

Democracy and Dictatorship: Conceptualization and Measurement

We live in a world that generally agrees on the importance and desirability of democracy.

But it hasn't always been like that.

The ancient Greeks were some of the first to start thinking about the merits of different forms of regime.

Demokratia is the Greek word meaning 'rule by the demos.'

Although the Greek word **demos** often gets translated as 'the people,' it refers more specifically to the 'common people' – those people with little or no economic independence who are politically uneducated.

Many believed that the demos would pursue their own interests at the expense of the commonweal.

Plato did not see democracy as government by the people.

Instead, he saw it as government by the poor and uneducated against the rich and educated.

Plato believed that political decisions should be based on expertise and that allowing all people to rule would lead to mob rule and class warfare.

TABLE 5.1**Aristotle's Classification of Regimes**

	Good form	Bad form
Number of rulers	"For the Good of All"	"For the Good of the Rulers"
One	Monarchy	Tyranny
Few	Aristocracy	Oligarchy
Many	Politeia	Democracy

Aristotle saw democracy as the most dangerous of the corrupt forms of regime.

- Democracy was class rule by the worst class.

Democracy was not associated with elections.

- Until the 18th century, democracy was seen as a regime in which offices were distributed by lot.

Democracy was viewed as obsolete.

- Democracy meant direct legislation, not representative government.

Monarchy was consistently preferred to democracy by political thinkers.

Things began to change in the **Age of Revolution** (1775-1848).

People had talked about representative government, not democracy.

But 'democracy' and 'aristocracy' came to designate the main lines of cleavage in the Age of Revolution.

The classical 3-way distinction between the one, the few, and the many was gradually replaced by the 2-way distinction between democracy and autocracy.

Research Questions

- Why are some countries democracies and others dictatorship?
- Do democracies or dictatorships produce better economic performance?
- What factors influence democratic survival?

All of these questions require that we be able to classify countries as democratic or dictatorial.

Theories about the world are based on abstract concepts.

A **concept** is a mental category or construct that captures the meaning of objects, events, or ideas.

Theoretical concepts cannot be observed; they exist only in our heads.

When we want to test our theoretical claims, we have to translate our concepts into concrete measures or indicators that we can actually observe.

A **measure** or **indicator** is a quantification of the thing we are interested in.

The process by which we translate a concept into a measure is called **operationalization** – we use a particular measure to operationalize a theoretical concept.

Democracy is an abstract theoretical concept.

What is your concept of democracy?

How should we operationalize it?

The central notion underlying our contemporary concept of democracy is that the 'people' rather than some subset of the people should rule.

But how should we translate this abstract concept into a practical set of criteria for classifying political regimes?

A **substantive view of democracy** classifies political regimes in regard to the outcomes that they produce.

A **minimalist** or **procedural view of democracy** classifies political regimes in regard to their institutions and procedures.

Robert Dahl proposed a minimalist view of democracy.

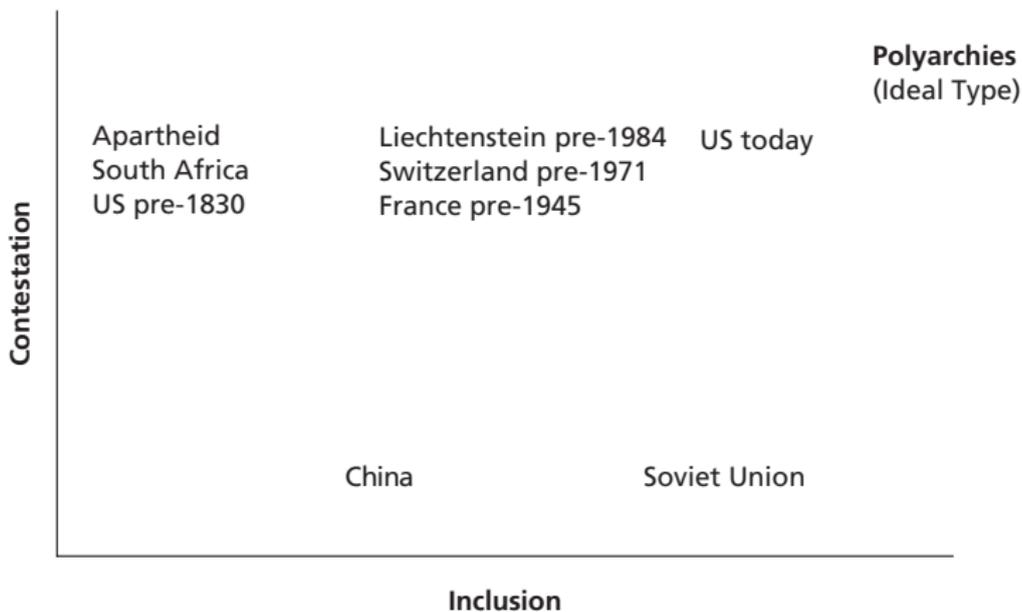
Two dimensions

1. **Contestation** captures the extent to which citizens are free to organize themselves into competing blocs in order to press for the policies and outcomes they desire.
2. **Inclusion** has to do with who gets to participate in the democratic process.

A **polyarchy** is a political regime with high levels of both contestation and inclusion.

FIGURE 5.1

**Dahl's Two Dimensions of Democracy:
Contestation and Inclusion**



Three measures of democracy and dictatorship

1. Democracy-Dictatorship (DD) Measure, click [▶ here](#)
2. Polity IV Measure, click [▶ here](#)
3. Freedom House Measure, click [▶ here](#)

Democracy-Dictatorship Measure

Democracies are regimes in which governmental offices are filled as a consequence of contested elections.

A country is classified as a democracy only if all of the following conditions apply:

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

The DD measure builds on Dahl's insights in two ways.

1. Minimalist view of democracy.
2. Emphasis on contestation.

The main difference with Dahl is that the DD measure treats regime type as a dichotomy.

- A **dichotomous measure** has only two discrete categories or values, such as 'tall' and 'short'.
- A **continuous measure** can take on any intermediate value within a given range, such as 'height in centimeters'.

FIGURE 5.2A

DD's Dichotomous Conceptualization of Regime Type

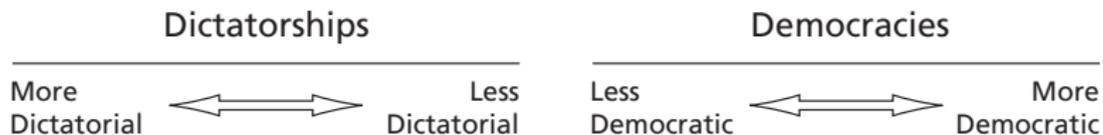


FIGURE 5.2B

Dahl's Continuous Conceptualization of Regime Type



Polity IV Measure

Polity IV provides annual measures of democracy and autocracy.

- Democracy score, 0-10.
- Autocracy score, 0-10.

Polity IV provides an annual polity score.

- Polity Score = Democracy Score – Autocracy Score.
- Polity Score ranges from -10 to 10.

A country's polity score is based on five different attributes or dimensions.

1. Competitiveness of executive recruitment.
2. Openness of executive recruitment.
3. Regulation of political participation.
4. Competitiveness of political participation.
5. Executive constraints.

Polity IV is minimalist and captures Dahl's notion of inclusion and contestation.

A country's polity score is based on five different attributes or dimensions.

1. Competitiveness of executive recruitment.
2. Openness of executive recruitment.
3. Regulation of political participation.
4. Competitiveness of political participation.
5. Executive constraints.

Polity IV is minimalist. In addition to capturing Dahl's notion of inclusion and contestation, it adds executive constraints.

TABLE 5.2**Competitiveness of Political Participation**

	Contribution to Democracy Score	Contribution to Autocracy Score	Contribution to Polity Score
Competitive	3	0	3
Transitional	2	0	2
Factional	1	0	1
Suppressed	0	1	-1
Repressed	0	2	-2

TABLE 5.3**Regulation of Political Participation**

	Contribution to Democracy Score	Contribution to Autocracy Score	Contribution to Polity Score
Sectarian	0	1	-1
Restricted	0	2	-2

Freedom House Measure

Two categories:

1. Political rights.
2. Civil rights.

Based on scores for political and civil rights, Freedom House classifies countries as **Free**, **Partly Free**, and **Not Free**.

The amount of freedom on the political rights dimension is measured by 10 questions, each worth between 0 and 4 points.

Three categories:

1. Electoral Process.
2. Political pluralism and participation.
3. Functioning of government.

A country's score out of 40 is converted to a 7-point scale.

The amount of freedom on the civil rights dimension is measured by 15 questions, each worth between 0 and 4 points.

Four categories:

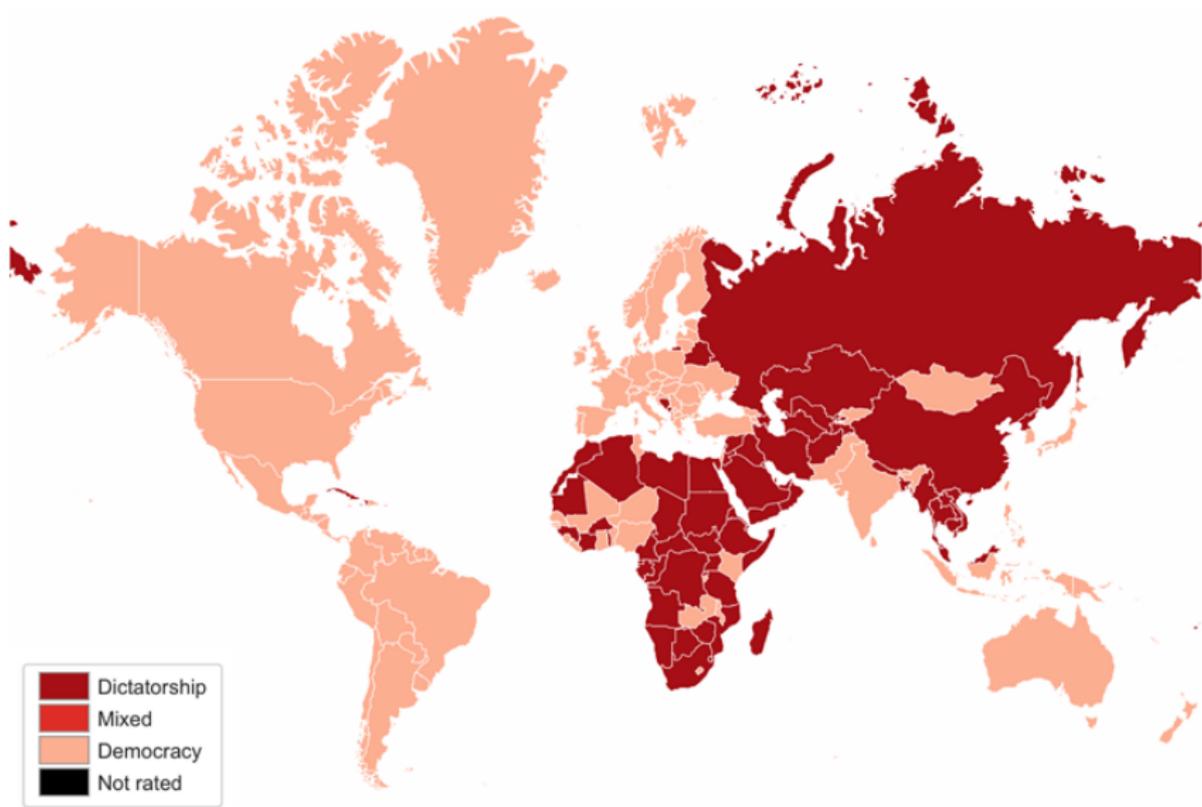
1. Freedom of expression and belief.
2. Associational and organizational rights.
3. Rule of law.
4. Personal autonomy and individual rights.

A country's score out of 60 is converted to a 7-point scale.

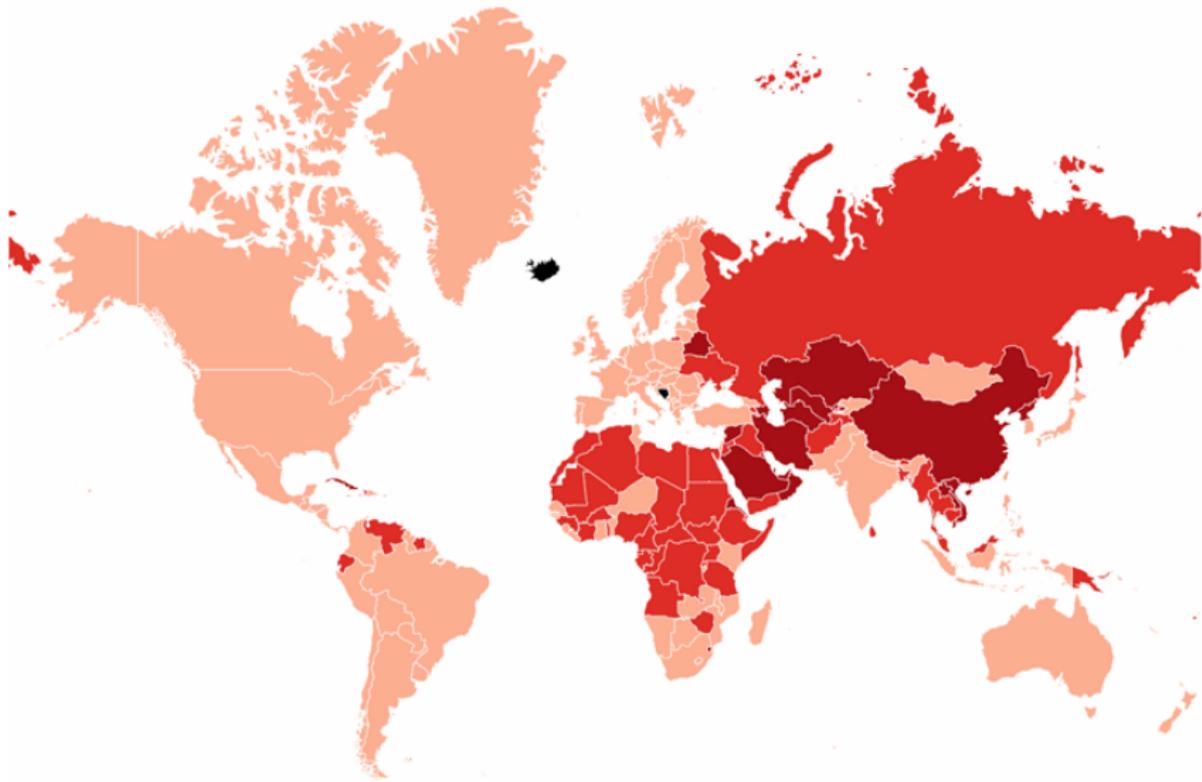
A country's overall Freedom House score is the average of its political and civil rights scores.

Freedom House captures Dahl's notion of inclusion and contestation.

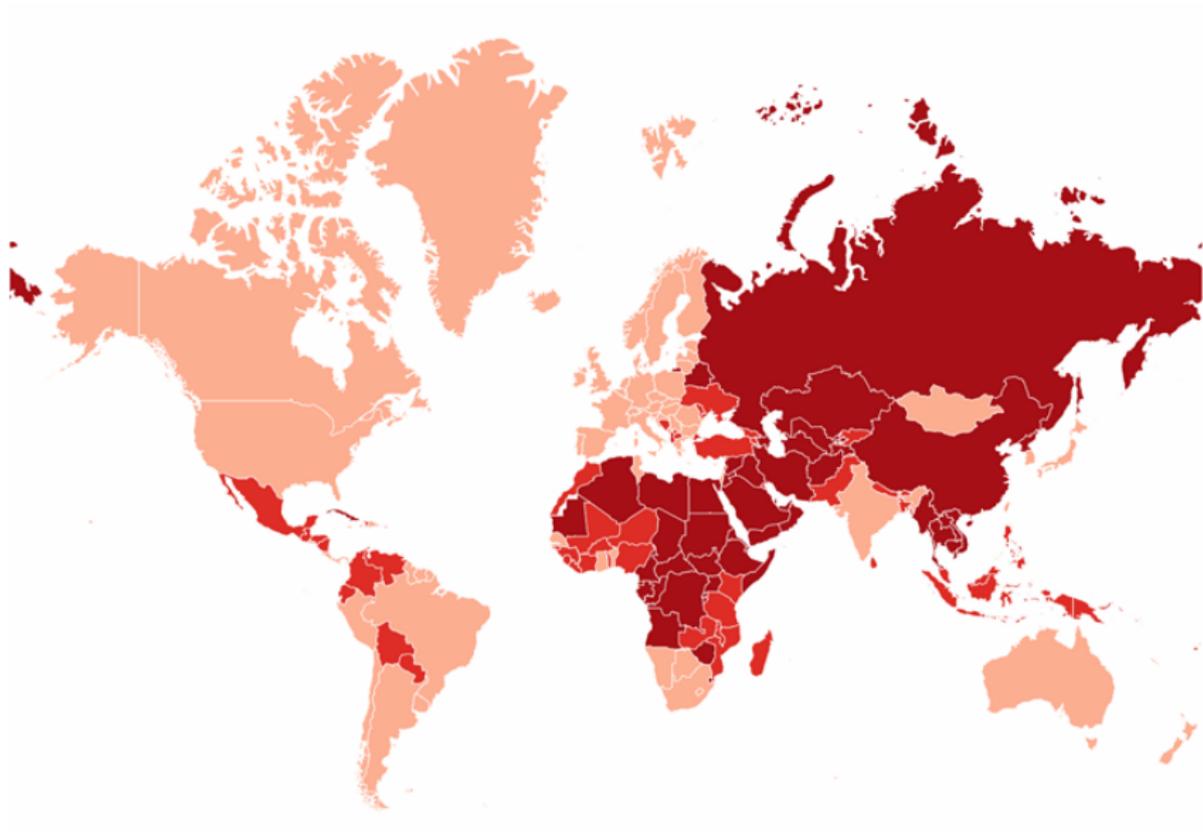
The big difference is that it employs a substantive view of democracy.



Democracy-Dictatorship 2015



Polity IV 2015



Freedom House 2015

We can evaluate measures in different ways.

- Conceptualization.
- Validity.
- Reliability.
- Replicability.

Conceptualization is the process of creating mental categories that capture the meaning of objects, events, or ideas.

- Minimalist vs. substantive view of democracy.
- Dichotomous vs. continuous view of democracy.

The research question matters.

The substantive view of democracy runs into problems if the researcher wants to know how regime type influences particular outcomes.

- If we define democracy substantively in terms of, say, inequality, we cannot examine the effect of regime type on inequality without engaging in circular reasoning.

The Return of Goldilocks in . . . Civil War and the Three Regimes,
click [▶ here](#)

Identifying causes.

It is easier to identify causes with minimalist measures of democracy.

If a study using Freedom House finds a positive relationship between democracy and economic development, how do we know which of the 25 underlying attributes is driving the observed relationship?

Scholars can reasonably disagree about whether regime type is dichotomous or continuous.

Again, the research question may matter.

- Impact of economic factors on democratic transitions.
- Impact of foreign intervention on level of democracy.

Validity refers to the extent to which our measures correspond to the concepts that they are intended to reflect.

Several things are important for validity:

- Attributes.
- Aggregation issues.
- Measurement level.

You might ask whether a particular measure includes the *correct attributes*.

Unfortunately, there are no hard and fast rules for determining which attributes a measure should include.

At the very least, scholars should try to avoid using too many attributes because this reduces the usefulness of the measure.

Once you have chosen your attributes, how do you **aggregate** them into a single measure?

Freedom House

- Is it appropriate to weight the civil and political rights dimensions equally?

Polity IV

- Is it appropriate to think that moving from a 1 to a 2 on one dimension is equivalent to moving from a 3 to a 4 on another?

Once you have aggregated your attributes, you have decide the appropriate measurement level

A **nominal measure** classifies observations into discrete categories that must be mutually exclusive and collectively exhaustive.

An **ordinal measure** rank-orders observations along some dimension.

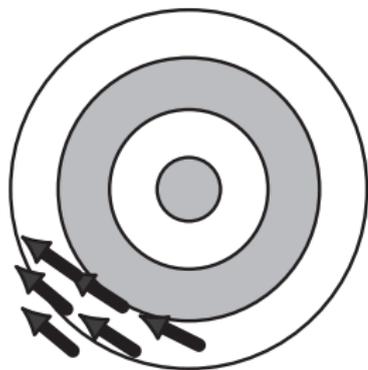
An **interval measure** places observations on a scale so that we can tell how much more or less of the thing being measured each observation exhibits.

Reliability refers to the extent to which the measurement process repeatedly and consistently produces the same score for a given case.

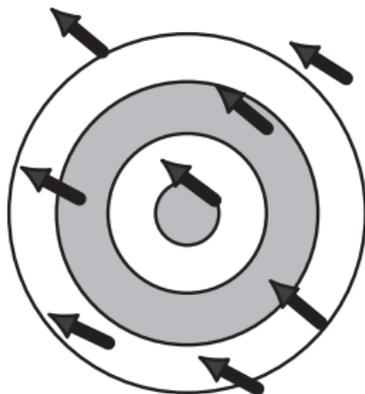
The reliability of a measure is likely to depend on the extent to which the measure is based on observables rather subjective judgements.

FIGURE 5.3

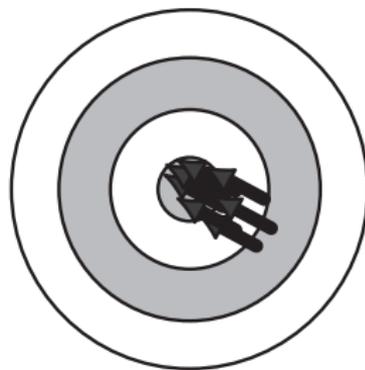
Comparing the Reliability and Validity of Three Measures



Reliable, but Not Valid



Valid, but Not Reliable



Valid and Reliable

Replicability refers to the ability of third-party scholars to reproduce the process through which a measure is created.

Replicability is important because it allows researchers that are not party to the construction of a particular measure to independently evaluate the reliability and validity of that measure.

At a minimum, replicability requires that scholars provide clear coding rules and make their disaggregated data available.