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Conceptual Hierarchies in Comparative Research: The Case of Democracy¹

David Collier and Steven Levitsky

The global wave of democratization in the final decades of the twentieth century presented scholars with the challenge of conceptualizing a diverse array of post-authoritarian regimes. The national political regimes in Latin America, Africa, Asia, and the former communist world that emerged in the democratic third wave (Huntington 1991) exhibited important attributes of democracy. Yet these regimes differed profoundly both from each other and from the democratic regimes of advanced industrial countries. Indeed, scholars considered many not to be fully democratic.²

This chapter argues that researchers responded to this challenge by pursuing two potentially contradictory goals. On the one hand, they attempted to increase *analytic differentiation* in order to capture the diverse regimes that had emerged. On the other hand, they sought to avoid the *conceptual stretching* that may occur when the concept of democracy is applied to cases for which, by relevant scholarly standards, it is not appropriate (Collier and Mahon 1993; Sartori 1970). The result was a proliferation of alternative conceptual forms, including a surprising number of subtypes involving democracy with adjectives.³ Examples from among the hundreds of subtypes that appeared in the scholarly literature were neo-patrimonial, illiberal, delegative, managed, and low-intensity democracy.

This proliferation of subtypes occurred despite efforts by leading analysts to standardize usage on the basis of procedural definitions of democracy in the tradition of Joseph Schumpeter (1947) and Robert A. Dahl (1971). This standardization succeeded in important respects. Yet as democratization continued and attention focused on an increasingly diverse set of cases, scholars introduced even more subtypes and additional conceptual innovations. The resulting conceptual confusion served as a strong reminder that tools for understanding and clarifying concepts are crucial to the social science enterprise.

We seek to refine available tools for concept analysis, focusing on the concepts employed in studies of democracy at the level of national political regimes, with particular attention to work on Latin America. Our goal is to examine the strategies of conceptual innovation that emerged and to explore trade-offs among them.

This chapter first introduces a new framework for analyzing two forms of conceptual hierarchy that are central to these strategies – the *kind hierarchy* associated

with *classical subtypes* of democracy, and the *part–whole hierarchy* associated with *diminished subtypes* of democracy. We then address the *root concept* of democracy in this literature, and go on to examine specific forms of conceptual innovation: moving up and down a kind hierarchy, moving down a part–whole hierarchy, shifting the overarching concept in a kind hierarchy, and *precising* the definition of democracy itself so as to make explicit features of democracy that might otherwise be taken for granted.

A central objective of the chapter is to encourage more careful definition and use of concepts. This is an important goal, given that the diverse conceptual forms examined here typically were central to the researchers' main substantive arguments. These concepts served as the data containers that conveyed the most salient facts about the regimes under discussion (Sartori 1970: 1039). In order adequately to describe these newly formed regimes, these data containers had to be employed with care.

Improved description, in turn, is essential for assessing the causes and consequences of democracy – a central goal in this literature. Many studies have treated democracy as an outcome to be explained, including major works of comparative-historical analysis and studies of the “social requisites” of different regime types.⁴ Other analyses have looked at the impact of democracy – and specific types of democracy – on economic growth, income distribution, economic liberalization and adjustment, and international conflict.⁵ In these studies, the results of causal assessment can be strongly influenced by the definition and meaning of democracy employed.⁶ We hope that the present discussion serves as a step toward greater consistency and clarity of meaning, which in turn will provide a more adequate basis for assessing causal relationships.

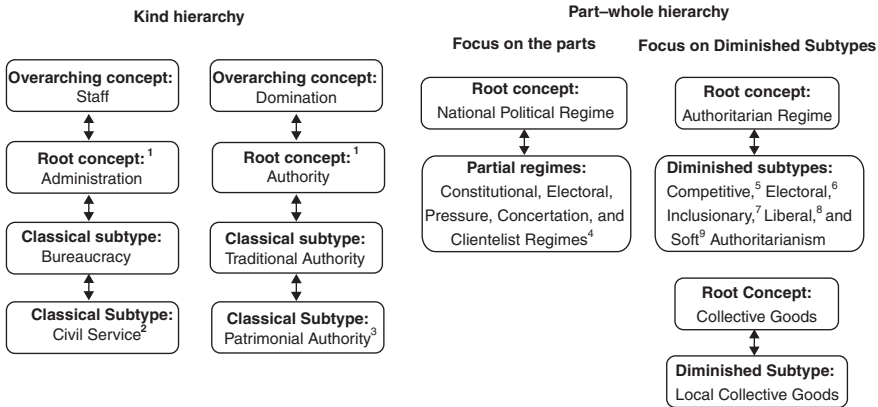
Kind hierarchies and part–whole hierarchies

Conceptual hierarchies have long played a key role in comparative research. Giovanni Sartori's classic work reshaped thinking about comparison by formulating the idea of a *ladder of abstraction*.⁷ This ladder or hierarchy – which posits a vertical array of concepts – has been crucial in efforts to pursue the two-fold goal of increasing analytic differentiation and avoiding conceptual stretching (Collier 1995; Collier and Mahon 1993; Sartori 1970).

The present analysis focuses on kind hierarchies and part–whole hierarchies. This approach provides more self-explanatory labels for the two forms of conceptual structure examined here, as well as linking this discussion to a wider literature on concepts and conceptual change.⁸

Kind hierarchies

A *kind hierarchy* is a nested set of concepts in which the subordinate concepts or subtypes are a *kind of* in relation to the superordinate concepts. An example is Sartori's (1970: 1042) discussion of conceptual choices in the field of comparative administration, which in important respects draws on Weber. Taking as a point of



¹Authority and administration are treated here as the root concepts. See discussion in the accompanying text; ²Sartori (1970: 1042); ³Weber (1978: 212-254); ⁴Schmitter (1992: 426-430); ⁵Levitsky and Way (2002); ⁶Schedler (2006); ⁷Bagley (1984: 125); ⁸Jowitt (1999: 225); ⁹Means (1996).

Figure 10.1 Kind hierarchy and part-whole hierarchy.

departure the concept of administration, we may argue that bureaucracy is a kind of administration, and civil service is a kind of bureaucracy. Looking up the hierarchy, administration is in turn a specific kind of staff⁹ (Figure 10.1). Collier and Mahon (1993: 846) also suggest an example from Weber: taking the concept of authority as a point of departure, they observe that traditional authority is a kind of authority, and patrimonial authority is a kind of traditional authority. Again, looking up the hierarchy, authority is a specific type of domination (i.e., it is legitimate domination). Yet another example is found in the literature on corporatism: corporatism and pluralism are seen as specific types in relation to an overall system of interest intermediation (Collier 1995: 143; Schmitter 1974).

In discussing a kind hierarchy, it is helpful to distinguish the root concept, the overarching concept, and subtypes. The root concept is the level in a conceptual hierarchy that is the initial point of reference in a given study or line of analysis.¹⁰ Thus, in the literature cited above on corporatism, the root concept is corporatism. In relation to this root concept, the system of interest intermediation is the overarching concept, in that corporatism is a *kind of* in relation to this overarching idea. Specific subtypes of corporatism – for example, liberal corporatism – are a *kind of* in relation to the root concept of corporatism.

Three points about kind hierarchies should be underscored here – points that converge with the standard understanding of Sartori’s ladder. (1) The subordinate concepts at a lower level in the hierarchy routinely are understood as *classical subtypes* (Lakoff 1987: *passim*; Taylor 2003: Chapter 2). This is another way of saying that each subordinate concept has the attributes of the superordinate concept *plus* attributes that differentiate it – i.e., the relationship of *genus et differentia*. In

Weber, for example, authority is distinguished from domination by the further differentiating attribute of legitimacy. (2) The relationship among levels is characterized by a pattern of inverse variation.¹¹ Further down the hierarchy, the concepts have more defining attributes – i.e., greater *intension* – and encompass fewer instances – i.e., more limited *extension*. By contrast, further up the hierarchy, concepts have fewer defining attributes and encompass more instances – i.e., more limited intension and greater extension. (3) Correspondingly, we find the familiar trade-off between avoiding conceptual stretching and achieving more fine-grained analytic differentiation. For instance, designating a particular form of rule as domination would avoid the conceptual stretching that could arise from inappropriately calling it a system of authority (i.e., legitimate domination). At the same time, designating it as a system of domination provides less analytic differentiation than does the designation of authority.

Part-whole hierarchies

Part-whole hierarchies build on the idea that we can meaningfully identify *parts* of many phenomena and entities. Just as a tree has branches as component parts, so – in Schmitter’s (1992) analysis of partial regimes – a national political regime has five parts: the constitutional, electoral, pressure, concertation, and clientelist regimes (Figure 10.1).

The idea of part-whole hierarchies is crucial in the present analysis because it is the basis for understanding what we call *diminished subtypes*. Here, the focus is not on the specific parts of a given phenomenon taken separately, but rather on instances in which one (or potentially a few) of these parts is missing or only partially present – yet all (or most) of the other parts are present. Here again we can use the idea of the root concept and the subtype. In this instance, the subtype encompasses many features of the root concept, yet some are missing. For example, we find many diminished subtypes of authoritarianism, as with competitive, electoral, inclusionary, liberal, and soft authoritarianism. Another example is Desposato’s (2001: 126) analysis of *public goods*, i.e., goods that have the defining attributes of being non-rival and non-exclusive. Desposato focuses on what he calls *local* public goods, for which their distinctively local character attenuates – but definitely does not eliminate – the attribute of non-exclusivity. Hence, this is a diminished subtype of public goods.¹²

An observation should be added about the role of well-bounded concepts in part-whole hierarchies and diminished subtypes. At various points in the present volume, we find the argument, formulated by Sartori (e.g., 1970: 1036–40), that before turning to the question of degrees and partial instances, analysts should specify when a phenomenon is present or absent. This approach is essential in developing diminished subtypes. Thus, the question of “diminished in relation to what?” is crucial.¹³

We now explore how these two forms of conceptual hierarchy were employed in the literature on the third wave of democracy. To do so, we first introduce the root concept of democracy that was the point of departure for this literature.

Defining the root concept of democracy

In his famous analysis of essentially contested concepts, W. B. Gallie argues that democracy is “*the appraisive political concept par excellence*.”¹⁴ Correspondingly, one finds recurring disputes over appropriate meaning and definition. However, the goal of Gallie’s analysis was 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.

The root concept of democracy in the literature on the third wave was anchored in a *procedural minimum* definition. This definition focused on democratic *procedures*, rather than on substantive policies or other outcomes that might be viewed as democratic. It was *minimal* in that it deliberately focused on the smallest possible number of attributes that still were seen as producing a viable standard for democracy. Not surprisingly, there was some disagreement about which attributes are needed for the definition to be appropriate. For example, most (but not all) of these scholars differentiated what they viewed as the more specifically political features of the regime from characteristics of the society and economy. They argued that the latter were more appropriately analyzed as potential causes or consequences of democracy, rather than as features of democracy itself (Karl 1990).

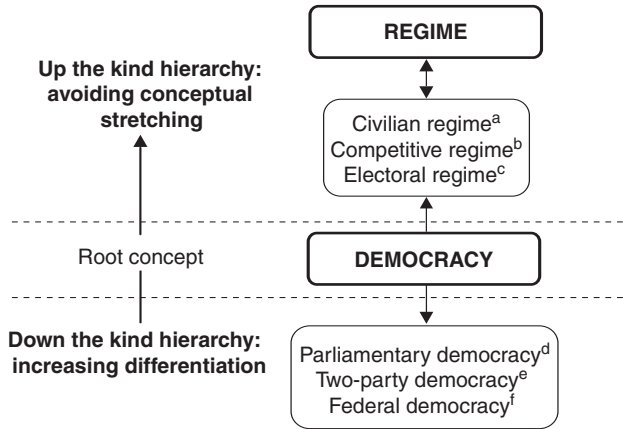
The procedural minimum definition most widely used in this literature presumes genuinely contested elections with full suffrage and the absence of massive fraud, combined with effective guarantees of civil liberties, including freedom of speech, assembly, and association.¹⁵ However, some variants on this definition were also important. Certain scholars, for example, created an *expanded* procedural minimum definition by adding (and in a sense making explicit) the criterion that elected governments must, to a reasonable degree, have effective power to govern vis-à-vis the military and other powerful, non-elected actors. As we will see below, this was a crucial issue in some countries.

Strategies of conceptual innovation

We turn now to specific strategies of innovation found in this literature. These strategies employ the kind hierarchy and classical subtypes; the part–whole hierarchy and diminished subtypes; shifting the overarching concept within a kind hierarchy; and refining (or precisizing) the definition of democracy to encompass features that are not stipulated in a particular definition, but that are critical to the wider understanding of democracy.

Working with classical subtypes in a kind hierarchy

As argued in the introduction, key analytic goals in the literature on the third wave were to achieve analytic differentiation among the diverse forms of democracy that emerged, while at the same time avoiding conceptual stretching in analyzing these regimes.



^aBooth (1989: 26); ^bCollier and Collier (1991: 354);
^cPetras and Leiva (1994: 89); ^dLinz (1994: 3);
^eGasiorowski (1990: 113); ^fGastil 1990: 35.

Figure 10.2 The kind hierarchy: increasing differentiation versus avoiding conceptual stretching.

In the tradition of Sartori, greater analytic differentiation that captured these diverse forms of democracy could be achieved by moving *down* a kind hierarchy to classical subtypes that had more defining attributes and fit a narrower range of cases. These subtypes provide more fine-grained distinctions that often are invaluable to the researcher. A standard example would be parliamentary democracy (Figure 10.2).

However, subtypes formed in this manner may leave analysts more vulnerable to conceptual stretching. They presume that the cases under discussion definitely are democracies and, as can be seen in the figure, these subtypes may incorporate further differentiating attributes inappropriate to the cases under analysis. One standard approach to avoiding this problem is to move up the kind hierarchy to concepts that have fewer defining attributes and correspondingly fit a broader range of cases. In the present context, this could be accomplished by working with concepts located *above* the root concept of democracy within the kind hierarchy. Scholars commonly viewed democracy as a specific type in relation to the overarching concept of regime. Hence, if they had misgivings as to whether a particular case was really a *democratic* regime, they could move up the hierarchy and simply call it a regime.

An obvious trade-off arises here. Shifting to a concept as general as regime entailed a loss of analytic differentiation. Scholars therefore typically moved to an intermediate level (Figure 10.2), adding adjectives to the term regime and thereby generating classical subtypes to differentiate specific *types* of regime. The resulting subtypes remained more general than the concept of democracy, encompassing not only democracies but also some non-democracies. Examples included *civilian*

regime, *competitive regime*, and *electoral regime*. While scholars thus achieved some analytic differentiation in relation to regime, they did not specifically commit themselves to the claim that the case under discussion was a democracy. A similar pattern was followed when scholars used a synonym for regime, such as *civilian rule* or *competitive polity* (Karl 1986; Wilson 1993).

Although climbing the hierarchy in this way helped to avoid conceptual stretching, it had an important drawback: it produced a sharp loss of analytic differentiation. These two strategies of moving down and up the kind hierarchy could advance one or the other of these goals, but not both at once.

Working with diminished subtypes in a part–whole hierarchy

An alternative strategy of conceptual innovation, widely employed in this literature, was to use diminished subtypes within a part–whole hierarchy. This approach had the merit of simultaneously avoiding conceptual stretching and increasing analytic differentiation. Examples included *limited suffrage democracy* and *tutelary democracy*. Unlike classical subtypes in a kind hierarchy, diminished subtypes achieved both goals discussed here. First, because these subtypes served to designate partial democracies, analysts were less vulnerable to conceptual stretching in that they made a more modest claim about the extent of democratization. The second point concerned differentiation. The distinctive feature of diminished subtypes is that they generally identify specific attributes of democracy that are missing, thereby establishing the diminished character of the subtype. At the same time, they stipulate other attributes of democracy that are still present. Given this focus on specific combinations of attributes, these subtypes increase differentiation.

Table 10.1 presents examples of the numerous diminished subtypes that were generated in relation to the root concept of democracy noted above. For the purpose of illustration, we focus on examples in which the author was reasonably careful in isolating a single missing attribute.

The subtypes in the first group (1a) refer to cases where the missing attribute was full suffrage. Here, we find terms such as *male* or *oligarchical democracy*, which were used to distinguish contemporary cases from historical cases prior to the advent of universal suffrage. Where the attribute of full contestation was missing (1b), as when important parties are banned from electoral competition, we find terms such as *controlled* and *restrictive democracy*. Where civil liberties were incomplete (1c), scholars used terms such as *electoral* and *illiberal democracy*.

The subtypes in the final group (2) are those introduced by the scholars who created the expanded procedural minimum definition – which as noted above added the defining attribute that, to a reasonable degree, the elected government had effective power to govern. From that point of departure, these scholars introduced diminished subtypes for which this attribute was missing. Examples that referred to cases where the military was seen as having an inordinate degree of ongoing political power included *protected democracy* and *tutelary democracy*.

Table 10.1 Part-whole hierarchy: examples of diminished subtypes

1. Diminished from procedural minimum definition		
(1a)	(1b)	(1c)
Missing attribute: Full suffrage	Missing attribute: Full contestation	Missing attribute: civil liberties
Limited democracy ^a	Controlled democracy ^d	Electoral democracy ^g
Male democracy ^b	De facto one-party democracy ^c	Hard democracy ^h
Oligarchical democracy ^c	Restrictive democracy ^f	Illiberal democracy ⁱ
2. Diminished from expanded procedural minimum definition		
	Missing attribute: elected government	
	Has effective power to govern	
	Guarded democracy ^j	
	Protected democracy ^k	
	Tutelary democracy ^l	

Notes

a Archer (1995: 166); b Sorensen (1993: 20); c Hartlyn and Valenzuela (1994: 99); d Bagley (1984: 125); e Leftwich (1993: 613); f Waisman (1989: 69); g Hadenius (1994: 69); h O'Donnell and Schmitter (1986: 9); i Emmerson (1995); j Torres Rivas (1994: 27); k Loveman (1994: 108-11); l Przeworski (1988: 60-61).

Diminished subtypes, then, were a useful means to avoid conceptual stretching in cases that were less than fully democratic. They also provided new analytic differentiation. Various scholars have pointed to the need for moving beyond a dichotomous conceptualization of authoritarianism and democracy, and have recognized the *hybrid* or *mixed* character of many post-authoritarian regimes.¹⁶ Diminished subtypes can bring into focus the diverse features of these hybrid regimes.

However, for countries considered less than fully democratic, the question arose as to whether it would be better to avoid identifying them as subtypes of democracy – for example, in cases of gross violations of civil liberties and/or severe restrictions on electoral competition. An instance of such questioning was Bruce Bagley's rejection of the numerous diminished subtypes of democracy that had been applied to the National Front period in Colombia (1958–74). These subtypes included *restricted*, *controlled*, *limited*, *oligarchical*, *elitist*, and *elitist-pluralist* democracy. Bagley instead characterized Colombia as a diminished subtype of authoritarianism: *inclusionary authoritarian regime* (Bagley 1984: 125–27). A parallel use of a diminished subtype is Levitsky and Way's (2002: 52–58) characterization of Russia under Putin and Peru under Fujimori. These are treated not as partial democracies but instead as competitive authoritarianism regimes.

Shifting the overarching concept

A further strategy of conceptual innovation involved a different approach to modifying kind hierarchies. In this case, scholars shifted the overarching concept, in

relation to which democracy was seen as a specific instance. This shift in the overarching concept changed the meaning of the root concept, i.e., of democracy. In this sense it may be seen as a more drastic modification, compared with the two strategies just discussed.

Scholars in this literature most commonly understood democracy in relation to the overarching concept *regime*, and the procedural criteria for democracy discussed above were features of the regime. Yet some analysts came to view democracy as a root concept in relation to other overarching concepts, such as democratic *government* or democratic *state*. Hence, when a given country was labeled *democratic*, the meaning was modified according to the alternative overarching concept.

Scholars used the strategy of shifting the overarching concept in order to create a standard that could be either less or more demanding for classifying cases as democratic. These alternatives may be illustrated with examples from the analysis of Brazil (Table 10.2). Some scholars found that in the immediate post-1985 period, Brazilian politics was so poorly institutionalized that it appeared inappropriate to use the overarching label regime, yet they felt it was unreasonable to insist that Brazil was not democratic. They thereby lowered the standard for labeling it a democracy by referring to a democratic situation.¹⁷ Other scholars, out of a similar concern with the implications of regime, shifted the overarching concept by using the terms democratic government or democratic moment.¹⁸ The idea of a democratic *government*, for example, served to suggest that, although a particular government¹⁹ had been elected democratically, the sustainability of democratic procedures remained in doubt.

Alternatively, by shifting the overarching concept from regime to state, O'Donnell established a more demanding standard for labeling a particular country as a democracy. Brazil's presidential election of 1989 led some scholars – previously skeptical about Brazilian democracy – to accept the idea that Brazil had a democratic regime. In this context, O'Donnell went on to pose questions about

Table 10.2 Shifting the overarching concept: post-1985 Brazil

Author	Lowering the standard		Point of departure	Raising the standard
	Democratic situation	Democratic government	Democratic regime	Democratic state
Duncan Baretta and Markoff ^a	Yes		No	
Hagopian and Mainwaring ^b		Yes	No	
O'Donnell ^c		Yes	No	
O'Donnell ^d			Yes	No

Notes

a Duncan Baretta and Markoff (1987: 62); b Hagopian and Mainwaring (1987: 485); c O'Donnell (1988: 281); d O'Donnell (1993: 1360).

the democratic character of the state in Brazil. He observed that, in the context of widespread neofeudalized and sometimes sultanistic political relationships in some regions of the country, the national state did not protect basic rights of citizenship within the framework of law (1993: 1359 and *passim*, 2001). This failure might not directly influence the functioning of the regime, in the sense of affecting the elections and associated civil liberties that were core features of the procedural understanding of a democratic regime. However, O'Donnell argued that this failure of the legal and bureaucratic institutions of the state was a crucial feature of Brazilian politics, as well as politics in several other Latin American countries. Although he recognized that Brazil had a democratic regime, he excluded it from the set of countries which he considered to have democratic states.

To summarize, shifting the overarching concept within the kind hierarchy served to introduce finer differentiation. When this strategy lowered the standard for declaring a given case a democracy, it also helped avoid stretching the concept. When the strategy raised the standard, it typically was acknowledged that the cases of concern were in fact democratic regimes.²⁰ Hence, the motivating concern was not the problem of conceptual stretching. Rather, this innovation provided additional analytic differentiation by pointing to respects in which the countries might be considered non-democratic.

Precising the definition

A final strategy consisted of *precising* the definition of democracy itself by adding defining attributes.²¹ This approach thereby changed the root concept in relation to which both the kind hierarchies and the part-whole hierarchies were structured. As the concept of democracy was extended to new settings, researchers sometimes confronted a particular case that was classified as a democracy on the basis of a commonly accepted definition. Yet such a case might not have been seen as fully democratic in light of a larger shared understanding of the concept.²² This mismatch between the case and the formal definition sometimes led analysts to make explicit one or more criteria that were implicitly understood as part of the overall meaning of democracy, but that were not included in the prior definition. The result was a new definition intended to change how a particular case was classified. This new definition increased analytic differentiation by fine-tuning the cut-point between democracy and non-democracy. Simultaneously, *precising* the definition avoided conceptual stretching by not including cases that did not fit the new conception of democracy.

One example of *precising* the definition was the emergence of the expanded procedural minimum definition, noted above. In several Central American countries, as well as in South American cases such as Chile and Paraguay, one legacy of authoritarian rule was the persistence of reserved domains of military power over which elected governments had little or no authority (Valenzuela 1992: 70). Hence, despite free or relatively free elections, civilian governments in these countries were seen by some analysts as lacking effective power to govern.

Given these authoritarian legacies, and often in reaction to claims that these countries were democratic because they had held free elections, some scholars modified the procedural minimum definition by explicitly specifying that the elected government must to a reasonable degree have effective power to rule. With this revised definition, countries such as Chile, El Salvador, and Paraguay were excluded by some scholars from the set of cases classified as democracies, even though they had held relatively free elections.²³ These scholars thereby modified the definition by including an attribute that was taken for granted in studies of advanced industrial democracies, yet was absent in these particular Latin American cases. This revised definition was widely accepted, though some disagreement continued about the classification of specific cases.²⁴

In this instance, precisising the definition sharpened analytic differentiation by fine-tuning the cut-point between democracy and non-democracy. It also avoided conceptual stretching in the sense of not including cases that did not fit this larger conception of democracy. However, because precisising the definition introduced changes in the entire constellation of meanings connected with the idea of democracy, it was the most drastic among the strategies discussed here.

Correspondingly, other initiatives to precise the definition received less acceptance and served to illustrate pitfalls of this strategy. A second example illustrates the problem of what might be called a Tocquevillean definition, which encompassed a focus on selected aspects of social relations. In analyzing post-authoritarian Brazil, scholars such as Francisco Weffort and Guillermo O'Donnell were struck by the degree to which rights of citizenship were undermined by the pervasive semi-feudal and authoritarian social relations that persisted in some regions of the country. In light of this concern, they precisised the definition of democracy so as to exclude Brazil. Thus, Weffort added the definitional requirement of "some level of social equality" for a country to be considered a democracy, and O'Donnell introduced a similar stipulation.²⁵ In adopting the Tocquevillean view, these authors basically saw themselves as remaining within the procedural framework. However, introducing issues of social relations nonetheless represented a sharp departure from earlier procedural definitions, and this approach was not widely followed.²⁶

A third effort at precisising, which likewise was not widely accepted, arose from a concern that, in many new democracies in Latin America and former communist countries, some elected presidents made extensive use of decree power; circumvented democratic institutions such as the legislature and political parties; and governed in a plebiscitary manner that had strong authoritarian undercurrents. In the Latin American context, prominent examples of this failure of horizontal accountability²⁷ included Carlos Menem in Argentina, Fernando Collor de Mello in Brazil, and, in the most extreme case, Alberto Fujimori in Peru. The concern with these authoritarian tendencies led some authors to include checks on executive power in their procedural criteria for democracy, thus excluding cases of unconstrained presidentialism.²⁸ However, this innovation was likewise not widely adopted.

Precising the definition can serve both to introduce finer differentiation and to avoid conceptual stretching. Yet caution is in order. Among alternative strategies of conceptual innovation examined here, precisising introduced the most drastic change by modifying the definition of democracy itself. More generally, if an innovation based on precisising is widely accepted, it changes the definitional point of departure for all the other strategies, thereby unsettling the *semantic field*.²⁹ By contrast, the introduction of a new subtype does not pose this problem. For literatures in which conceptual confusion is a recurring problem, the analytic gains from precisising the definition must be weighed against this cost.

A related concern is the problem of definitional gerrymandering, in the sense that scholars might introduce a new definition as an ad hoc means of dealing with an anomalous case.³⁰ However, the contrast between the first example of precisising (adding the criterion of effective power to govern) and the third example (adding horizontal accountability) shows that scholars may in fact impose constructive limits on this type of innovation. In the first example, the inability of elected governments to exercise effective power was seen as invalidating their democratic character. By contrast, the third example involved heavy-handed assertions of power by the president, and a crucial point was that these presidents *were* elected leaders. Hence, it might be argued that it was appropriate to treat these regimes as meeting a minimal standard for democracy and to avoid precisising, as long as they maintained presidential elections, the legislature continued to enjoy some autonomy, and a general respect for civil liberties was maintained.³¹

Concluding observations

We have discussed strategies of conceptual innovation employed by scholars as they addressed a two-fold challenge in characterizing the diverse regimes that emerged in the third wave of democracy: increasing analytic differentiation, while simultaneously avoiding conceptual stretching. Our goal has been to examine the structure of these alternative strategies and to evaluate their strengths and weaknesses. Even when these analysts proceeded intuitively, rather than self-consciously, they tended to operate within these hierarchical structures. However, in the interest of conceptual and analytic clarity, it was far more desirable for scholars to proceed self-consciously, with full awareness of the trade-offs among the strategies.

The strategies employed in addressing these analytic challenges are summarized in Figure 10.3. Conceptual innovation occurred at three levels: the root concept of democracy itself, the subtypes, and the overarching concept. We observed that the strategies of (1) moving down the kind hierarchy to classical subtypes of democracy and (2) moving up that hierarchy to classical subtypes of regime could usefully serve either to increase differentiation or to avoid conceptual stretching, but they could not do both simultaneously. By contrast, these two goals could simultaneously be achieved by (3) creating diminished subtypes within the framework of a part-whole hierarchy and (4a) shifting the overarching concept as a means of lowering the standard. By contrast, (4b) shifting the overarching concept

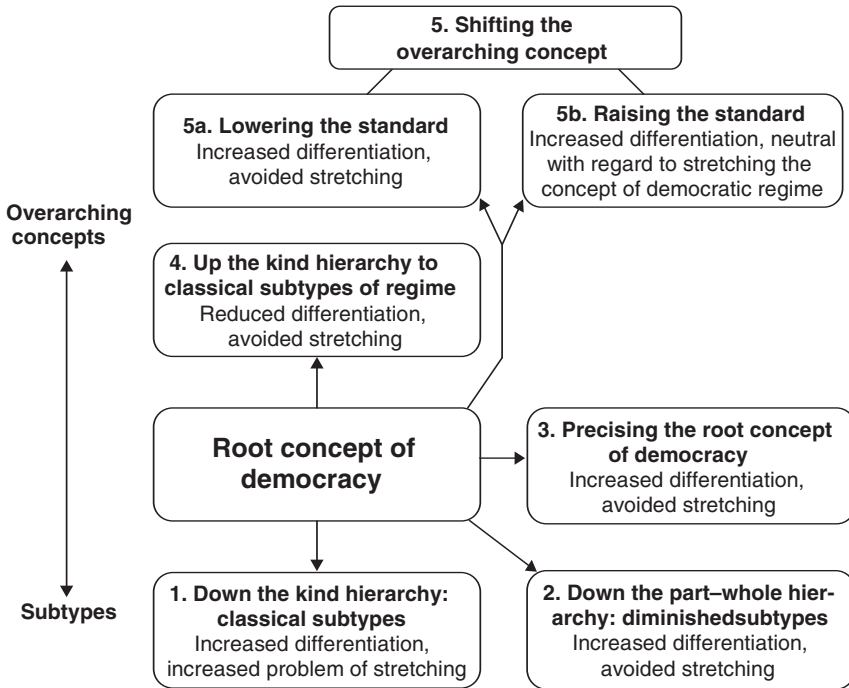


Figure 10.3 Evaluating the strategies: differentiation and avoiding stretching.

to raise the standard for democracy, introduced finer differentiation but did not avoid stretching.

The fifth strategy – i.e., (5) precising the definition of democracy by adding defining attributes – had the merit of contributing both to avoiding stretching (vis-à-vis a larger understanding of democracy) and to achieving finer differentiation. However, as with shifting the overarching concept, it was a more drastic approach in that it shifted the meaning of other concepts in the hierarchy.

We have also underscored distinctive issues that arose with particular strategies. Diminished subtypes were useful for characterizing hybrid regimes, but raised the issue of whether these regimes should be treated as subtypes of democracy, rather than subtypes of authoritarianism or some other regime type. Shifting the overarching concept with the goal of raising the standard was not relevant to the problem of conceptual stretching. However, it allowed scholars to introduce new analytic issues without abandoning a procedural definition of democracy. Finally, the strategy of precising the definition was subject to the perennial problem of scholarly disputes over definitions of democracy, as well as to the need to impose limits on definitional gerrymandering.

The diverse strategies summarized in Figure 10.3 also point to a broader problem. This literature on the third wave of democracy – as in many areas of the social sciences – faced a major dilemma in the proliferation of literally hundreds of

subtypes, many of which meant approximately the same thing. The consequence could too readily be scholarly confusion, as well as undermining the theory-building enterprise. Although new types were created in part because scholars were pursuing these goals of differentiation and avoiding conceptual stretching, they also were introduced with the goal of developing compelling labels that drew attention to novel forms of democracy. In the larger literature on national political regimes, important analytic innovations have periodically been introduced in conjunction with the creation and/or systematization of concepts that vividly capture important constellations of phenomena: e.g., authoritarianism, polyarchy, bureaucratic authoritarianism, corporatism, and consociational democracy. The invention of additional concepts that play this same role is an important goal in the ongoing study of regimes. However, if research on political phenomena such as democracy were to degenerate into a competition over who can produce the next famous concept or subtype, the comparative study of regimes would be in serious trouble.

Hence, we propose another major objective of concept usage – one that introduces a further trade-off vis-à-vis the two goals of achieving analytic differentiation and avoiding conceptual stretching. Scholars should aim for parsimony and avoid excessive proliferation of new terms and concepts. Coordinating scholarly inquiry around carefully developed concepts will facilitate constructive dialogue and theory-building. Otherwise, the advantages that may derive from the conceptual refinements analyzed here will be overridden by the resulting conceptual confusion.

Notes

* Originally published as Steven Levitsky (1998) “Institutionalization and Peronism: The Concept, the Case, and the Case for Unpacking the Concept,” *Party Politics* 4 (1): 77–92.

- 1 This chapter is a substantially revised version of David Collier and Steven Levitsky (1997), “Democracy with Adjectives: Conceptual Innovation in Comparative Research,” *World Politics* 49 (3): 430–51. We acknowledge the valuable comments on this new version provided by Robert Adcock, Nora Archambeau, Mauricio Benítez, Taylor Boas, Christopher Chambers-Ju, John Gerring, Fernando Daniel Hidalgo Maia, Jaskoski, Jody LaPorte, James Mahoney, Josephine Marks, Sebastián Mazzuca, and Miranda Yaver.
- 2 Schedler (2002) writes of the “foggy zone” with regard to regime types. See also the other articles in the April 2002 issue of the *Journal of Democracy* on hybrid regimes.
- 3 A parallel expression, “democracy without adjectives,” appeared in debates in Latin America among observers concerned with the persistence of incomplete and qualified forms of democracy (see, for instance, Krauze 1986).
- 4 Lipset (1959, 1994), Londregan and Poole (1996), Luebbert (1991), Moore (1966), Przeworski and Limongi (1997), and Rueschemeyer et al. (1992).
- 5 Bollen and Jackman (1985), Brown et al. (1996), Linz and Valenzuela (1994), O’Donnell (1994), Przeworski and Limongi (1993), Remmer (1986), Russett (1993), Sirowy and Inkeles (1990), Stallings and Kaufman (1989), and Stepan and Skach (1993).
- 6 Bollen and Jackman (1989: 613–16), Russett (1993: 15–16), and Paxton (2000).

- 7 The distinction between Sartori's ladder of abstraction and Collier and Mahon's (1993) idea of a ladder of generality should be noted. The concepts further up on Sartori's ladder of abstraction have fewer defining attributes. With these concepts fewer differentiating criteria are employed in making empirical observations, which by standard usage is what is meant by abstract. The limiting case of an abstract concept is one located in a theoretical system and has no empirical referents at all. Collier and Mahon later sought to elaborate Sartori's focus by speaking of a *ladder of generality*. The characteristic of greater generality is a concomitant of the greater degree of abstraction: with fewer defining attributes, the concepts are more general. We now view the notion of a kind hierarchy as a more self-explanatory framing that encompasses both of these two understandings of ladders.
- 8 In linguistics, a kind hierarchy is called a hyponymy, and a part-whole hierarchy a meronymy (Cruse 2004: 148–54). For a discussion of how these two forms of hierarchy play a role in the conceptual change associated with scientific revolutions, see Thaggard (1990, 1992).
- 9 That is, staff in Weber's sense, as with the immediate set of employees who support the work of a given leader or executive.
- 10 Rather than referring to the root concept, Goertz (2006: *passim*) writes of the *basic level*. We prefer the idea of root concept because to us it suggests more directly that the level at which the root concepts is located may vary according to the context of analysis. This focus of the context of meaning – and, correspondingly, the contrasting levels on a hierarchy that are appropriate – is parallel to Cruse's (1977) arguments on *lexical specificity* (see also Cruse 2004: 368).
- 11 This pattern of inverse variation is a standard feature of conceptual structure, and for present purposes it is a basic and valuable point of reference. However, in some contexts this inverse pattern does not hold (Copi and Cohen 2002: 116).
- 12 Diminished subtypes do not necessarily take the form of the root concept plus an adjective. In Skocpol's (1979: 4) study, the focus is on social revolutions, which in her analysis encompassed the transformation of both social structure and political structure. By contrast, in her usage, political revolutions involve only political transformation. For her, political revolution is therefore a diminished subtype vis-à-vis her overall concept of social revolution: one element is missing.
- 13 The centrality of this question is evident in Table 10.1 below, where the diminished subtypes take on distinct meanings according to the definition of the root concept.
- 14 Gallie (1956: 184, italics in the original); see also Collier et al. (2006).
- 15 Diamond et al. (1989: xvi), Di Palma (1990: 16), and O'Donnell and Schmitter (1986: 8); see also Linz (1978: 5).
- 16 Conaghan and Espinal (1990: 555), Hartlyn (1994: 93–96), Karl (1995), Malloy (1987: 256–57), Weffort (1992b: 89–90), and Levitsky and Way (forthcoming).
- 17 This distinction followed the example of Juan Linz's (1973) analysis of Brazil during the earlier post-1964 authoritarian period: Linz introduced the concept of an *authoritarian situation* to take into account the weak institutionalization of national political structures.
- 18 Malloy (1987: 236) used the expression *democratic moment* to convey basically the same idea as *democratic government*.
- 19 Government is understood here as the head of state and the immediate political leadership that surrounds the head of state.
- 20 For example, O'Donnell (1993: 1355), in his discussion of the democratic state, was quite explicit in saying that the countries under discussion had democratic regimes.
- 21 Copi and Cohen (2002: 106–09) and Sartori (1984: 81).
- 22 This distinction between the commonly accepted definition of democracy and the larger understanding of the concept is parallel to the contrast between the systematized concept and the background concept discussed by Adcock and Collier (2001).
- 23 Karl (1990: 2), Loveman (1994), and Valenzuela (1992); see also Rubin (1990).

- 24 For example, in analyzing Chile in the post-1990 period, Rhoda Rabkin took exception to the usage adopted by scholars who introduced the expanded procedural minimum definition. She argued that the problem of civilian control of the military did not represent a sufficient challenge to the democratically elected government to justify calling Chile a *borderline* democracy, as she put it (Rabkin 1992–93: 165).
- 25 O'Donnell (1988: 297–98, 1992: 48–49) and Weffort (1992a: 18, 1992b: 100–01).
- 26 As we saw above, O'Donnell subsequently opted for shifting the overarching concept as an alternative means of incorporating this set of concerns.
- 27 Authors who employed horizontal accountability in their definitions included Ball (1994: 45–46) and Schmitter and Karl (1991: 76, 87). O'Donnell and Schmitter (1986: 8) actually include it in their formal definition, but it appears to play no role in their subsequent analysis.
- 28 Fish (2001: 54) later wrote of superpresidentialism.
- 29 On the problem of unsettling the semantic field, see Sartori (1984: 51–54).
- 30 Jennifer Widner suggested this term.
- 31 For Peru under Fujimori and Venezuela under Chávez, the regime clearly failed to meet a minimum standard due to violations of civil liberties.

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