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WHAT DO DEMOCRACY INDICES MEASURE? A CONCEPTUAL AND  
METHODOLOGICAL CRITIQUE

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Critique

Demokrasi Endeksleri Neyi Ölçer? Kavramsal ve Yöntemsel Bir Eleştiri

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## **LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS**

BTI	Bertelsmann Transformation Index
EIU	Economist Intelligence Unit
FITW	Freedom in the World Report
IDEA	International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance
V-Dem	Varieties of Democracy Project



## **ABSTRACT**

Comparative democratization studies is characterized by a minimalist-proceduralist conception of democracy, relies heavily on quantified democracy indices, and its perspective is reflected in the democracy promotion policies. The democracy indices strongly both the conceptual and methodological preferences of this field, while they are increasingly used in making decision on democracy promotion policies. The field of democratic theory, on the other hand, is increasingly being dominated by critical approaches that insist on the centrality of concepts of participation and deliberation in both the functioning and analysis of democracy. Such approaches find their application in democratic innovations and the social struggles for deepening democratization. They are relatively weaker in their applications at the nation-state scale and also in producing alternative assessment frameworks for democratic quality of political systems. This study aims to compare these two strands with regard to their strength in conceptualizing and analyzing democratic politics, as well their contributions to the debates and struggles for democracy in the public sphere. For this aim, it first provides a critical analysis of the state of the art in comparative democracy assessment, diagnose their shortcomings in both providing sound assessments of the state of democracy and in representing the plurality of conceptions of democracy. Prominent democracy indices are also subjected to an analysis with regard to the role they play in the normative foundations of world politics and global governance. These analyses together demonstrate the need for going beyond the dominant conceptual and methodological tendencies. For this aim, the study finally analyses the prospects of

introducing the deliberative democracy theory into the field of comparative democracy assessment. Deliberative democracy theory is well-suited for democratizing democracy assessment by offering a normatively justified, theoretically grounded concept of democracy and accommodating institutional and scalar variations. It is also amenable to participatory methodologies, whereby the citizens themselves can be included in the process of assessment, thereby providing strong input to the public debate on democratization in all contexts.

**Keywords:** Democracy, Democratic Theory, Democracy Indices, Deliberative Democracy, Deliberative Capacity

## ÖZET

Karşılaştırmalı demokratikleşme çalışmaları minimalist ve usule dayalı demokrasi kavramlaştırmasıyla tanımlanır, sayısal demokrasi endekslerini yoğun olarak kullanır ve bu alandaki hâkim bakış açısı demokrasi teşvik politikalarında da yansımaları bulur. Demokrasi endeksleri bu alanın kavramsal ve yöntemsel tercihlerini güçlü bir şekilde yansıtmakla beraber demokrasi teşvik politikalarına yönelik karar alma süreçlerinde kullanımı giderek yaygınlaşmaktadır. Öte yandan, demokrasinin hem analizinde hem de işleyişinde katılım ve müzakere kavramlarının merkezi önemini vurgulayan eleştirel yaklaşımlar demokrasi teorisinde giderek hâkim hale gelmektedir. Bu yaklaşımların yansımaları ise demokrasiyi derinleştirmeye yönelik toplumsal mücadelelerde ve demokratik yeniliklerde gözlenmektedir. Yine de katılım ve müzakere odaklı yeni yaklaşımlar ulusal ölçekli siyasal sistemlerin gerek işleyişinde gerekse demokratik niteliklerine dair alternatif değerlendirme çerçeveleri geliştirmede görece daha az uygulama alanı bulmaktadır. Bu çalışmada bu iki hattın, demokratik siyasetin kavramlaştırılması ve çözümlenmesi, ayrıca kamusal alanda demokrasiye dair tartışma ve mücadelelere katkıları bağlamında karşılaştırmayı amaçlamaktadır. Bu amaçla öncelik demokrasi değerlendirme çalışmalarının güncel durumuna ilişkin eleştirel bir çözümleme sunmakta, demokrasinin durumuna ilişkin güçlü değerlendirme çerçeveleri sunmada ve demokrasi kavramlaştırmalarının çeşitliliğini yansıtmada sergiledikleri eksiklikleri teşhis etmektedir. Önde gelen demokrasi endeksleri dünya siyasetinin ve küresel yönetişimin normatif temellerinin tanımlanmasında oynadıkları rol açısından da çözümlemeye tabi

tutulmaktadır. Bu çözümler bir araya getirildiğinde, hâkim kavramsal ve yöntemsel eğilimlerin ötesine geçmenin gerekliliğine işaret etmektedir. Bu kapsamda, çalışmada son olarak müzakereci demokrasi kuramının karşılaştırmalı demokrasi çalışmaları alanına dâhil edilmesinin sunacağı imkânlar tartışılmaktadır. Müzakereci demokrasi kuramının, normatif düzlemde gerekçelendirilmiş, kuramsal olarak temellendirilmiş bir demokrasi kavramlaştırması sunması ve kurumlar ve ölçekler düzleminde çeşitliliğe yer açması bakımında demokrasi değerlendirme pratiğinin kendisini demokratikleştirmek açısından elverişli bir zemin sunduğu savunulmaktadır. Böylesi bir demokrasi kavramlaştırması, mevcut siyasal sistemlerin değerlendirilmesi sürecinde katılımcı yöntemlerle de uyum sağlaması, böylece her bağlamda demokratikleşmeye dair kamusal tartışmalara güçlü bir girdi sağlaması açısından, yöntem düzleminde de demokratikleşme çalışmalarına yeni mecralar sunmaktadır.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Demokrasi, Demokrasi Kuramları, Demokrasi Endeksleri, Müzakereci Demokrasi, Müzakere Kapasitesi

## INTRODUCTION

Democratization has been a central topic in the past three decades characterized by the end of the Cold War, globalization, neoliberalism and terrorism. The wave of democratization and liberalization in the beginning was applauded with a euphoric mood, while the prospects for further democratization started to look dimmer, and the erosion in the quality of democracy became visible even in those countries considered to be fully established liberal democracies. That these debates were accompanied by quantified indices or ratings of democracy was something new

Democracy can be considered as the central concept in both politics and political science. The normative power of the concept can be observed in both declarations of commitment to it in political life, albeit hypocritically most of the time, and the recognition of democracy as the sole model of good polity, albeit implicit most of the time. The sheer abundance of academic and non-academic works on various aspects of the topic of democracy is indeed “overwhelming and bewildering” (Coppedge, 2012, p. 1). Since 1990s, it has been a common observation that “we are all democrats now” (Brown, 2010), that democracy has gained “global primacy” (McGrew, 1997, p. 27), and that “democratization has become a key tool for the analysis of the contemporary world” (Grugel, 2002, p. 3). Yet liberal representative democracy has been considered to be in a crisis even where it was firmly established (Crouch, 2004; Vormann & Lammert, 2019), and

the observation that democracy is in decline worldwide has been a source of growing anxiety in recent years (Diamond & Plattner, 2015).

The indices of democracy, especially the Freedom in the World report (FITW) published annually by the Freedom House, have been major sources to declare and argue for first the rise and then the decline of democracy globally in the post-Cold War era. A growing popularity of these indices has accompanied the debates on democracy, with the democracy indices being employed as some sort of thermometers or barometers that give us a measurement of the political climate. The popularity of these indices –or rankings, scales or indicators- is also paralleled in political science, as reflected in the increasing number of indices produced by scholars as well as the vast literature on quantitative studies of democracy and democratization.

The increasing number, scope and popularity of democracy indices is also a part of the broader proliferation of quantitative indicators in all areas of social, economic and political life. Quantification of almost all spheres of social and personal lives is a prominent feature of our age, while the drive toward evidence-based decision-making and policy-making increases the requirement for quantitative data and the increasing diffusion of managerial thinking is reflected in the measurement of performance of employees and all kinds of organizations, including governments or states (Mau, 2020; Porter, 1996; Power, 1997). In a world where “numbers rule” (Fioramonti, 2014), therefore, the prominence of quantitative indicators also call for critical analyses with regard to how they are produced or how they impact on and are influenced by power relationships in both national and

international politics, as reflected in the burgeoning literature on global rankings and indicators (Alonso & Starr, 1989; Andreas & Greenhill, 2010b; Cooley & Snyder, 2015; Davis et al., 2012; Morse, 2004).

These observations point to the dual character and function of democracy indices. They are academic products or instruments developed by scholars in universities or other organizations, employed in quantitative studies on democracy and democratization. Yet they are also instrumental in politics of democracy in actual global politics. Therefore, this study starts with the observation that they possess three qualities simultaneously: They are social scientific instruments for observing, coding and classifying the phenomena of political regimes, developed as part of the empiricist approach in comparative politics; but they are also inescapably normative and performative. They are normative, in contrast to the empiricist arguments, because the assumption that the idea of democracy represents the idea of the good society is embedded in them. Thus, the way they conceptualize and operationalize the concept of democracy necessarily has normative implications. They are also performative, in the sense that the very act of labelling certain political regimes as more or less democratic has direct practical, or political, impact to the extent that democratic politics is an established norm in global politics and such labeling affects the reputation of countries with direct or indirect consequences. This study, therefore, aims to investigate the democracy indices with regard to their preferences in conception and methodology, questioning the normative assumptions implicit in these preferences, scrutinizing to what extent they attempt to and succeed in reflecting the current diversity in theories of

democracy, while also placing them in a historical and political context. Such an approach is necessitated by the social scientific, normative and performative dimensions of the topic.

This inquiry is guided by two questions. The first is inspired by Saskia Sassen's description of her own analytic tactics, which includes asking "When I invoke this category, what don't I see?" in the face of powerful explanations "that is collectively produced over time that really does explain, that has been subjected to analyses and contestation, and that has survived all of that" (Warburton, 2014). The empirical theory of democracy that underlies the democracy indices can be regarded as an example of such a powerful approach, yet it is continuously questioned. In this line, this study investigates what these indices do not see. Second question is inspired by the broader criticisms directed at behavioral or positivist dominant approaches in social sciences. For a wide array of scholars, these dominant approaches –epistemologies, theories and methodologies- function as justifications of established political, social structures and institutions (Duncan & Lukes, 1963; Dunn, 1993; Macpherson, 1977; Pateman, 1970). Taking its cue from these criticisms, this study seeks to reveal the justificatory, apologetic function of democracy indices with regard to existing democracies, which results in the unnecessary restriction of the horizon of democratic politics.

Efforts to "measure" democracy first emerged as part of the emergence of "empirical" theories of democracy in the post-World War Two political science. While the classification of regimes has been quite an old preoccupation, going back to Aristotle, the empiricism of the newly developing theories of democracy required



quantified datasets of political systems worldwide, so as to enable statistical methods to be used for developing and testing hypotheses. Thus, starting with the works of Dahl, Lipset, Lerner and others, various datasets of governments – whereby each country was attributed a numerical value representing their level of democracy- became an indispensable part of democracy studies. This led, in the 1960s and 1970s, to the emergence of alternative indices. The increase in the range of data available, and the developments in statistical methods gave further impetus to these studies, while a series of conceptual and measurement issues led to debates and contention. In late 1970s and 1980s, in contrast, such efforts lost some momentum, together with the general trend in studies on democracy and democratization (for some examples, see Cutright 1963; Cutright and Wiley 1969; Neubauer 1967; for overviews see Bollen 1980, 1990; Munck and Verkuilen 2002). The 1990s, however, witnessed a real explosion, a proliferation of all kinds of political, social and economic indicators, together with those measuring “human rights”, “governance”, “democracy”, or “civil society”. Currently there are hundreds of measurements, assessment frameworks, or similar projects or initiatives conducted by various types of governmental, non-governmental, private or scholarly institutions. Some of these are conducted worldwide, some on a regional basis; some measure the general level of democracy in a political system, others focus on particular components; some develop their own indicators and measurements, others choose to combine indices developed by others. They also increasingly differ with regard to the conception of democracy, the methodology of measurement, and also with regard to the audiences they respond to.

There is also an alternative trend of democracy assessment that avoids quantification, and applies participatory approaches to the production of assessments. The Democratic Audits produced by a group of scholars first for Britain is the primary example of this trend (Beetham, 1994, 1999; Weir & Beetham, 1999). Here the aim is not to rate and rank countries on a continuum, but to provide detailed assessments of the level of democracy in singular countries. Thus, the methodology adopted is qualitative in contrast to the prominence of quantitative methodology in democracy measurements. In that sense, it offers an alternative, paralleling the quantitative/qualitative division in political science –or the “thick” or “thin” concepts of democracy (Coppedge, 1999, 2005). The audit framework was also adopted by the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA) titled as State of Democracy (Beetham et al., 2002) and applied to various countries, such as the Philippines or New Zealand (Co et al., 2010; Henderson & Bellamy, 2002).

There is a vast amount of literature revolving around issues of conceptualization, operationalization, data aggregation and measurement errors, and compare various indexes on these lines. Apart from general comparative assessments, a quite common pattern is to offer a new and better index after such a comparison of alternative indices (Adcock & Collier, 2001; Bollen, 1980, 1990; Bollen & Paxton, 2000; Brusis, 2006; Hadenius & Teorell, 2005; Munck & Verkuilen, 2002).

To the extent that these quantitative democracy indices can be linked to the “liberal electoral democratization studies” (Dryzek, 2009, p. 1380), they are also

obviously imbued with a particular normative conception of democracy. However, at the current state of political theory, we cannot speak of a consensus on the definition of democracy, or on the theory of democracy that should guide academic studies; and different perspectives offer different routes for empirical study. For instance, the affinities between various normative theories and certain lines of research in political science, as mentioned by Habermas, exemplify this link (Habermas, 2006, pp. 412–413). The differences in normative perspectives, and their consequences for academic and political applications also have an increasing significance in world politics. Increasing importance is given to those policies collected under various labels, such as “democracy promotion”, “democracy assistance”, or “political conditionality”, with increasing resources allocated by governments and intergovernmental or non-governmental organizations. The differences of perspectives observed in these policies are also reflected in the geometrically increasing number of democracy or governance measurements, and especially in the rivalry between ‘measurement’ and ‘assessment’ schemes. Therefore, it is a meaningful academic task to scrutinize, or uncover when implicit, the normative conceptions that guide them in the processes of conceptualization, operationalization and methodology selection, and to evaluate them in comparison with the existing normative conceptions of democracy developed in political theory.

These observations suggest that normative –or meta-theoretical– assessments of various measurement schemes, together with the production of alternative ways of assessing democracy derived from alternative normative perspectives, is a promising venue of academic research. Indeed, there are some

significant attempts to formulate such alternatives. One of the significant examples is David Beetham and his colleagues' work, and the assessment methodology they developed for the IDEA (Beetham, 1994, 1999, 2004). A second line of work relates to the deliberative democracy perspectives, whereby scholars such as John Dryzek develop a framework for assessing "deliberative capacity", and others focus on "measuring deliberation" or the "quality of discourse" (Dryzek, 2009; Ferree et al., 2002; Neblo, 2005; Rosenberg, 2005; Steiner et al., 2004).

Other critical studies also exist, which criticize democracy measurement schemes for being based on narrow and particular conceptions of democracy (Giannone, 2010; Koelble & Lipuma, 2008). However, these studies are few in number and are limited in their coverage of measurement and assessment schemes; besides they do not provide their own conceptions of democracy in a clearly formulated and philosophically grounded manner. Thus, we observe that meta-theoretical analyses that would consider the normative understandings –as conceptions of "good society"- that underlie these measurements are –perhaps ironically- underdeveloped. This is surprising because, even though the urge for quantification tends to conceal this, democracy measurement schemes are motivated with a clearly normative agenda. Given the prominent role the concepts of "democracy", "democracy promotion" or "democracy assistance" play in current world politics, this study aims to contribute to this relatively underdeveloped aspect of the academic literature on democracy measurement.

Against this background, a comprehensive study of these instruments with regard to their historical evolution, and the opportunities and deficiencies they

possess for providing a sound assessment of democratic challenges and possibilities around the world, seems timely. Such a study could improve our knowledge in a number of crucial aspects. First, it would contextualize the development of these measurements according to their interactions with: (i) The political developments; and (ii) the developments in theories of democracy in the same period. Secondly, it could offer a better understanding of the prevailing conception(s) of democracy that guide various aspects of world politics: the general discourse on democracy; international security policies that rely on some versions of “democratic peace thesis”; democracy assistance policies. And finally, it could assess the possible contributions of deliberative democracy perspective in understanding the challenges and possibilities of democratization; while staying clear from a number of handicaps and traps inherent in those measurements based on narrower conceptions of democracy.

This study seeks to answer the following questions:

- a) What do these instruments claim to measure? How do they deal with the issues of conceptualization, operationalization, data collection and aggregation, and measurement? How do they compare with each other?
- b) What are the normative conceptions of democracy that guide each instrument? Do they explicitly express their normative perspectives? Are the definitions of democracy employed sufficiently grounded? How are normative and conceptual differences reflected in methodologies?

- c) How could these measurements be assessed from the perspective of deliberative democracy? Are they measuring the right thing, or are they leaving some crucial aspects of democracy outside?
- d) What possibilities does a deliberative perspective offer for developing a sounder democratic assessment framework without compromising its normative and critical edge?

It is a commonly emphasized point that all attempts to study or measure democracy need to be guided by a theory of democracy and a ‘root concept’ of democracy derived from that theory (Berg-Schlosser, 2004; Collier & Levitsky, 1997). For instance, in Bollen’s words, “[t]o agree on the measurement of political democracy, analysts will have to arrive at a consensus on the meaning of the term” (Bollen, 1993b, p. 821). However, the consensus Bollen wishes for can be elusive due to the plurality of definitions of democracy, and the indispensability of this pluralism as a result of the normativity –or performativity (Skinner, 1973)- of talking about democracy. However, the empiricism and the desire for quantification observed in Bollen’s work results in the restriction of the range of definitions of democracy to be used and of questions to be asked.

As an offshoot of empirical theories of democracy, democracy measurements are vulnerable to the line of criticism directed at those theories. By adhering to a narrow definition of democracy inherited from Schumpeter, and limiting their focus to only those variables that can be empirically observed and quantified, they share the same conservative standpoint of empirical theories, providing justification for the “actually existing forms of liberal democracy”, and

reject possibilities of alternative forms, or the deepening of democracy in the existing ones. In the case of those measurements based on the Schumpeterian definition of democracy, the theoretical references are almost standard: Dahl, and Lipset, sometimes accompanied by Downs, and Huntington. Alternative conceptions are almost never mentioned, let alone any lengthy discussion on the comparative merits of alternative conceptions. The main objective is to employ a parsimonious definition that is suitable to testing through quantitative data. However, any attempt at measuring or assessing democracy, as Beetham points at (1994), raises questions which are at once philosophical, analytical and empirical; and they are of interest not only to political scientists, but also to governments and citizens.

Starting especially with 1980s, the comparative assessment of various democracy measurement indices has been a growing area of academic research. Within this literature, these indices have been scrutinized with regard to all stages of the construction of empirical research: conceptualization, operationalization, selection of indicators, and methods of aggregation. While dealing with both conceptual problems, and problems of measurement, this literature has focused more on methodological issues. As Bollen summarizes, conceptual problems include inadequacy of the theoretical definitions of democracy used, confounding of the concept of democracy with other concepts, and the treatment of democracy as a binary concept; problems of measurement, on the other hand, concern selection of invalid indicators, biases or random and systematic errors included in subjective

indicators, or the failure to test the ability and validity of the indices (Bollen, 1990; Coppedge, 2005; Hadenius & Teorell, 2005; Munck & Verkuilen, 2002).

One of the methods in comparing different indices is to check the existence of a correlation among them as a proof of their ‘external validity’ –as a proof that they are measuring the same thing (Bollen, 1980, pp. 380–382; McMahon & Kornheiser, 2009). However, it is also argued that correlation does not mean interchangeability, in the sense that researchers cannot freely choose among them or substitute one with another (Casper & Tufis, 2003). The measurement errors included in various indices have also been a topic of research; particularly Kenneth Bollen has been insistent on the quantitative empirical analyses of systematic measurement errors (Bollen, 1986, 1993a; Bollen & Paxton, 2000).

The validity of indicators used is also an important aspect of measurement, and the use of invalid indicators, a consequence of confounding the concept of democracy with other concepts –such as political stability (Cutright, 1963; Muller, 1988), voter turnout (Lerner, 1958; Stack, 1979), or party composition of the legislature (Vanhanen, 1990)- has been an enduring topic of criticism (Bollen, 1980, 1993a; Munck & Verkuilen, 2002).

Although these problems are discussed merely as methodological problems, and remedies to them are also sought via methodological refinement or precision in measurement, it can also be argued that these issues should also be considered at the meta-theoretical level, whereby the normative and theoretical aspects of the concept of democracy are at issue. Thus, we could gain new insights when the issue of biased judgments translated into quantitative indices –what Bollen mentions as



“judge-specific measurement error” or “method factors”- would be considered as a result of the normative choices made at the stage of conceptualization. Or the observation that “the confusion in the democratization literature” can be explained by the instability of the results obtained from various measurements could be dealt with more effectively from a meta-theoretical perspective (Casper & Tufis, 2003, p. 202).

Therefore, what seems to be missing to a great extent in this literature is a meta-theoretical evaluation of the democracy indices that will consider what normative understandings –which conceptions of “good society”- are inherent in these instruments and how these are reflected in the definitions, questions and methods they prefer. A starting point could be to ask whether these democracy indices are measuring the ‘right thing’? This means assessing their “theoretical validity” by asking “the normative question of whether the various existing democracy indices are ‘doing the right thing’ and considering what actually needs to be examined” (McMahon & Kornheiser, 2009). Although the importance of the theoretical definition of democracy is frequently emphasized –since “satisfying the other standards [of measurement] depends on it” (Bollen, 1990, p. 19)- this question is a widely ignored aspect in the comparative assessment of democracy indices.

A significant line of research that needs to be mentioned in this respect is the burgeoning field of “democracy assessment”, whereby the focus is on qualitative, in-depth study of singular countries, based on a more demanding concept of democracy. A major example is the Democratic Audit framework developed by the Human Rights Centre at the University of Essex (Beetham, 1999;

Beetham et al., 2001; Weir & Beetham, 1999). Currently this framework has been developed into a State of Democracy framework implemented by the IDEA (Beetham, 2004). This framework offers a critique of quantitative democracy measurements on three significant points: first of all, “[q]uantification conveys an illusory impression of objectivity and precision to what are essentially qualitative judgments” (Beetham, 2004, p. 3). Second, they tend to “take the established democracies as an unproblematic standard for the assessment of developing ones” (Beetham, 1999, p. 568). Third, they are “conducted by outsiders passing judgment on a country from abroad” (Beetham, 2004, p. 5). In response, Beetham’s framework is based on qualitative assessments conducted by the citizens of the country being assessed, and instead of aggregation, different aspects of the democratic system are kept separate. At the conceptual level, it gives priority to the principles and norms rather than institutions and practices, and provides a more comprehensive list of requirements. More fundamentally, the framework rests on two assumptions: The first regards the universality of the norms of democracy both at the philosophical and empirical level; and second, that “the distinctive institutions of western representative democracy do have an exemplary significance for democracies everywhere” (Beetham, 2004, p. 13). Consequently, the Democratic Audit and State of Democracy assessment frameworks differ significantly from quantitative democracy measurements methodologically: A thicker concept of democracy –an extensive checklist of requisites; qualitative assessment instead of quantification; assessment by citizens instead of outsider judges. These also point to a significant improvement at the conceptual level, as

observed in the priority given to norms, and the inclusion of dimensions such as social and economic rights, or a vibrant civil society. Still they retain some similarity to the theories of democracy guiding the democracy indices, therefore whether all these differences amount to a meta-theoretically significant break is a question that needs a thorough consideration.

A second line of research that offers a meta-theoretical critique and alternative to the mainstream democratization studies is related to the theory of deliberative democracy. Deliberative democracy theory developed and gained increasing influence in recent decades basically at the philosophical level, while empirical study of deliberation is also a burgeoning area of academic research, as documented, for instance in the two-volume special issue of *Acta Politica* in 2005 and in other studies (Agné, 2006; Chambers, 2003; Jenssen, 2008; Steenbergen et al., 2003). Besides providing philosophically grounded criticism of the existing theories of democracy, particularly of the Schumpeterian minimalist version that guides the democracy measurement efforts, this perspective makes a major contribution to comparative studies of democracy and democratizations, by introducing deliberation as the central feature of democratic policy making. This is accompanied by recent efforts to develop empirical research agendas on deliberation. A significant example is the Discourse Quality Index, which is a measurement instrument that takes speech, “the public discourse by a particular individual delivered at a particular point in a debate”, as its unit of analysis (Steenbergen et al., 2003, p. 27).

More recently the framework offered by Dryzek promises an alternative way of assessing the democratic quality of political systems (Dryzek, 2009). Dryzek's criticism of the comparative studies of democratization based on electoral definitions of democracy is basically that "they miss a key aspect –deliberation" (Dryzek, 2009, p. 1380). In his framework, political systems can be positioned on a continuum of deliberative capacity, which is defined as "the extent to which a political system possesses structures to host deliberation that is authentic, inclusive, and consequential" (Dryzek, 2009, p. 1382). This framework seems to promise some advantages over other forms of measuring or assessing democracy: First of all, it does not fixate any specific institution, or political entity, allowing deliberation to occur in various places and scales. Second, by not being too tied to the existing liberal democratic institutional structures, it is able "imagine deliberative systems without, say, a legislature, or internally deliberative political parties, or designed forums, or elections" (Dryzek, 2009, p. 1385). These in turn tend to be more in line with the current changes in the scales and forms of politics associated with the processes of globalization.

There are also other critical studies that directly deal with the quantitative indices, though they are few in number. One example is Giannone's article on the case of Freedom House (Giannone, 2010). The annual surveys of the Freedom House have been subject to criticism for quite a long time, particularly for containing a conservative bias (Bollen, 1993a; Bollen & Paxton, 2000; Hartman & Hsiao, 1988, pp. 796–797). Giannone continues this line of criticism, focusing on the "dominance" of Freedom House's measurements, despite its methodological

flaws, and arguing that “the use of the scales of Freedom House is equivalent to an implicit acceptance of their political-ideological background” (Giannone, 2010, pp. 90–91). In another similar study, this time focusing on the Bertelsmann Transformation Index (BTI), Koelble and Lipuma criticizes democracy measurements for their a-historical and a-cultural assumptions (Koelble & Lipuma, 2008). According to them, such indexes “measure only the extent to which democracies in the post-colony conform to a Euro-American model that is culturally inappropriate and perhaps economically impossible by virtue of the metropolitan-defined global economy now in motion” (Koelble & Lipuma, 2008, p. 21). They also formulate a principle for assessing democracy: “the real measure of a democracy, the true gauge of effective governance, is the extent to which democratic governance meets the critical values and visions of the electorate” (Koelble & Lipuma, 2008, p. 22).

As can be observed from the summary of the literature given above, comparative assessment of democracy worldwide has been a dynamic area of research and application. Two significant points emerge from this summary: First of all, while a substantive part of the academic literature focus on the methodological aspects of quantitative study of democracy, and new measurement schemes continue to be developed, they are still far from reaching a consensus on many critical issues such as how to operationalize the concept, which data sources to be used, or which methods of aggregation are more appropriate. Second, these methodological issues are also linked to theoretical and normative understandings that guide any attempt to define or measure democracy; and existing classifications

of concepts democracy –minimalist versus maximalist, or thin versus thick- fail to capture this aspect in a comprehensive manner.

So the democracy indices are almost exclusively located within the empirical democratic theory tradition, and therefore are open to critique from normative perspectives. The guiding assumption of this study regarding normativity of defining democracy and the performativity of measuring it, requires the study to begin with a review of this empirical-normative divide in democratic theory. Therefore, the first chapter will cover this aspect, focusing on the potential of normative theories of democracy to provide assessment frameworks for democratic quality.

The first chapter thus provides a review of theories of democracy, tentatively applying the empirical/normative divide for categorization purposes. The underlying goal, however, is to emphasize the normativity inherent in all theories of democracy. The chapter will conclude with a discussion of the argument on the essentially contested nature of the concept of democracy, which implies an impossibility of arriving at a consensus on its definition.

The following two chapters will investigate a list of prominent democracy indices in a chronological manner. The 1990s is taken as a breaking point dividing the two historical periods of democracy measurement: the first period covers roughly the 1960s-1980s era, whereby the rise of the empirical democratic theory gave impetus to the production of quantitative political indicators, which culminated in the emergence of the two most well-known and widely used democracy indices –the FITW index of the Freedom House, and the POLITY index.

The second period starts with the end of the Cold War, when a global diffusion of democratic regimes occupied the world, coinciding with the proliferation of all kinds of indicators –political, economic and social- that is also the reflection of the emergence of global governance mechanisms. Covering the period from 1990s to the present, the third chapter will also summarize the state of the art in democracy measurement.

In both chapters, the selected democracy indices will be scrutinized primarily with regard to the concepts of democracy they employed, and the normative assumptions these reflected. The methodological choices will also be discussed in connection with the conceptual preferences. In line with the significant developments in philosophical and theoretical debates in democratic theory in the same period, as reviewed in the first chapter, the aim will be to assess to what extent the state of the art in democracy measurement reflects the conceptual plurality and normative considerations in democratic theory. Also considered in connection with the dilemmas and failings of current democratic regimes, as reflected in the decline in overall scores in democracy indices for the past decade, the limitations of these indices will be explained.

The fourth chapter, in turn, will focus on the political, or practical, aspect of democracy measurement. Taking clue from the sociology of quantification and the burgeoning literature on the politics of global ranking, the chapter will focus on the disciplinary and discursive functions the democracy indices perform in global politics, similar to other global rankings such as those covering governance, corruption or competitiveness. Critical studies that analyze such indicators as

instruments of governmentality or ideological hegemony will also be discussed with regard to their relevance for democracy indices. In the second half of the chapter, the political aspects of democracy measurement will be analyzed in two periods in line with the periodization offered in the previous two chapters. Accordingly, the first part will consider the early indices within the context of Cold War politics, while the second part will locate them in the politics of democracy promotion and global governance. In the concluding discussion, the prospects of emancipatory assessment frameworks for the quality of democracy will be the topic.

An underlying theme in the dissertation is a certain understanding of political science that goes against the still powerful separation of domestic/national politics and international politics. Democracy measurement is directed at the political systems of nation-states, the sphere of international politics, even the foreign policy issues, are outside of its scope. The international dimension does not play a role also in the conceptual or theoretical basis of democracy measurement. Yet, the practice of democracy measurement is taken in this study to be a practice that directly impacts on and is shaped by world politics at various levels. As discussed in detail in Chapter 4, democracy measurement is a political activity and constitutes an increasingly important part of international politics.

As the critical analysis of the practice of democracy measurement with regard to its normative, performative and political aspects is covered in these four chapters, the fifth chapter will attempt to provide the outline of a framework that would democratize democracy assessment itself. Going back to the conclusions of



the theoretical discussion in the first chapter, where the deliberative democratic perspective was considered as the most promising venue for developing an assessment framework that would be theoretically grounded and empirically productive while maintaining a critical normative edge, this part will provide a detailed analysis of the potential of an alternative to democracy measurement. On the conceptual dimension, the concept of deliberative capacity will be discussed. On the methodological dimension, the discussion will start with the only existing index of deliberative democracy produced by the V-Dem, and continue to review the methodological innovations in the fields of deliberative democracy and participatory research.

One caveat should be mentioned. The field of political indicators is indeed extensive, and there are several indicators that measure political concepts that are closely related to democracy –such as good governance or rule of law. The relations between these concepts and the concept of democracy can also be considered significant in terms of conceptualizing democracy. This dissertation, however, focuses solely on those indices directly measuring or considered to be measuring democracy in its broader sense.

One important point is about the loose usage of the term measurement in social sciences in some cases. One such example is an edited volume on “measuring identity” in which all social scientific methodologies ranging from surveys to discourse analysis or ethnography are assumed to be measuring identity (Abdelal, 2009). Yet such an extension of the concept of measurement is counterproductive for discussing different methodologies. More importantly, the generally accepted

definition of measurement in social sciences, which also provides the basis for democracy measurement, is “the assignment of numerals to objects or events according to rules” (Stevens, 1946, p. 677).

Another caveat that should be mentioned is the issue of the extent of democracy, and hence the unit of democracy assessment. For some time, at least theoretically, it has been argued that democratic decision-making processes should no longer be imagined as contained within the limits of nation-states. Besides the growing emphasis on sub-national, local levels of democratic policy making, the international, transnational and global levels have also been argued to be significant for democracy. One of the first was Held: “Paradoxically, perhaps, democracy has to be extended and deepened within and between countries for it to retain its relevance in the twenty-first century” (Held, 1993, pp. 14–15). The democracy indices investigated in this study, however, commonly focus on the nation-state level, thus measuring democracies of states, but also including some autonomous areas as separate units, while subnational, transnational or supranational political institutions left outside the assessment. This issue of scale will be among the topics discussed in the final chapter, where the potentials of a deliberative democracy assessment are investigated.

## **1. DEMOCRATIC THEORY: EMPIRICAL OR NORMATIVE?**

Democratic theory is the moral Esperanto of the present nation-state system ... the public cant of the modern world  
(Dunn, 1993, p. 2)

The aim of this chapter is twofold. The first aim is to review how conceptions of democracy guiding the democracy indices developed within the “empirical democratic theory” that emerged as part of the development of political science in the post-World War Two context. The second aim is to review the alternative conceptions of democracy that emerged in the same period against the dominance of these empirically oriented conceptions. The discussion of democracy, being guided by these aims, is therefore not exhaustive but selective.

This chapter may also be seen to present a case study of how a central concept came to be conceptualized and studied in political science. The story of the concept of democracy in the second half of the twentieth and the beginning of the twenty-first centuries can be told by juxtaposing Schumpeter and Habermas. Schumpeter’s theory of democracy, published in 1942, successfully guided and reflected the basic tendencies of the empirical democratic theory, and was declared as victorious by S. Huntington in 1991 (Huntington, 1991, p. 6). Habermas, in contrast, can be considered as a prominent figure representing the criticisms directed at this theory, while also offering a philosophically grounded normative theory of democracy which also influenced institutional innovations. It was John Dryzek (2000), who declared that democratic theory had taken “a strong

deliberative turn” in the 1990s (p. 1), and in a later work (Dryzek, 2010) that since then “deliberative democracy has gone from strength to strength” (p. 3).

The normative-empirical distinction employed in this chapter regarding different conceptions of democracy does not coincide with the similar distinction made between empirical political science and political theory –or political philosophy. This point will be discussed in larger detail in the section on normative democratic theories.

### **1.1. EMPIRICAL DEMOCRATIC THEORY**

Political Science in the post-World War Two era, especially as it developed in the United States, was mostly occupied with defining the political science itself (Kariel, 1967). It was characterized by a clear distinction with the traditional, classical theories and analyses, and an ambition to recreate the study of politics as a scientific discipline. The strict separation of this discipline “from the old classical or canonical political theory” was accompanied with the rejection of “what was later called the normative element in political theory” (Alexander, 2019, p. 405).

The rise of “empirical democratic theory” coincides with the identification of democracy with the liberalism of the West: “[A]fter 1945 democracy was successfully married to liberalism. Liberalism was no longer seen as one strand of democracy: it was presented as the only version there was” (Grugel, 2002, p. 17).

A series of trends that shaped this period in political science were particularly influential in the emergence of the empirical theories of democracy and the democracy indexes as their offshoot. First, the methodological trend –

behavioralism, empiricism. Second, the empirical-normative separation, also reflected in the changing conceptions of democracy, with the ideals and values associated with democracy being left to political philosophers, a realist attitude, using empirical evidence to argue for a more restricted understanding of democracy. Third, the trend for comparative studies – American, Western political scientists engaging in research in other, decolonizing regions and new states – with modernization and development as key concepts.

The emergence of empirical theories of democracy was in response to two separate trends –an epistemological/methodological preference for quantitative study in order to develop a science of politics; and a normative agenda shaped by American politics and the Cold War political atmosphere, reflected in the prevalence of pluralism. These trends were countered by two parallel trends – growing criticism towards empiricism in social sciences, particularly towards the end of 1960s; and the growing frustration with liberal representative democracy within the democratic West itself. Just as the post-World War Two era was characterized by the celebration of the victory of democracy, preference for a more restrictive –realist- conception of democracy was gaining ground among political theorists and social scientist.

Here in Lasswell (1956), we see all critical points defining the new approach: a particular understanding of science; necessity of indices for correlation analysis; the parallel with economics:

When studies of trend are well thought-out in advance and made subject to appropriate methods of correlation analysis, the scientific core of political science can be greatly strengthened. (...) The first technical step in conducting research on

trend is to take the "key abstractions," such as "freedom" or "shared power," and to choose the most appropriate indices for each term. (p. 136)

In parallel to the general trend of the day, Laswell (1956) offers economics as a role model for political science, especially for distinguishing democracies and dictatorship in a similar way:

Side by side with the theoretical models of a 'competitive economy', or a 'monopolistically competitive economy,' we need to perfect our conception of a 'democratic polity' and of the 'polities of dictatorship,' as related to diverse cultural contexts. (p. 141)

One of the exemplary studies that both displayed the tendencies of this period, and had serious impact on the following studies was the study on the voting behavior in the 1948 presidential elections in the U.S. by Bernard R. Berelson et al. (1954). The most significant point about this work was their observation of a paradox:

Individual voters today seem unable to satisfy the requirements for a democratic system of government outlined by political theorists. But the system of democracy does meet certain requirements for a going political organization. (p. 312)

What the authors concluded in the face of this paradox was that liberal democracy should be considered beyond the traditional understanding that limits the scope of democracy to the voters and political institutions:

For political democracy to survive, other features are required: the intensity of conflict must be limited, the rate of change must be restrained, stability in the social and economic structure must be maintained, a pluralistic social organization must exist, and a basic consensus must bind together the contending parties. (Berelson et al., 1954, pp. 312–313)

Another trend within American social science should also be considered at this point; that is the new subdiscipline of comparative politics, indicating a greater

interest of U.S. political scientists in other countries, which led to the emergence of theories of modernization and development. These theories also affected the study of democracy, or rather democratization in the case of the Third World. So the debates on the prerequisites of democracy, and the consequences of democratization gained importance.

So, in all these areas the definition of democracy was to play a central role, and minimalist conceptions took the lead in both political science and the global politics of democracy.

Munck (2007) gives an interesting account of the impact of Schumpeterian conception of democracy in the studies on democratic transitions. As a conception focused particularly on elections, it was most useful for transition studies since the holding of competitive elections is usually the critical step in such processes. Therefore, Munck states, “the status of democratic transitions as a distinctive field of research is given by an undeniably Schumpeterian approach to democracy” (p. 46). This point was particularly evident in the mid-1970s and thereafter, with a new wave of democratization around the world and “the change in values, especially among the left in both the South and the East, did much to place the Schumpeterian approach to democracy in a positive light” (p. 46). While pointing at the connection between the transition studies and the Schumpeterian conception of electoral democracy, “a threshold marked by the introduction of competitive elections with mass suffrage for the main political offices”, Munck also argues that narrowing the concept of democracy in such a way, excluding a large array of issues is analytically justifiable (p. 47).

Interestingly, therefore, a division of labor is suggested among different, thin and thick, conceptions of democracy, whereby Schumpeterian definition is more relevant for democratic transitions, thicker definitions that include more dimensions are relevant for “countries where democracy is firmly established” (p. 48). This also means that the analytical distinction of transitions as a distinct topic does not necessarily mean “a judgment about the importance of a Schumpeterian approach compared with any other approach but is rather a conceptual decision ... breaking down democratic theory into a series of distinct and hence manageable explanatory challenges” (p. 48).

#### **1.1.1. Schumpeter’s Minimalist Conception of Democracy**

Even Joseph Schumpeter himself would be surprised, it could be speculated, at the frequency of references to his definition of democracy and its impact on the development of democratization studies in political science. While the minimal or procedural conception of democracy Schumpeter offered has been subjected to extensive scrutiny and criticism, perhaps not leaving much to be added, his name is still indispensable for understanding the approach to defining and measuring democracy that emerged starting from 1950s, given the central role attributed to his conception in this literature. Describing Schumpeter’s book as “extraordinarily influential”, Carole Pateman (1970) describes his influence as such:

An understanding of the nature of Schumpeter's theory is vital for an appreciation of more recent work in democratic theory for it is elaborated within the framework established by Schumpeter and based on his definition of democracy. (p. 3)



This centrality is best reflected in Samuel Huntington's argument in 1991 that the debate around the definition of democracy had come to an end by the 1970s on behalf of the procedural conception and "Schumpeter had won" (Huntington, 1991, p. 6).<sup>1</sup>

In his introduction to the 1994 edition of Schumpeter's *Capitalism, Socialism, and Democracy*, Richard Swedberg considers the two chapters "in which Schumpeter presents and confronts two different theories of democracy, are especially brilliant" (Schumpeter, 1994, p. xv) and states that this part of the book is "as much to the point today as when it was originally written" (1994, p. xix). Apart from the particular definition of democracy he offers, however, Schumpeter is hardly regarded as a political theorist, though highly revered for this economic thought.

After a lengthy discussion of what he calls "classical democratic theory", which seems to be essentially the utilitarianism of J. Bentham, Schumpeter (1994) arrives at his own definition of democracy:

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. (p. 269)

The power of Schumpeter's definition is derived from the fact that it is in fact a plain statement of a tradition of thought that could be extended to the elitist theories of Mosca and Pareto, which "has a scientific appeal, by reason of the

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<sup>1</sup> Huntington can also be recalled for his arguments in the infamous report of the Trilateral Commission of 1975, which clearly reflected the link with a minimal conception of democracy and a similarly restricted normative understanding of it.

analogy which it presents to the model of economic behavior in a free enterprise system” (Bottomore, 1993, p. 88). In Schumpeter’s model, thus, democracy is only about the decision on who will rule, and the competition is among groups elites, just like the economic competition among firms:

[P]rofessional politicians grouped in organized political parties which function like firms on a market compete for the allegiance of voter at lengthy intervals and the successful competitors rule the state (with rather little distraction) in the intervening periods. (Dunn, 1993, p. 26)

Schumpeter was quite confident that his definition of democracy “greatly improves the theory of the democratic process”, especially by providing “a reasonably efficient criterion by which to distinguish democratic governments from others”, thus foreseeing its future impact on empirical studies on democracy (Schumpeter, 1994, p. 269). As indicated by Huntington’s declaration of the triumph of Schumpeter’s conception of democracy (1991, p. 6), the impact of his definition of democracy indeed requires explanation. In Schumpeter’s model, for instance, does not require universal suffrage: “we do not define democracy by the extent of the franchise” (Schumpeter, 1994, p. 276). He is also not clear whether certain civil liberties are necessary (Skaaning, 2021, p. 29). As an electoral model of democracy, moreover, it restricts the role of the citizens only “to deciding who the leading man shall be” (Schumpeter, 1994, p. 273). Schumpeter is even skeptical of voters interfering in the work of the rulers in-between the election periods:

The voters outside of parliament must respect the division of labor between themselves and the politicians they elect. They must not withdraw confidence too easily between elections and they must understand that, once they have elected an

individual, political action is his business and not theirs. This means that they must refrain from instructing him about what he is to do. (p. 295)

This insistence on restricting the role of the voters in the political process is explained by Schumpeter (1994) mostly by arguing that people would act irrationally in politics, even if they can be rational with regard to their personal and economic activities:

Thus the typical citizen drops down to a lower level of mental performance as soon as he enters the political field. He argues and analyzes in a way which he would readily recognize as infantile within the sphere of his real interests. He becomes a primitive again. His thinking becomes associative and affective. (p. 262)

This view of the typical citizen is in striking parallel, as Pateman points out, with the findings of empirical studies that were conducted after Schumpeter, which pointed at the indifference and ignorance of citizens to political issues in democratic polities (1970, p. 3).

In discussing Schumpeter's overall approach, rather than being limited to the oft-cited three chapters of his book, Medearis argues that "a great deal has been lost when social scientists and political theorists abstract Schumpeter's elite conception from the whole of his thought on democracy and social transformation" (Medearis, 1997, p. 831). As for the aims of this study, however, what is more important is this impact or instrumental value of Schumpeter's minimalist definition of democracy rather than being fair to his philosophical standing.

### 1.1.2. Dahl and Polyarchy

The works of Robert A. Dahl are very central for theoretical and empirical studies on democracy, and his notion of polyarchy is “the most frequently cited referent of empirically oriented democratization studies in the last decades” (Berg-Schlosser, 2007, p. 31). While Dahl produced a long list of works during his career, two of his books are particularly significant in shaping the mainstream approaches to democracy, whereby he developed the concept of “polyarchy”: *A Preface to Democratic Theory* (1956), and *Polyarchy* (1970).

Dahl’s concept of polyarchy is particularly significant, and has been influential, as it makes a distinction between democracy as the more idealized form with a more demanding set of criteria, and the more readily observed polyarchy, defined minimally and procedurally similar to Schumpeter but including some additional criteria. One reason for this distinction is Dahl’s attempt to respond to criticisms arguing that the empirical theories that derive the definition of democracy from the existing political systems lead to the justification of these as representing the ideal form of democracy that is possible.

In his first book, Dahl can be observed to chart a way that is quite similar to Schumpeter’s, with also some significant differences. Similar to Schumpeter, Dahl’s list of “institutional arrangements” gives a depiction of the electoral process (1956, p. 84). Dahl’s polyarchy is an electoral democracy divided into four periods: “the voting period” is characterized by the equal right to vote, “the prevoting period” is when all alternatives can be scheduled freely, “the postvoting period” is when “the alternatives with the greatest number of votes acquire office, and the

orders of elected officials are executed”. The fourth period, “the interelection stage”, constitutes a difference with Schumpeter, as this is a period of inactivity for Schumpeter and thus left out of the definition, while Dahl considers it a condition that “all interelection decisions are subordinate or executory to those arrived at during the election state”, and if not, “new decisions during the interelection period are governed by the preceding seven conditions, operating, however, under rather different institutional circumstances” (p. 84).

In his 1971 book, Dahl provides a more extensive description of polyarchy. His emphasis is on political equality, which means that “all full citizens must have unimpaired opportunities”, in particular for having “their preferences weighed equally in the conduct of the government”, which is a necessary condition for democracy, but should be supported by certain guarantees. These guarantees, ranging from freedom of expression to right to vote and alternative sources of information, again focus on the electoral processes (Dahl, 1971, pp. 2–3). He also defines two dimensions of democratization, one is “liberalization” which means improvement in “public contestation”, and “inclusiveness” which relates to the level of participation, this basically meaning the extent of franchise (1971, pp. 5–7).

A significant difference between Dahl and Schumpeter is observed in their assumptions regarding the capacities of individuals in judgment, since Dahl’s conception of democracy is based on the conditions of both equality and personal autonomy:

If the good or interests of everyone should be weighed equally, and if each adult person is in general the best judge of his or her good or interests, then every adult

member of an association is sufficiently well qualified, taken all around, to participate in making binding collective decisions that affect his or her good or interests, that is, to be a full citizen of the demos. More specifically, when binding decisions are made, the claims of each citizen as to the laws, rules, policies, etc. to be adopted must be counted as valid and equally valid. Moreover, no adult members are so definitely better qualified than the others that they should be entrusted with making binding collective decisions. More specifically, when binding decisions are made, no citizen's claims as to the laws, rules, and policies to be adopted are to be counted as superior to the claims of any other citizen. (Dahl, 1989, p. 105)

In both books, Dahl also writes, though not very extensively or systematically, about how to measure polyarchy, or how to classify regimes according to the principles of polyarchy. In 1956, he briefly mentions that the eight institutional dimensions of polyarchy could be taken as a scoring instrument, and six categories are defined according to the levels of scores, which are grouped in two parts as polyarchies and hierarchies (1956, p. 87). In his 1971 book, there is a classification of the levels of democratization, this time from hegemonic regimes to near-polyarchies, from near-polyarchies to full polyarchies, and finally the third stage of “the further democratization of full polyarchies” (1971, p. 10).

Particularly mentioning Dahl’s 1989 book, Munck argues that “Dahl’s concept of democracy, though procedural, is much broader than usually assumed and provides a theoretical basis for a research agenda that goes well beyond Schumpeterian-rooted agendas” (Munck, 2007, p. 66).

## **1.2. CRITICS OF EMPIRICAL DEMOCRATIC THEORY**

The criticisms towards both Schumpeter's definition of democracy and to the general trends in empirical political science was related to their normative impact on the value of democracy, as expressed by J. Dunn:

[T]heir attempts to redefine the democracy by reference to then prevailing American practices prompted understandable criticism that they had stripped democracy of much of what makes it morally attractive. (Dunn, 1993, p. 13)

What Dunn defines as "capitalist democratic theory" (Dunn, 1993, p. 24), which unites both Schumpeter' and Dahl' conceptions, has a restricted view of democracy that is sometimes referred to as "a theory of political democracy" for excluding the social, economic, and personal domains outside the scope of democracy (Gould, 1990, p. 4). Such exclusion "not only leaves untouched the inequalities outside political sphere (as does liberal individualism, generally), but it introduces these inequalities ('realistically,' to be sure) as systemic features", hence going beyond mere description of reality, and becoming a justification for inequalities (Gould, 1990, pp. 9–10).

In line with this justificatory function, the reduction of democracy to "a set of procedures for government" is also logically flawed, since "this is to mistake the necessary conditions for liberal democracy for its defining characteristics", while these procedures do not necessarily guarantee the existence of key democratic freedoms and rights, such as tolerance, respect for civil liberties and equality before the law" (Grugel, 2002, p. 6).

Moreover, despite the claims for making empirical descriptions devoid of normative assumption, this normative consideration of electoral democracy, can be

seen in many authors, best exemplified by Lipset's declaration that democracy is "the good society itself in operation" (Lipset, 1960, p. 403).

### **1.3. NORMATIVE THEORIES OF DEMOCRACY**

Why normative? Is it parallel to the positive theory/normative theory distinction? The normative political theory was thought, both by normativists and their positive political theorist counterparts, as more a collaborator than a rival. There was supposed to be a "division of labor", hence "The normativists did not threaten the positive political theorists on their own territory" (Alexander, 2019, p. 410). So, the question is whether normative democratic theories could threaten the empirical theory on its own territory.

The different conceptions of democracy are usually grouped as two opposing camps, the empirical-normative distinction being one of them. Schumpeter, for instance, juxtaposes his own theory with what he calls "the classical democratic theory", although he is not always clear what he means with this classical theory. At certain points it becomes clear that he has the utilitarian philosophy of politics in mind; and the classical theory is also mentioned as a version of representative theory, so we can conclude he does not even consider the more radical variants as proposed by Rousseau, Marx or others.

Another similar duality is between direct and representative democracy:

Traditional political theory has taken democracy to be a form of government in which people govern themselves either by direct participation in decisions affecting all of them or by the election of representatives. (Gould, 1990, p. 81)



Indeed, the historical experience of democracy also coincides with this distinction: The direct democracy of ancient Athens, and the modern representative democracy that emerged in the end of the eighteenth century (Dunn, 1993, p. 14).

Yet another distinction is between procedural and substantive models of democracy. In this distinction, procedural democracy is the more limited one focusing only on the political domain and on the procedures of political decision-making which are supposed to be democratic through the processes of elections; whereby substantive democracy emphasizes the social and economic conditions and rights that should accompany political rights so that the interests and preferences of all citizens could be equally transmitted to the political domain. Underlying such distinctions and discussions is of course the question of the relationship between capitalism and democracy. There is, on the one hand, what Dunn calls “capitalist democratic theory”, suggesting a connection and correlation between capitalism and democracy:

There are still ample exponents of the view that capitalist democracy is not merely the only democracy we yet have –but also the best democracy we are ever likely to have, let alone to be able to retain for any length of time. Capitalist democratic theory (as we may provisionally call it) accepts, as it always has accepted, states more or less as it finds them. It accepts that government is necessary, expedient, and presumes that it will always remain so.” (Dunn, 1993, p. 24)

Substantive theories of democracy, in contrast, argue that certain social and economic rights and distributive mechanisms should be in place for democracy to thrive. Social democratic, participatory or egalitarian models of democracy are usually those that emphasize the substantive outcomes of democratic processes, as providing equality and fair distribution of opportunities and capabilities.

Those conceptions grouped as normative conceptions can also be grouped under the titles of “radical democracy”, as they call for radical transformation of liberal democracy, or of “participatory democracy”, since extensive participation of all citizens is the crux of their understanding of democracy. Honneth, for instance, discusses the proceduralist and republican division within “the tradition of radical democracy”, commonly aiming for giving “democratic will formation a greater role than is usual in political liberalism” (Honneth, 1998, p. 763).

### **1.3.1. Participatory Democracy**

In all works on democratic theory, Carole Pateman is the leading figure credited as the theorist of participatory democracy. Pateman is one of the earliest critics of the empirical democratic theory, who also offered an alternative conception in her 1970 book. Pateman (1970) begins with a critical review of the recent theories of democracy, including Schumpeter’s and Dahl’s versions, but also points at the “inconclusive nature of the criticisms of the contemporary theory of democracy” (p. 16). Her starting point in positing a participatory theory of democracy against the representative theory is that Schumpeter’s notion of “the classical theory of democracy” was in fact a myth:

The very importance of Schumpeter's influence is that it has obscured the fact that not all writers who have claim to be called 'classical' theorists of democracy took the same view of the role of participation. In the theories of J. S. Mill and Rousseau, for example, participation has far wider functions and is central to the establishment and maintenance of a democratic polity, the latter being regarded not just as a set of national representative institutions but what I shall call a participatory society. (p. 20)

“Participatory democracy is often treated as a purely normative argument, concerned with ideals. That I presented empirical evidence in my book to support my arguments is often ignored” (Pateman, 2012, p. 10)

In a similar vein, Carol C. Gould offers “a normative argument for the right of participation in decision-making” in “economic and social life” as well as in politics, and proposes “concrete forms of social and economic institutions that would serve to realize the philosophical principles” (Gould, 1990, pp. 1–2). She argues that her theoretical attempt at the extension of democracy is a response to the “burgeoning practical demands for democratization of political, social and economic life” (1990, p. 24). A significant difference with Pateman is that Gould criticizes the “completely participatory and anti-representational system” offered by Pateman (1990, p. 21).

Such arguments and demands for participatory mechanisms, especially as argued for by Gould, can also be considered as complimentary elements to the established procedures of political democracy. With respect to the comparative assessment of democratic quality, therefore, such approaches may offer additional criteria that would differentiate different political systems according to the extent they include participatory institutions in various domains. Such an attempt has already been made as part of the V-Dem project, in which participatory democracy is among the six major types of democracy to be measured on its own, which will be discussed in Chapter 3.

### **1.3.2. Deliberative Democracy**

As a theoretical paradigm that is considered to be dominating the field of democratic theory (Dryzek, 2010), the concept of legitimacy lies at the heart of it. In contrast to the mainstream understanding of democracy that focuses on the aggregation of preferences and interest, “the essence of democratic legitimacy should be sought instead in the ability of all individuals subject to a collective decision to engage in authentic deliberation about that decision” (Dryzek, 2000, p. v). According to Jürgen Habermas, the major theorist of deliberation, a deliberative democratic process is one that could “generate legitimacy through a procedure of opinion and will formation”. These dual processes of opinion and will formation necessarily extend the scope of democracy beyond the election processes, and this procedure should grant: “(a) publicity and transparency for the deliberative process, (b) inclusion and equal opportunity for participation, and (c) a justified presumption for reasonable outcomes” (Habermas, 2006, p. 413). These points indicate an affinity with other participatory approaches, but it also introduces a requirement of rational discussion.

It is still quite common to regard the deliberative theory is as merely a normative perspective, with little purchase for empirical application. Even Habermas himself consider the deliberative model as an example of “the widening gap between normative and empirical approaches toward politics” (2006, p. 411).

Public deliberation means something more. It means “debate and discussion aimed at producing reasonable, well-informed opinions in which participants are willing to revise preferences in light of discussion, new information, and claims made by fellow participants” (Chambers, 2003, p. 309). This more demanding

perspective on public deliberation suggests going beyond asking “Who deliberates?” by asking “How do they deliberate?” and “To what end?” (Wessler, 2008, p. 2).

Habermas’s difference from Schumpeter can be seen as a continuity of his position against the Hobbesian understanding of social contract, particularly reflected in his insistence for the need to “assume from the outset that these individuals are communicative agents, and not merely strategically acting, success-oriented agents” (Russell, 2019, p. 127). Therefore, while Russell considers Habermas’s theory as a continuation of the social contract theory in the Locke-Rousseau-Kant line, Habermas emphasizes that “a discursive or deliberative model replaces the contract model: the legal community constitutes itself not by way of a social contract but on the basis of a discursively achieved agreement” (Habermas, 1996, p. 449).

Coming to the difference between deliberative democracy and liberal representative democracy, the basic difference is that “deliberative democracy by definition is open to preference transformation within political interaction”, in contrast to the liberal democracy, which “by definition deals only in the reconciliation and aggregation of preferences defined prior to political interaction” (Dryzek, 2000, p. 10).

Habermas’ both strength and weakness can be related to this point. On the one hand, Habermas attempts to evaluate the existing democratic institutions and procedures according to their own normative self-understandings, thereby offering a strong critique of their shortcomings as well offering remedies. This results in a

sound understanding of democratic politics that does not suffice with the contemporary reality of democratic regimes. On the other hand, Habermas clearly defines his own approach as reformist, and considers revolution as a nineteenth century phenomenon that does not correspond to the complexity of modern societies (1992, p. 469). Considered in connection with the first point, this reformist stance risks being excessively restricted.

From a deliberative perspective, therefore, Dahl's dual dimensions of polyarchy –contestation and participation- are significant for their potential to produce the conditions for the development of this deliberative capacity. One crucial question in this context is whether the specific institutions of existing democratic regimes should be considered as necessary and/or sufficient for this. Dryzek's statement that "a deliberative system and its component elements do not require any specific institutions, be they competitive elections or a constitutional separation of powers" (2010, p. 13) points that they are neither necessary nor sufficient.

The relation between liberal representative democracy and deliberative democracy is a point of great theoretical and empirical importance. Deliberative democracy, as it was first formulated by Habermas, started as a project limited to the already established representative democracies of the West. The relationship between the two conceptions could then be considered as sequential. Habermas's reformist and evolutionary approach tends to support this, even when he defines his project as "radical democracy" or "to radicalize those institutions that we have already established in Western countries" (1992, p. 470). In recent decades,

however, empirical studies on deliberative democracy have also covered other contexts of authoritarian (He, 2013, 2015, 2018; He & Warren, 2017) or semi-democratic countries (Curato, 2014, 2015; Kanra, 2009), or conflict resolution processes in divided societies (Drake & McCulloch, 2011; Dryzek, 2005; Ivie & Waters, 2010; Ugarriza & Caluwaerts, 2014). Deliberative processes could be particularly valuable in democratic transitions, for instance, as they support “the terms of engagement and cultivates communicative norms that govern the process of conflict resolution and decision-making” (Curato, 2014, p. 119).

The relationship between the projects of participatory democracy and deliberative democracy should also be considered. As perhaps the best-known author associated with the participatory democracy concept, Pateman’s view on this connection is:

Participatory democracy, I argue, is different from deliberative democracy. Deliberation, discussion, and debate are central to any form of democracy, including participatory democracy, but if deliberation is necessary for democracy it is not sufficient. (Pateman, 2012, p. 8)

Criticizing the exclusive focus on deliberative forums, Pateman (2012) argues that this attitude “leaves intact the conventional institutional structures and political meaning of ‘democracy’” (p. 10), which however should be viewed as changing with the increasing focus on the systemic dimension of deliberation and the deliberative quality of the overall political systems.

In her study of Venezuela’s democratic impasse, Curato (2014) similarly argues that deliberation is a crucial requisite for participatory democracy and points at the close connection between these two projects. Yet she tends to emphasize the

priority of deliberation: “Without deliberation, the gains of participatory democracy are severely compromised” (p. 120).

### **1.3.3. Agonistic Democracy**

In current debates on critical or radical theories of democracy, the agonistic and deliberative variants emerge as the most powerful rivals. From the post-Marxist perspective of agonistic democracy, “democracy is an inherently contested, evaluative, incomplete formation that is always open to further perfection, without hope of its final culminating in a pure form” (Barnett & Low, 2016, p. 4). This view is in stark contrast with the approach of defining an authoritarian-democratic continuum that define the currently existing democratic forms as the end point, and thus implying a fixed pure form that agonistic democrats oppose. Indeed, this is the point where the mainstream approaches to democracy assessment end up limiting the horizon of politics by identifying the ideal with the current reality.

These different concepts of democracy may still be combined under the umbrella of participatory democracy, since despite their difference they agree in putting the participation of citizens at the core of the meaning of democracy.

The relation between state and economy, or market, is also a significant topic in theoretical debates on democracy. During the Cold War, this debate was mostly shaped by the ideological conflict that dominated the Cold War. In the post-Cold War period, but also starting from 1970s, the debate on neoliberalism has been the dominant topic. Those theories collected under the title of empirical democratic



theory generally assume a positive correlation between democracy and market economy.

As for those alternative theories that are explicitly normative, there is a more diverse picture. Economy is more pronounced in the participatory variant, where the democratization at the level of economic institutions is a significant requirement. In the radical democracy variant, represented by Mouffe, there is not much discussion on economic decision-making or the role of markets in a democratic political order. Coming to the deliberative perspective, a similar ignorance of economy may be observed, yet this may also be attributed to Habermas' position on the topic. Habermas, particularly in the 1970s, wrote extensively on the relation between politics and the market, or capitalism.

#### **1.4. DISCUSSION: IS DEMOCRACY AN ESSENTIALLY CONTESTED CONCEPT?**

The empirical political science and normative political theory distinction started essentially as a fiction of empiricists, but became the reality of political science to a great extent. In the case of democratic theory, however, the theories discussed here as normative do not necessarily accept this distinction. Such explicitly normative approaches are already valuable when they reveal the unnecessary restrictive, even undemocratic, character of those empiricist theories that they claim to be relying on reality, and not ideals or normative assumptions. But the question investigated in this work is how those normative theories of democracy function in describing, understanding, and criticizing that reality. That

is, can they work better in assessing how democratic are the existing political systems.

The review above leaves us with a variety of conceptions of democracy. This variety and the lack of consensus among scholars lead most authors to suggest that democracy is one of those “essentially contested concepts” (Gallie, 1955), that is at the center of “disputes ... which, although not resolvable by argument of any kind, are nevertheless sustained by perfectly respectable arguments and evidence” (p. 169). In other words, “nearly everyone values the label, but there are different reasonable and legitimate, yet incompatible, criteria for judging whether the label is deserved” (Coppedge, 2012, p. 11). Despite the lack of consensus on any definition of democracy, it is a very powerful concept for both people and governments, as we observe a near universal agreement on its value. Jean-Paul Gagnon (2013) offers perhaps the starkest statement regarding this paradoxical situation:

We do not know what democracy is. We do not know what it means, or where it came from, or where it is going. It is universally pervasive in politics and society but, at the same time, an empty and confusing thing. (p. 3)

Gallie’s argument about the contested nature of the concept of democracy is indeed difficult to oppose. His point about its *appraisive* character is particularly related to the discussion carried out in this study. This means that the use of such a contested concept is “to use it against other uses and to recognize that one's own use of it has to be maintained against these other uses” (Gallie, 1955, p. 172). The argument regarding the normativity all concepts of democracy, even when they claim to be descriptive or value-free, is quite identical with Gallie’s argument. Yet

it leaves us with the question of how to avoid a relativist position and make observations and judgments about the current state of democracy in the world. After all, asking “how democratic is this or that country?” is inevitable for both scholars and citizens, and how this question may be answered is the topic of this study. Some empirically oriented scholars, for instance, accept this lack of consensus yet either continue to pick one conception and continue their research without engaging in a conceptual or theoretical discussion, leaving the conceptual discussion to philosophers or theorists.

Another attempt to accommodate the contestation among the variety of conceptions is to include them in a single assessment framework as in the example of the Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem) project. According to one of the principal investigators of the project, all the existing definitions of democracy could be grouped in “six overlapping models: socioeconomic, people's, participatory, representative, liberal, and deliberative democracy” (Coppedge, 2012, p. 12). All of these six models imply a different way for the realization of “the rule by the people”, and “taken together offer a fairly comprehensive accounting of the concept of democracy as it is employed today” (Coppedge & Gerring, 2011, p. 253).

It is also possible, however, to observe a common core of the concept of democracy. This is in fact the centrality of participation, simplified in the slogan “rule by the people”. The dominant understanding of electoral democracy seems to refute it, by arguing it as a myth, given the impossibility of extensive participation in the scale and complexity of modern societies. Yet, democracy necessarily connotes participation, arguments about the necessity of restriction of participation

to voting do not negate this. This is the point emphasized by Beetham (1992) when he makes a distinction between the singular concept of democracy, which is uncontested, and the plural theories of democracy “which involve contestable claims about how much democracy is desirable or practicable, and how it might be realized in a sustainable institutional form” (p. 40).

At this point, however, Grugel’s (2002) call for some level of realism in favoring a particular theory, especially for the purpose of empirical research, should be recalled. Grugel warns against the use of “too utopian a definition of democratization”, which would limit its use only to “idealized versions of the ‘good society’, hence render it useless in our effort to understand the current reality of political systems (p. 5). Any definition of democracy that is sufficiently realistic, therefore, would need to consider two points at the same time: first, it should be conscious about the uncertainty surrounding the concept of democracy, while combining the scalar and sortal elements as defined by S. Elstub (2015): It should be able to offer a scale in order to distinguish the more democratic from the less democratic; and it should be able to distinguish the democratic from the non-democratic.

Those conceptions collected under the title “empirical theories of democracy” have led to the production of numerous quantitative indices of democracy, and they will be investigated in the following chapters. As such, these indices, it can be expressed beforehand, reflect the shortcomings of those theories. Particularly, they reflect the conservative, justificatory function of these theories.

The aim of this study is to investigate how this function emerges in the methodological choices and the findings of these indices.

Particularly, Schumpeter's minimalist conception, and Dahl's relatively more extensive Polyarchy have been prominent in efforts to agree on a standardized concept of democracy (Collier & Levitsky, 1997, p. 431; Skaaning, 2021, p. 29). A "procedural minimal" definition that defines democracy as "fully contested elections with full suffrage and the absence of massive fraud, combined with effective guarantees of civil liberties" can be considered to enjoy a consensus among a significant part of the political scientists (Collier & Levitsky, 1997, p. 434).

It is also obvious, on the other hand, that when the shortcomings of these theories are pointed out, these indices that rely on such theories also become dubious. The criticisms directed at the minimalist conceptions of democracy are naturally valid for those indices that rely on them. Yet, given the call for an assessment framework that would allow both political scientists and citizens to assess the quality of democracy in the political reality they observe or experience, such critics should go further and offer novel ways to answer that question.

This means, in methodological terms they should be available for operationalization. From another angle, in practical terms, the question is whether they offer specific institutions or procedures, such as industrial democracy or self-management, the existence or absence of which would determine the quality of democracy. Alternative conception may also be questioned with regard to whether

they offer alternative or additional criteria that reveal what the existing indicators ignore and thus allow us to make better assessments of democratic quality.

The debate carried out in this chapter brings us to some conclusions: Minimal, procedural definitions of democracy, despite their claim for realism, consistency, or accuracy, fail in an important respect. They fail to embrace and represent the spirit of the concept of democracy, and leave out a variety of values, concepts, and perspectives as irrelevant to the discussion of the democratic quality of the existing institutional arrangements, while these are experiencing grave problems with regard to legitimacy and functionality. Thus, they leave us with mechanic and restricted conceptual frameworks that mostly function as justification for the democratic institutions as they exist.

Moreover, a strictly minimalist conception of democracy, as defined by Schumpeter, is almost impossible to defend in the current political atmosphere, even –or especially- in the more problematic times of increasing populism today, characterized by apathy and polarization. Schumpeter’s distrust of average citizen takes the form of a general distrust of increasing demands for participation in Huntington. What Huntington regarded as “the crisis of democracy” has since been regarded by a greater number of democratic theorists as the call for greater democracy. This contrast is reflected in how Huntington’s declaration of victory for Schumpeter’s minimalist democracy came at the same that “the theory of democracy took a definite deliberative turn” (Dryzek, 2000, p. v, 2010).

Some of the alternative perceptions, particularly the participatory and agonistic versions, are strong in producing critics of the liberal representative

democracy, and calling for greater participation as a remedy. Their failure is in offering concrete, viable and stable political alternatives. Especially with regard to our concern here, how to assess the level of democracy in existing political systems, they are not available for developing comprehensive assessment frameworks, apart from some vague suggestions.

In the light of these, my argument is that the deliberative theory offers the most promising conception for developing an alternative assessment framework. The deliberative perspective is fairly developed with regard to both operationalization and institutionalization. But its greatest strength comes, I would argue, from the fact that, once we agree on the participatory and deliberative essence of the concept of democracy, the deliberative perspective allows us to inquire and question the democratic quality of existing representative political regimes. The deliberative theory's advantages in this respect will be the topic of the final chapter.

In fact, there is ample ground to question how democratic the minimalistic conceptions of democracy are: especially in Schumpeter's ideas or assumptions about the individual citizens/voters, the work on civic culture, or Huntington's worries about excessive democratization.

Starting from participatory conceptions of democracy for conducting assessments present some serious challenges which are directly related to the substance of these theories that render them ignorable by empirically oriented political scientists or politically impracticable and utopian by their opponents. These challenges, moreover, have not changed much throughout the decades under

review in this work. Already at the end of 1980s, Held had pointed out at these, reviewing the works of Carole Pateman and Nicos Poulantzas:

The state of democratic theory and the knowledge we have of radical democratic experiments does not allow wholly confident predictions about the most suitable strategies for organizational change. In this particular sense, the ‘music of the future’ (Marx) can only be composed in practice through innovation and research. (Held, 1989, p. 185)

Is this still the case? If so, it may be too early and ripe to talk about alternative forms of democracy in practice. Yet even if we agree on this, what about assessment of democracy? After all, these alternative theories of democracy are mostly considered to be more effective in criticizing the existing democratic institutions and practices rather than offering feasible alternatives. So, why not capitalize on their critical power to develop evaluation and assessment frameworks for better diagnosing the problems of democratic politics as it exists today? Besides, the experiments and experiences with a variety of participatory, deliberative, and inclusive forms of decision-making in a variety of countries and scales have provoked serious debates and academic studies for further democratization of the liberal democratic systems, which are experiencing serious crises of efficiency and legitimacy.

Any conception of democracy is inevitably evaluative; they provide normative standards to evaluate the reality. While some theories of democracy claim to derive their conceptions from the realities of existing democratic systems, and justify their minimalism on the basis of necessity (of human nature or the pluralistic nature of societies), other explicitly define normative standards for



democracy to exist in reality. Conception may also differ with regard to the convenience they offer for designing assessment frameworks, but the core normativity of defining democracy is inescapable.

## **2. DEMOCRACY MEASUREMENT: THE ORIGINS**

### **2.1. MEASUREMENT IN POLITICAL SCIENCE: POLITICAL INDICATORS**

In order to engage in or talk about democracy measurement, we need a definition of democracy -this is an oft-repeated, and rightly so, mantra. Yet even before defining democracy, we need a definition of measurement, since the specific definition or conception of measurement we prefer -and there is more than one- will definitely affect how we can measure any conception of democracy we choose.

It may indeed seem strange, but the “measurement theory” -obviously not the practice of measurement- starts with the work of a psychologist: S. S. Stevens (1946). Stevens originated the idea of the levels of measurement and classification of scales in 1946 for psychology testing.

A very common way of defining ‘measurement’ is by referring to “the assignment of numbers to specific observations in such a way as to reflect variations among those observations” (Crano & Brewer, 2002, p. 11). A corollary of this definition is also the emphasis on the rule-based character of this assignment operation.

Similar definitions with varying emphases include:

Measurement is the assignment of numbers to objects in order to represent their properties, not any property but only those specific properties called magnitudes or quantities, which are capable of 'more or less' instantiation, i.e. of instantiation in degree. (Díez, 1997, p. 168)

By measurement I mean, at a minimum, the establishment of an order among the phenomena, so that A can be said to be greater than, equal to, or less than B, or some equivalent logical relation. (Dahl, 1956, p. 2)

Measurement refers to the assignment of numerals and numbers to represent attributes and properties in order to make choices and practical decisions. (Van Gigch, 2009)

A serious difference emerges with such definitions, however. The issue is related to the quantitative character of the numbers assigned to observation. Some scholars insist that those observations themselves should be *quantifiable* in order for the assignment to be considered as a proper measurement. In this case, the definition of measurement becomes more qualified.

The assignment of numbers can be done in four different ways, that is, the resulting scales are classified into four categories (differing according to “the extent of correspondence between the number and the subtle variations in the attribute or construct being measured” (Crano & Brewer, 2002, p. 11): Nominal/categorical, ordinal, interval, and ratio. When the former definition is preferred, all four categories are considered as measurement, while only the final two categories correspond to a proper measurement according to the second definition.

This tension is also mentioned by Crano & Brewer (2002) when they state:

[T]he ability to interpret observations in terms of higher order measurements adds considerable precision to the research process, but the assignment of numbers does not automatically create precision if there is some possibility that the rules of number assignment have been violated. (p. 12)

Shively (2009) explains a similar problem with measurement:

The chief problem of measurement is to ensure, as much as possible, that the relationships between concepts and measures are such that the relationship between the measures mirrors the relationship between the concepts.

Problems we may encounter in trying to achieve this correspondence between measures and concepts fall under two headings: problems of measure reliability and problems of measure validity. (p. 45)

In the aftermath of the World War II, along with all other drastic changes and reformulations in all dimensions of politics both national and international, the discipline of Political Science has also been reshaped. The emergence of an “empirical democratic theory” apart from the “classical” or “normative” one played a central role in this reshaping.

The attempt towards constructing a “science of politics”, a “political science” that would investigate and explain political phenomena in a systematic way, employing methodology and techniques that are deemed necessary for scientific research, provided the essential framework for attempts to develop measures for democracy, together with other political and social scientific concepts.

Examples of such concepts and early instruments for measurement - the roots of political metrology in the behavioral and positivist approach to political science.

Already in 1972, Taylor was talking about “a cacophony of definitions with numerous indicators designed to measure a number of facets of multiple phenomena” (1972, p. 103).

## **2.2. EMERGENCE OF DEMOCRACY INDICES**

Cross-national comparison of political systems was a defining characteristic of the post-WW2 political science in the United States, through which it was expected to gain “illumination and increased rigor” (Almond, 1966, p. 877). As reviewed in the preceding chapter, the rise of empirical theories of democracy has been one of the defining features of post-War political science. Measuring the concept of democracy and other related concepts has also been an indispensable part in this trend. This chapter will investigate the development of democracy measurement from its origins until the end of 1980s in its historical context. The focus will be on the conception of democracy that these measures relied on and the methodological choices. Theoretical and methodological criticisms directed at them will also be covered. In a recent study that provided a brief history of democracy measurement, four phases were defined: the first two phases cover the period up to 1990, including the preliminary attempts led by S. M. Lipset, and the “first blooming of truly comparative measurements of democracy” in 1970s, a period when “best practices emerged in the field” (Giebler et al., 2018, pp. 2–3). In the following two phases, encompassing the period since the end of the Cold War, a period characterized by greater variety and intense conceptual and methodological debates accompanying the proliferation of democracy indices (Giebler et al., 2018, pp. 3–4). The periodization that is preferred in this study takes the end of the Cold War as a breaking point, and defines two periods: the first period of democracy measurement until 1989, which will be covered in the rest of this chapter, and the post-1990 period, the subject of the next chapter, which is characterized by

proliferation of democracy indices together with all kinds of global indicators, intensifying conceptual and methodological innovations and debates, and drastic changes in the global political environment.

### **2.2.1. First Attempts at Scaling Democracy**

The path taken toward comparative politics, and especially the modernization theory that guided such trends, were particularly influential in promoting measurement of political concepts. In the case of democracy or democratization, certain indicators related to modernization were taken as independent variables that would explain the existence or absence of democracy, which in turn needed to be measured, so as to observe the correlations between these independent variables and the dependent variable of democracy. The ultimate aim was to develop “broad “macro-quantitative” statistical analyses based on the respective means and correlations of their major indicators” (Berg-Schlosser, 2007, p. 20).

Lipset presented an “extreme version”, by arguing “a high level of socio-economic development ... as a requisite for democracy” (Berg-Schlosser, 2007, p. 19)

Russel H. Fitzgibbon can be considered as a pioneer in producing league tables of countries, ranking them according to their levels of democracy. His methodology was based on polling a group of ten U.S. scholars, experts in Latin American politics, asking them to rank twenty Latin American countries according to their level of democracy. The basic question was: “How democratic do you consider state X?”, and fifteen criteria were provided to guide their assessment

(Fitzgibbon, 1951, p. 517). The scholars were first polled in 1945, and the poll was repeated in 5-year intervals until 1970 by Fitzgibbon, and continued by Kenneth Johnson and Philip Kelly until 1995 (Fitzgibbon, 1951, 1956, 1967; Fitzgibbon & Johnson, 1961; Johnson, 1976, 1982; Johnson & Kelly, 1986; Johnson & Williams, 1978; Kelly, 1998).

Fitzgibbon and his followers made certain changes in the methodology, mostly tried once and not continued in further surveys, still the basic conceptual and methodological structure remained intact, thus providing a continuous “study in depth of the course and rapidity of change of various components of democracy in the Latin American scene” (Fitzgibbon, 1967, p. 133). His concept of democracy included fifteen criteria, given as separate questions, and reflected an extensive conception that encompassed criteria regarding the social and economic domains as well as political institutions.<sup>2</sup> This conception, compared with the prevalent

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<sup>2</sup> The list of the criteria is (Kelly, 1998, pp. 3–4):

1. An education level sufficient to give the political processes some substance and vitality,
2. A fairly adequate standard of living,
3. A sense of internal unity and national cohesion,
4. A belief by a people in their individual political dignity and maturity,
5. An absence of foreign domination,
6. Freedom of press, speech, assembly, radio, and so on,
7. Free elections; honestly counted votes,
8. Freedom of party organization; genuine and effective party opposition in the legislature; legislative scrutiny of the executive branch,
9. An independent judiciary; respect for its decisions,
10. A public awareness of the collection and expenditure of funds,

procedural definitions that gained prominence in the same period, is extensive and goes beyond the political domain. Yet, Fitzgibbon, and even the scholars who continued his work into the 1990s, did not provide a theoretical justification for this conception, mostly giving some impressionistic reasons for explaining how the list of criteria had been constructed.

Methodologically, using the survey technique was an innovative approach at the time, but the survey was not applied to a random sample but a group of scholars selected for their expertise. It was also interesting that, in one of the surveys Fitzgibbon “included provision for indicating self-assessment as to the respondent’s familiarity with both states and criteria” (Fitzgibbon, 1967, p. 155), which was an early attempt to deal with the problem of .

While Fitzgibbon can be seen as the first scholar to produce a measurement instrument for the level of democracy, Seymour M. Lipset is more commonly cited as the pioneer in this effort. Cutright, for instance, considers Lipset’s work as “the best known and most articulate effort by a sociologist to deal empirically with a large number of contemporary national political systems” (Cutright, 1963, p. 253).

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11. An intelligent attitude toward social legislation; the vitality of such legislation as applied,
  12. Civilian supremacy over the military,
  13. A reasonable freedom of political life from the impact of ecclesiastical controls,
  14. An attitude toward and development of technical and scientific government administration,
  15. An intelligent and sympathetic administration of whatever local self-government prevails.



Lipset's line of research was followed by other scholars (Cutright 1963; Neubauer 1967; Olsen 1968; Winham 1970).

Cutright's (1963) work on "national political development" can also be listed among the precursors of democracy indices. He develops an "index of political development", and explains the concept in terms of the existence of "complex and specialized national political institutions" (p. 255). The details of the scoring method, however, reveals the close connection between political development and electoral democracy. There are two indicators, one for the "legislative branch of government", and one for the "executive branch of government". Highest points are given for the existence of a parliament with two or more political parties, and with at least 30 per cent of the seats occupied by the minority, and when the chief executive is recruited by "direct vote in an open election" (p. 256). After thus constructing an index of political development, Cutright investigates the correlations with levels of communication, urbanization, education, and employment, and interestingly concludes that nations may be politically overdeveloped, as well undeveloped, when their political development goes beyond other social indicators, hence indicating "possible imbalance in the social system" (p. 257).

### **2.2.2. Freedom in the World (FITW)**

Freedom House, "America's oldest human rights NGO" (Korey, 2001, p. 443), was founded in 1941 as a bipartisan organization that would defend the value of freedom as part of the United States' war effort against Nazi Germany. With the

end of the World War Two and the advance of the Cold War, the organization continued its efforts, this time as part of the ideological confrontation between the US-led Western camp and the Soviet Union and the Iron Curtain countries. The organization would support an active foreign policy, placing democracy at its center, and function as “a coordinating center” and “a clearinghouse for organizations enlisted in the fight for freedom” (Korey, 2001, p. 444).

A periodical bulletin that would report on the status of political rights and civil liberties around the world would fit perfectly with such an agenda. So, as early as 1955, the Freedom House started to publish the annual “Balance Sheet of Freedom”, which was later renamed as “Freedom in the World” (Freedom House, n.d.), but also titled as “Comparative Survey of Freedom” by its author (Gastil, 1990). With its new form, the report has become the organization’s flagship report, as well as the most cited index of democracy.

Coinciding with the periodization preferred in this study, the history of Freedom House’s democracy measurement can be divided into two periods, the first period until 1989, and the second period starts in 1990 when the index was modified significantly conceptually and methodologically, and started to be produced by a new team. The most striking feature of this first period of the index is that it was produced by a single author, political scientist Robert Gastil. A second feature is that, as is reflected in its title, the index’s claim is to measure freedom, rather than democracy. Still, it has always been regarded as measuring democracy as a latent concept, and it is Gastil (1990) himself confessing a confusion in that regard: “it was years before its author understood that the survey was essentially a survey of

democracy” (p. 26). He also argues this to be an advantage of the survey, since it also explains “why the survey has been less concerned with institutional arrangements and laws and more concerned with actual behavior than most discussions of democratic freedoms” (p. 26).

The index is constructed in two parts, each part measuring a different dimension of freedom, one for political rights and one for civil liberties. A separate checklist is used for each dimension, to come up with both a score for each country calculated as the sum of score in each dimension, and the classification of countries into three classes of regimes according to their total scores.

### **2.2.3. POLITY**

The POLITY measurement of democracy relies on the of Ted Robert Gurr conducted in the early 1970s (Gurr, 1974). This work was later named as POLITY I, in a following work where Gurr and his colleagues published the findings of their POLITY II dataset (Gurr et al., 1990).

In the first study, the aim was to investigate the stability of political systems, asking “whether typological traits like "democracy" and "autocracy" predict consistently to durability” (Gurr, 1974, p. 1482). For this aim, the pattern of political authority in each country, or polity, is measured along five dimensions, or “authority indicators”: Openness of executive recruitment; decision constraints on the chief executive; extent of political participation; scope of governmental control; and complexity of governmental structures (p. 1485-1486).

According to the scores, then, each polity is placed in one of the categories of autocracy, democracy, and anocracy. The democratic polity is “the presence of multiple institutionalized centers of power, some of which are open to widespread citizen participation”, while power is monopolized by the state in autocracies, and the anocracies are defined by the “relative lack of political power and institutionalization” (p. 1487).

This conception of democracy, and its alternatives, is clearly influenced by the minimal/procedural theories of democracy. Most importantly, participation is restricted to the elections:

Participation is greatest when there are relatively stable and enduring political groups (not necessarily parties) which regularly compete for national political influence ("institutionalized" competition). Participation tends to be least when no open, organized competition is allowed. (p. 1486)

Elections, moreover, is required for the recruitment of the chief executive, and other offices or institutions are not involved in this dimension.

The POLITY II is an update of the initial dataset, with two significant modifications. The authority traits were coded in the updated dataset on an annual basis, thereby making it more available for longitudinal analyses; and the scope of the dataset was extended to 1986 (Gurr et al., 1990, p. 77). While the definition of indicators mostly remain intact, in this second version the scores are calculated for two separate scales, one for “institutionalized democracy” and one for “institutionalized autocracy”. Each polity is assumed to contain both dimensions, and the final score for each polity is obtained by the difference between these scores. Hence, in democratic polities the democracy scores are greater than the

autocracy scores, and the greater the difference, the higher is the level of democracy.

### **2.3. CONCEPTUAL AND METHODOLOGICAL DEBATES**

The scholarly debate on democracy measurement in this period was almost exclusively focused on methodological issues. The search for a consensus on a single conception of democracy was significant, and the underlying logic was in tandem with the empirical democratic theory approach.

Starting with Dahl's concept of Polyarchy, the issue of the availability of the data necessary for the designed measurements has been a major problem. As Dahl mentions, for example, the correlation between economic growth and the possibility of democracy was widely studied in part due to the relative convenience in obtaining the relevant data, thus attributing this relationship a greater significance than it deserved.

The problems of conceptualization, operationalization and aggregation that caused great deal of controversy were exacerbated by the problem of data availability and the inaccuracy or partiality of data sources. The attempts toward solving these problems in order to develop more accurate measurements that would provide better basis for hypotheses testing and policy formulation constitutes a great portion of democracy studies. Various datasets and alternative lists of indicators have been developed.

Pointing at both theoretical inadequacy and inaccuracy of information in the early statistical works on political development or democracy, and representing a

sharp critique of these preliminary attempts at quantifying social indicators worldwide and relying on them to develop hypothesis about political change, Rustow (1968) particularly emphasized the difference between correlation and causality:

Correlations between contemporary social, economic, and political indicators for series of countries give no clues whatever as to the direction, if any, of causality. If authors such as Lipset or Cutright find democracy highly correlated with education, affluence, and urbanization (and if for the moment we stipulate the adequacy of their data), we still do not know (1) whether college graduates, rich people, and townsmen make better democrats or (2) whether democracy is a system of government that encourages schooling, wealth, and urban residence or (3) whether both democracy and its alleged correlates result from further unexplored causes. (p. 48)

Political bias has been a serious point of criticism for democracy indices in this period. One form of political bias criticism argued for bias in the judgments regarding specific countries or regions. In the case of Freedom House, for instance, the organization's political standing and involvement in U.S. government's policies were sources of criticism. Gastil's response to these was to give his own attitude as an assurance, separating the production of the index from the Freedom House as an organization: "Perhaps the survey's strongest claim to "scientific" status results from the author's determination not to let current international opinion, the interests of American foreign policy, Freedom House, or personal prejudices affect survey ratings" (Gastil, 1990, p. 26).

A more substantial criticism, partly related to the first, concerned the conception of democracy as the source of a deeper and general bias, producing misleading results in almost all cases.

I think it is important to stress that when the debate is limited to the topics of reliability and validity, we cannot detect the problems arising from the conception. Of course we may detect both random and systematic errors in observation made by those measurement instruments under scrutiny. We may find that in a certain year, the democracy score of this or that country was faulty. This may be due to a random error –the analyst may have failed to take certain developments into consideration, or exaggerated others, which by the way was very possible for the early period of Freedom House scores prepared by Gastil alone. Or some sort of systematic error(s) (or systematic measurement bias) may occur.

Thus, the current work aims to go beyond these two questions: “Are these measurements reliable?” (Do they produce the same scores when conducted by different persons, at different times?) and “Are they valid?” (Do they actually measure what they purport to measure?)

### **3. DEMOCRACY MEASUREMENT: THE STATE OF THE ART**

This section covers the proliferation of democracy indices in the post-Cold War era, following the previous chapter that covered the history of democracy measurement until the end of the 1980s. As already mentioned, the increasing variety and use of democracy indices in this period parallels the proliferation of all kinds of political, social and economic indicators.

#### **3.1. DEMOCRACY INDICES RELOADED**

In this period, the two prominent indices –FITW and POLITY- continued with modifications, while new indices designed on similar principles emerged. In this section, two of these new indices will be included –the BTI and the Economist Intelligence Unit’s (EIU) Democracy Index. They are both produced by non-academic institutions, with some conceptual and methodological changes. Other indices with various conceptual and methodological innovations, almost all produced by scholars, will be covered in the following section.

##### **3.1.1. Freedom in the World (FITW)**

Along with world-historical transformations, 1990 was also a turning point for the FITW report of the Freedom House. While the general conceptual and methodological structure can be considered to remain intact, a series of modifications have been introduced in this period. Until 1989, the reports had been prepared solely by Robert Gastil for seventeen years, but from 1990 on the report has been prepared by a Freedom House Survey Team. In 1990 the team was headed



by R. Bruce McColm as the survey coordinator, who was also the executive director of the organization (Freedom House Survey Team, 1990); McColm was replaced by Adrian Karatnycky in the 1994-2004 period, and Karatnycky was in that period the president of the organization, which may be seen as an evidence of the importance given to this report by the Freedom House. The tripartite categorization of countries as free, partly free and not free was reintroduced. There were also changes in the ratings of many countries. A chapter on the methodology of the survey has become a standard part of the annual surveys.

Starting from 1990 onwards, the FITW report has undergone numerous modification, both minor and major, including the deleting of some items in the checklist, changes in their wordings and inclusion of new items, as described in detail by D. Giannone (2010, pp. 76–89).

The striking point about the report in this period is that it increased its popularity and importance among both scholars and policy circles, while continuing to be severely criticized for a series of methodological, conceptual or factual shortcomings. While this success of the index can be attributed to “its inextricable interweaving with the basic theoretical paradigm that has generated it” (Giannone, 2010, p. 91) , its enthusiastic reception by journalists and politicians particularly in the United States, should also be considered as a significant factor (Zerndt, 2020).

### **3.1.2. POLITY IV**

From the beginning, the POLITY dataset did not define itself as democracy index, but rather provided a scale of the democratic and autocratic elements that

were to be found in all forms of political systems. The underlying question, moreover, was to understand the determinants of stability in political systems. This is an interesting parallel with the Freedom in the World report, an equally popular and widely used index, which claims to measure freedom and not democracy. While this report is considered convenient particularly for providing continuous annual measurements starting in 1972, a particular advantage of the POLITY is that its scope extends back to 1800s.

In this period, POLITY's trajectory seems to have been closely related with the changes in U.S. politics. Starting from early 1990s, the POLITY project has been sponsored by the Political Instability Task Force (PITF), which was a governmental task force funded by the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA). This funding was disrupted in February 2020, apparently causing funding problems for the project.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> On the website of the Center for Systemic Peace, the not-for profit Corporation that produces the POLITY dataset together with a series of others, the disruption of the government funding is announced together with a note on the change in the scores of the U.S. in the dataset (<http://www.systemicpeace.org/>):

Users of the Polity data series should be aware that Polity measures patterns of authority demonstrated and observed in political behaviors involving interaction events between and within state and non-state entities. Polity measures political practices rather than proclamations. In 2016, CSP changed the coding for Political Competition in the USA to Factional (or polarized) Competition; this coding change dropped the USA's POLITY score to +8. According to the PITF Global Model, this change to "factional competition" placed the USA at high risk of impending political instability (i.e., adverse regime change and/or onset of political violence). In 2019, CSP changed the USA code for Executive Constraints from 7 to 6 due to the executive's systematic rejection of congressional oversight. In 2020, the coding for Executive Constraints fell another two points due to the executive's systematic purge of "disloyalists" from the administration, forceful response to protest, vilification of the main opposition parties; and undermining public trust in the electoral process, reducing the USA POLITY score for 2020 to +5 (anocracy).

### **3.1.3. Bertelsmann Transformation Index (BTI)**

The prominent democracy indices, in line with the empirical democracy theories, have been criticized for functioning as scientific justifications for the capitalist or market-oriented liberal democracies. The post-1990 period that witnessed both the spread of liberal democracy and the proliferation of political indices was characterized by the growing hegemony of neoliberalism. The BTI produced by the Bertelsmann Stiftung in Germany could be seen as the best example of this tendency. The BTI has a complex structure, as it comprises three different indices: Political Transformation Index, Economic Transformation, and Governance Index, which “refers to the quality of the political management of transformation processes”.<sup>4</sup> A fourth aggregated index is constructed by combining the Political Transformation and Economic Transformation indices into a single Status Index.

The unique character of the BTI is related to the concept of “transformation”. The index is directed at those countries considered or expected to be undergoing a dual transformation towards democracy and market economy; hence those countries considered to be long-established democracies are excluded. It may also be considered unique due its transparency regarding the normative standing underlying the index. Transformation is defined as “comprehensive and politically driven change in which an authoritarian system and a state-dominated or clientelist economic order evolve in the direction of democracy and a market-based

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<sup>4</sup> The information in this section, other than those from cited sources, are compiled from the BTI’s website: <https://bti-project.org/en/home.html?&cb=00000>

economy”, thus perfectly representing the hegemonic ideology of liberal democracy.

The level of transparency of the index, with regard to its methodology, coding procedures, and the list of regional and country experts, is remarkable compared to most of the other democracy indices discussed in this study. Such transparency is crucial in methodological terms, since it improves the reliability and credibility of the index.

#### **3.1.4. The Economist Intelligence Unit Democracy Index**

The Democracy Index of the Economist magazine’s Intelligence Unit is another prominent democracy index that emerged in the post-1990 period, and produced outside the academy. When produced by organizations or institutions, indices are not produced solely for scientific research, and they are motivated by organizational, political or other agendas. The publicity and visibility of the indices, in this case, becomes very important, since both the organizations wish to increase their reputation and influence with the help of such projects, and their impact also depends on the capacities of the organizations. EIU’s Democracy Index can be considered as advantageous in this respect, as it can rely on the popularity of The Economist.

Conceptually, the EIU starts from the observation that “measures of democracy that reflect the state of political freedoms and civil liberties are not thick enough. They do not encompass sufficiently, or, in some cases, at all, the features that determine how substantive democracy is” (The Economist Intelligence Unit,

2021, p. 55). So this more extensive conception of EIU's democracy index includes five categories: electoral process and pluralism; civil liberties; the functioning of government; political participation; and political culture. These categories, in turn, include 60 indicators to be scored 0, 0.5, or 1; and these include both quantitative and qualitative indicators. The list of indicators, and the basic rules of coding are included in the methodology appendix, together with a brief and superficial conceptual discussion; yet the identity of the coders are not disclosed, and there is no mention of any mechanisms for review and calibration of country scores.

### **3.2. CONCEPTUAL AND METHODOLOGICAL INNOVATIONS**

In the post-1990 period that is covered in this chapter, the increasing number of democracy indices has also been accompanied by extensive discussions on both the concept of democracy and the methodology of democracy measurement, resulting in a greater diversity of approaches compared with the previous period. A part of this proliferation, the continuation of the FITW and POLITY, and the inclusion of the BTI and the EIU Democracy Index, was discussed in the previous section. The BTI among these stand out with a significantly different approach, and a sufficiently transparency of its methodology. Yet, the more striking innovations were produced mostly by scholars in this period, and these projects will be reviewed in this section.

It is a striking feature of democracy measurement that the two indexes of FITW and POLITY continue to be frequently used despite all sorts of criticisms directed at them. A series of conceptual and methodological innovations were

introduced in the post-1990 period in order to overcome their shortcomings and replace them with more reliable indices.

### **3.2.1. Quality of Democracy and Democracy Barometer**

In the intensive discussion about the merits and shortcomings of existing democracy indices, one generally accepted point was that the prominent indices, especially the FITW and POLITY, were useful at least indicators of general trends in the distribution of democracies and autocracies around the world. One of their failures was in detecting the differences among those countries with higher levels of democracy. This observation motivated some scholars to consider those countries with higher levels of democracy –the full polyarchies in Dahl’s terminology, free countries in FITW classification or the consolidated democracies in the POLITY dataset- as a separate group, and develop a specific measurement for this group. The object of measurement in this case is the “quality of democracy”.

One particular application of Morlino’s framework is presented by Dressel (2011), who applies this framework to the assessment of democratic quality in the Philippines. An outstanding example of this sort of “quality of democracy” measurement is provided by the Democracy Barometer project (Bühlmann et al., 2012). The Democracy Barometer is a project within the National Centre of Competence in Research (NCCR) ‘Challenges to Democracy in the 21st Century’, sponsored by the Swiss National Foundation. The team working on the Democracy Barometer consists of researchers from the University of Bern (Marc Bühlmann), the Centre for Democracy Studies in Aarau (Lisa Müller) as well as researchers

from the Social Science Research Centre Berlin (Wolfgang Merkel, Bernhard Wessels, and Heiko Giebler).

The Democracy's Barometer's insistence on a theoretically grounded concept of democracy, and its extension of the scope of democracy brings it in close contact with the deliberative democratic perspective. In some aspects, Barometer can be said to reflect the arguments of this perspective, as argued by Fleuss and Helbig (2021). It does not, however, provide an index of deliberation, as this is neither the claim or the intention of its creators, and it "only scarcely and non-systematically considers deliberative quality" (p. 320).

### **3.2.2. Conceptual Pluralism and the Varieties of Democracy Project (V-Dem)**

V-Dem definitely represents the state-of-the-art in democracy measurement, as the project is meticulously designed to overcome almost all the conceptual and methodological shortcomings or problems encountered in the previous democracy indices.

Most strikingly, it accepts the essentially contested nature of the concept of democracy, and rather than preferring a specific conception over others, attempts to cover the diversity of conceptions prevalent in theoretical debates: "it is desirable to develop a consensus on a manageable number of types of democracy so that at least some research projects address the same questions. (Coppedge, 2012, pp. 13–14).

By referring to the distinctions in the empirical literature that "distinguish consolidated democracies from transitional ones, parliamentary from presidential

democracies, unitary from federal democracies, high-quality from low-quality democracies, and so on” (Coppedge, 2012, p. 13), Coppedge implicitly points at a significant characteristic of their group of models: The representative and its subset liberal are in fact the ones subjected to empirical study, because they are the existing forms of democracy. Deliberative, participatory and socio-economic models of democracy, on the other hand, have limited existence in the real world, hence are mostly value-based proposals for change. The sixth category of people’s democracies is apparently one that is just reluctantly included in the list, a subset of socio-economic model and isolated from the other four models. Yet, the basic idea of V-Dem is to measure all six of them, while only two really refers to nation-wide “systems”, and if the others are considered as necessary dimensions of a democratic system, then there is a more general single concept of democracy.

On the methodological aspect, V-Dem offers highly developed and complex solutions to various problems. I will suffice to emphasize two topics that have significant connection with the issues raised in this paper, as well as being significant in a purely methodological sense. One of these is the presentation of the disaggregated data which is also related to the issue of transparency, and the second relates to the potential bias and errors of experts performing the coding of countries.

The employment of numerous coders, inter-coder reliability tests and self-reporting of uncertainty by the coders themselves are seen as serious mechanisms for ensuring validity. The insistence on employing experts that are natives and preferably residents of the countries they code is also a serious response to the criticism directed at many similar indices.



V-Dem is at its core an expert based coded scheme, distinguished with the methodological improvements and control mechanisms directed at overcoming the well-known problems of this method. The inclusionary dimension is also striking, with more than 3000 experts involved in assessing individual countries, and most of them from the countries they code. A second significant quality of V-Dem is its transparency in disclosing its sources of information and its truly disaggregated data. Its most innovative aspect is perhaps its inclusion of various conceptions of democracy. The significant theoretical point here is that the electoral democracy dimension is considered as a necessary condition in the construction of the aggregated High Level Indexes representing each principle of democracy.

### **3.2.3. Democracy Audits**

Within the proliferation of alternative instruments, one significant trend has been to offer assessment frameworks in the form of audits which could present an alternative to democracy indices in both conceptual and methodological aspects. Well known examples of such assessments include the Democratic Audit project in the UK, and the State of Democracy reports produced by the IDEA. Here the aim is not to rate and rank countries on a continuum, but to provide detailed assessments of the level of democracy in each country. Thus, the methodology adopted is generally qualitative and the process of assessment is participative, including experts and people from the country under assessment to the process. In stark contrast to the prominence of quantitative methodology and expert judgments in democracy measurements, this process was intended to overcome the alienating

effect rankings based on expert judgments and conducted behind closed doors. In their own words, the core proposition of the State of Democracy assessments is that:

[T]he only people who can have legitimacy in assessing the quality of their country's democracy are citizens of that country, and that country ownership of the assessment is necessary for it to be able to influence the course of democratic progress and reform. (Beetham et al., 2008, p. 19)

A major example is the Democratic Audit framework developed by the Human Rights Centre at the University of Essex (Beetham, 1999; Beetham et al., 2001; Weir & Beetham, 1999). Currently this framework has been developed into a State of Democracy framework implemented by the IDEA (Beetham, 2004). This framework offers a critique of quantitative democracy measurements on three significant points: first of all, “[q]uantification conveys an illusory impression of objectivity and precision to what are essentially qualitative judgments” (Beetham, 2004, p. 3). Second, they tend to “take the established democracies as an unproblematic standard for the assessment of developing ones” (Beetham, 1999, p. 568). Third, they are “conducted by outsiders passing judgment on a country from abroad” (Beetham, 2004, p. 5). In response, Beetham's framework is based on qualitative assessments conducted by the citizens of the country being assessed, and instead of aggregation, different aspects of the democratic system are kept separate.

At the conceptual level, it gives priority to the principles and norms rather than institutions and practices, and provides a more comprehensive list of requirements. More fundamentally, the framework rests on two assumptions: the first regards the universality of the norms of democracy both at the philosophical and empirical level; and second, that “the distinctive institutions of western

representative democracy do have an exemplary significance for democracies everywhere” (Beetham, 2004, p. 13). Consequently, the Democratic Audit and State of Democracy assessment frameworks differ significantly from quantitative democracy measurements methodologically: a thicker concept of democracy –an extensive checklist of requisites; qualitative assessment instead of quantification; assessment by citizens instead of outsider judges. These also point to a significant improvement at the conceptual level, as observed in the priority given to norms, and the inclusion of dimensions such as social and economic rights, or a vibrant civil society.

So this framework is built on a skepticism towards assessments produced by experts. Yet the overall framework of the assessment is also produced by experts. It is built on the two dimensions of popular control and political equality, considered as the universally accepted components of democratic governance. It covers four areas: State-guaranteed equal rights to all citizens; the effectiveness and responsiveness of democratic institutions and processes; the extent of active citizen participation and finally, and uniquely, what they call “democracy beyond the state”. More important for my discussion, however, it is designed as a locally organized and performed assessment. Any kind of organization, public or private or academic may organize and initiate the assessment, and the outcome of the assessment is in the form of a detailed assessment similar to an in-depth case study.

There is also a wealth of various studies of complete or partial assessments apart from the audit and state of democracy frameworks. Australia is an outstanding country in this respect.

One interesting development has been the cooperation between IDEA and the V-Dem Project, as they started to prepare a Global State of Democracy Index together, first published in 2017 (International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance, 2017). This represents a remarkable change in IDEA's attitude, since its assessments led by D. Beetham were clearly based on a criticism of quantitative indices, yet now the IDEA cooperates with the V-Dem to produce annual democracy ratings, and considers the report as its "flagship report" (<https://www.idea.int/our-work/what-we-do/global-state-democracy>). This report offers the broadest, hence thickest, conception of democracy in comparison to all quantitative indices, as it incorporates the variety of democracy conceptions separately measured by the V-Dem into a single scale:

International IDEA's broad understanding of democracy overlaps with features emphasized by different traditions of democratic thought associated with the concepts of electoral democracy, liberal democracy, social democracy and participatory democracy. (International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance, 2017, p. xiv)

It is not clear, as there is no statement to that effect, whether this move constitutes a major change in the IDEA's approach to the definition of democracy and whether the audit framework will be abandoned or the two frameworks will be continued together. Still, this new project can be considered as a further evidence of the increasing popularity of quantitative indices. Such a change may be motivated by a change in perspective, but also by organizational or political considerations which are publicly discussed.

### 3.3. DISCUSSION

Considering the evolution of democracy measurement reviewed in these two chapters, we observe a slow but consistent trend towards extending the conception of liberal democracy beyond the minimalist line first introduced by Schumpeter, and supported by a wave of empirical studies, from the findings of voting studies regarding the indifference and apathy of citizens to the limited role of participation in civic culture. Dahl's polyarchy, Beetham's insistence on extending liberal democracy's scope and Merkel's embedded democracy, functioned as milestones in this evolution. What still seems to be lacking, however, is a greater role for deliberative theory in empirical studies of democracy, as well as assessments of quality of democracy. There are some exceptions in this regard, which will be discussed in Chapter 5.

Particularly in the period before the 1990s, but also afterwards, the dominant approach to democracy, and politics in general, was still under the influence of the "positive political theory" tradition that shaped the 20<sup>th</sup> century political science (Alexander, 2019).

The FITW presents a severely paradoxical situation, as it has been, since almost its beginning, directed all possible criticisms that could be thought of a ranking and scaling scheme, it is still the most widely used democracy index by all kinds of users of such indices.

The impact of democracy indices can be observed in how they are utilized in attempts to answer a series of questions related to the origins, workings or effect of democracy. One group of questions attempt to discover the underlying causes of

democracy, be they economic, social, political or cultural. Another group of questions related to the effects of democracy: does democracy produce peace, economic development, equality and so on. In both groups of questions, democracy indices provide valuable data for quantitative relations, by allowing the testing of correlations between level of democracy and other variables. Hence, from a certain methodological (epistemological) point of view, they are indispensable for meaningful scientific research on political regimes and their effects on various aspects of social life.

The popularity of different indices can therefore be observed by the frequency of their usage in academic publications.

The concept-methodology connection is naturally not limited to democracy assessment. In various other examples, choices regarding the conception and methodology are guided by normative considerations. This point is emphasized in the case of poverty measurement, for instance:

Each of the approaches to poverty derives from a different perspective on what constitutes a good life and a just society. For operationalization, each requires methodological assumptions that are often not transparent. Because of the major differences in definition, who counts as poor is likely to differ according to the approach and the precise methods used by each approach. (Laderchi et al., 2003, p. 262)

The inclusion of normative –or political- considerations in the construction of measurements also indicate that the processes of construction should be considered as social processes whereby different social actors and ideational factors are involved (Laderchi et al., 2003, p. 268). This is more pressing when the producer of the measurements are not individual scholars but organizations with particular

agendas. This process of construction in the case of democracy measurement, therefore, will be the topic of the following section.

If the democracy indices are supposed to depict the political systems correctly, then they should also be giving us an assessment of what is working, what is not functioning and what is lacking in a country in terms of democratic politics. This is the political and prescriptive part of democracy assessment, and the normativity of the conceptions employed become obvious here: what do these indices ignore or hide, as well as show? So they should be assessed also with regard to their ability in providing clues for further democratizing the political regimes, pointing at the ailing parts and thus implying remedies or paths for correction. This should be how they contribute to public debates on democracy and democratization.

The topic of “hybrid regimes” can be considered to be an especially significant topic for assessing what the present democracy indices achieve in this respect.

In parallel to the increasing demand for indexes, the shortcomings of the existing ones became more apparent. A serious amount of criticism accumulated about them, especially about those produced by the Freedom House; yet their popularity continued both in academic and political realms, which is usually explained as a result of the lack of alternatives.

Indeed, criticisms cover all aspects of index production: Definition, precision of the measurements, sources of information, the coding procedures and their incoherence or opaqueness; the methods of aggregation and the misfit with these and the concepts; as well as validity and reliability issues. Especially in certain

regions, and in the case of more hybrid forms that are not clearly democratic or autocratic, these indexes may contradict each other.

But there are also alternatives. I am particularly interested in two specific alternatives here: The State of Democracy Assessments promoted by the International IDEA, an intergovernmental organization engaged in democracy promotion; and the V-Dem project that represents the state-of-the-art in the field of democracy measurement. While sharing similar concerns regarding the shortcomings of previous assessment frameworks, they represent radically different approaches to the methodology of assessment.

The audit framework and the V-Dem project can be considered as two different attempts at democratizing democracy assessment from different angles. First of all, they both offer greater transparency regarding their conception and processes. The audit framework's real democratizing move is its inclusionary process of assessment, while V-Dem's democratic attitude is reflected in its coverage of a diversity of theoretical approaches and its sensitivity to local knowledge by depending on a great part on the judgments of local experts.

They are also radically different, representing a tradeoff regarding generalizability. Indeed, in the first version of their project description, the V-Dem consider the "detailed inquisition into the quality of democracy" offered by such frameworks to be "very much in the spirit of [their] enterprise", yet they fail in providing data that is comparable across other cases of assessment. But on the other hand, the audit methodology enables the local ownership of the task of assessment by designing it in a way that the citizens of the assessed country are involved



throughout the whole process. What V-Dem offers in this aspect is the employment of local experts. Yet, the issue of local ownership is crucial, since again as the V-Dem team puts it, the need for democracy measurement is not only about explanation but also about “affect[ing] its future course”. This brings us again to the political function of measurement in global politics, while also reminding the need for self-reflexivity in the practice of political scientific research.

With the partial exception of V-Dem and the Democracy Barometer projects, democracy measurement has been driven by the conception of liberal democracy, either in a minimalist vein or in its more extended polyarchy version. Yet it is obvious that the universe of theoretical, and ideological, debates on democracy include more elements. Particularly those conceptions characterized by a critical theoretical stance or explicitly normative character occupy a significant place in these debates, a significance that has increased with the growing crisis of liberal democracy. The increasing emphasis on civic engagement, citizen participation, deliberation and identity politics in efforts to both explain the deficits of liberal representative democracy model and offer ways to transform it indicate that critical theories of democracy could be valuable in assessing the current situation of democracy. Three conceptions could be listed in this context: Participatory democracy, deliberative democracy, and agonistic democracy. Among these three, the deliberative democracy variant is the most developed with regard to both conceptualization and empirical application. While there is a burgeoning literature on the “institutionalization of agonistic democracy” which could be helpful in this respect, it would still be difficult to derive criteria for a

democracy assessment from the major works defining the agonistic theory of democracy. While preceding other critical theories with its origins in the 1960s debates (Pateman, 1970), my contention is that the basic outlook of the participatory democracy is included in the deliberative theory of democracy, although differences do exist (Pateman, 2012).

Coming to the question of a deliberative democratic assessment framework, the two current projects already constitute significant rivals in both conceptual and methodological dimensions.

In the case of V-Dem, it already offers a Deliberative Component Index, while the citizen-centered and context-sensitive format of the audit framework may meet the requirements of a participatory process that would be in the spirit of deliberative democracy.

In the light of the conclusions of the Chapter 1 and the investigation of existing democracy assessment and measurement frameworks conducted in this chapter, we should agree with Curato's observation:

“Democratic theory has moved on from the framework of electoral democracy to examining articulations of democracy in different contexts. Methodology should follow too. Indicators capturing different manifestations and ideals of democracy should be conceptualized” (Curato, 2015, p. 112).

In discussing the shortcomings of democracy measurement, one final problem relates to the question of scale. The nation-state is the taken-for-given scale of democratic political regimes. This is especially the case for the electoral conception of democracy. Yet from a citizen- or individual-centric point of view, the principle of participation requires the individual to be able to have some access

to decision-making regarding those decisions that affect their lives, and especially in contemporary world, the extent of those decisions cannot be limited to the nation-state. For the citizens of Germany, for instance: such an assessment requires considering both sub-national and supra-national political mechanisms as well. There are still elections in both levels for them: local and federal government and the European Parliament, but the governing bodies of the European Union are not exactly representative, leading to debates around the democracy deficit in the Union. The processes of globalization and mechanisms of global governance, moreover, indicate such an extension of perspective for almost everyone around the world, a point also recognized by Dahl: “A single country has become too small a unit to secure economic wellbeing, security from nuclear war, and many other important goals. Consequently, it might be argued that transnational political systems should exist and that they should be democratized” (Dahl, 1982, p. 15).

A conception of democracy restricted to elections, however, fails to grasp this reality. The democracy indices do not offer any opportunity to include these varying scales to be taken into consideration. Among the prevalent democratic paradigms, only the deliberative democracy approach offers some venues for development in these dimensions, which will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 5.

#### **4. POLITICS OF DEMOCRACY MEASUREMENT**

The previous chapters aimed to present an extensive overview of democracy indices in their contemporary form, together with their historical evolution. This chapter, however, will focus on a limited number of democracy indices, selecting those indices that are created or funded by non-academic organizations, be they non-governmental or government-related. While the political context of democracy measurement in general will also be discussed, in exploring the political and ideological context of democracy measurement,

As mentioned earlier, the wave of democratization following or coinciding with the end of the Cold War led to a greater emphasis on the international dynamics of democratization. Alternative or critical approaches also emerged that emphasized the global character of this dynamic, and opposed the faulty dichotomy established between internal and external causes of democratization –such as the neo-Gramscian perspective. These approaches also provide a reasonable beginning point for investigation the role of democracy indices in this global wave of democratization. After all, the external causes of democratization include such mechanisms as diffusion, contagion, which could be considered less direct or conscious, as well policies of promotion, export and conditionality.

The global rankings, including democracy indexes, are increasingly subjected to analysis and criticisms from the perspectives of sociology, political science and international relations. A point of focus in these studies regards how these rankings, and the organizations that produce them, acquire power and authority vis a vis states in world politics, as technologies of global governance or

instruments of ideological hegemony. The production of rankings is a crucial step for international NGOs to acquire private authority.

#### **4.1. SOCIOLOGY OF QUANTIFICATION AND GLOBAL RANKINGS**

The central argument of the dissertation regarding the political meaning and role of measuring democracy also presents a particular difficulty in developing its outline, since it also means bringing together literatures and debates that usually move in separate lines. The proliferation of the global indexes, an observation that stimulated the topic of dissertation in the first place, has continued at a faster pace since the submission of the proposal. What accompanied this proliferation was also a burgeoning scholarly literature on this phenomenon, which could be gathered under the title of “politics of rating and ranking”. More strikingly, indexes related to the concept of democracy constituted a part of this proliferation and growing scholarly interest and as reflected in the publication of special issues on democracy measurement by various academic journals.

Democracy indexes constitute a part of the global proliferation of global rankings. In that aspect, the burgeoning fields of sociology of quantification and the politics of rating and ranking provide useful theoretical and conceptual tools for analyzing the practice of democracy measurement.

It is particularly important to question how international indexes are received in those countries whose performance are subjected to measurement, including both the official reactions by governments and the debates that they provoked in the public sphere. Thus, it is the interaction between the measurements

and those (governments or societies) subjected to measurement that determines the impact and authority such measurements can have. Since democracy indexes have an increasing importance in the formulation of democracy promotion policies and the assessment of their impacts, they play a significant political role yet their effectiveness is also dependent on how they are perceived and received by those on the receiving end of the democracy promotion policies. In this context, conceptual frameworks developed in the literatures on sociology of quantification and politics of ratings should be consulted.

The proliferation of global rankings, which measure the performance of states in various areas of politics, constitute a significant part of the architecture of global governance. The increasing popularity of these rankings gives them both a discursive power and a disciplinary function. By "discursive power", I refer to their role in defining the "normative horizons" of politics. They do not just measure or monitor, but they also define the ideal, the good, the legitimate and the acceptable. By providing benchmarks and describing "best practices", they constitute an integral part in the processes of international diffusion of ideas, institutions or policies. To the extent that they practically influence the decisions and actions of states or international bodies, moreover, these indexes also perform a disciplinary function, compelling their targets to comply with the norms they propagate. These functions are realized, however, in the way they are received and reacted upon by the states and societies they measure.

Publishing comparative data on the ease of doing business inspires governments to reform. Since its start in October 2003, the Doing Business project has inspired or informed 48 reforms around the world. Mozambique is reforming several aspects

of its business environment, with the goal of reaching the top rank on the ease of doing business in southern Africa. Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger are competing for the top rank in West Africa. Georgia has targeted the top 25 list and uses Doing Business indicators as benchmarks of its progress. Mauritius and Saudi Arabia have targeted the top 10. (The World Bank, 2007, pp. 3–4)

We are now living in a world in which performance of states as well as individuals and organizations are constantly assessed and evaluated through various types of indexes, rankings or measurements. Quantification has become the norm for all sorts of concepts, and this is not merely a methodological issue of concern only for scholars, since it has become an indispensable component of a wide variety of social relationships. This is best summarized by Andreas and Greenhill (2010a):

We live in a hyper-numeric world preoccupied with quantification. In practical political terms, if something is not measured it does not exist, if it is not counted it does not count. (...) to measure something –or at least claim to do so- is to announce its existence and signal its importance and policy relevance. (p.1)

States –as well as individuals and public and private organizations- are subjected to performance measurement on various dimensions. International ratings/rankings, produced by various national and international actors, play an increasingly effective role in this aspect: “As tools of organizational power, these rankings are designed to exert normative pressures on states to promote change in a country's performance or improve some aspect of its domestic institutions or policymaking” (Cooley, 2015, p. 2).

The organizations producing these indices measuring such concepts as rule of law, poverty, corruption or gender inequality, may also be seen as intermediaries between academic research and a variety of non-academic audiences. What these

indices do is, in part, translating academic concepts and research into simplified or summarized information that would be more convenient to be used by policy-makers, civil society organizations, activists or citizens. Academics function as either as the principal authors of the report or as experts guiding the process of the rating. In any case, they play crucial roles in the choice of concepts and definitions, the design of the ratings and interpretation of the results.

The proliferation of various kinds of measurement, ratings and rankings is also accompanied by debates on the merits and political meaning of this development. While some applaud the "measurement revolution in political science and the political world" (Munck, 2009, p. xii), their increasing role in world politics is also subjected to criticism, which is not surprising given their involvement in relations of power –as disciplinary instruments affecting the flow of economic resources; strengthening or weakening the international standing and legitimacy of regimes and governments; as ideological instruments defining the normative horizons of national and international politics. As a result, there is a growing body of literature discussing how numbers rule the world (Fioramonti, 2014; Henshaw, 2006), arguing that we are living in an "audit society" (Power, 1997), together with other critical works on various types and aspects of global rankings (Cooley & Snyder, 2015; Davis et al., 2012).

The increasing popularity of ranking states according to their performance attributes these tools of comparison a discursive power and a disciplinary function. They constitute an integral part in the processes of international diffusion, providing both benchmarks by describing the best practices and disciplinary mechanisms by



defining what is legitimate and accepted. In this respect, they could be studied in the context of Foucauldian or neo-Gramscian approaches focusing on governmentality or neoliberal hegemony at the global level. Indeed, when various indexes are considered together, it is obvious that they form a consistent normative horizon defined by the basic premises of the neoliberal hegemonic ideas.

Besides these general points, however, rankings and indexes are produced by a variety of actors –international governmental organizations, NGOs, private companies or official, semi-official or non-governmental national bodies. They have different preferences regarding conceptualization and methodology. The local effects of these measurements, moreover, display a wide variety as governments and other local actors interact with these measurements in different ways.

In parallel to this proliferation, even if not exactly catching up in volume, these measurements are increasingly subjected to critical scrutiny in sociological, political science and anthropological research. So mostly based on a constructionist perspective, we now have alternative frameworks for "the social sciences of quantification" as in the title of a recent book (Bruno et al., 2016): Social scientific studies of quantification include studies focused on the history of statistical institutions or on the politics of measurement analyzing what quantification entails; how these measurements are produced; how they gain authority; how they "reproduce structural inequalities and biased policy agendas" (Cooley, 2015, p. 18) or how they are "creating new forms of global governmentality" (Shore & Wright, 2015, p. 22).

Cooley (2015, pp. 10–13), for instance, relates the proliferation of these indexes to the increasing diffusion of performance measurement starting with the public sector reforms; the emergence of global governance networks and international regulatory bodies; and the data gathering and processing capacities offered by information technologies.

With regard to the processes whereby these rankings are produced, a “sociology of quantification” framework, as proposed by Espeland and Stevens (2008) provides a good alternative. Inspired by Austin’s speech act theory, they start by stating that “We do things with numbers” (p. 412). Their framework consists of five dimensions: work, reactivity, discipline, authority, and aesthetics.

In an earlier work (Espeland & Stevens, 1998), referring to Foucault and Porter, they state that:

The validity of censuses, test scores, or public opinion polls requires complicity from their subjects. Individuals are made governable and numbers become self-vindicating when measures guide the activities being measured or shape the images of those whose characteristics they measure. (p. 331)

The following excerpt provides a clear explanation of how they consider the efforts for measurement:

[W]e should recognize that quantification facilitates a peculiarly modern ontology, in which the real easily becomes coextensive with what is measurable. (...) An ethics of quantification should investigate how the world is made by measures, but should strongly reject any conceit, scientific or otherwise, that measurement provides privileged or exclusive access to the real. (Espeland & Stevens, 2008, p. 432)

With regard to the roles played by the RROs producing these indexes, on the other hand, Cooley (2015) offers another framework for identifying these organization through a three-fold typology:

- *judges* producing "clear impersonal measures" and "standard, simplified categories" in order to make "numerical judgments" (p. 16);
- *global regulators*, and in the process reproducing "structural inequalities and biased policy agendas" (p. 18);
- *advocates* providing "important focal points for both domestic and external activists to strengthen their information campaigns, frame proposed solutions, and mobilize for change" (p. 20)

In analyzing how states react to these, Cooley defines two perspectives –rationalist or constructivist. From a rationalist perspective, the existence or absence of material costs may be expected to determine the reaction of states. Especially when performance in these indexes is associated with decisions regarding international development aid or capital flows, then the states that are dependent on such resources would take such indexes more seriously. The importance given to the country risk ratings of the credit rating agencies by almost all states worldwide provides perhaps the best example in this context. So the potential for the rewarding or punishing effect of credit ratings render the agencies that produce them powerful in the face of governments.

From a constructivist perspective, however, international norms and state compliance, the socialization of states and the effects of stigmatization in international politics become significant concerns. The options are again summarized by Cooley (2015, p. 6): "By exerting social influence, rankings appeal

to the status of states and state leaders, offering positive reinforcement for their practices, opprobrium or opportunities for normative contestation”

What is not included here is, however, how those states and their leaders may react to such influence. What consequences such positive reinforcement or opprobrium would produce on the receiving end, or whether the state subjected to measurement would engage in normative engagement or contestation remain as empirical questions to be observed in each case. Yet in the case of negative scores or rankings, we can expect three types of reaction: A restatement of adherence to the norm and promise for better performance in the future; ignorance or no response, which may be considered as a passive rejection of the authority of the ranking in question; or an open rejection of the ranking which could also amount to contesting the underlying norm itself. My contention is, moreover, that in understanding how and which type of reaction prevails, a context sensitive approach is required. This is to say that the democratic quality of the public sphere, the extent of public interest and debate on the topics measured by global rankings and the responsiveness of governments to public opinion could be listed as significant factors alongside other strategic, political and identity issues in determining the shape of interaction.

Among the critical approaches to global rankings, two theoretical lines are prominent: Those that consider rankings as technologies of governing from a distance based on the Foucauldian concept of governmentality; and neo-Gramscian approaches considering them as instruments of ideological hegemony.

## **4.2. POLITICS OF DEMOCRACY MEASUREMENT**

### **4.2.1. The Democracy Agenda in the Cold War Ideological Struggle**

These early indices and in fact the whole academic and political debate surrounding them were mostly U.S.-centric, occurring within the US political and academic milieu. The Cold War and the ideological conflict, moreover, provided its political context. The most significant development in that context was the increasing importance given to democratization in U.S. foreign policy, first by the Carter Administration and then the Reagan Administration and its Democracy Project.

Liberal democracy gradually came to be constructed as the only acceptable form of democracy, and was justified in the Cold War period by empirical democratic theory. (Grugel, 2002, p. 12)

The democracy indices gain importance when they are used by powerful actors. The general framework for the Cold War period is of course the ideological conflict, which was depicted as a conflict between democracy and totalitarianism. In this context, the importance given to the Freedom House's reports by U.S. politicians and administration was perhaps the best indicator of its influence. A broader, international or global influence or usage, however, was limited, which can partly be explained by the relatively limited spread of international information networks, especially compared with the post-Cold War era.

### **4.2.2. Global Diffusion of Democracy and Democracy Measurement**

Whether democratization is a part of the spread of globalization, and of the Western power and influence together with it, is one of the great questions of the

time. This question can be said to have existed ever since the beginning of the twentieth century (Wilson's slogan of making the world safe for democracy); or the U.S. and some other international actors (such as the UN, the OSCE) can be said to be "promoting" democracy since 1970s, or that democracy promotion has started to play a central role in U.S. foreign policy since 1980s (Reagan administration's Democracy Project).

The question of the international dynamics of democratization is also connected with the more philosophical question regarding the universality of democracy.

In any case, democracy indices has been a part of these trends starting in the 1970s, as discussed in the previous sections. The enthusiasm of U.S. policy makers and the U.S. media for using FITW reports in the 1970s and 1980s, as documented by Bush (2017), was in line with U.S. foreign policy's inclination towards making democracy a central part of their rhetoric and policy.

The tremendous development and spread of information flows, channels and networks should also be mentioned as a crucial dimension that boosted the influence of global rankings in recent decades.

#### **4.3. DISCUSSION: PROSPECTS OF DEVELOPING EMANCIPATORY DEMOCRACY ASSESSMENT FRAMEWORKS**

Global rankings have become a salient feature of global politics, and as they become effective instruments of global governance, they are increasingly subjected to criticism on ethical and political grounds as well criticisms on empirical or

methodological grounds. Of course, there is great variation in the extent and modes of the impact of different rankings, depending on various factors such as the significance of the topic, the political clout of the producers or the extent they are instrumentalized by powerful global actors.

Democracy indexes have been subjected to criticism on various grounds (Chapters 2 and 3). Yet a crucial characteristic of these indexes, as argued in this study, is that they gain meaning within the global context of democratization, and this political context shapes both their conceptions and methodologies. The preceding discussion of democracy indexes in the context of a sociology of global rankings highlights this connection and underlines the political dimension of assessing and comparing political regimes. Perspectives and conceptions of democracy that go beyond the limits of pluralist liberal democracy, however, point at the need for rethinking how to develop comparative assessment framework that allow for democratizing democracy worldwide.

Moving from defining democracy to devise comparative assessment framework, it is usually assumed that there is one universal definition –and form– of democracy, which is one of the most challengeable aspects of this approach:

The main question we wrestle with here is whether democracy is one and universal (similar to the U.S. model) or particular and based on very different local, regional, and cultural traditions and institutions. Is democracy everywhere the same or fated to become that way as countries become wealthier and better integrated into globalization, or is it present in various forms depending on distinct philosophical and political backgrounds, as well as having different levels of socioeconomic and political development? Americans tend to believe that ours is the best and virtually only form of democracy, but in fact there are many and diverse kinds and foundations of democracy. We need to understand and appreciate these diverse

forms not only for a better comprehension of different countries and traditions but also because many policy considerations having to do with democracy and human rights hinge on whether democracy is everywhere the same or has distinct meanings and priorities in different countries. (Wiarda & Skelley, 2007, p. 158)

The dimensions of the effort to measure democracy, that is the fundamental issues that it is related to in the broadest sense, can be classified as follows:

- *“the will to measure”* – the role of quantitative measurement in the modern mentality willing to rationalize decision making processes – in this case the most obvious processes of decision making relate to development aid and democracy assistance programs

- *Epistemological / Methodological dimension* – these measurement schemes are required by a certain way of doing political science – in fact, these indexes are not perfectly quantitative, that is they do not measure or count the way other indexes do (for instance price indexes in economics); instead, even when they are presented in numerical form, what they reflect are judgments, that is qualitative evaluations, produced by certain persons (experts). Thus they involve personal perspectives, value judgments, and arbitrary choices. In methodological terms this may indicate the possibility of “systematic error”, or “coding bias”; but at a deeper level they point at the inescapably normative character of this endeavor. What is done is in fact the establishment of certain normative benchmarks for nation-states to be considered as democratic.

- *Ideological dimension* – ignoring the normative character of defining democracy –hence ignoring alternative answers to question of what to measure- renders these indexes an ideological character.



- *Democratization dimension* – as these indexes, particularly those developed for political purposes, advocate the spread of democracy worldwide, they also need to be questioned with regard to their possible contribution to processes of democratization.

- *International political dimension* - When produced by political – governmental or non-governmental- institutions, they are also shaped and motivated by the causes these institutions support or advocate. In this case, they provide a means for not only ranking countries along a continuum of democraticness, but also for attributing varying degrees of legitimacy to them in accordance with their level of democraticness. Thus, these indexes also play a political role in the power struggles of international politics.

Even when produced purely for scientific tasks, a framework for assessing the level of democratic quality of a political system inescapably possesses political/practical implications. This is obvious, because when you determine how far a political system is from a full democracy (as defined in your assessment framework), you also indicate what needs to be changed for a further democratization. Hence, you also provide insights and clues that could be useful for “practitioners” –in determining priorities, shaping strategies, choosing which actors to support, and so on. Indeed, in many cases the producers of the comparative assessment framework (e.g. V-Dem) mention the democratic assistance policies of developed states and international organizations, or they are produced directly by organizations involved in such an agenda (e.g. Freedom House), or they aim to

provide input and impulse for the debates and struggles for democratization inside the countries subject to assessment.

The State of Democracy assessment methodology empowers citizens to assess their own democracy and to identify policy steps needed to improve the quality of that democracy.

Even when any political/practical motivation is implicitly or explicitly denied, the very fact that “democracy” has positive connotations, any ranking among the existent states with regard to level of democracy also functions as a ranking of legitimacy for those regimes or their domestic and international policies.

What kind of knowledge do the extant democracy indices offer? The current debates indicate that, parallel to the discussion on the conceptualization of the hybrid cases resulting mostly from the third (and maybe fourth) wave(s) of democracy (the gray zone phenomenon), measurement schemes also try to solve the puzzles caused by these cases: As BLM demonstrate, it is the in-between cases rather than those countries that could easily be coded as democracy or autocracy that lies behind most of the inconsistencies in democracy measurement. There is also the issue of measuring the finer gradations/changes in the level of democracy among the democracies –the Democracy Barometer attempts to deal with this by producing an index of Quality of Democracy limited to OECD countries that are accepted as established (as opposed to defective) democracies.

Using references to the FITW in two U.S. newspapers and in the Congress records, Bush (2007) observes that the frequency of references remains stable most of the time in both sources, and concludes that methodological improvements did

not result in any significant change in Freedom House's private authority. She also finds a steady increase over time in the usage of both FITW and POLITY scores in academic articles, "which suggests that the increased usage reflects a growing interest in democratization or usage of quantitative analyses, rather than a reaction to changes in the quality of the rating itself" (Bush, 2017, p. 718).

So, these indices can be considered successful in pointing at the obviously democratic and autocratic countries –but why all the trouble with measuring? The general comment is that they at least give us the general historical trends. Yet, do we really need them to determine the existence of these trends? Why this obsession with measuring? It is either a result of the dogmatism about how to conduct political science, or should be explained with reference to the performative (or propagative/political) function of ranking countries and distributing international legitimacy accordingly. More probably, it is a combination of both, which takes us to a discussion on the "function" of political science. With regard to the link between the measurement and the propagation/promotion of democracy, on the other hand, it is those in-between cases about which information would mostly be required.

In the light of all the criticisms that could be directed at democracy indices, however, the ultimate question becomes whether to abandon them altogether, continue using them but informed and cautious about their limits and defects, or to develop alternative forms of comparative democracy assessment, through changes in conception and/or methodology. In any case, developing such indices cannot be seen as merely a technical or academic endeavor. In defending the need for

systematic comparison by pointing at a “desire to compare” among academic and policy worlds, Coppedge and Gerring (2011) states that these are necessary “to mark progress or regress on this vital matter, to explain it, to reveal its consequences, or to affect its future course” (pp. 247-248). The motivations for such comparisons, therefore, are not merely academic, and normative and political consideration clearly play a role.

## **5. DEMOCRATIZING DEMOCRACY ASSESSMENT: CONCEPTUAL AND METHODOLOGICAL ALTERNATIVES**

Previous Chapters 2 and 3 investigated the historical evolution of democracy measurement and the current state-of-the-art in democracy indices. While pointing at the conceptual and methodological innovations developed in response to the shortcomings of previous measurement schemes, as this investigation found out, the diversity of the theoretical debate on democracy is not sufficiently reflected in the field of comparative democracy assessment. As was already discussed in Chapter 1, the deliberative theory of democracy emerged in the past decades as a powerful alternative to the established conceptions of liberal democracy, and its practical applications have also spread around the world, calling for a more participatory and discursive understanding of democratic politics. What seems to be lacking, however, is its comprehensive involvement in the assessment of democratic quality at the nation-state level.

As also discussed in Chapter 3, what is most lacking in democratic studies is a conception of democracy that could also better differentiate those cases of so-called hybrid regimes. Concepts of democracy, moreover, are not merely explanatory devices, but they also set normative standards for evaluating political systems and can be used as tools for diagnosing problems and deficiencies. In the case of those in-between regimes, which are neither clearly authoritarian nor could be considered sufficiently democratic even in terms of electoral democracy, this evaluative and diagnostic function is particularly important for the current world events.

The Chapter 4, on the other hand, placed democracy measurement in the broader context of global political indicator production, revealing how they are implicated in power relations, and that a critical and reflexive approach requires both conceptual and methodological innovations so that such comparative assessment schemes could be more effective in helping citizens become involved in a public debate on democratic quality of existing political configurations. The aim of this chapter, in turn, is to turn to the deliberative theory of democracy and deliberative and participatory methodologies of both social scientific research and public debate in order to analyze the potentials they provide for coming up with alternative comparative schemes that are themselves democratic in both spirit and practice.

So the question guiding this chapter is how to develop new venues that offer remedies for the problems of democracy assessment by offering better conceptions, better methodologies while also making a conscious ethical approach to the field of indicator development.

When democracy measurement is considered together with democratization studies in general and the policies of democracy promotion/assistance in real life, there emerges the semblance of a typical “applied science”: We have all the components of theory, measurement and application. Hence we can even speak about “democracy engineering”. If the metaphor of engineering would be considered inappropriate, we can speak of democracy indexes as thermometers (or barometers as they are sometimes called) that give us information about the changes in the “political climate”. Indeed, the current debates about a global decline or

backsliding of democracy are either initiated or accompanied by the findings of such indexes.

Of course the critical tone in these metaphors point at the positivist inclinations that consider the development of such measurement tools as a necessary part of scientific knowledge production about politics. Yet it is difficult to ignore the performative dimension in labelling regimes as democratic or autocratic, and placing them on a continuum with these two opposite ends. The task of classifying political regimes is rooted in the very origins of the discipline. Yet it has always been a normative task of evaluation at the same time. Defining democracy is always related to thinking and debating on the “good polity” or “good society”. Therefore, “implicit normative judgments lie behind all evaluative work on democracy” (Dawson, 2014, p. 21).

Going back to the engineering metaphor, measurement may be seen simply as an instrument, but as is usually mentioned as a justification or motivation for producing them, this instrument is expected to inform or direct democracy promotion policies (Munck, 2009, pp. 1–12). This connection is also apparent in the politically motivated character of organizations involved in the production of indexes, Freedom House being the most well-known. In this respect, democracy indices also constitute a part of the global proliferation of all sorts of rankings. This, in turn, brings them into the scope of the growing literatures on “sociology of measurement”, which investigate the production of measurements from a constructivist sociological perspective, or on “politics of rating” that scrutinizes the roles played by such indices in mechanisms of global governance.

Assessments of democratic quality can aim to have impact on processes of democratization through various ways: Creating global publicity and thereby putting pressure on poor performing countries through naming and shaming; guiding the decisions and targets of national and international political bodies in their democracy promotion efforts or imposing punitive measures; or assisting the democratic publics by promoting public debate on issues of democratic reform within countries. The approach taken in this respect, in turn, is closely related to the conceptual and methodological choices in the production of assessment framework.

The possibility of “democratizing democracy assessment” could be investigated in two respects: Conception and methodology. The conceptual aspect can be achieved either by choosing a better, truly democratic conception or by trying to reflect the diversity of conceptions developed in political theory. With regard to methodology, a democratizing attempt could entail greater participation of citizens in the process. The contention guiding this reflection is that deliberative democratic theory and innovative deliberative mechanisms could offer the best paths for such a rethinking of democracy assessment.

## **5.1. DELIBERATIVE THEORY AND DEMOCRACY ASSESSMENT**

### **5.1.1. The Systemic Turn**

It has become a common practice to summarize the evolution of deliberative theory in a sequence of turns or generations. The first generation of deliberative theory was initiated with Habermas and Rawls, whereby democratic theory took a deliberative turn, and it was followed by the second generation which focused on



reconciling their normative theorizing with the complexity of modern societies. What followed was the empirical turn of the third generation, “who have sought to establish the nature of the institutions required to achieve this reconciliation in practice” (Elstub, 2010). Most recently, a “systemic turn” is dominating the agenda of deliberative democracy (Ercan et al., 2017), starting particularly with the publication of a seminal edited volume (Parkinson & Mansbridge, 2012).

Empirical applications of deliberative theory developed in an increasing pace throughout the 2000s. The increasing empirical research was also accompanied by practical applications. Yet this “empirical turn” in deliberative democratic theory focused mostly on small group studies, the so-called mini-publics. As the deliberative theory’s essential claim was to theorize the democratic system in general, at the nation-state level and even beyond, this focus was severely limited. With the “systemic turn” however, deliberative theory came closer to producing analytical frameworks at the political system level. The literature on this systemic dimension is, therefore, crucial for the aims of this study.

Mini-publics, as microcosms of a democratic public sphere, demonstrate how a democratic public sphere works (or should work) –hence aim to educate and inspire through demonstration, by offering a simulation. They also serve scientific research by providing experiments to observe, to test the impact of democratic deliberation (informed and free discussion) on how opinions are formed, discussed and transformed; in which case the changes in individual opinions and the move towards a consensus among the participants act as proof of the validity of arguments about deliberation. They may also be used for practical purposes, for raising

awareness, providing input into decision making; and they can even be institutionalized as part of the regular procedures of decision-making. But there is always the issue of scale. They may be effective in local, small-scale politics, yet they are essentially specific, issue-based. The deliberative theory's claims are, however, related to the overall system of democratic politics at the nation-state level, and more recently related to global governance mechanisms, where a simple "scaling-up" of these forums may not be possible or adequate (Niemeyer & Jennstal, 2018).

This is where the systemic turn enters. Most recently came the systemic turn, due to the limits and theoretical problems associated with the exclusive focus on empirical research and practical application in small-scale (Ercan et al., 2017). A particular issue is related to the normative dimension, or it can be seen as a choice of whether continuing to see deliberative theory as a critical theory of democratic politics, or an empirical research agenda associated with a reformist practical dimension that does not question the hegemony of liberal democracy and its institutional arrangements. Another significant issue is related to the academic study of deliberation at the systemic level, particularly the methodological challenges and tradeoffs concerned.

### **5.1.2. Deliberative Capacity and its Assessment**

The shift in focus towards the system level in deliberative theory has opened the path towards an assessment framework for deliberative quality at the nation-state level. Such a framework can be seen as a continuation of the quality of

democracy measurement, and thus based on the concept of “deliberative quality”, yet the concept of “deliberative capacity” emerges as the most developed alternative for devising such a framework. J. Dryzek (2009) offers this concept for the aim of “analyzing and evaluating whole regimes or political systems”,<sup>5</sup> and defines it as “the extent to which a political system possesses structures to host deliberation that is authentic, inclusive, and consequential” (p. 1382). In this formulation, three criteria are required:

1. *Authenticity* requires that “deliberation must induce reflection noncoercively, connect claims to more general principles, and exhibit reciprocity” (p. 1382).
2. *Inclusiveness* “applies to the range of interests and discourses present in a political setting” (p. 1382), and it links deliberation to the principle of including all affected parties in to the process of decision-making.
3. *Consequentiality* requires that processes of deliberation should have direct or indirect impact on the outcomes of political decision-making.

The components of a deliberative system that provides the necessary setting for such deliberative processes to take place, on the other hand, include a public space; an empowered space that includes the institutions and decision-making processes; mechanisms of transmission and accountability between these two spaces, and a final element of decisiveness:

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<sup>5</sup> The concept of deliberative capacity was already used previously, but within the context of particular deliberative forums, as the potential to reach the ideal of deliberative communication, “which has at least two aspects: diversity of viewpoints and openness to preference shifts” (Hendriks et al., 2007, p. 366).

1. *Public space* is the realm of “free and wide-ranging discourses, with no barriers limiting who can communicate, and few legal restrictions on what they can say” (Dryzek, 2010, p. 11). As such it mostly coincides with Habermas’s concept of the public sphere.
2. *Empowered space* encompasses the institutions that produce collective decisions.
3. *Transmission*, which means the existence of mechanisms “by which public space can influence empowered space” (2009, p. 1385).
4. *Accountability* of the empowered space to the public space, as the “key to the generation of broad deliberative legitimacy for collective outcomes” (2009, p. 1386).
5. *Decisiveness*, as the final element that is necessary in order to ensure that “these first four elements are consequential in influencing the content of collective decisions” (2009, p. 1386).

In more recent works, Dryzek (2010) included a further element to this framework: Meta-deliberation, which refers to “deliberation about how the deliberative system itself should be organized”. This “capacity for self-examination and self-transformation” is not, however, a part of the daily practice, but instead becomes necessary at times when the structure of the polity itself becomes the topic of discussion (p. 12).

While the “deliberative capacity” concept is promising in its potential for developing assessment frameworks for multiple levels, empirical applications of it have been limited to few studies (Berg & Lidskog, 2018; Kuyper, 2015; Milewicz

& Goodin, 2018; Schouten et al., 2012; Stevenson & Dryzek, 2014). In the case of assessing the deliberative capacity at the nation-state level, this potential is only beginning to be utilized (Curato, 2014, 2015; Fleuß & Helbig, 2021; O’Flynn & Curato, 2015; Salnykova, 2015).

One of those few studies is offered by N. Curato’s study of the Philippines (Curato, 2015), presenting preliminary empirical observations on the deliberative capacity of the Philippines democracy. Also relying on Morlino’s framework for assessing the quality of democracy, but replacing its focus on electoral politics with deliberation and deliberative capacity, Curato reviews three elements of a deliberative system in the context of Philippine’s politics: the public space, the empowered space, and the transition mechanisms. In her analysis of the public space, it is important to note that, the focus of attention is “discourse rather than actors or interest groups”, thus taking discourse “as a distinct analytical category from ideology ... or party position” (p. 106).

Her conclusion about the Philippine’s political system, in the end, is that there is a gap in terms of deliberative capacity between the public space, characterized as considerable, and the empowered space with modest capacity; and this gap indicates that “transmission mechanisms are key components of the deliberative system in making an exclusionary empowered space more responsive and accountable to the discourses in the public space” (p. 113).

### **5.1.3. Measuring Deliberative Democracy: V-Dem**

As already discussed in Chapter 3, one of the innovative aspects of the V-Dem project is its pluralist approach to the concept of democracy, taking different conceptions as subjects of measurement. Deliberative democracy is among these pillars.

The V-Dem project's measurement of deliberative democracy can be analyzed in its conceptualization of deliberation and its methodological approach to it. The deliberative capacity concept, discussed above, provides a yardstick for discussing this conception, while the work by D. Fleuss and her colleagues (Fleuß et al., 2018; Fleuß & Helbig, 2021) towards developing a deliberative quality assessment framework provides a critique on both aspects.

Within the deliberative democratic literature, the “deliberative capacity” concept developed by John Dryzek (2009) is the most suitable one to form the basis of an assessment framework. So the starting point could be investigating the fit between deliberative capacity and the deliberative component of the V-Dem.

The V-Dem framework measures deliberative democracy based on expert judgments, whereby the experts are supposed to answer 6 questions “with particular focus on elite levels” and “some of these questions focus on the quality of discourse and others focus on public policies”.

A crucial point here is that the V-Dem considers electoral democracy as a necessary condition for a polity to be democratic and includes it in the construction of the Deliberative Component Index, similar to the indexes of other components. Yet Dryzek's claim that “a deliberative system and its component elements do not

require any specific institutions, be they competitive elections or a constitutional separation of powers” (2010, p. 13) clearly contradicts this assumption.

Dryzek’s main point here is of course that deliberation should be regarded as a feature of all sorts of decision-making processes, applicable to all types of governance mechanism be it global, transnational, local, or network type. Indeed, this is one of the significant advantages of the deliberative perspective as it applies the principles of democratic decision-making to all the existing or potential forms of governance.

The most detailed criticism of V-Dem’s measurement of deliberative democracy from a deliberative perspective comes from Fleuss and Helbig (2021), who also attempt to construct a measurement framework for “nation states’ deliberativeness”. Major points of their criticism focus on the narrow definition of deliberation, a mismatch between the theoretical assumption regarding the existence of deliberation at all levels and the measurement being focused predominantly on the level of elite deliberation; and the failure to focus on the transmission mechanisms between deliberations within the civil society and the empowered space (Fleuß et al., 2018; Fleuß & Helbig, 2021, pp. 313–320). Their own project of measuring democratic deliberation or deliberative quality, however, is apparently a work-in-progress, as they present mostly an analysis of the challenges that should be met for such a project and only the general principles of the project itself.

## **5.2. METHODOLOGICAL ALTERNATIVES FOR ASSESSING DELIBERATIVE DEMOCRACY**

The idea of a deliberative democracy index that could rival, complement or replace the existing democracy indices is attractive, especially given the conceptual and methodological shortcomings of democracy measurement as explored in the previous chapters of this study. There have already been attempts for such an index, and we should expect more in the near future. The aim of this section is, however, to search for alternative venues for not necessarily measuring but for comparatively assessing deliberative quality at the nation-state level. The democratic audit model discussed in Chapter 3 will serve as a methodological role model, a participatory procedure that will also be in perfect harmony with the core values of deliberative democracy, which is “a reform movement as well as an academic activity” (Ercan & Dryzek, 2015, p. 241).

The nascent attempts toward assessments of deliberative capacity (Curato, 2015) or democratic deliberation (Fleuß & Helbig, 2021) are both formulated as frameworks that would guide assessment or measurement from an observer’s point of view, or as academic research project. The idea to be investigated in this section is what innovative deliberative methods can offer for an assessment framework that would be based on the participation of the citizens of the country that is the object of assessment.



The rich repertoire of innovative applications of deliberative democratic ideas serves as a perfect starting point. Indeed, what is called the empirical turn in deliberative democracy encompasses a great variety of small-scale deliberative contexts of different sizes and arrangements, where “groups small enough to be genuinely deliberative and representative enough to be genuinely democratic” (Goodin, 2008, p. 11) deliberate on specific topics, issues, policy recommendations and so on. These deliberative designs, the *mini-publics*, range from citizen juries, citizen assemblies to deliberative polls (Goodin, 2008, pp. 11–37). The popularity of these deliberative forums has even resulted in a deliberative industry. Indeed, the whole trend of “democratic innovation” can be considered to be heavily influenced by the deliberative perspective (Geissel & Newton, 2012).

One of the prominent examples that could be particularly useful in this context is the Deliberative Polling developed by James Fishkin. Designed as a deliberative alternative to the standard methods of public opinion pollings, it incorporates the sampling techniques into a form of deliberative forum. The method has been applied in a variety of settings, on various subjects and in different countries since first initiated in the late 1980s (Fishkin, 1991, 1997, 2018; Fishkin et al., 2000; Fishkin & Luskin, 2005).

Deliberative Polling, as the name suggests, is foremost an alternative to the standard practices of public opinion surveys. In contrast to such surveys that record the opinions of citizens on a topic, without taking into consideration possible factors skewing the responses –respondents may be distracted, not paying attention, they may be ill-informed or manipulated- Fishkin’s deliberative poll asks “what would

the people think should be done if they could consider a problem of collective choice under good conditions?” (2018, p. 314). In a deliberative poll, a random sample of citizens are invited to participate in some sessions of discussion on a particular topic. An advisory group of experts prepare background information on the topic that will reflect the main points and all the alternative opinions and options on the topic, which then feeds into the discussions among the sample. The participants are expected to form their opinions on the topic after digesting the information and discussing the topic with the other participants under conditions of good deliberation. They are not expected to reach a consensus, although this can be logically possible. While the participants thus benefit from the process by having the chance to form their opinions in a fully democratic setting, the exercise also serves the public through the dissemination of the discussions and the resulting opinion by enriching the broader debates in the public sphere, and by functioning as a consultation or advisory body to the formal decision-making actors within the empowered space.

In its basic structure the deliberative poll may be considered as similar to other forums such as citizen’s juries or citizen’s assemblies, yet it is distinguished with the selection of participants through random sampling, and it has been implemented in numerous cases, in various countries and places on a variety of topics. As such, it could provide a very suitable form for designing a citizen-led democracy assessment, continuing the already established tradition of democracy audits conducted by the IDEA. As already discussed in Chapter 3, the International IDEA’s democratic audits, designed principally by David Beetham, presented one

of the most innovative method of democracy assessment by rejecting quantification and allowing participatory bodies to conduct the assessment. While the organization seems to have left aside this practice, instead focusing recently on a quantitative index of democracy as its flagship activity, the idea could be revived, this time by designing deliberative polling groups or similar deliberative bodies of citizens conducting an assessment of the democratic quality of their own political systems.

In such an endeavor, of course, the first question would be to decide on the concept of democracy that would lead the assessment. In the case of Democratic Audit, the concept of democracy is basically given to the assessors; it is an extensive conception of liberal democracy, but still the assessors are not expected to come up with their own concepts. Making the choice of the conception of democracy a first step in the deliberations of this body, on the other hand, may not be realistic, as a consensus may not be guaranteed that would sabotage the assessment in the first place. One option may be to present a list of alternative conceptions to the assessors, similar to the V-Dem's list presented to the country experts, and this would be in line with the design of Deliberative Polling. Yet another option is, of course, to present a deliberative capacity framework, as offered by Dryzek, to form the basis of the assessment.

### **5.3. HOW CAN DEMOCRACY ASSESSMENT BE DEMOCRATIZED?**

Deriving an assessment framework from the deliberative democratic theory of Habermas requires dealing with a series of question. One particular question is

related to the deliberative model's connection with the representative model that guides the existing democracy indices.

The strength of deliberative theory in offering an assessment framework can be considered to come from the fact that it accepts the basic institutional structure of liberal democracy. The public sphere and deliberative processes of opinion- and will-formation are supported, yet “the widely branching communication structures of the public sphere do not at all possess the kind of political power by which universally binding decisions can be made” (Honneth, 1998, p. 764).

If Habermas's concern is about reforming the existing democratic institutions, deliberative democracy can be considered as a reformed version of liberal democracy, which may also indicate a sequential relation –an electoral, representative model should be established for a reform toward a deliberative model to take place.

When translated into an assessment framework, should this mean that the deliberative quality of political institutions could be assessed only in the context of an already established liberal democracy? If that is the case, deliberative assessment would resemble those assessments of the quality of democracy that first distinguish democracies from non-democracies and then proceed to assess the differences among those established democracies. Indeed, research on the quality of democracy tends to rely on broader conceptions of democracy rather than Schumpeterian minimalist democracy, Merkel's notion of embedded democracy, discussed in Chapter 3, being a good example. Munck (2007), for instance offers a division of labor among narrower and broader conceptions of democracy, considering

Schumpeterian conception as more suitable for understanding the transitions to democracy, while arguing that understanding post-transition issues requires broader conceptions, mentioning Dahl's conception as an example.

A similar division of labor exists between measurements of democracy and democratic quality. Fleuss and Helbig (2021), for instance, consider a measurement of deliberativeness at the nation-state as a version of democratic quality measurement. This is a crucial point, conceptually and methodologically, in considering the potential of deliberative perspective for allowing both social scientists and citizens to answer the question "how democratic is country A?".

What would the implications be for non-democratic or partly democratic contexts, such as authoritarian regimes, hybrid regimes (competitive authoritarianism) or defective democracies? We may turn to the literature on deliberation in authoritarian contexts (such as China) to search for clues.

Engaging the citizens in democracy assessment is important for allowing them to define democracy themselves, also reflecting the possibility of diverse understandings of democracy in different contexts: "Many countries have different meanings and understandings of democracy, accord it different priorities, and have quite different philosophical underpinnings and institutional arrangements of democracy" (Wiarda & Skelley, 2007, p. 157).

But a greater challenge is to decide the appropriate methodological approach in accordance with the normative and critical foundation of deliberative democratic theory. In their review of the methodological challenges of thinking and studying deliberation on a system scale, Ercan et al. (2017) emphasize the

interpretivist approach over modernist approaches. They also touch but do not solve the potential tension between an interpretivist perspective that “focuses on meaning, rather than measurement” and the requirements of a comparative framework. Any framework developed should not suffice with the institutional checklists but should deal with the complexity of the relationship between institutional design and deliberative quality. Therefore, the relation between theory and methodology becomes a vital question, which can be put as: Does a deliberative theory of democracy require a particular methodology (such as interpretive) or can different methodologies be employed? With the systemic turn in deliberative, this question has become more pressing as can be observed in the attempts towards measuring deliberative quality or capacity at systemic levels discussed above.

Democracy assessment in practice is not always a scholarly practice, in many cases it is conducted by various non-academic organizations, and the methodology question may take a different shape in that context. Quantification may in that context be seen as more a practical choice regarding the dissemination of the results, rather than an academic consideration of methodology. Still, this choice out of convenience may have important parallel with the academic preference for quantitative approach that is they may both reflect a similar normative conception of democracy. Therefore, the question of methodology regarding the empirical studies of deliberative democracy also bears significance for democracy assessment frameworks that will be found on that perspective, even when they are developed and applied by non-academic organizations.

One further significant question relates to the question of whether a contradiction exists between deliberation and representation. This question is significant because if we cannot argue that representative democracy is anti-democratic, and instead argue that it has certain deficiencies that should be remedied, or faults that should be corrected, by deliberation; the representative mechanisms would then be seen as not the core or essence of a democratic system, but necessary instruments or compromises in the face of the extreme difficulty of maintaining deliberative processes in the extensive and complex societies of modern times. Yet such a view of the liberal democracy could then be defenseless against the argument that in the end, deliberative democrats should also accept this is the currently existing form of democracy that we must study, hence a definition focusing on representation rather than deliberation is meaningful, fair and appropriate. At this point, an argument regarding an inherent contradiction between representation and deliberation could help. In this case, those features of representative democracy that are hampering or destroying the processes and conditions of deliberation would gain importance.

While the emphasis in this study has been on developing deliberative democracy assessments at the nation-state level, a particular strength of deliberative democracy theory is that the principles it formulates for deliberative processes of opinion and will formation are not necessarily limited to the nation-state level. Any level of political decision-making, formal or informal, can be subjected to an evaluation with regard to its potential for democratic deliberative processes to dominate decision-making. That “deliberative models of democracy are able to

break the conceptual link between democracy and the nation-state” (Galligan & Clavero, 2008, p. 8) should be considered as a significant advantage, and this advantage could easily be reflected in real-life applications.



## CONCLUSION

This study attempted to cover the topic of comparative democracy assessment in its historical evolution with respect to various aspects. The starting point was the conceptions and theories of democracy that guided such assessments and measurements.

From the practical point of view, where the concern and motivation for democracy assessment is to induce and promote public debate on democratization, the more qualitative methodologies with citizen participation seems to be more promising. Hence, it would be meaningful for promoters of democracy worldwide to support such practices. Yet, the preference of IDEA to rely on and invest in a quantitative index, and possibly downgrading its significant project of democracy audits, is a step in the wrong direction.

In comparison to other critical/radical theories of democracy, the deliberative perspective emerges as the one that provides greater opportunity for evaluative purposes as well as being more effective in offering institutional and methodological insights.

Once we settle for formulating an assessment framework based on a deliberative conception of democracy (deliberative capacity assessment, for instance) we face a series of questions:

Will the resulting comparison (and rankings maybe?) produce a significantly different picture of the world, and thus invalidate the existing indices? Is it reasonable to expect this? Or, in other words, is it possible to expect any

significant change in the relative standing of the countries or categorical changes in individual political systems –such as some countries being depicted as (sufficiently/highly) deliberative while they are coded as non-democratic or less democratic by the others?

There is also the question of a threshold. Should there be a threshold that would define systems with a certain level of deliberative capacity as ‘democratic’ and those with lower levels of deliberative capacity as ‘non-democratic’? Where would such a dividing line be drawn?

Or is it the case that a deliberative conception would put higher expectations or limits so that even the “most democratic” systems today would be considered as lacking in deliberative capacity? So taking the higher side of the continuum further away, putting all existing systems further from the ideal, or highest possible, value –and making all the existing systems (democratic and non-democratic) pack closer down the line.

Of course, these questions all emerge if we agree to the comparative logic of current rankings –that is, thinking quantitatively of rankings, continuums and so forth. Yet, is a different logic of comparison possible? Or, is it more commendable to leave aside the desire to compare?

All these and similar question, moreover, are related to how we define deliberative capacity with regard to liberal democracy, as defined and measured by current indices of democracy: Is deliberative quality (the level of deliberative capacity) an additional feature of liberal democratic regimes or does it exist independently of the features and institutions of liberal democracy? In the first case,

deliberative capacity becomes an issue of “quality of democracy”, a dimension that differentiates among already democratic regimes, which are considered above a certain threshold that separates democratic and non-democratic regimes. In the second case, however, deliberative capacity provides a completely independent logic of comparison, the results of which may not necessarily be correlated with other comparisons of liberal democracy.

Another issue that democracy indices fail to respond: “Spaces of democratic politics that exist above and below the level of the nation-state” (Barnett & Low, 2016, p. 3). Especially a critical point where democracy indices even fail to recognize is related to “an alternative sense of ‘democratization’ understood not so much as the geographical diffusion of established norms of democracy but as the deepening of democratic impulses and their extension of new arenas of everyday life” (Barnett & Low, 2016, p. 4). So the limitation in scope (fixation on the nation-state) is combined with a limitation of scope with regard to conceptualization. This limitation may also be considered with regard to its impact on the promotion of democracy, for a promotion effort focused on such democratic impulses would necessitate a very different view on policies and instruments.

What these conclusions imply for political scientists? At the very least, political scientists should be aware that the choice of one or other method of comparative democracy assessment inevitably includes a tradeoff—in a similar way of the choice between qualitative and quantitative methodologies. Beside the normative implications inherent in the preference for a liberal, deliberative or other conception of democracy, the alternative, participatory methods discussed in

Chapter 5 may not be feasible in most contexts, let alone worldwide, thus failing to provide the extensive information we may need. While appearing to provide extensive and compact information required for worldwide comparisons, the quantitative indices, on the other hand, may be offering an illusionary precision. One of the major arguments of this study is that the role that democracy assessments may play in informing and promoting public debates on democracy and democratization should be taken into consideration when deciding on the possible trade-offs included in conceptual and methodological choices.

Further conclusions can be deduced that go beyond the conception or study of democracy, and relates to the contentious topic of democracy promotion, or international democracy assistance. A deliberative understanding of democracy, and the methodological innovations associated with this perspective provide great prospects for developing more inclusive and more effective approaches in international and transnational democracy assistance. Such an approach is also promising with regard to overcoming the serious criticisms directed at democracy promotion policies.

The organizations producing democracy indices, also other kinds of indices measuring such concepts as rule of law, poverty, corruption or gender inequality, may also be seen as intermediaries between academic research and a variety of non-academic audiences. Such indices may be seen to translating academic concepts and research into simplified or summarized information that would be more convenient to be used by policy-makers, civil society organizations, activists or citizens.

What this dissertation say about deliberative democracy assessment? There are two alternative paths that could be taken, and perhaps progressing on both would be the best option. The first option is to continue with the nascent attempts at developing a democratic quality index based on the deliberative conception of democracy. The increasing focus on the systemic level in the field of deliberative democratic theory, and the preliminary works that offer the basic formulations of a deliberative quality assessment framework at the potentials in this aspect, and contributions to this endeavor could significantly benefit political science, enriching the tools of democratization studies. A second path is to develop the deliberative quality assessment framework on the basis of qualitative case studies, and with innovative methodological that would allow citizens to conduct the assessments themselves. Such assessments may not readily offer comparable results available for cross-country studies, yet they can also function as tests of validity or credibility for quantitative, large-N datasets. This may offer yet another promising line of research, once such participatory assessment forums become available.

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