Election Outcomes

- A Dimension of Democracy?

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The focus of this contribution to the workshop on “Measuring Democracy”, is on the relationship of elections results to various definitions of democracy as laid out by Gerring (2009); if and how is can be conceptualized and measured; questions of possible indicators; existing data; and possible rules of aggregation. For the purposes of the workshop, my presentation is structured as follows. First, I dwell some on a conceptual discussion of democracy, and in particular the dimension of contestation, which is the aspect of democracy that election outcomes relates most closely to. This is also where I argue that while election ‘results’ cannot really be seen as a dimension of democracy, it is possible to argue that election ‘outcomes’ is. Second, the discussion moves to the question if election outcomes can be said to constitute one dimension of contestation. Thirdly, the paper looks at a set of possible indicators of election outcomes, and finally, possible rules of aggregation to construct an index measure of election outcomes. I admit that the argument in part is rough around the edges and sometimes makes claims that I am not sure can be defended, yet, I hope these features contribute to making it stimulating as a basis for discussion rather than the other way around.

**Election Outcomes as a Dimension of Self-Government?**

The most fundamental value of democracy is arguably self-government. This is not to deny that there are other democratic values as well. The only point is to say that self-government as the freedom of individual citizens to rule over themselves through a concerted collective process, is logically the most fundamental of them all. In any of the established understandings of democracy, the people should rule over itself, the people are sovereign. This sovereignty must be distributed equally since unequal distribution of sovereignty implies in fact that some segments of the people are not sovereign. This is what Locke referred to as all men are, or ought to, be
considered equal as political beings\(^1\) (Locke 1689-90/1970, 322) and what Dahl calls the “idea of intrinsic equality” (Dahl 1989, 85). In translating the idea of self-government into practice, the question becomes what key instrumental dimensions are necessary to its realization. Leaving aside the definition of the people\(^2\) it follows logically that rule by the people requires equality of political participation. As (Ake 2000) notes, it is the equal access to be part of the decision-making process\(^3\) rather than the liking of the substantial decision to everyone, which satisfy the right to self-government\(^4\). Equality of participation is thus a core dimension of any definition of democracy since it is a necessary requisite of self-government as the expression of the sovereignty of the people. Without going into details here on variations of participation (for that is not my assigned role), I note in passing that regardless of which models of democracy (Held 1987) one have in mind, for a political system to have the potential to be democratic, it has to provide legal provisions for political participation based on equal distribution of sovereignty.

Now, as (Sartori 1987, 30) reminds us, the etymological understanding of democracy leaves out the other side of the coin. Rule of the people is exercised over the very same people. This is no easy equation; several formats for translation of rule by the people into a rule over the people have been envisaged. However, it is rather uncontroversial to argue that in order to be

\(^1\) At the time, of course, men meant just free men excluding the vast majority of the population. Without any intention of downplaying its significance, the difference is a matter of citizenship and not democratic principle, hence, is not central to the discussion here.

\(^2\) Not within the scope here to go into depth with each of these related concepts. For a good discussion of the notion of how the “people” can be conceived, see Dahl 1989, Ch. 9.

\(^3\) Political participation in the decision-making process may indeed take many forms in a democracy, ranging from localized and indulgent deliberations among friends to national and cross-national advocacy, and the selection of representatives for the execution of power.

\(^4\) That is the conceptual point. In empirical terms, the realization of equal participation may naturally vary. And as an empirical realization we tend to appreciate participation in terms of “the more, the better”.
workable any modern form of national democracy must be representative\(^5\). The reasoning is fairly simple and provides the conceptual link between rule by the people and the concern here: contestation. In order to rule the people must have some procedures for making decisions that are mutually binding on members of the polity. This requires some form of government, which in a complex modern democratic polity entails representation of the people. Individuals or groups aspiring to represent the people and assume the function of government -- or legislature -- must be subjected to contestation. Thus, the fundamental value of self-government translates to not only into equality of political participation, but also free political contestation allowing the people to exercise its sovereign discretion to rule\(^6\).

Historically with the advent of modern democracy, marrying liberal rights with republican obligations and responsible leadership, representation therefore became grafted upon democracy (Hindess 2000). Representation induces a particular kind of vertical accountability (Schedler 1999) taking on paramount significance making free contestation a core issue since it creates choice without which it is impossible to hold representatives accountable.

\(^5\) Even “participatory” democracy as a formula for decision-making translates into a representative form as only the few can in practice lead, speak and contribute to mass meetings -- or the meetings would be endless -- whilst the many are confined to listen, evaluate and vote just as in a representative democracy proper (Dahl 1989, 277). There are indeed other venues for participatory approaches of inclusion that can feed into a policy process before the decision-point but that renders participatory approaches a supplement, as opposed to alternative, to representative democracy.

\(^6\) It is quite possible to make the argument that the level of competition in any political system is also dependent on the character of political parties, not only their sheer existence. Political parties based on ethnic or class, or other functional differentiation that applies more or less by automation makes for less competition than programmatic parties. One cannot chose which ethnic group, family, or class one is born into, and social mobility is typically highly constrained. If parties and voting is based on such belongingness rather than policy options, few voters can or will switch their votes between elections. Competition is thereby reduced.
Thus, the understanding of democracy that election outcomes is most closely related to is the electoral democracy descending from Schumpeter’s (1947, 269) basic definition, via scholars such as Riker (1986, 25) to the most widely accepted extension of Schumpeter’s definition is that of Dahl (1971, 1-7) in his concept of “polyarchy”. It is similarly central the extended version of polyarchy in the form of liberal democracy. One can wonder what the meaning of ‘pluralism’ is without contestation but the implications are deeper than that. For example, it can easily be argued that the horizontal accountability and checks on the executive outside of elections such as term limits, constitutionality, and judicial review, are rather toothless in the absence of *de facto* contestation (i.e. the existence of a viable and strong opposition). Term limits matter little if the same party and political elite remains in power as demonstrated by the example of PRI’s long rule in Mexico. Constitutions can be changed in most countries with an absolute majority (typically 2/3 – 3/4 of the votes in the legislature), and judicial reviews in countries in the Middle East demonstrate the relative powerlessness of the judiciary in the absence of *de facto* contestation (e.g. Brown 1998). Finally, aspects of contestation are also relevant to ideals of participatory democracy for without rights to contest ideas, challenge and offer alternatives, any participation (also direct, user-defined) rings hollow. To some extent, but more indirect, this is also true for the ideals of deliberative democracy.

**Contestation, Competition, and Competitiveness**

Notwithstanding the reasoning above, there remains the issue to delineate contestation, competition, and competitiveness. Contestation is Dahl’s classic sense is present when members of a polity have “unpaired opportunities” to formulate, as well as signify by individual and collective action their preferences, and have them “weighted equally in the conduct of the
government” (Dahl 1971, 2). This is usually interpreted to mean that certain rights and procedures must be guaranteed and institutionalized. Indeed, Dahl (1989, 220-222) himself outlines seven institutions\(^7\) necessary for the existence of polyarchy, out of all but one (universal suffrage) empirically seem to vary along one single dimension: contestation (Coppedge and Reinecke 1990; Coppedge et al. 2008).

The list of empirical indicators that have been used to measure contestation is long and varied and typically include one or more components that are election outcomes (e.g. Banks 1979; Bollen 1998; Coppedge and Reinecke 1990; Gastil/Freedom House; Hadenius 1991; Polity IV; Przeworski et al. 2000; Roessler and Howard 2009; Vanhanen 1990; c.f. Bogaards 2008; Munck and Verkulien 2004). But the first order decision in conceptualizing and measuring contestation regards the choice of viewing as necessary and/or sufficient 1) *de jure competition*, i.e. formal legal-institutional provisions of contestation; 2) *de facto competition*, i.e. effective enforcement of the legal-institutional provisions; and 3) *competitiveness*, i.e. the outcomes that are produced under the first and possibly second conditions.

It seems to me that no one really question anymore that competition in the legal-formal sense is necessary condition for any level of “democraticness” in this dimension. Constitutional monarchies and one-party states, military dictatorships, and civilian sultanistic regimes simply have zero amount democracy in terms of contestation. But it seems also generally recognized that the formal-legal structure of competition is insufficient in itself unless these rules of the game are upheld effectively and impartially (at least to some extent). For instance, Equatorial Guinea is a

\(^7\) Dahl (1971, 3) original formulation included eight institutions but the last one (“Institutions making government policies depend on votes and other expressions of preference”) seems to be taken by most to be subsumed in the
constitutional multiparty democracy and holds periodic elections at regular intervals yet remain one of the most repressive autocracies in the world. That is why Freedom house for example, seeks to measure political rights as they are in practice, “on the ground”, rather than looking only at the legal framework. In short, de jure competition is a necessary condition, a marker of when democratic competition is a possibility but the level of de facto competition is what should be used to indicate the extent to which competition is actualized. The problem is how to measure de facto competition, an issue I will return to below.

The distinction between competition (understood as the combination of 1 and 2 above) and competitiveness is well known and put elegantly by Sartori (1976, 218) as the difference between “the rules of the game” (i.e. competition) and “a particular state of the game” (i.e. competitiveness), arguing decisively that the latter is irrelevant to the question of democracy. A vast majority of voters may simply prefer one particular party as in South Africa; and/or may trust a major party with power for long periods of time as in Japan or Sweden; and oversized majorities in the legislature may be the effect of first-past-the-post systems in single-member districts (cf. Bogaards 2008, 1232-33). So in short, there can be democracies with full de jure and more or less complete de facto competition, with very low levels of political competitiveness as displayed by election results.

The point has been made also from the other side by the re-emerging literature on competitive autocracies (e.g. Gandhi and Lust-Okar 2009; Levitsky and Way 2002; Brownlee 2009; Schedler ed. 2006, 2009; for an earlier statement, see Hermet et al 1979), demonstrating that the world has increasingly become populated by hybrid regimes that are clearly not

first seven: Elected officials, free and fair elections, inclusive suffrage, universal right to run for office, freedom of expression, right to alternative sources of information, and freedom of associational autonomy.
democracies (even in the minimal polyarchic sense), but still hold *de jure* competitive elections with significant levels of competitiveness as indicated by the election results. Ethiopia is not anywhere near a polyarchy, yet in the August 2005 elections the ruling EPRDF got only 296 out of 547 seats (54%) – enough to form a new government but noticeably less than the typical British ruling party command. Sartori (e.g. 1976, 221) thus seem to have been validated in that election results are a poor device to distinguish between democracies and autocracies.

But if this is true, why has so many used election results such as the winner’s share of votes and/or seats and turnovers as indicators of democracy (e.g. Alvarez et al. 1996; Arat 1991; Diamond 2002; Freedom House; Przeworski et al. 2000; Vanhanen 1990). Even in Polity IV’s highly formal-legal index, the component-indicator PARCOMP requires that “ruling groups and coalitions regularly, voluntarily transfer central power to competing groups” (Marshall and Jaggers 2009, 26).

First, one has to recognize that the Sartorian efforts have been to clearly delineate what is to be unambiguously classified as a democracy and a non-democracy, respectively. Elections results are simply not very useful for the purpose of creating such a cut-off point, as the above discussion hopefully has made clear. The good news is that efforts at measuring gradations of democratic qualities, or dimensions, is a different challenge where election results can be more helpful if used with care and sufficient sophistication even if this makes the coding rules a little complicated as we shall see below. The bad news is that if election outcomes means different things in democracies and autocracies, it becomes necessary to take into consideration other dimensions of democracy (some of those laid out by Gerring 2009), thus adding a question mark: Is election outcomes really a independent dimension?
Election Outcomes in Democracies and Autocracies

In terms of election outcomes as one dimension of democracy, I will consider the following component attributes and discuss various measures:

1) Winner’s share of votes, and first-second candidate ratio in presidential elections;
2) Winning and second largest party’s share of votes/seats, and winning party/coalition-opposition parties ratio of votes/seats;
3) Number of candidates/parties
4) Opposition parties’ participation/boycott; and
5) Losers’ acceptance/rejection of results.

But I will start with a discussion of the importance of a conditioning variable: free and fair elections and I will argue that the interpretation of the component attributes of election outcomes as a dimension, is distinct in democracies and autocracies respectively. I realize that this potentially undermines the ambition of using election outcomes as one dimension of democracy in a continuous index but I think (hope?...) there is a reasonable solution to that potential problem.

Free and Fairness of Elections

A fundamental issue in electoral regimes is also the extent to which the election process is free and fair. Since it conditions what s a reasonable interpretation of other variables (e.g. voter turnout, the winner’s share of votes and legislative seats), the distinction between free and fair
processes, and flawed ones is crucial\textsuperscript{8}. One should not assume that irregularities, manipulation, and fraud are only sins of incumbents, however. Opposition parties in transitioning countries for example, are notorious for their tit-for-tat strategies and on many occasions manipulations on either side might well cancel each other out but there is no well-documented method of how to gauge such claims on comparative basis for large-\textit{N} analysis\textsuperscript{9}. While there is no such thing as an entirely clean election due to human and technical errors, flaws must not alter or predetermine the outcome. We are therefore well advised to treat free and fairness of elections not only as A) indicating if the electoral process was acceptable or not, but also as B) conditioning our interpretation of indicators such as turnout, share of votes and seats since their values will be affected by whether elections were free and fair or not.

It is obvious that when a ruling president in a country like Equatorial Guinea ‘wins’ an election with 97\% of the votes, it has little to do with voters’ preferences and real ballots cast and

\textsuperscript{8} One could argue that this variable should have been included as an indicator of competition since it might seem contra-intuitive that unfair elections can be competitive at all; but they can. There are for example, a few instances in Africa where genuinely unfair elections have effectuated an opposition win: The presidential and parliamentary elections in Ivory Coast on 22 October and 10 December 2000; the executive elections of Madagascar on 16 December 2001; the parliamentary elections in Malawi on 15 June 1999; and the constituent assembly-cum-legislative elections in Namibia on 11 November 1989 are examples where electoral irregularities affected the results but there was still an alternation in power. Even though the “menu of manipulation” is wide (Schedler 2002a), trying to cheat is one thing, doing it successfully is sometimes quite another even if serious irregularities do not usually coincide with turnovers

\textsuperscript{9} It is also quite possible that manipulated or outright fake elections can be a sign of high levels of competition since just because competition is not allowed to play out in election results does not necessarily mean it does not exists. In Zimbabwe for example, there has been an inverse relationship between the level of real competition and the trustworthiness of official results. The more competitive the political struggle for power in Zimbabwe, the more unfair and violent means President Mugabe and his regime applied. In such cases we cannot take election results as indicative of the level of competition but keeping in mind unfair elections might indicate high levels of actual competition in the political system.
everything to do with the fundamentally flawed electoral process. Yet, it is exactly in these less-than-democratic situations that election results can be useful. When electoral processes are fundamentally flawed the outcomes do not authentically reflect voters’ preferences, but they rather indicate the amount of de facto competition the ruling regime is willing to allow. This is the beauty of this intricacy: When election outcomes cease to indicate competitiveness, they start indicate level of de facto competition.

When the electoral process if democratic, it is free and fair and minimum conditions of both de jure and de facto competition are satisfied. In this case, election outcomes merely indicates level of competitiveness that generally has little to do with more/less democracy. In countries like Botswana, Japan, and South Africa, dominant parties have secured vast legislative majorities through free and fair elections but that in itself does not make them less democratic than France, Denmark, or Ghana.

When the electoral process is fundamentally flawed, however, there is still de jure competition but the level of de facto competition is unknown other than that it is less than full/satisfying. The crux of the matter, in terms of measuring level of “democraticness” among such regimes, is to establish the level of de facto competition. An election outcome that gives opposition parties 45 percent of votes/seats for example, indicates that the ruling regime accepts or has been forced to concede to allowing more de facto competition than one like Obiang’s Equatorial Guinea where he won (sic) almost all votes himself.

The problem is to find data on electoral processes, something that I understand our colleague Jørgen Elklit will discuss in more detail. Let me just note that Kelly (forthcoming 2010) has collected data based on election monitoring reports from 21 organizations reported through the US Department of State Country Reports on HR, covering 1,207 elections in 172
countries and independent territories from 1975 to 2004. She has nine different indicators of freedom and fairness of the election, that partly overlaps with the dimension of electoral administration. All variables are categorical. The first and most basic is “Sa1: will of the people” representing the reported overall summary of the election as being generally free and fair, or flawed. The other eight variables are measured on a four-level scale (“0”=no problems, “1”=minor problems only, “2”=moderate problems, and “3”=major problems). The variables are:

1. Sa2: Extent of Problems (combined legal, administrative, political)
2. Sr0str: Structural Problems (quality of the legal framework only)
3. Sr11cheat: Overall Pre-electoral Political Conditions (range of issues from campaign, use of public funds, restrictions on freedom to campaign, misuse of media, and intimidation)
4. Sr12cap: Overall Pre-election Administrative Capacity (voter lists/registration, EC, voter information, technical problems)
5. Sr13viol: Pre-election Violence and Unrest
6. Sr21cheat: Election Day Explicit Cheating
7. Sr22cap: Election Day Administrative Capacity
8. Sr23viol: Election Day Violence and Unrest

Andreas Schedler (2006, 2009, mimeo), has another data set, also yet to be made publicly available, that covers “all electoral authoritarian regimes” from 1980 to 2002 resulting in a total of 200 elections (122 legislative and 78 presidential elections) in 57 countries across six regions of the world. Schedler (mimeo, 12-13) justifiably criticizes the measure in the World Bank’s Database of Political Institutions (DPI) for being “deeply flawed conceptually, methodologically, and empirically”, and instead measures freedom and fairness of these elections using two
measures based on a range of secondary sources: One for electoral fraud (“0”=no fraud, “1”=irregularities, and “2”=fraud), and one for exclusion (“0”=openness, and “1”=exclusion).

Lindberg (2004, 2006, 2009), covers sub-Saharan Africa’s 48 countries 1969-2007 and code the freedom and fairness in four ordinal categories based on a range of secondary sources: “0”=No, not at all, when elections were wholly unfair and obviously a charade orchestrated by the incumbent regime; “1”=No, irregularities affected outcome, when the elections had a legal and practical potential to be free and fair but there were numerous flaws and serious fraud that affected the result; “2”=Yes, somewhat, when there were deficiencies either unintended or organized but they did not impact the outcome of the election, and “3”=Yes, entirely, when elections were free and fair although there might have been fewer number of human errors and logistical restrictions on operations. When distinguishing between flawed processes and essentially acceptable electoral ones in a binominal fashion, the first two categories are collapsed into “flawed” while the later two indicate “free and fair”. The most important documentation for such judgments has been mission statements and reports from international and domestic (if present) election observation teams, and in some cases news reports relaying such mission statements.

One important methodological complication is the changing and somewhat fluid standards over time for what observers have covered and what irregularities count as more serious than others making elections less than free and fair (e.g. Eklit and Svensson 1997, Lehoucq 2003, Schedler 2002a). To some extent control for such inconsistencies can be accounted for by the use of other sources such as Election Watch, Keesing’s Record of World Events, and assessments of other academics that specializes in a particular country or region. In some countries, local think tanks and institutes also provide additional information. Another problem was the more
politicized observation missions such as those from the Organization of African Unity (OAU), then African Union (AU). These reports are often less reliable than others. Finally, independent observation missions essentially never monitored elections held before 1990 and information on the freedom and fairness of elections prior to that date, have to rely on other kinds of sources such as the ones used by Schedler and Kelly discussed above.

1) Winner’s Share of Votes, and Winner-second candidate ratio.

This component attribute of the electoral outcomes-dimension, concerns presidential elections that are either direct or indirect using an electoral college in practice mandated to follow the popular vote. While more competition is not always better\(^{10}\) too little competition indicates that the potential for this democratic quality to contribute to the realization of self-government has not been fulfilled. Competition among alternatives also implies that there is a potential for alternations in power. To some extent, election results (competitiveness) can indicate whether a political system *de facto* has competition, but it is not an entirely straightforward issue. Following the discussion above, it seems reasonable to follow Sartori (1976) and accept that in democracies, i.e. as long as both *de jure* and *de facto* competition is sufficiently guaranteed, the people must have the right to have similar as well as different preferences. A minimum requirement in order for people to have a choice is that there are at least two alternatives. While choice in a two-party/candidate system is a limited, as long as the legal provisions do not prevent more parties

\[^{10}\] Similarly to participation, it is generally considered that more competition is better in terms of democratic freedom of choice. However, one should recognize the possibility of too much competition. Too many parties in the legislature, for example, make a fragmented party system (Sartori 1968) detrimental to governability and thus effective representation. In this sense, one should recognize that in certain respects, there is such a thing as too much democratic quality (Coppedge 2003).
from engaging, and as long as other restrictions or practices such as threats or intimidation do not seriously undermine the process, there are de facto no constraints on the potential for choice.

Thus, it seems to me that a higher level of competitiveness in terms of a lower share of the votes gained by the winning candidate in presidential elections, is not indicative of more, deeper, or a higher-order democracy in either the electoral or liberal sense *per se*, as long as the situation in a country satisfy a minimum level of democracy. Presidential elections are by their very nature winner-takes-all institutions with the potential drawback that may come with it (e.g. Linz 1990).

It may still be relevant in a project like the present one to collect the data on all candidates’ share of the vote (enabling the calculation of different ratios), not the least since this would make it possible to test if this aspect is causally related to other aspects of democracy that are considered intrinsic to the various models of democracy, e.g. if higher levels of competitiveness are associated with things like more frequent turnovers, better horizontal accountability, greater participation, stronger judicial independence, and more egalitarian politics.

We noted above that while *de jure* competition may be present also in extremely repressive autocracies, *de facto* electoral competition is lower that required or non-existent in non-democratic countries with elections (Dahl 1989; Diamond 2002; Schedler 2002; van de Walle 2002). In non-democracies, this variable taps the level of *de facto* competition in executive

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11 As a core institution of representative democracy, elections are supposedly the means to decide who should hold legislative and executive power respectively. Yet, as discussed above elections also take place in less than democracies and the political system thus can be characterized by varying degrees of democratic features ranging from zero to a theoretical maximum. If we agree than some political systems can be more democratic than others, “democrativeness” becomes an attribute that the political system is potentially endowed with. This reasoning translates into viewing democracy as an attribute of the political system, the latter being the object of study Even if a political system would reach the theoretical maximum on all specified indicators of democratic attributes, it
elections. There are essentially two versions: plurality and majoritarian elections. Motivated by a concern with validity following the requirement of an absolute majority in the latter system, I argue that figures from the first round of elections should be used, rather than results from the run-off in majoritarian systems. Since the run-off is typically between the two most successful candidates from the first round, winning shares tend to be inflated while the figures from the first round are more representative of the actual level of competition. This choice also makes figures comparable to executive elections in countries using plurality rules (simple majority).

The indicator measuring the winning candidate’s share of votes (first round) as percentage of total valid votes is probably the most valid measure. One could argue for a denominator like the total number of registered voters, or the voting age population, but I concur that in many countries (especially less-developed nations) these are likely to induce more systematic errors (i.e. bias) than the number of valid votes – not so much in within country comparisons as in cross-country and cross-temporal comparisons. Voters’ registries are frequently manipulated or badly kept. Especially non-democratic regimes tend to make sure the registries are inflated to enable double-voting and ballot box stuffing and cleaning-up exercises are more often part and parcel of a democratization process. To give but one example, when voter turnout went up by almost 15 percent between the 2000 and the 2004 elections in Ghana, it was almost exclusively a result of some 900,000 “ghost” names being purged from the voters’ registry. Similarly, population figures are often very unreliable. Before Nigeria’s latest census, its population was estimated between 90 and 120 million, a difference of 33 percent. The number of votes cast is

would not make democracy the object. Objectification is a matter of conceptual analysis, not empirical conclusion.
simply the most reliable figure there is even if electoral fraud induces a certain amount of error in the estimates.

The problem with the main rival measure, the ratio between first and second candidate, or largest and second largest party, is similar to the problem with a measure like the number of effective parties (Laakso and Taagepera 1979, see also Pedersen 1980; Molinar 1991; Bogaards 2004; and Taagepera 1999). The two construct components vary independently and it is a world of a difference in terms of competitiveness between a situation when the largest party gets 70 percent of the seats and the second party gets 30, and a situation when the largest party scrambles 35 percent of the seats and the second party only 15 – but the ratio is still the same. In the first case (e.g. Gabon but also South Africa), the ruling party can do as they wish with no regard to the opposition including changing the constitution in most countries in Africa, whereas in the second scenario (closer to the situation in Zambia and Kenya) competition is fierce.

1B) Same/Different Candidate/Party?

In addition, it is imperative that any measure of this kind that measures vote shares or similar (i.e. it also concerns the following ones), is supplemented with information on whether the winner/second candidate/party is the same as in the previous election (c.f. Lindberg 2007, Bogaards 2008). The reason is simple. If the winner scores 70 percent of the vote in two consecutive elections it may well look like a political system with little *de facto* competition or very low level of competitiveness – as long as the winner is the same candidate/from the same party. If the winner gets 70 percent of the vote but (as in Benin) the winner in the second lection is a different candidate from a different party, the conclusion is exactly the opposite: high *de facto* competition or high level of competitiveness.
In either case, the data is widely available and as objective as it gets (bearing in mind the
difference between genuine results as indicators of competitiveness and results from flawed
elections as indicators of de facto competition) for election results. There are several sources that
can be useful, but none (to the best of my knowledge) that captures the whole range of countries
back to 1900. (see table at the end of the paper for details).

2) Largest and Second Party’s Share of the Votes or Seats/Ratio Winners-Opposition.
This second component attribute of election outcomes as a dimension of democracy, is similar in
many ways to the first. Measuring either individual parties’ (most importantly the largest and
second largest parties) share of the votes or seats, the logic discussed above with regards to
different interpretations for democratic and non-democratic situations should apply.

In democratic systems, voters’ collective choice is the expression of its sovereignty and
should not be used to infer more or less of democracy or democratic quality, but in non-
democratic situations the resultant figures are more an expression of the amount of de facto
competition the ruling regime is willing to allow, or has be pressed to allow.

There are some considerations regarding this component compared to the component
measuring presidential elections, that could make a difference however. One could argue that the
emphasis on political pluralism and horizontal accountability in the liberal model of democracy,
and the emphasis on inclusive participation in the participatory model, allow for using values
measured by this component to make judgments about more/less democracy also above a
minimum threshold. With regards to pluralism, an election with multiple parties arguably offers
more pluralism than a two-party contest, and a legislature with more parties accordingly
constitutes a more complex and differentiated plural representation of society than a legislature
dominated by two parties. Hence, relatively smaller shares of votes and seats for the two largest
parties would indicate more pluralism (although a more effective indicator would be based on the
number of parties).

With regards to horizontal accountability emphasized by the liberal doctrine, it may well be
reasonable to assume that large legislative majorities makes for less accountability when a ruling
party commands both the executive and the legislature (in presidential as well as parliamentary
systems). Smaller proportions of legislative seats held by the largest party should therefore be
more democratic in the liberal sense. But this is really an empirical claim that I submit should be
evaluated and proven before accepted. It may well work the other ay around. In Ghana, for
example, it has been the other way around (Lindberg 2009b). By all indications, the legislature
was more assertive in terms of oversight when NDC had a comfortable legislative majority from
1992 to 2000 than when NPP struggled with very narrow majority 2001 to 2004. The small
margin induced the president to find all possible means to control and coerce the legislators,
crush dissent and undermine all efforts associated with horizontal accountability. With the
possibility that large legislative majorities have contradictory effects in this regard, I would be
hesitant to recommend using it as an indicator for more/less liberal democracy.

When one collects the data, it is preferable (and includes little extra work) to collect several
figures including party names and abbreviations, results for all parties as well as both vote and
seat shares. The benefits are several: In the event one wants to adjust the measure one uses the
data will be immediately available; different researchers may prefer different measures; and it
allows for the calculation of various indicators that can be important in other analyzes (e.g.
number of effective parties/legislative parties, coalition sizes, age of legislative parties and so on).

Personally, I favor using the indicator measuring the largest party’s share of total seats in parliament as component indicator for the purpose of the democracy index. The main alternative – share of votes – is more problematic for two reasons. First, the figures for share of votes are missing for more elections than for share of seats and are more likely to be less reliable. Second, the situation in parliament is of particular importance as an indicator of both de facto competition and the level of competitiveness facing ruling majorities. A two-thirds majority in parliament often gives the ruling party free reign to introduce changes in the constitution unilaterally. No agreement on the rules of the game is needed and incumbents have proven likely to exploit this.

Naturally, electoral systems are designed to mediate the proportionality between votes and seats and thus the use of the share of seats would be influenced by the electoral system. The most important effect is that proportional representation (PR) system tends to produce multiparty as opposed to two-party, or two-and-a-half party systems and decrease the winner’s relative share of votes and seats. This effect is most prominent in PR systems with medium to large multi-member constituencies (MMCs) (e.g. Bogdanor and Butler 1983; Downs 1957; Duverger 1954; Lijphart 1984, 1994, 1999; Lindberg 2004c; Mair 1990; Powell 1982, 2000; Rae 1971; Sartori 1968, 1986, 1997). On the other hand, we expect the disproportionality of the two-round absolute majority- and plurality electoral systems to produce inflated legislative majorities, displaying lower than “real” levels of competition. Nevertheless, it provides information on the de facto competitiveness in parliaments with the advantage of facilitating further discussions on legislative majorities and minorities.
The isolated measure of the relative seat share of the winning party has been criticized for not showing the strength of the opposition in cases where the opposition is split between a number of parties. Supplementing it with a measure for the second largest party’s share of total seats in parliament addresses this concern.

An alternative to these two main measures could be proportion of seats held by the ruling government versus the remaining opposition. That would allow for the inclusion of a coalition of parties in the ruling bloc when applicable. The data collection and coding would be relatively unproblematic with regards to pre-election coalitions and coalitions forming immediately after election results are announced. The problem with governing legislative coalitions (and this is also true in presidential systems) is that they frequently break up and/or change composition during a term and it would require quite extensive data search through news archives to make sure one traces such changes to truly reflect the state of affairs. The consequence would also be that the election outcomes component indicator would change without an election, something that seems counter-intuitive.

Ratios of differentials between winning/governing parties and second largest/opposition parties suffer from the same problem as discussed above under the first component: when two indicators that vary independently are combined, substantively different configurations can result in the same measure misleading the analyst.

2B) Same/Different Candidate/Party?

Same considerations as under 1B above, but for legislative elections.
With regard to sources and existing data sets, here are several sources that can be useful, but none (to the best of my knowledge) that captures the whole range of countries back to 1900. (See table at the end of the paper for details).

3) Number of candidates and parties.

For electoral Schumpeterian democracy, the number of parties participating in an election and winning seats is (or should be) largely irrelevant as long as *de jure* and *de facto* competition is satisfactory. For a liberal democrat, the number should be at least two to guarantee some level of pluralism, horizontal accountability and executive oversight. The more emphasis put on pluralism and minority rights (assuming few if any national states are completely homogenous) in the liberal doctrine, the more value in terms of increased democracy should be placed on more parties.\textsuperscript{12} This is especially true for the limitations of two-party systems, and also affects participatory views of democracy. The well-known tendency for two-party systems to capture the median voter and while seeking to be large umbrella parties that can capture a majority of the votes, parties in such systems tend to ignore, hence, not represent minority views that are not pivotal in terms of calculated election outcomes. This typically also leads to lower levels of participation since such minorities have less to gain from voting. Hence, also the participatory doctrine would give extra points in terms of “democraticness” to a system with more parties although with some sense of diminishing returns, and some point when there is “too much of the good” and the costs of a fractionalized party system probably outweighs the benefits of representation. It is hard to say exactly where the cut-off point is (7 legislative parties as in Sweden or 24 as in Benin), and I am not going to try and suggest a definitive solution here.
While a number of alternative indicators could have been used, there one in particular that merits a brief comment. One of the most frequently used measures is Laakso and Taagepera’s (1979) index of effective number of parties, a mathematical cousin to Rae’s (1971) index of fractionalization. As shown by Pedersen (1980), Molinar (1991) and Bogaards (2004) and acknowledged by Taagepera (1999) himself, the main problem with this measure indicating the real levels of competition is that several distinct outcomes can be represented by the same number of the index and some very misleading. Bogaards’ (2004, 185) example is Gabon with an effective number of parties at exactly 2.0 in the 1996 and the 2001 legislative elections. This supposedly indicates a two-party system with a decent measure of competition whereas the reality is that the ruling party PDG won 70 and 71 percent of the seats respectively in these two elections. Taagepera (1999) gives examples of situations with three effective number of parties yet, the largest party acquires an absolute majority while at the same time, other party systems are more fractionalized and still score a mere 3.0. The reason is that the index combines two dimensions (size and number) that can vary independently just as 16 can be the product of 4x4 as well as 2x8 and 1x16.

Quite aside from the mathematical properties, it is not exactly clear why an effective number/fractionalization measure is preferable to indicate the concerns of the liberal and/or the participatory democratic models. Representative pluralism and inclusive participation are not necessarily captured by such indexes and the number of parties do well, and probably better in measuring pluralism. Even if two large parties capture some 70 or 80 percent of the votes and/or seats, a relatively large number of small groups can still be represented at the national level.


12 With caveats noted above, see footnote 11.
4) Opposition parties’ participation/boycott

Democratic contestation also implies that individuals and political parties have equal rights to exist and field candidates to contest elections. But full contestation by all political parties is only a given in established democracies and opposition decisions to withdraw from contesting elections in emerging democracies and electoral autocracies is something we often associate with situations where incumbents are creating extremely unfair conditions by way of intimidation, violence, preparation of fraud, and so on. Again, the interpretation of the component depends on the level of democracy. If *de jure* and *de facto* competition is guaranteed to a satisfactory extent, boycotts by opposition parties is a sign of sore losers at best, and undemocratic, subversive parties at worst, but in any case reduce the level of competitiveness. On the other hand, when only *de jure* competition is established and the level of *de facto* competition is under scrutiny, widespread boycotts by opposition parties can be used as one of several indicators of the level of allowed, “on the ground” competition.

Underlying this is an assumption that — *ceterus paribus* — full participation by political parties translates into higher democratic quality by realization of full actual competition than if some or all parties boycott. Yet, one would have to be careful in constructing such a component. On the one hand, opposition parties sometimes participate even when elections stand no chance of being even remotely free and fair or legitimate. On the other hand, boycotts are occasionally staged in elections of relatively high democratic quality with the aim of discrediting the ruling regime when opposition parties stand no chance of winning.

There are not many data sets out there with this kind of data. To the best of my knowledge the main ones are Schedler’s data set on 174 elections in 54 countries with authoritarian regimes, Beaulieu’s data set of 383 elections (51 elections with major boycotts and 333 other randomly
selected elections) 1990-2007, and Lindberg’s (2006, 2009) data set covering all elections in Africa 1989-2007. All these data sets use a variety of sources such as election monitoring reports, news reports, and records such as IPU’s Chronicle and Keesing’s. They also code the component indicator in very similar ways, typically as an ordinal indicator at three levels: “0”=Boycott by all major opposition parties, “1”=Partial boycott by some opposition parties, and “2”=All relevant parties participated.

Extending this data to more countries and back in time should be possible if somewhat work intensive. IPU’s Chronicle covers all parliamentary elections back to 1968 and usually contains information about boycotts if they occurred and can relatively quickly be cross-checked with Keesing’s. Nohlen et al’s volumes on Africa, Latin America, and Asia and Pacific is an excellent source that often, but not always contain this information as well. In addition, one can relatively easy do a news report search for the days after the election in each country (e.g. using BBC’s electronic archive) where a post-election summary report would usually indicate if there were boycotts.

5) Losers’ acceptance/rejection of results
Whether the losers accept the results indicates the extent to which political elites view elections as legitimate, hence, is one possible indicator that the de facto competition has reached a satisfactory level. In “normal” free and fair elections, we expect democratic-minded elites to accept defeat graciously -- even if grudgingly -- and to assume the position of a constructive opposition. Yet, in new electoral regimes losing parties may initially challenge the results based on unsubstantiated rumors of irregularities when many inexperienced and less educated actors are on the scene but it may also be tactic action in order to gain political advantage, e.g. from the
international community. Challenging legitimate results can also be a strategy for “bad losers” seeking to undermine the political rule of their rivals, a posturing more likely to appear in places undergoing transition when things are still in flux. Therefore, we may still want to be cautious with regards to taking at face value, regardless of other conditions, a challenge to the official results as substantiating allegations of irregularities and lack of satisfactory de facto competition.

Complicating the picture further, opposition parties and presidential candidates may also accept defeat and the election results even under circumstances of less than free and fair elections. This is more likely when opposition parties acknowledge that they would probably have lost even if the elections had been free and fair, that is, when the incumbent engaged in “unnecessary” fraud. But it is also a possible strategy of opposition parties with a long-term perspective and expectations that are more moderate. If an electoral process is generally accepted as a substantial improvement on the past and there is a perceived prospect of future advancements, opposition parties may well accept defeat in the interest of peace and stability and in anticipation of a better chance at winning the next time around. Nevertheless, losers' peaceful acceptance is a critical test of the legitimacy of claims that there were de facto competition. It is only when an election is free and fair and the losers accept the results that we can speak of manifested legitimate elections.

As with the previous component, there are not many data sets out there with this kind of data. It seems that Lindberg’s data set is the only collation and it only covers contemporary Africa. Sources as above. Losers’ acceptance is measured using three ordinal values: “0”=No acceptance, for when none of the main losing parties accept the outcome; “1”=Some/Later, for when either some or all losing parties reject the results at first as evidenced by public statements and/or file petitions but within three months accept it, or, if some losing parties do not accept the
results but others do; and “2”=Yes, all immediately, for when all losing parties concede defeat immediately after the results are pronounced.

As with the previous component, extending this data to more countries and back in time should be possible if somewhat work intensive. IPU’s Chronicle covers all parliamentary elections back to 1968 and usually contains information about rejection of results by the opposition if they occurred and can relatively quickly be cross-checked with Keesing’s. Nohlen et al’s volumes on Africa, Latin America, and Asia and Pacific is an excellent source but does not always or even very frequently contain this information. In addition, one can relatively easy do a news report search for the days after the election in each country (e.g. using BBC’s electronic archive) where a post-election summary report would usually indicate if the results were rejected or accepted.

**Level and Rules of Aggregation?**

I must admit that at this stage, I have not been able to work on aggregation of components for this dimension. But let me note a few things. First of all, all data related directly to elections will have to deal with the thorny issue of multiple elections in all countries but those operating unicameral parliamentary systems. Elections for president, upper and lower chambers are sometimes held concurrently, sometimes just a few weeks or a month apart, and sometimes separated by years. In some countries the intervals are varied with presidential elections held every seventh year and elections for parts of the upper chamber every second year while for all seats in the lower chamber every fifth year. Some countries change these rules over time, especially during re-democratization after a period of authoritarian rule. How are we going to handle this complexity within, and across countries and time? Federal structures obviously add one (or more!) layers to
this and it will all impact on whatever rule for aggregation is adopted for dimensions involving election-related data.

Second, I am not sure if I think alternations in power is its own dimension separate from election results/outcomes. It seems to me that a turnover is a very definitive election outcome intimately related to the component indicators discussed here such as the winner’s share of votes in presidential elections, winning party’s share of seats in legislative elections, and losers’ acceptance.

Thirdly, I am acutely aware of the possibly contradictory way I have gone about arguing about the interpretation of the component indicators above. We are setting out to measure in a multi-dimensional fashion, the level of democracy. To argue then, that the interpretation of an indicator of the level of democracy is dependent on the level of democracy, is less than ideal. Nevertheless, I see no alternative with regards to the dimension components I was asked to address, for the reasons given above. My hope is that another dimension can be used for this purpose (most likely perhaps #7 Election administration).
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Component</th>
<th>Data Set</th>
<th>Indicator</th>
<th>Level</th>
<th>#Countries</th>
<th>#Cases/CY</th>
<th>Years</th>
<th>Notes</th>
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<td>Kelly</td>
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<td>1,207 elections</td>
<td>1975-2004</td>
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<td>0/1</td>
<td>177</td>
<td>5,625 CYs</td>
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<td>Fraud</td>
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<tr>
<td>Election results</td>
<td>DPI</td>
<td>Presidential, % first round</td>
<td>Interval</td>
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<td>5,625 CYs</td>
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Legislative, Seats and Votes, 1st-3rd party, others
Gov/Opposition Seats and Vote shares
Margin of Majority

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<th>IPU Parline/Chronicle</th>
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<th>Interval</th>
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<th>1968 – present</th>
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<td>Beaulieu</td>
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<td>197 elections</td>
<td>1980-2002</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Beaulieu, Emily. Mimeo. “Election Protest and Political Reform”. Department of Political Science: University of Kentucky.


