Chapter-3

DEMOCRACY

As it is well-known, ancient Greece is the birthplace of democracy. The word democracy comes from the Greek and it literally means rule by the people. It is sometimes said that democratic government originated in the city states of ancient Greece. The Greeks gave us the word, but did not provide us with a model of democracy. Greek democracy was regarded a poor form of government by all the Greek philosophers and historians whose writings have survived, including Plato, Aristotle and Thucydides. The term democracy in its modern sense came into use during the course of the nineteenth century to describe a system of representative government in which the representatives are chosen by free competitive elections. Democracy is therefore a fairly new phenomenon in world history, though it is spreading.

Democracy is generally defined as a form of government in which all the people have an equal say in the decisions that affect their lives. Ideally, this includes equal participation in the proposal, development and passage of legislation into law. It can also encompass social, economic and cultural conditions that enable the free and equal practice of political self-determination.

As an ideal, it has become the dominant political objective in the world today. Political philosopher contains writings advocating, criticising and analyzing the idea of democracy. The ideal of democracy has never been universally accepted. It has been, and this remain true, critised both by those who become democracy but see existing reality as falling far short of that ideal, and also by those who reject the democratic ideal out of hand.

The ideals of democracy are, therefore, problematic, both in terms of what they mean and how they can be justified, as well as in the ways and the extent to which they can be realized in practice. Democracy is the Political
Empowerment of the People. Democracy originally meant “rule by the people.” An important component of democracy in its original formulation was the ideal of the citizens’ direct participation in the legislative and political decision-making process. Democracy is an idea. It is developed as an analytic concept, a normative ideal, a political presentation, and an empirical description. It’s meaning slide among these usages. The idea of democracy is real in its far reaching consequences.

On democracy as idea, starts from the argument that political concepts such as democracy are “essentially contested” we can not, therefore, necessarily agree on their core meaning. Their meanings will depend on the ways in which they are used in specific historical contexts. This perspective opens a bridge between historical narrative and conceptual analysis with which both historians and political philosophers tend to feel uncomfortable. It then explores the elementary forms of democratic politics and the non democratic conditions of democracy. It critically examines alternative conceptions of democracy; showing that they cannot get round the essential contestedness of the concept.

3.1 Definitions of Democracy

If we start from the lexical definition democracy means the rule of the people. We immediately run into the problem of how, in practical terms, to define the people and how to define the meaning. In the so called real world of politics, democracy continues to be an essentially contested concept.

U.S. president Abraham Lincoln (1809-1865) defined democracy as:

“Government of the people, by the people, for the people”

1. “A constitution [or politeia] may be defined as ‘the organization of a city or polis in respect of its offices generally, but especially in respect of that particular office which is sovereign in all issues. . . . In democratic cities, for example, the people demosis sovereign. . . . When the masses govern
the city with a view to the common interest, the form of government is called by the generic name... of ‘constitutional government’... Democracy is directed to the interest of the poor only, not to the interests of everyone--WR.”(Aristotle 1995, 97-101) 1

2. “Democracy is not majority rule: democracy is diffusion of power, representation of interests, and recognition of minorities.” (John Calhoun, as paraphrased by Roper 1989, 63) 2

3. Democracy is “the substitution of election by the incompetent many for appointment by the corrupt few.” (G.B. Shaw, quoted in Danziger 1998, 155) 3

4. Democracy is “government by the people; that form of government in which the sovereign power resides in the people as a whole, and is exercised either directly by them... or by officers elected by them.” (Oxford English Dictionary, )

5. A definition of the ideal: “Government by the people, where liberty, equality and fraternity are secured to the greatest possible degree and in which human capacities are developed to the utmost, by means including free and full discussion of common problems and interests.” (Pennock, 1979,) 4

6. “The competitive electoral context, with several political parties organizing the alternatives that face the voters, is the identifying property of the contemporary democratic process... Democratic systems are... characterized by competitive elections in which most citizens are eligible to participate.” (Powell 1982,) 5

7. “Democracy is a form of institutionalization of continual conflicts... and of uncertainty, of subjecting all interests to uncertainty...” (Przeworski 1986) 5

8. A ‘democratic regime’ is “first and foremost a set of procedural rules for arriving at collective decisions in a way which accommodates and
facilitates the fullest possible participation of interested parties.” (Bobbio 1987, 7)

9. “Democracy is a system in which parties lose elections. There are parties: divisions of interest, values and opinions. There is competition, organized by rules. And there are periodic winners and losers.” (Przeworski 1991.) 8

10. “Modern political democracy is a system of governance in which rulers are held accountable for their actions in the public realm by citizens, acting indirectly through the competition and cooperation of their elected representatives.” (Schmitter and Karl 1991) 9

11. “Democracy is a political system in which different groups are legally entitled to compete for power and in which institutional power holders are elected by the people and are responsible to the people.” (Vanhaninen 1997) 10

12. “Democracy provides opportunities for 1) effective participation, 2) equality in voting, 3) gaining enlightened understanding, 4) exercising final control [by the people over the agenda, and 5) inclusion of adults.”

The political institutions that are necessary to pursue these goals are “1) elected officials, 2) free, fair and frequent elections, 3) freedom of expression, 4) alternative sources of information, 5) associational autonomy, and 6) inclusive citizenship.” (Dahl 1998) 11

13. Democracy is “governance by leaders whose authority is based on a limited mandate from a universal electorate that selects among genuine alternatives and has some rights to political participation and opposition.” (Danziger 1998, 159)

14. “Democrats are committed to rule by the people. They insist that no aristocrat, monarch, philosopher, bureaucrat, expert, or religious leader has the right, in virtue of such status, to force people to accept a particular conception of their proper common life. (Shapiro 1999), 12
In a democracy important public decisions on questions of law and policy depend, directly or indirectly, upon public opinion formally expressed by citizens of the community, the vast bulk of whom have equal political rights.” (Weale 1999)\textsuperscript{13}

In the light of these definitions it is clear that the term democracy is not definable. There is always a dispute and disagreement in its definitions and analysis. It can therefore be inferred that the term democracy is an essentially contested concept and full fills all the seven conditions that Gallie has considered requisite for a concept being essentially contested.

3.2 History of Democracy

The term Democracy first appeared in ancient Greek political and philosophical thought. The Greek city state of Athens, led by Cleisthenes, established what is generally held as the first democracy in 507 BCE. Cleisthenes is referred to as "the father of Athenian democracy". The Athenian philosopher Plato contrasted democracy, the system of "rule by the governed", with the alternative systems of monarchy (rule by one individual), oligarchy (rule by a small elite class) and timocracy (ruling class of property owners). Today Classical Athenian democracy is considered by many to have been a direct democracy.\textsuperscript{14}

During the Middle Ages, there were various systems involving elections or assemblies, although often only involving a small amount of the population, the election of Gopala in Bengal, the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, the Althing in Iceland, the Løgting in the Faroe Islands, certain medieval Italian city-states such as Venice, the tuatha system in early medieval Ireland, the Veche in Novgorod and Pskov Republics of medieval Russia, Scandinavian Things, The States in Tirol and Switzerland and the autonomous merchant city of Sakai in the 16th century in Japan. However, participation was often restricted to a minority, and so may be better classified
as oligarchy. Most regions in medieval Europe were ruled by clergy or feudal lords.

20th century transitions to liberal democracy have come in successive "waves of democracy," variously resulting from wars, revolutions, decolonization, religious and economic circumstances. World War I and the dissolution of the Ottoman and Austro-Hungarian empires resulted in the creation of new nation-states from Europe, most of them at least nominally democratic.

In the 1920s democracy flourished, but the Great Depression brought disenchantment, and most of the countries of Europe, Latin America, and Asia turned to strong-man rule or dictatorships. Fascism and dictatorships flourished in Nazi Germany, Italy, Spain and Portugal, as well as nondemocratic regimes in the Baltics, the Balkans, Brazil, Cuba, China, and Japan, among others. 15

World War II brought a definitive reversal of this trend in western Europe. The successful democratization of the American, British, and French sectors of occupied Germany (disputed), 16 Austria, Italy, and the occupied Japan served as a model for the later theory of regime change.

However, most of Eastern Europe, including the Soviet sector of Germany was forced into the non-democratic Soviet bloc. The war was followed by decolonization, and again most of the new independent states had nominally democratic constitutions. India emerged as the world's largest democracy and continues to be so. 17

By 1960, the vast majority of country-states were nominally democracies, although the majority of the world's populations lived in nations that experienced sham elections, and other forms of subterfuge (particularly in Communist nations and the former colonies.)

We shall examine in the proceeding lines the contestability of the word democracy as analyzed by Gallie and others:
3.3 Forms of Democracy

Democracy has taken a number of forms, both in theory and practice. The following kinds are not exclusive of one another: many specify details of aspects that are independent of one another and can co-exist in a single system.

Representative democracy involves the selection of government officials by the people being represented. If the head of state is also democratically elected then it is called a democratic republic.\(^\text{18}\) The most common mechanisms involve election of the candidate with a majority or a plurality of the votes.

Representatives may be elected or become diplomatic representatives by a particular district (or constituency), or represent the entire electorate proportionally proportional systems, with some using a combination of the two. Some representative democracies also incorporate elements of direct democracy, such as referendums. A characteristic of representative democracy is that while the representatives are elected by the people to act in the people's interest, they retain the freedom to exercise their own judgment as how best to do so.

Parliamentary democracy is a representative democracy where government is appointed by representatives as opposed to a 'presidential rule' wherein the President is both head of state and the head of government and is elected by the voters. Under a parliamentary democracy, government is exercised by delegation to an executive ministry and subject to ongoing review, checks and balances by the legislative parliament elected by the people.\(^\text{19}\) Parliamentary systems have the right to dismiss a Prime Minister at any point in time that they feel he or she is not doing their job to the expectations of the legislature. This is done through a Vote of No Confidence where the legislature decides whether or not to remove the Prime Minister from office by a majority support for his or her dismissal.\(^\text{20}\) The Prime
Minister can also call an election whenever he or she so chooses. Typically the Prime Minister will hold an election when he or she knows that they are in good favor with the public as to get re-elected.

Presidential Democracy is a system where the public elects the president through free and fair elections. The president serves as both the head of state and head of government controlling most of the executive powers. The president serves for a specific term and cannot exceed that amount of time. By being elected by the people, the president can say that he is the choice of the people and for the people. Elections typically have a fixed date and aren’t easily changed. Combining head of state and head of government makes the president not only the face of the people but as the head of policy as well. The president has direct control over the cabinet, the members of which are specifically appointed by the president himself. The president cannot be easily removed from office by the legislature. While the president holds most of the executive powers, he cannot remove members of the legislative branch any more easily than they could remove him from office. This increases separation of powers. This can also create discord between the president and the legislature if they are of separate parties, allowing one to block the other. This type of democracy is not common around the world today due to the conflicts to which it can lead.

3.4 Gallie’s essentially contested concept in relation to democracy

In 1956 W.B. Gallie argued that aesthetic, ethical, and political concepts, such as Art, or Democracy, are “essentially contested.” Though we may agree broadly on the elements that constitute a concept and on classic exemplars of its meaning in use, we can not always expect to reach agreement on its meaning or its proper application. These will be a matter for continuing argument. We can not necessarily agree on an “ineliminable core” or find an “anchor” or lay down the outer limits to a concept. The contest is over its essence.
Since “essentially contested concepts” are used to appraise works of art, private and public actions, or social institutions, the contest may appear to be over the ways in which we each use them to suit our own aesthetic, moral, or political arguments. Are we confusing different concepts by attaching the same word to them and arguing past one another? Gallie’s argument has deeper roots than the observation that we suit our concepts to our political purposes. “Essentially contested concepts, “such as democracy, liberty, state, or power, are complex “clusters.”

Applying his first criterion Gallie considers its evaluative nature. The concept in itself is appraisive. It means that it can be defined in many ways. There are endless dispute. No two authors agree with the argument of one another. The appraisiveness also refers to the impossibility of the final argument. In short democracy is appraisive par excellence for the reason that the motivation behind it is normative and positive both.

Democracy is an essentially contested concept for it fulfils the second and third criteria. It means that democracy is internally complex and its programmes and achievement are variously describable. Internal complexity refers to the multi dimension of the concepts. Democracy is not only a form of government it includes in its meaning different other aspects and each of these aspects can be described in many ways. Its important aspects for examples (a) Democracy is a form of government giving the power of choice to the citizens of a country. (b) Democracy is the form of government providing all kind of equalities to the citizens and also gives opportunities to all political parties to establish their leadership in the society. (c) Active participation of all citizens in political life at all levels. All these aspects can be described variously. It would also determine the type of democracy that we have in particular country, like social democracy in Indonesia, direct democracy in Switzerland etc.

Democracy being an essentially contested concept is based on some exemplar. Gallie defines the exemplar as a long tradition or source of
inspiration which serves as a model for further establishment. Many British colonies gaining independence decided to follow British pattern of democracy. Many other countries drew inspiration from the French revolution. Similarly countries in Latin America and Africa followed one or the other model of democracy. For some seven Athenians model of democracy was quite fascinating. Thus if we go through the present democracies we will come to the conclusion that they are the outcome of one or the other model which become the source of inspiration.

The character of democracy is manifest in the competition of different uses. Even after being opposite to each other these uses are acknowledge and recognized. The opposite uses sometimes make the aims of democracy vague and achievement confused.

Thus democracy fulfils all the main and subsidiary conditions that Gallie has formulated for a concept to become essentially contested. The debate about democracy its achievement and importance are widely spread in different fields. We have before us many patterns of democracy, parliamentary democracy, presidential democracy, unitary structure, federal structure and so on. We believe that each if them has its own merits and demerits. The debate is still going on and we can come to yet some another conclusion. It proves that democracy is a progressive concept having many dimensions, aspects and programmes.

In his famous analysis of “essentially contested concepts,” the philosopher W. B. Gallie argues that democracy is “the appraising political concept par excellence.” Correspondingly, one finds endless disputes over appropriate meaning and definition. However, the goal of Gallie’s analysis is not simply to underscore the importance of such disputes, but to show that recognition of the contested status of a given concept opens the possibility of understanding each meaning within its own framework.
With reference to democracy, he argues that “politics being the art of the possible, democratic targets will be raised or lowered as circumstances alter,” and he insists that these alternative standards should be taken seriously on their own terms.

In this spirit, we focus on the procedural definitions that have been most widely employed in research on recent democratization at the level of national political regimes. These definitions refer to democratic procedures, rather than to substantive policies or other outcomes that might be viewed as democratic. These definitions are also “minimal,” in that they deliberately focus on the smallest possible number of attributes that are still seen as producing a viable standard for democracy; not surprisingly, there is disagreement about which attributes are needed for the definition to be practical. For example, most of these scholars differentiate what they view as the more specifically political features of the regime from characteristics of the society and economy, on the grounds that the latter are more appropriately analyzed as potential causes or consequences of democracy, rather than as features of democracy itself.

They share “family resemblances”, like Wittgenstein’s thread, their strength “does not reside in the fact that some one fibre runs through its whole length, but in the overlapping of many fibres.”

Their past and current usages include different elements, which are often in tension with one another. We may disagree on the relative weighting and priority of different elements or in the ways in which they need to relate to one another. These concepts are incomplete in themselves. They acquire their full meaning only when they are deployed in specific arguments and are used in specific social and historical contexts. There is thus scope for continuing dialogue as we each advance reasons for our preferred conceptions and applications of concepts. There are better and worse arguments, but no best or best possible answers.
(I) the concept of democracy which we are discussing is appraisive; indeed many would urge that during the last one hundred and fifty years it has steadily established itself as the appraisive political concept par excellence. Questions of efficiency and security apart, the primary question on any major policy-decision has come to be: Is it democratic? By contrast, the concept of liberty or more accurately, of particular liberties deserving protection irrespective of their democratic increase or appeal, appears gradually to have lost ground.

(II) And (III) The concept of democracy which we are discussing is internally complex in such a way that any democratic achievement (or programme) admits of a variety of descriptions in which its different aspects are graded in different orders of importance. (I) list as examples of different aspects (a) Democracy means primarily the power of the majority of citizens to choose (and remove) governments a power which would seem to involve, anyhow in larger communities, something like the institution of parties competing for political leadership; (b) Democracy means primarily equality of all citizens, irrespective of race, creed, sex, etc., to attain to positions of political leadership and responsibility; (c) Democracy means primarily the continuous active participation of citizens in political life at all levels, i.e., it is real when, and in so far as, there really is self-government. Of these descriptions (b) and (c) emphasize features of democracy which clearly can exist in greater or less degree and are therefore liable to be differently placed for relative importance. But does not description (a) state an absolute requirement and therefore a necessary condition of paramount importance perhaps even a sufficient condition of a democratic society? But we believe our claim to be confused; for all that our democratic practice may have been, to date, none the worse for that.

Suppose a society which answers in high degree to the conditions required by descriptions (b) and (c). In such a society government might reasonably be expected to show itself responsive, in considerable degree, to
movements of popular opinion. Yet this result does not necessarily require constitutionally recognized means (e.g., universal and secret ballot and the existence of competitive parties) for the wholesale removal of governments. The practice of certain churches which claim to satisfy proper democratic demands, here shows a curious parallel to those governments which insist on their democratic character while denying their citizens the right of “free election” on the western pattern. For this reason, as well as for others which space forbids me to elaborate here, we conclude that the popular conception of democracy conforms to conditions (II) and (III) for essential contestedness.

(IV) The concept of democracy which we are discussing is “open” in character. Politics being the art of the possible, democratic targets will be raised or lowered as circumstances alter, and democratic achievements are always judged in the light of such alterations.

(V) The concept of democracy which we are discussing is used both aggressively and defensively. This hardly requires discussion except by those who repudiate the suggestion that there is any single general use of the term “democracy”. Such people neglect the possibility of a single general use made up, essentially, of a number of mutually contesting and contested uses of it.

(VI) These uses claim the authority of an exemplar, i.e., of a long tradition (perhaps a number of historically independent but sufficiently similar traditions) of demands, aspirations, revolts and reforms of a common anti-inegalitarian character; and to see that the vagueness of this tradition in no way affects its influence as an exemplar, we need only recall how many and various political movements claim to have drawn their inspiration from the French Revolution.

(VII) That continuous competition for acknowledgement between rival uses of the popular concept of democracy seems likely to lead to an optimum development of the vague aims and confused achievements of the democratic
tradition? Is it not, rather, more likely to help fan the flames of conflict, already sufficiently fed by other causes, between those groups of men and nations that contest its proper use? It is not the job of the present analysis or of political philosophy in general, to offer particular predictions or advice on this kind of issue. We shall try to answer in generalized form below, viz., in what way should we expect current dog-fights over the concept of democracy to be affected if its essentially contested character were recognized by all concerned?²³

According to Gallie, ‘democracy’ is such a concept, at least as it is used in western industrial societies. It is an achievement valued by most. Commonly accepted criteria of its application are weighted differently by opposing parties, and certain criteria viewed as central by one party are rejected as inappropriate or marginal by others. Finally, arguments about its proper use turn on fundamental issues about which reasoned argument is possible but full and definitive resolution often unlikely. Thus, for some the central criterion of a democracy is the power of citizens to choose their government through competitive elections, for other this factor is less important than the equality of opportunity for all citizens in attaining positions of political leadership, for still others both of these criteria pale in significance if the continuous participation of citizens at various levels of political life is not attained. These disagreements propagate further when we see that concepts used to express them, such as power, political equality and participation, require elucidation also, a process likely to expose further disagreements among those contesting the concept of democracy.²⁴

As examples of essentially contested concepts Gallie gives the concepts of democracy, social justice, work of art and a Christian life. Consider his justification for classifying the concept of democracy as essentially contested. It accredits a valued achievement. This achievement is internally complex (Gallie claims) because it makes reference to three elements: the power of the people to choose and remove governments; equality of opportunity to attain positions of political leadership and responsibility; active participation of citizens in political life of all levels.²⁵
These elements which contribute to the valued achievement are weighted differently by contestants. Furthermore, the concept of democracy is open in character because ‘democratic targets will be raised or lowered as circumstances alter.’

Gallie might also have added, in the way that more recent writers such as William Connolly have done, that the concept of democracy is contestable not only because people can (without contradiction or absurdity) attach different weights to these elements but also because they may interpret them differently.

What counts as having the power to choose and remove governments, what counts as equality of opportunity to attain political positions and what constitutes active participation in political life, are all matters of dispute? So one essentially contested concept is related to a group of other concepts whose proper uses are themselves contested, perhaps also essentially.

Political philosophers use many concepts with complex meanings that are regularly contested. These contested concepts raise a series of challenges. It is a commonly held political certainty that democracy is the best form of government for the human being to live in. Degree of freedom enjoyed by people is an important standard against which democracy can be evaluated vis-à-vis other forms of government. People enjoy more freedom, at least political, under democracy than under any other form of government which is worldwide recognized as fundamental for all round human development. The experiences have taught us the importance of democracy. Democracy is certainly an essentially contested concept. But there is no solid ground to be found for any common definition of democracy, or definitely for any other essentially contested concepts. People could reasonably disagree over defining the characteristics of democracy. Democracy is a contested concept because nearly everyone values the level, yet there are different reasonable and genuine, yet unsuited criteria for judging whether the level is deserved. In his famous analysis of “essentially contested concepts”, the philosopher
W.B.Gallie argues that democracy is “the appraisive political concept par excellence.” Correspondingly, one finds endless dispute over appropriate meaning and definition. However, the goal of Gallie’s analysis is not simple to underscore the importance of such disputes, but to show that recognition of the contested status of a given concept opens the possibility of understanding each meaning within its own framework.

we must take into consideration W. B. Gallie’s classical statement that democracy like justice or arts is yet another one among those “essentially contested concepts “which lack unique standards of definition. Furthermore and fortunately the contest seems to concern first and foremost the interpretation of the concept, not the concept of democracy itself. Obviously then the question that must be made is whether it is possible to find arguments and criteria to assess what is the best interpretation of the concept of democracy or whether all there is to be done is to accept a combination of competing versions. This approach implies a second, deeper problem, namely, the extent to which conceptual history might help in acquiring a normative perception of democracy. At first glance, there can only be an answer in the negative: conceptual history (here understood as the description and analysis of concrete historical semantics, origins, derivations and alterations of concepts apparently belongs to the empirical example in social sciences, therefore a normative notion of democracy can only be informed by political philosophy.

In his famous analysis of “essentially contested concepts,” the philosopher W. B. Gallie argues that democracy is “the appraisive political concept par excellence.” Correspondingly, one finds endless disputes over appropriate meaning and definition. However, the goal of Gallie's analysis is not simply to underscore the importance of such disputes, but to show that recognition of the contested status of a given concept opens the possibility of understanding each meaning within its own framework. With reference to democracy, he argues that “politics being the art of the possible, democratic
targets will be raised or lowered as circumstances alter,” and he insists that these alternative standards should be taken seriously on their own terms.

David Collier with his mates in the article on “Essentially Contested Concepts: Debates and Applications” comments on Gallie’s democracy, examining them critically he writes:-

3.5 Democracy as Essentially Contested Concepts:

Research on democracy encompasses a large body of scholarship. Gallie provided detailed arguments as to why democracy is an essentially contested concept and studies of democracy continue to demonstrate the relevance of his ideas.

Gallie’s own discussion of democracy certainly suggests that it fits the category of an essentially contested concept, and there would appear to be little disagreement on this point. However, this opinion is not unanimous. One interesting dispute is presented in David Beetham’s outstanding book on Defining and Measuring Democracy. Focusing on alternative definitions, Beetham writes of the

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\text{enormous variety of such definitions in the literature of recent political theory, and the disagreement which has surrounded them. Some would even put democracy into the category of ‘essentially contested concepts’ . . . . In my judgment, the extent and significance of such disagreements has been greatly exaggerated.}^{14}
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Although this chapter of Beetham’s book is carefully argued, and though it is certainly possible for the idea of contested concepts to be overused.

A substantial degree of decontestation (in the broader sense) has occurred in current research on democracy, as will be emphasized later. Yet there has been great change in meaning and contestation over time, and there is no reason to assume that such contestation will not arise again in future.
Thus, as originally emphasized by Gallie, democracy appears to stand as a contested concept.

I. **Appraisiveness.** Gallie was very much on target in calling democracy ‘the appraisive concept par excellence’. Major works on democracy by Robert Dahl and Giovanni Sartori, as well as Guillermo O’Donnell and Philippe Schmitter, begin with strong statements that a central motivation in studying democracy derives from its positive normative valence. But the appraisal is not always positive. Huntington and Rosanvallon have convincingly traced the varying normative assessment of democracy, pointing to a negative valuation in the West during important parts of the 19th century, and at key points in the 20th century.²⁸

II. **Internal complexity and III. Diverse describability.** As employed in the comparative politics literature, democracy meets Criteria II and III. The complexity of the concept comes out clearly, for example, in O’Donnell and Schmitter’s four dimensions of liberalization, encompassing (1) civil liberties; (2) democratization, in the specific sense of meaningful electoral competition with universal suffrage, and fair and open elections; (3) democratization of social institutions and economic processes; and (4) democratization in the sense of the extension to citizens of substantive benefits and entitlements.²⁹

In order to label different combinations of these four postulated dimensions, scholars often create new terms. Many have qualified the noun democracy, yielding a proliferation of ‘democracy with adjectives’. In O’Donnell and Schmitter’s analysis, examples of democracy with adjectives that reflect these four dimensions include political democracy, limited political democracy, popular democracy, social democracy, and socialist democracy.³⁰
Analysis of these dimensions raises again the issue of disaggregation. How do we know that they are components of the same concept? Perhaps these are really four different phenomena that should be conceptualized separately, i.e. the liberalization of national political regimes, the democratization of these regimes, the democratization of social institutions and economic processes at a more micro level, and the extension to citizens of substantive benefits and entitlements. In the literature on national political regimes, it has certainly been argued that concepts may become more analytically useful when they are disaggregated. Perhaps it is most productive to conceptualize these components separately, rather than as aspects of democracy.

We would argue that disaggregation is often useful, but this does not undermine Gallie’s overall argument as applied to the body of research under discussion here. This literature is indeed about democracy, and the scholars and political actors of concern here do indeed think of the struggles in which they are involved as being about democracy. Of course, this concept does have multiple components. Some components are emphasized more than others by certain authors, and some components may appear to be more or less relevant in particular contexts. But these are routinely conceptualized as facets of democracy.

IV. Openness. Here again, as noted earlier, Gallie’s language is vivid: ‘democratic targets will be raised or lowered as circumstances alter, and democratic achievements are always judged in the light of such alterations’. In the field of comparative politics, carefully analyzing diverse conceptualizations of democracy across contexts, and establishing analytic equivalence, is a challenge of wide concern.

A central aspect of openness is change over time in the political, economic, and social systems being compared. The fundamental shifts in the meanings and normative valence of democracy in the West, traced by Rosanvallon and Huntington through the 19th and 20th centuries, are
substantially linked to the emergence over many decades of a middle class, the rise of industrial society, and the appearance of the working class as a major political actor. In the second half of the 19th century, for example, the term democracy was commonly used in characterizing regimes that maintained property requirements for voting, that did not encompass the working class in the electoral arena, and that given exclusion of women from voting certainly lacked universal suffrage.

Another example is the challenge of comparing democracy in the late 19th century and the latter part of the 20th century. The specific arguments examined in Ruth Berins Collier’s study of the working class role in democratic transitions, and in Bruce Russett’s study of the democratic peace hypothesis, under take comparisons of democracies and democratic transitions in the two eras. By the standard of the late 20th century, there were no democracies in Europe in the late 19th century in part due to the limited suffrage in the earlier period. Yet these scholars identify cases in this earlier period that are appropriate to include in the comparison, given the frameworks employed by these analysts. Rather than apply the same standard for democracy in both periods, these authors focus on whether a country is democratic by the norms of that historical period. Recognizing that empirically democracy has a different meaning in the two eras, they adapt their comparison accordingly.

Openness is also an issue in comparisons among countries. One example arises in the analysis of some Latin American regimes that might initially have been presumed democratic. However, due to the continuing power of the military, the traditional oligarchy, or external economic and political actors, it appears that the elected government did not to a reasonable degree have authority to rule. In light of this issue, some scholars have revised their definition of democracy, establishing a new cut point according to which these countries are not treated as such.³¹
In all of these examples, ‘democratic targets’ have indeed been adjusted to changed circumstances, to state this in Gallie’s own language.

V. Reciprocal recognition. The relevance of this criterion is illustrated in both the political and scholarly domains. In the political sphere, a suggestive example is the debate between the government and the opposition.

In the sphere of scholarship, reciprocal recognition may be found in a context as obvious as book reviews. Reviews of O’Donnell and Schmitter’s volume debated their use of a procedural definition of democracy. Arthur MacEwan raises standard concerns about alternative meanings of democracy, arguing that it is essential to develop a more complete conceptualization and analysis of the interconnections between political democracy, on the one hand, and economic and social democracy, on the other. Daniel Levine points to similar themes, and further argues that the procedural conceptualization of democracy is too much influenced by a concern with promoting transitions to democracy, and insufficiently concerned with recognizing that the meaning of democracy depends centrally on the ideals and struggles of those who promote it. Revisiting the O’Donnell, Schmitter text, it is evident that they had considered these alternative conceptualizations, but chose not to adopt them. Thus, rather than talking past one another, these analysts are to some degree making choices among a mutually recognized set of alternatives.32

VI. Exemplars. The idea of exemplars, in its narrower version of the original exemplar discussed earlier, on occasion is relevant to the concept of democracy. Athenian democracy is evoked in discussions of the New England town meeting and in the current debate in the US on deliberative democracy. At certain points in the evolution of French political thought, Athens has been a relevant exemplar, although much of the time it has not. The widely discussed international diffusion of democracy certainly reflects the role of exemplars in the broader sense although the impact of these exemplars must be demonstrated through careful empirical assessment. The idea of ‘waves’ of democracy illustrates a global version of this perspective. On the other hand,
many relevant exemplars have been proximate to the cases under consideration temporally or spatially, or in terms of established patterns of international communication. Thus, presidential democracy in the US has certainly been an important exemplar in Latin America, as has British parliamentary democracy for many former British colonies. Not only established democracies, but also transitions to democracy, can be exemplars. Schmitter, building on Laurence Whitehead’s analysis, observes that

*The successful example of one country’s transition establishes it as a model to imitate and, once a given region is sufficiently saturated with this mode of political domination, pressure will mount to compel the remaining autocracies to conform to the newly established norm*.

For instance, in Latin America in the 1980s, the prior democratization of Portugal, Spain, and Greece was certainly an inspiration. And one can find negative as well as positive exemplars. The difficult and prolonged democratic transition in Brazil, extending from the 1970s well into the 1980s, may have discouraged those promoting democratization in Argentina, and possibly also in Chile. Further, while many political actors in South America as well as scholars concerned with the region found much to admire in the Nicaraguan Revolution launched in 1979, they specifically did not see it as the appropriate model for South America. They were convinced that following the Nicaraguan path had a high likelihood of triggering a regression to the military authoritarianism from which they were trying to escape. For this reason, Nicaragua was a negative exemplar.

**VII. Progressive cooperation as a variant of progressive competition.**

Progressive competition entails the idea that reciprocal recognition among contending users of a concept may possibly lead to improving the quality of arguments. Among Gallie’s critics, this criterion has been met with substantial skepticism, with a number of commentators convinced it does not occur.
This section discusses a particular and possibly more plausible form that progressive competition may take, which we will call progressive cooperation. Within the democracy literature this pattern encompasses some sharp shifts in focus, but maintains continuity in analytic concerns on a broader level. In other words, there is sufficient continuity that the concept may be seen as decontested (in the broader sense), yet with important shifts in meaning and application. This is in effect a case of cooperation among successive scholars of a kind commonly interpreted as reflecting progress in scholarship.

This route of progressive cooperation may be seen as inaugurated with the idea of a procedural definition of democracy, introduced by Schumpeter. He criticizes what he calls the ‘classical doctrine of democracy’ based on the idea of the common good and the will of the people. He asserts that ‘there is no such thing as a uniquely determined common good’, and the idea of ‘the will of the people vanishes into thin air’. At a key point in the argument, he discusses major negative political consequences of these vague conceptions consequences that were evident in the rise of totalitarian regimes in prior decades. As an alternative, he proposes a definition based on ‘competition for political leadership’. ‘The democratic method is that institutional arrangement for arriving at political decisions in which individuals acquire the power to decide by means of a competitive struggle for the people’s vote’.34

In a subsequent step in this trajectory of progressive cooperation, Dahl makes a similar argument, although its components fit together in a different way. He considers the ideal situation of a regime that is ‘perfectly or almost completely responsive for all its citizens’, which is in part parallel to Schumpeter’s idea of ‘the will of the people’ as a criterion for democracy according to the classical theory. However, rather than simply delinking the term democracy from that meaning, Dahl proposes that this hypothetical, ideal situation be attached to the term democracy. He uses the term polyarchy in referring to his procedural definition a definition that is far more elaborate
and detailed than the one proposed by Schumpeter. Thus, Dahl provides a label that retains within his framework this ideal, if unattainable, form of democracy, while at the same time developing a more complete procedural definition. Indeed, this latter definition is sufficiently concrete and detailed that scholars have subsequently operationalized it as a cross national measure of democracy.35

In a further modification within the procedural tradition, O’Donnell and Schmitter seek to map out the political alternatives open to potentially democratizing regimes in Latin America and Southern Europe in the 1970s and 1980s. They explore how different types of democracy can be understood in terms of their four dimensions noted earlier two involving procedural issues, and two involving substantive outcomes. Within this framework, they propose a particularly clear and usable typology based on these dimensions, advancing their analytic goal of privilege the procedural side of democracy by using the label ‘political democracy’.36

A further step in this sequence has emerged following the period of initial transitions to democracy and corresponds to a widely held set of concerns with the quality and deepening of democracy. Within this body of work, O’Donnell acknowledges the importance of Dahl’s earlier procedural definition as a standard against which regimes should be judged. Yet he opens the discussion to a wider understanding of democracy, involving equality before the law and the protection of democratic citizenship under the rule of law. These can certainly be understood as democratic ‘procedures’, and in that sense they are squarely within the procedural tradition. At the same time, however, they are outcomes that the governments embedded within democratic regimes can produce through public policy.37

The final step considered here, in this route of progressive cooperation, concerns the distinction between access to power and the exercise of power. This distinction is intended to provide new power in analyzing issues of the democratic state and the rule of law just discussed. Sebastian Mazzuca
suggests that the basic line of argument among these several authors focuses on access to power, yet O’Donnell’s research on the rule of law under the democratic state is about the exercise of power. The idea of access to power fits extremely well within standard conceptions of procedural democracy. By contrast, Mazzuca proposes a very different conceptualization for the exercise of power, suggesting that it is better understood in terms of Weberian types of administration: i.e. patrimonialism versus bureaucracy. He evokes this different analytic frame, which provides new power and brings into focus a distinct set of similarities and contrasts among countries. Thus, as part of this sequence of progressive cooperation, Mazzuca succeeds in capturing O’Donnell’s distinctive focus on the exercise of power that indeed departs from standard procedural definitions and successfully and productively places it in an alternative framework. What has happened with this sequence of progressive cooperation? Within the framework of a basically decontested (in the broader sense) understanding of democracy, a sequence of scholars has produced a series of linked conceptualizations and insights. With each step, one can see varying combinations of a sharpening of analytic framing, a response to changing circumstances, and a shift in focus that to some degree takes the discussion in a new direction, while building on prior steps.
References:


15 Age of Dictators: Totalitarianism in the inter-war period


26 Gallie, ibid, p. 186.

27 William E. Connolly, op. cit, ref 15


31 Guillermo O’Donnell and Philippe C. Schmitter, ibid, p.13


33 Guillermo O’Donnell and Philippe C. Schmitter, op. cit, ref22

Joseph A. Schumpeter, Capitalism, op. cit, ref 21


Joseph A. Schumpeter, Capitalism, op. cit, ref 21