

## An Intervention on 'Democracy' as a Term in Empirical Political Analysis

Jean-Paul Gagnon  
University of Queensland, Australia

### Abstract

*Two separate sets of data derived from recent scholarship on the subject are examined to show that the term 'democracy' is problematically used in certain empirical political analyses. The first data set concerns thirty articles published by the journal Political Analysis between the years 2005 and 2010. The second data set is a body of 30 prominent monographs and edited volumes dealing substantively with 'democracy' from the years 2006 to 2011. Twenty-five out of thirty articles in the first data set do not explicitly define what is meant by the use of 'democracy' to the reader. Twenty-nine out of thirty works in the second data set provide subjective conceptualisations of 'democracy' to the reader which is parochial rather than post-foundationally universal. This work proposes that the practice of using a 'disclaimer' is a positive step to solving this problem. When a concept cannot be delivered in a universal framework, it makes a difference to err on the side of caution and make clear to the reader the subjective quality of a term like 'democracy'.*

*Key words: democracy, political analysis, empirical, conceptual clarity*

### Introduction

This paper is an intervention on the argument regarding conceptual clarity in the social sciences that Sartori (1970, p. 1033; 1984; and 1988 with Job) made some years ago. It is not a comprehensive response, as the focus herein will be on the use of 'democracy' as a concept in empirical studies — whereas Sartori was more concerned with comparative politics. This work's specific focus will be on the use of the term or concept 'democracy'<sup>1</sup> in the substantive area of empirical political analysis. This argument is important to make because of two factors: the first is that certain recent developments<sup>2</sup> in social and political theory have shown that our previous modes of thinking about 'democracy' are problematic. And the second is that numerous thinkers in empirical political analyses are not explicitly defining their subjective understandings of 'democracy' to the reader despite these recent changes. That compounds the problem at hand. This discussion ends with the argument that certain empiricists have moved beyond this problem by using 'disclaimers' regarding 'democracy'.

To try to meet part of Sartori's expectations, this paper will first clarify several

specific arguments and concepts. The first concerns 'democracy'. It is widely acknowledged that there are a multiplicity of understandings concerning this word as a term, form of government, or style of governance. And as will come to be seen, certain thinkers have been acknowledging this difficulty and circumventing this gap in the literature (the missing post-universally<sup>3</sup> agreed upon definition of 'democracy') by going into greater specificity concerning the role of 'democracy' or how it is conceived in their study.

One point that would merit a discussion is how empiricists in political science have moved past what certain commentators have called 'the endless debate among political theorists' concerning the definition of democracy. Because a post-universal definition is not yet available, empiricists moved to using procedural conceptions heavily focused on the institutions of 'free and fair elections' or the subjectively defined parameters relating to democratic governance as defined for example in the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (particularly Articles 25, 26, and 27). But that in itself is a major critique from political theorists: free and fair elections or the Covenant's own definition do not equate with 'democracy'. There are also significant differences in how voting, campaigning and the broader election process can take place not to mention a plurality of understandings about those matters. The method of trying to move past 'theoretical squabbles' by avoiding the conceptual or terminological demands of democracy has not worked. As will come to be seen, the use of a 'disclaimer' appeases this situation and is a proven method for empiricists to use in their studies. This work argues that 'democracy' as a form of government *and* governance should be based on robust theoretical and empirical studies primarily employing a cosmopolitan methodology. If that is not possible, the default to a 'disclaimer' is effective.

As can be seen from Gagnon (2010) who analysed forty different types of 'democracy' using both theoretical and empirical methods, there might be a method to use that could allow scholars to understand what the 'democracy' from which all other democracies stem. Some call this 'true' or 'ecumenical' (Saward, 2003, 2003b; Fung, 2007; Elstub, 2010) democracy whilst Gagnon (2010) calls this 'basic' democracy. A noticeable shortcoming with Gagnon's work is that it does not sufficiently employ a cosmopolitan methodology<sup>4</sup>. To be more specific, the forty types of 'democracy' analysed by that author (and the literature associated with those types) are mainly, if not entirely, from European and North American thinkers. There is also a strong presence of male thinkers which should have been balanced by seeking out female authors to a greater extent. Because much democratic theory and practice from the 'South',<sup>5</sup> 'East',<sup>6</sup> third world and fourth world were not included, his work is parochial<sup>7</sup> and only informs a theory of 'basic Western' and male-centric 'democracy'.

However, that being said, the possibility that these deficiencies were not present in his work can be entertained. If that were the case, the academy might have the ability to arrive at a less parochial (if not 'truly' universal) conception of democracy: one that

does not risk being manipulated by ersatz democrats such as the once German Democratic Republic or the elite politics in the People's Republic of China. Although the only and central aim of this paper is to show that identifying the subjectivity of democracy makes a significant difference in an empirical study, it would be good to not avoid the real possibility of becoming 'lost' in the Wittgensteinian word-game of democracy's conceptions: there must be some rigid definition of it that can accommodate different praxes over time. By re-deploying Gagnon's method in a manner that could conform to these cosmopolitan expectations, a definition of democracy so robust as to avoid having to enter the 'niggling grounds' of explaining what democracy 'means' in an empirical work could be achieved.

### Clarifying 'Democracy'

Nevertheless, the aforementioned is beyond the scope of this work. Therefore the simple conceptualisation of 'democracy' to be used is that not enough is known about it. This recent conceptual frame from Dunn (see Dunn and Gagnon 2011) argues that there are many different conceptualisations of democracy which have enough similarity to fend off the ersatz whilst at the same time being uncertain.

It is necessary to justify how this uncertainty over democracy exists as Dunn's argument may come to some as a surprise. The cosmopolitan turn in social theory plays a central role here. So too, do the works of Isakhan and Stockwell (2011, 2011a, 2013), Keane (2009) and Seeley (2011) as well as a reading into the extant literature created by archaeologists and anthropologists who investigate early human or hominid societal organization (for example Diamond 1997, 2005, and Fukuyama 2011). A synthesis of these works reveals two important points: the first is that a number of works concerning 'democracy' are being done in time periods that greatly pre-date Classical Greece or the revolutionary periods of countries near the North Atlantic. Some also investigate societies with minimal or no contact with other peoples. The second is that there is a surprisingly robust set of arguments concerning non-human democratic practices in various animal societies like those of certain bees, ants, and gorillas. Should it be considered that 'democracy' might be a form of government and governance that the human species evolved with, then there might be a greater degree of legitimacy to the idea that 'democracy' is for all peoples and that all peoples at one stage or another had various types of democratic organization.

The aforementioned has created a crisis in the way we 'used to think' about democracy. It used to be foundational in numerous places and times (ancient Athens, Republican Rome, representation-era England for example). But that has now by necessity given way to uncertainty until we can reach a new and acceptable foundation that is 'truth' to global humanity. This does not exist today which is possibly why Dunn argues that the only definition for democracy is that we do not have one. We've but guesses glued together from the potsherds of history. Many giant gaps remain — our

vase is fragile.

To understand this point further, the 'false narrative of democracy' needs some attention. Isakhan (2011) explained this narrative in a clear and convincing manner. He argued that the normative understanding of 'democracy', which it appears is still prevalent in recent literature (see Dahl 1989, Qvortup 2004, Brown 2004, Fleck and Andrew 2006 and Woltermann 2011 for example), is that it is a form of government and governance invented by the Greek or typically the Athenians concerning their form of direct democracy. As the story goes, 'democracy' was then taken up by the Roman Republic which consequently lost it to empire and decline. It then came back from the dead after approximately a thousand years, a construct usually associated with the end of the 'dark ages', in the form of rediscovered Greek texts, the *Magna Charta* and the much later North Atlantic revolutions. The story then moves to arguing that 'democracy' had undergone a period of maturation in European and North American governments and that, in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, it was then ready for export to other countries and peoples who were ignorant of 'democracy' as it was not invented in their histories. Other more accommodating readings of this narrative often include mention of Italian city-state republics and Swiss cantons,<sup>8</sup> but it is difficult to deny that this narrative (however one reads it) is orientalist and smacks of 'Western'<sup>9</sup> pomposity. It might also be clear to a variety of critical thinkers that this standard narrative is parochial and flawed because much of thinking that has gone into it was using parochial theoretical presumptions.

If the works of thinkers like Beck and Grande (2010, p. 409), Held (Held and Gagnon, 2011, p. 1-18), Fukuyama (2011), Weale (2007), Whitehead (2001), Isakhan and Stockwell (2011), Keane (2009), Watkins (2008), Cunningham (2000), Ober,<sup>10</sup> Lo,<sup>11</sup> Dunn (Dunn and Gagnon, 2011) or Jahanbegloo (Jahanbegloo and Gagnon, 2011) were grouped together there is a point of delineation between what was presumed to be 'democracy' and what is now understood and doubted about 'democracy.'

This standard narrative does not logically fit with the new narrative and presumably will not fit with a global study of what 'democracy' might be. The standard narrative is problematic because it leaves out many diverse political histories and, without considering those histories, the standard understanding of 'democracy' is potentially flawed by a lack of knowledge. This new understanding of 'democracy' invalidates the standard understanding's claim as to knowing what 'democracy' is and how others should be going about it. However, if the standard understanding could be labelled a 'Western' understanding of 'democracy' it could legitimately continue to be recognised for the brilliant work that has happened over centuries in its regional group of thinking.<sup>12</sup> Because it is not appropriate for 'democracy' to be extrapolated globally it should also not be simply termed 'democracy' but something more specific as qualified by a subjective disclaimer.

A difficulty with this paper is that the argument does not go into great detail concerning how 'democracy' is used by authors in both datasets. To explain further, semantic analysis or other content analysis methodologies are not used herein. This was specifically avoided because it is not necessary to make this point. This paper is straddling a fine line: it is attempting to argue in a normative fashion that scholars are still using 'democracy' in their works in a problematic way, but that this can improve across the board through the simple 'disclaimer' method — at least until such a time as 'democracy' can be conceived of in a post-foundationalist (Eckersley, 2011) manner. It is hoped that this primarily logic-based argument will not prove Gordian and that it will serve, in whatever small way, to create greater clarity in the empirical studies of 'democracy' or those studies that involve 'democracy' as a variable.

Recalling the earlier mentioned arguments from Sartori, he made it very clear that it is the thinker's responsibility to provide conceptual clarity wherever possible which, in some anxiety, is something hopefully achieved throughout this article. Sartori argues that this removes unnecessary ambiguity or nebulosity from a work which is a boon to the reader and other researchers. As mentioned earlier, the by-pass empiricists have tried to make by focusing on quantifiable institutions solely targeting elections did not meet this demand.

The 'missing ingredient' in empirical arguments of democracy having no non-parochial universal definition leads to the necessity for authors to tell the reader what he or she means when using 'democracy' in his or her work. This, however, is not often done in the majority of recent empirical literature. There are at least two possible reasons for this is: the first is a widespread flaw in the theoretical understanding of 'democracy' as a concept or how it is better used as a term. The second is negligence or ignorance of the issue. Other studies would be useful to show which reason is most predominant or what other possibilities might be.

### Justifications

It must be considered why works were selected from 2005-2011 and why, for that matter, from the journal *Political Analysis*. That temporal period was targeted to provide contemporary evidence showing that this 'democracy' problem in empirical analyses exists. Staying between those years has its drawbacks with the most noticeable being that many authors, especially in the second dataset (D2), have dealt with the definitional issues of 'democracy' in their earlier works. Taking this into account, the second dataset was assigned a comparative role: something that can be drawn from to help analyse the first data set which focuses on the way 'democracy' is used in contemporary empirical political analyses. However, as will come to be seen, the point still stands that despite earlier definitional work the authors of empirical analyses should still deploy the use of a disclaimer if the concept or term 'democracy' appears therein.

The first data-set, here to forth referred to as 'D1', (see Appendix A under Ancillary Material at the end of this paper) is a sample of thirty works from 2005-2010 published by the journal *Political Analysis*. Articles from this journal were chosen because this journal has a high impact factor and is well-regarded by academics internationally as a leader in high-quality empirical political analysis (e.g. Gary King). Despite the 'American' leanings the journal has, it does produce studies 'for the world' and it is in this journal that the solution to the problem lies. That fits the exact needs of this study. The thirty articles were chosen randomly by the fact that they had used 'democracy' in some way.

The goal of this study is to see how the authors of those papers approached the use of 'democracy' in their works. These papers are highly technical, often focusing on but one aspect of democratic processes and that they are ultimately not meant to dwell on the ontological basis of the concept and definitional aspects of 'democracy'. And this helps to explain that the argument in this paper is not one that is critical of why 'democracy' was not better explained in the thirty papers although widely known, this is because it is impractical to engage the definitional issues of 'democracy'. There is simply no space to do so in an empirical work tangentially using democracy as a variable for example. But by justifying the 'how' of 'democracy' in their work (the disclaimer) more robustly this removes the need to be bothered with the 'why': that is completely central and may very well 'do Sartori proud'. This disclaimer could give the impressive methodological arguments seen in twenty-five of those thirty papers greater clarity.

The second data-set, or 'D2', (see Appendix B at the end of this article) is a sample of monographs and edited collections from 2006-2011 that are to varying extents addressing 'democracy' published by academic presses. D2 is included in this study, as outlined above, because it demonstrates that a citation by the author of an empirical study is not enough as the conceptions of 'democracy' in *all* of D2 are subjective. Even with a citation, the author of an empirical study needs to place a disclaimer.

The authors of empirical studies often direct the reader to monographs written, for example, by Lijphart who uses a reason-based argument when discussing what he means by 'democracy' which is not compatible with any of the recent developments in the new understanding of democracy. This is due to the ontology used in his work. This criticism would not be valid if Lijphart used a cosmopolitan methodology (but that in many ways is an anachronism). It appears that the authors in these articles who refer to Lijphart or other thinkers may reason that these publications are authoritatively explaining what 'democracy' is. But this is not the case. Depending on the reference, the meaning of 'democracy' can change: indeed, a number of references are made to entire monographs without designating page numbers for the reader to gain a better sense of 'democracy' in the empiricist's study.

Because of the aforementioned it seems reasonable to argue that, despite providing a reference, particular care should still be taken to tell the reader what is meant (if ever so briefly for articles dealing only in passing with 'democracy') in order to situate the author's subjective meaning of 'democracy' within the extant literature. This may have the ability to remove a degree of ambiguity from the argument and may help the reader to understand the author's findings to a greater degree, especially if 'democracy' plays a central role in the work. This may also have the effect of reducing the number of studies extrapolating parochial findings on the globe as one 'democracy' may not necessarily be relevant to countries with different 'democracy'. However, the obverse may also be true. The authors of the articles in D1 may legitimately argue that their works are not parochial and may be relevant to different notions of 'democracy'. It is just that this is not in majority convincingly done. It is not seen how their works are capable of doing so because it is not seen how 'democracy' is subjectively situated in their arguments.

To finish with the justificatory arguments, it would be good to question the assumptions made in various quantitative empirical indices concerning 'democracy' as these are frequently used in empirical analyses. The block quote below explains the now out-dated but still cited Polity III index:

The Polity III dataset is a modified and updated version of the widely used Polity II dataset (ICPSR89). Polity III updates and, in some instances, alters the Polity II data (on the modifications see JPR95). Included in the Polity III time-series dataset are two indicators of regime type (Autocracy and Democracy) and eight indicators of political authority (Regulation of Executive Recruitment, Competitiveness of Executive Recruitment, Openness of Executive Recruitment, Monocratism, Constraints on Chief Executive, Regulation of Political Participation, Competitiveness of Political Participation, and Centralization of State Authority). (Jagers and Gurr, 1996)

Several questions<sup>13</sup> initially come to mind after reading this quote. Why is there a considerable focus on the executive body, on participation, and centralization? Should there not also be consideration for the boundaries of citizenship, the nature of that citizenry's sovereignty, its understandings of equality, the way in which it challenges or influences law, the nature of communication, and the ways in which officials are selected? There seems to be confusion here between government type and type of governance which is another example of how it is problematic to conceptualise 'democracy' as it can be viewed as both a form of government and a form of governance. It is also a static concept that is complex and because of this authors should be weary of assuming that readers or even nearest colleagues would have the same understanding of it. Ultimately, authors should also be wary of what indices are measuring and terming 'democracy' as their dependent variables might not be relevant or may lose their relevance in countries that have different understandings of 'democracy' than do the theoretical underpinnings on which these indices rely. This argument can be made for

Freedom House, Polity IV, and the Economist's popular measurement of 'democracy' as these are the indices primarily investigated herein.

## **Problematic Uses of 'Democracy' in D1**

D1 will be investigated in a manner that shows the difficulty of forming a globally consensual definition of 'democracy' rather than disparaging this body of literature for not having done so. Remarkably, and the reason this paper exists, is because empiricists have solved this problem (but that is to come further below). In order to understand the solution to the difficulties that 'democracy' is posing, a few examples of how works have addressed the issue poorly is pertinent.

Wilson and Butler's<sup>14</sup> examination of Reich's (1999) and Poe and Tate's (1994) statistical robustness resulted in the mention of 'democracy'. It appears that neither Reich nor Poe and Tate indicated what they were exactly referring to when they themselves mentioned 'democracy'. Reich (1999, p. 737) stipulated that he depended on Polity III's index along with several other indices such as those generated by Freedom House,<sup>15</sup> Bollen (1980, p. 370), and Vanhanen (2000). This diversification of indices, however, is a positive development as it reduces the author's dependence on one particular concept of 'democracy'. Bollen stated,

A researcher wishing to test...hypotheses faces a number of difficulties. One central problem is the controversy surrounding the measurement of political democracy. These measurement problems can drastically affect empirical results. (Bollen, 1980: 370)

Bollen argued that his method of indexing democracies was better than others used prior to his argument. But here under this critical light his work only helps to further establish the current paradigm of how 'democracy' is problematically measured in empirical political analysis, rather than settling the 'democracy' debate. It sometimes seems that institutions typically for elections and how they function have become synonymous with 'democracy' rather than parts of 'democracy'. This mode of thinking developed because scholars wanted to distinguish what is actual democracy (real existing democracies) from the claimants the ersatz in a climate of vague theory. As de Schweinitz<sup>16</sup> observed:

Democracy is one of those troublesome words which means all things to all people. Like motherhood and patriotism, it is thought to be a noble condition and is evoked by politicians, publicists, preachers, and demagogues to prove their unsullied intentions and just claim to popular support. (Bollen, 1980, P. 371)

Bollen (1980, p. 372) described 'political democracy' as 'the extent to which the

political power of the elite is minimised and that of the non-elite is maximised,' meaning that his measurement could concentrate on trying to gauge the degree of sovereignty the citizenry have. But rather than focus intently in that direction (understandably the theoretical parameters to do so were not yet developed), he takes a different approach by bringing Dahl (1956), Downs (1957), Lenski (1976), and Lipset (1959) into the scenario and focused primarily on elections and liberties so as to populate indirect variables in order to measure the power of the non-elite. In this example we see that the shift from trying to settle the 'debate that surrounds the definition of democracy' became a focus on institutions whilst the subjective definitions of 'democracy' became acceptable to base empirical studies upon. This situation may be problematic because the results relate to the exact meaning the researcher has of 'democracy'. It is subjective and may be less legitimate when this is extrapolated in an attempt to fit over other perceptions and practices of 'democracy' — especially those that fit normative expectations or models of 'democracy' that can be rigorously argued to not be ersatz.

Here are some examples of uses where the disclaimer is not given: Grimmer (2010, p. 3) mentions deliberative democracy but gives no further details pertaining to that particular style. Is deliberative democracy the concept of 'democracy' agreed upon by Senators? Perhaps more importantly, where in the now massive literature on deliberative democracy is Grimmer situating his conception? Wilson and Butler (2007, p. 112), Jusko and Shively (2005, p. 339), Plümper and Troeger (2007, p. 126) and Ho et al (2007, p. 217) make mention of 'democracy' but do not define it, as do Krehbiel, Meirowitz and Romer (2005, p. 114) and Jackson and Sides (2006, p. 208) regarding representative democracy; Mustillo (2009, p. 317, 322) concerning transitions to 'democracy'; Sambanis and Michaelides (2009, p. 97-98) when discussing democratic counterfactuals; and Hood, Kidd and Morris (2008, p. 324) when describing the Granger test as being capable of answering questions such as the causal relationship between 'democracy' and economy. Whilst the Granger test's capacities are not doubted, the example used by the authors is less accurate by their use of 'democracy'. As 'democracy' was not explained by the authors their example could be less clear because the reader might be using his or her own subjective understanding of the term or concept in relation to the Granger test's result — that could possibly be contrary to Hood, Kidd and Morris' intentions for the reader.

Continuing, Kern and Hainmueller (2009, p. 379) argued that West German television familiarised East Germans with the freedoms and liberties and the functioning of 'democracy' which undermined the communist regime. The reader is here confronted with similar questions to those that arose in the brief look at democracy indices made earlier in this work. Which liberties and freedom? What exactly is the functioning of 'democracy'? The authors refer primarily to O'Donnell, Schmitter, and Whitehead (1986) but despite this work's many impressive merits it does not answer the question of what 'democracy' is. The work (O'Donnell, Schmitter and Whitehead 1986,

p. 6) seems to advocate that a liberal civil society based on Gramsci's 'historical bloc' argument is a key to 'democracy' (which it may be)<sup>17</sup> but this was not given by Kern and Hainmueller.

Davidov's (2009) study based on the International Social Survey Program<sup>18</sup> (ISSP) continues this trend. The survey asks respondents questions like: 'how proud are you of the way democracy works?' (Davidov 2009, p. 68). This question is problematic as every respondent has a different understanding of 'democracy'. The question could be modified to ask the respondent to answer firstly 'what is democracy' and then 'how proud of it are you?' In that manner a more precise understanding of 'democracy' could be gained. The quantitative results may be weaker in this case because the respondents were replying to different conceptualizations of 'democracy' since no disclaimer of that sort was made.

Laslier (2006) is another example of this difficulty. The author seems to suppose that the reader or other researcher that would like to reproduce his work will come to have the same 'point of view of democracy' as he does. As can be seen in the block quote below, should Laslier have avoided using the term 'democracy', and instead discussed the virtue of approval voting from a viewpoint of it being a process of a certain kind of democracy, he would have ducked this criticism.

The present article stresses the fact that approval voting is interesting from another point of view. Apart from the identity of who is finally elected, an election held under the approval voting rule provides a more accurate picture of the political space. This point in itself is valuable from the point of view of democracy. (Laslier 2006, p. 176)

Continuing, Clarke (2007, p. 358) described Huth and Allee's (2002) study of political accountability as having six variables, most of which interact with 'democracy'. However, Huth and Allee did not define what 'democracy' is which may potentially make both studies confusing. Sanders et al (2007) offer another example in this argument:

Democracy dissatisfaction: On the whole, are you satisfied or dissatisfied with the way that democracy works in this country? (Response options: very satisfied, fairly satisfied, a little dissatisfied, very dissatisfied, do not know, refused). (Sanders et al 2007, 282)

At this point, we can argue that the question above is inappropriate. How can 'democracy' be considered a dependent variable if it is not defined to the individual? As each respondent has a different understanding of 'democracy' the survey results may not be as robust as they could be. Hug (2010) discussed 'democracy' regarding the Polity IV Democracy scale as a variable but did not discuss what 'democracy' is or what Regan and Norton (2005) considered it to be. Kedar and Shively (2005: 297), in their

discussion of comparative politics, referred to 'democracy' as being a 'macro level' variable. However, 'democracy' can be argued to have no such agreed-upon macros. The fact that a variety of indices measuring 'democracy' (such as the Economist's Democracy Index, L. J. Diamond's great democracy indexing work, and other NGO and MNO score cards) does not override the argument that democratic theory has not yet established the macro parameters of a post-universal democratic variable. The use of 'democracy' in this sense is problematic and can cast doubt onto the relevancy of any political analysis concerning 'democracy' unless the variable is specifically defined to the reader.<sup>19</sup>

Continuing, Huber, Kernell and Leoni's (2005, p. 362, 382) argument about individual attachments to political parties relies on 'democracy' for the argument to function. In the case of this article, the authors cite Polity IV's ten point scale to ascertain which democracies would be involved in their study (as do Brambor, Clark, and Golder 2006, and Box-Steffensmeier, De Boef, and Joyce 2007). Systemic Peace (the creators of the Polity analyses) described the parameters of their study in the following way:

This perspective envisions a spectrum of governing authority that spans from *fully institutionalized autocracies* through *mixed, or incoherent, authority regimes* (termed 'anocracies') to *fully institutionalized democracies*. (www.systemicpeace.org/polity/polity4.htm, accessed January 14, 2012, 10:33 am)

The description made above has problems similar to those with other scales measuring 'democracy'. This argument is relevant to Arceneaux and Nickerson's (2009) reanalysis of Broz's large study of fiscal transparency and level of 'democracy' as the authors rely on the Polity III scale. Even if these projects had robust theoretical underpinnings the argument that they are parochial might still be made because this scale and its assumptions are not based on a cosmopolitan methodology. A future investigation into whether the theory behind Polity IV, or other scales, and whether such are compatible with recent developments in democratic theory seems called for. Continuing, King and Zeng (2006) refer to 'democracy' in their discussion of counterfactuals:

We now apply these methods of evaluating counterfactuals to address one of the most asked questions in political science: what is the effect of a democratic form of government (as compared to less democratic forms)? We study counterfactuals relating to the degree of democracy using data collected by the State Failure Task Force. (King and Zeng, 2006, p. 141)

The authors of the quote above rely on Esty et al's (1998) Phase II study of regime change. However, the Esty et al study does not define 'democracy' but rather defines one parameter of their study as 'liberal democracy' (Esty et al, 1998, p. 52). The

problem is that democratic institutions are culturally relevant entities that were created by various complex bodies and processes over time.<sup>20</sup> The literature has shown that an attempt to superimpose one type of democratic institution on a citizenry to which such is culturally alien is inappropriate. The 'democracy' which informs all other democracies (that post-universalist concept) is not defined by institutions. Institutions, it is argued, define the style of 'democracy'. Furthermore, measuring governments around the world using primarily a US-American liberal democracy<sup>21</sup> model is not compatible with non-parochial expectations that are now rather prevalent in political theory.

## Conceptualisations of 'Democracy' in D2

As earlier stipulated, this set of data has been assigned a comparative role. The intention is to investigate these works and to classify them based on how they have conceptualised 'democracy'. This is done to try and complete the argument made earlier in this work: specifically the aspect that empirical political analysts should not rely on citing one or more sources in the literature (even contemporary ones) to express what 'democracy' means but rather that this should be done to detail how the authors conceive 'democracy'. This argument goes further and stresses that depending on these works is an insufficient justification for extrapolating findings globally.

D2 will be analysed using Charmaz's (2006) grounded theory methodology and will classify the data into four sections: qualitative, quantitative, non-formal theory, and formal theory. The intention is to understand which technique thinkers in this body of data have used the most when conceptualizing 'democracy' and to simultaneously see if any of them happened to have used a method that may be termed a cosmopolitan methodology. It is hoped that this will make a small contribution to better understanding the way in which 'democracy' is conceptualised in contemporary work. The result of this study may be useful for a comparative analysis with literature between a different five year period (could 'democracy' have been conceptualised differently then and how?).

Figure 1 shows that nearly the entire majority of texts in D2 used non-formal theoretical methods when conceptualising 'democracy'. The one work which stood out was Diamond and Plattner's edited volume which drew on several different empirical analyses from contributors in an impressive attempt to understand how people in different regions understand 'democracy'. Although this work is admirable to a great extent, there is still the question of the theoretical underpinnings in each study the authors drew from. How did the researchers conceptualise 'democracy' and did this then impact the results? Another impressive feature of this work is that it almost had a cosmopolitan methodology about it as the work was gathering data from a diverse set of individuals across the globe. However, where it falls short of non-parochial expectations, is that it is used an understanding of 'democracy' rooted in the standard

narrative of 'democracy'.

**Figure 1 Contemporary Methods for Conceptualising 'Democracy'**

Qualitative	Quantitative	Non-Formal Theory	Formal Theory
0	1	29	0

### Improved Uses of 'Democracy' in D1

Kedar (2005, p. 413) mentioned that one factor which may lead to voters' perceptions of policy is the voters' naïve understanding of 'democracy'. But scholars might be falling prey to the same naïveté with 'democracy' as in this example the author depends solely on Lijphart's (1999) understanding of 'democracy.' Lijphart (1999, p. 1) began by providing a definition of 'democracy' as 'government by the people'. He then provided definitions of representative democracy and then concisely provided the differentiation between majoritarian and consensus or negotiation styles of democracy (1999, p. 2). However, Lijphart's initial premise of 'democracy' as government by the people is too vague: it could mean any variety of things. Furthermore, Lijphart used the consensus and majoritarian styles of democracy as his theoretical base point which underlines his analysis. Kedar (2005, p. 418) showed how difficult this 'democracy' concept can be when stating 'Lijphart...famously offers a two-dimensional conceptual map of democracy...'. What Lijphart appears to have offered is a contrasting 10 point scale that can be used to measure a polity's tendencies towards either a consensus or majoritarian style of democracy and not 'democracy' itself.

But this is where matters turn around. The solution to the use of 'democracy' appears to have almost come by chance. For example, Monroe, Colaresi and Quinn (2008) recognised the limits to using 'democracy':

Contemporary representative democratic systems are shaped, perhaps defined, by the relationships among citizens, elected representatives, political parties, and the substance of politics. Creating tools to analyze these relationships, and how they interconnect dynamically over the life of a democracy, is a fundamental challenge to political methodology. (Monroe, Colaresi and Quinn 2008, p. 298)

Following Monroe, Colaresi and Quinn's mention of the 'fundamental challenge to political methodology', there are some other examples in the data. Lewis and Linzer (2005, p. 360) approach 'democracy' in their article through the nature of their argument. The authors recognised that 'democracy' is an estimated value due to the variety of indices, scales, and classifications that exist regarding the measuring of 'democracy'. They cite Cohen's (2004) democracy classification model as the definition of their dependent variable and base part of their critique off it. This is a strong example of authors carefully engaging 'democracy' in an empirical analysis.

Macdonald, Rabinowitz and Listhaug's (2007) work is another strong example for good use of democratic terminology. They refer specifically to a 'typical European multiparty democracy' (Macdonald, Rabinowitz and Listhaug 2007, p. 409) in the case of Norway, and then provide evidence concerning political competitiveness and fragmentation. The authors state a style of democracy and link that style to others of similar nature in Europe, which is a positive step forward as they have provided the reader with the context and contours of their conceptualisation of 'democracy'. Brandt and Freeman (2009) continue,

Although some variables in macropolitical processes clearly are exogenous, we believe that others are both a cause and a consequence of each other. For example, *our understanding of democracy* [emphasis added] implies that there is some popular accountability for economic policy and thus endogeneity between popular evaluations of the economy and macroeconomic outcomes (or policies). (Brandt and Freeman 2009, p. 114)

Here the authors do not explain what democracy is, but rather share that their understanding of it implies certain things. They succeed in not drawing in the reader's own notions of 'democracy' and they do not waste space on the tangent of explaining in detail concerning what they think 'democracy' is as this would be highly marginal to their central argument. McDonald and Best (2006) serve as a further example,

Put differently, in any democracy that could be labeled stable and competitive, it is difficult to imagine a theory of voting that would disavow the roles of equilibria vote divisions and short-lived deviations. (McDonald and Best 2006, p.370)

The authors used democracy in what may be considered a more appropriate way. By stating 'in any democracy that could be labeled...' they are removing the onus to define what they mean by 'democracy' and as such their work becomes more relevant to the reader. Bianco et al (2008, p. 129) are another example of how 'democracy' was specifically used. The authors described a style of democracy 'formal majority rule democracy' and furthermore provided a citation to McKelvey (1976) which sheds further light on what formal majority rule inherently means. Finally, Herrera and Kapur (2007) also demonstrate a clear usage:

...take democracy as the concept of interest to us. Depending on our *definition of the concept*, [emphasis added] dimensions might include fairness of elections or civil liberties... (Herrera and Kapur 2007, 367)

The authors broached the subject in a convincing way by stating 'depending on our definition of the concept' which—like Bianco et al—keeps the reader from confusing definitions. It bypasses the fact that 'democracy' has no post-universalist definition *and* recognises the need to disclaim the parochial nature of a particular 'democracy'. It is, in

short, a coup for solving a long-standing problem between political theory and empirical political analyses. There is a proven path in the literature regarding the way 'democracy' is used in empirical studies. It is the 'disclaimer' method and, as was hopefully shown in the arguments and evidence offered above, is clearly effective at bypassing the 'democracy' problem.

### Conclusion and Comparative Discussion

In D2, the non-formal category dominated the results.<sup>22</sup> Certain works, like Tilly's or Read's, did not out rightly stipulate for example 'this is what I see democracy as' but was a type of work wherein the reader must gradually learn how the author conceptualised 'democracy'. In cases like this, it also pays to investigate previous works as more often than not the author(s) will have explicitly conceptualised 'democracy' in them. This might also make the process of figuring out how a concept of 'democracy' in a later work may have changed significantly easier (for any wishing to track the morphology of Tilly's 'democracy' for example).

Certainly, it can be argued, that a better study would have been to survey thirty books specifically trying to define 'democracy'. However, such a study would not work with the argument that is trying to be made in this article: that the majority of contemporary political thinkers (whether empirical or theoretical) are not engaging the concept or term with sufficient care and clarity. Even if the term is of marginal importance to an article as it is for numerous pieces in D1, because it is such a problematic term it should either gain greater consideration to qualify what is meant by its inclusion or we avoid the concept entirely (as in the suggestion made earlier concerning Laslier's brilliant work). It is hoped that this small analysis of the D1 and D2 datasets, however, has shown convincing examples of where thinkers *have* taken care with 'democracy' and how doing so has benefitted their arguments. In a small way, this work may help to understand how to better address 'democracy'. It provides scholars with a tool, the 'disclaimer' method, which will allow empiricists to bypass theoretical difficulties with 'democracy' in their works. A future study looking at a large number of books specifically trying to define 'democracy' is, however, needed. So too is an analysis for measuring the clarifying impact of 'disclaimers'.

What are the consequences of not using a disclaimer? In the first instance it creates a degree of confusion in the work as aforementioned. Should the reader not understand what is meant by 'democracy', this creates a level of nebulosity which may take away the robust nature of an analysis. In the second instance, and especially in cases which use 'democracy' as a key term or concept, the misuse of the term could potentially warrant a complete reconsideration of the argument. But most importantly, the misuse of 'democracy' in a work may disempower other equally valid conceptualisations (and the populations behind them) by appearing to represent 'true' democracy when really the author is representing a specific concept of 'democracy' and a specific history or

population. Thus being careful with how we relate 'democracy' in our work to the reader may remove a degree of bias, may recognise and situate a parochialism in the argument, and will add clarity to the argument overall.

This was seen firstly by discussing the particular heuristics this work would be using (in the introduction) and then offering the evidence found in D1 in two sections: the first looked at the shortcomings present in the use of 'democracy' and the second looked at where scholars have made significant improvements. The analysis on the literature found in D2 was presented in an attempt to understand how certain contemporary political thinkers are conceptualising 'democracy' in books. D2 supported the point that a reference to a thinker is not sufficient to tell the reader what is meant by 'democracy'. A disclaimer is still needed. The results of both studies establish the central argument of this work: that 'democracy' is still problematically used in the literature, that it is most often conceptualised in a subjective manner, but that there is a way passed that problem by using a disclaimer.

### Notes

1. 'Democracy' may be considered another prime example of Ludwig Wittgenstein's language games (see Wittgenstein, 1953). The word's etymological variegations contribute to the difficulty of pinning it down exactly.
2. See Beck and Grande (2010); Keane (2009); as well as Isakhan and Stockwell (2011, 2013).
3. Post-universalism describes an ontology that specifically tries to avoid parochialisms—in that respect it is similar or the same to post-foundationalism as described by Wingenbach (2011, pp.3-19). In Beck and Grande (2010) the authors establish that should an argument for the entire world be made, it must include as internationally diverse research and thinking as possible. It differs from universalism. That ontology, often argued to be a condition of first modernity, takes a parochial starting point and then conducts research to make illegitimate arguments concerning the entire globe. The starting point for any argument in a post-universalist or post-foundationalist ontology must be global, complex, capacious, and 'just'. This is a fundamental aspect of a cosmopolitan methodology.
4. As broached in note #3, Beck and Grande (2010) called for a cosmopolitan turn in social sciences as previous, parochial, modes of thinking are argued to be insufficient to answer problems that are global in nature. Democracy (or a lack thereof) is a global problem. This ties-in with evidence from Isakhan and Stockwell (2011, 2013), as well as from the contributors to their volumes, that I use to say that democracy is a form of government and governance that we as humans evolved with. This argument has a growing basis in biology, anthropology and archaeology especially if we were to consider Seeley's (2011) opus *Honeybee Democracy*.
5. For example: Latin America, Africa, South East Asia, and the Pacific Island excluding Australia and New Zealand.

6. For example: China, Japan, Central Asia, and the Middle East.
7. A significant 'anti-parochial' expectation is derived from the paradigm of 2<sup>nd</sup> modernity. Therein, scholars are expected to pursue 'cosmopolitan' analytic frameworks and conceptual developments: this is a method that is not widely practiced perhaps because the possibility of defining concepts in this way becomes overly problematic. That being said, and as will be seen in over five examples, when a concept cannot be delivered in a non-parochial universal framework, to err on the side of caution and determine to the reader the subjective quality of a term (like democracy) to be used in a work makes a difference. For more, see Beck and Gagnon (2011) and Beck (2006).
8. This narrative has further problems as Weale (2007) argued. Because Ancient Athens and Swiss Cantons did not include slaves, metics and women (certain Swiss Cantons only extended the franchise to women in 1971) they should not be considered democratic.
9. The term 'Western' is placed in brackets throughout this article because it too is difficult to conceptualise as convincingly argued by Marquand (2011). This may also be said concerning other geopolitical terms such as the 'East,' 'Far East,' and to some degree 'European' (although Marquand has helped to clarify the conceptual boundaries of the latter). In this paper, 'West' concerns colonial Europe and her offshoots.
10. Josiah Ober; mainly a forthcoming work arguing that democracy in classical Athens was more than just voting and discussing by a select citizenry, it was about getting things done.
11. Sonny Lo; in a forthcoming work this thinker argues that previous efforts of democratization were flawed precisely because of the way democracy was conceptualised by all parties involved.
12. This work is not arguing that 'Western' or Classical conceptions of 'democracy' are worthless. Rather, these bodies form a critically robust literature that serve as a powerful tool for comparative politics. To give one example, should the possible varieties of growth in Baganda democracy (an indigenous people in Uganda that have their own non-European influenced traditional democratic systems) be considered, various typologies in 'Western' ideology that have advanced institutions, processes or theories can be comparatively looked at to see if any of those would be of use to the Baganda method. However, in the empirical realm, parochial assumptions in analyses which extrapolate their findings globally are often seen and this may lead to disempowering the Baganda democracy (in this scenario) as the Baganda may have their own understandings or desires about elections, voting and the institutions of campaigning. It may be said that the imposition of one conceptualisation of 'democracy' over another (even unintentional) is in itself non-democratic and a violation to some degree of fundamental rights.
13. Why is autocracy considered the opposite of democracy? Aristotle classified autocracy as the rule of one and democracy as the rule of all or many (mob in his critical view). In this spatial scale it makes perfect sense. But things become slightly difficult should we consider Keane's argument in *Life and Death*, 2009,

that in a 'democracy' there are no rulers. Does this invalidate the scale? Perhaps it still stands but builds on the Aristotelian argument that autocracy is the rule of one whilst democracy is the rule of none. However, this too is problematic as the rule of none brings to mind classical anarchism.

14. Wilson and Butler, 'A Lot More to Do.'
15. This organization publishes a yearly 'Freedom in the World' survey which monitors 'trends in democracy' among other variables. Should the reader look into the survey's 'key democracy indicators', many of the same questions encountered with the Polity III index are also present. For example, there are limitations to the way in which this survey contextualises democracy: why do elections take such prominence and how does Freedom House understand elections to be guarantors of 'democracy' when most, if not all elections, are considered flawed? Despite this, it can be seen that certain areas that the survey paid attention to conform to certain pieces in the 'new' literature. For one, there is a focus on violence as an enemy of democracy (p. 2) which is a central argument in Keane's work.
16. Karl de Schweinitz, *Industrialization and Democracy*, (Glencoe: Free Press, 1964).
17. In other areas of O'Donnell, Schmitter, and Whitehead the authors make reference to various styles of 'democracy', institutions currently affiliated with 'democracy', but do not give a post-universalist and empirically robust concept of 'democracy'.
18. International Social Survey Program (National Identity Module), 2003
19. Kedar and Shively (2005) were discussing multilevel variables. One could argue that by considering 'democracy' as inherently varied in theory that it has various levels to it. But this was not sufficiently explained in the work and appeared unclear as the reader is left to try to understand what a multilevel democracy may be and how this consideration of 'democracy' may then make it a suitable macro-level variable.
20. Przeworski, Stokes and Manin (1999) is a good source for this argument.
21. The literature suggests that US-American liberal democracy is dependent on various institutions and processes such as a written constitution, a Bill of Rights, the separation of powers, the act of voting, elections, a bi-cameral system, and some degree of tension between 'republican' and 'democratic' values. One may concede, however, that this term is a contested one and like 'democracy' or other typologies of 'democracy' it has a variety of conceptualisations.
22. Sundstrom, Soneryd and Furusten (2010) came close to using an empirical methodology in their work. However, they rationalised that democracy is 'formed' and 'reformed' (p. 2) and due to that it is necessary to understand and organise which values are *associated* with democracy so as to understand whether governance is enhancing or weakening democracy. This is different than trying to understand what a post-universalist democracy might be. It was also thought that Launis and Raikka (2007) might have used a qualitative method in their definition of democracy but they did not show their method and rather directed the reader to a few thinkers (see for example p. 17, footnotes 8-15).

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## ANCILLARY MATERIAL

## Appendix A: Dataset 1

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**Appendix B: Dataset 2**

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