proviso that such changes are best characterized as involving a transition between subtypes of democracy, which could simply be a matter of reforms that alter the degree to which the regime subtype is democratic, in contrast to a transition between regime types, which entails a clear qualitative change. Generally speaking, I am skeptical of the attempt to conceptualize a postconsolidation politics. Essentially, given the definitions offered of transition and consolidation in this article, there is nowhere to go beyond full consolidation.

Besides allowing researchers to be analytically precise and thus avoid conflating distinct theoretical problems, the conceptual map elaborated by regime analysts has important implications for the testing of theories, particularly inasmuch as it provides researchers with adequate tools to select cases while avoiding the problem of conceptual stretching, that is, the use of a concept that does not fit a specific case. This usage can be exemplified by way of addressing the thorny issue of selecting cases when using concepts that have fuzzy rather than sharp boundaries and that admit degrees of membership, a frequent occurrence in the analysis of the institutional rules of democratic regimes.

To avoid the problem of conceptual stretching when handling such tough cases, regime analysts have, first of all, organized their typological constructs vertically along a ladder of abstraction or generality (Sartori 1970, 1040–46, and 1984, 44–46; Collier and Mahon 1993, 846). Such a task has been accomplished by placing necessary and defining attributes shared by all cases of a regime type at the top of the ladder, while introducing central and contingent attributes as a way to descend the ladder of generality and generate regime subtypes, including hybrid subtypes, that branch downwards dividing the total number of cases within a regime type into smaller subsets.²⁵ The virtue of such a vertical organization of concepts, which introduces the broadest possible qualitative distinctions to separate all cases into regime types at the very top of the ladder of generality and which relegates quantitative distinctions to lower rungs of the ladder of generality, is that it facilitates the selection of cases while abiding by Sartori's (1970, 1038, 1044) dictum about subordinating the logic of gradation to the logic of classification, a suggestion that aims at preventing the confusion between distinctions of degree and of class, a key source of conceptual stretching. Indeed, once concepts have been organized vertically along the ladder of generality, the avoidance of conceptual stretching hinges upon a fairly simple rule: cases are to be selected first on the basis of necessary and defining attributes shared by all members of a particular set and only after this choice has been made are cases to be selected on the basis of additional central and contingent attributes, which can be used to generate subtypes consisting of subsets of a general population that can be characterized as being more or less central or prototypical members of a particular regime type.²⁶

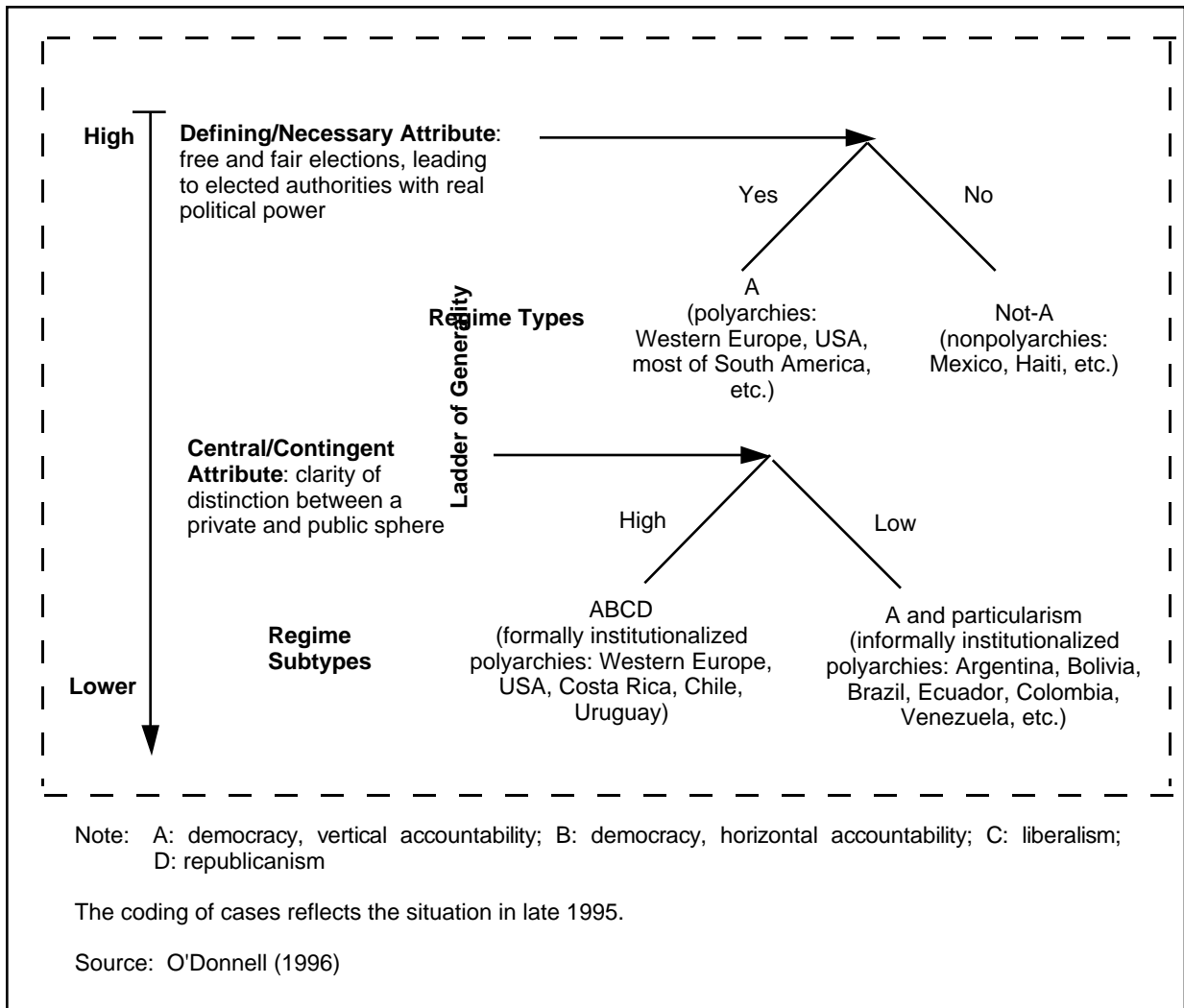
²⁵ On the distinction between defining and central attributes, see Sartori (1984, 32–33, 55–56).

²⁶ It should be noted, as was pointed out above, that while the generation of subtypes through hybridization has implications for the authenticity of the subtype, this is not the case with subtypes generated through neutral specification. This argument parallels Collier's emphasis on the use of subtypes as an important strategy used by researchers to avoid conceptual stretching (Collier and Mahon 1993, 850–52; Collier and Levitsky 1994, 11–12, 17–21). There is a significant difference, however, between the organization of typological constructs within the ladder of

Figure 6

Method of Case Selection: O'Donnell's Informally Institutionalized Polyarchies

generality as proposed in this article and in Collier's work. Most crucially, while Collier states that radial concepts generate subtypes that do "not fit clearly within the framework of the ladder of generality" and that radial subtypes, which correspond to my hybrid subtypes, do "not necessarily branch *down* to a lower rung on the ladder of generality" (Collier and Levitsky 1994, 10), I propose a scheme that sees all subtypes as branching down. The reason for seeing radial or hybrid subtypes as branching down is that hybrid subtypes are generated through the apparently contradictory procedure of limiting the authenticity or completeness of one subset of cases vis-à-vis the regime type by adding information to that which defines a general population. See footnote number 18. As a result, the rules Sartori (1970, 1041) proposed for climbing and descending the ladder of generality on the basis of classical concepts, subtracting attributes to climb and adding attributes to descend, are seen as equally applicable to classical and radial concepts. For a skeptical view of this argument, however, see Lakoff (1987, Chapter 9).



This is the exact procedure that is followed by O'Donnell (1996) in his recent article on 'informally institutionalized' polyarchies, a hybrid subtype of polyarchy (see Figure 6). In a textbook example of how to select cases while avoiding conceptual stretching, he first distinguishes cases that belong to the category of polyarchy as a regime type, using the criteria Robert Dahl provides for defining polyarchy, in a slightly modified manner, as a necessary attribute that distinguishes polyarchies from nonpolyarchies.²⁷ Only then does he go on to distinguish among subtypes of polyarchy on the basis of the degree to which the subset of polyarchies

²⁷ While O'Donnell selects cases on the basis of the presence or absence of the criteria of polyarchy he discusses, an even clearer basis for case selection would be to follow Sartori's (1987, Chapter 7) suggestion and not only define what democracy or polyarchy is but what democracy is not, that is, an autocratic system of rule.

exhibit a second and contingent attribute, a clear distinction between a private and public sphere. This new criterion allows O'Donnell to distinguish between 'formally institutionalized' polyarchies, which exhibit a fairly clear division between a private and public sphere and which are thus characterized by a universalism that is conducive to vertical and horizontal forms of accountability as well as a liberal and republican form of rule, and 'informally institutionalized' polyarchies, which display a blurring of the line between private and public spheres and which are thus characterized by particularism, a foreign element that tends to undermine horizontal accountability and both the liberal and republican components of rule that are found in 'formally institutionalized' polyarchies. In sum, through a two-step sequential process, O'Donnell is able to clearly distinguish polyarchies from nonpolyarchies while generating a hybrid subtype, 'informally institutionalized' polyarchies, which allows him to distinguish cases that are polyarchies but that, in light of their particularism, are not prototypical members of polyarchy as a regime type, and to avoid in the process the problem of conceptual stretching that would occur if these diminished polyarchies were coded together with the 'formally institutionalized' and full polyarchies, which are prototypical members of the polyarchy family or, even worse, with polities that are not even polyarchies.²⁸

In sum, the rich semantic field regime analysts have elaborated provides researchers with a conceptual map that is particularly suited to the task of theory-building, in that it offers clear criteria to distinguish among analytically distinct problems, as well as to the task of theory-testing, in that the vertical organization of its key concepts along a ladder of generality (see Figure 1) has made the avoidance of conceptual stretching depend upon the application of a simple rule. Indeed, the pay-off of such a framework is quite evident in the manner in which regime analysts

²⁸ There are many other examples of hybrid regime in the literature on democratization. For example, Karl (1995, 73–74) characterizes the polities of Central America in 1994 as “hybrid regimes that combine elements of both authoritarianism and democracy.” O'Donnell and Schmitter (1986, 9, 13, 14, 39–45) have also referred to 'limited democracies' or *democraduras*, and 'liberalized authoritarian' regimes or *dictablandas*. What is noteworthy about these characterizations is that they capture the gray or fuzzy area between democracy and authoritarianism while remaining firmly rooted in the concept of one or another regime type (see also Weffort 1992, 89–92, 97–98). Thus, Karl's (1995, 74, 80) characterization is used to distinguish partial from full democracies, while also stressing the qualitative difference between these regimes and the 'reactionary despotic' regimes that were common in Central America in the recent past. Similarly, O'Donnell and Schmitter (1986, 7–9) capture the difference between authoritarian polities that extend certain rights to individuals and groups, such as freedom of movement and freedom from censorship, as opposed those that do not, while making it clear that such liberalization should not be confused with the more fundamental change in structure of authority that is entailed in democratization. Indeed, in all these cases, as in the case of O'Donnell's 'informally institutionalized' polyarchies, it is crucial to stress that while a hybrid subtype is generated to acknowledge different degrees of membership within a particular regime type, these subtypes are always firmly rooted within the category of regime type, defined on the basis of necessary attributes.

have been able to define and advance an ambitious but manageable agenda centered around what is arguably the greatest challenge facing students of comparative politics these days: the need to come to terms with the vast political changes, broadly summarized by the label democratization, that have shaken the world over the past twenty years. For the set of concepts outlined above have served as the foundation for an ambitious but manageable research agenda that has sought to build and test arguments concerning the links among the type of authoritarian regimes that prevailed throughout the world in the post–World War II period, the modes of transition whereby these authoritarian regimes came to an end beginning in the mid–1970s, and the nature and prospects of consolidation of the new democracies that by the early 1990s had been installed throughout the East and the South.²⁹ The conceptual framework elaborated by regime analysts has provided, in short, the foundation for a bold attempt to build and test a general theory of democratization.

Alternative Conceptualizations of Regime

The merits of such a conceptualization can be made clearer by contrasting the understanding of politics that is built around the concept of political regime as formulated by regime analysts to that offered from other perspectives. The first alternative way of understanding the concept of regime that deserves attention is that advanced by authors who conceive of regimes solely in terms of actors or who treat institutional rules as epiphenomenal, and who end up viewing a regime as something akin to the ruling coalition. This tendency to underrate the institutional rules of politics, fairly common among sociologists, is most patent in definitions that directly eliminate all reference to institutions, such as Michael Mann's (1993, 18–19) definition of a regime as “an alliance of dominant ideological, economic, and military power actors, coordinated by the rulers of the state.” The importance of actors is so overriding in such a formulation that it leads authors such as Mann to speak, anthropomorphically, about ‘regime strategies,’ that is, as though a regime had no institutional component whatsoever. A less extreme form of underrating institutional rules is also associated with definitions of regime that introduce a distinction between actors and rules but posit nonetheless a one-to-one correspondence between these two

²⁹ The clearest statement of this agenda is provided by Schmitter (1988). Works seeking to explore such linkages include Karl (1990), Huntington (1991), Schmitter and Karl (1992), O'Donnell (1992), Valenzuela (1992), Whitehead (1994), Haggard and Kaufman (1995), Linz, Stepan, and Gunther (1995), and Linz and Stepan (forthcoming). Important efforts to develop typologies of nondemocratic regimes include Linz (1975) and Linz and Stepan (forthcoming); on current democratic regimes, see Linz and Valenzuela (1994) and O'Donnell (1996). For an early assessment of this agenda, see Munck (1994).

dimensions, typically seeing rules as *expressing* or being *based* upon the more fundamental power of actors.³⁰ The result, nonetheless, is the same: whether defining a regime solely in terms of actors or treating institutions as epiphenomenal, these 'ruling coalition' formulations of political regime lead the analyst to ignore the independent importance of institutions and to give an overriding weight to actors and the ruling coalition in particular (see Figure 7 in the appendix).

There are several problems associated with such a reductionist conception of a regime. Most obviously, because the importance of institutional rules in structuring politics is ignored, such a conceptualization tends to ignore the range of institutional diversity that can coexist with a similar set of actors (Cardoso 1979, 39–40) and that regime analysts seek to acknowledge through their typologies of political regimes. Moreover, lacking a definition of regime that addressed the importance of both actors and rules, such a conceptualization also fails to consider the interplay between actors and institutional rules. As a result, distinctions in terms of the degree to which a regime is consolidated become inconceivable, as does the very notion of a process of transition whereby actors advance an alternative to existing rules. The reductionist conceptualization entailed by the 'ruling coalition' formulations of political regime leads, in short, to a dramatic truncation of the research agenda made possible by the more complete and complex conceptual map regime analysts have elaborated.³¹

A second alternative way of thinking about political regimes and one that deserves more attention, in that it is more common within political science and raises even thornier issues than the tendency toward reductionist thinking among sociologists, is the one advanced by authors who have not offered an explicit definition of regime but who have sought nonetheless to contribute to the literature on democratization through the construction of quantitative indices of democracy.³² The framework underlying these efforts is quite simple. Starting with a definition

³⁰ These reductionist definitions as a whole are clearly different from those offered by regime analysts in that they go counter to a shared perception among regime analysts, made explicit by Collier and Collier (1991, 789), to the effect that the notion of regime should not be confused with "the particular incumbents who occupy state and governmental roles [or] the political coalition that supports these incumbents."

³¹ While failing to stress politics, seen as the conflicts among actors over the shaping of institutional rules and the patterning of conflicts that such rules allow for, authors such as Mann (1993) have provided valuable insights into how actors are constituted as such, as a result of the interplay of state, military, ideological, and economic forces. That is, while saying little about what the stakes of politics are and how politics is done, the key aim of regime analysis, they have shed light on who the actors of politics are. The challenge, for regime analysts, is to draw upon this sociology of actors and integrate it with the analysis of politics they stress.

³² Notable efforts to construct indices of democracy and to use them to test hypotheses have been carried out by Bollen (1980), Bollen and Jackman (1985), Vanhanen (1984, 1990, 1994), Arat (1991), Coppedge and Reinicke (1991), Coppedge (1996) and Hadenius (1992). The most widely used survey, however, is the "Comparative Survey of Freedom" that the Freedom House

of democracy, such indices are based on the collection of data on all polities according to the criteria afforded by the operationalization of such a definition and the subsequent alignment of all polities on a continuum that goes from the most democratic at one pole to the least democratic at the opposite pole. Such simplicity, however, is deceptive, in that most of these indices not only invite theoretical obfuscation but are also associated with a rampant problem of conceptual stretching.

Part of the problem with such indices is that they implicitly entail a reductionist definition of regime that, as in the case of the sociological formulation discussed above, involves a truncation of the agenda regime analysts propose. However, because this reductionism operates in an opposite direction to that associated with the 'ruling coalition' formulation of regime, giving primacy to institutional rules rather than actors, its implications are quite distinct. Most fundamentally, because actors are ignored, there is no way in which these indices can capture the *processes* of transition or consolidation, which only make sense in terms of the behavior of actors.³³ At best, then, such indices can provide only a partial understanding of regimes, focusing on the synchronic analysis of institutional rules. However, because most indices of democracy entail not only a reductionist but also a teleological bent, whereby all polities are viewed in terms of their proximity to or distance from a necessary destination or telos, democracy, they even fail to provide an adequate conceptual foundation to advance our understanding of institutional rules. The root of the problem is that while the constructors of such indices quite rightly treat the concept of

has published since 1973. There is some question concerning just what the Freedom House measures. As Gastil (1991, 22), the survey's director from 1977 to 1989, put it, although the criterion for the rating system is 'freedom' rather than democracy, after some years he "understood that the survey was essentially a survey of democracy." The lack of a one-to-one correspondence between freedom and democracy is evident, however, in a statement summing up the 1994 survey to the effect that "while the state of freedom deteriorated worldwide, the number of democracies continued to grow" (Karatnycky 1994, 6). This statement is probably quite accurate, even though the author provides no basis for his statement concerning the number of democracies he detects. For the purpose of this paper, however, what is significant is that scholars such as Lipset, Seong, and Torres (1993) and Diamond (1992) have used the Freedom House survey in testing their hypotheses as though it were an index of democracy. The country rankings as well as the methodology used in compiling the Freedom House index are presented and discussed each year in the first issue of *Freedom Review*.

³³ The little discussion that there has been concerning the usefulness of indices of democracy to conceptualize transitions has hinged on their ability to distinguish between qualitatively distinct regime types (Huntington 1991, 11–12, 318). But the real problem with such indices is that they do not have a concept of the *process* of transition, which is not only a matter of rules but also of actors. It is important to note, nonetheless, that while transitions have generally been conceived of in terms of a change in regime type, it is also possible to discuss transitions between regime subtypes, which may be distinguished only in terms of the degree to which they exhibit a certain attribute. The challenge of how to study such transitions, which are likely to be increasingly relevant to the process of democratization, remains virtually unexplored.

democracy as a continuous concept so as to capture nuanced distinctions that would escape a conceptualization of democracy as a dichotomous concept, which would lead to the classification of cases into the qualitatively distinct categories of democracies and nondemocracies or autocracies, they mistakenly proceed to dismiss the utility of classificatory schemes and to operate as though quantification, which establishes differences in degree, does not presuppose classification, which establishes differences in kind or qualitative differences.³⁴

The conceptual consequences of such a procedure are vast and negative. Operating with a framework that is founded on what Sartori (1987, 182, 189; and 1970, 1035, 1042–43, 1046–52) would call a 'boundless' or 'no-difference' concept of democracy, that is, one that does not have an opposite, the first consequence is that these indices of democracy simply have no conceptual basis upon which to distinguish among diverse regime types. As a result, important questions in the study of democratization, such as the characteristics of the *ancien régime* from which a democratic transition represents a departure and the impact of the *ancien régime* on the processes of transition to democracy and democratic consolidation, are not even conceivable.³⁵

³⁴ It is important to pinpoint the disagreement between quantitative and qualitative researchers. The rationale for thinking about democracy as a concept that allows for distinctions in terms of the degree or level of democracy in a particular country is accepted by quantitative scholars such as Kenneth Bollen (1991, 9–10), who stresses that political democracy can be used as a continuous concept, as well as by qualitative scholars, such as Collier, who argues that the concept of democracy can be treated as a graded concept (Collier and Levitsky 1994, 25–26). The disagreement comes, thus, not over the appropriateness of quantitative measurements but over the connection between quantitative and qualitative distinctions. In this regard, Bollen is categorical, arguing that the treatment of democracy as a dichotomous concept should be dismissed. Indeed, given Bollen's (1991, 9–10; 1993, 1208–09, my emphasis) definition of democracy "as *the extent* to which a political system allows political liberty and democratic rule," it is impossible to state what democracy is not. As a result, all differences are treated as differences in degree, and the problem of classification, as well as the problem of how differences in kind and of degree relate to each other, is erased. The position of Collier is quite different. Even when seeking to emphasize the varying degrees to which a particular attribute is manifested in different cases, he argues (Collier and Mahon 1993, 848), that it is necessary to abide by Sartori's (1970, 1036–38, 1042–43; 1976, 295, 298; 1987, 182, 189) suggestion that "concept formation stands prior to quantification" or that 'what is' questions, which establish differences in kind, must be asked *before* 'how much' questions, which establish differences in degree.

³⁵ While the conceptual framework provided by regime analysis helps researchers avoid some of the most grievous problems associated with teleological thinking, such as the inability to clearly link differences in kind to differences in degree, it does not totally eliminate the danger of teleological thinking (O'Donnell 1996). Indeed, wherever there is a continuum, such as that offered by the notion of degrees of consolidation, there is a temptation to think from one pole, and assume that the political dynamics of all cases can be understood in terms of some necessary drive toward the normatively positive pole. While theoretically problematic, in that such a teleological bent does not allow for the recognition of the distinct dynamics of partially consolidated as opposed to fully consolidated institutional rules, it bears mentioning that because regime analysts tend to be quite explicit about subordinating differences in degree to differences in kind, they avoid the problem of confused conceptualization of quantitative differences and conceptual stretching that characterizes most indices of democracy.

A second and related consequence of such an antiquitative procedure is that these indices necessarily fail to deliver on their main promise: to assist analysts in making distinctions in terms of the degree of democraticness of polities. Because the proper construction of such an index requires that we first establish that a polity is democratic and only then distinguish the democraticness of such democracies, the rejection of a classificatory scheme that distinguishes broad qualitative types leads to utter conceptual confusion. Indeed, such a procedure induces us to think that it is possible to distinguish polities in terms of their degree of democraticness even if they are not actually *democratic* regimes to begin with.

The implication of such conceptual obfuscation for empirical analysis are also problematic. Ignoring the need for classification, the constructors of indices of democracy have oscillated between two equally untenable positions. Some researchers have obstinately insisted that all differences are differences of degree and that all countries can really be compared solely in terms of the degree to which they are democratic. Disregarding the qualitative differences regime analysts convey in distinguishing between regime types, however, such an approach ends up supporting quite ridiculous conclusions, such as that “all the existing political systems are democracies, albeit to a lesser and lesser degree,” or that the former Soviet Union was merely less democratic than but not qualitatively different from the United States (Sartori 1987, 184–85).³⁶ Even students with little knowledge about such cases could tell that this latter statement is flawed, in that it entails a misapplication of the concept of democracy to a case, the former Soviet Union, that did not share the attributes that define the concept of democracy.

The obvious problem of conceptual stretching such a position invites has led other researchers to recognize, in an *a posteriori* fashion, the need to introduce qualitative distinctions. Having neglected to construct such indices on the basis of a classificatory scheme from the outset, however, they are only able to make such distinctions by resorting to ad hoc criteria. Thus, to take one example, after elaborating an index that purports to distinguish among the degrees of democracy in 147 countries, Tatu Vanhanen (1993, 302, 311–13) does recognize the need “to separate democracies from nondemocracies.” But having ignored the need to classify cases before distinguishing them in terms of their degree of democraticness, all that Vanhanen can do is state that “it seems sensible” to distinguish “more or less autocratic systems” from “semi-

³⁶ Bollen’s (1991, 9) statement concerning the desire of scholars to show how “Mexico [around 1988] has more democracy than Chile [under Pinochet]” is an example of a statement that would sound very strange to Latin Americanists. The debate stressed, if anything, the nondemocratic nature of politics in these two countries and whether they should both be considered as cases of bureaucratic authoritarianism or of two distinct subtypes of authoritarianism, rather than the relative degree of democracy of these two country’s regimes.

democracies” and democracies, and that such distinctions are to be established by selecting certain cut-off points or thresholds, in what he admits is an “arbitrary” fashion, along the continuum distinguishing degrees of democracy. Such an ad hoc operation, as widespread as it may be,³⁷ rests on the flawed supposition that the data themselves can provide conceptual categories (Sartori 1970, 1038) or, alternatively, that appeals to common sense, after the fact, have validity as a method for the conduct of scientific inquiry. Indeed, because the initial assumption, that all countries could be compared as democracies, cannot be undone, any attempt to empirically distinguish democracies from nondemocracies must originate outside of the researchers’ conceptual framework, a clear admission of conceptual inadequacy.

Thus, whether researchers simply deny the need for qualitative distinctions or whether they seek to recognize them after they have collected their data, they are unable to offer a method to avoid the problem of conceptual stretching. Though the comprehensiveness of the data such indices generate remains alluring to scholars seeking to test the generalizability of hypotheses concerning the impact of economic factors on issues such as the timing of transitions to democracy and the durability of democracies, it is important to recognize that efforts to test such questions through the use of currently available indices of democracy are methodologically unsound because the validity of the data such indices generate remains suspect. This does not mean that a proper quantitative index could not be constructed. Indeed, it remains the case that the practice of distinguishing democracies in terms of degrees or levels is both justified and desirable. The point then is to learn from the mistakes of current efforts to construct an index and to use these lessons in future endeavors.

Conclusion

The study of democratization is among the most pressing challenges faced by students of comparative politics. Such a task, however, raises complex conceptual issues that must be resolved if explanatory theories are to be elaborated and tested. In this paper, I have argued that while many regime analysts have not been very explicit about their concepts, some of the key scholars who have defined this agenda have provided definitions of their concepts that allow us to

³⁷ The tendency to make qualitative distinctions on the basis of a continuous variable is widespread. For example, in Lipset’s recent work the Freedom House labels of ‘free,’ ‘partly free,’ and ‘unfree,’ which correspond to different segments of a freedom scale, are directly taken to refer to democratic, semidemocratic, and authoritarian ‘regime types,’ respectively (Lipset, Seong, and Torres 1993, 157). Diamond (1992, 455–57) proceeds in a similar fashion, if breaking down the Freedom House index into smaller segments, so as to define seven ‘regime types.’

elaborate a systematic conceptual map. Such a conceptual map, which hinges around the disaggregated two-dimensional concept of political regime, brings order to what is a vast and sometimes unwieldy body of literature and should help to clarify the lines along which regime analysts have developed their comparisons in the context of the cases of Southern Europe and Latin America. It should also provide basic guidelines for the extension of such an agenda to new regions of the world, such as Eastern Europe, while alerting researchers to the dangers entailed by alternative conceptualizations, with their tendency toward reductionist and teleological thinking.

Not all researchers are likely to agree with the conceptual analysis provided in this paper. Nonetheless, the current analysis will have served its purpose if it helps to focus discussion on issues that are at the heart of much research but are rarely addressed in a direct and explicit manner. Indeed, despite the plea for a careful analysis of the concepts we use in our research made by Sartori (1970) a quarter of a century ago, and notwithstanding the direct implications of our concepts for our ability to conduct empirical research in a methodologically sound manner and to assist in the accumulation of knowledge as a collective enterprise, conceptual analysis remains a rare genre in political science. We can only hope that it will be less so in the future.

Appendix

A Reconstruction of the Concept of Political Regime

The reconstruction of the concept of political regime is carried out, following Sartori's suggestion, through the collection of a representative set of definitions (see below), the extraction of the attributes used in these definitions, and the construction of a matrix that organizes these attributes according to the theoretical context of these definitions (1984, 40–42, 46–57). On the basis of this exercise, summarized in Figure 7, it is possible to identify two distinct and incompatible formulations of the concept of political regime: the 'regime analysis' and 'ruling coalition' formulations, which are discussed in the text of this paper.

Figure 7

Matrix of Attributes Used in Definitions of Political Regime

Definitions of Political Regime

- Christian Anglade and Carlos Fortin (1985, 16, 19, my emphasis): “On the one hand, the state expresses the domination of a given combination of classes and fractions of classes on the rest of the society... On the other hand, the state is a *set of institutions and personnels through which class domination...is expressed...* The state in its institutional sense is often referred to as the ‘regime’, thereby emphasizing the formal structures of political authority—parliament, executive, judiciary—but including also the mechanisms of mediation between those structures and the citizens, notably the party system... Forms of regime include all the variants of democratic arrangements (constitutional monarchy, republic, presidentialism, parliamentary system, two-party, multi-party, etc.) as well as politically exclusionary regimes: authoritarian, corporatist, fascist, etc.”
- Peter Calvert (1987, 18, my emphasis): “A regime is the name usually given to a government or sequence of governments in which power remains essentially in the hands of the same *social group*.”
- Fernando H. Cardoso (1979, 38): “It is essential to distinguish between the concept of political regime and the concept of the state. By ‘regime’ I mean the formal rules that link the main political institutions (legislature to the executive, executive to the judiciary, and party system to them all), as well as the issue of the political nature of the ties between citizens and rulers (democratic, oligarchic, totalitarian, or whatever). The conceptualization of the state is a complex matter, but there does exist a certain degree of agreement that at the highest level of abstraction the notion of state refers to the basic alliance, the basic ‘pact of domination,’ that exists among social classes or fractions of dominant classes and the norms which guarantee their dominance over the subordinate strata.”
- Ruth Berins Collier and David Collier (1991, 789): A regime consists of “the formal and informal structure of state and governmental roles and processes. The regime includes the method of selection of the government and representative assemblies (election, coup, decision within the military, etc.), formal and informal mechanisms of representation, and patterns of repression. The regime is typically distinguished from the particular incumbents who occupy state and governmental roles, the political coalition that supports these incumbents, and the public policies they adopt (except of course policies that define or transform the regime itself).”
- Robert Fishman (1990, 428): “A regime may be thought of as the formal and informal organization of the center of political power, and of its relations with the broader society. A regime determines who has access to political power, and how those who are in power deal with those who are not.”
- Manuel A. Garretón (1995, 185–86, my translation): A political regime consists of the “institutional mediations between the State and society that resolve the problem of how society is governed, of the relationship between the people [*la gente*] and the State, of the forms of representation and participation, and of the channeling of conflicts and demands.”
- Helio Jaguaribe (1973, 94–98, my emphasis): “The regime of power is analytically distinct from the political regime...” A political regime defines “the structure and functions of the government, how the authorities are to be selected, and how they are to proceed.” But the “regime of power...will always...shape and condition the political regime,” for the “*political regime is based, explicitly or implicitly, on the regime of power*, which determines who may and who may not hold power, how they may hold it, and what for.” Thus, “the regime of power, [which] expresses the regimes of values and participation of a given society...determines the political regime, which is nothing more than a particular manifestation, with strong ideological colorations and (conscious or not) falsifications, in legal terms, of the prevailing regime of power.”

Stephanie Lawson (1993, 187): “The concept of regime is concerned with the form of rule... The regime...determines not only the manner in which governments are formed and carry out their functions, but also the basis of their legitimacy as well as the extent to which they are permitted to exercise authority. In summary, regimes embody the norms and principles of the political organization of the state, which are set out in the rules and procedures within which governments operate.”

Juan J. Linz (1975, 350, 182–85, 191–92, 264, 179, 277, 268): Linz does not provide a formal definition of political regime but in his effort to develop a typology of political regimes he does stress the key ‘dimensions’ that must be considered in building such a typology. There are three main dimensions Linz stresses: “the degree of monism versus limited pluralism, mobilization versus depoliticization of the population, and centrality of ideologies versus predominance of what we have called mentalities.” Though the contrast between ideologies and mentalities figures in Linz’s definitions of authoritarianism and totalitarianism, he argues for dropping this dimension due to the difficulties it presents in research. One could also argue that this dimension should be dropped because it is actually correlated with another dimension: the mobilization versus depoliticization of the population. Thus, I take Linz’s implicit definition of regime to include two dimensions: the degree of political pluralism, and the extent and type of mobilization of the population.

Scott Mainwaring (1992, 296): “Regime...is a broader concept than government and refers to the rules (formal or not) that govern the interaction of the major actors in the political system. The notion of regime involves institutionalization, i.e., the idea that such rules are widely understood and accepted, and that actors pattern their behavior accordingly.”

Michael Mann (1993, 18–19, my emphasis): A regime is as “an alliance of dominant ideological, economic, and military power *actors*, coordinated by the rulers of the state.”

Guillermo O’Donnell (1988, 6): “The regime is the set of effectively prevailing patterns (not necessarily legally formalized) that establish the modalities of recruitment and access to government roles and the criteria for representation and the permissible resources that form the basis for expectations of access to such roles.”

Guillermo O’Donnell and Philippe Schmitter (1986, 73): By regime or political regime “we mean the ensemble of patterns, explicit or not, that determines the forms and channels of access to principal governmental positions, the characteristics of the actors who are admitted and excluded from such access, and the resources or strategies that they can use to gain access. This necessarily involves institutionalization, i.e., to be relevant the patterns defining a given regime must be habitually known, practiced, and accepted, at least by those which these same patterns define as participants in the process. Where a regime effectively exists, real or potential dissents are unlikely to threaten these patterns, owing to their weak organization, lack of organization, manipulated depoliticization, or outright repression.”

T.J. Pempel (1992, 120, my emphasis): “Regimes represent a particular social order [and involve] a sustained fusion between the institutions of the state and particular segments of the socio-economic order... In short, a regime’s character will be determined by the *societal coalition on which a state rests*, the formal powers of that state, and by the institutionalization and bias of the public policies that result.”

Philippe Schmitter and Terry Lynn Karl (1991, 76, emphasis in original removed): “A regime or system of governance is an ensemble of patterns that determines the methods of access to the principal public offices; the characteristics of the actors admitted to or excluded from such access; and the rules that are followed in the making of publicly binding decisions. To work properly, the ensemble must be institutionalized—that is to say, the various patterns must be habitually known, practiced, and accepted by most, if not all, actors. Increasingly, the preferred mechanism of institutionalization is a written body of laws undergirded by a written constitution, though many enduring political norms can have an informal, prudential, or traditional basis.”

Laurence Whitehead (1994, 327): "The term 'political regime' denotes a defined set of institutions and 'rules of the game' that regulate access to, and the uses of, positions of public authority in a given society."

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