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and Electoral Democracy Revisited.
Some Conceptual
and Empirical Clarifications

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Abstract

Since the late 1990s, many students of democratisation have emphasised that a salient empirical gap is emerging between liberal and electoral democracy. In this paper, I reappraise the gap by revisiting Larry Diamond's important contribution from *Developing Democracy*. Emphasising both the electoral and the liberal component of democracy, with assistance from classical and modern authors, the paper arrives at a fourfold typology of the political regime form. When reanalysing the 1990s using this typology – and when extending the analysis to the 2000s – the gap between liberal and electoral democracy turns out not to be in the increase at all. The reason is a simple one: because I systematically treat the two components of liberal democracy as different attributes, conceptually independent of each other, I do not identify a gap that is based on a difference in degree, not in kind.

For their insightful critical comments to this manuscript, I would like to express my gratitude to Laszlo Bruszt, Peter Mair, and Larry Diamond. Also, Philippe Schmitter and Guillermo O'Donnell were kind enough to reflect briefly on the paper in its earlier stages. Needless to say, the sole responsibility for any shortcomings or outright errors rests with me.

1. Statements about the gap between liberal and electoral democracy

Half a decade ago in his *Developing Democracy*, Larry Diamond carefully developed a distinction between electoral and liberal democracy and then went on to demonstrate that most of the recent instances of democratisation belong in the electoral category – separated by a significant gap from their liberal betters. To quote from his account, “[...] the gap between electoral and liberal democracy has grown markedly during the latter part of the third wave, forming one of its most significant but little-noticed features”¹.

Diamond has not been alone in staking this claim. Guillermo O’Donnell’s notion of ‘delegative democracy’ very much builds upon the existence of such a gap, albeit with a more narrow empirical context in mind, namely that of Latin America. To quote from his original working paper on this new conceptual animal, “[d]elegative democracy [...] is more democratic, but less liberal, than representative democracy”². In his later writings, this assertion has both been maintained and elaborated. Hence, in an attempt to direct attention to the intimate relationship between the state and democracy, O’Donnell writes that “[...] in many areas the *democratic*, participatory rights of polyarchy are respected. But the *liberal* component of democracy is systematically violated”³.

Fareed Zakaria has been even more outspoken. In a recent book with the title *The Future of Freedom. Illiberal Democracy at Home and Abroad*, he argues that liberal and electoral democracy have more or less parted ways in the world of today. Quoting one of his passages, “[o]ver the last half-century in the West, democracy and liberty have merged. But today the two strands of liberal democracy, interwoven in the Western political fabric, are coming apart across the globe. Democracy is flourishing; liberty is not”⁴.

The writings of Diamond, O’Donnell and Zakaria have one further thing in common: their assertions about liberal and electoral democracy build on an inductive reasoning. When looking at the world, they identify such a gap. Yet, there is more to then notion than that. A very strong theoretical argument in favour of spelling out the merits of modern democracy with reference to both an electoral and a liberal element does in fact exist. As we shall see, the two dimensions cover distinct aspects of modern democracy. In other words, both ‘illiberal democracy’ and ‘liberal autocracy’ – i.e. regimes that combine the presence of the electoral component with the absence of the liberal equivalent and vice-versa – are conceptually meaningful.

Also, the distinction aptly captures the lineage of democracy. The electoral element dates back to ancient Greece; witness the literal meaning of the Greek word ‘democracy’ as *rule by the people*. The liberal element neatly covers the much more recent Anglo-Saxon addition, emphasizing – at the very least – the constitutional qualifications of freedom rights and the rule of law, *rule for the people*, that is. If a significant gap is separating the two, then it is indeed an important observation.

Diamond’s account of the gap is the most ambitious in the literature, empirically as well as theoretically. Hence, I will stick to him in this paper. His actual conceptualisation is, however, less convincing than his point of departure. He goes on to develop a fourfold ‘typology’ of political regime forms, as illustrated below.

¹ Larry Diamond, *Developing Democracy. Toward Consolidation* (The Johns Hopkins University Press: Baltimore and London, 1999), 10.

² Guillermo O’Donnell, *Delegative Democracy?*, Kellogg Institute, Working Paper no. 172 (March, 1992), 7.

³ Guillermo O’Donnell, *On the State, Democratization and Some Conceptual Problems*, Working paper no. 192, Kellogg Institute (April, 1993), 11-12.

⁴ Fareed Zakaria, *The Future of Freedom. Illiberal Democracy at Home and Abroad* (W. W. Norton & Company, New York and London, 2003), 17.

Figure 1: Diamond's original typology of political regime forms⁵

Liberal Democracy	Electoral Democracy	Pseudo- Democracy	Non- democracy
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The figure indicates that Diamond's edifice is not what we would normally term a typology. Rather, it is a classification or at the very most a matter of 'quasi-types'⁶. And so what, one may feel inclined to ask. The consequent conceptual problem is, however, a very tangible one. A pure classification only covers one dimension; it is an ordering – based on mutually exclusive classes – that refers to one attribute only. In other words, Diamond has drawn a line with 'very undemocratic' in one end, 'very democratic' in the other end, and placed four 'quasi-types' along this line⁷.

In doing so, Diamond is unable to carry his distinction between the electoral and the liberal dimension of liberal democracy over into his actual conceptualisation of political regime forms. In his typology, the two dimensions are not conceptually independent of each other. Rather, they are covered by one and the same attribute. Hence, a country moves from 'electoral democracy' to 'liberal democracy' not by adding liberal merits only but by either 1) doing better with regard to both the electoral and the liberal criteria or 2) doing much better with regard to any of the two (see appendix 2 for an illustration).

In other words, the two 'quasi-types' or 'classes' are separated by a difference in degree, not a difference in kind. This is also obvious when reading Diamond's subsequent scoring of selected countries, an issue I will return to. Taken together, Diamond's conceptualisation simply cannot appreciate his own distinction between the electoral and the liberal component of liberal democracy.

To be fair, Diamond has changed his conceptual scheme since the publication of *Developing Democracy*⁸. First, he has proposed to operate with one dimension only, namely the electoral one. Second, he has rebuilt his typology. Third, he has changed the thresholds between the quasi-types or classes.

The third point, the modification of thresholds, is only a technicality – albeit a very pertinent one which I myself will mention and adhere to later on. But let us discuss the two first corrections in turn.

Starting with the former point, sticking to the electoral dimension is definitely a way to circumvent the logical problems of his conceptualisation identified above. In this way, it is possible to rely on a pure classification, i.e., it is possible to classify countries independently of the 'liberal' dimension. This is an issue I will return to in the concluding sections of this paper.

Diamond does not stop here, however, and this brings us to the second point. Immediately after classifying countries on the electoral dimension only, he reintroduces the notion of conceiving "of democracy in terms of two thresholds"⁹. The first one is that of electoral

⁵ Adapted from Diamond, *Developing Democracy*.

⁶ In their seminal article on classifications and typologies P. F. Lazarsfeld & A. H. Barton, "Qualitative Measurement in the Social Sciences: Classification, Typologies, and Indices", in D. Lerner & H. D. Lasswell (eds.), *The Policy Sciences* (Stanford University Press, 1951), 169 employs this terminology to denote "[...] 'types' which are the result of serial operations on one attribute", i.e. what is normally referred to as classes. Genuine types "[...] refer to special compounds of attributes".

⁷ This is also indicated by Diamond's use of 'midrange conceptions', i.e. regime forms situated between the respective 'types' of electoral and liberal democracy. See Diamond, *Developing Democracy*, 13.

⁸ See Larry Diamond, "Thinking About Hybrid Regimes", *Journal of Democracy*, Vol. 13, No. 2 (April, 2002) and Larry Diamond, *Can the Whole World Become Democratic? Democracy, Development, and International Policies*, Paper 03'05, Center for the Study of Democracy (University of California, 2003).

⁹ Diamond, *Can the Whole World Become Democratic?*, 8.

democracy; that “[...] principal positions of political power are filled through regular, free, fair, and competitive (and, therefore, multiparty) elections”¹⁰. The second one is that of “liberal democracy”. To quote him at length:

“Beyond the electoral arena, it features a vigorous rule of law, with an independent and non-discriminatory judiciary; extensive individual freedoms of belief, speech, publication, association, assembly, and so on; strong protections for the rights of ethnic, cultural, religious, and other minorities; a pluralistic civil society, which affords citizens multiple channels outside the electoral arena through which to participate and express their interests and values; and civilian control over the military”¹¹.

The two dimensions are back in, and – as illustrated in figure 2 – Diamond’s consequent typology of political regime forms is merely a more fine-grained version of his former edifice; which is very much illustrated by the fact that the countries once again move from the ‘electoral’ to the ‘liberal’ classes not exclusively by adding liberal merits but by doing better on both of the two dimensions.

Figure 2: Diamond’s elaborated typology of political regime forms¹²

Liberal Democracy	Electoral Democracy	Ambiguous Regimes	Competitive Authoritarian	Electoral, Uncompetitive Authoritarian	Politically Closed Authoritarian
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In a nutshell, the logical problem of identifying two relevant theoretical dimensions and then building an ordering that refers to one attribute only remains. In this paper, I will seek to remedy this problem by creating a conceptualisation that systematically treats the liberal and electoral element as independent attributes. To be more precise, I will build up an ordering of ‘attribute compounds’, i.e., a genuine typology¹³.

Throughout these endeavours, I build on Diamond’s argumentation about the two dimensions of liberal democracy – it is first and foremost the technique that I intent to adjust. However, as will be demonstrated, this has significant consequences for the actual scoring of the cases and, by extension, for the conclusions about the direction of the current of what Huntington¹⁴ has dubbed the “third wave” of democratisation.

To pave the way for these empirical aspirations, an initial conceptual exercise is pertinent. In order to re-do the taxonomic exercise, it is necessary to conceptualise ‘democracy’. In doing so, I will very much walk down the same aisle as Diamond. But I feel that it is necessary to elucidate this path to avoid any confusion about the subsequent empirical analysis.

2. Conceptualising democracy

Students of democracy have not bequeathed one, uniformly agreed-upon definition of their subject matter to social science. On the contrary, a plethora of competing offers are found on

¹⁰ Diamond, *Can the Whole World Become Democratic?*, 8.

¹¹ Diamond, *Can the Whole World Become Democratic?*, 9.

¹² Adapted from Diamond, “Thinking About Hybrid Regimes” and Diamond, *Can the Whole World Become Democratic?*

¹³ See Lazarsfeld & Barton, “Qualitative Measurement in the Social Sciences”.

¹⁴ Samuel P. Huntington, *The Third Wave. Democratization in the late Twentieth Century* (University of Oklahoma Press: Norman and London, 1991).

the conceptual marketplace¹⁵. That should not come as a surprise, however, and it is not as pernicious as is often claimed. What is important is that the scholar reveals all his interim considerations; play with an open hand, so to say. In a nutshell, the validity of the definition hinges on whether it is possible to understand the researcher's goals and the way these are produced.

I will argue that maximal conceptual validity is achieved by using Giovanni Sartori's¹⁶ so-called 'ladder of abstraction'. In the subsequent pages, I will descend the ladder of abstraction along the lines proposed by Diamond in *Developing Democracy*.

Little disagreement exists with regard to the most abstract definition of democracy. As Diamond¹⁷ so rightly emphasises, most scholars today define democracy as a *political regime form*¹⁸. This understanding of 'the background concept'¹⁹ is in line with the tradition reaching back to Joseph Schumpeter. In *Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy*, originally published during the Second World War, he famously wrote that,

“[d]emocracy is a political *method*, that is to say, a certain type of institutional arrangement for arriving at political – legislative and administrative – decisions and hence incapable of being an end in itself, irrespective of what decisions it will produce under given historical conditions. And this must be the starting point of any attempt at defining it.”²⁰

Schumpeter's proposition makes sound sense. Yet, when reaching the level of 'the systematised concept', the matter at hand becomes more complicated. Schumpeter went on to define democracy as “[...] that institutional arrangement for arriving at political decisions in which individuals acquire the power to decide by means of a competitive struggle for people's vote”²¹, the free competition for the free vote, that is. This pure 'electoral' understanding of democracy has subsequently come under severe attack. To quote Diamond, “[...] such formulations may still fail to give due weight to political repression and marginalization, which exclude significant segments of the population – typically the poor or ethnic and regional minorities – from exercising their democratic rights”²².

Two influential scholars – Robert A. Dahl and Guillermo O'Donnell – have, while staying loyal to the notion of democracy as a political method, sought to purvey a remedy for this 'electoral fallacy'. Dahl²³ has added the presence of the respective liberal rights of the freedom of expression, the freedom of information, and the freedom of association while

¹⁵ For an overview of the literature, see David Collier & Steven Levitsky, "Democracy with Adjectives: Conceptual Innovation in Comparative Research", *World Politics*, 49.3 (1997).

¹⁶ Giovanni Sartori, "Concept Misformation in Comparative Politics", *The American Political Science Review*, 64 (December, 1970).

¹⁷ Diamond, *Developing Democracy*, 8.

¹⁸ See also Collier & Levitsky, "Democracy with Adjectives".

¹⁹ See Robert Adcock & David Collier, "Measurement Validity: A Shared Standard for Qualitative and Quantitative Research", *American Political Science Review*, 95:3 (September, 2001). In this article, Adcock & Collier elaborate Sartori's 'ladder' by dividing it into the respective levels of 'the background concept', 'the systematized concept', 'indicators', and 'scores for cases'.

²⁰ Joseph A. Schumpeter, *Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy* (Unwin University Books, London, 1974), 242.

²¹ Schumpeter, *Capitalism*, 269.

²² Diamond, *Developing Democracy*, 9.

²³ Robert A. Dahl, *Polyarchy* (Yale University Press, New Haven and London, 1971).

O'Donnell²⁴ has called for the presence of a rule of law capable of upholding these rights. Their common argument is that without these, the electoral rights cannot be exercised effectively.

When adding Dahl's and O'Donnell's 'liberal' requirements to the 'electoral' requirements of Schumpeter, we arrive at a double classification²⁵. The first concerns the electoral component of democracy. Here, a country may be classified as either being an electoral democracy or not. To elaborate: either the country fulfils the Schumpeterian criterion of free and fair elections for political leadership or it does not. The second concerns the liberal component. Here, a country may be classified as either having a liberal state or not. To elaborate: either the state apparatus is capable of upholding certain liberal rights (Dahl) through a rule of law (O'Donnell) or it is not. When fusing these classifications, a typology covering the political regime form emerges – as illustrated in figure 3²⁶.

Figure 3: A typology of political regime forms

		Liberal component	
		+ Liberal state	- Liberal state
Electoral component	+ Electoral democracy	Liberal democracy	Illiberal democracy
	- Electoral democracy	Liberal autocracy	Illiberal autocracy

Before proceeding, it is necessary to say a few words about the notion of the presence or absence of the 'liberal state' covering the serial operations on one of the two attributes of the 'political regime' attribute compound.

Collier & Levitsky have proposed that O'Donnell is shifting his background – or “overarching” as they term it – concept of democracy from ‘regime’ to ‘state’ when he includes the rule of law into his definition²⁷. O'Donnell does in fact attribute the judicial characteristics to the state, yet this does not alter the fact that his main point seems to be that the electoral rights will never be effective without a liberal state. In other words, following in O'Donnell's footsteps it is possible to retain the Schumpeterian concept of democracy as a 'political regime form' but – as is also done by borrowing from the Dahlian elaboration – add requirements.

Thus, I have developed an analytical scheme that exhausts the background concept and spells out the possible variants in a systematic manner. The last thing remaining on this level is to specify the connotative definitions of these four types, i.e. to exhaust the property space of the typology. I propose the following definitions:

²⁴ Guillermo A. O'Donnell, “Democracy, Law, and Comparative Politics“, *Studies in Comparative International Development*, 36 (Spring, 2001).

²⁵ David Collier & James E. Mahon, Jr., “Conceptual ‘Stretching’ Revisited: Adapting Categories in Comparative Analysis”, *American Political Science Review*, 87:4 (December, 1993) have questioned whether it makes sense to define democracy using classical categories. They claim that democracy is in fact a radial concept, and go on to demonstrate this in detail. In doing so, however, they shift the overarching concept beyond ‘political regime form’ – they include the concept of democracy as what may best be termed a system of ‘social domination’. When sticking with the traditional overarching concept, it is still possible to define democracy using a classical categorisation (as recommended by Sartori, “Concept Misformation”, 1044).

²⁶ This particular conceptual construction is my own but the exercise as such follows the logic of making classifications and typologies developed by Lazarsfeld & Barton, “Qualitative Measurement in the Social Sciences” : see esp. 155-165 and 169-180.

²⁷ Collier & Levitsky, “Democracy with Adjectives”.

- 1) Liberal democracy is a political regime form that combines the presence of i) free electoral competition for political leadership with ii) the presence of a liberal state able to uphold certain liberal rights through the rule of law.
- 2) Illiberal democracy is a political regime form that combines the presence of i) free electoral competition for political leadership with ii) the absence of a liberal state able to uphold certain liberal rights through the rule of law.
- 3) Liberal autocracy is a political regime form that combines the absence of i) free electoral competition for political leadership with ii) the presence of a liberal state able to uphold certain liberal rights through the rule of law.
- 4) Illiberal autocracy is a political regime form that combines the absence of i) free electoral competition for political leadership with ii) the absence of a liberal state able to uphold certain liberal rights through the rule of law.

We now reach the denotative side of the operations coin, the operational level, that is. What is necessary here is to present a way to measure the empirical membership of each of the four types identified at the level of the systematised concept. I will do so by employing an elaborated version of Dahl's criteria for polyarchy. Luckily, it is only necessary to expand the denotative definitions with one category, namely the rule of law. Instead of seeking to reinvent the wheel, I will use a retouched version of one of O'Donnell's formulations as criterion, i.e. whether "[...] the legal system enacts and backs – at least – the rights included in the definition of a democratic regime and prevents anyone from being *de legibus solutus*"²⁸. This criteria can be added to the original Dahlian list as demonstrated in figure 4.

²⁸ O'Donnell, "Democracy, Law, and Comparative Politics" : 24.

Figure 4: The elaborated Dahlian model

1. Elected officials.	Control over government decisions about policy is constitutionally vested in elected officials.
2. Free and fair elections.	Elected officials are chosen in the frequent and fairly conducted elections in which coercion is comparatively uncommon.
3. Inclusive suffrage.	Practically all adults have the right to vote in the election of officials.
4. Right to run for office.	Practically all adults have the right to run for elective offices in the government, though age limits may be higher for holding office than for the suffrage.
5. Freedom of expression.	Citizens have a right to express themselves without the danger of severe punishment on political matters broadly defined, including criticism of officials, the government, the regime, the socio-economic order, and the prevailing ideology.
6. Alternative information.	Citizens have a right to seek out alternative sources of information. Moreover, alternative sources of information exist and are protected by laws.
7. Associational autonomy.	To achieve their various rights, including those listed above, citizens also have a right to form relatively independent associations or organizations, including independent political parties and interest groups.
8. The rule of law	The legal system enacts and backs – at least – the rights included in the definition of a democratic regime and prevents anyone from being <i>de legibus solutus</i> .

Finally, it is necessary to consider the validity *and* the reliability of the scoring. A high validity will only be achieved insofar as it is meaningful to claim that the data employed measure the eight criteria listed above. A high reliability requires that the data employed actually measure what they pretend to measure.

The claim that I intend to defend here is that the Freedom House ratings concerning political rights and civil liberties will serve me better than any available alternative. This assertion sounds somewhat defensive. It does so because using the Freedom House ratings to measure ‘democracy’ is very much a point of controversy within the democratisation literature.

Concerning the reliability of the data, my conclusion is straightforward. The ratings are without doubt more reliable than anything I would be able to produce on my own – especially since I need diachronic data. Concerning the validity of the data, the index is divided into questions concerning two dimensions, one covering political rights and one covering civil liberties. To describe this distinction, a quotation from Karatnycky – the president of Freedom House – will suffice:

“A country grants its citizens political rights when it permits them to form political parties that represent a significant range of voter choice and whose leaders can compete for and be elected to positions of power in government. A country upholds its citizens’ civil liberties when it respects and protects their religious, ethnic, economic, linguistic, and

other rights, including gender and family rights, personal freedoms, and freedoms of press, belief, and association”²⁹.

This separation is well suited for my purposes because the typology developed covers a liberal and an electoral dimension. In fact, the index is built up around a number of questions that are remarkably alike to my criteria³⁰. Using these figures to measure the empirical distribution of countries within the typology has one further great advantage. It will allow me to compare my findings with those of Diamond, since he, too, employs the Freedom House ratings.

Hence, I will let my two dimensions of liberal democracy be covered by the corresponding Freedom House-dimensions. The electoral dimension will be measured using the values for political rights; the liberal dimension will be measured using the values for civil liberties. But which actual thresholds does this entail?

The Freedom House index assigns scores between 1 and 7 on both the electoral and the liberal dimension of democracy. The most important cut-off point, i.e. the point separating ‘free’ countries from ‘partly free’ countries, is situated at 2.5. This is also the threshold that Diamond relied on in *Developing Democracy*. It does not appreciate my point about keeping the two dimensions independent of each other, however. The most blatant example of this is that a country that scores 2 on ‘political rights’ and 3 on ‘civil liberties’ is termed ‘free’ whereas one that scores 3 on ‘political rights’ and 2 on ‘civil liberties’ is only termed ‘partly free’ – one attribute is simply more equal than the other.

I cannot rely upon this scheme as I seek to order on two equally important dimensions. First, I must have the same threshold on both attributes. Second, a country must pass each of these thresholds to reach the type of ‘liberal democracy’. The question is, however, whether I should choose 3 or 2 as the threshold. As touched upon earlier, in his more recent pieces Diamond has changed his threshold. Now, only countries that scores 2 or better on both ‘political rights’ and ‘civil liberties’ obtain the predicate of ‘liberal democracy’. Diamond’s argument is that this is necessary to avoid classifying countries with severe shortcoming as ‘liberal democracies’. He makes a convincing case for this and I will join rank with him on this point. That brings us to the following operational definition:

- 1) Liberal democracy is a *political regime form where both the former four criteria and the latter four criteria carry an average value that equals or is less than 2 when employing the values of political rights and civil liberties as assigned by the Freedom House.*
- 2) Illiberal democracy is a *political regime form where the former four criteria carry an average value that equals or is less than 2 whereas the latter four criteria carry an average value of more than 2 when employing the values of political rights and civil liberties as assigned by the Freedom House.*
- 3) Liberal autocracy is a *political regime form where the former four criteria carry an average value of more than 2 whereas the latter four criteria carry an average value*

²⁹ Adrian Karatnycky, “Liberty’s Advances in a Troubled World”, *Journal of Democracy*, Vol. 14, Number 1 (January, 2003) : 102.

³⁰ See Freedom House’s chapter on ‘Methodology’, www.freedomhouse.org. To be fair, on both the electoral and the liberal dimension the Freedom House questions go somewhat beyond my denotative definition. For instance, they include a question whether the government is accountable to the electorate between the elections; something that I have in no way built into the denotative definition. This validity-problem does not invalidate my argument, however, and I will ignore it in the following analysis.

that equals or is less than 2 when employing the values of political rights and civil liberties as assigned by the Freedom House.

- 4) Illiberal autocracy is a political regime form where both the former four criteria and the latter four criteria carry an average value of more than 2 when employing the values of political rights and civil liberties as assigned by the Freedom House.

3. A reappraisal of the third wave of democracy

It is time to return to Diamond’s empirical observations concerning the gap between electoral and liberal democracy in the early 1990s. I have now developed a conceptualisation of the political regime form that is virtually a mirror image of his theoretical considerations in *Developing Democracy*, yet differs significantly with regard to the taxonomic exercise. Hence, I am able to revisit and reappraise his empirical analysis.

In doing so, I will solely employ his original analysis for two reasons. First, as already argued his elaborated typology basically suffers from the same logical problem as his original one. Second, and more pragmatically, his original edifice is that which is easiest to compare with my typology because it is simpler.

Diamond’s empirical claim about the gap is not based on an actual comparison between the two ‘quasi-types’ of ‘liberal democracy’ and ‘electoral democracy’. Rather, he employs Freedom House’s distinction between ‘free states’ (liberal democracies) and ‘formal democracies’ (electoral democracies). With these data in mind, he points out that,

“[a]s a proportion of all the world’s democracies, free states declined from 85 percent in 1990 to 65 percent in 1997 [...] The proportion inched back up to 69 percent in 1997 (and close to 75 percent in 1998). But it remains to be seen whether this is a harbinger of a new trend of democratic deepening or just oscillation within a new equilibrium”³¹.

The data-series that he refers to are presented in table 1, adapted from his own account.

Table 1: Diamond’s account of political regime forms, 1990-1997

Year	Formal Democracies (N, %)	Free States/Liberal Democracies (N, %)	Free States as Percentage of Formal Democracies	Total N
1990	76 (46.1)	65 (39.4)	85.5	165
1991	91 (49.7)	76 (41.5)	83.5	183
1992	99 (53.2)	75 (40.3)	75.8	186
1993	108 (56.8)	72 (37.9)	66.7	190
1994	114 (59.7)	76 (39.8)	66.7	191
1995	117 (61.3)	76 (39.8)	65.0	191
1996	118 (61.8)	79 (41.4)	67.0	191
1997	117 (61.3)	81 (42.4)	69.2	191

³¹ Diamond, *Developing Democracy*, 28.

Table 1 clearly demonstrates that the gap between free states (liberal democracies) and formal democracies (electoral democracies) was widening throughout the 1990s. But what happens when the Freedom House numbers are reanalysed using the four-fold typology conceptualised in this paper? The corresponding figures are depicted in table 2.

Table 2: The alternative account of political regime forms, 1990-1997, thresholds = 2

Year	Liberal democracies (N, %)	Illiberal democracies (N, %)	Liberal autocracies (N, %)	Illiberal autocracies (N, %)	Liberal democracies as percentage of all democracies	Total N
1990	51 (30.9)	14 (8.5)	2 (1.2)	98 (59.4)	78.1	165
1991	52 (28.3)	26 (14.1)	1 (0.5)	105 (57.1)	58.1	184
1992	57 (30.7)	19 (10.2)	3 (1.6)	107 (57.5)	75.0	186
1993	57 (30.0)	19 (10.0)	1 (0.5)	113 (59.5)	75.0	190
1994	57 (29.8)	22 (11.5)	2 (1.1)	110 (57.6)	72.2	191
1995	63 (33.0)	18 (9.4)	0 (0.0)	110 (57.6)	77.8	191
1996	64 (33.5)	22 (11.5)	0 (0.0)	105 (55.0)	74.4	191
1997	64 (33.5)	21 (11.0)	0 (0.0)	106 (55.5)	75.3	191

Recall that ‘illiberal democracy’ is basically synonymous with what Diamond terms ‘electoral democracy’. Three trends are worth elucidating.

First, at the outset ‘liberal democracies’ constitute a lower proportion of all democracies in my edifice than when relying on Diamond’s analysis: 78.1 percent as opposed to 85.5 percent. But then the relationship is turned upside-down from 1993 onwards. Whereas Diamond’s numbers hit a rock bottom of 65 percent in 1995, my numbers only reach 72.2 percent in 1994.

Second, and more importantly, according to my typology there is no increasing gap between the ‘liberal democracy and ‘illiberal democracy’ in the period 1990-1997. With the sole exception of 1991 – the penultimate year of political change – liberal democracies as a proportion of all democracies is fixed close to 75 percent throughout the period.

Third, pure electoral democracies (illiberal democracies) are not really a salient phenomenon. In absolute numbers, the membership of this political regime form only oscillates from a low of 14 in 1990 to a high of 26 in 1991 – and from then on hovers around 20. Related to this, I find some ‘liberal autocracies’ in most of this the period, ranging from a high of three in 1992 to a low nil in 1995, 1996 and 1997³². The scant membership and volatile nature of the ‘liberal autocracy’-type goes to show that this is not a stable political regime form. But neither is illiberal democracy. It is in fact very difficult to find very many genuine specimens of either of these two types over the period in question.

What emerges from these differences? When the electoral and the liberal dimensions of liberal democracy are systematically conceptualised as independent of each other, Diamond’s increasing gap does not exist. Throughout the period in question, the countries almost always

³² Diamond has argued that the ‘liberal autocracy’ type is virtually inexistent – or at the very least confined to odd island-cases (see Diamond, *Developing Democracy*, 4). There is some truth to this but there are a number of exceptions, such as Panama in 1990-1991, Kyrgyzstan in 1992, Estonia in 1993-1994, and Mongolia in 1992. Hence, I do not think it is possible to refuse the empirical reality of ‘liberal autocracies’ when placing one’s faith in the Freedom House numbers.

move in the same direction on both the electoral and the liberal dimension. True, there are exceptions to this pattern but that is exactly what they are: exceptions.

Diamond did not have the possibility of analysing the subsequent years, i.e. 1998-2004. What happens if we extend the analysis to this period? The consequent distribution between the four types appears.

Table 3: The alternative account of political regime forms, 1998-2004, thresholds = 2

Year	Liberal democracies (N, %)	Illiberal democracies (N, %)	Liberal autocracies (N, %)	Illiberal autocracies (N, %)	Liberal democracies as percentage of democracies	Total N
1998	64 (33.5)	24 (12.6)	1 (0.5)	102 (53.4)	72.7	191
1999	67 (34.9)	19 (9.9)	0 (0.0)	106 (55.2)	77.9	192
2000	69 (35.9)	19 (9.9)	1 (0.5)	103 (53.7)	78.4	192
2001	66 (34.4)	20 (10.4)	2 (1.0)	104 (54.2)	76.7	192
2002	72 (37.5)	15 (7.8)	3 (1.6)	102 (53.1)	84.7	192
2003	76 (39.6)	11 (5.7)	3 (1.6)	102 (53.1)	87.4	192
2004	76 (39.6)	11 (5.7)	2 (1.1)	103 (53.6)	87.4	192

As can be seen, the gap between illiberal and liberal democracy has shrunk significantly in the new millennium. Since 2000, liberal democracies as a proportion of all democracies have risen above former pinnacle of 78.1 percent in 1990, even clearly surpassing it since 2002. Also, and related to this, the number of illiberal democracies, i.e. pure electoral democracies, has hit a low of just above 10 in the latest two years.

This does not mean that the figures do not hide a significant gap. In fact, they do – and both in the period observed by Diamond and in the subsequent one. However, this is the gap between a large cluster of consolidated liberal democracies and a large cluster of countries with very unstable political regime forms, countries that often oscillate between all of the four types without ever stabilising at the upper bounds of the ‘illiberal autocracy’-type. The former countries persistently receive an average score between 1 and 2 in the Freedom House Index whereas the latter receive an average score above 2 but below 5.

It is really this gap that Diamond zooms in on. In his reading of the numbers, it becomes a gap between electoral and liberal democracy because these two quasi-types are operationalised using one attribute only. Situated in the middle of the one-dimensional continuum, they logically tend to fall into the class of electoral democracy because this class is based not only on electoral merits but on the combination of electoral and liberal ones. To some extent, the same logical flaw seems to lie behind the earlier mentioned observations of Guillermo O’Donnell³³ and Fareed Zakaria.

That the actual gap is of this kind also seems to be Diamond’s conclusion in his more recent pieces. Instead of talking about the liberal and electoral democracies partings ways, he refers to the increase of ‘pseudodemocracies’. To quote: “Thus the trend toward democracy has been accompanied by an even more dramatic trend toward pseudodemocracy”³⁴. One

³³ This is less the case for O’Donnell as he is mostly interested in Latin America, a setting in which the gap seems to be somewhat more meaningful than on the global level. See the Freedom House scores for Latin America, 1990-2004. Also, neither O’Donnell nor Zakaria claim to identify the gap based on the Freedom House scores – as opposed to Diamond.

³⁴ Diamond, “Thinking About Hybrid Regimes”, 27.

could also speak about ‘hybrid regimes’ which is indeed the very headline Diamond is working under in the mentioned article.

The conceptual conclusion is, however, inescapable. If we are to operate with two independent dimensions of democracy, one electoral and one liberal – and if we trust that the Freedom House ratings actually measure what they claim to measure – then there is no increasing gap between liberal and electoral democracy, and there has not been one during the latest one-and-a-half decades. Doing better with regard to one element most often means doing better with regard to the other and vice-versa.

To be sure, these are big ‘ifs’. But the result of the analysis should still be noted because a lot of recent writings on democracy, that do in fact accept these ‘ifs’, seem to obscure these empirical facts.

4. Conclusions

In the present paper, I have attempted to develop a conceptualisation of democracy capable of making a systematic distinction between the electoral and the liberal component of liberal democracy. This conceptualisation – and the subsequent empirical analysis of the third wave of democracy – follows in the footsteps of that crafted by Larry Diamond in *Developing democracy*. However, I part ways with Diamond by operationalising the electoral and liberal dimensions as independent of each other, as different attributes so to say.

To do this theoretically, I have departed from Schumpeter’s classic electoral definition, yet have maintained his emphasis on democracy as a method. Assisted by Dahl’s notion of polyarchy and O’Donnell’s focus on a liberal state capable of upholding the rule of law, I have arrived at a fourfold typology of political regime forms. In emphasising both the electoral and the liberal element of democracy, the typology exhausts the dependent variable of the political regime form.

When I reanalyse the period placed under scrutiny by Diamond, i.e. 1990-1997, I find myself forced to qualify his conclusions concerning the current of the third wave. Treated as independent attributes, the gap between the electoral and the liberal component is not in the increase, and this pattern is only strengthened in the subsequent period, i.e. 1998-2003, where it is more or less disappearing. The only gap that seems to exist is that between stable liberal democracies on the one hand and countries moving to and fro all the four types in the typology – or at least staying in the ‘lower’ regions of the ‘illiberal autocracy’-type – on the other hand. This only becomes a gap between ‘liberal democracy’ and ‘electoral democracy’ when the liberal and electoral dimensions are operationalised using one attribute only.

What emerges from these findings? The paradoxical conclusion is that a conceptualisation that is actually able to appreciate the distinction between the electoral and liberal democracy is little worth empirically. Beyond the finding that there is no gap between the electoral and liberal dimensions, the typology tells us precious little about the dynamics of democratisation. First and foremost, it does not in itself identify the actual gap, that between ‘liberal democracy’ and ‘hybrid regimes’.

To capture this gap, it is seemingly necessary to conceptualise and measure ‘democracy’ using one dimension only. This can be done either by referring to the electoral dimension only – as Diamond has proposed in his more recent writings – or by demonstrating that the electoral and liberal dimensions are in synch, and that they can thus be added up as one attribute. This latter way out of the conceptual mess is that pointed to by the present paper. But the logical consequence of doing so is that we can no longer talk about a gap between liberal and electoral democracy. Needless to say, this conclusion is only valid for the examined years.

Appendix 1. Counting rules

With a Freedom House threshold of 2 on both the electoral dimension ('political rights') and its electoral equivalent ('civil liberties'), the counting rules of my typology are very simple:

- A Freedom House score that equals or is lower than 2 on both 'political rights' and 'civil liberties' makes for the political regime form of '*liberal democracy*' [+ electoral democracy; + liberal state] for any given country.
- A Freedom House score that equals or is lower than 2 on 'political rights' but higher than 2 on 'civil liberties' makes for 'illiberal democracy' [+ electoral democracy; - liberal state] for any given country.
- A Freedom House score that is higher than 2 on 'political rights' but that equals or is lower than 2 on 'civil liberties' makes for 'liberal autocracy' [- electoral democracy; + liberal state] for any given country.
- A Freedom House score that is higher than 2 on both 'political rights' and 'civil liberties' makes for 'illiberal autocracy' [- electoral democracy; - liberal state] for any given country.

To give four empirical examples:

- Afghanistan 1990 (PR = 7; CL = 7)
- Antigua & Barbuda 1990 (PR = 3; CL = 2)
- Argentina 1990 (PR = 1; CL = 3)
- Australia 1990 (PR = 1; CL = 1)

		Liberal component	
		+ Liberal state	- Liberal state
Electoral component	+ Electoral democracy	Australia 1990	Argentina 1990
	- Electoral democracy	Antigua & Barbuda 1990	Afghanistan 1990

Appendix 2. A practical comparison of my typology and Diamond's

This appendix gives two examples that are meant to demonstrate the practical and logical differences between Diamond's typology from *Developing Democracy* and that conceptualised in this paper.

1a) The movement within Diamond's typology that occurs as a result of a given country improving its Freedom House rating on both *political rights* and *civil liberties* from 4 to 2:

Liberal Democracy ←	Electoral Democracy	Pseudo-Democracy	Non-democracy
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1b) The movement that would occur within my typology as a consequence of the same improvement:

		Liberal component	
		+ Liberal state	- Liberal state
Electoral component	+ Electoral democracy	Liberal democracy ←	Illiberal democracy
	- Electoral democracy	Liberal autocracy	Illiberal autocracy

2a) The movement within Diamond's typology that may occur as a result of a given country improving its Freedom House rating on *political rights* from 4 to 2 while maintaining a rating of 3 on *civil liberties*:

Liberal Democracy ←	Electoral Democracy	Pseudo-Democracy	Non-democracy
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2a) The movement that would occur within my typology as a consequence of the same improvement:

		Liberal component	
		+ Liberal state	- Liberal state
Electoral component	+ Electoral democracy	Liberal democracy	↑ Illiberal democracy
	- Electoral democracy	Liberal autocracy	Illiberal autocracy

Notice how a country in Diamond's typology can make one and the same move between types irrespective of whether its score changes on one or two attributes while this is not possible in my typology. This is the practical consequence of relying on a pure classification – or on *quasi-types* – and a genuine typologisation, respectively.

Appendix 3. Changing the thresholds

In Diamond's original typology, the Freedom House threshold was to be found between 2 and 3. This is a threshold that is logically impossible to use with regard to my conceptualisation. But what if we choose to place the threshold at 3, i.e., on the other side of Diamond's but at the same distance from it as that used throughout this paper? Do the empirical (the logical are not in imperilled) conclusions of this paper hold in such a case? The consequent results are illustrated in table 4 and 5 below.

Table 4: The alternative account of political regime forms, 1990-1997, thresholds = 3

Year	Liberal democracies (N, %)	Illiberal democracies (N, %)	Liberal autocracies (N, %)	Illiberal autocracies (N, %)	Liberal democracies as percentage of all democracies	Total N
1990	68 (41.2)	6 (3.7)	4 (2.4)	87 (52.7)	91.9	165
1991	86 (47.0)	7 (3.8)	4 (2.2)	86 (47.0)	92.5	183
1992	87 (46.8)	6 (3.2)	10 (5.4)	83 (44.6)	93.5	186
1993	83 (43.7)	17 (9.0)	4 (2.1)	86 (45.2)	83.0	190
1994	81 (42.4)	20 (10.5)	8 (4.2)	82 (42.9)	80.2	191
1995	82 (42.9)	15 (7.9)	9 (4.7)	85 (44.5)	84.5	191
1996	86 (45.0)	17 (8.9)	7 (3.7)	81 (42.4)	83.5	191
1997	91 (47.6)	15 (7.9)	4 (2.1)	81 (42.4)	85.8	191

Table 5: The alternative account of political regime forms, 1990-1997, thresholds = 3

Year	Liberal democracies (N, %)	Illiberal democracies (N, %)	Liberal autocracies (N, %)	Illiberal autocracies (N, %)	Liberal democracies as percentage of democracies	Total N
1998	92 (48.2)	15 (7.9)	4 (2.1)	80 (41.8)	86.0	191
1999	91 (47.4)	15 (7.8)	5 (2.6)	81 (42.2)	85.8	192
2000	96 (50.0)	11 (5.7)	6 (3.1)	79 (41.2)	89.7	192
2001	96 (50.0)	11 (5.7)	6 (3.1)	79 (41.2)	89.7	192
2002	102 (53.1)	7 (3.6)	5 (2.6)	78 (40.7)	93.6	192
2003	105 (54.7)	6 (3.1)	5 (2.6)	76 (39.6)	94.6	192
2004	106 (55.2)	5 (2.6)	6 (3.1)	75 (39.1)	95.5	192

At first glance, these findings seemingly point in the same direction as those of Diamond. As a proportion of democracies, the liberal ones did indeed decline during the former part of the 1990s – from 91.9 per cent of all democracies in 1990 to 85.8 per cent in 1997. But looks may be deceiving. At a closer inspection, the narrative told by the figures in table 4 is strikingly different from Diamond's.

First, the increase is much smaller than that identified by Diamond and it more or less dies out in the 2000s. Second, I find a lot more 'liberal autocracies' with these thresholds, something that only goes to show that there is no gap, merely oscillation. Taken together, the empirical conclusions of this paper hold and this is only strengthened by the development in the subsequent period, illustrated in table 5.