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The Quality of Democracy

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About the Center on Democracy, Development and the Rule of Law (CDDRL)

CDDRL was founded by a generous grant from the Bill and Flora Hewlett Foundation in October in 2002 as part of the Stanford Institute for International Studies at Stanford University. The Center supports analytic studies, policy relevant research, training and outreach activities to assist developing countries in the design and implementation of policies to foster growth, democracy, and the rule of law.

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The Quality of Democracy

By Larry Diamond and Leonardo Morlino

As democracy has spread over the past three decades to a majority of the world's states, analytic attention has turned increasingly from explaining regime transitions to evaluating and explaining the character of democratic regimes. Much of the democracy literature of the 1990s was concerned with the consolidation of democratic regimes.¹ In recent years, social scientists as well as democracy practitioners and aid agencies have sought to develop means of framing and assessing the quality of democracy. This stream of theory, methodological innovation, and empirical research has three broad motives: first, that deepening democracy is a moral good, if not an imperative; second, that reforms to improve democratic quality are essential if democracy is to achieve the broad and durable legitimacy that marks consolidation;² and third, that long-established democracies must also reform if they are to attend to their own gathering problems of public dissatisfaction and even disillusionment. In fact, these latter trends—the broad decline of public confidence in governmental and political institutions, the growing citizen alienation from political parties in particular, and the widespread perceptions that democratic governments and politicians are increasingly corrupt, self-interested and unresponsive—are common to many democracies, new and old, and have even led prominent researchers to speak of a “crisis of democracy.”³

Touching as it does on basic questions of norms and legitimacy, the quality of democracy is a value-laden and hence controversial subject. Who is to define what constitutes a “good” democracy, and to what extent is a universal conception of democratic quality possible? How can the effort to address avoid becoming paternalistic exercises in which the established democracies take themselves for granted as models and so escape scrutiny? How can assessments of

democratic quality go beyond mere analytics and be useful to political reformers, civil society activists, international donors, and others who seek to improve the quality of democracy? These are only some of the questions that pervade and motivate this growing sub-field of study.

The five thematic essays that follow are part of a collaborative effort, launched at a conference at Stanford University, to elaborate and refine the concept of democratic quality and to apply it to a series of six paired comparisons. The concluding essay in the present collection, by Marc Plattner, develops critical comments he offered at that conference.⁴ The authors of the five thematic essays were each asked to define and articulate a particular dimension of the quality of democracy, to explain how it relates to other dimensions in our framework, to suggest possible indicators for measuring the dimension, to identify ways in which this element of democratic quality is subverted in the real world (and how these subversions can be empirically detected), and to offer (where possible) policy recommendations for reform and improvement of democratic quality. As we explain below, we do not assert that these five conceptual dimensions—freedom, rule of law, vertical accountability, responsiveness, and equality—fully constitute the quality of democracy. The framework we outline below in fact has eight dimensions—including as well participation, competition, and horizontal accountability. Others could be identified as well, for example transparency and the effectiveness of representation. The different aspects of democratic quality overlap, however, and we choose to treat these latter two as elements of our principal dimensions. In fact, the more we enumerate distinct dimensions, the denser and more complex the overlaps become.

We attempt here to identify some of the ways in which the different elements of democracy not only overlap but also depend upon one another. In identifying these different linkages, we suggest that democratic quality can be thought of as a system, in which improvement in one dimension can have diffuse benefits for others (and vice versa). At the same time however, there are sometimes trade-offs between the different dimensions of democratic quality, and it is impossible to achieve each of them to the maximum degree. This is one respect in which each

democracy must make an inherently value-laden choice about what *kind* of democracy it wishes to be.

We begin by offering brief definitions of the terms “democracy” and “quality,” and we then suggest how these two concepts can be integrated into a multidimensional conception of democratic quality. In the main body of the paper, we define and analyze eight different dimensions of democratic quality. We then reflect further the linkages and interactions among them. Finally, we review how the six case studies employ and illuminate our analytic framework.

“Democracy” and “Quality”

To analyze the quality of democracy, and to seek a “good” democracy, we must first know what democracy is. At a minimum, democracy requires: 1) universal, adult suffrage; 2) recurring, free, competitive and fair elections; 3) more than one serious political party; and 4) alternative sources of information.⁵ If elections are to be truly meaningful, free and fair, there must be some degree of civil and political freedom beyond the electoral arena, permitting citizens to articulate and organize around their political beliefs and interests.⁶ In addition, formal democratic institutions should be sovereign in fact, that is they should not be constrained by elites or external powers that are not directly or indirectly accountable to the people.⁷ Once a regime meets these basic conditions, further empirical analysis can assess how well it achieves the three main goals of an ideal democracy—political and civil freedom, popular sovereignty (control over public policies and the officials who make them), and political equality (in these rights and powers)—as well as broader standards of good governance (such as transparency, legality, and responsible rule).⁸

Thus, the analysis of a good democracy should exclude hybrid or “electoral authoritarian” regimes, which, in failing to conduct free and fair elections, fall short of an essential requirement for democracy.⁹ By definition, we will find the quality of democracy quite low in *defective democracies*, which are “exclusive” in offering only limited guarantees for political rights, or

“dominated” in allowing powerful groups to condition and limit the autonomy of elected leaders, and/or “illiberal” in the inadequacy of their protections for civil rights and the rule of law.¹⁰ We can also expect the quality of democracy to be quite deficient in *delegative democracies*, which have electoral competitiveness and relative civil and political freedom, but whose officials, once elected, are only minimally responsive to citizen preferences, constrained by other agencies of government, and respectful of the rule of law.¹¹

A second step in evaluating democratic quality requires a clear definition of “quality.” A survey of the use of the term in the industrial and marketing sectors suggests three different meanings of quality (each with different implications for empirical research):

1. *procedure*: a “quality” product is the result of an exact, controlled process carried out according to precise, recurring methods and timing;
2. *content*: quality inheres in the structural characteristics of a product, such as its design, materials, or functioning;
3. *result*: the quality of a product or service is indirectly indicated by the degree of customer satisfaction with it, regardless of how it is produced or its actual content.

What is a “Quality” Democracy?

Starting from the definitions above, we consider a quality or good democracy to be one that provides its citizens a high degree of freedom, political equality, and popular control over public policies and policy makers through the legitimate and lawful functioning of stable institutions. A good democracy is thus first a broadly legitimated regime that satisfies citizen expectations of governance (*quality in terms of result*). Second, a good democracy is one in which its citizens, associations, and communities enjoy extensive liberty and political equality (*quality in terms of content*). Third, in a good democracy the citizens themselves have the sovereign power to evaluate whether the government provides liberty and equality according to the rule of law. Citizens and

their organizations and parties participate and compete to hold elected officials accountable for their policies and actions. They monitor the efficiency and fairness of the application of the laws, the efficacy of government decisions, and the political responsibility and responsiveness of elected officials. Governmental institutions also hold one another accountable before the law and the constitution (*quality in terms of procedure*).

With the above in mind, we identify eight dimensions on which democracies vary in quality. The first five are procedural dimensions: the rule of law, participation, competition, and accountability, both vertical and horizontal. Though also quite relevant to the content, these dimensions mainly concern the rules and practices.¹² The next two dimensions of variation are substantive in nature: respect for civil and political freedoms, and the progressive implementation of greater political (and underlying it, social and economic) equality. Our last dimension, responsiveness, links the procedural dimensions to the substantive ones by measuring the extent to which public policies (including laws, institutions, and expenditures) correspond to citizen demands and preferences, as aggregated through the political process. These eight dimensions are elaborated below.¹³ Each may vary in the specific form of its institutional expression, and in its degree of development. Capturing and explaining this variation requires indicators that reveal how and to what degree each dimension is present in different countries (and in different models of the good democracy). The resulting empirical data will also make it possible to track trends in the quality of democracy in individual countries over time, including the effectiveness of institutional reforms.¹⁴

The multidimensional nature of our framework, and of the growing number of democracy assessments being conducted in individual countries, implies a pluralist notion of democratic quality. As we note below, there are not only dense linkages but also trade-offs and tensions among the various dimensions of democratic quality, and democracies will differ in the normative weights they place on the various dimensions of democratic quality (for example, freedom vs. responsiveness). There is no objective way of identifying a single measurement framework of democratic quality, right and true for all societies.

Our analytical framework proposed here partially differs somewhat from other studies on the quality of democracy, such as those of Altman and Perez-Linan (2001) and Lijphart (1999). Both of them develop a quantitative comparative strategy. We emphasize the virtuous combination of qualitative and quantitative measures in the empirical analysis of the phenomenon. Some difference also emerges in our definition of a good democracy and consequently in the dimensions of variation and related indicators. Altman and Perez-Linan refer to three aspects that draw on Dahl's concept of polyarchy (civil rights, participation, and competition). Lijphart includes indicators such as female representation, electoral participation, satisfaction with democracy, and corruption, and these indicators can be associated with our different dimensions (respectively, equality, participation, responsiveness, and rule of law).

The institutions and mechanisms of representative democracy are the main objects of the analysis of the quality of a democracy. This is not to ignore direct democracy as perhaps the purest expression of democratic quality, but to acknowledge the actual experience of representative democracies and their real potential for improvement. If the analysis has to be focused on representative democracies, then (vertical) accountability becomes a truly central dimension in so much as it grants individual citizens and organized actors in civil society means of control over politicians and political institutions. In a good democracy, this feature attenuates the difficulties that emerge out of the shift from direct to representative democracy.

Vertical accountability is implicitly based on two assumptions from the liberal tradition that highlight the interconnectedness of all of the dimensions explained above. The first assumption is that if citizens are genuinely given the opportunity to evaluate the government's performance, they are in fact capable of doing so, possessing above all a relatively accurate perception of their own needs and preferences. The second assumption is that citizens, either alone or as part of a group, are the only possible judges of their own interests and needs; no third party can determine them. Generally, we accept these assumptions, though they are debatable, and as Dietrich Rueschemeyer

notes in his essay on equality, those actors with more wealth and cultural capital have disproportionate power to shape citizen policy preferences.

Freedom and equality, however they are understood, are necessarily linked to accountability and responsiveness. Indeed, provision of freedom and equality is one standard by which citizens may assess the performance of their political leaders and representative institutions. In addition, an effective rule of law is also indispensable for a good democracy, in part because it guarantees, through the mechanism of a politically neutral and independent judiciary, the defense of citizens' rights and of the equal status, before the law and in the political arena, of all citizens. As the next section will explain, freedom, equality, and even accountability are unobtainable if respect for law is ineffective or if the elected government cannot govern authoritatively. These are the fundamental presuppositions necessary for identifying and implementing reforms to improve the quality of democracy.

Procedural Dimensions of Democratic Quality

We are now ready to explore more concretely our eight dimensions of democratic quality in three respects: the empirical definition, the conditions for the dimension to develop and thrive, and the means by which it is commonly subverted. We begin in this section with the five procedural dimensions.

The Rule of Law. As Guillermo O'Donnell explains, under a rule of law all citizens are equal before the law, which is fairly and consistently applied to all by an independent judiciary, and the laws themselves are clear, publicly known, universal, stable, and nonretroactive. These characteristics are fundamental for any civil order and a basic requirement for democratic consolidation, along with other such cognate features of a constitutional order as civilian control

over the military and the intelligence services and an elaborated network of other agencies of horizontal accountability that complement the judiciary.

More comprehensively, a “good” (or in essence, a liberal) democracy has a strong, vigorous, diffuse and self-sustaining rule of law in the following respects:

- The law is equally enforced toward everyone, including all state officials; no one is above the law.
- The legal state is supreme throughout the country, leaving no areas dominated by organized crime, local oligarchs, or political bosses who are above the law.
- Corruption is minimized, detected, and punished, in the political, administrative, and judicial branches of the state.
- The state bureaucracy at all levels competently, efficiently, and universally applies the laws and assumes responsibility in the event of an error.
- The police force is professional, efficient, and respectful of individuals’ legally guaranteed rights and freedoms, including rights of due process.
- Citizens have equal and unhindered access to the justice system to defend their rights and to contest lawsuits between private citizens or between private citizens and public institutions.
- Criminal cases and civil and administrative lawsuits are heard and resolved expeditiously.
- The judiciary at all levels is neutral and independent from any political influence.
- Rulings of the courts are respected and enforced by other agencies of the state.
- The constitution is supreme, and is interpreted and defended by a Constitutional Court.

What further distinguishes and completes a “democratic rule of law,” O’Donnell argues, is that the legal system defends the political rights and procedures of democracy, upholds everyone’s civil rights, and reinforces the authority of other agencies of horizontal accountability that ensure the lawfulness and propriety of official actions.

To some students of democracy, it may seem odd to begin elucidating democratic quality with the rule of law, as the presence of several dozen illiberal democracies in the world attests to the

possibility for competitive elections and popular participation to co-exist with considerable lawlessness and abuse of power.¹⁵ Nevertheless, the rule of law is the base upon which every other dimension of democratic quality rests. When the rule of law is weak, participation of the poor and marginalized is suppressed; individual freedoms are tenuous and fleeting; civic groups may be unable to organize and advocate; the resourceful and well connected have vastly more access to justice and power; corruption and abuse of power run rampant, as agencies of horizontal accountability are unable to function properly; political competition is distorted and unfair; voters have a hard time holding rulers to account; and thus, linkages vital to securing democratic responsiveness are disrupted and severed.

The above aspects concern in large measure the impartial and efficient application of the law and the fair resolution of disputes within the legal system. Various indicators can represent each and the relevant data can be analyzed on a case-by-case basis using both qualitative and quantitative techniques. Of course, a detailed assessment of judicial fairness and efficiency would be extremely expensive and practically impossible to apply to a high number of cases. However, one can examine across many cases the degree to which public officials are responsible before the law, or instead enjoy relative impunity; the extent of official corruption, as measured (quite roughly and imprecisely to be sure) by indices of perceptions of corruption and of market distortions; the extent of civil liberties violations; the access of citizens to the court system; and the average duration of legal proceedings.

The ways in which the rule of law is subverted in a democracy are myriad. For example, politicians may use the law as a “political weapon” against their political and civic adversaries.¹⁶ Democratically elected leaders may attempt to pack the judiciary (particularly the constitutional court) with political loyalists. There is a growing tendency among individual citizens or economic groups to resort to the courts to assert their own interests (as opposed to strictly defending against illegal actions). The political culture also plays an important role in sustaining or undermining the rule of law. A democratic rule of law is diminished in many countries by the diffuse cultural

attitude that views the law merely as an impediment to realizing one's own interests, a nuisance to be circumvented in any way possible. In many countries, this attitude extends widely from the popular to the entrepreneurial classes and is captured by the Italian saying, "*fatta la legge, trovato l'inganno*" (in essence, fraud goes hand in hand with law).

The most important conditions aiding the development of the rule of law are the diffusion of liberal and democratic values among both the people and, especially, the elite; strong bureaucratic traditions of competence and impartiality; and the institutional and economic means for fully implementing a rule of law. However, these conditions are not all that common and they are very difficult to create from scratch—hence, the weakness of the rule of law in many recently established democracies (and even a number of older ones as well). The best approach is probably to proceed incrementally to build up the independence, capacity, and authority of the entire judicial system. But the literature on rule of law development is sobering: No amount of training and financial resources (including generous external assistance) will suffice unless democratic leaders exhibit both political will and self-restraint. This in turn requires a mobilized and aware civil society, and efficient democratic instruments of competition so that voters can remove public officials who obstruct rule-of-law reforms.

Participation. No regime can be a democracy unless it grants all of its adult citizens formal rights of political participation, including the franchise. But a good democracy must ensure that all citizens are in fact able to make use of these formal rights to influence the decision-making process: to vote, to organize, to assemble, to protest, and to lobby for their interests. With regard to participation, democratic quality is high when we in fact observe extensive citizen participation not only through voting but in the life of political parties and civil society organizations, in the discussion of public policy issues, in communicating with and demanding accountability from elected representatives, in monitoring the conduct of public office-holders, and in direct engagement with public issues at the local community level.

Participation in these respects is intimately related to political equality, because, even if formal rights of participation are upheld for all, inequalities in political resources can make it much more difficult for lower-status individuals to exercise their democratic rights of participation. Thus a fundamental condition for widespread participation in a good democracy is broad diffusion of basic education and literacy, and with it political knowledge of the system of government, its procedures, rules, issues, parties, and leaders. Important again, as a supporting condition, is the political culture, which should value participation and the equal worth and dignity of all citizens. The latter implies as well tolerance of political and social differences, and thus acceptance on the part of all individuals and organized groups of the right of others (including their adversaries) to participate equally, so long as they obey the law. Finally, as we have suggested, extensive participation also requires a rule of law that will defend the right and ability of weaker social groups to participate fully.

Participation is subverted and constrained in a variety of subtle and overt ways in democracies around the world. A common subversion comes through the apathy of a citizenry that doubts the efficacy of democratic mechanisms or has become alienated from the democratic process as a result of the low quality of democracy in other respects (for example, corruption, abuse of power, and a lack of competitiveness). Of course, such systemic flaws can, under the right conditions of popular outrage and effective civic mobilization, generate *increases* in participation, but in the absence of viable reform alternatives, they induce civic withdrawal. Participation may be constrained by conditions of lawlessness and violence that make it risky for citizens to organize, assemble, or even to vote. To preserve their own entrenched privileges, powerful groups may intimidate and victimize the poor, the landless, ethnic, regional, and religious minorities in order to suppress their exercise of political influence. Participation is most commonly measured by voter turnout rates, but this captures only one aspect of participation in a democracy. No less important are the extent of membership and active participation in political parties, social movements, and

non-governmental organizations; the frequency of communication with elected representatives and other office-holders; and the extent to which citizens express themselves on public issues.

Competition. In order to be a democracy at all, a political system must have regular, free and fair electoral competition between different political parties. But democracies vary in their degree of competitiveness—in the openness of access to the electoral arena by new political forces, in the ease with which incumbents can be defeated, and in the equality of access to the mass media and campaign funding on the part of competing political parties. Depending on the type of electoral system, democracies may allow for more or less decisive electoral alternation as well. Here we confront a trade-off within the overall goal of competition. Electoral systems based on proportional representation score well on one element of competitiveness—ease of access to the electoral arena and parliament on the part of multiple political parties—but at the expense of another element of competitiveness, the ease of alternation of power (or the efficiency of the electoral process), since the presence of multiple parties with relatively defined shares of the vote tends to produce a succession of coalition governments that have some considerable continuity in party composition over time.¹⁷ There is no objective, a priori way to determine from this respect alone which system produces a higher quality democracy, though Lijphart argues that PR does a better job of fulfilling other dimensions of democratic quality, such as the more equal representation of women and minorities.

One condition for vigorous competition is the legal and constitutional order. In contemporary democracies, political party and campaign finance is such an important foundation of electoral viability that it is difficult for challenging parties and candidates to compete effectively without some fair minimum in this regard. While there is considerable skepticism about the efficacy of laws that limit campaign spending—in part because of the ease with which they are evaded in new and old democracies alike—some floor of public funding for significant parties and robust requirements for the full and rapid reporting of all contributions to parties and campaigns do

seem to promote greater electoral fairness and competitiveness.¹⁸ In first-past-the-post systems, the means by which electoral districts are drawn also heavily shape competitiveness. Where partisan bodies are able to draw electoral districts to their own advantage (as in the United States, where this gerrymandering is performed every decade by state legislatures, with the aid of increasingly sophisticated computer programming), they are likely to do so in ways that will promote partisan and incumbency advantage. As a result, elections to the U.S. House of Representatives have seen the rate of defeat of incumbents steadily decline, and less than ten percent of House seats are competitive. Of course, electoral competitiveness also depends on fairness in access to the mass media, pluralism in media ownership (and viewpoints), some dispersion of economic resources in society, and the enforcement of political rights by an independent judiciary. There is also an important linkage with horizontal accountability, because the most important institutional guarantee of freedom and fairness (and hence competitiveness) in elections is an independent and authoritative electoral commission.¹⁹

Competition can be constrained or subverted through partisan control of electoral administration, not just the drawing of electoral district boundaries but the design and enforcement of rules regarding the conduct and financing of campaigns and the administration of the actual vote. Competitiveness can also be diminished by the actions of parties and other non-state forces that suppress the freedom of different groups and parties to contest for office, or that commit outright electoral fraud. To the extent these subversions become so extensive that declared electoral outcomes do not represent the will of the people, or it proves all but impossible to replace the ruling party through elections, the system falls beneath the threshold of democracy into some form of electoral authoritarian rule. But some regimes straddle ambiguously the boundary between low-quality democracy and semi-democracy.

Competition is one dimension of democratic quality that is relatively amenable to quantitative measurement (though no quantitative measure can fully capture the extent of it). Altman and Perez-Linan propose an indicator of the “balanced presence of opposition in

parliament,” which has a negative value when the governing party dominates the legislature in terms of seats or when the opposition is so strong that it poses problems for the decisional efficacy of the government.²⁰

Vertical Accountability. Accountability is the obligation of elected political leaders to answer for their political decisions when asked by citizen-electors or other constitutional bodies. Schedler suggests that accountability has three main features: information, justification, and punishment/compensation.²¹ The first element, information on the political act or series of acts by a politician or political organ (the government, parliament, and so on), is indispensable for attributing responsibility. Justification refers to the reasons furnished by the governing leaders for their actions and decisions. The third, punishment/compensation, is the consequence that is imposed by the elector or some other authoritative body following an evaluation of the information, justifications, and other aspects and interests behind the political act.

Accountability can be either vertical or horizontal. Vertical accountability is that which citizens as electors can demand from their officials in the course of campaigns and elections, and which political and civil society actors can exercise at moments of political controversy. As Philippe Schmitter explains, in modern democracies, elected representatives play a crucial mediating role in the accountability relations between citizens and rulers. This is especially so in parliamentary systems, where elected representatives can bring down the government, but in all democracies representatives not only receive but help to share and structure citizen preferences and expectations. The electoral form of vertical accountability has a periodic nature and is dependent on the various local and national election dates. Ideally, the performance of the incumbent is reviewed and evaluated, policy alternatives are debated, and the vote either rewards the incumbent party and office-holders or punishes them by voting for an opposition party (or abstaining from the vote). As Schmitter notes, the outcome of accountability may just as likely be reward (reelection) as punishment (defeat), for the most accountable leaders are really those whose conduct and decisions

conform to citizen expectations (and the law). The dynamics of vertical accountability extend beyond elections and the interplay between voters and their elected representatives, however, encompassing as well the efforts of civic associations, NGOs, social movements, think tanks, and the mass media to hold government accountable in between elections. Smulovitz and Peruzotti refer to this as “societal accountability.”²²

Political competition and participation are crucial conditions for vertical accountability. If voters are to be able to hold their public officials and ruling parties accountable periodically through elections, they must be engaged, knowledgeable about the performance of their office-holders and the issues, and they must turn out to vote in large numbers. At the same time, vertical accountability requires genuinely competitive elections, in which institutionally strong parties are able to offer programmatic alternatives to the voters, and in which incumbents do not enjoy such entrenched advantages that voters are not able to “punish” them for poor performance or unwanted policies. In short, political competition and the distribution of power must be fair and robust enough to allow for genuine electoral alternatives at the various levels of government, and to produce some electoral alternation over time, so that incumbents face a credible threat of electoral punishment. The ongoing vertical process of monitoring, questioning, and demanding justification, through the work of non-governmental organizations, think tanks, the mass media, professional associations, interest groups, opposition parties, and other actors in civil society, in turn requires freedom for these groups to function and a rule of law that protects them from intimidation and retribution. In both these electoral and non-electoral respects, vertical accountability therefore requires a strong system of horizontal accountability to sustain the rule of law and thus the integrity of these vertical processes. At the same time, it also depends upon strong and well-established intermediary structures, a responsible, vigilant political opposition, independent and pluralistic mass media that are conscious of their civil function, and a well-developed network of active, informed organizations and associations that share democratic values—in other words, a vigorous and vigilant civil society.

Vertical accountability is subverted when office holders manipulate the rules and the powers of office to heighten the electoral advantages of incumbency and to handicap the political opposition, or when they extend control over the media and other actors in civil society to the point that the latter fear to question their conduct in office. In the modern era, where the mass media in general and the television media in particular are so vital to the flow of political influence and debate, efforts to subdue or eliminate independent (critical) control of the television media in particular are a common means by which incumbents try to vitiate both the electoral and the civic instruments of vertical accountability.

Beyond these rather blatant and deliberate subversions lie more subtle, intrinsic, and pervasive difficulties in securing political accountability from below. Given the opacity and complexity of government, politicians have ample opportunity to absolve themselves of any concrete responsibility. Thus, accountability frequently becomes a catchphrase more connected to the image of a politician than to decisions made or results achieved. Negative outcomes are easily justified by reference to unforeseen events, or by taking advantage of a favorable press or effective image-makers to influence public opinion. At the same time, good results obtained by wise and prudent leadership, even if sometimes at the cost of temporary sacrifices by the governed, might be punished in the next election in reaction against the temporary pain.

The very action, often ideological and instrumental, of parties or other opposition actors, or even of powerful media actors, further highlights the difficulty of implementing accountability. The lack of clear distinctions between incumbent leaders and party leaders means that parties, be they of the opposition or of the majority, are hindered in carrying out their role as watchdogs for their constituents. At the parliamentary level, party discipline is considered more important than accountability to the voters and, in most democracies, the parliamentary majority (where it exists) supports the government without really controlling it. Furthermore, there should also be a clear distinction between the responsible leader, either of the government or of the opposition, and the intermediate layers of party actors that range from activists to sympathizers. These latter should

trigger a bottom-up process that gives direction for how parties should control the government or organize their opposition. Yet recent research on party organization in a few advanced democracies shows a trend toward strong, oligarchic leaders who collude—rather than compete—with other parties.²³

For European citizens, the supranational architecture of the European Union generates additional difficulties in holding national rulers accountable, enabling the latter to shift blame for unpopular decisions onto the EU even if they concern clear-cut issues such as streamlining national administrations or reorganizing state finances to address large national deficits. Governments and politicians justify unpopular actions by claiming that their hands were forced by opposing coalitions in the EU Council of Ministers or in the European Council of prime ministers and chiefs of state, or by votes in the European Parliament. A similar tactic is often used—and not without justification—by elected governments in developing countries in relation to economic policy constraints imposed by international financial institutions and the World Trade Organization.

Horizontal Accountability. Democratic quality also requires that office holders answer for their conduct to and have it reviewed by other institutional actors that have the expertise and legal authority to control and sanction their behavior. In contrast to vertical accountability, the actors are, more or less, political equals. Horizontal accountability is usually manifest in the monitoring, investigation, enforcement and independent functioning of a number of different government institutions (which sometimes overlap in their authority): the opposition in parliament, specific investigative committees of parliament, the various tiers of the court system, including, crucially, the constitutional court, audit agencies, a counter-corruption commission, the central bank, an independent electoral administration, the ombudsman, and other bodies that scrutinize and limit the power of those who govern.²⁴

The counter-corruption commission is a particularly crucial agency of horizontal accountability in contemporary democracies. To be effective, this body must be charged not only

with receiving but also monitoring and verifying the assets declarations of the president or prime minister, national-level ministers, members of parliament, state or provincial governors, high-level bureaucrats, major military and police officers, and other elected and appointed public officials above a certain level. (A truly comprehensive effort in a large country will also provide for the commission to have branch offices at the provincial level to monitor provincial and local government officials and legislators). The commission must then have the staff to investigate annually on a random basis some significant percentage of these assets declarations, and systematically, the declarations of the country's highest officials.

Scrutiny must be comprehensive if it is to be effective, and if the threat of detection is to be credible. This requires a lot of resources: accountants, investigators, and lawyers trained in the ways that wealth is moved, accumulated, and hidden, along with computer specialists and other support staff to back them up. Not only does a counter-corruption commission need a lot of well-trained staff, it needs to pay them enough to deter temptation and establish a high esprit de corps.

Scrutiny, however, is not enough. If credible evidence of wrongdoing emerges, there must be the institutional means to try the suspected offender and impose punishment on the guilty. The single most common and crippling flaw in systems of corruption control is an inability to enforce this function free from interference by the highest levels of government. The counter-corruption commission should have the ability to prosecute officials who have allegedly violated ethics laws independently. One of the most important changes introduced by Thailand's democratic constitution of 1997 was to grant the National Counter Corruption Commission independent prosecutorial authority, even if it means overruling the attorney general.²⁵

The Ombudsman's office (which may go under many names, including, in South Africa, the office of public protector) receives and investigates public complaints of abuse of office. Members of the public or the press should have a right to—indeed be encouraged to—bring evidence to the counter-corruption commission if they believe a public official has misrepresented his or her assets or abused their office. But democracies need a supplementary channel of public access to remedial

government authority if power is being abused and the counter-corruption commission does not pursue its mission, or judges some abuse of power to lie outside its scope of authority. Even if the system is working well, the ombudsman may occasionally come upon evidence that the counter-corruption commission does not have, or that reinforces investigations the commission has already opened. And, agencies of horizontal accountability work best when they may be held accountable by one another for failure to do their job.

The powers and functions of the office of the Ombudsman vary widely across countries. In some countries, it is simply a mechanism to receive and investigate citizen complaints. The Philippine Constitution, however, gives the Ombudsman an explicit mandate to fight corruption through public assistance, prevention, investigation, and prosecution of suspect public officials, and administrative direction and adjudication. It can order “any government official or employee remiss in his duties to do his job, or stop, prevent and remedy improper and abusive acts.” In the Philippines, this office need not wait for citizens to come forward, and it can also act on anonymous complaints. Moreover, it may not only refer charges (against lower-ranking officials) to the regular courts, it may also prosecute directly.²⁶ Thus the office combines the more limited functions of an ombudsman with many of those of a counter-corruption and even supreme audit agency.

Independent, systematic audits of public accounts form another crucial link in the web of accountability. Clearly, it is not enough simply to monitor the personal accounts of public officials. A dense, overlapping system of accountability requires that all major government bureaus, agencies, and ministries have their accounts regularly audited, and that they be open to inspection and evaluation of their performance more generally. To conduct these checks, each major government agency or bureau should have its own auditing office and inspector-general. But periodic external audits are also essential. The government should have an office of the auditor-general with the authority to conduct external audits on a periodic or random basis, and audit any agency at any time when there is evidence of wrongdoing. One model is the General Accounting

Office (GAO) of the United States, which is the investigative arm of, and is responsible to, the U.S. Congress (thus giving it substantial autonomy from executive-branch agencies).

Horizontal accountability is most effective when it is comprehensive, that is, when the agencies that comprise it interlock and partially overlap in a systemic fashion. Overlapping authority ensures that if one institutional actor fails to perform its duty to expose, question, and punish (and thus ultimately, deter) corrupt behavior, another institution may initiate the accountability process. Interlocking authority means that the different institutions relate to one another in a way that is complementary and reinforcing, so that, for example, an audit agency can uncover fraud, a counter-corruption commission can impose civil penalties for it, and the judicial process can function on its own to press for criminal penalties, while an ombudsman may stand by to investigate and report if other institutions do not work, or to assist and stimulate them in working. As Guillermo O'Donnell (who is in some ways the intellectual founder of the term and the field) argues, "Effective horizontal accountability is not the product of isolated agencies but of networks of agencies that include at their top—because that is where a constitutional legal system 'closes' by means of ultimate decisions—courts (including the highest ones) committed to such accountability."²⁷

The vitality of horizontal accountability hinges most of all on a legal system that, as mentioned above, provides for the exertion of checks and balances by other public entities that are independent of the government, and not competing as an alternative to it. Such a system begins with the law itself (including the constitution), which must provide for strong authority for various governmental institutions to check and monitor one another, while protecting their independence through tenure in office and means of appointment that rise above patronage or partisanship. If the agencies of horizontal accountability (beginning with the courts) are to work, they must have institutional capacity, training, and leadership that is at once capable, vigorous, but also responsible. Like the law itself, the agencies of horizontal accountability can be used as a weapon against political opponents, undermining the credibility of the entire institutional network.

One type of law that is particularly important regards freedom of information. Malfeasance thrives in secrecy and obscurity. The more that government transactions and operations are transparent and visible, open to scrutiny, the more feasible it is to expose, deter, and contain corruption. For this reason, citizens must have the legal right to request and receive information on all functions and decisions of government that are not a matter of national security or that do not infringe on individual rights of privacy. In the fight against corruption, the public availability of information on government finance, procurement, and contracting is particularly important. Ideally, such information should be posted on the Internet. In particular, all government procurement above a certain (modest) level should be done through competitive bidding that is advertised on government websites.

Particularly in political systems with a tradition of corruption and abuse of power, where democratic norms are not deeply rooted, agencies of horizontal accountability, like the electoral administration, need constitutional autonomy. There are a number of possible models for this. In Costa Rica, the Supreme Electoral Tribunal is virtually a fourth branch of government, whose members are elected to staggered six-year terms by a two-thirds vote of the Supreme Court. In India, the electoral commission's independence is protected by explicit constitutional mandate, and by a powerful chairman, who is appointed by the non-partisan president. In some other countries, independence is attained through supervision by a judicial body or by being made accountable to the parliament rather than the executive branch.²⁸

Subversion of the institutions of horizontal accountability comes most frequently in the appointment process. If the government is able to appoint politically pliable individuals to head these agencies, their potential to scrutinize, question, challenge, and punish may be largely neutralized from the beginning. Executive actors also attempt to undermine horizontal accountability by limiting the legal authority of these agencies, or making them completely dependent for funding on the budget requests of the executive, or preventing them from pursuing

any legal action (including criminal prosecution) save through a ministry of justice that is controlled by a political loyalist.

The Substantive Dimensions: Freedom and Equality

Freedom can be seen to consist of three types of rights: political, civil, and social (or socioeconomic).²⁹ Political rights include the rights to vote, to stand for office, to campaign, and to organize political parties. These rights make possible vigorous political participation and competition, hence vertical accountability. But they are not as simple as they seem. As David Beetham explains, a good democracy must ensure that voters can vote in secret, without coercion or fear, and “with effective choice between candidates and parties” that are able to contest on a level playing field. An even richer version of this right is achieved when citizens can choose the candidates of political parties, through intra-party (primary) elections.

Essential civil rights include personal liberty, security, and privacy; freedom of thought, expression, and information; freedom of religion; freedom of assembly, association, and organization (including the right to form and join trade unions and political parties); freedom of movement and residence; and the right to legal defense and due process. There are also a number of what could be called “civil economic rights,” including not only the rights to private property and entrepreneurship, but also the rights associated with employment, the right to fair pay and time off, and the right to collective bargaining.

As the overwhelming majority of democratic legal systems have established this collection of civil rights, there are two primary dimensions that appear to be important for a good democracy. The first pertains to the capacity to enrich the legacy of rights and freedoms enjoyed by citizens without limiting or damaging others. The second concerns the actual procedures by which these rights are granted to all residents in a certain area. This latter takes us back to the issues of efficiency that were raised in the discussion on the rule of law. For example, the right to a legal

defense entails the right to due process, to a speedy trial, and to legal assistance regardless of one's economic means. Although the overlapping of such rights appears messy and less than elegant from a theoretical point of view, it is inevitable if one wishes to demonstrate how rights and freedoms are the "content" of democracy, that is important in their own right.

One condition for ensuring the provision of these rights is clarity in the law. As Beetham notes, many human rights documents, including the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the European Convention, authorize exceptions and qualifications for preventing disorder and protecting public "health and morals." Unless the courts have clear and final authority to adjudicate on these exceptions and to protect rights, any government can contrive an excuse to suppress these rights. Freedom is more secure to the extent that these exceptions are absent from the law entirely.³⁰ Secure freedom also requires clear constitutional and legal provisions establishing civilian supremacy over the military and intelligence services, to ensure that they do not become unaccountable violators of citizens' rights. Except in circumstances of true national emergency bordering on civil war, the military should be prohibited from engaging in domestic security or surveillance operations.

Assuring political and civil rights requires many of the institutional conditions of fairness and horizontal accountability discussed above with respect to participation, competition, and vertical accountability. First and foremost among these institutions is an independent, capable, and constitutionally authoritative judiciary, along with a broader legal system (and culture) that ensures a rule of law. Other important instruments of horizontal accountability (or what Beetham calls "agencies of protection") are an independent electoral commission, an ombudsman and human rights commission, and local police commissions.³¹ Finally, if, as Benjamin Franklin said, "vigilance is the eternal price of liberty," then an indispensable condition for sustaining political and civil freedom is an active and well-organized civil society that monitors and defends civil liberties and the integrity of the electoral process. This includes independent and vigorous mass

media that are able not just to report but to investigate, question, and expose abuses of power that violate rights.

From these conditions, we can infer the more common sources of subversion of rights. These include executives who manipulate perceptions or fears of national security to enlarge their powers, curb criticism and dissent, and silence particularly troublesome opposition; judicial systems that are either too incompetent or too politically partial to defend citizens' rights, or that themselves abuse these rights in their prosecutorial zeal; police who abuse the rights of the accused and detained, or who target groups for purely political reasons; and military and intelligence actors that intimidate and crush political opposition under the guise of fighting terrorism or defending national security.

Equality. Many of the previous dimensions imply or require, and the very word democracy commonly symbolizes, the formal political equality of all citizens. Thus such phrases as "equal rights under the law" and "one person one vote" are bedrock principles of democracy. A good democracy ensures that every citizen and group has the same rights and legal protections, and also meaningful, reasonably prompt access to justice and to power. This entails as well prohibition of discrimination on the basis of gender, race, ethnicity, religion, political orientation, or other extraneous conditions.

Even more so than some of our other themes, equality is an ideal that is never perfectly achieved, even in strictly political terms. As Dietrich Rueschemeyer observes, individuals and groups with better education, more information, and more resources will inevitably have more power to shape public debate and preferences and to determine the choice of leaders and policies. We come, then, to a fundamental dilemma. Democracy as a political system does not in itself require a certain set of social or economic policies. Rather, the democratic process is precisely about the struggle to determine those policies, and thus to shape the distribution of benefits across groups and even across generations. However, to enjoy political equality, citizens must also have

some measure of equality in income, wealth, and status. The more extreme are social and economic inequalities, the more disproportionate will be the power of those who control vast concentrations of wealth and hence their ability to make leaders respond to their wishes and interests. This is especially true in rural sectors polarized into a small class of wealthy landowners and a mass of landless and dependent peasants, generating semi-feudalistic relations and cumulative grievances that breed radical politics and various forms of repression in response. Where, as in the Andean region of Latin America, such class polarities overlap with regional and ethnic cleavages, democratic politics becomes even more polarized and unstable. Whether rural or urban, to the extent that extreme inequality is associated with widespread poverty—as it is in much of Latin America, the Philippines, and South Africa, for example—this generates enormous policy challenges (intense pressures for redistribution, high rates of crime and lawlessness) and formidable barriers to the effective exercise of citizenship rights.³² These barriers are not only structural—in that the desperately poor lack the knowledge and resources necessary to use and defend their rights—but also cultural, as massive status inequalities, reproduced across generations, lead the rich to view the poor as inferior, irresponsible, and incapable of self-governance.³³ Such cultural views justify extremely paternalistic treatment of the poor at best, and often raw exploitation. Mobilization by the poor can attenuate this impact (in India, the poor and lower castes actually vote in higher percentages than the wealthy). So can rules and institutions (such as party and campaign finance laws) that mitigate the capacity of the wealthy to convert financial into political resources, or that put a minimum floor of political resources under the feet of all major parties. But to one degree or another, the problem confronts all democracies.

Thus, even if we conceive of the equality dimension in narrow political terms, we cannot ignore its economic and social correlates. Philosophically as well, some insist that democracy must be judged by the extent to which it achieves over time greater social rights: the right to health (mental and physical); the right to assistance and social security; the right to work and to strike; the right to study and to an education; the right to a healthy and clean environment; and the right to

housing. Constitutions vary in the extent to which they formally acknowledge and guarantee these rights, but newer democratic constitutions are increasingly explicit about them.

Unlike “first generation” political and civil rights, which can mainly be secured by the self-restraint and correct legal functioning of the state, social and economic rights place a burden on the state for positive action and are thus more difficult, and much more financially costly, to achieve. Consequently, there have been attempts to redesign policies to achieve social rights in a way that diminishes (or better distributes) the economic burden on society.

Thus, the main prerequisites for the further achievement of social rights (beyond political will) are sufficient affluence to fund social policies and wise strategies to achieve egalitarian policy goals with the greatest efficiency and lowest drag on economic prosperity. Efficiency requires that the available resources go as much as possible toward investments in physical infrastructure and especially human capital (public health and education) that will raise the productivity of the poor over time. This in turn necessitates the control of corruption, and hence strong institutions of horizontal accountability.

There is a circular nature to the quest for greater equality (or at least steady reduction of absolute poverty). If it requires wise and progressive policies, where are these to come from if the leaders elected through the disproportionate power of the privileged are not enlightened enough to reach beyond immediate political self-interest? Historically, the answer has lain heavily, as Rueschemeyer notes, in the collective mobilization of autonomous groups and parties representing lower class and status groups. In particular, unified and strong trade unions have played an important role in winning the extension of many economic and social rights.³⁴ But it is also vital that the legal system protect the political and civic rights of subordinate and vulnerable groups to organize, assemble, protest, lobby, campaign, and vote.

The Results Dimension: Responsiveness

Finally, we can analyze democratic quality, by what it achieves, in terms of government responsiveness to the expectations, interests, needs, and demands of citizens. This dimension is closely related to vertical accountability (and hence to participation and competition). And it in turn influences how well citizens will be satisfied with the performance of democracy, and to what extent they will view as legitimate, the best form of government for their country.

As G. Bingham Powell explains, democratic governments are responsive when the democratic process induces them “to make and implement policies that the citizens want.” As Powell portrays it, the democratic process that produces responsiveness takes place in a chain of three linkages. First, choices are structured in a way that distills citizens’ diverse, multidimensional policy preferences into more coherent national policy choices offered by competing political parties. Second, citizens’ electoral preferences are aggregated (by very different institutional means in different types of democracies) into a government of policymakers. And third, elected officials (and their appointees) then translate policy stances and commitments into actual policy outcomes. The products of responsiveness also include government services, the distribution of material benefits to constituents, and the extension of symbolic goods.³⁵

The empirical study of responsiveness, however, is more complicated. In fact, the idea that even educated, informed, and politically engaged citizens always know their own interests and desires in relation to specific policies is an assumption (see above), especially tenuous in situations where citizens might need specialized knowledge to accurately identify and evaluate what will work to their benefit. A dilemma also occurs, Powell notes, when policymakers have to weigh the trade-off between responsiveness to short-term citizen preferences and longer-term citizen interests. Different institutional forms also present different problems for responsiveness. Majoritarian systems make it possible for voters to bring in a new government with a decisively different policy course, but they may fail to be responsive to the needs and demands of different minorities. Consensual systems, based on proportional representation, are more broadly responsive in the latter respect but less so in their ability to mandate and empower a sharply different policy course.

Powell notes a host of other conceptual and practical problems. When the issues fall on multiple dimensions and partisan orientations do not neatly sort between them, it becomes difficult to infer an electoral policy mandate to which a new government owes responsiveness. The responsiveness chain also fails from the start when competing parties and candidates do not clearly structure policy choices for the voters, or when no party offers the policy citizens want.

The contextual conditions that favor responsiveness are similar to those that support vertical accountability. They include a well-established, independent, informed, and engaged civil society, and a stable, coherent party system that is capable of defining clear national policy choices for the electorate and then translating those policy programs into agendas for legislative and executive action. It is fairly obvious why these factors are essential. Effective political parties and civil society institutions of all kinds are essential for articulating and aggregating citizen interests and demands. But the government must then be capable of translating those aggregated preferences into policies and programs. This requires, as Powell notes, a government bureaucracy that is not only capable and professional but also honest and transparent. Thus, strong horizontal accountability, to limit corruption and misrule, is important for securing this final linkage in the chain of responsiveness.

There are at least three orders of objective limits on responsiveness. First, democratically elected leaders do not always seek to understand and respond to the concerns, preferences, and demands of citizens. Often they instead work to maximize their own autonomy and take advantage of the complexity of problems as well as the shifts in political over the course of an electoral term. When demagogic leaders seek to divert attention from, or manipulate public sentiment about, public policy issues in order to aggrandize their power and wealth, we move from the phenomenon of constraint to active subversion.

Government responsiveness to citizen demands is also constrained by limited resources and budget deficits, even in the wealthiest countries. For example, if an aging population demands higher pensions and better health care and other benefits, with no increase in the retirement age or

other offsets, a government burdened with budgetary limitations may simply be unable to meet their expectations in a sustainable way. Likewise, the persistent problems posed by unemployment and immigration further illustrate the near impossibility of finding generally satisfactory, legitimate, and responsive solutions in contemporary democracies. No government can afford for long to be fully responsive to all the different demands of major constituencies for services, benefits, and other program expenditures. Governing responsibly—as opposed to purely responsively—involves setting priorities and making difficult choices. One of the most important aspects of responsiveness in a democracy is to infer from the cacophony of policy commitments, election results, and interest group demands precisely what “the electorate’s” priorities are. Inevitably, some groups will be disappointed.

The third order of limit on government responsiveness derives from the diminishing control that national governments have over their own economies in an era of globalization, as we have mentioned above with respect to vertical accountability. Of course, responsiveness may be constrained, undermined or subverted in other ways as well: for example, when political parties are organized along ethnic or identity rather than programmatic lines; or when electoral systems yield severely disproportional outcomes that penalize minorities and prevent the real distribution of preferences from being reflected in the legislature; or when the process of policy formation and implementation becomes distorted by blatant corruption and the disproportionate lobbying power of wealthy interest groups that contribute heavily to political parties.

These constraints and subversions, combined with the pure intractability of policy problems such as entrenched poverty and inequality, demographic shifts, and the staggering short-term costs of structural economic reforms, breed discontent, dissatisfaction, and malaise in many contemporary democracies, even long-established ones. Such conditions, particularly when combined with the reality or perception of extensive political corruption, erode the legitimacy of democratic systems and encourage populist and irresponsible alternatives.

One way to measure responsiveness is directly: to simply ask citizens, in surveys, to what extent they believe government is responsive to their needs and concerns. Another way is to infer responsiveness from citizen satisfaction with the way democracy works. Empirical measures of citizen satisfaction can be found in the surveys that have been regularly conducted for many years, especially in the U.S. and Western Europe, but also increasingly in Latin America, Eastern Europe, Africa, and Asia.³⁶ Some scholars have also indirectly obtained a second measure of responsiveness by measuring the distance between the governors and the governed on certain policies, and not just in terms of left/right divisions.³⁷

The System of Democratic Qualities

We have presented here eight different dimensions of democratic quality (and noted how other dimensions could be isolated from within these as well). In one sense, we can speak of different “qualities” of democracy, and assess the level of development of each one individually. But as we have emphasized throughout, these different dimensions densely interact and reinforce one another, ultimately converging into a system. Although it is possible to identify different types of lower-quality democracy, which are deficient in different qualities, the various dimensions are closely linked and tend to move together, either toward democratic improvement and deepening or toward decay. Where we find democracies very weak on some dimensions, such as freedom and the rule of law, they tend to be noticeably deficient on others as well.³⁸

The linkages among the different elements of democracy are so densely interactive and overlapping that it is sometimes difficult to know where one dimension ends and another begins. Without extensive protection for and facilitation of civil and political rights, many citizens will not have the ability to participate in the political process, both in the electoral arena and outside it. Unless there is fair and unimpeded access to the electoral arena, vertical accountability may be greatly diminished. This requires not only the prevention of electoral fraud, and of violence and

intimidation against voters, candidates, and parties, but also—as Beetham argues—the prevention of more subtle denigrations of electoral rights, including rights to (some measure of) equality in access to political finance and to the mass media. If, because of the accumulated unfair advantages that the ruling party enjoys, voters are not able to convert their dissatisfaction with the incumbents into electoral support for the opposition, or if any party (ruling or not) overwhelms its opponents and drowns out their messages with vastly superior funding and media access, the electoral dimension of vertical accountability may be vitiated. And if voters cannot effectively hold their rulers accountable at the polls—and put in office an opposition whose policy promises they prefer—then a crucial linkage in the chain of accountability as defined by Powell breaks down.

Civil and political rights are thus critical to the vigorous participation and competition of parties, interests, and organizations that make for vertical accountability and responsiveness. They are necessary as well for horizontal accountability, in that agencies of horizontal accountability in the state become more active and effective when they are reinforced, beseeched, and informed by agents of vertical accountability, particularly in the mass media, NGOs, and other actors in civil society.

But none of this is possible without a rule of law, wherein an independent and impartial judiciary affirms rights and penalizes and prohibits violations of the institutional safeguards for vertical and horizontal accountability. Neither can a rule of law be sustained and the abuse of power preempted and contained without strong institutions of horizontal accountability, which also ensure that the electoral instruments of competition and vertical accountability will not be abused. At the same time, participatory citizens, voting at the polls and acting in various organized ways in civil society, are the last line of defense against potential executive efforts to subvert rule-of-law and good-governance institutions.

To be sure, all good things do not go together smoothly. A government highly responsive to majority wishes may trample on the rights of minorities. Maximizing the procedural dimensions of popular sovereignty—participation, competition, and vertical accountability—can, under certain

circumstances come at the expense of freedom and equality. A high quality democracy thus is not infinitely high in every quality of democracy. Rather, it represents a balance between virtues that lie in tension. As Guillermo O'Donnell has suggested, polyarchies (or by implication, good, robust democracies) “are the complex synthesis of three historical currents or traditions: democracy, liberalism, and republicanism.”³⁹ Seen in this way, citizens and their organizations participate and compete to choose and replace their leaders and obtain responsiveness from them. That is the democratic element. But the liberal element protects the rights of all individuals and groups under the law, while the republican element (through unelected instruments of horizontal accountability) enforces the law and ensures that public officials serve the public interest. Good democracies balance and integrate these three distinct traditions. Yet they do so with distinctive mixes and institutional designs, reminding us that democratic quality is a flexible and pluralistic concept, shaped by the normative choices of society.

There remains a vexing philosophical as well as empirical set of questions. Will a quality democracy necessarily produce quality results, and citizen satisfaction? Will improvements in quality relieve the apparent growing disaffection of democratic citizens in many countries? A government may score generally quite highly on our eight dimensions of quality—including responsiveness—yet still many citizens dissatisfied. This may be true for several reasons. First, as we suggested earlier, citizens do not always know what policies will produce the outcomes they seek, such as broad economic prosperity and stability. Second, we live in an era when news and information reach citizens with unprecedented speed and competition for attention, generating a tendency toward sensationalism and negative exposure in the mass media. This makes the failings of democracy appear more scandalous, more often, than they would have in a previous era. Third, as we have noted, responsiveness in a democracy is intrinsically complex and multidimensional. With so many different interests in society, capable of aggregating in so many different ways, it is impossible for government to be responsive to all interests and concerns. Democracy is about competition and choice, and losers are bound to be dissatisfied, at least temporarily.

Nevertheless, we think part of the present disenchantment with democracy does concern procedures and institutions, and stems not only from more information about the failings of government, but also higher citizen expectations of what democracy can deliver procedurally and substantively, as well as in terms of results. We do not believe it is wrong for democratic citizens, who are increasingly informed and aware, to want more scope for participation, greater accountability, transparency and competitiveness, a stronger rule of law, more freedom and equality, and more responsive—or at least reasonably responsive—government. In fact, we think the long historical evolution of democracy suggests that if citizens mobilize effectively, these aspirations for a higher quality of democracy can gradually, if still imperfectly, be achieved.

¹ See for example Juan J. Linz and Alfred Stepan, *Problems of Democratic Transition and Consolidation: Southern Europe, Latin America, and Post-Communist Europe* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), Leonardo Morlino, *Democracy Between Consolidation and Crisis. Parties, Groups and Citizens in Southern Europe*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), and Larry Diamond, *Developing Democracy: Toward Consolidation* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999).

² From the perspective advanced by Philippe Schmitter in this collection, and in his other writings on democratic consolidation, however, democracy may become consolidated at any level of quality, so long as citizens and politicians come to accept the rules of democratic competition.

³ Max Kaase and Kenneth Newton, *Beliefs in Government* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995). The classic recent work on this subject is Susan J. Pharr and Robert D. Putnam, eds., *Disaffected Democracies: What's Troubling the Trilateral Countries* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000).

⁴ The conference on the Quality of Democracy, organized by the two of us and sponsored by Stanford's Center on Democracy, Development, and the Rule of Law, was held on October 10 and 11, 2003

⁵ See for example, among a myriad of possible sources, Robert Dahl, *Polyarchy: Participation and Opposition* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1971)..

Larry Diamond, Juan J. Linz, and Seymour Martin Lipset, "Preface," in Diamond, Linz, and Lipset, eds., *Democracy in Developing Countries: Africa* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 1988), p. xvi..

⁷ Philippe C. Schmitter and Terry Lynn Karl, "What Democracy is... and is not". In Larry Diamond and Marc F. Plattner, eds., *The Global Resurgence of Democracy* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993): 45-46.

⁸ For a related approach, see David Beetham, "Towards a Universal Framework for Democracy Assessment," *Democratization* 11 (April 2004): 1-17..

⁹ Larry Diamond, "Elections without Democracy: Thinking About Hybrid Regimes," and Andreas Schedler, "Elections without Democracy: The Menu of Manipulation," in *Journal of Democracy* 13 (April 2002): 21-35 and 36-50.

¹⁰ W. Merkel and A. Croissant, Aurel, "Formal Institutions and Informal Rules of Defective Democracies," *Central European Political Science Review* (1) 2:31-47.

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- ¹¹ Guillermo O'Donnell "Delegative Democracy," *Journal of Democracy* 5 (January 1994): 60-62.
- ¹² Herbert Kitschelt and his co-authors also consider accountability to be a "procedural" dimension. *Post-communist Party Systems. Competition, Representation and Inter-party Cooperation* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1999).
- ¹³ Our original framework, which guided the case studies, presented did not delineate participation and competition as distinct dimensions of democracy quality, nor did it separate horizontal and vertical accountability. While most of the case studies do treat vertical and horizontal accountability as distinct dimensions, they analyze participation and competition more implicitly as contributing factors to vertical accountability and/or responsiveness.
- ¹⁴ These are among the purposes of a formal democracy assessment, for which International IDEA has recently published a guide. See *International IDEA Guide to Democracy Assessment* (New York: Kluwer Law International, 2001), available at http://www.idea.int/ideas_work/14_political_state.htm.
- ¹⁵ One empirical way to classify a regime as an "illiberal democracy" is if it meets the test of an electoral democracy, by having regular, free, fair, and competitive elections to fill the principal positions of power in the country, but it does not qualify as a "free" country in the annual ratings of civil liberties and political rights by Freedom House. By this measure, there were 33 such regimes at the end of 2002. Freedom House, *Freedom in the World 2003* (New York: Freedom House, 2003), available at <http://www.freedomhouse.org/research/index.htm>.
- ¹⁶ José María Maravall, "The Rule of Law as a Political Weapon," in Maravall and Adam Przeworski, eds. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).
- ¹⁷ See the debate among Arend Lijphart, Guy Larderet, and Quentin L. Quade in Larry Diamond and Marc F. Plattner, eds., *The Global Resurgence of Democracy* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993), pp. 146-177, and also Arend Lijphart, *Patterns of Democracy: Government Forms and Performance in Thirty-six Countries* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999).
- ¹⁸ Michael Pinto-Duschinsky, "Financing Politics: A Global View," *Journal of Democracy* 13 (October 2002): 69-86; U.S. Agency for International Development, Office of Democracy and Governance, *Money and Politics: A Guide to Increasing Transparency in Emerging Democracies* (November 2003), http://www.usaid.gov/our_work/democracy_and_governance/publications/pdfs/pnac223.pdf.
- ¹⁹ Robert Pastor, "A Brief History of Electoral Commissions," in Andreas Schedler, Larry Diamond, and Marc F. Plattner, *The Self-Restraining State: Power and Accountability in New Democracies* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 1999), pp. 75-82.
- ²⁰ G. A. Altman, G.A. and Anibal Perez-Linan, "Assessing the Quality of Democracy: Freedom, Competitiveness and Participation in 18 Latin American Countries", Kellogg Institute, Notre Dame University, paper, 2001.
- ²¹ Andreas Schedler, "Conceptualizing Accountability," in Schedler, Diamond, and Plattner, *The Self-Restraining State*, p. 17
- ²² Catalina Smulovitz and Enrique Peruzotti, "Societal Accountability in Latin America," *Journal of Democracy* 11 (October 2000): 147-158.
- ²³ The most extreme hypothesis related to this phenomenon is that parties, supported by public financing, in fact constitute a kind of political "cartel." Richard S. Katz and Peter Mair (1995), "Changing Modes of Party Organization and Party Democracy: The Emergence of the Cartel Party", in *Party Politics*, vol. 1, no 1 (1995): 5-28.
- ²⁴ Schedler, Diamond, and Plattner, *The Self-Restraining State*.
- ²⁵ James R. Klein, "The Constitution of the Kingdom of Thailand, 1997: A Blueprint for Participatory Democracy," Working Paper #8, The Asia Foundation Working Paper Series, March 1998, p. 29.
- ²⁶ Sheila S. Coronel and Lorna Kalaw-Tirol, eds., *Investigating Corruption: A Do-It-Yourself Guide* (Manila: Philippine Center for Investigative Journalism, 2002), pp. 257-264, quoted from 259.
- ²⁷ Guillermo O'Donnell, "Horizontal Accountability in New Democracies," in Schedler, Diamond, and Plattner, *The Self-Restraining State*, p. 39.
- ²⁸ Pastor, "A Brief History of Electoral Commissions," pp. 78-79.
- ²⁹ See for example Dahl, *Polyarchy*, T. H. Marshall, *Sociology at the Crossroad* (London: Heinemann, 1963).
- ³⁰ For example, this is what motivated the drafters of the Iraqi interim constitution, the Transitional Administrative Law adopted on March 8, 2004, to exclude all such qualifications and limitations from the Iraqi bill of rights, in Chapter Two of the document.
- ³¹ Prison complaint boards provide a more specific line of defense and accountability against one of the most pervasive forms of abuse of rights.
- ³² On the implications for democracy in Latin America, see Larry Diamond, Jonathan Hartlyn, and Juan J. Linz, "Introduction: Politics, Society, and Democracy in Latin America," in Diamond, Hartlyn, Linz and Seymour Martin Lipset, *Democracy in Developing Countries: Latin America* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1999): 48-53.
- ³³ This is an important reason why Seymour Martin Lipset asserted that economic development makes democracy more sustainable, because it generates a "diamond-shaped" distribution of wealth, with a large middle class, thereby narrowing status differences in society. See his classic essay, "Economic Development and Democracy," in his *Political Man: The Social Bases of Politics* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1981), pp. 27-63.
- ³⁴ Dietrich Rueschemeyer, Evelyne H. Stephens and John D. Stephens, *Capitalist Development and Democracy* (Cambridge, Polity Press, and Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992).

³⁵ Heinz Eulau and P. Karps, "The Puzzle of Representation: Specifying Components of Responsiveness." *Legislative Studies Quarterly*, 3 (1977): 233-54.

³⁶ A common question, for example, is "How satisfied are you with the way in which democracy functions in your country?" See Morlino *Democracy Between Consolidation and Crisis*, ch. 7.

³⁷ See, for example, Lijphart, *Patterns of Democracy*, pp. 286-88. There are a number of quantitative studies that analyse this theme, including Heinz Eulau and Kenneth Prewitt, *Labyrinths of Democracy* (New York, Bobbs-Merrill, 1973); Eulau and Karps, "The Puzzle of Representation"; Sidney Verba and Norman Nie, *Participation and Political Equality: A Seven-nation Comparison* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1978), and, more recently, Gary King "Electoral Responsiveness and Partisan Bias in Multiparty Democracies", in *Legislative Studies Quarterly*, vol. 15, no. 2 (1990), and John D. Huber and G. Bingham Powell, "Congruence Between Citizens and Policy Makers in Two Visions of Liberal Democracy" in *World Politics*, Vol. 46, no. 3 (1994): 291-326.,

³⁸ This is why we observe a strong correlation, for example, between the Freedom House country ratings on civil liberties and those on political rights. See the annual surveys of freedom at www.freedomhouse.org.

³⁹ Guillermo O'Donnell, "Horizontal Accountability in New Democracies," in Schedler, Diamond, and Plattner, *The Self-Restraining State*, p. 31.