

# A Scientifically Superior Conception of Democracy

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## Abstract

This paper proposes a flexible definition of democracy that is procedural, minimalist, multidimensional, and builds on previous scholarship. The most important dimensions are competitive elections, limitations on government, and individual rights and liberties.

I argue against views of democracy that consider it as a latent property and that use multiple indicators to infer its existence. Such measures create an upward bias in studies of the relationship between democracy and economic performance, confound democracy with other systems, and complicate causal inference. Preserving the multidimensional structure of the minimalist concept lends itself to refined hypothesis testing, and facilitates scientific analysis and theory building.

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## **1. Democracy in ordinary usage and scientific analysis**

How do we know when a country is democratic? Literate adults can use the term “democracy” correctly in a sentence to mean a variety of things. Since it is an “essentially contested concept” there will never be a single authoritative definition.<sup>1</sup> But it does not follow that one definition is as good as another. This chapter will present a strategy for systematic analysis that is adaptable to different values and beliefs. It will present a way of conceptualizing and measuring democracy that is procedural, minimalist, multidimensional, and lends itself to scientific analysis.

Gary Goertz has said that “The amount of attention devoted to a concept is inversely related to the attention devoted to the quantitative measure” (2006, 2). Regarding democracy, this statement may be true in different ways for different sets of scholars. There are some who specialize in the meaning of the concept, and there are other scholars who specialize in the quantitative measure. There is all too little communication between the two groups. This chapter will attempt to bridge the gap between concept and measure of democracy.

## **2. For scientific purposes, a procedural, minimalist and multidimensional definition of democracy is desirable.**

For general scientific purposes, a concept must be operational. That is, there must be a specific way for trained observers to identify or measure it. And for general scientific purposes, it needs to relate to interesting empirical phenomena of theoretical interest, and to lend itself to cumulative research.

In specific, a definition of democracy should be *procedural* rather than substantive, i.e. oriented to outcomes or results. If the definition of democracy were to include outcomes as well as procedures, this would eliminate many interesting empirical questions about the causal impact of democracy. For example, one widely used measure of democracy has from time to time included substantive criteria such as equality of opportunity, the absence of economic exploitation, and freedom from “extreme governmental indifference.”<sup>2</sup> If substantive things are part of the definition, then what is the point of asking if democracy is associated with good (or bad) things?

A definition of democracy should be *minimalist* to avoid bringing in nonessential features that might confound analysis. If no more than essential things are included, democracy will be easier to identify, and causal inference will avoid being confounded by nonessential features. One manifestation of minimalism is the principle that features that can be found in countries that are not democracies cannot be a defining feature of democracy.

This principle rules out desirable things such as honest, transparent government, economic freedoms, and rule of law as defining features of democracy, because they can be found in countries that are not democratic. A good example is economic freedoms such as property rights. The top two countries in the Heritage Index of Economic

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<sup>1</sup> See Gallie 1964.

<sup>2</sup> This is the Freedom House Index in previous formulations.

Freedom are Singapore and Hong Kong, which almost no-one would consider democracies.

Like Cheibub et al., I eschew requirements that democratic governments dominate other centers of power in the society, even though they may sound like very reasonable conditions. In fact, “all governments are constrained in their actions, be it by those who hold guns or by those who own capital, domestic or international” (Cheibub et al. forthcoming). It would place a very heavy burden on democratic governments to demand that they dominate other centers of power. And doing so would introduce intractable measurement problems. How would we measure domination?

The definition I propose is *multidimensional*, because in my view there are different features of democracy that do not necessarily go together. In contemporary times, scholars and citizens alike think first of elections as a defining feature. In my framework, this is just one feature, or dimension of democracy. Another feature that in fact historically preceded elections is limitations on government. And individual rights against government might be considered a third dimension, though rights may also be considered a part of limitations on government.

These separate dimensions could conceivably collapse empirically into one, if they were always found together. But I will consider them separately because they are likely to have different causal consequences. Under these considerations, *assuming* a single dimension of something that has potentially multiple dimensions seems a poor strategy. If there are items that might not be on a single dimension, collapsing them into one as the “maintained hypothesis” wastes information and confounds analysis.

The reader will note that I am assuming that democracy is an observable, rather than a latent construct. That is, I disagree with the presumption of the work of Bollen (1980), Treier and Jackman (2008) and Przeworski, Meserve and Melton (2008) that democracy cannot be observed directly.

Each of these criteria of procedural, minimalist and multidimensional makes for more precise scientific inference and a better understanding of mechanisms, processes and causal pathways. Following them makes for better scientific procedure.

### **3. Defining features of democracy**

This section will describe three defining features, or dimensions of democracy: competitive elections, limitations on government, and individual rights and liberties, though not all elections, limitations and rights are defining features of democracy. In my view, all are necessary conditions for democracy, but I will leave it to other scholars to address questions of sufficient conditions.

#### **3.1 Competitive elections**

In contemporary thinking, competitive elections are most central to most definitions of democracy. The definition and measure that I favor is DD, for *Democracy and Development* (Przeworski, et al. 2000) the book that first applied it and made it

famous, and for Democracy and Dictatorship as refined and advanced in the most recent analysis, Cheibub, Gandhi and Vreeland (forthcoming).

The reasons I favor this definition are that it is procedural and minimalist. It is not multidimensional, but is a very good way of defining and measuring competitive elections, which is one of the dimensions of democracy.

Most widely used definitions and measures of democracy include elections as at least one of their components. Joseph Schumpeter (1950) and Riker (1982) both make elections central to their theories of democracy. Robert Dahl elaborates eight conditions that make elections meaningful, and then collapses these into two dimension, contestation and inclusiveness (1971, see also 1998, 2002). Neither Schumpeter, nor Riker nor Dahl developed an empirical measure of democracy, though Vanhanen, apparently inspired by Dahl, developed a (flawed) empirical index of contestation and participation (2000).<sup>3</sup> Michael Coppedge has made sophisticated efforts to recover these dimensions empirically by considering them latent, rather than minimalist (Coppedge et al. 2009)

The two most widely used indicators of democracy mix elections with other dimensions and criteria. Freedom House has two indices, political rights and civil liberties. Most of the (currently) ten items in their political rights index have to do with elections, though the index as a whole fails to be procedural and minimalist.

But three of the ten items have to do with the functioning of the government, including “Is the government free from pervasive corruption?” Freedom from corruption is not a distinguishing feature of democracy, and therefore does not belong in a definition as was explained above.<sup>4</sup> The checklists change from time to time, without being revised retroactively. This makes use of the index over the 35 or so years since its inception problematic, though Freedom House defends their utility over time.<sup>5</sup>

This basically election-oriented index is averaged together by Freedom House with the civil rights and liberties scale to yield averages that range between 1 and 7 points. (Freedom House does give enough information that the separate dimensions of political rights and of civil liberties can be recovered.)

For Polity IV (the other most widely used index of democracy) three of the four variables on its ten point scale of democracy are relevant to elections, though none of

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<sup>3</sup> The Vanhanen index is flawed because it measures participation as a fraction of total population, though as he recognizes, the fraction of the population that is adult is higher in developed than in poor countries (2000, 255). Also, his index of contestation, which is the share of the vote won by parties other than the largest single party, seems to consider two-party systems as less democratic than multi-party systems.

<sup>4</sup> The methodology for the 2008 edition can be found at [http://www.freedomhouse.org/template.cfm?page=351&ana\\_page=341&year=2008](http://www.freedomhouse.org/template.cfm?page=351&ana_page=341&year=2008). Accessed 7/14/2008 and 3/11/2009.

<sup>5</sup> A spokesperson for Freedom House answered an email inquiry about these issues as follows: “In terms of your concern, although the methodology for our Freedom in the World survey has been changed over the years, we provide our historical data for public use, and are confident that these scores can be used for trend analysis over time” (email to Keech from Katrina Neubauer, August 20, 2008).

them is very specifically about elections: “competitiveness of executive recruitment,” “openness of executive recruitment,” and “competitiveness of political participation.” None of these is very easy to interpret, and Gleditsch and Ward (1997) argue that Polity IV scores reflect mainly the “constraint on the chief executive” variable. See Marshall and Jaggers 2007 for details.

The definition of the electoral dimension that I support is self-consciously procedural, minimalist and solely about elections. Adam Przeworski and his colleagues (2000) have carefully worked out a definition of democracy, and applied it to 141 countries between 1950 and 1990.<sup>6</sup> This index has subsequently been updated, corrected and elaborated by Jose Antonio Cheibub, Jennifer Gandhi and James Vreeland (forthcoming), which they now designate as “DD,” after Democracy and Development in the title of the original book and after Democracy and Dictatorship, the basic alternatives. They extend the time period back to 1946 and forward through 2007.

For DD there are four basic criteria for a country to be a democracy, all of which revolve around elections. They are

1. The chief executive must be elected.
2. The legislature must be elected.
3. There must be more than one party competing in elections.
4. An alternation in power under identical electoral rules must have taken place.

The first three criteria are self-explanatory, and readily observable necessary conditions for a country to be a democracy on the electoral dimension. If a government does not yield power after losing an election, how do we know that it would? Cheibub et al. say that this is unknown and unknowable until there is an election that successfully defeats the incumbents.

Their key example is Botswana, which has fulfilled the first three criteria of democracy for decades. The Botswana Democratic Party (BDP) has won every election between 1966 and the present. This fact leads the authors to question whether the BDP would give up office if it lost an election. They choose to err on the side of caution, avoiding Type I error (false positives: accepting that Botswana is a democracy when in fact it is not) and not to classify Botswana as a democracy.

Mexico and Japan are other countries that failed to meet the alternation in power standard for a while before the incumbent party lost. The authors say that these countries became democracies as of the time that the establishment of the electoral rules under which the incumbent party lost. Japan gets credit for being democratic back to 1952, even though the incumbents first lost in 1993. Mexico gets credit for being democratic back to 2000, when the ruling party first lost the presidency, even though the rules changed in 1996 and the ruling party lost control of the legislature in 1997.

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<sup>6</sup> The original group was Michael Alvarez, Jose Antonio Cheibub, Fernando Limongi and Adam Przeworski.

DD considers countries that do not make the cut for democracy to be dictatorships. In *Democracy and Development* (2000), the Przeworski group left this as a large residual, though it did classify non-democracies into bureaucracies and autocracies, depending on whether or not they had internal rules and laws (2000, 32-3). The DD definition of democracy lacks a conception of democracy as a way of limiting government. Although limitations on government are no part of the DD definition of dictatorship either, Gandhi finds that dictatorships that have institutions that limit governmental power have better economic performance and greater longevity than those that do not (2008).

Since the DD index of democracy is defined by elections, it is constant between electoral periods. If a democratic incumbent were to undermine the viability of an opposition between elections, as President Perón did in Argentina between 1946 and 1951, this would not show up. Countries do not become less democratic between elections because the “snapshot” definition of democratic is met by the nature of the election that takes place at a single point in time.

Yet the fourth DD (alternation) test can involve time in a very important and highly variable way. In principle a country that meets the first three tests does not become democratic until it has an election in which the incumbent party loses. So it takes at least two elections for a country to be designated democratic by DD. For Japan it took more than forty years for the opposition to win, which retroactively made it a democracy for all of those years. It took Mexico 71 years for the opposition to win, but it got credit for being a democracy only as of the year the opposition won.<sup>7</sup> This standard implies to me that countries that had one election that met the first three standards, but was followed by a coup before another party could win, would not meet the fourth test.

The size and scope of the eligible electorate does not become relevant until a country has competitive elections in the DD sense. For countries that meet the DD criteria, a country that has full adult suffrage is more democratic than one that has full manhood suffrage. A country that has full manhood suffrage is more democratic than one that limits access to the ballot by race or by property requirements, as the United States has done in its past. Full adult suffrage with high participation does not have the same meaning if the relevant elections are not competitive or offer no choice. .

Needless to say, not all elections count as relevant for democracy. The DD index addresses this with condition 3: there must be more than one party competing in elections. This rules out elections held by authoritarian governments in which there is no competition.

### **3.2 Formal limitations on government**

There is now considerable consensus that competitive elections are an essential feature of democracy, but numerous prominent definitions ignore limitations on government. Why would limitations be an essential feature of democracy?

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<sup>7</sup> With a website to be associated with the revised and updated DD dataset, users can use or ignore the Botswana rule.

First of all, in the countries that developed the institutions of democracy most gradually, limitations on government preceded elections. In England, the Magna Carta (1215) established that the king was not above the law. The Glorious Revolution of 1688 further limited royal powers and enhanced the powers of Parliament. In the United States, the separation of powers, federalism, a limited list of federal government powers, and a Bill of Rights were all ways of limiting government. Such limits were initially much more central features of the American Constitution than were elections. Not until the 19<sup>th</sup> century did electoral features become major democratic concerns in either country.

Secondly, limitations assure that no election will be the last, and they make explicit the idea that the winners of elections must follow rules that assure due process and protect individual and minority rights. What keeps the winners of elections from trampling on the rights of the losers? Constitutional limitations on government are the standard way to do this. But not all limitations on government will count as being relevant to democracy, as will be explained below.

Charles Lindblom explains the roots of democracy as follows:

The history of democracy is largely an account of the pursuit of liberty. ... One way (man) has tried to insure his liberties ... is by instituting the more or less democratic regimes we call polyarchies, polyarchy being the means, liberty the end (1977, 162-163).

Polyarchies are systems of rules for *constraining* rather than *mobilizing* authority. They grow out of the struggle *to control authority* rather than *to create it or make it more effective* (1977, 165, emphasis added).

Lindblom's observations put the finger on a key difference between democracy and authoritarianism. For my purposes of relating these alternative systems to economic performance, authoritarian governments are governments that may be designed to create and to mobilize authority, and this could well be an advantage for carrying out reforms designed to improve economic performance. Democracy, in contrast, has essential features that may work against each other: competitive elections can be used to mobilize authority, and limits on government can be used to constrain authority. Thus these two features of democracy *could* work in concert, but they may well be in tension with each other.

Witold Henisz has developed a measure of "political constraints" that comes close to what I have in mind for limits on government (2000, 2002a, 2002b, 2004).<sup>8</sup> Unlike Polity, which has a constraint on executive feature among others, Henisz's index limits

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<sup>8</sup> The World Bank has developed a Database of Political Institutions, which has a measure of checks and balances. This includes an index of political cohesion, which measures whether the same party controls the executive and the legislature for presidential systems, and the number of parties controlling the government for parliamentary systems. This is supplemented by two checks variables, one for the number of veto players, and the other to measure likely disagreement among veto players (Beck et al. 2001).

itself to constraints on policymaking in elected governments. His index is not motivated by an effort to measure democracy, and it does not claim to be an index of democracy. Henisz developed the Political Constraint Index (POLCON) as a better measure of political risk.<sup>9</sup> He designed it to measure credible policy commitments in general and the likelihood of changes in the policy regime in particular.

Henisz chose to do this with formal and official institutional veto players and the degree of agreement among them. This is precisely the kind of indicator I have in mind for the limited government feature of democracy. The index is based on the number of independent branches of government with veto power over policy change. To this is added a conception of political agreement across veto players, as measured by party identity.

POL CON III measures effective constraints by way of an executive, a lower house and an upper house of a legislature. POL CON V adds an independent judiciary and sub-national units. Both indexes range between 0, which means no effective veto points, or full discretion of government to change policy without needing anyone's agreement, to 1, which means complete constraint. In effect Henisz combines de jure veto players with a conception of the likelihood that they will in fact agree with each other or block change. Even though Henisz's political constraints index is not motivated by an interest in political variables, it is based on indicators of likely behavior that may be more sophisticated about politics than the other measures I am reviewing.

The Henisz POLCON index is continuous between 0 and 1, whereas the DD index of electoral democracy is dichotomous. This raises the question of what level of limitations is necessary for a government to be democratic on that dimension. One might be tempted to say that more veto points means more democratic, but such a stance would unfairly advantage presidential over parliamentary democracies.

Even though I have argued that the electoral dimension of democracy is observable rather than latent, the same may not be true for the limitations dimension. How do we know when there are meaningful limitations on the power of a given branch of government?

We do know that observables are relevant. In the United States, for example, a Democratic majority in the Congress has recently passed a "stimulus bill," the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009. The president proposed a bill and the legislature passed it in February 2009. Can this be evidence relevant to limitations on government? In fact, the bill was modified in order to secure sufficient support in the legislature, which might otherwise have defeated it, so this is indeed relevant evidence. What would we have concluded if it had passed with ease with only Democratic votes and no feedback?

In the late days of the Bush administration, Congress passed the Medicare Improvements for Patients and Providers Act of 2008. President Bush vetoed it and each

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<sup>9</sup> Henisz's index is available at <http://www-management.wharton.upenn.edu/henisz/>.

house of Congress voted to override, and the bill became law in spite of the president's veto. This too is evidence of limits on government.

But American presidents have considerable power in their capacity to issue executive orders. In principle and in fact, an executive order that does not derive directly from a constitutional power can be over-ridden by a congressional majority. Indeed, scholars have created spatial models of the interaction between presidential and Congressional ideal points to identify where presidents are likely to be able to issue executive orders that will not be over-ridden.

Latin American presidents have extensive decree power (Carey and Shugart, eds. 1998). For example, Presidents Allende of Chile and Menem of Argentina have used decrees very extensively. It remains an open question at which point limitations on government become meaningful.

In general, we might conjecture that when we see disagreement and conflict between branches of government we know that there are observable, relevant limitations on government. When a country merely has the potential for such disagreement and conflict, we may be in a situation that is similar to that of defeat of incumbents for the electoral dimension of democracy: we cannot be sure that one agency of government can block another until we see it.

Not all limitations on government count as relevant to the definition of democracy. Limitations on government by private business, the church, labor unions, or even the military, etc. do not count as formal and constitutional limitations on government. Such things are part of virtually any society, and since they are found in countries that are not democracies, they cannot be defining features of democracy.

### **3.3 Legally enforceable individual rights against government**

Individual rights and freedoms are often thought to be basic to democracy. Indeed one of the most widely used indicators of democracy is the Freedom House index of political rights and civil liberties, about which more will be discussed below.

The most important way that individual rights are relevant for the conception of democracy that I am developing here is as follows. There should be freedom of thought, speech and assembly, so that no alternative is precluded from electoral politics. And there should be protections against arbitrary imprisonment without due process of law, so that citizens whose opinions might legitimately influence electoral outcomes cannot be silenced by jailing them. These rights are designed to make electoral competition more meaningful. This is not to diminish the importance of other rights, but to suggest that they may not be as central to a minimalist conception of democracy.

The United States Bill of Rights is a list of protections against government. Because of a Supreme Court holding in *Barron v. Baltimore* (1833) the list was a guarantee only against the federal government until 1868, the year of the ratification of the Fourteenth Amendment. That amendment extended protections against the federal

government to state action as well, through the due process and equal protection clauses, and by a process of “selective incorporation” that has taken many decades.

Not all rights are conditions for democracy. In ordinary discourse, rights are not always limited to protections against government. Often they are thought of as obligations of government or rights against other citizens. There are several kinds of rights that I do not advocate as essential to democracy.

Consider the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which has been agreed to by many nations, not all of which are democratic. Article 25 states that

- (1) Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family, including food, clothing, housing and medical care and necessary social services, and the right to security in the event of unemployment, sickness, disability, widowhood, old age or other lack of livelihood in circumstances beyond his control.

I consider the right to a standard of living to be a matter of policy rather than something that is essential for democracy. It would involve substance over procedures, and considers many things that I do not believe are essential to a procedural and minimalist conception of democracy.

Freedom House has been measuring “freedom in the world” since the early 1970s. Their index includes several elements that are relevant to all three of my dimensions. However they are so mixed together that there is no single measure of the kinds of individual rights I include. Freedom House is far from minimalist, and it is not possible to extract from their scales the information we need. So although there are valid measures available for competitive elections and for limitations on government, Freedom House’s measures of rights violate several of my criteria. In spite of its limitations, I know of no other measure of individual rights of free expression and against arbitrary imprisonment than the Freedom House index of Civil Liberties.

#### **4. The other poles**

Gary Goertz points out that a concept is best defined if its opposite pole is also identified (2006, 30-35). For my purposes, authoritarianism is the opposite pole of democracy, and the real world alternative of greatest interest in comparisons of democracy with non-democracy. But there are problems with such a conception.

First, an opposite pole implies a single dimension. In my three dimensional context, there would be an opposite pole for each dimension. An authoritarian government may be one that lacks competitive elections, constitutional limits on government and individual rights and liberties. Just as all three dimensions are for my purposes necessary for full fledged democracy, it could be that appropriate values on all three dimensions are similarly necessary for a positive definition of authoritarianism, as opposed to a definition of authoritarianism that is simply the residual of democracy.

Second, the variety of possible combinations of values on the three dimensions implies that some countries are neither fully democratic nor fully authoritarian. This makes sense, but is at odds with definitions, such as that of Przeworski et al. (2000), Gandhi (2008) and Cheibub et al. (forthcoming), which consider all governments that are not democracies (by the electoral standard) to be dictatorships.

Third, there seems to be an implicit assumption that the units of analysis are nation states with an effective government. I do not contend that all governments are either democratic or authoritarian, and I do not contend that I have mapped (or am prepared to map) all possible governments. The terms democracy and authoritarianism seem to apply to modern nation states. Countries that lack competitive elections, internal limitations on government, and individual rights and liberties are a very diverse lot in contemporary times, and there is even more diversity among such countries over historical eras. Somalia is certainly not a democracy, but it does not seem to be an authoritarian government either, since authoritarian implies that someone has authority, and is “in charge.”

In this project, I will not make a serious effort to map that diversity among non-democratic regimes, but I am particularly interested in contrasting democracy with authoritarian or dictatorial regimes that seem to have advantages for achieving good economic performance. My original reason for making Latin America the setting for this investigation was that many countries there have experienced both democracy and authoritarian government, and some of the authoritarian governments and many of the democracies have made serious efforts to improve economic performance.

What follows is an effort to identify positively some of the features of the opposite of democracy on the three dimensions.

#### **4.1 No elections or noncompetitive elections**

For my purposes, the absence of meaningfully competitive elections means that a government can make policies without fear of punishment at the polls. These policies might be bad things, like corruption, nepotism and rent-seeking, or putatively good things, like economic reforms oriented to growth, efficiency and equity. A government that believes that an austerity plan is the best way to eliminate inflation or to put an economy on a higher growth path may be glad not to have to face elections in which an opponent can criticize the economic pain and perhaps parlay it into a defeat for the incumbent party. A policy plan in which “things will get worse before they get better” must worry about the timing of elections.

Even noncompetitive elections can have consequences, and surprisingly, these consequences may be perverse. Mexico had regular elections for decades before competition was meaningful, but somehow the incentives led to perverse results. For a time there was a “sexenio curse” that brought bad economic times every presidential election (Heath 1999).

#### **4.2 No formal limitations on government**

Virtually all governments face meaningful constraints. They may be constrained by the physical world or by the economy. They may be constrained by other political actors. According to Jennifer Gandhi, these may be the royal family for monarchs, the military for military dictators, and a party for civilian dictators (2008). Bueno de Mesquita et al. argue that all leaders are constrained by their “*selectorate* – the set of people with a say in choosing leaders and with a prospect of gaining access to special privileges doled out by leaders – and the *winning coalition* – the subgroup of the selectorate who maintain incumbents in office and in exchange receive special privileges” (2003, xi.) Even totalitarian countries find that their leaders are constrained by organized interests (Schwartz and Keech 1968).

But these various constraints may or may not be predictable. They may not serve the purpose that formal veto players are thought to play in giving foreign investors confidence to set up shop in host countries that lack them. Razo (2008) presumes that a dictator in a country without formal checks and balances may have a credibility problem.

#### **4.3 No legally enforceable individual rights**

The absence of legally enforceable individual rights often, if not usually means that dissidents and despised groups are suppressed, incarcerated, or worse. Such practices may well be designed to intimidate opposition.

### **5. Are there “emergent” properties of democracy?**

The procedural, minimalist and multidimensional character of democracy explicitly rules out criteria like efficient, honest, transparent government that protect economic freedoms, even though these things are very likely to be associated with good economic performance. I rule them out because they can be found in countries that are not democracies and are therefore not defining features of democracy.

However, there is a possibility that long experience with democracy as measured here in multiple dimensions would be causally connected with qualities of good government that are related to economic performance. Such long experience could well be associated with the development of favorable institutions in the sense of North (1990) and Williamson (2000). On the other hand, it could be just as likely that long experience with democracy leads to a proliferation of interest groups and special privileges that undermine economic performance as explained by Olson (1982).

When these are the issues, it may be the case that considering democracy as a latent variable, a strategy that I rejected in section 2, becomes appropriate. As Miller and Page observe in their chapter on emergence, what happens may depend on the kinds of feedback mechanisms that exist in democracy as a complex adaptive system (2007, chapter 4).

## 6. Conclusion

I have proposed a way of thinking about democracy and authoritarianism that is procedural, minimalist and multidimensional. My proposal encourages precise causal thinking by identifying several processes and mechanisms through which democracy works. It helps focus attention on the issue of what it is about democracy that fosters or hinders economic performance.<sup>10</sup>

I have built on previous scholarship, using what I consider the most valuable features of other contributions. My approach is not a first step, because it depends so much on what has gone before. My approach is a work in progress, as well. I believe that our understanding and measurement of elections is more nearly satisfactory and complete than our understanding and measurement of limitations on government and of individual rights.

My approach is flexible to the values of the reader or investigator. The team that brings us the DD index is convinced that elections as measured by them are necessary and sufficient for democracy. Although I am a supporter of their measure as an indicator of the electoral dimension of democracy, I disagree that the DD index is sufficient to define democracy. I have made a case for the necessity of a limitation on government dimension, which may or may not include individual rights as a separate dimension. Some have felt that the extent of the suffrage deserves inclusion as well. For them, a sub-dimension of the elections dimension is relevant: where the DD criteria for competitive elections are met, the extent of suffrage can be relevant to how democratic a country is.

I am also agnostic about how many dimensions it takes to be sufficient for democracy. This issue depends on values, and again raises the idea that democracy is an “essentially contested concept.” This issue is also one for political philosophers to consider. I am open to many if not all of these possibilities. What I consider most central is the importance of the three basic criteria for democracy of procedural, minimalist and multidimensional.

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<sup>10</sup> The same approach can help identify what it is about democracy that is associated with other phenomena, such as peace (Russett) or the absence of famine (Sen).

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