The Quality of Democracy

THE AMBIGUOUS VIRTUES OF ACCOUNTABILITY

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When Terry Karl and I hit upon the concept of accountability as the key to the broadest and most widely applicable definition of “modern representative political democracy,” our effort in 1991 met with a surprising amount of indifference or even hostility. In the last ten years, however, there has been a veritable explosion of scholarly concern with the notion of political accountability, not to mention such cognate concepts as “corporate social accountability,” “communitarian responsiveness,” and “individual moral responsibility.”

Generically speaking, political accountability is a relationship between two sets of persons or (more often) organizations in which the former agree to keep the latter informed, to offer them explanations for decisions made, and to submit to any predetermined sanctions that they may impose. The latter, meanwhile, are subject to the command of the former, must provide required information, explain obedience or disobedience to the commands thereof, and accept the consequences for things done or left undone. Accountability, in short, implies an exchange of responsibilities and potential sanctions between rulers and citizens, made all the more complicated by the fact that a varied and competitive set of representatives typically interposes between the two.

Needless to say, there are many caveats, loose linkages, and role reversals in this relationship, so that its product is almost always contested. Information can be selective and skewed; explanations can be deflected to other actors; sanctions are rarely applied and can be simply ignored.

All stable political regimes probably have some predictable form of accountability to some type of constituency. Sultanistic autocracies have their coteries and cadres. Military dictatorships have their juntas...
and deals among the different armed services. Even absolute monarchs are supposed to be accountable to God—not to mention more earthly dynastic and marital concerns. What democracy has that these do not is citizens—a constituency covering the entire country and populated (these days) by virtually all adults minus resident foreigners. Moreover, in terms of political accountability, each citizen has the same rights and obligations, that is, to be informed (with limited exceptions) about official actions, to hear justifications for them, to judge how well or poorly they are carried out, and to act accordingly—electorally or otherwise.

What makes the role of citizens increasingly complex is that they have had to rely more heavily than ever on specialized representatives, that is, on agents who in turn act as principals when it comes to ensuring that elected or appointed rulers are held accountable. As if this were not complex enough, these very same agents-cum-principals may have ruled in the past and probably aspire to rule again in the future. Meanwhile, citizens go from being principals to being agents when they are obliged to conform to official decisions that they may have opposed or did not even know about.

However complex it may be, political accountability must be institutionalized if it is to work effectively. This means that it has to be embedded in a mutually understood and preestablished set of rules. Some of these may be formalized in constitutions, legal codes, or sworn oaths, but political accountability is not the same as legal, financial, or ethical accountability. Rulers can be investigated and held to account for actions that did not break the law or result in illicit personal enrichment or violate common mores. They may have simply made bad political choices that failed to produce their intended effect or cost vastly more than initially announced. And rulers can even be held accountable for acts of omission as well as commission in somewhat the
same way citizens can, provided that the rules were made by previously established consent.

Finally, it should be noted that the process of political accountability still goes on even when incumbents win, as most often they do. The exchanges of information, justification, and judgment that make up the ordinary cycle of accountability are less obtrusive than the “big bang” of “throwing the rascals out,” but no less real and significant for all that. Thus it would be wrong to think that only an electoral turnover, the loss of a confidence vote in parliament, a presidential impeachment, or a premier’s resignation demonstrate that political accountability is working. In all likelihood, the most accountable rulers are those who never face the immediate threat of such measures. These leaders make it a practice to take citizens’ expectations on board, to explain to citizens what the leaders are doing and why, and, therefore, have nothing to fear from accountability. Indeed, such rulers may even find that the degree to which they hold themselves plainly answerable to citizens gives them greater legitimacy when they have to act against immediate popular opinion.

Measuring That Which Eludes Measurement

My first, failed attempt to measure accountability’s impact on the quality of democracy rested on induction. Using the burgeoning literature on the alleged defects of new democracies, I came up with the seven items listed in the table. None defines democracy in the “accountable” sense that I have proposed, but one or more authors found each of these conditions to be a likely and desirable product of well-functioning democratic institutions.

Finding a reliable way to gauge these items proved difficult. Converting them into cardinal or even ordinal measures was virtually impossible. Moreover, the items may be connected to one another—either causally or functionally—which implies that they should scale. To give one example, survey research indicates that increases in a person’s sense of “political efficacy” (item 6) are related to an increase in the likelihood of voting (item 4). While much evidence on this and other relationships at the individual level has been gathered and analyzed, we still do not know how they cluster at the level of whole polities.

Judging the extent to which the constitution and other major rules are evenly applied across a nation’s physical and social landscape is obviously hard. Guillermo O’Donnell speaks of “brown areas”—often outside major cities and presumably outside dominant ethnic, class, or social circles as well—where democratic guarantees and legal norms are routinely violated or ignored. This too is widely attested yet not easily measurable, either in extent or significance. Counting legal challenges involving the misapplication of laws would likely be in vain since “brown areas” where the rule of law fails to apply are not likely to be
places where the weak and marginalized would dare to take their cases to court. To gauge how great a real-world effect the formal extension of the rights to vote and to associate is having, one might look at indicators such as margins of electoral victory, with smaller margins likely bespeaking greater competitiveness. Or one might look for the presence of stable sets of competing class-based organizations as a sign that free associational life has become politically significant.

Changes in income and gender equality can be measured fairly readily in both comparative and historical terms within and across many polities. Not so data on things like whether or not people feel a “sense of personal political efficacy.” Changes in voter turnout are easy to chart, but hard to interpret. Nearly every neodemocracy has seen an early “orgy” of civic participation associated with founding elections followed by declines in turnout. Does this indicate relative citizen satisfaction and rational “free-riding,” or growing disenchantment with the new system and the politicians that it has produced? Data on the diversity of purposes and membership of individuals in civil society organizations are notoriously hard to come by and easily distorted. Seizing on one type of organization for which there exist data—whether it is trade unions or bowling societies—can be quite unrepresentative of collective actions that are occurring elsewhere in society.

My hunch about the flaws in my quality-of-democracy research is that I chose the right items, but fell short when it came to figuring out a rigorous method for reliably scoring these qualities or conditions. Let me add that my first hunch could be wrong: I may have chosen the wrong items. Yet this too is hard to say, for the simple reason that the entire discussion regarding democratic quality has been beset by fallacies.

The first is the unquestioned assumption that all or most neodemocracies are inferior in quality, whether considered absolutely or in relation to older democratic regimes. This assumption is mistaken on both counts: Not only are most recently established democracies doing far better than anyone had the right to expect, but most older democracies are performing less well than this assumption implies and less well than they used to.

One could examine any established Western democracy one or even two decades after it started democratizing and find a decidedly mixed picture. What was Britain like in the late 1830s? How would 1860s Denmark or 1890s France measure up? Were any of them doing as well as East European or Latin American countries today? In those earlier democratizing societies would you really find less in the way of public corruption, vote-buying, legislative malapportionment, favoritism for the privileged, and disregard of the oppressed—not to mention the denial of voting rights to women, illiterates, and the poor? I doubt it.

Of course, this comparison is unfair. Political history has accelerated and expectations have changed. Modern democracy has different rules
and benchmarks. Today’s fledgling democracies are supposed to be better than yesterday’s, and the equal of contemporary established democracies as well. The century or more it took the latter to reach their current levels of public transparency, electoral fairness, effective rights guarantees, equal access, and citizen accountability somehow drops out of sight.

To avoid this fallacy of anachronism, the criteria we use to judge democratic quality must be temporally appropriate. This implies that: 1) We must avoid holding neodemocracies to the sorts of elevated performance standards that took previous democracies decades or more to reach; and 2) we must refrain from blaming older democracies for failing to do things (like, say, giving women the vote or abolishing rotten boroughs) that virtually no one would have expected them to do at the time. Clearly, the post-1974 and post-1989 democracies must be evaluated according to a “normal” range of variation drawn from the experience of the modern West. This means holding them to standards higher than their predecessor democracies. But it does not mean assessing them according to “best practices” rather than “normal benchmarks.” The goal posts, in other words, must shift to reflect the historical reality of the current moment in the evolution of democracy. But they cannot be set so high or far that only top Western competitors can reach them, or moved again just to discredit the game’s latest entrants.

The second potential fallacy is idealism, or the holding of all actual democracies to unrealistic standards. Any democratic regime is going to suffer from some degree of unfairness, citizen apathy, politically salient inequality, self-serving behavior by public officials, and so on. But democracy, unavoidably, is not just a descriptive term for a regime characterized by significant if imperfect equality, citizen participation, transparency, and so on. It is also a term used to denote a normative goal that can be approached but never in practice fully attained. Thus we are stuck with a word that has both empirical and normative connotations. Unless we recognize that much of democratic theory is hortatory—aimed at encouraging us to do better in the future than we have done in the past—we will be unable to make fair and “realistic” assessments about what neodemocracies have or have not accomplished.

The third fallacy is partisanship. It is very tempting to assume that the neodemocracy one is studying should be doing what one would like it to do substantively. Not infrequently, at least among North American and West European observers, this is not unrelated to what they would like their own preferred party of reference to accomplish at home. Social democrats castigate neodemocracies for not making incomes more equal, free-market liberals complain about the slow pace of privatization, traditional conservatives bewail the decline of old ways or old elites, and so on. To limit the sway of partisanship, the trick is to focus on such widely endorsed goals as respect for human and civic rights, decline in poverty, holding rulers accountable, protecting national identity, and
so forth. When applying less generic standards—such as gender equality or agricultural subsidies—it is wise to be sensitive to the observable preferences of the citizens in the specific polity one is dealing with.

Behind all three of these potential fallacies lies the prospect that consolidating a democracy in no way guarantees its quality. Consolidation, as I understand it, means getting people to compete and cooperate according to rules and within institutions that citizens, representatives, and rulers alike find mutually acceptable. The rules and institutions thus consolidated may produce a democracy of low, medium, or high quality. In the first two events, one hopes that citizens will demand improvements, but nothing is certain and the process can take a long time. One of the main hypotheses of democracy advocates is that even a low-grade, purely procedural democracy is more likely to improve these conditions eventually than is a high-quality autocracy—if such a thing exists. Democracy cannot ensure improvements in the short run, but does offer the possibility of making them in the future. Hence, any democracy is better than no democracy.

Indeed, it may even prove counterproductive to aim for too high-quality a democracy during the transition. To insist on the radical changes that this would require may be to invite a backlash from groups that feel threatened but which might have gone along with a slower, more disarmingly procedural approach. And such patience should be easier under democracy, since there is always supposed to be another free and fair election around the corner. Democracy is unique among generic regime types in that it can lawfully and consensually change its own rules and make itself into a different type of democracy.

Can Proximate Measures Work?

Can an indirect approach to measuring the quality of democracy succeed where my direct one failed? Can we observe how well or poorly neodemocracies build in accountability during the consolidation process, and then see if this correlates positively with economic growth, social and gender equality, a more evenly distributed rule of law, better rights protection, and the like? Since we have no reason to believe that the mere consolidation of democracy will bring all these benefits right away, perhaps the missing link to a better future lies in the various mechanisms that connect citizens to rulers via representatives.

The spatial metaphor that political scientists have traditionally used when discussing political accountability stresses “vertical” power relations between citizens, representatives, and rulers. Various kinds of information, justifications, and sanctions or threats of sanctions move up and down the chain in an ongoing exchange. To this vertical dimension, advocates of the “liberal” aspect of democracy and scholars of democratization have added a “horizontal” one.
Horizontal accountability is a matter of interactions, not between rulers and ruled, but between arms or branches of the regime and state acting according to preset constitutional or legal rules. Such regular “checks and balances” are supposed to ensure greater accountability—and in some accounts even to trump the vertical connection with citizens—as, for example, when a constitutional court strikes down a law that most citizens support or when a central bank ignores a popular government’s request to cut interest rates for the sake of keeping up employment levels.

While I have my doubts about whether this type of accountability actually works very well or is truly democratic, there is no gainsaying either the extraordinary efforts that have gone into creating new institutions of horizontal accountability in older democracies or the energy with which such institutions have been urged upon newer democracies. Some horizontal-accountability mainstays are juridical in nature, such as high courts to deal with constitutional issues or more specialized courts to deal with matters concerning human rights, race and labor relations, or the conduct of elections. Others intervene in executive-legislative-judicial relations to provide “outside” accountability. These “guardian” agencies (to use Robert A. Dahl’s term) can include auditing offices, inspectorate generals, and offices of the ombudsman as well as a plethora of independent regulatory agencies.

How useful is it to apply these spatial metaphors—to which one might add the idea of “oblique” accountability to various civil society groups—to our thinking about democratic political accountability and the methods or mechanisms through which it might work? Here I am ambivalent. There must be something significant behind the proliferation of these institutions and the persistence with which Western democracies demand that newcomers try to adopt them, but is this not about the need for stable property rights and secure elite interlocutors rather than the quality of democracy per se?

For this reason, I have chosen to use the dimension not of space but of time, as illustrated first in Figure 1 below. Democracy has a set of rhythms. Elections, popular mobilizations, policy cycles, public attention spans, and even the popularity of politicians follow more or less predictable patterns over time in any consolidated democratic polity—even if their coincidences occasionally produce exciting moments of fortuna or improvised acts of virtú. Broadly speaking, there are three movements to the dance: The overture, labeled “before” in Figure 1, is a relatively lengthy period of proposing, discussing, and agenda setting. The intermezzo is more compressed. Labeled “during” in Figure 1, it is the period when a decision is made via interest alliances, interagency bargaining, and executive-legislative transactions until eventual ratification is achieved. The finale, often drawn out, sees the proposal—now having taken on the form of a law or regulation—undergo
implementation, produce its intended and unintended effects, and possibly be subjected to court review or become a topic for wider political debate.

The hunch behind this emphasis on time rather than space—on “when” rather than “where” as the decisive factor in the process of mutual accountability—is admittedly not something that one can prove. But one can try to build upon it and see if it turns out to be more fruitful than the usual spatial metaphors in explaining the benevolence or malevolence of outcomes.4

In Figure 1, I have cross-tabulated the temporal aspect of the decision-making process with the type of actor whose behavior is being evaluated. This generates nine criteria for evaluating a successful accountability sequence. The most “classic” is probably the one in the upper left-hand corner: participation. It has long been presumed that the more citizens participate actively in the “decision to make a decision” (that is, in the discussion about whether a decision should be made, what should be on the agenda, and who should be involved in making the decision), the more attention they will pay to the subsequent process and the more likely they will feel obligated to conform to whatever is decided—even if they opposed the decision itself.

Representatives in the broad sense (elected or otherwise) will presumably play a key mobilization role in the “before” phase by telling their “constituents” (who may be but need not be formally grouped into territorial units) what is at stake, and by canvassing their opinion. During the making of a decision, these representatives compete under preestablished rules against rival sets of representatives to influence its substance. Should they fail, it is understood they will nonetheless comply with the result and try to persuade their supporters to accept it as well.

Following a similar logic, the more that rulers provide accessibility to the greatest number and widest variety of individual citizens or organizations from civil society, the higher will be the level of information that they will carry into their more restricted deliberations and the greater will be the likelihood that the decisions they eventually take will be responsive to the interests and passions of citizens and their representatives.

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**Figure 1—The Generic Properties of Successful Accountability: Time x Actors**

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<th><strong>BEFORE</strong></th>
<th><strong>DURING</strong></th>
<th><strong>AFTER</strong></th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>CITIZENS</strong></td>
<td>Participation</td>
<td>Attention</td>
<td>Obligation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>REPRESENTATIVES</strong></td>
<td>Mobilization (for and against)</td>
<td>Competition</td>
<td>Compliance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>RULERS</strong></td>
<td>Accessibility</td>
<td>Deliberation</td>
<td>Responsiveness</td>
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</table>
Note that these criteria are not functionally or necessarily interrelated. Rulers can gain access to relatively passive and disorganized citizens (for example, via informal soundings, survey research, or focus groups) and active and well-organized citizens can participate in “unconventional” ways that do not involve being granted formal access (for example, by demonstrating against their lack of access). The active participation of individuals in the initial phase may not be a guarantee of their subsequent interest in a particular issue, and they may feel no obligation to conform once the decision has been made and is being implemented. Representatives can find themselves in a particularly ambiguous position. On the one hand, they must mobilize their followers in order to have a chance of influencing the decision. On the other hand, once the decision is made the rulers will expect them to deliver the compliance of these same people—even if their influence has been marginal. Failure to deliver compliance could lead to the representatives’ being labeled disloyal and excluded from future decisions.

Figure 2 simply inverts the previous matrix in an effort to capture what qualities might emerge if the process of political accountability were to go wrong. There is no reason to provide any detail about these negative criteria. They are merely intended to capture the reverse of those discussed above. Their theoretical importance will become more evident as we turn to the thorny issue of measurement, for accountability seems to be one of those political concepts, like legitimacy, that usually becomes apparent only when it is defective or absent. When the accountability process is working well not much seems to be happening, and one could reach the false conclusion that it makes no contribution to improving the various qualities that a democracy should display.

**Measuring Accountability**

Before turning to measurement issues in detail, we should be sure that we are not fine-tuning indicators without first having asked ourselves if the mode of scoring or aggregating them is consistent with the very notion of accountability itself. A great deal of the recent empirical
work on democratization suffers from precisely this defect, especially
from the urge to collapse a sizeable range of data into a single number
or name. As a result, two cases that receive the same score or fall into the
same box can reveal, on closer inspection, radically different overall
“profiles.” Only after one has coded the more discretely equivalent vari-
ables and then tested them for scalability does it make sense to use the
aggregate result and to compare countries according to their relative
approximation to such complex phenomena as liberalization, democra-
tization, or accountability.5

Accountability is not only hard to measure directly, as we have seen,
but also has a rather “tricky” conceptual structure. For one thing, some
of its “positive properties” may be incompatible with each other, or at
least may involve complex tradeoffs. High levels of individual participa-
tion may not be so benevolently linked to subsequent attention and
sense of obligation. Citizens may become passionate advocates only to
tire quickly or blame their representatives unfairly for making neces-
sary compromises. Rulers may be highly accessible, but may not have
the time to take what they hear seriously because they have to deliber-
ate with each other under a deadline.

Even more commonly, persons in positions of authority—whether
elected or selected—may honestly be convinced that they have done
desires best to be responsive to citizen preferences, only to discover that
citizens did not really want what they said they wanted or have changed
their minds in the meantime. Democratic and accountable politicians
very frequently have to take risks of this sort and follow courses of
action that are not immediately popular, making the calculation that
once the effects are experienced the citizenry will have learned to ac-
cept them. I infer from this that the scores on the variables are highly
unlikely to produce a single scale of accountability. The most one should
expect are distinctive clusters of scores that will generate accountabil-
ity profiles which might be equally effective or defective in different
social, cultural, institutional, or historical contexts.

One should also expect that the relation of many of these variables to
accountability will be anything but linear and incremental. Officials
may be so accessible that they do not make a decision in time to solve
the problem. Representatives may mobilize their followers and, thereby,
raise expectations to unrealistic heights. Or some representatives may
stalemate other representatives of major interests so effectively that the
intervention of a tiny minority determines the outcome—undermining
both citizen responsiveness and compliance. Thus, when trying to fit the
nominal scores generated above into a single scheme of evaluation, one
should attend to the likelihood that there will be curvilinear or perhaps
parabolic relationships with the quality of democracy. There may even
be bizarre “kinks” due to peculiar sequences or unique combinations.

Finally, the operationalization of these variables will be almost in-
Philippe C. Schmitter

evitably contaminated by prior knowledge about the longevity, stability, or reputation of the regime being scored. It will be difficult not to conclude that, say, Norway, Switzerland, and the United States must have more accountable practices than, say, Germany, Japan, and Italy simply because liberal democracy has been around for so much longer in the former countries. Needless to say, all the neodemocracies (except perhaps Uruguay) will automatically be suspected of “defects” in their accountability mechanisms. The scientific answer to this problem would be to deprive the data of their national identity and code it anonymously, but this would be simply impossible to do. If somehow one could invent a way of decontaminating the data-gathering process, counterintuitive scores might emerge. For example, Norway, Switzerland, and the United States—each with its long democratic history and (relatively) satisfied body of citizens—might turn out not to have more-accountable rules and practices, in which case we would have falsified not only the hypothesis that “high accountability” improves the quality of democracy (at least, as assessed by citizens), but also the hypothesis that it is causally related to the survivability of such a regime.

My approach to measurement would be to come up with simple yes-or-no questions (with the possibility of a “fuzzy” intermediate score) for each variable and only then to try to see if they produce a single scale or cluster into nominal categories. The questions should be multiple for each variable and they may well prove uncorrelated with one another. They should be capable of capturing both the positive and negative aspects in the cells of Figures 1 and 2. And they should be composed of a mix of generic and specific issues—although the latter will be difficult since not all polities have had to deal with the same policy issues within the same timeframe and with the same intensity. Since I have only just begun thinking conceptually about accountability, I have not yet come up with operational suggestions for all of the requisite questions. But let us begin with the easiest, which is participation (or abstention) by individual citizens:

1. Has turnout over the past three elections for the national legislature increased significantly (1), remained about the same (0.5), or decreased significantly (0)?
2. [Pick a salient issue area of contemporary politics, say, environmental protection.] Have individuals over the past five years tended to join and support parties focusing particularly on this issue much more than other parties (1), about the same (0.5), or much less than other parties (0)?
3. Have individuals responding to public opinion polls over the past five years expressed a greater interest in politics (1), about the same interest (0.5), or less interest (0)?

Note that the first and last questions touch on generic matters, while the middle question deals with a more specific topic. Note also that they
involve different techniques of gathering data. This is deliberate: While it may be tempting to rely on easily available survey data to assess the perceived degree of accountability, it would be a mistake to do so exclusively, especially for comparative purposes. Responses to opinion polls are difficult to interpret across languages and cultures; are “costless” when they are uttered; and may reflect immediate circumstances rather than deeply held values or judgments. (On a related note, the evaluation should be made over a period long enough to screen out momentary fluctuations.) The subjective data collected by opinion pollsters have a place in research on accountability, but only when surrounded by more-objective measures of actual behavior.

A somewhat more challenging task would be to formulate questions on the topic of how responsive (or imposing) rulers are seen to be:

1. [Presume that most citizens would benefit from the enhanced competitiveness of their respective national economies.] According to the best available indicators of economic competitiveness, has [country X] improved (1), sustained (0.5), or diminished (0) its relative position over the past five years?
2. Has the national legislature over the past five years tended to approve the annual government budget within the prescribed time limit (1), with a slight delay (0.5), or with a considerable delay (0)?
3. When polled over the past five years, have citizens reported that they believe that their leaders pay more attention to persons such as themselves (1), about the same amount (0.5), or less (0)?

Finally, let us focus on representatives and the perceived degree to which they compete (or collude) for control over (or obstruct) the decision-making process:

1. In the past five years or so, have there been major incidents in which significant parties, associations, or movements have refused to participate in hearings or discussions of important legislation (0), minor incidents (0.5), no noticeable incidents (1)?
2. Is it the general practice of executive decision makers to invite spokespeople from competing parties, interest groups, or social movements to discuss the drafting of major laws before they are submitted to the legislature (1), more or less while parliamentary debate is taking place (0.5), or only after a formal decision has been made (0)?
3. Have there been frequent incidents over the past five years in which significant parties, associations, or movements have urged their supporters to boycott or resist the implementation of government decisions they deem to have been improperly taken (1), a few incidents (0.5), or no noticeable incidents (0)?

Coming up with a full repertoire of such tripartite question sets should be feasible. Some will no doubt be more difficult to formulate than
others, especially when it comes to so-called objective indicators. But as long as one avoids excessive dependence on one source or method of observation, triangulation should allow one reasonable confidence about prospects for coming up with a valid score. As I said above, it is highly unlikely that these scores will produce a single reproducible scale of political accountability. I would be quite satisfied if the effort ended with a nominal typology of different “profiles” that might produce more or less the same quality of democracy (and of legitimacy) in societies of different composition and historical trajectory.

After all, if we have learned one thing from the recent study of transitions from autocracy and consolidations of democracy, it is “equifinality.” Many countries having left from different points of departure and chosen different modes of transition have been ending up, not with the same type of democracy, but with similarly stable and consolidated institutions. Why should there not be multiple ways of exercising political accountability and translating that accountability into improvements along the various measures of quality according to which democracy can be assessed?

NOTES

1. Philippe C. Schmitter and Terry Lynn Karl, “What Democracy Is . . . and Is Not,” *Journal of Democracy* 2 (Summer 1991): 75–88. Our definition, offered at page 76, holds that democracy is “a regime or system of governance in which rulers are held accountable for their actions in the public domain by citizens acting indirectly through the competition and cooperation of their elected representatives.” If we had it to do over again, we would change two particulars. First, we would replace the word “governance” with “government” after critical engagement with the vast literature on “governance” and its too-common tendency to use the term to justify the introduction of less-than-democratic practices. Second, we would delete the word “elected” that an overzealous editor inserted in front of “representatives,” since our concept of representation was and is far broader than the kind that is putatively secured through elections.

2. Philippe C. Schmitter, “The Limits of Horizontal Accountability,” in Andreas Schedler, Larry Diamond, and Marc F. Plattner, eds., *The Self-Restraining State: Power and Accountability in New Democracies* (Boulder, Colo.: Lynne Rienner, 1999), 59–63. There I worry that “servants of the state” will often be tempted to collude and protect their shared privileges, and I note that the architects of the U.S. constitutional order saw checks and balances as “auxiliary precautions” meant precisely to place limits on potentially unjust or unwise majority desires.

3. It is worth noting that whatever a country’s other democratic credentials, if it refuses to adopt horizontal-accountability institutions—including a technocratically run central bank—it will never have a chance of gaining admission into the European Union. Yet many a well-established democracy has managed to survive quite well without this element of horizontal accountability. France, Austria, the Netherlands, and the Scandinavian countries all have had centralized government structures, less independent central banks and relatively few regulatory agencies. There is no firm empirical evidence that autonomous central banks boost the stability or quality of democracy. Moreover, even their ostensible goal of controlling inflation may not be a democratic objective.
4. An associated hypothesis would be that there has been a tendency—accelerating in recent years—on the part of rulers to convince citizens to rest content with *ex post facto* accountability only, and especially that offered by elections. The usual reason given is that the increased scale and scope of governing, combined with the rising importance of technology, makes the average citizen less capable of evaluating the costs and benefits of a given course of action before the fact. Technocrats and other specialists should do the forecasting, the argument goes, and voters can rule on it all when next they visit the polls. One way to keep citizens from getting into the vertical-accountability game "too early" is to shift ever more decision-making power to "horizontal"—and to citizens, inaccessible—agencies such as autonomous central banks, independent regulatory commissions, and the like. With parties in many countries coming to adopt platforms that resemble each other's fairly closely, citizens seem to feel increasingly dissatisfied with electoral accountability, and ask whether they even have real choices. In neodemocracies, especially, the response to growing technocracy and unsatisfying elections seems to be stratospheric levels of electoral volatility and frequent turnovers of power. And yet even in these countries citizens do not seem to feel any evident sense of satisfaction at having exercised so successfully their capacity to hold rulers accountable. Basic policy orientations change little; the old rulers later return to power; and disenchantment with democracy encounters no adequate response.