
Mapping Contemporary Forms of Autocracy

Jørgen Møller/Svend-Erik Skaaning

Jørgen Møller, born in 1979. MSc in political science from Aarhus University (2004). PhD in Political Science from the European University Institute in Florence, Italy (2007). Assistant professor at the Department of Political Science at Aarhus University since 2008. His research interests include conceptualization of democracy, post-communist political change, patterns of state formation and qualitative methodology.

Svend-Erik Skaaning, born in 1978. MSc (2003) and PhD (2007) in political science from Aarhus University, Denmark. Visiting scholar at Stanford University (2006) and at University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill (2009). Assistant professor at the Department of Political Science at Aarhus University since 2006. His research interests include conceptualization of regime types, regime change, patterns of state formation and comparative methodology.

Abstract

In den vergangenen Jahrzehnten sind durchdachte neue Typologien der Demokratie wie Pilze aus dem Boden geschossen. Zur gleichen Zeit wurden die nichtdemokratischen Systeme als eine Restekategorie behandelt, die wenig Aufmerksamkeit verdient. Wir behaupten, dass diese Vernachlässigung überraschend und unglücklich ist. Die gleichen Gründe für eine Ausdifferenzierung der Typologien der Demokratie gelten auch für die Autokratien. Die Unterscheidungen zwischen verschiedenen Arten der Autokratie sollten dabei durch eine Ausweitung des Merkmalsraums der vorhandenen Typologie der Demokratie geschaffen werden. Wir nutzen den Transformationsindex von Bertelsmann, um verschiedene Typen der Autokratie auf der Grundlage der herkömmlichen Definitionsmerkmale von Demokratie zu unterscheiden. Weiterhin weiten wir das Blickfeld aus auf die Charakterzüge des Herrschers. Das Ziel beider Bestrebungen ist es, die Vorarbeit zu leisten, um Unterscheidungen zwischen verschiedenen Formen der Autokratie als *explanans* oder als *explanandum* zu behandeln.

I. Introduction

More than a decade ago, Collier and Levitsky set out to appraise the flourishing tendency to create a set of diminished subtypes in the study of democracy.¹ They stopped counting at 500! Since then, attempts to make systematic distinctions between different kinds of democracies have proliferated further and the literature now teems with elaborate typologies.²

-
- 1 Cf. David Collier/Steven Levitsky, *Democracy with Adjectives: Conceptual Innovation in Comparative Research*. In: *World Politics*, 49 (1997), pp. 430–451.
 - 2 E. g., Fareed Zakaria, *The Rise of Illiberal Democracy*. In: *Foreign Affairs*, 76 (1997), pp. 22–43; Larry Diamond, *Developing Democracy*, Baltimore 1999; Wolfgang Merkel, *Embedded and Defective Democracies*. In: *Democratization*, 11 (2004), pp. 33–58; Mikael Wigell, *Mapping 'Hybrid' Regimes: Regime Types and Concepts in Comparative Politics*. In: *Democratization*, 15 (2008), pp. 230–250; Jørgen Møller/

What is so striking about this relatively new research agenda is the extent to which it treats the non-democracies as a residual category that merits little or no attention. When looking back at the literature of the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s, this development stands out as strong relief. In those decades, the autocratic part of the spectrum was where important political variation was sought. Recall – just to mention a few – the classical works of Arendt and Friedrich and Brzezinski on totalitarian regimes, O'Donnell on bureaucratic-authoritarianism, Huntington on political disorder in developing countries, Finer on military dictatorships, and Linz's famous effort to provide a conceptual separation between totalitarianism and authoritarianism and their respective subtypes.³

Very recently, a number of scholars, in particular Schedler, Way and Levitsky have advocated that the literature should change its focus and zoom in on various types of authoritarianism rather than various types of democracy.⁴ There is no doubt that this conceptual agenda has been influential of late.⁵ But what these scholars basically advocate is to construe the countries situated in what has been termed the 'grey zone' between democracy and autocracy⁶ – or at least some of them – as diminished subtypes of authoritarianism, rather than diminished subtypes of democracy.⁷ What is new here is thus only the nomenclature,

Svend-Erik Skaaning, *Beyond the Radial Delusion: Conceptualizing and Measuring Democracy and Non-Democracy*, Manuscript, Aarhus 2009.

- 3 Cf. Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* [1951], Ohio 1958; Carl J. Friedrich/Zbigniew K. Brzezinski, *Totalitarian Dictatorship and Autocracy*, New York 1965; Guillermo O'Donnell, *Modernization and Bureaucratic-Authoritarianism: Studies in South American Politics*, Berkeley 1973; Samuel P. Huntington, *Political Order in Changing Societies*, New Haven 1968; Samuel E. Finer, *The Man on Horseback: The Role of the Military in Politics*, New York 1962; Juan Linz, *Totalitarian and Authoritarian Regimes* [1975], Boulder 2000.
- 4 Cf. Andreas Schedler, *The Menu of Manipulation*. In: *Journal of Democracy*, 2 (2002), pp. 36–50; Andreas Schedler (ed.), *Electoral Authoritarianism: The Dynamics of Unfree Competition*, Boulder 2006; Steven Levitsky/Lucan A. Way, *The Rise of Competitive Authoritarianism*. In: *Journal of Democracy*, 2 (2002), pp. 51–65.
- 5 Underscored, e.g., by Guillermo O'Donnell (*The Perpetual Crisis of Democracy*. In: *Journal of Democracy*, 7 (2007), pp. 5–11, here 8; cf. Linz, *Totalitarian*, pp. 35–36) who has remarked that, "This set of countries can be distinguished in turn, albeit in some cases somewhat hazily, from a third set wherein elections, even if held, are not reasonably fair and many political freedoms are seriously curtailed. These are democracies pour la galerie, especially the international galerie. They are the 'electoral authoritarianisms' that have recently been drawing much attention in the scholarly literature".
- 6 Cf. Thomas Carothers, *The End of the Transition Paradigm*. In: *Journal of Democracy*, 2 (2002), pp. 5–21.
- 7 Also, as argued by Axel Hadenius/Jan Teorell (*Authoritarian Regimes: Stability, Change, and Pathways to Democracy, 1972–2003*, Kellogg Institute for International Studies Working Paper 331, University of Notre Dame 2006,) these conceptualizations are only based on the attribute of 'competitiveness', which means that they disregard the non-electoral attributes of autocracy which we will highlight in this paper. Speaking the technical language of property spaces, they make for classificatory orderings on one dimension only rather than typological orderings on a compound of attributes.

as the autocracies⁸ proper still lie beyond the scholarly agenda. When they are in fact treated explicitly, it is mostly to appraise the consequences of the prior regime form for democratization⁹ and not to assess their causes and consequences as autocracies.

In our view, this is both surprising and unfortunate. To understand why, we need to say a bit more about the empirical and theoretical impulses behind the new focus on different kinds of democracies. Peter Mair has pointed to two such impulses, both of which we find convincing.¹⁰ First, the so-called third wave of democratization means what used to be a relatively homogenous class, subsuming empirical referents situated in Western Europe and North America, has become a heterogeneous one. It now contains a large number of quite dissimilar countries encountered in virtually every corner of the globe¹¹ – thus it is crying out for conceptual differentiation.

Second, Mair argues that developments within political science have also contributed to the focus on subtypes of democracy. Since the early 1980s, much of the work within the discipline and particularly within the subfield of democratization studies, has shifted to a lower level of abstraction. The plea for a return of the state and the advent of the new institutionalisms are examples of this – in particular *vis-à-vis* the prior systems theory of Gabriel Almond and associates.¹²

-
- 8 We use the general designation ‘autocracy’ to denote the overarching category in which regime types such as totalitarianism and authoritarianism are situated. This is in accordance with Giovanni Sartori (*The Theory of Democracy Revisited*, Chatham 1987, p. 205) who argues that autocracy “stands as an undisputed and hardly disputable good opposite of democracy”.
- 9 Cf. E. g., Juan Linz/Alfred Stepan, *Problems of Democratic Transition and Consolidation: Southern Europe, South America, and Post-Communist Europe*, Baltimore (1996); Samuel P. Huntington, *The Third Wave: Democratization in the Late Twentieth Century*, Norman 1991; Barbara Geddes, *What Do We Know about Democratization after Twenty Years?* In: *Annual Review of Political Science*, 2 (1999), pp. 115–144; Hadenius/Teorell, *Authoritarian Regimes*.
- 10 Cf. Peter Mair, *Democracies*. In: Daniele Caramani (ed.), *Comparative Politics*, Oxford 2008, pp. 108–132.
- 11 Such is the case, at least, when using a ‘thin’ definition of democracy that only emphasizes free elections. The referents thereby classified as democracies obviously all share the presence of this attribute; otherwise they would simply not be democracies. However, they have very diverse values on accompanying attributes such as civil liberties (freedom of speech, association, and assembly) and the rule of law (horizontal accountability and equality before the law); hence the heterogeneity. When embracing ‘thicker’ definitions, in which all the mentioned properties are construed as defining attributes, membership of the consequent class of liberal democracy once again becomes quite homogenous, and largely confined to the Western world. But this attempt to solve the problem of empirical variation by definitional fiat simply means that the class of democracy borders a heavily populated zone of diminished subtypes. These were the constructs identified by Collier and Levitsky a decade ago and it is these that have recently been systematized into typologies of democracies.
- 12 Cf. Peter Evans/Dietrich Rueschemeyer/Theda Skocpol (eds.), *Bringing the State Back In*, Cambridge 1985; James G. March/Johan P. Olsen, *Rediscovering Institutions: The*

As Mair has explained in an earlier paper, the consequences of this shift in the level of abstraction – and, *ipso facto*, in the scope of comparisons – is that institutional variation is increasingly conceived as *explanans* rather than *explanandum*.¹³

More particularly, the aim of the contemporary typological mappings of democracy is two-fold. The first objective is to lay bare the dividing lines within the grey zone between liberal democracy and autocracy; a zone which – as a consequence of the “unprecedented growth in the number of regimes that are neither clearly democratic nor conventionally authoritarian”¹⁴ – covers such a large part of the non-Western world today. The second objective is to understand the political, economic, and social effects of these different types of democracy. This debate takes place, in particular, under the rubric of the ‘Quality of Democracy’-headline.¹⁵ Whereas the former exercise is purely descriptive, the latter exercise is basically explanatory and, sometimes, normative.

In our opinion, and to return to the subject matter, both of the two objectives of the new and fine-grained typologies of democracy described above entail that the non-democratic part of the spectrum is interesting as well. First, the very existence of a grey zone between democracy proper and autocracy proper means that the borderline between democracies (including diminished subtypes in the grey zone) and non-democracies needs to clearly specified. To say this slightly differently, it is necessary to establish the conceptual and empirical boundaries of the overarching category of autocracy *with* the overarching category of democracy functioning as an explicit frame of reference.¹⁶ Second, if it is worthwhile treating the various types of democracy as *explanans and explanandum*, scrutinizing their political, economic, and social effects, then it seems equally plausible that it is worthwhile treating the various types of autocracy as *explanans and explanandum*.

In this article, we provide the descriptive footwork needed for both of these exercises. Hence, we set out to create a typology of modern forms of autocracy.

Organizational Basis of Politics, New York 1989; Gabriel Almond/G. Bingham Powell, Comparative Politics: A Developmental Approach, Boston 1966.

13 Cf. Peter Mair, Comparative Politics: An Overview. In: Robert E. Gooding/Hans-Dieter Klingemann (eds.), A New Handbook of Political Science, Oxford (1996), pp. 309–335.

14 Larry Diamond, Thinking about Hybrid Regimes. In: Journal of Democracy, 13 (2002), pp. 21–35, here 25.

15 Cf. Larry Diamond/Leonardo Morlino (eds.), Assessing the Quality of Democracy, Baltimore 2005; Guillermo O’Donnell/Jorge V. Cullerl/Osvaldo M. Iazzetta (eds.), The Quality of Democracy: Theory and Applications, Notre Dame 2004.

16 Cf. also Giovanni Sartori (Concept Misformation in Comparative Politics. In: American Political Science Review, 64 (1970), pp. 1033–1053, here 1042) who emphasizes that even at the most abstract level there must be a contrary to a concept, in *casu* democracy. This point can also be appreciated via the ‘double-root strategy’ suggested by Matthijs Bogaard (How to Classify Hybrid Regimes: Defective Democracy and Electoral Authoritarianism. In: Democratization, 16 (2009), pp. 399–423).

We proceed in three steps. First, we use the present conceptualizations of democracy to create a conceptual typology of autocracy. This is an exercise which also allows us to write into the existing literature on non-democracies. Secondly, we order the autocratic countries in this typology and discuss the characteristics and memberships of the various types. Finally, we carry out a qualitative elaboration in the context of which we direct attention to an additional, accompanying attribute of autocracy.¹⁷

II. A Typology of Contemporary Forms of Autocracy

1. Autocracy as the mirror image of democracy

In an earlier paper, we have constructed a systematic typology of democracy.¹⁸ This typological exercise was inspired by the work of Wolfgang Merkel.¹⁹ Instead of using Merkel's radial logic of diminished subtypes however, we employed the hierarchical logic of the ladder of abstraction.²⁰ In doing so, we conceptualized four different types of democracy: liberal democracy, polyarchy, electoral democracy, and minimalist democracy.

Generally speaking, this ordering was based on three attributes, viz. electoral rights, civil liberties, and the rule of law. The thickest type – liberal democracy – made up a bounded whole of 'perfect scores' on all of these attributes, situated at the lowest level of generality. Each step onto a higher rung of the ladder of abstraction was then performed by eliminating criteria. To elaborate, all liberal democracies, placed at the bottom of the ladder, also fulfill the respective criteria of polyarchy, electoral democracy, and minimalist democracy; all polyarchies also fulfill the respective criteria of electoral democracy and minimalist democracy; and all electoral democracies fulfill the criteria of minimalist democracy.

What we argue in this article is that the same three attributes of electoral rights, civil liberties, and the rule of law provide a pivot for creating a typology of modern forms of autocracy. To say this slightly different, we posit that it makes sense to construe autocracy as the mirror image – or 'contrary' to use Sartori's

17 We use the kind of typology that Kenneth D. Bailey (Monothetic and Polythetic Typologies and Their Relation to Conceptualization, Measurement, and Scaling. In: *American Sociological Review*, 38 (1973), pp. 18–32, here 27) terms 'Classification, then Identification', meaning that we first create our conceptual typology and then order the empirical referents within it.

18 Cf. Møller/Skaaning, *Beyond*.

19 Cf. Merkel, *Embedded and Defective Democracies*, pp. 36–38.

20 Cf. David Collier/James E. Mahon, Conceptual 'Stretching' Revisited: Adapting Categories in Comparative Research. In: *American Political Science Review*, 87 (1993), pp. 845–855; Sartori, *Concept Misformation*.

term²¹ – of democracy. *Ipsa facto*, regarding the background concept, we define autocracy as a political regime form.²²

2. Scope conditions of the typology of modern forms of autocracy

Before we present our typology, it is necessary to establish two general lines of demarcation, namely the borderline between democracy and non-democracy and the borderline between non-democratic ‘failed states’ and autocracy. Our prior ordering of democracies, described above, rests on a general electoral premise as being only countries that exhibit the presence of relatively free elections. Such systems were included in what may be termed the “overarching category of democracy”. This is thus the one necessary and sufficient condition for the noun, “democracy”. This separate conceptual treatment of the electoral rights attribute is justified by a simple theoretical point which we also derive from the literature: free elections are the *condiciones sine quibus non* of democracy, implying that there is a certain degree of inherent conceptual hierarchy among the attributes of democracy.²³ As Merkel emphasizes, free elections are – in a nutshell – the clearest expression of the very core of democracy, viz., the sovereignty of the people.²⁴ Consequently, it provides the basic criterion for distinguishing democracies from autocracies.

By extension, the one necessary and sufficient condition for membership in the overarching category of non-democracy is the absence of free elections. We emphasize the adjective ‘free’. The mere presence of elections does not rule out non-democracy (nor its autocracy-subset, cf. below). Only free elections do that. It should also be noted that, on the most general level, the consequence of this scope condition is that even the extreme defectiveness of attributes such as civil liberties and the rule of law do not make for autocracy²⁵ *insofar* as the elections are deemed free. Conceptually, this is a very important point because it makes for parsimony. Empirically, it is almost irrelevant as no single country in our dataset,

21 Cf. Sartori, *Theory of Democracy*

22 Cf. Robert Adcock/David Collier, *Measurement Validity: A Shared Standard for Qualitative and Quantitative Research*. In: *American Political Science Review*, 95 (2001), pp. 529–546. We therefore place the concept of autocracy within the ‘realistic’ tradition of Joseph A. Schumpeter (*Capitalism, Socialism, and Democracy*, New York 1950) and Robert A. Dahl (*Polyarchy*, New Haven 1971). They of course sought to define democracy, but our argument is that the same notion of the regime form as a political method can be used with respect to autocracy.

23 Cf. David Collier/Robert Adcock, *Democracy and Dichotomies: A Pragmatist Approach to the Choices about Concepts*. In: *Annual Review of Political Science*, 2 (1999), pp. 537–565. This is also why the hierarchical notion of the ladder of abstraction is an apt tool.

24 Cf. Merkel, *Embedded and Defective Democracies*, pp. 36–38.

25 Cf. as argued Merkel, *ibidem*.

presented below, is characterized by such extreme defectiveness with regard to the liberal elements *whilst* completely safeguarding the electoral element.

This electoral criterion is the first of our two scope conditions and we stress the importance of defining it in such unequivocal terms. To illustrate the problems of not doing so, an otherwise interesting recent attempt to conceptualize different forms of authoritarianism can be highlighted. Hadenius and Teorell introduce a general threshold between democracy and the 'authoritarian family' based on an index made up of the *Freedom in the World*-scores of the Freedom House (FH) and the Polity-scores. Using the mean of the FH and Polity scales (converted to the range of 0–10), they draw the line at 7.5. This threshold is based on "the mean cutoff point separating democracy from autocracy in five well-known categorical measures of democracy".²⁶

Regarding the general count of autocracies, this line of demarcation comes relatively close to that proposed in this paper. We find it very problematic however, that no explicit account is given as to what it means with respect to the electoral attribute – and with respect to other attributes included in, e.g., the FH-subcategory of Civil Liberties. More particularly, no justification is given as to why non-electoral criteria are needed to establish the dividing line between democracies and non-democracies. Moreover, we do not even know if the countries unable to clear this threshold, which is based on the average value across several attributes, are in fact characterized by the absence of free elections.

Turning to the second scope condition, it is meant to delimit the subset of non-democracies that can be called autocracies without committing conceptual stretching. The point here is that a particular aspect of the general attribute often termed stateness²⁷ is a necessary condition for autocracy. In gist, we argue that autocracy requires the presence of state – or at least a power apparatus – that has a monopoly on the use of force. This qualifier is necessary to distinguish between what might be termed anarchic non-democracies, often in the guise of non-democratic 'failed states', and autocracies proper.

Within these limits, we make the following distinctions with regard to the three attributes of electoral rights, civil liberties, and the rule of law. Regarding the electoral scope condition, we simply operate with one status, viz., the absence of free elections. This is justified by such absence of free elections being the defining attribute of non-democracy. This is our first scope condition of the typology of modern forms of autocracy. As regards the two other attributes, we distinguish between the respective values of moderate or severe defects on the one hand and extreme defects on the other hand.

These values, which we further explain below, imply the presence of an additional, or residual, class without defects, meaning that we implicitly trichotomize each of these two attributes. This would logically make for a typology of eight (2^3) types, but we use a combination of the two types of reduction which Elman

26 Hadenius/Teorell, *Authoritarian Regimes*, p. 5.

27 Cf. Linz/Stepan, *Problems*, ch. 2.

terms ‘logical compression’ and ‘empirical compression’ to reduce the property space.²⁸ The justification for the former strategy is that no country is expected to show any defect on the twin attributes of civil liberties and rule of law insofar as it is characterized by the absence of free elections. A number of scholars have observed that²⁹ although such ‘liberal autocracies’ may have existed in 19th century Europe, today they are an extinct species.³⁰ The latter strategy then works as a robustness-test. The actual empirical ordering carried out below shows that such theoretically unexpected combinations do not occur on the ground.³¹

Consequently, our conceptual typology consists of four (2²) types (see table 2 below). The two polar types make up the bounded wholes of totalitarianism and authoritarianism. The former is defined as the combination of extreme defects on all three attributes. In the case of totalitarianism, our electoral criterion is thus stricter than the general condition of non-democracy (as indicated in table 1). In gist, the electoral attribute must be characterized by extreme defects to make for membership of this type, whereas severe defects are enough in all other types.³² This is in accordance with Sartori who has argued that, “Totalitarianism is an ultimate escalation of despotism, the strongest of all despotisms ... totalitarianism simply consists of all the characteristics of oppressive regimes at their highest point of conceivable perfection.”³³

The authoritarian type is defined by the combination of moderate or severe defects on the two attributes of civil liberties and the rule of law, given the absence of free elections. The remaining two types are mixed. They combine the status of extreme defects on one attribute (e. g. civil liberties), with the status of severe or moderate defects on the other attribute (e. g. the rule of law).

The next analytical step is to order present-day autocracies in this typology. Before doing so however, it would be appropriate to re-examine the existing lit-

28 Cf. Colin Elman, *Explanatory Typologies in Qualitative Studies in International Politics*. In: *International Organization*, 59 (2005), pp. 293–326.

29 Cf. Diamond, *Developing Democracy*, pp. 33–58.

30 The only possible exceptions here are small European principalities such as Monaco, San Marino and Liechtenstein, none of which are included in our dataset. But even these do not exhibit a mix of low electoral and high ‘liberal’ scores when pinning one’s faith in the Freedom House’s *Freedom of the World Survey for 2007*. Instead, they score low (i.e., ‘well’) on both ‘Political Rights’ and ‘Civil Liberties’. Still, we do not rule out that these might be classified as some kind of liberal autocracies if they had been included in the BTI.

31 We thereby appreciate a point made by Alexander George/Andrew Bennett (*Case Studies and Theory Development in the Social Sciences*, Cambridge, Mass. 2005, p. 249). Regarding typological reductions, they stress that it is only types that are not ‘socially possible’ that should be removed. What they mean is that only the types that are neither found empirically nor to be expected theoretically can be deleted – rather than deleting all null cells automatically.

32 Once again, the property space that we illustrate figuratively has thus been implicitly reduced. More particularly, on the electoral scope condition we have collapsed two continuous cells of severe and extreme defects.

33 Sartori, *Theory of Democracy*, pp. 198, 200.

erature on non-democratic regimes and show the extent to which our conceptualizations of totalitarianism and authoritarianism fit into this body of writing.

3. Relating the typology to previous conceptualizations of autocratic regimes

Our two pure types conform rather well to the established writings on authoritarian and totalitarian regimes. In table 1 below, we relate the preceding conceptualization to that of Linz and Merkel.³⁴

Linz actually operates with four dimensions: leadership, mobilization, ideology, and pluralism. Merkel goes even further and posits no less than six dimensions: legitimization of political power, access to political power, monopoly on political power, structure of political power, claim to political power, and exercise of political power. However, according to our reading, both of them clearly distinguish between our three defining attributes, and as the overview shows, their definitions on these are quite close to our definitions.

Besides electoral rights, civil liberties, and the rule of law, both Linz and Merkel touch upon some extra traits. One of them, which is solely associated with totalitarianism, seems relevant for our purposes. What Linz and Merkel argue is that such extreme autocracies are supported by an explicit ideology, offering an aegis against regime breakdown. We discuss the extent to which our cases of totalitarianism conform to this criterion in the context of the presented typology.

III. Ordering the Referents in the Typology

To order the referents in the typology, we turn to the *Bertelsmann Transformation Index* (BTI) 2008.³⁵ Invoking the criteria of Munck and Verkuilen,³⁶ the BTI arguably has a competitive edge *vis-à-vis* indices such as Freedom House's *Freedom of the World* and *Polity*. This relatively new dataset covers 125 developing countries (and those in transformation) with more than two million inhabitants. Most of the countries excluded from the dataset are therefore "developed democracies" or small island democracies. In other words, the dataset allows us to capture most of the existing non-democracies.

34 Cf. Linz, *Totalitarian*; Linz/Stepan, *Problems*; Wolfgang Merkel, *Systemtransformation*, Opladen 1999; Wolfgang Merkel/Aurel Crossaint, *Formale und informale Institutionen in defekten Demokratien*. In: *Politische Vierteljahresschrift*, 41 (2000), pp. 3-31.

35 The scores cover the year 2007.

36 Cf. Gerardo Munck/Jay Verkuilen, *Conceptualizing and Measuring Democracy. Evaluating Alternative Indices*. In: *Comparative Political Studies*, 35 (2002), pp. 5-34.

Table 1: Comparing Definitions of Authoritarian and Totalitarian Regimes

	Present authors		Linz		Merkel	
	Authoritarian	Totalitarian	Authoritarian	Totalitarian	Authoritarian	Totalitarian
Electoral rights	Severely or extremely defective elections	Extremely defective elections	No free elections	No free elections	Elections are either nonexistent or they are severely restricted	No free elections
Civil liberties	Moderate or severe defects in freedom of speech, assembly, and association	Extreme defects in freedom of speech, assembly, and association	Limited, irresponsible political pluralism. Often some space for semi-opposition and extensive social pluralism	No significant social or political pluralism	Limited repression	Total repression
Rule of law	Moderate or severe defects in horizontal accountability and civil rights	Extreme defects in horizontal accountability and civil rights	Leadership exercises power within formally ill-defined but actually quite predictable norms	Leadership rules with undefined limits and great unpredictability for members and non-members	Semi-pluralistic power concentration. Partially limited intervention in society. Limited repression	Monocratic power concentration. Unlimited intervention in society. Extensive, systematic, and arbitrary repression

One of the great advantages of the BTI-scores is that they are linked directly to narrative qualifiers. We have already built these qualifiers into our definitions as they denote the values of ‘no defects (nd)’, ‘moderate defects (md)’, ‘severe defects (sd)’, and ‘extreme defects (ed)’ on each of the subcategories. Repeating the verbal definitions of these categories across the subcategories covering electoral rights, civil liberties, and the rule of law would require too much space. Instead, we have included them as appendix 1. They are basically self-explanatory and show why we have chosen the specific points of demarcation on the three attributes. One general elaboration is however, worth spelling out. As the BTI linguistic qualifiers show, our decision to label all countries exhibiting severe or extreme defects on the electoral attribute as non-democracies, conforms well with Przeworski’s famous definition of democracy as “a system of ruled open-endedness, or organized insecurity”.³⁷ The point is that no such insecurity is present when the countries exhibit severe or extreme defects, cf. the formulation in appendix 1, whereas some such open-endedness is present in the case of moderate electoral defects.

More particularly, among the five categories of political transformation assessed in the BTI, only the questions linked to two of them, viz., political participation and rule of law,³⁸ are directly relevant for our typology. These components are illustrated in table 2, in which we also report the letters which we use to denote them below.

The distinguishing components between different kinds of autocracies are the civil liberties of association/assembly rights (C) and freedom of expression (D) and the rule of law criteria of separation of powers (E), independence of the judiciary (F), and respect for civil rights (G).³⁹ A few other components are used

Table 2: Subcategories of Political Participation and Rule of Law

Political Participation	Rule of Law
A. Free elections	E. Separation of powers
B. Democrats rule	F. Independent judiciary
C. Association/assembly rights	G. Civil rights
D. Freedom of expression	

37 Adam Przeworski, *Democracy and the Market: Political and Economic Reforms in Eastern Europe and Latin America*, Cambridge 1991, p. 13.

38 We exclude the rule of law-subcomponent of abuse of office from consideration since it is not relevant when distinguishing between authoritarian and totalitarian regimes.

39 To the extent that scores from more than one subcategory are used to capture an attribute, we consider them to be mutually constitutive corresponding to the logic of bounded wholes. Consequently, rather than using the average, we employ a minimum

to operationalize our two scope conditions. The free elections components (A) and democrats rule (B) are used to distinguish democracies (exhibiting moderate or no defects on the electoral attribute) from non-democracies (exhibiting severe or extreme defects on the electoral attribute). Moreover, the stateness subcategory of the monopoly on the use of force (not shown in table 2) is employed to exclude failed states without centralized authority (exhibiting a status of severe or extreme defects) from the set of non-democracies. The following empirical ordering can be constructed on this basis.

Table 3: A Typology of Modern Forms of Autocracy

	Rule of law (ed)	Rule of law (md or sd)
Civil liberties (ed)	5 Totalitarian	5 Mixed type
Civil liberties (md or sd)	0 Mixed type	33 Authoritarian

A total of 58 countries are classified as non-democracies on the basis of the general electoral scope-condition. Of these, 15⁴⁰ fall short on the second scope condition of stateness. The remaining 43 countries are situated in the overarching class of autocracy and are therefore ordered in the typology. The numbers in table 3 indicate how many referents fall in each type.

In the bounded whole of totalitarian regimes, when combining the status of extreme defects in civil liberties and the rule of law, we find only five countries, viz., China, Eritrea, Laos, North Korea, and Syria. Tellingly, all of these countries also show extreme defects on the electoral attribute. This was the additional defining attribute of totalitarianism which we introduced in the conceptual part. This indicates a systemic logic, or possibly even a lock-in, of extremeness. Another five countries, namely Cuba, Libya, Saudi Arabia, Turkmenistan, and Vietnam, are situated in the adjacent mixed type which is defined by extreme civil liberty defects but only moderate or severe defects on the rule of law. The remaining thirty-three countries (viz., Algeria, Angola, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Bahrain, Belarus, Bhutan, Cambodia, Cameroon, Republic of the Congo, Egypt, Ethiopia, Guinea, Iran, Jordan, Kazakhstan, Kuwait, Kyrgyzstan, Liberia, Malaysia, Mauritania, Morocco, Oman, Papua New Guinea, Rwanda, Singapore, Tajikistan, Thailand, Togo, Tunisia, United Arab Emirates, Uzbekistan, and Zimbabwe) are situated in the opposite polar type. These are the pure authoritarian

score procedure to aggregate them, as Gary Goertz has recommended (Social Science Concepts: A User's Guide, Princeton 2006). Note that because we focus on autocratic regimes, totalitarian regime – rather than liberal democracy – constitutes the fundamental polar type.

40 Afghanistan, Central African Republic, Chad, Côte d'Ivoire, Democratic Republic of Congo, Haiti, Iraq, Lebanon, Myanmar, Nepal, Nigeria, Pakistan, Somalia, Sudan, and Yemen.

regimes negatively defined by the absence of any extreme defects. However, in anticipating the subsequent qualitative robustness test, two countries need to be removed from this set. These are Papua New Guinea and Liberia, both of which seem to have been assigned scores that are too low on the electoral attribute in the BTI, cf. below.

Based on this simple overview, some interesting conclusions can be made about the way autocracies score on the different defining⁴¹ attributes. First, the clear majority of the autocracies are of a more moderate kind, as they do not exhibit extreme defects in civil liberties or the rule of law. This somewhat pragmatic regime form, which we term authoritarianism, is thus the species of non-democracy most prevalent in the world of today.

Second, only five countries can meaningfully be labelled as totalitarian, which goes to show that this regime form is running dry in the world of today. This conclusion can be further substantiated by briefly touching up on Linz's and Merkel's point about genuine totalitarian regimes being supported by an explicit ideology. As a number of scholars have pointed out, democracy has won the normative battle with her challengers in the preceding decades.⁴² Even in some of the remaining communist regimes, such as China, ideology is not what it was some decades ago; legitimacy created via economic growth is arguably more important than that associated with utopian social and political aims. Some nuances are thus in order. In the world of today, the question is whether it makes sense to classify these countries as totalitarian at all. *In comparison to* the totalitarian regimes of the twentieth century that are famously described by Friedrich and Brzezinski, the present members of the class surely pale. This presents some justification for inventing new terms which qualify the type, such as Linz's and Stepan's concept of 'post-totalitarianism'.⁴³ Suffice to say here, however, that the five countries mentioned come very close to totalitarian rule. This is for the simple reason that, with regard to the three attributes of electoral rights, civil liberties, and the rule of law, they, to reuse Sartori's formulation, consist "of all the characteristics of oppressive regimes at their highest point of conceivable perfection"⁴⁴.

Third, it turns out that there is a particular sequencing in the way the countries score on the attributes. No single country with extreme defects on the rule

41 Even though only the electoral attribute is defining for autocracy on the highest level of abstraction, all three attributes are defining for the four more particular types created by descending the ladder of abstraction according to the hierarchic logic of Sartori.

42 Cf. Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man*, New York 1992; Levitsky/Way, *The Rise*, p. 61.

43 Cf. Linz/Stepan, *Problems*. Cf. also Giovanni Sartori (*Totalitarianism, Model Mania and Learning from Error*. In: *Journal of Theoretical Politics*, 5 (1993), pp. 5–22) who argues that the pure type of totalitarianism is absent from the contemporary world. The use of the prefix 'post' is somewhat misleading. For example, Syria and Eritrea have never had guiding ideologies akin to the 'political religions' of fascism and communism. Cf. Hans Maier (ed.), *Political Religions: Concepts for the Comparison of Dictatorships*, Oxon 2004.

44 Sartori, *Theory of Democracy*.

of law-attribute is thus characterized by less than extreme defects on the civil liberties-attribute. In autocracies hence, the civil liberty criteria are violated to at least the same extent, and sometimes more, than the rule of law criteria.

By unfolding and including the implicit dichotomy on the electoral attribute, thus substructuring a property space made up of eight (2^3) types,⁴⁵ it is indeed possible to show that the empirical distribution of the 43 countries conforms to what Bailey terms a perfect simple order scale,⁴⁶ meaning that there are no tie scores on the properties. To elaborate, any country exhibiting extreme defects on the attribute of civil liberty necessarily obtains extreme defects on the attributes of rule of law and electoral rights. Likewise, any country exhibiting extreme defects on the rule of law is also characterized by extreme defects on the electoral attribute. We cannot further pursue this interesting issue in this paper, which engages in a descriptive exercise only. Therefore we simply note that there seems to be a systematic sequencing, indicating an underlying systemic logic. We leave the question about the causes of this sequencing for future research.

IV. A Qualitative Elaboration

Having ordered the autocracies on the three defining attributes, we proceed to qualitatively scrutinize an additional property, namely the character of the ruler(s). Inspired by Huntington and Geddes,⁴⁷ we here distinguish between the four classes of personalist rule, party rule, military rule, and traditional rule (i. e., monarchy).⁴⁸ We do not understand this addition to be a defining attribute of either the overarching category of autocracy or its four more particular subtypes. Rather, we construe it as an accompanying attribute, the analytical value of which is to bring forward some interesting characteristics of these non-democracies.

45 Consisting of the classes of moderate and severe defects on the one, and extreme defects on the other on the two attributes of civil liberties and the rule of law, as well as the classes of severe defects on the one hand and extreme defects on the other hand on the attribute of electoral rights.

46 Cf. Bailey, *Monothetic and Polythetic*, pp. 18–32.

47 Cf. Huntington, *Third Wave*; Geddes, *What Do We Know*. Hadenius/Teorell, *Authoritarian Regimes* introduce a more elaborate classification on this dimension. This allows them to include a type that they name multi-party authoritarianism which they show to be the best point of departure for democratization. This is not surprising as this type most likely belongs in the grey zone between democracy and non-democracy, and is not classified as autocracy per se. This is also indicated by the fact that, on average, it is much more ‘democratic’ than the other types of autocracy identified by Hadenius and Teorell. Furthermore, as the adjective ‘multi-party’ indicates, this is particularly so with regard to the electoral attribute which we have argued should be employed to establish the borderline between democracy and non-democracy in the first place. We therefore maintain Geddes’ and Huntington’s distinctions. We also include the class of (traditional) monarchy, which as Hadenius and Teorell argue, has been overlooked by the former.

We have attempted to use a systematic procedure to order the countries in this fourfold classification. One of the authors has thus read the BTI country reports on all of the 43 autocracies and on the basis of information herein, has assigned each country to one of the four classes. Subsequently, the other author has repeated this procedure using Freedom House's equivalent country reports for the same year (i. e., 2007) as a robustness check without knowing the results of the first ordering. Regarding the instances in which the two orderings did not match, the two authors revisited the cases on their own and subsequently reached a common judgment through deliberation. Admittedly, not all empirical cases fit neatly into these categories. In such instances we classified regimes according to a principle of 'dominant resemblance'.⁴⁹ The results are illustrated in table 4 below.

Only three referents did not fit into this classification: Iran, which is basically a clerical regime, and Liberia and Papua New Guinea, which according to the narratives in both the BTI and the FH reports are in fact minimalist democracies, meaning that they have been misclassified as autocracies. This latter point

Table 4: Ordering the Autocracies in the qualitative classification

Personalist rule	Party rule	Military rule	Traditional monarchy
Algeria, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Congo, Egypt, Guinea, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, <i>Libya</i> , Tajikistan, Togo, Uzbekistan	Angola, Armenia, Cambodia, Cameroon, CHINA, Cuba, ERITREA, Ethiopia, LAOS, Malaysia, NORTH KOREA, Rwanda, SYRIA, Singapore, Tunisia, <i>Turkmenistan</i> , <i>Vietnam</i> , Zimbabwe	Mauritania, Thailand	Bahrain, Bhutan, Jordan, Kuwait, Morocco, Oman, <i>Saudi Arabia</i> , United Arab Emirates

Note: the distinctions in emphasis between bold, italic and normal indicate the type of autocracy: TOTALITARIANISM, *Mixed type*, and Authoritarianism.

- 48 In a democracy, the ruler is the people through its representatives (or directly). On a more particular level it is conventional to make a distinction between presidential, parliamentary, and semi-presidential government.
- 49 Cf. Huntington, *Third Wave*, p. 112. Another possibility, recommended by Geddes, is to use amalgams or mixed types. We have refrained from doing so to decrease the complexity of the ordering. But here we report and describe the cases that fit less neatly. First, there are the cases of 'personalist-party rule' (classified in the personalist type): Algeria, Egypt, Togo, Tunisia. Second, there are the cases of 'personalist-military rule' (classified in the personalist type): Guinea. Third, the cases of 'party-personalist rule' (classified in the party type): Angola, Armenia, Cameroon, North Korea, Rwanda, Syria, Zimbabwe.

goes to show that the qualitative elaboration has the further merit of retesting an important aspect of the typological ordering, viz., the electoral scope condition. The verdict on Liberia and Papua New Guinea is in fact so clear, supported by both the BTI and the FH-reports, that it justifies eliminating these two countries from the set of autocracies.

Otherwise, the overview on this accompanying property of autocracy is inclusive. What comes out of it is in essence that all four types, including traditional monarchies, exist in the present world but that most contemporary autocracies are governed by parties. Also, it is interesting, though not surprising, that all totalitarian countries belong in the class of party rule.

V. Conclusions

In this article, we have argued that the present typologies of regime forms, which have been mushrooming under the auspices of the third wave of democratization, suffer from a blind spot: they neglect the autocracies proper, i. e., the countries situated beyond the so-called grey zone. If treated at all, this part of the spectrum is transformed into a residual class. Most often it is simply ignored. This is unfortunate as the very justification for creating the new typologies entails that distinctions between different kinds of autocracies are also interesting.

To remedy this problem, we have constructed a systematic ordering of autocracies. The very premise of this exercise is to be found in the deceptively simple point that autocracy should be defined as the mirror image of democracy, which also paves the way for creating a property space that works as an addition to the democratic property space. On this basis, we have presented a fourfold typology, delimited by the two scope conditions of the absence of free elections and the presence of a public monopoly on the use of force, and ordered 43 autocracies herein. Most of these countries belong in the type that we termed authoritarian. They are defined by only moderate or severe defects on the two attributes of civil liberties and the rule of law. Five countries were situated in the opposite polar type of totalitarianism, which is defined by extreme defects on both of the mentioned attributes as well as extreme defects on the electoral scope condition. An additional five countries inhabited the mixed type that is characterized by extreme defects on civil liberties and only moderate or severe defects on the rule of law. It thus turned out that there was a systematic sequencing to the ordering.

We also considered an accompanying attribute, namely the character of the ruler(s), and demonstrated that all but three of our autocracies could be ordered in a simply one-dimensional classification distinguishing between personalist rule, party rule, military rule, and traditional monarchy. We trust that the descriptive work presented in this article can be utilized in future research on both the causes and consequences of autocracies. Also, we feel confident that we

have contributed to the discussion about the ways in which to distinguish between democracy and autocracy in the first place.

Appendix

Table 5: BTI's Political Participation Criterion: Links between Scores and Conditions

	Free elections (A)	Democrats rule (B)	Association/ Assembly rights (C)	Freedom of expression (D)
No defect (9–10)	No constraints on free and fair elections	Elected rulers have the effective power to govern	The freedom of association and assembly is unrestricted	There is unrestricted freedom of opinion and the press
Moderate defect (6–8)	General elections are held and accepted in principle as the means of filling leadership positions. However, there are some constraints on the principle of equality	Elected rulers have the power to govern in principle, but individual power groups can set their own domains apart or enforce special-interest policies against the state	There are partial constraints - not consistent with democratic principles - on the freedom of association, but as a rule there are no prohibitions on parties or social organizations	Freedom of opinion and the press is subject to some intervention that undermines democratic principles, but outright prohibitions on the press are limited to a few isolated cases
Severe defect (3–5)	Elections or partial elections are held but have de facto only limited influence over who rules	Elected rulers have the power to govern in important matters, but the fundamental orientation of the constitution can be curtailed or rendered ineffective by strong veto groups	Opposition parties with any relevance for governance are prohibited or systematically disabled. Freedom of assembly is not ensured everywhere by the state. Civic organizations can act if they support the regime or are not outspokenly critical of it	The core elements of a public sphere and of public debate exist but are vulnerable to distortion and manipulation through massive intervention
Extreme defect (1–2)	No democratic elections at the national level	Elected rulers have de facto no power to govern, or rulers are not democratically elected	No freedom of association for political and social groups. No freedom of assembly	No freedom of opinion or of the press

Table 6: BTI's Rule of Law Criterion: Links between Scores and Conditions

	Separation of powers (E)	Independent judiciary (F)	Civil rights (G)
No defect (9-10)	There are no constraints on the basic functions involved in the separation of powers, especially on mutual checks and balances	The judiciary is free both from unconstitutional intervention by other institutions and from corruption. There are mechanisms for judicial review of legislative or executive acts	There are no restrictions on civil rights
Moderate defect (6-8)	The separation of powers is restricted partially and temporarily. Fundamentally though, a restoration of balance is sought, especially by the other branches	The judiciary is established as a distinct profession and operates relatively independently, but its functions are partially restricted by factors such as corruption and insufficient territorial or functional penetration	Civil rights are violated partially or temporarily or are not implemented in some parts of the country
Severe defect (3-5)	One branch (generally the executive) has an ongoing and either informally or formally confirmed monopoly on power, which may include the colonization of other powers	The judiciary is institutionally differentiated, but its decisions and doctrine are subordinated to political authorities or severely restricted by functional deficits such as territorial penetration, resources or severe corruption	There is a massive violation over extended periods of time, or they are protected only within limited enclaves
Extreme defect (1-2)	The separation of powers is either non-existent or it exists only on paper	The judiciary is not institutionally differentiated or is significantly subordinated to religious or political authorities	Civil rights either have no protection (even in principle) or they are systematically violated