

J O H N M A R K O F F

A Moving Target: Democracy

Abstract

Achieving consensus on a definition of “democracy” has proven elusive. Institutions that have been taken to be essential to democracy have changed radically since the word “democrat” began to be widely used toward the end of the eighteenth century. Democratic ideas and democratic practice engender conflict that transforms institutions rather than just reproduces them. Its transformative character rests on a half-dozen key attributes of democracy: it is an actor’s concept, as well as an analyst’s; it can arouse strong feelings; it combines not always compatible ideas; it empowers dissent; it involves a dynamic mixture of inclusion and exclusion; and the democratic histories of national states have been intertwined with global domination. Two processes combine to generate much social dynamism. First, democracy’s stirring inclusionary claims have been contradicted by a complex structure of exclusions, including distinctions in rights of full participation among citizens, distinctions in rights between citizens and non-citizens, and distinctions in resources among legally equal citizens. And second, democratic practice has been fertile soil for the development of social movements. Taken together, democracy is an invitation for movements to try to shift the boundaries of inclusion and exclusion, and in so doing to expand or constrict democracy itself.

Keywords: Democracy; Citizenship; Social movements; Globalization.

[S]ites of democracy always display the sign
Under Construction. Charles Tilly (1997, p. 213).

ANYBODY WHO HAS spent even a little time going through the literature on democracy knows that the question of measurement has generated vast effort and little consensus. Researchers not only struggle to find appropriate data, they differ with each other on what it is they are seeking indicators of; on whether to think of democracy as a dichotomy, a continuous variable, something in between, or as some entity to which these terms are not even appropriate; and on how to weight the components of what is – and this is a rare point of agreement – a multidimensional concept. When classifying national states they frequently differ, with much debate, for example, over

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what adjectives if any ought to demarcate the precise sort of democracy established or re-established in the many states that embarked on a “democratic transition” from the 1970s into the 1990s (Collier and Levitsky 1997). Such recent questions have hardly resolved a lot of already classic classificational conundra, which continue to baffle those not wholly focused on the most recent twists and turns in democracy’s history. (How, for example, was one to weight the deprivation of voting rights for large numbers of non-white US citizens between the end of Reconstruction and the 1960s?)¹

This will not be another essay that proposes some superior definition whose virtues ought to drive competitors from the field. It will be an exploration of why democracy has proved so resistant to consensus on measurement and, a closely related matter, to definition. Some parts of the argument have been made before but what I hope to show is that the inability of social scientists to hold a precise concept in their sights is rooted in the confluence of several different types of causes. The measurement problem is not primarily a question of data nor the definitional question one of conceptual precision.

The history of democracy has been a history of change. When one of its keenest students, and prophets, Alexis de Tocqueville (1994 [1835, 1840], 1: 57) marveled in the 1830s at the extent of successful democratization in a country born not very much earlier, he thought the advancement of suffrage had gone about as far as could be imagined, but it had not. After suggesting that “[w]hen a nation begins to modify the elective qualification, it may easily be foreseen that, sooner or later, that qualification will be entirely abolished”, he concludes that “[a]t the present day the principle of the sovereignty of the people has acquired in the United States all the practical development that the imagination can conceive”. But in the early twenty-first century few would regard as terribly democratic any country in which, as in Tocqueville’s America, women could not vote, millions were enslaved, and ethnically distinctive minorities were denied citizenship rights. Democracy’s defining institutions have altered as have ideas about what democracy means, could mean, or should mean. They have altered well beyond what an unusually acute observer in the 1830s imagined as even possible. The student of

¹ Most political scientists called it democracy even in violation of their own definitions. For example, LINZ (2000 [1975], pp. 58-59) intends to “call a political system democratic” when it meets three criteria, among them that it does not use force to bar

“members of the political community” from participating. The United States did not meet this criterion before the 1960s, but that stopped few from classifying it as a democracy. For some exceptions: THERBORN 1977, p. 17; RUESCHEMEYER *et al.* 1992, p. 122.

democracy has as the object of study a moving target that bobs and weaves, advances and retreats. Both its ideas and its practice engender conflict, and some of that conflict tends to transform institutions, rather than just reproduce them. I set out six key points in abbreviated form below, then develop their implications.

I shall try to show that democracy inherently generates a variety of tensions, including tensions about how to realize democracy itself. I shall then argue that democratic government provides fertile ground for the development of a wide variety of social movements, some of which challenge current institutionalizations of democracy and that whenever governments make credible claims to democratic legitimation such movements are to be found. I will then conclude in a speculative vein by pointing to some of the tensions of the twenty-first century that may reshape democracy in the years ahead.

Actor's concept

“Democracy” is not merely or even most importantly an analyst’s concept, but an actor’s. When this very old word escaped from the philosopher’s study in the late eighteenth century,² it entered into the vocabulary of political approbation and – at first probably more commonly – denunciation. From that moment on participants in political struggles found it useful to refer to institutions, parties, movements, programs, and personalities as “democratic” in order to praise or damn them. We still do. The significant stakes in these struggles gave various inflections to the meaning of democracy. When democracy was a powerful term of approbation the efforts of actors to reshape institutions to better approximate democracy were facilitated. But efforts to shade the meaning of democracy to more closely approximate the institutions those actors wished to support were also facilitated.

Strong feelings

By the early twenty-first century, “democracy” was in many places a well-established set of relationships and habitual practices, and in established democracies, most of the time, was simply the way

² “Democrat” seems to be a coinage of the 1780s (CONZE, KOSELLECK and BRUNNER 1972–84, 4, pp. 821–899; PALMER 1953), a symptom of that revolutionary moment

when people fought to advance, create, reinvent, delimit, derail, prevent, and destroy democracy in actual practice.

things were. Juan Linz and Alfred Stepan (1996, pp. 5-7) see such routinization as strong evidence that a new democracy has been successfully “consolidated”, to use a term much in vogue among students of political transformations. Nonetheless, the claim that some set of relationships and practices is or is not democratic has at least the occasional capacity to arouse strong feelings. No account of democracy that omits this intermittent capacity to inspire talk of watering the liberty tree with blood is complete. The statement that some set of institutions is not democratic is not always a detached observer’s dispassionate judgment but may be uttered in sorrow or anger or disgust. This is an important part of why movements for or against democracy at moments are invested with so much energy. But democracy as an emotionally compelling claim is in potential tension with any particular collection of institutions, even institutions that have been held in the past to be democratic ones, should some new proposal capture the imagination. Democracy is therefore repeatedly seen as inadequate in practice by impassioned democrats first and foremost, which drives efforts at change.

Reason

Democracy is a complex of not always compatible ideas, which implies that incompatible practices can reasonably be held to follow from democratic principles. Opponents can at times therefore mount their attacks on each other in the name of democracy, equally convinced that their own position is but the application of democratic principles to some particular issue. Conceptual discussions are therefore often quick to rediscover that democracy is a good example of an “essentially contested concept”.³

Empowerment of dissent

In a way that is not the case of any other legitimating claim, democracy is virtually an invitation for social movements to challenge power-holders. Such movements may operate within current

³ In fact, it is one of GALLIE’S (1956, p. 184) premier examples. A half century after GALLIE, PRZEWORSKI (2009) has compellingly reexamined contradictory notions embedded in democratic ideals from the foundational moments of modern democracy.

conceptions of democracy, they may constitute an implicit challenge to current conceptions, they may openly call for a truer democracy, they may implicitly or explicitly call for restricting democracy, and they may even be avowedly antidemocratic. But no other legitimating principles so profoundly empower those outside the circles of power to mount such a wide variety of challenges and so severely constrain the capacities of elites to fend them off.

Citizenship

Democratic citizenship has been a profoundly contradictory thing that keeps salient the hope and promise of inclusion while also creating and recreating a system of exclusions, thereby continually recreating a potential pool of support for the next struggle for greater inclusiveness as well as potential support for antidemocratic movements resentful of some prior inclusion.

Global domination

The intertwining of democratic institutions and global domination has exacerbated citizenship/exclusion issues. Democracy's contradictions within states are underlined by the legacies of colonialism, globalized racism, and transnational migration.

What follows from these half-dozen notions?

Democracy is not just a set of rules

The more quantitatively inclined among students of democracy have with some frequency attempted to develop sets of indicators. Such indicators might include: the presence or absence of electoral mechanisms; the inclusiveness of voting rights; the degree of respect for a range of civil liberties; the degree to which elected officials actually exercise effective power (rather than military officers, unelected civilian bosses, hereditary monarchs or lords, foreign colonial governors, or *de facto* proconsuls).⁴ Some students of democracy, indeed, have insisted that democracy must be defined exclusively as

⁴ Several impressive attempts of this kind are ably scrutinized in MAINWARING *et al.* 2001.

a set of procedures,⁵ and in some variants the procedures are limited to the conduct of elections.⁶ Such efforts at measurement and at definitional clarity, in this arena as in others, are vital aspects of scholarly inquiry. But when we notice that over the more than two centuries of modern democratic history a great many brilliant writers have patiently and impatiently told us how we should define democracy and a smaller but still considerable number of skilled researchers have proposed ingenious ways of measuring it without having produced any consensus, we ought to try to understand why. It is the wager of this essay that the ongoing lack of consensus is not only telling us something about a troublesome concept⁷, but is also a clue to some fundamental properties of the entire history of democracy.

One of the reasons consensus has been wanting – and there are others, to be explored below – is that something is missing from many definitions and measures, and sensing this some other scholar tries to fill the void. Unsuccessfully. There is something missing that is not procedural and we can get a sense of part of what it is by glancing at some episodes when the state of democracy was in contention.

A long campaign for “universal suffrage” (for adult men, that is) yielded a momentary victory in the early months of France’s revolution of 1848. A sense of rebirth was underscored by fixing that first election for Easter Sunday. Rural voters formed processions as they trooped across the country to sometimes distant polling places, along with drums and flags, and led by local mayors, priests, and other notables such as Tocqueville, who left us a vivid paragraph (1942[1893], pp. 100–101; Huard 1991, p. 38). To take another instance, consider Haiti in the fall of 1987, gearing up for its first presidential election in a generation, a prospect unenthusiastically faced by supporters of the incumbent regime. As that election approached, polling places, churches and radio stations were targets for violence. In one dramatic incident known to foreign reporters in Port-au-Prince, citizens queuing up to vote at a downtown school were attacked with machetes and gunfire. Perhaps fifteen died (French 1987, A1). Here is a third witness: If we credit historian Edward Thompson’s (1985, p. 200) account of his time in a tank in Italy in

⁵ For example, MAINWARING *et al.* 2001, p. 41: “We limit the definition of democracy to procedural issues”.

⁶ For example, PRZEWORSKI *et al.* (2000, p. 15): “Thus, ‘democracy’, for us is a regime

in which those who govern are selected through contested elections”.

⁷ To explore just how troublesome, one could start with COLLIER and LEVITSKY (1997) and then go through the numerous works cited there.

World War Two, his comrades were “democrats and anti-Fascists” who “knew what they fought for”.

A mere three snapshots of instants in complex struggles drawn from different countries, centuries, and kinds of conflict can hardly be more than suggestive. But if we ask what it was that captivated nineteenth century French peasants, and for which twentieth century Tommies and Haiti’s poor were in different ways running the risk of death, it is not terribly plausible that the answer can be limited to a change in procedures for validating elite incumbents of office.

What it is that is affectively compelling must be something of a different kind. I want to venture the hypothesis that part of democracy’s power as a legitimating formula is found in its at least intermittent power to arouse passions. Consider one 16th century formulation: “Democracie, when the multitude have government” (Fleming 1576, p. 198). As a definition, this is certainly inadequate by the standards of the constructors of indexes. It does not tell us how the multitude are to wield power, nor over what, nor even which people we are talking about. For those who insist on procedural definitions, and perhaps for those who insist on any sort of readily observable indicator, such a notion is probably vacuous and perhaps devoid of sense. But if we ask what it is that people are from time to time willing to die for, and to kill for, it seems a good deal closer to the mark.

Procedures might be a part of the mix, when those procedures seem to have something to do with freedom or equality or recognition or participation or self-rule or some other currently contested democratic attribute. But the rules on behalf of which people fought yesterday may not solve all the problems of tomorrow and those rules may come to seem to be barriers to freedom or equality or recognition or participation or self-rule, inducing other people or even the same people to fight again.

The lesson in this simple exercise is that democracy as a formula of legitimation is not identical to democracy as a system of rules. What makes democracy legitimate, to be sure, may owe something, in an even minimally established democracy, to a sense of ethical obligation in following properly established rules, the sort of deep-seated justification that Max Weber thought a hallmark of “rational-legal” authority. But it would be a great error to simply think of democracy as exhausted by these sorts of justifications. There is also the belief that democracy does indeed have something to do with popular self-rule.

Democratic authority is often claimed for the actions of elected bodies or executive bureaucracies but it is also claimed for those who defy those bodies. In whose actions is democracy made manifest? Properly elected or appointed officials under attack often claim that the legality of their actions is precisely where democracy is embodied, but sometimes not all are convinced and – as we discuss further below – social movement activists often successfully claim it is themselves, not the legally elected or appointed, in whom democracy inheres. It is a very interesting question why representatives and bureaucrats are able to successfully claim democratic authority at some times and not others, but this is not a question on which Weber is at all helpful.⁸ The rules by which incumbents are selected and the rules by which they go on to make consequential decisions will frequently appear to some, and sometimes appear to many, to be violations of the claims of self-governing peoplehood on which assent to a considerable degree rests.

Of course any realistic political scientist will be quick to point out the myriad ways in which any such notions are impossibly vague, or even just plain impossible, that they are merely fictions, and that the real object of our study must be the rules. And this leads me to precisely the points I want to make here. There is an inherent tension between democracy as a legitimating formula and the particular rules, which have been provisionally taken to be the embodiment of that democracy. A full account of democracy must take into account the many times when we attempt to alter that framework to produce a set of procedures that more closely approximates the democratic state about which we care passionately.

Guy Hermet (1984, p. 137) distinguishes democrats *by conviction* and *by convenience*, those who are of the view that democracy is a superior way for people to govern themselves, as opposed to those hoping for some personal benefit from democratic advance. Hermet provocatively contends that conviction has played a much lesser role than convenience in advancing democracy, and that no one is quicker to be disappointed by democracy in practice than a democrat by conviction. While the precise mix of conviction and convenience is worth considerable scrutiny (including their intertwinings), my simple

⁸ Weber's own recognition that democracy was not very well characterized as a form of rational-legal authority was awkwardly expressed in his notion of "plebiscitarian democracy" or "leader-democracy" in which

a mass following validates a leader's charismatic credentials, a parliamentary challenge being an occasion to demonstrate whether or not a party leader's charisma is still valid (MOMMSEN 1974, pp. 73-94; 1984).

contention here is that the role of conviction is far from zero. As for disappointment with democracy in practice: exactly so, which helps fuel the next movement for more democracy.

Democracy is multifaceted

It is a commonplace to speak of democracy as a multidimensional concept. But the consequences of this challenge to definition and measurement have not always been appreciated in their significance for the history of democracy. Dahl's (1989, p. 221) especially influential formulation tells us that "polyarchy is a political order distinguished by the presence of seven institutions all of which must be present". A glance at the seven shows some of them to be themselves multidimensional. A resourceful empirical researcher, moreover, might want more than one indicator of these 7+ criteria, all essential in Dahl's view.⁹ But Dahl insists that polyarchy is a good bit short of democracy. Differently put, democracy is polyarchy plus still other criteria. In general, those who seek indicators and those who seek definitional precision – two endeavors with much in common – need to ponder how to weigh guarantees of citizen rights against the state; state capacities to impose authoritative decisions on citizens; the range of activities in which the rights of citizens are equal; the ways in which powerholders achieve power; the ways in which powerholders arrive at decisions with consequences for citizens; the extent and quality of citizen participation; the ways in which citizens become informed; the ways in which political competition is and is not a level playing field. Compare quantitative studies and you will find different things measured and then combined into an index in different ways.¹⁰

This multidimensionality is not just a measurement problem for scholars, but a source of change. People seeking many different things can often find some aspect of democracy to plausibly weave on their banners.

⁹ In a different formulation DAHL (2006, p. 84) tells us that we have polyarchy when eight "conditions exist to a relatively high degree". Since the relationship of these eight essential "conditions" to the seven "institutions" is not especially transparent, quite different measures might equally reasonably claim to measure polyarchy.

¹⁰ Among prominent examples: PRZEWORSKI *et al.* 2000; JAGGERS and GURR 1995; GASTIL 1991; VANHANEN 1997; MAINWARING *et al.* 2001. Very instructive is Pamela Paxton's (2000) demonstration of how different the timing of democratization looks depending on whether one does or does not insist on woman's suffrage.

Democracy's inclusionary claims conflict with its exclusionary practices

"[A]ll men" may have been created equal as one of the quotable foundational formulas had it, but they certainly were not legislated equal, as has been observed countless times. The inclusionary claims that stir the heart were contradicted by a complex structure of exclusions, among which I will stress three: distinctions in rights of participation among citizens, distinctions in rights between citizens and noncitizens, and distinctions in resources among legally equal citizens.

Active citizens and passive citizens

In 1789 Sieyès proposed that the new revolutionary order in France would be one in which all would enjoy many kinds of rights but only some were to actively participate in shaping society. In so doing he provided the terminology for a distinction made in practice in all the new republics of the age. *Active* citizenship was for those of independent judgment, *passive* citizenship for the rest. Independence was conferred by nature, shaped by education, reinforced by occupation, and secured by resources. Those deficient in natural aptitude, inadequately educated, employed in deferential roles, or short on means were neither to occupy office nor vote (Sewell 1988). Excluded on such grounds at various times and places: the destitute, the illiterate, women, domestic servants, the military, the clergy, the imprisoned, the mentally ill, the nonwhites, the children. There has never yet been a democratic state that has not excluded at least one of these categories from voting rights.¹¹

The very early currency of the misleading expression "universal suffrage" testifies to the power of the idea of an inclusion wider than

¹¹ The United States at the beginning of the twenty-first century, for example, excluded citizens under 18 years of age and, in most states, convicted felons as well, a very large category in light of the dramatic expansion in incarceration in the later twentieth century, augmented by the lifetime character of the ban in some states. In the elections of 2000, 4.7 million adults were thus disfranchised (BEHRENS *et al.* 2003, p. 560). In consequence, notes Alexander Keyssar in his thorough history of US voting rights

(2000, p. 308): "Nationwide, 14 percent of black males are barred from voting because they are in prison or have been convicted of felonies. In Alabama and Florida, nearly one out of every three black men is disfranchised, and in Iowa, Mississippi, New Mexico, Virginia, Washington and Wyoming, the ratio is only slightly lower". For compelling evidence that a major purpose of felon disfranchisement has been to reduce non-white voting strength, see BEHRENS *et al.* 2003.

any actual practice has ever been. Tocqueville (1994[1835], I, p. 57, p. 97, p. 199, p. 200) repeatedly marveled at the “universal suffrage” of the United States at a moment when no women, no slaves, few free blacks and few Native Americans could vote. The tension between one or another actual exclusion and the inclusionary promise has been a fertile catalyst for social movements and other forms of contentious politics struggling over redrawing the boundary between active and passive citizenship.¹²

- *Citizens and noncitizens*. When France’s revolutionary National Assembly proclaimed the *Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen* it left ambiguous the question of whether one had various enumerated or implied rights by virtue of being a human being or a citizen of France (compounded by the gender ambiguity of “Man”). Since most analysts from that day to the present have been of the view that rights are meaningless without some mechanism for enforcement, the only meaningful rights have seemed to involve claims on some state as rights-enforcer. A state’s citizens were distinguished from others by virtue of a distinct collection of claims upon that state and obligations to it. The distinction between citizen and noncitizen is one that characterizes every state, democratic or otherwise, and therefore in every democracy the rights of citizens and noncitizens differ.

This boundary, too, seems inherently an invitation to challenge. To enumerate a half-dozen processes that make it difficult to keep this boundary from shifting:

- 1) States may find it convenient to agree by treaty to confer some rights on some noncitizens;
- 2) Prudence may dictate treating foreign nationals as if they had certain rights, even in the absence of a formal treaty;
- 3) Advocates of citizens’ rights sometimes champion those of non-citizens as well (citizens’ labor standards, for example, will quickly be vitiated if they are not extended to noncitizen resident workers and perhaps even to workers in other countries);
- 4) The rhetorical confounding of citizen rights and human rights encourages social movements to make demands for the former in the name of the latter;
- 5) The significant presence of immigrants in various statuses generated by employment opportunities, family ties, asylum and refugee policies makes it difficult to adhere to a watertight

¹² Democracy’s compound of inclusion and exclusion is imaginatively treated in WALLERSTEIN (2002).

- distinction of citizen vs. noncitizen. There is much reason for suspecting that this arena will catalyze more social movements and other forms of contention in the future than it has in the past;
- 6) As the quarreling kinfolk of Romeo and Juliet rediscovered, love does not always stop at categorical boundaries, with the result that demands for special legal treatment of noncitizen spouses and children are common.

The upshot of such pervasive boundary-blurring is the ubiquitous proliferation of category schemes a great deal more complex than the citizen-noncitizen binary. The importance of the citizen-noncitizen boundary in combination with the difficulty of freezing it is an invitation to conflict.¹³

Legal equality and unequal resources

We readily appreciate the familiar irony that the law grants rich and poor the equal right to sleep under the bridge. To the extent that expanding formal democratic citizenship enlarges the realm of legal equality it increases the salience of the inequalities embedded in differential resources. If all have a right to a “fair trial”, we soon notice that some have more money to pay smart lawyers. If all have a right to run for office, we soon notice that some have more money to spend on campaigns than others. If all have a right to argue for their views, we soon notice that some views and not others are expressed by the communications media. If all have a right to public education, we soon notice that children of wealthier families get better educations than those from poorer ones. If all have an equal right to vote, we soon notice that those with resources have greater access after Election Day to elected and appointed officials.¹⁴ These ambiguities of equality are catalysts for social movements and other forms of contentious politics. The claim that a particular instance of democracy is to some degree fraudulent is a recurrent consequence.

¹³ A more fine-grained analysis might try to lay out principles of variation. The citizen/noncitizen divide is not always as contentious as it is, for example, in Western Europe in the early twenty-first century (SOYSAL 1994; CHEBEL D'APPOLLONIA 1998; KOOPMANS and STATHAM 2000; GUIRAUDON 2001; BOSWELL 2003).

¹⁴ Those with greater resources may find the sheer act of voting easier. If elections are held on workdays, the location of voting

determined by residence and not workplace, and the polls close early, those who cannot afford to give up a day's pay find it more difficult to vote. These conditions have been common in the United States as noted in a wide-ranging study of nonvoting as early as the 1920s (MERRIAM and GOSNELL 1924, pp. 86-102; pp. 232-234). But greater voting turnout among the better off is a general characteristic of many democracies (LIPPHART 1997).

In 1878, a US industrialist suggested to a church group that a major task confronting “systems of religion and schemes of government is, to make men who are equal in liberty – that is, in political rights and thereby entitled to the ownership of property – content with that inequality in its distribution which must inevitably result from the application of the law of justice” (Hewitt 1937, p. 277). But equals in liberty have sometimes used that liberty to challenge those inequalities. There are at least three ways in which material inequalities under democratic conditions might generate movements.

1. The *affront* to valued equality may rise with greater inequality, conceived statically. On this hypothesis, higher *levels* of inequality are more offensive. It is not clear whether this is better conceived as a continuous monotonic function, or whether there is some threshold above which claims of inequality are both especially credible and especially infuriating.¹⁵

2. The *salience* of inequality may increase with an increase in inequality or some other change in the mix of equalities and inequalities. *Change* gets people focused on inequalities. Declining circumstances may be more striking than long-endured miseries. Alternatively, the achievement of great equality in one arena may make other inequalities less tolerable. Tocqueville (1955[1856], p. 81) argues that in the late Old Regime in France it was because in so many ways liberal-minded members of the nobility and the enlightened commoner elite had grown alike, that the legal divide that separated them in honors and rights was so profoundly hateful to the latter and so weakly defended by the former. Tocqueville saw this as an uncommon and perverse state of affairs that was a major catalyst of revolution. But under democratic auspices, explosively changing mixes of equality and inequality are commonplace.

3. The *possibilities* for activism may be greater due to the greater opportunities presented by democratic regimes, a point elaborated below. Even if the sense of grievance were no greater, and even if the extent of inequality in actual fact were no greater, democratic politics is fertile soil for movements of many kinds, including movements challenging inequalities.

Under democratic conditions, inequality is a frequent source of trouble.

¹⁵ On the role of anger in the genesis of movements see GOODWIN *et al.* 2001; GOODWIN and JASPER 2004.

Democracy in some countries in an undemocratic world

Among the boundaries of inclusion and exclusion, the territorial aspect of the divide of citizens and noncitizens deserves special attention. If we ask what is the entity whose democratic character we wish to evaluate, the answer since the late eighteenth century has generally been “the national states”. Although we might speak of villages, provinces, international organizations, families, factories, universities, many other institutions, and even entire ways of life as having or lacking a democratic character, for the most part the term figures in discussions of national political institutions. When without other qualifications we speak of “the world’s democracies” we readily understand that we are identifying a subset of national states, not international institutions, families, folkways, or villages.

National states inherently link several different sorts of entities: a *government* ruling more or less authoritatively over some territory and its inhabitants; the *territory* over which that government’s authority and no other legitimately operates; a *population* regarded as being subject to its laws and who, if endowed with rights as well as obligations by virtue of being members of the national community, are its *citizens*; and often a *nation*, a collection of people claimed to have a common identity extending into the past and future to whom it is sometimes said that the state rightfully belongs.

In the seventeenth century, the murderous civil and interstate wars of Europe led to the spread of the notion of sovereignty, of large self-governing territorial states that could deal with one another as autonomous entities. When we attach the adjective “sovereign”, we are taking the authority of the state over its territory to run right up to the border, to be superior to whatever authority may reside in territorial subunits contained within it, and to not be constrained by external or supranational authority other than by treaties to which it has freely consented. This strengthened state could pacify its own territory; the states together could both negotiate peace among themselves and construct rules to limit the destructiveness of warfare. Leviathan was the antidote to anarchic violence. In the turbulence of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, movements in Europe’s western hemispheric possessions sought states of their own. The era’s independence wars were settled through the recognition of many new such entities.

But over the next century, Europe launched a new wave of colonial conquest. According to data gathered on the eve of the Second World

War, 32 percent of the human population were living in colonial dependencies (Clark 1936, 23)¹⁶. The war's devastations were an opportunity for a variety of movements in those colonies to assert, with success, their claims to statehood. By the mid-1970s, virtually the entire population of the planet was living in one or another of such putatively sovereign entities.

The question of democracy was a question of how it was that such a sovereign entity was politically organized. To the extent that those subject to its authority were citizens, to the extent that those citizen's rights were extensive and equal, to the extent that those who held power were accountable to those citizens, to the extent that those citizens were secure from arbitrary state action, and could debate, protest, organize, and challenge that government, it had by the late twentieth century become common to call such government "democracy".

So democracy was something characteristic of sovereign states and more characteristic of some than others. The important rights were citizens' rights; the important lines of accountability involved the accountability of the governments of those states to their own citizens. From its inception the notion of sovereign entities was a simplified fiction, an aspiration of states, rather than a precise description. Smugglers knew borders could be crossed, criminals challenged the state's monopoly on force, and states sought to control other nominally sovereign states. Despite many occasions at which diplomats make ceremonial displays of the equality of their states, there have always been enormous differences among them in autonomy and influence, as much a truism in the early twenty-first century as ever. Michael Goodhart (2005) has shown very interestingly how significant for theories of how democracy could work and should work was the fundamental presumption that it was a sovereign state that was the essential conceptual field within which notions of democracy operated.

Because the claim of democracy, like that of sovereignty, was a claim made about the national states, democratization could take place in some of those states without disturbing transnational structures of domination. A sovereign state in a system of sovereign states could become more – or less – democratic without any necessary alteration of its place in that system. Indeed, democratization was especially prone to advance in some of the wealthier and more powerful states.

¹⁶ I include Clark's (1936) categories of "dependencies" and "mandates" but not "British self-governing".

Nineteenth and twentieth century observers could be impressed by the degree to which citizens of some of the states were securing equal rights within those states and write wonderingly or anxiously of the advance of democracy, despite increasing inequalities of power on a world scale.

Any history of world democracy would surely pay significant attention to such colonial powers as Britain, France, the Netherlands, Belgium, and the United States. The very places pioneering the advancement of citizens' rights were also major players in establishing global hierarchies. Pride in their own democratizing institutions and pride in domination over colonial subjects blended in the belief that their mastery liberated those subjects from local tyrannies. In a further elaboration, champions of one's own state's colonial domination could proclaim their imperial vision superior to that of their rivals because their own aimed at liberation while their rivals merely subjugated (Go and Foster 2003; Conklin 1997; Cooper and Stoler 1997). For the United States, for example, Jefferson's equation of the US's westward expansion with the "Empire of Liberty" was echoed two centuries later when a US president claimed that "freedom is on the march" (Foner 1998, p. 50; Sanger 2004, p. A1).

In Juan Linz's (2000 [1975]) invaluable taxonomic exploration of the variety of nondemocratic regimes a distinctive place is allotted to "racial democracy", a category most clearly exemplified by South Africa for decades before 1994, a period when competitive electoral politics existed among that country's white minority from which the great majority, non-white, were excluded. For Linz this is not a variant of "democracy" but of "authoritarianism". We readily see British, French, Dutch or Belgian history for two centuries as heading toward democracy and South African as heading somewhere else until the 1990s. But is the distinction quite so clear if we think about the political structures of colonial empires taken as a whole? The metropolitan zone's residents, or at least the adult citizens among them, may have chosen the imperial government in an increasingly democratic fashion.¹⁷ However, if twentieth century Great Britain could be said to have governed itself democratically the British Empire as a whole involved exclusions quite as radical as South Africa's. Less than one person in ten under British rule in the 1930s

¹⁷ This formulation ignores those important moments when European states were headed away from democracy.

even lived in the United Kingdom (Clark 1936, p. 23)¹⁸. That the exclusion rested on the citizen/noncitizen distinction, buttressed by distance and non-contiguity, to a considerable degree insulated British political institutions from Indian grievances. We see here how effectively the citizen/noncitizen distinction permits people to see Britain as a fountainhead of democracy even at the height of Empire while casting South Africa out of the democratic category. Democracy is taken as something that should apply to citizens only.

As yet another indication of the shifting mix of exclusion and inclusion that has characterized the entire history of democracy, we may take note of the institutions of self-government set up by nineteenth century Boers moving north away from British domination. Their Republic of Natalia had an Assembly of Representatives of the People “elected by universal franchise of white males” by 1838; the later Orange Free State had no property or wealth qualifications for those born there, although new immigrants were subject to such restrictions (as codified in 1877) (Giliomee 2003, 2004). One prominent comparative student of democracy at the onset of the twentieth century, James Bryce (1901, I: 380), saw them as “highly democratic” and was especially impressed by the Orange Free State: “an ideal commonwealth” (Bryce, 1899, 314). Few students of democracy have shared Bryce’s interest, let alone enthusiasm. But twentieth century Afrikaners sometimes took pride in their own democratic traditions, despite the ill-repute that racial exclusion has earned their twentieth century institutions in everyone else’s eyes.¹⁹

In exploring the intellectual history of democracy’s intertwined inclusions and exclusions, it is interesting to consider that creative champion of parliaments, proportional representation, personal freedoms and women’s rights, John Stuart Mill. Not only did he advocate that such principles were to be advanced in England but in Britain’s “possessions in America and Australia” as well, and he passionately denounced existing colonial structures in those places (Mill 1991[1861], p. 337). There were, however, other colonies wholly incapable of self-rule, whose cultures were hopelessly resistant to freedom, and which had to have colonial masters if they were to be

¹⁸ The proportion under French rule who lived in France was 39 percent, the comparable figure for Belgium 38 percent, and for the Netherlands 12 percent, all countries that might reasonably figure in any comparative treatment of “western democracy” – a phrase

that such figures suggest should carry an ironic charge. This form of exclusion was a great deal less important for the United States with 89 percent (CLARK 1936, p. 23).

¹⁹ I thank Hermann Giliomee for much information about the Boer republics.

decently governed. Indeed, it “is rapidly tending to become the universal condition of the more backwards populations to be either held in direct subjection by the most advanced or to be under their complete ascendancy” (pp. 346–347). India in particular, he points out, cannot rule itself decently. Such externally imposed “despotism” – Mill’s own term (*e.g.*, p. 346) – ideally might be justified “as the best mode of government for training the people in what is specifically wanting to render them capable of a higher civilization” (p. 346), while the whites under British rule were capable of ruling themselves.

We usually see Mill as a great theorist, and champion, of democracy. But his work is also evidence of the degree to which democracy has involved quite radical exclusions and has been compatible with quite strong structures of transnational domination. In “On Liberty” Mill (2003 [1859], p. 81) contended that “[d]espotism is a legitimate mode of government in dealing with barbarians, provided the end be their improvement, and the means justified by actually effecting that end”. But imperial powers often claim the intention of improving their subjects and find evidence that they are doing so. If we take the perspective of the Empire as a whole and not just its favored places, might one even see Mill as a great theorist, and champion, of racial democracy?²⁰

Consider two different antonyms for “citizen”.²¹ On the one hand there is the “subject”, the person under the state’s authority who lacks the rights of citizen, and on the other the “foreigner” who may be either a subject or a citizen of some other entity. At the beginning of the twenty-first century, when most people live on the territory of one or other putatively sovereign states, we take it for granted that a foreigner here is a citizen somewhere. But in making citizenship in a sovereign state nearly universal, decolonization opened up the question of rights beyond national citizenship.

As the vast colonial zone was reorganized into sovereign states in the generation after the Second World War, for the first time democracy was a question for all. The agonizing effort by Portugal to hold on to its enormous remaining African possessions was not only one of the last great decolonization struggles, but it also triggered a democratic upheaval in Portugal itself that was the start of a vast new

²⁰ Mill was for thirty-five years employed in the London offices of the East India Company. For a compelling statement of Mill as a symptom of liberalism’s exclusions,

see MEHTA 1997. See also SULLIVAN 1983, LAL 1998, MILLER 1961.

²¹ I borrow this formulation from DUCHESNE 2001, p. 189.

wave of global democratization. As democratic, semi-democratic, and pseudo-democratic institutions flourished over the next generation, disappointment with democracy as it actually existed ran strong in many places.

In post-military Latin America in 2002, almost twice as many reported themselves dissatisfied as reported themselves satisfied with democracy in their country (60 percent *vs.* 32 percent). Although a slim majority held democracy “preferable to any other form of government”, more than a third favored an “authoritarian government” or held that it did not matter (Latinobarómetro 2002). In post-communist Europe, as one indicator of disillusion, consider a survey from 2004 reported by Poland’s Center for the Study of Public Opinion: asked how frequently “high government officials and politicians” took bribes, 84 percent of respondents answered “often” or “very often”, as opposed to 4 percent answering “rarely” or “very rarely” (CBOS 2004, p. 3). For those looking up the global gradient of wealth and power the experience of “third wave democracy” was often disappointing. And even in the established wealthy democracies, many citizens doubted that their own governments performed satisfactorily (Lipset and Schneider 1983; Adams and Lennon 1992; Pharr and Putnam 2000; Norris 1999; Nye *et al.* 1997). A geographically vast disenchantment with existing democracy had begun.

But will future students of democracy – should there be any democracy worth studying – continue to think primarily of the national states? It seems conceivable that one of the consequences of global economic flows, global communications networks, and air travel is to weaken the capacity of the citizen/noncitizen divide to insulate the wealthier states from the grievances of noncitizens whether those noncitizens are within their borders or beyond them.

Transnational political decision-making structures have emerged (see *e.g.*, Slaughter 2004). More will do so. Transnational economic and cultural connection is followed by a thickening structure of transnational political coordination from the UN to the WTO. A globalized economy brings with it globalized criminality, globalized epidemics, and globalized environmental threats, summoning forth (let us hope!) globalized structures of response. Diffusion of technology, e-mail, and air travel mean that foes of current realities might obtain awful weapons and coordinate attacks on targets on the other side of the planet, another threat that may yet summon up some global response. The very globalized economic connection that generates new forms of wealth, in its volatility, raises new forms of threat to national

economies that may yet also invigorate measures of control (as straws in this particular wind see Soros 2000; Stiglitz 2002).

Of course many of these structures cannot simply be said to be erosions of state authority when it is the states themselves, or some of them, that are rushing headlong to create such structures. The states, or some of them, are among the major actors in creating the global order. But the fiction that the people of the world are neatly divided into citizenries connected to states under whose sovereign authority they exclusively and unambiguously live is looking especially fictive. At the beginning of the twenty-first century, it seems possible that the fundamental conception that democracy has its primary meaning within the national states will become yet another fruitful catalyst of contention.

Democracy invites movements

Much of the foregoing suggests that democracy fosters movements; some of the foregoing presumes that it does. It is time to spell out some of these connections (for a lot more, see Tilly 2008, 2006, 2004b, pp. 123-143; Goldstone 2004). If democracy were only a complex bundle of contradictory principles or a formula for legitimation reposing on fanciful claims about authority, its dynamic potential might well be quite limited. Other legitimating formulae are no less fanciful. But these issues matter as much as they do because they are not restricted to the philosopher's study or the councils of rulers. Let me begin with *ideals*, and then move on to *structures*.

Ideals

In exploring the development of notions of popular sovereignty in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century England and British America, Edmund Morgan (1988, p. 306) argued that while claims that the state was the agent of popular will may have been every bit as fictive as claims that it was the agent of God, they had the consequence of galvanizing action to make those claims less fictive. Democratic legitimation in several ways encourages social movements. Claims that the people are sovereign are invitations for people to act; claims that the government serves the people are invitations for people to demand it do so; claims

that the governors are the people's representatives are invitations for those who feel unrepresented to point that out.

Governments that claimed their authority ultimately reposed upon divine mandate had a very powerful claim to the extent that claim was credible. States making such claims were likely to attempt to insure that religious authorities bolstered rather than subverted their rule. Max Weber devoted a great deal of thought to describing the varieties of relationships that developed between state and religious authorities, as states worked out arrangements to channel, sponsor, mold, placate, threaten, control, suppress and share power with religion while religious authorities worked out arrangements to gain influence in or insulate themselves from states.

In the recent era of democratic legitimations, it is worth considering the relationships of states and social movements. To claim that authority reposes on the people's will is to grant enormous clout to those who can credibly claim to embody that will, and elections are commonly presumed to do this. But movement activists also put forward statements as to what that will is and to demonstrate their popular character through the mobilization of numbers, their determination in the face of opposition, their worthy embodiment of democratic values, and their capacity to cause trouble. States may variously try to channel, sponsor, mold, placate, threaten, control, or suppress movements. But for states claiming a democratic character, the repressive option is significantly constrained. Democratic governments have at various times banned some (but not all) opposition parties, shown great hostility to labor movements, imprisoned or killed opponents, barred certain tactics, and restricted press coverage. However such measures tend to be limited (but not eliminated) by judges upholding civil rights, other movements or powerholding factions forming electoral coalitions with the excluded, the solidarity of tolerated journalists with banned ones, barred parties recreating themselves under new labels, rhetorical deference to liberty, equality, and accountability, and so forth. This hardly meant that repression does not happen. But it does mean that a broader range of movements are likely to be tolerated than under nondemocratic auspices.

Practices

It is not only democratic ideals and democratic legitimacy claims that foster movements. The familiar terrain of democratic practice

assures the development of an organizational life of the sort that undergirds social movement activism. Here I will indicate four such elements.

- First of all, electoral mechanisms, which have become inextricably linked to democratic legitimation, are an arena in which numbers count. One of the resources available to movements, therefore, is the mobilization of large numbers of adherents thereby making elected officials and those dependent upon them take the possibility of electoral defeat into account. In addition, electoral practices establish legitimate occasions for the mobilization of numbers, which creative movement activists can stretch into other occasions and for other purposes. When powerholders, too, attempt to mobilize great numbers for their own supportive parades, rallies and demonstrations they further diffuse the knowledge of how to organize such things at the same time as they acknowledge the resonance of such events.

- Second, the freedoms of association, speech, and publishing that are part and parcel of modern democratic practice are absolutely critical to the forms of political action that constitute the modern social movement. Confronting the great variety of nondemocratic political systems under which human beings have lived in most of human history and in much of the planet today, people have often managed to act collectively to advance their own social visions. No one would study the history of Europe in the seventeenth century, for example, without paying considerable attention to its large scale popular insurrections. But today's profusion of campaigns for change, with their demonstrations, marches, meetings, chanted slogans, signs, picketing, occupations of public space, press conferences, and pamphleteering that characterize all democratic countries, is distinctive and in part an adaptation to the opportunities presented by governments making credible claims to democracy. The institutions on which genuine electoral contestation depend not only guarantee the existence of election-contesting parties but of social movements as well.

- Third, democracies are bound to generate other sorts of significant political actors that collectively constitute a dense organizational web upon which movements build. Surrounding the formal rules of decision-making, including the electoral procedures for choosing incumbents of office, the formal rules governing the relationships of executives and legislators, and the decision-making rules of the legislators, other kinds of actors form. Democratic politics, therefore,

is hardly limited to elections and the public aspect of governmental decision-making. All democratic states develop organizations to contest elections, to attempt to persuade bureaucrats and legislators to regulate and legislate in their favor, and to mobilize public protest. These are commonplaces of political science, although political scientists have devoted far more energy to the study of parties and lobbies than to movements. Not only does democratized government nourish parties, lobbies and movements but parties, lobbies, and movements frequently galvanize each other. They do so in part because their activities draw on and nurture similar sets of skills so that experience in social activism may lead to a post in a lobbying organization and vice-versa. And they do so because one organization may stimulate another. Movements may be galvanized by disgust at the manipulations of parties deemed to be frustrating the true expression of the people's wishes or fear that some lobby wields inappropriate and undemocratic influence away from public scrutiny.

In these organizational struggles the meanings of democracy are debated. In the name of democracy, one often sees some decrying of the protestors who, it is claimed, do not accept the will of the people as expressed through the actions of their legitimately chosen representatives. And in the name of democracy, one often sees movements denouncing the actions of those who do not truly represent the people, who are beholden to hidden lobbies, chosen in the dark by party bosses, and validated by electoral procedures that distort the people's will.

We could extend the argument beyond parties and lobbies to look at other kinds of organization that go hand in hand with democracy and which help sustain movements as well, including labor unions, business associations, fund-raising organizations, think tanks, self-help groups, polling agencies, PR firms, independent academic institutions, foundations, NGOs, self-organized student groups, and freely competing religious groups (on which see the good observations of Tilly [2004b, p. 139]).

If you write a democratic constitution and fail to mention parties, lobbies, and movements alike – as in the newly independent United States – you will nonetheless summon all three, and more, into lively and mutually encouraging existence.

- The fourth reason that democracy nurtures movements is the propensity for democratic movements to spin off other movements. Consider the never fully satisfactory character of movements themselves as emblematic of democracy. Not only does democracy generate

movements for more democracy, but movements for more democracy generate other movements for more democracy still. Although movement participants may at times identify their cause with democracy, rivals within the broad alliance of the moment as well as external opponents will not be slow to point to the movement itself as a site of hierarchy, exclusion, suppression of dissent, falsification of claims of unity, and hypocrisy. The very claim of activists to be embodying the democratic ideals fraudulently deployed by the governing elite, suggests to their opponents inside and outside of the movement coalition the tactic of turning the very same rhetorical weapons against them. Passions engaged by democratic causes may be aroused by movements, too, as by other institutions. One much-noted instance from the intertwined histories of social movements and democracy in the United States came about in the 1840s when women active in the transnational antislavery movement, disappointed in their marginalization by that movement's men, launched the US women's movement, thereby bringing to it antislavery's theme of emancipation along with their activist experience. Benita Roth's (2004) fine study of recent feminist activism among US whites, blacks, and chicanas is a treasure chest of examples of how the intersections of issues of gender, race, ethnicity, and class generate a variety of responses, splits, mergers, and debates.

The plausibility of such charges from within ostensibly democratic movements has perhaps increased over the two centuries during which movements have been in existence because of the increasing role within movements of a professionalized stratum who carry on fund-raising, hire lawyers, lobbyists, and publicists, and develop routinized relations with powerholders and parties,²² a stratum that will seem to some to contravene movement democracy. It seems likely that such charges will increase in the future with the growing significance of transnationally organized social activism. The transnational "advocacy networks" (Keck and Sikkink 1998) that were emerging toward the end of the twentieth century gave important roles to technical experts, media specialists, public relations people, sympathetic scientists, computer nerds, legal advisers, and fundraisers. They are often only minimally connected to any form of grassroots mobilization. Transnational forms of organizing, even on behalf of democratic causes, are therefore often quite removed from any sort of democratic accountability themselves, although some discern seeds of future

²² As provocatively pointed out in a classic essay by McCARTHY and ZALD (1987).

democratic processes within them. (On these features of “global civil society” and “transnational NGOs” see Chandhoke 2002; Korzeniewicz and Smith 2001; Smith 2008.) In addition, the global geography of transnational activism, as shown by Jackie Smith’s statistical studies, reveals that as of the early twenty-first century the wealthier countries were the favored sites of organization and actions (Bandy and Smith 2004 and Smith 2004b; Smith and Wiest 2005), a source of considerable concern among activists in the global south. The history of national social movements very strongly suggests that complaints about the inadequacy of movement democracy will prove at least as important in the transnational arena as they have been in the national, and at least as important in the future as in the past.

The important point here is not simply that there are movements within democracy but that the vitality of movements frequently transforms democracy by altering political rules, by changing the boundaries that separate the excluded from the included, and by generating demands for a truer realization of democracy, which, however ambiguously, tends to intermittently undo whatever provisional institutionalization democracy has for the moment achieved.

Antidemocratic movements

Not all the movements born within democracy deepen democracy, of course. Many have more limited, or other, objectives; many have more limited, or other, consequences. But one special cluster deserves special mention: antidemocratic movements. Those enabled to organize, those galvanized by anger at the actions of lobbies, parties, or other movements, those impressed by the gap between legitimating rhetoric and other realities include antidemocrats as well as democrats.

Their actions, too, precipitate change:

- In challenging past democratic achievements they galvanize countermobilizations by democratic movements.

- In overthrowing democracy altogether – consider Europe’s post-World War One fascisms – they not only institute change but make it improbable that democratic restoration, should it come, will simply restore the previous democratic arrangements. Ralf Dahrendorf (1969, p. 396, pp. 412-426) provocatively argued that by thoroughly wrecking the prewar German social order, the Nazis destroyed significant longstanding barriers to democratization. We may go further.

Not only were the postwar institutions of Germany along with Italy and Japan significantly different from the past, but the “restored” democracies of Western Europe were sometimes strikingly different as well. France enfranchised women in 1944, for example, which was just one of many ways in which the Fourth Republic differed from the Third. The struggle against fascism also set in motion important changes even in the democratic countries that had not been occupied. Britain, for example, brought its plural voting to an end in the war’s aftermath. As for the United States, black activists challenged their country to live up to the antiracist language with which the Nazi enemy was denounced. Congress acted to protect the absentee voting rights of black soldiers through the Soldier Voting Act of 1942 and the Supreme Court ruled primary elections for whites only unconstitutional in 1944, beginning the challenge to Jim Crow exclusions that culminated two decades later in the successes of the Civil Rights movement (Keyssar 2000, pp. 244-253).

Human rights vs. citizens’ rights?

Extrapolating from the multiple ways in which the tensions surrounding the mix of equalities and inequalities, exclusions and inclusions, empowerments and disempowerments have galvanized movements that have reshaped democracy within the national states, it is imaginable that the vast diffusion of democratic ideology within a world of separate and radically unequal states will be among the major catalysts of contention in the century ahead. Consider specifically the democratic principle that those subject to authority should have some capacity to hold that authority accountable. Medieval lawyers were fond of the Roman formula “quod omnes tangit, ab omnibus tractari et approbari debet” (what touches all has to be treated and approved by all), applied by Bartolomé de Las Casas to deny Spanish claims to legitimate rule over the Indians of the Americas without their consent (Pennington 2003; Manin 1997, p. 87). James Madison, the architect of the US Constitution, called this principle “vital” to a meaningful democracy. He rejected the proposal that only a limited stratum of property holders would have the right to vote, commenting that such a restrictive proposal “violates the vital principle of free Govt. that those who are to be bound by laws, ought to have a voice in making them. And the violation wd. be

more strikingly unjust as the lawmakers become the minority” (quote in Dahl 2002, p. 35).

As we have seen, the identification of those who “ought to have a voice”, as Madison put it, and the specification of how they are to do this, turn out to have been profoundly contentious in all countries wrestling with the meanings of democracy and citizenship. As late as the 1930s, however, a century and a half after those US constitutional debates, such questions were still largely irrelevant to the great portion of humanity who lived under colonial rule. But post-World War Two decolonization made it possible to think ahead to the global triumph of democracy taking the form of the successive democratization of all the sovereign states on whose territory now lived the overwhelming majority of humanity. A more democratic world would mean, and could only mean, the democratization of the world’s states, one by one. But will this view remain dominant?

One important spur to thinking about democracy beyond the national states is the rise of transnational decision-making bodies, as noted earlier. But there is a second challenge, rooted in the inequalities of wealth and power among those states themselves. By the early twenty-first century, who on this planet is not to at least some degree subject to decisions made in the United States? In Greece it is not unusual to refer to the president of the United States as the “planetarch”, perhaps another useful political coinage from a country that a long time ago gave us a great many.²³ Although most of the world’s population are now citizens of some sovereign state, and many are citizens of states with significant democratic features, only a tiny minority are able to vote for the planetarch.²⁴

We have usually thought of citizens’ rights as the vehicle for achieving whatever there was that could be achieved by way of human rights. The states were the vehicles for enforcement; the advance of citizen’s rights, state by state, was the path by which human rights would be achieved. Since accountability of governors to governed was one important mechanism raising the likelihood that states would adhere to their part of the bargain, the geographic expansion of democratization would advance human rights in the world. Democratic states have not been immune from torture, ethnic violence, and

²³ I thank Mike-Frank Epitropoulos for sharing his research on this usage.

²⁴ According to US CENSUS BUREAU (2008) estimates, 4.5 percent of the world’s population lived in the United States in 2008.

hunger but they do not suffer from genocide and mass starvation.²⁵ In a world of states of vastly unequal wealth and power, however, the question of rights in an ever-changing global order that includes important transnational institutions may be a significant new source of contention, galvanizing movements and galvanizing resistance to those movements. The question of who needs to be accountable to whom, and how, and over what may be rethought. Human rights may in some ways be extensions of citizens' rights, to grow state by state, but in some ways in opposition to them (Brysk and Shafir 2004; Morrison 2004).

Although it seems to many simply common sense that the development of transnational mechanisms that might make a reality of human rights will simply be an extension of the practices of the more democratic national states into the transnational arena, there is much reason to be skeptical. It is not only the world's less democratic states that resist effective transnational institutions, but some of the more democratic ones as well. Consider the observations of Andrew Moravcsik (2000, p. 244) on the forging of the UN Covenant on Civil and Political Rights after the Second World War.

At the height of the Cold War, in the early 1950s, the most stable among modern democracies, including the United States and the United Kingdom, allied with authoritarian and totalitarian states like the Soviet Union, China, South Africa, and Iran, in opposition to the inclusion of compulsory, enforceable agreements (Moravcsik 2000, p. 244).

A half-century later, one could say much the same thing of the ferocious – and it is not too strong a word – opposition of the United States to the emergence of an effective International Criminal Court with jurisdiction over human rights cases (Forsythe 2002). This is a consequence of the intertwining of democratization of the national states and global patterns of domination. The governments with the best established democratic institutions are hardly enthusiastic about diminishing their own claims of sovereignty by creating transnational human rights regimes that can enforce their own citizens' claims, but they include states with considerable weight on the global stage. It is very doubtful, for example, that the United States' government would welcome its own citizens having effective rights to challenge its prison conditions, its capital punishment, or the legitimacy of its curious

²⁵ See the very important arguments of Amartya Sen (*e.g.*, 1999, pp. 146-188).

electoral practices in an international arena with decision-making authority. Of course, supporters of the US positions also cite democratic principles, claiming that the judges of such a court will not be democratically accountable and that the international arena today includes many countries whose democratic claims are extremely limited or non-existent. As often, very different positions can appeal to “democracy”.

So, on the one hand, the governments of the older democracies may be something less than enthusiastic supporters of transnational human rights regimes, and will no doubt be less than friendly to other aspects of a more democratic world. But on the other hand there is some reason to think that these countries may be important launching pads for transnational social movements of all sorts, including movements for a more democratic world. Smith and Wiest’s (2005) data on transnational movement organizations suggests that they flourish best in the same sorts of places that national movements do, namely within the more democratic states, some of whose elites are not very likely to be pleased. So the politics of a more democratic world is likely to be as highly contentious within the established democracies as anywhere else. Perhaps the propensity of democratic states to violate their own laws in combating “antiglobalization” activism is a sign of things to come (Smith 2002; della Porta and Tarrow 2001).

Whether transnational movements can effectively reshape transnational institutions is a matter of some debate among students of social movements because it is not obvious whether the conditions within national states that fostered the development of effective national social movements are or will be replicated in the transnational arena.²⁶ Nor is it obvious what other forms of contention await. Some of the issues include:

- Whether the forms of solidarity, coordination, and coalition formation that built movements within the states have analogues beyond the states;
- Whether there are analogues for the state itself in its catalytic role as target of movement action;
- Whether elite control of transnational institutions is so effective as to deny any potential movements the sorts of leverage that have been so important within the states at moments of intra-elite conflict.

²⁶ KHAGRAM *et al.* 2002; SMITH 2008; TARROW 2004; TARROW 2001; IMIG and BANDY and SMITH 2004a; DELLA PORTA and TARROW 2001; MARKOFF 2004.

On all of these matters there is no shortage of contradictory views. And it is even less obvious whether whatever mechanisms for transnational participation, accountability, and protection of rights that may emerge will have much resemblance to the institutions that have come to define democracy at the level of the national states. But we may be certain that the history of democracy has hardly come to an end. Tocqueville's dubious prognostication that popular sovereignty had gone about as far as it could go looks as unlikely to summarize the state of world democracy in the early twenty-first century as the state of American democracy in the early nineteenth. I have suggested there are reasons to suspect that in the emerging global age two important circumstances will lead to questioning whether the national states can remain the field within which democracy applies: first, the ongoing development of transnational decision-making bodies poorly accountable to citizenries and, second, the vast differences of wealth and power among the nominally sovereign states. The student of democracy is always concerned with an edifice under construction, all too often subject to demolition, and never completed, in large part because new architects emerge to alter the plans that in any event they are often unable to get the workers to follow.

A deeply conflictual history...

The foregoing discussion also implies something that receives far too little acknowledgment in much of the literature on democracy: how profoundly democratic history – both advances and retreats – has been shaped by the most intense kinds of conflict there are, including war and revolution. Let us glance at the more stable democratic regimes in existence, as of the early twenty-first century. Robert Dahl (2002, p. 186) suggests a convenient list of “countries steadily democratic since at least 1950”, which turn out to be precisely twenty-two in number. Had the outcome of World War Two been different (and a democratic outcome did not look very probable in 1942), a minimum of 10 of these would be most unlikely to be very democratic places today (Austria, Belgium, Denmark, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, Luxembourg, the Netherlands and Norway). The United States was born in revolution and its democracy was significantly advanced in the most bloody war of its entire history. French democracy underwent so many advances and retreats in

revolutionary upheavals of various kinds that a major late twentieth century French historian was being provocative in entitling an essay *The Revolution is Over* (Furet 1983, pp. 11–109). Many countries on Dahl's list participated in bloody interstate wars that were widely understood to be at least in part wars for and against democracy. Significant advances in democratization in still others came about in settling civil wars (not just the United States, but – happily much less bloodily – Switzerland and Costa Rica). Some countries on this list owe even their independent existence to the aftermath of wars (Austria, Finland, Israel). Major advances in the political rights of workers and women occurred in a cluster of these countries as a result of the First World War giving an enormous boost to democratizing social movements; in others women's voting rights came with the end of the next war (Markoff 1996, pp. 73–75). Still others underwent major episodes of anti-democratization that halted or reversed prior democratizing episodes (Tilly 2004a). Tremendous shocks, not just incremental alterations, have been part and parcel of the history of democracy. Many scholars have focused on explaining stable democracy, an important scholarly agenda because stability is worth understanding, but we must not lose sight of the many storms before the calm. And sometimes after, too.

I conclude by returning to the issues of definition and measurement with which I began. Consider Robert Dahl's (1971, p. 2) definition of democracy as a government “completely or almost completely responsive to all its citizens”, only a hair's breadth more precise than Fleming's “the multitude have government” four centuries earlier. But Dahl goes on to argue that what empirical researchers can readily measure is the extent to which existing political systems approximate “polyarchy”, which he goes on to define as a set of procedures that are by no means adequate to constitute this perhaps unattainable “democracy”. And now we do arrive at something a great deal more precise than Fleming. Dahl's polyarchy deeply influenced subsequent efforts at index construction, but on the whole these subsequent efforts abandoned any effort to think beyond polyarchy, and often called what they claimed to be measuring “democracy” into the bargain. In doing so, political scientists miss the significance of aspiration. My point is not simply to emphasize Dahl's distinction between any existing system, even polyarchy, and democracy, but to point to that gap as a recurrent catalyst to change.

Change is inherent in democracy because of the disjunction between its emotionally compelling claims (that are a vital component

of its legitimacy) and the particular rules for choosing incumbents and making decisions that are provisionally held to be democracy in practice. It is never more than provisionally.²⁷ While there may be moments in which the appeal of following the rules and the appeal of “democracy” coincide, there are other moments at which they part company. It is an important question why it is that since the 1780s, when people began to march under its banner, democracy came to be widely identified with representative institutions, secret ballots, universal suffrage, and competitive parties. This conflation is a social process worthy of study, and a highly conflictual one at that, not simply the logical entailment of some abstract definition.²⁸ How some practices became integral parts of “democracy”, others were shunted aside, still others caught on in some places but not elsewhere, and others yet again wax and wane by turns, needs much more attention. This is not only a question of how particular practices came into being in particular places (as in Fabrice Lehoucq and Iván Molina’s [2002] exemplary work on the institutionalization of honest vote counts in Costa Rica), or on how practices deeply antithetical to ancient democracy came to be denoted by the same word (as in Bernard Manin’s [1997] exploration of “representative government”), but also how certain new practices became part of democratic norms globally, like women’s suffrage (for overviews see Ramírez *et al.* 1997; Markoff 2003). And we need to understand a great deal more than we do about just who used the word democracy, in what ways, in what contexts, and for what purposes (and the same goes for terms widely associated with democracy like freedom, equality, participation, self-rule and others). But there is no reason to presume that the institutions that are taken to embody democracy today will be those taken to embody democracy tomorrow.

To end at this point leaves much unresolved. Although dissatisfaction with democracy as it exists here and now has recurrently troubled and altered the history of democracy, some or even many may find the current state of affairs a fully satisfactory realization of what they think proper democracy ought to be. They may be baffled or even indignant at those who campaign for a truer realization. Still others

²⁷ The provisional character of democratic institutions is especially easy to miss if our attention is directed to the hunt for the mechanisms by which a new democracy may be “consolidated” as a good deal of literature urges us to do, thereby directing

us to the search for short term stabilities and away from long term instabilities. For a thoughtful review: SCHEDLER 2001.

²⁸ For some suggestions in this direction, see MARKOFF 1999a, 1999b, 2003; TILLY and WOOD, 2003.

may renounce democracy altogether. And others yet again may not care. In arguing at length that such disagreement is woven into the democratic fabric, I have not attempted to specify who it is who views the present as satisfactory and who it is who favors particular alternative democratic visions. These are very large, important matters. What I have tried to do is show why democratic practices will intermittently generate movements whose actions transform it, but I have made no attempt to specify who participates in these movements, nor under what banners they march, nor at which times and places they do so. One might well ask, as a reader of an earlier draft of this essay did, just which social groups favored and favor the sort of democracy that takes “liberal” as a positive and essential adjective, or why a powerful state (let us say, the US) might oppose its realization in some places and at some moments and promote it in other places or at other moments. This essay’s ambitions have been more modest, but an understanding of the dynamic character of the history of democracy suggests an important context for those large, specific issues of who and when and where.

... and future

Toward the beginning of my argument I pointed to a sixteenth century definition that contained no guidance as to how citizens were to exercise democratic power, or even who those citizens were. It may have seemed to the educated elites of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries that in fashioning institutions that came to be called democratic, they had found an answer to the many challenges of the revolutionary age in which they lived. But democracy proved to be not an answer but a question. It still is.

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Résumé

Définir consensuellement la démocratie s'est révélé objectif fuyant. Les institutions jugées essentielles pour la démocratie ont radicalement changé depuis que, vers la fin du XVIII^e siècle, l'usage du terme démocrate s'est répandu. De la confrontation entre les idées démocratiques et la pratique naît un conflit qui transforme les institutions. Le potentiel de transformation repose sur une demi-douzaine d'attributs clés. Concept commun à l'acteur et à l'analyste, il peut susciter des engagements forts ; il combine des idées non nécessairement compatibles et peut générer de l'opposition ; il comporte un mélange dynamique d'inclusion et d'exclusion. Les États-Nations ont fait coexister démocratie et domination. Proclamations d'ouverture et exclusions (selon le niveau de ressources, entre hommes et femmes, citoyens et non-citoyens) forment un couple dynamique qui fait de la démocratie un terrain fertile pour le développement des mouvements sociaux.

Mots clés: Démocratie ; Citoyenneté ; Mouvements sociaux ; Globalisation.

Zusammenfassung

Die Demokratie konsensuell zu definieren erweist sich als unbeständig. Seit Entstehen des Begriffs »Demokrat« im 18. Jahrhunderts haben sich die für die Demokratie als grundlegend erachteten Institutionen entscheidend verändert.

Der Zusammenstoß von demokratischen Ideen und Praxis führt zu einem die Institutionen verändernden Konflikt. Das Veränderungspotential basiert auf einem halben Dutzend von Schlüsselmerkmalen: es handelt sich sowohl um das Konzept eines Handelnden als auch eines Analytikers; es kann zu starken Gefühlen führen; es setzt sich aus nicht immer harmonisierenden Ideen zusammen; es ruft Widerstand hervor; es besteht aus einer dynamischen Mischung von Ein- und Ausgrenzung und die demokratische Entwicklung der Nationalstaaten ist ohne Vorherrschaft undenkbar. Zwei Prozesse führen zu einer dynamischen Bewegung. Erstens sind die Öffnungserklärungen durch eine Serie von Ausgrenzungen, je nach Einkommensniveau, zwischen Bürgern und Nichtbürgern, zwischen Männern und Frauen, etc. widerlegt worden. Zweitens hat sich die demokratische Praxis als für soziale Bewegungen fruchtbarer Boden erwiesen. Derart können die Ein- und Ausgrenzungslinien verschoben und die Demokratie ausgebaut oder eingeschränkt werden.

Schlagwörter: Demokratie; Bürgerschaft; Soziale Bewegungen; Globalisierung.