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Elections Without Democracy

THE MENU OF MANIPULATION

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The idea of democracy has become so closely identified with elections that we are in danger of forgetting that the modern history of representative elections is a tale of authoritarian manipulations as much as it is a saga of democratic triumphs. Historically, in other words, elections have been an instrument of authoritarian control as well as a means of democratic governance.

Since the early days of the “third wave” of global democratization, it has been clear that transitions from authoritarian rule can lead anywhere. Over the past quarter-century, many have led to the establishment of some form of democracy. But many others have not. They have given birth to new forms of authoritarianism that do not fit into our classic categories of one-party, military, or personal dictatorship. They have produced regimes that hold elections and tolerate some pluralism and interparty competition, but at the same time violate minimal democratic norms so severely and systematically that it makes no sense to classify them as democracies, however qualified. These electoral regimes do not represent limited, deficient, or distorted forms of democracy. They are instances of authoritarian rule. The time has come to abandon misleading labels and to take their nondemocratic nature seriously.¹

Electoral authoritarian regimes neither practice democracy nor resort regularly to naked repression. By organizing periodic elections they try to obtain at least a semblance of democratic legitimacy, hoping to satisfy external as well as internal actors. At the same time, by placing those elections under tight authoritarian controls they try to cement their con-

tinued hold on power. Their dream is to reap the fruits of electoral legitimacy without running the risks of democratic uncertainty. Balancing between electoral control and electoral credibility, they situate themselves in a nebulous zone of structural ambivalence. Delimiting the blurry frontiers of electoral authoritarianism cannot help but be a complex and controversial task. Perhaps the best way to get a handle on the problem is take a fresh look at the normative presuppositions that underlie the idea of democratic elections.

But what does “democracy” mean in this context? How sharp is the distinction between “democratic” and “authoritarian” regimes? Political democracy, some argue, is not a matter of “either/or” but of more or less: Democracy is not simply present or absent, but admits of degrees. Others object that a qualitative difference separates democracy from authoritarianism. Authoritarian regimes are not *less* democratic than democracies, but plainly *undemocratic*. While debate over these issues among scholars and practitioners has been polemical and inconclusive, the idea of electoral authoritarianism combines insights from both perspectives. It introduces gradation while retaining the idea of thresholds.

The Foggy Zone

Most regimes today are neither clearly democratic nor fully authoritarian. They inhabit the wide and foggy zone between liberal democracy and closed authoritarianism. To order this universe of ambiguous regimes some authors have been working with broad intermediate categories like “democratizing regime” or “semidemocracy.” Others have been developing lists of more specific “diminished subtypes” such as “illiberal” or “delegative” democracy. Here, I propose to fill the conceptual space between the opposite poles of liberal democracy and closed authoritarianism with two symmetrical categories: electoral democracy and electoral authoritarianism. The resulting fourfold typology captures significant variation in the broad area between the poles without abandoning the idea that a meaningful distinction may be drawn between democratic and authoritarian regimes.

The distinction between liberal and electoral democracies derives from the common idea that elections are a necessary but not a sufficient condition for modern democracy. Such a regime cannot exist without elections, but elections alone are not enough. While liberal democracies go beyond the electoral minimum, electoral democracies do not. They manage to “get elections right” but fail to institutionalize other vital dimensions of democratic constitutionalism, such as the rule of law, political accountability, bureaucratic integrity, and public deliberation.

The distinction between electoral democracy and electoral authoritarianism builds upon the common affirmation that democracy requires elections, but not just any kind of elections. The idea of democratic self-

government is incompatible with electoral farces. In the common phrasing, elections must be “free and fair” in order to pass as democratic. Under electoral democracy, contests comply with minimal democratic norms; under electoral authoritarianism, they do not.

At present, most authoritarian regimes hold some sort of elections. But not all such contests are created equal. It is the nature of these contests that divides electoral authoritarianism from closed authoritarianism. Some are shams that nobody can take seriously; others are occasions of struggle that nobody can ignore. Moreover, as soon as elections cross a hard-to-specify but real threshold of openness and competitiveness, they tend to take on a life of their own. The threshold may be ill defined and its exact position may vary over time and across cases. But once a regime moves beyond it, elections stop being shams and start playing “enough of a role in the constitution of power” to compel both rulers and opposition forces “genuinely to care” about them.²

The present essay will primarily survey the contested center of the continuum, the boundary between electoral democracies and electoral authoritarianism. It starts from the assumption that a coherent set of minimal democratic norms exists that any democratic regime must fulfill. In principle, a regime leaves democratic ground the moment it violates at least one of the constitutive norms that make elections democratic. At the outset, though, let us avoid illusions of precision. The idea of a logical set of democratic norms circumscribes the core issues that must be addressed by anyone who wishes to set electoral democracies apart from electoral autocracies. But where empirical reality is fuzzy, no amount of conceptual sophistication will allow us to draw clear and consensual lines between regime types. On the contrary, regime boundaries tend to be blurry and controversial to the extent that their constitutive norms are idealizations that admit varying degrees of realization in actual political practice.

Democratic norms are not *perfectly* realized anywhere, even in advanced democracies. Access to the electoral arena always has a cost and is never perfectly equal; the scopes and jurisdictions of elective offices are everywhere limited; electoral institutions invariably discriminate against somebody inside or outside the party system; and democratic politics is never quite sovereign but always subject to societal as well as constitutional constraints.

Moreover, the distinction between obeying and transgressing democratic norms is imprecise. There is much room for nuance and ambivalence. In politics as in other types of competitive activities, bending and circumventing the rules may sometimes be considered “part of the game.” Anyone familiar with the often-messy business of monitoring elections knows that vote fraud can be a very complicated, shadowy, and slippery affair that causes domestic and international observers to pull their hair out by the handful. Much practical knowledge and painstaking

TABLE 1—THE CHAIN OF DEMOCRATIC CHOICE

	DIMENSIONS OF CHOICE	NORMATIVE PREMISES OF DEMOCRATIC CHOICE	STRATEGIES OF NORM VIOLATION
1	The object of choice	<i>Empowerment</i> : Democratic elections involve the delegation of decision-making authority.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Reserved positions</i>: limiting the scope of elective offices • <i>Reserved domains</i>: limiting the jurisdiction of elective offices
2	The range of choice	<i>Freedom of supply</i> : Citizens must be free to form, join, and support conflicting parties, candidates, and policies.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Exclusion of opposition forces</i>: restricting access to the electoral arena • <i>Fragmentation of opposition forces</i>: disorganizing electoral dissidence
3	The formation of preferences	<i>Freedom of demand</i> : Citizens must be able to learn about available alternatives through access to alternative sources of information.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Repression</i>: restricting political and civil liberties • <i>Unfairness</i>: restricting access to media and money
4	The agents of choice	<i>Inclusion</i> : Democracy assigns equal rights of participation to all full members of the political community.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Formal disenfranchisement</i>: legal suffrage restrictions • <i>Informal disenfranchisement</i>: practical suffrage restrictions
5	The expression of preferences	<i>Insulation</i> : Citizens must be free to express their electoral preferences.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Coercion</i>: voter intimidation • <i>Corruption</i>: vote buying
6	The aggregation of preferences	<i>Integrity</i> : One person, one vote. The democratic ideal of equality demands weighting votes equally.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Electoral fraud</i>: “redistributive” election management • <i>Institutional bias</i>: “redistributive” electoral rules
7	The consequences of choice	<i>Irreversibility</i> : Elections without consequences do not qualify as democratic.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Tutelage</i>: preventing elected officers from exercising their constitutional powers • <i>Reversal</i>: preventing victors from taking office, or elected officers from concluding their constitutional terms

methodological analysis have gone toward devising methods that allow monitors to distinguish massive fraud from widespread but unsystematic irregularities, but the results so far are hardly conclusive.

As a consequence, the dual challenge of defining reasonable normative and empirical thresholds is often a matter of context-sensitive judgment rather than precise measurement. Difficult cases will continue to stir up controversy. Still, the existence of foggy zones does not mean that no meaningful distinctions can be drawn between electoral democracies and electoral autocracies.

The Chain of Democratic Choice

To survey the complex and controversial frontier between electoral democracy and electoral authoritarianism, it seems fruitful to rely on the guiding idea that democratic elections are mechanisms of social choice under conditions of freedom and equality. To qualify as democratic, elections must offer an effective choice of political authorities among a community of free and equal citizens. Following Robert Dahl, this demo-

cratic ideal requires that all citizens enjoy “unimpaired opportunities” to “formulate” their political preferences, to “signify” them to one another, and to have them “weighed equally” in public decision making.³ Building upon Dahl, let us delineate seven conditions that must exist if regular elections are to fulfill the promise of effective democratic choice. The ensuing list, summarized in Table 1 on the previous page, covers every stage from the original structure to the final consequences of voter choice. Together, these conditions form a metaphorical chain which, like a real chain, holds together only so long as each of its links remains whole and unbroken.

1) *Empowerment*. Political elections are about citizens wielding power. Voters are not picking beauty-contest winners or answering questions in marketing surveys. Elections exist to accomplish the binding selection of the polity’s “most powerful collective decision makers.”⁴

2) *Free supply*. The idea of a democratic election presupposes the free formation of alternatives. Elections “without choice”⁵ do not qualify as democratic, and neither do elections with choice confined to a narrow menu of state-licensed options. The range of available alternatives cannot be something engineered by a manipulative government, but must be determined by active citizens themselves within a framework of fair and universal rules.

3) *Free demand*. Democratic elections presuppose the free formation of voter preferences. Citizens who vote on the basis of induced preferences are no less constrained than those who must choose from a manipulated set of alternatives. Modern democracy assumes that all citizens, regardless of their schooling or social status, have faculties of autonomous decision making which are effectively equal in the decisive political respect. But to use their faculties voters need to know about available choices, which in turn means they need to have access to plural sources of information. Unless parties and candidates enjoy free and fair access to the public space, the will of the people as expressed at the ballot box will be little more than the echo of structurally induced ignorance.

4) *Inclusion*. In the contemporary world, democracy demands universal suffrage. Restrictions of the franchise once commonly applied on the basis of property, education, gender, or ethnicity are not legitimate anymore. The modern *demos* includes all adults save those who fall into special categories such as convicted felons and those afflicted by severe mental illness.

5) *Insulation*. Once citizens have freely formed their preferences, they must be able to express them just as freely. The use of the secret ballot is designed to shield them from undue outside pressures, whether in the form of actual or threatened coercion, bribery, or even just the disapproval of neighbors.

6) *Integrity*. Once citizens have given free expression to their will at

the polls, competent and neutral election management must count their votes honestly and weigh them equally. Without bureaucratic integrity and professionalism, the democratic principle of “one person, one vote” remains an empty aspiration.

7) *Irreversibility*. Like elections that begin without choice, elections that end without consequences are not democratic. The winners must be able to assume office, exercise power, and conclude their terms in accordance with constitutional rules. Here, the circle closes. Elections must be “decisive” *ex ante* as well as “irreversible” *ex post*.⁶ If they do not invest winners with effective decision-making power, then they are only so much sound and fury, signifying nothing.

Elections may be considered democratic *if and only if* they fulfill each item on this list. The mathematical analogy is multiplication by zero, rather than addition. Partial compliance with democratic norms does not add up to partial democracy. Gross violation of any one condition invalidates the fulfillment of all the others. If the chain of democratic choice is broken anywhere, elections become not less democratic but undemocratic. Situated at a middling level of abstraction and complexity, this way of distinguishing between democratic and authoritarian elections offers at least two distinct advantages.

First, it narrows the gap between continuous and dichotomous conceptions of democracy. While attentive to nuance and gradation, it also takes into account “qualitative leaps” in the contested border regions that divide democracy and authoritarianism. It encourages close attention to empirical detail while offering a conceptual scheme to order and weight the innumerable checklist items that election observers use to assess electoral processes. Though cognizant of the foggy zone of ambiguity that spans democracy and authoritarianism, it still provides systematic justification for the notion that democratic regimes form “bounded wholes”—coherent configurations of essential attributes.⁷

Second, the idea of a coherent chain of democratic choice opens the way to “contextualized comparisons” of electoral regimes.⁸ Authoritarian incumbents may play the electoral-control game by attacking any link in the chain. But whichever approach or approaches they choose, the idea of basic norms linked together into a unified whole by the logic of democratic choice can help to reveal their maneuvers for what they are.

Engineering Authoritarian Elections

The above review of what makes for democratic elections takes into account every dimension of electoral choice, from its object to its impact. The chain of democratic choice is complete. No links to be added, none to be taken away. Yet authoritarian rulers may break any of the links in more than one way. The limits of the authoritarian imagination are not logical, but empirical. Rulers may choose a number of tactics to help them

carve the democratic heart out of electoral contests. What follows should be understood as only a preliminary list, corresponding to the seven links enumerated in Table 1 on page 39.

1) Authoritarian rulers may preempt potential threats emanating from popular elections by circumscribing the scope of elective office through the use of *reserved positions*. Some authoritarian regimes allow voters to fill subordinate positions of public authority, while keeping the “high center” of power shut off from electoral pressures. Local elections in Taiwan until the early 1990s, as well as legislative elections in contemporary Morocco and authoritarian Brazil (1964–85), exemplify such strategies of electoral confinement. Authoritarians may also keep elected officials from acquiring real power by establishing *reserved domains* to cut these officials off from effective decision making.⁹ Official posts are filled through elections, but crucial policy areas are removed from their jurisdiction. Guatemala in the late 1980s, Chile after Pinochet, and contemporary Turkey all furnish examples of formal “fencing-off” strategies, with the military walling off certain policy domains from democratic interference.

2) At times, authoritarian incumbents can emerge victorious from transitional elections thanks not to their own “cleverness but the ineptitude of [their] opponents.”¹⁰ With lamentable frequency, however, such incumbents find ways to engineer the failure of opposition parties. Most transitional regimes lack anything resembling a consolidated party system. Alert authoritarian rulers can take advantage of this fluidity to split or marginalize inexperienced opposition groups.

The means by which authoritarian incumbents can secure the *exclusion* of competitors are manifold. The attempted or actual murder of opponents, as in Togo in 1991 and in Armenia in 1994, is the most extreme form of candidate screening. Much more common is the softer technique of banning parties and disqualifying candidates. Expelling parties and candidates from the electoral game is sometimes a simple act of arbitrariness.

Often, however, ruling parties hand-tailor legal instruments that permit them to exclude opponents from electoral competition. The electoral laws of post-revolutionary Mexico kept regional and religious parties as well as independent candidates out of the electoral arena. In Côte d’Ivoire, Kenya, and Zambia incumbent presidents used custom-made “nationality clauses” to prevent their most serious competitors from running. In the Gambia, coup-monger Yahya Jammeh pushed through a new constitution that shut the country’s entire political elite out of the electoral game. In much of the Arab world, radical Islamist movements are either legally proscribed (as in Egypt, Tunisia, and Algeria) or admitted but tightly curbed (as in Yemen and Jordan). In contemporary Iran, candidates’ revolutionary credentials are subject to tight evaluation by state agencies and religious authorities.

Since at least the time of the ancient Romans and their policy of *divide et impera*, authoritarian rulers have been seeking to cause *fragmentation* among their opponents. To outlaw opposition parties and allow only unaffiliated individuals to contest elections, as in Taiwan until 1989, or

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to ban parties in general, as in contemporary Iran and Uganda, represents the most radical device for disorganizing electoral dissidence. But authoritarian incumbents have other, subtler ways of keeping opposition from coalescing. They may weaken opposition parties by informal practice, as Kenya’s President Daniel arap Moi did by “harassing or bribing the leaders of any new parties until splits occurred or key members defected.”¹¹ They may also design institutions to secure this end, as Peru’s President Alberto Fujimori did by securing passage of an election law that mandated an extreme form of propo-

tional representation in races for Congress.

3) To prevent voters from acquiring fair knowledge about available choices, incumbents may strive to prevent opposition forces from disseminating their campaign messages. Dissenters may find themselves shut out of the public space by denial of their rights to speak, peaceably assemble, or move about freely; or be stripped of reasonable access to media and campaign resources.

For elections to qualify as democratic, they must take place in an open environment where civil and political liberties are not subject to *repression*. Nevertheless, numerous regimes exhibit a “strange combination of remarkably competitive elections and harsh repression.”¹² Southeast Asia’s electoral autocracies have practiced “the containment of liberal participation” while tolerating electoral contestation, which has resulted in “a desultory mix of freedoms and controls.”¹³ In many sub-Saharan countries, electoral contests have gone hand in hand with pervasive state-sponsored violence. Fareed Zakaria has described regimes that are “routinely ignoring constitutional limits on their power and depriving citizens of basic rights and freedoms” as “illiberal democracies.”¹⁴ Illiberal they surely are, but democratic?

When authoritarian incumbents go out to face the voting public and get its electoral seal of approval for their continuance in power, they often confront emerging opposition parties under conditions of radical *unfairness*. In case after case, this unfairness has to do with money and the media. Usually, electoral authoritarians enjoy ample access to public funds and favorable public exposure. The whole apparatus of the state—

often including government-run media—is at their beck and call, and they often can harass or intimidate privately owned media organs into ignoring opposition candidates.

4) Ever since the invention of representative government, political actors have been tempted to control electoral outcomes by controlling the composition of the electorate, whether by formal or informal means. In the contemporary world, *formal disenfranchisement* is a very tough “sell” both domestically and abroad. Legal apartheid is not a viable model anymore. Today, even the most hard-boiled electoral autocracies commonly grant universal suffrage to their citizens.

The real growth end of the business, therefore, lies in the realm of *informal disenfranchisement*. “Ethnic cleansing,” the persecution, physical elimination, and forced displacement of certain groups of citizens, as of non-Arabic-speaking blacks in Mauritania in the early 1990s, is the most atrocious way of stripping citizens of their franchise (and much more). Less uncivil authoritarians may resort to subtler techniques. They may devise registration methods, identification requirements, and voting procedures that are universal in form but systematically discriminatory in practice. In addition, they may manipulate the voter rolls, illicitly adding or deleting names, or bar voters from polling stations on trumped-up legal or technical grounds.

5) Voters must be *insulated* from undue outside pressures if they are to choose freely. If power and money determine electoral choices, constitutional guarantees of democratic freedom and equality turn into dead letters. Clearly, violence or the threat of it can keep voters from exercising a free choice. (Intimidation may take subtler forms as well.) When authoritarian rulers resort to systematic violence against opposition candidates, civil society, and independent media outlets—as Zimbabwe’s President Robert Mugabe did in 2000—they may or may not succeed, but clearly they have stepped beyond the bounds of democratic politics.

Concerns about the “clientelist control” of poor voters tend to arise whenever electoral competition unfolds in contexts of glaring socioeconomic inequality. Accordingly, in many new democracies, such as the Philippines and Mexico, reform-minded parties and civic associations have been worrying about corrupt political entrepreneurs trying to buy the votes of the poor.¹⁵

6) Even if pre-electoral conditions allow for free and fair competition, authoritarian incumbents may still try to bend or break the will of the people through “redistributive” practices (electoral fraud) or rules of representation (institutional bias).

Electoral *fraud* involves the introduction of bias into the administration of elections. It can take place at any stage of the electoral process, from voter registration to the final tally of the ballots. It covers such activities as forging voter ID cards, burning ballot boxes, or padding the vote totals of favored parties and candidates. Invariably, though, it vio-

lates the principle of democratic equality. Fraudulent practices distort the citizenry's preferences by denying voting rights to some citizens, while amplifying the voice of others. Clearly, electoral alchemy has been a favored pursuit of authoritarian incumbents worried by the uncertainty of transitional elections. From Haiti to Peru, from Yugoslavia to Azerbaijan, from Burkina Faso to Zimbabwe, governing parties have rigged or tried to rig the vote. In at least half of 81 protested elections registered worldwide during the 1990s, opposition parties claimed that they had been victims of fraud.¹⁶

Authoritarian incumbents also can institute self-serving rules of representation granting themselves a decisive edge when votes are translated into seats. Rather than devising a minimally neutral framework of competition, they impose strongly "redistributive" rules to keep an eventual loss of votes from turning into a loss of power. In Mexico under the Institutional Revolutionary Party, Zimbabwe under Mugabe, and Croatia under Franjo Tudjman, majoritarian electoral rules proved effective at minimizing the parliamentary weight of opposition parties. In democratizing Mexico, a generous "governability clause" ensured that the ruling party could preserve its legislative majority with little more than a third of the vote. In other places such as Kenya, the Gambia, and Malaysia, authoritarian incumbents have relied on gerrymandering and gross malapportionment to help them keep winning despite losing.

7) The last link in the chain of democratic choice is the norm of irreversibility. Elections are meaningful exercises of democratic governance only if voters are able to endow elected officials with real power. Yet even if elections are decisive *ex ante*, with elected representatives enjoying full constitutional authority, they may still fail to be decisive *ex post*. They may turn inconsequential, too, when undemocratic actors put elected officials under their tutelage or straightaway remove them from their positions.

Students of new democracies have long been awake to the danger of "tutelary powers" undermining the authority of democratic politics. Under authoritarian tutelage, elected representatives possess their constitutional powers only on paper. In fact, they are subordinate to the whims and wishes of their unaccountable masters. At the time, Portugal following the 1974 Revolution of the Carnations and Chile after Pinochet seemed to be clear examples of military guardianship.¹⁷

Cruder and more drastic than the assertion of tutelary powers is the classic coup or putsch, in which nondemocratic actors nullify electoral outcomes by either preventing democratically elected officials from filling their posts or by ousting them before their constitutional mandate has expired. Naturally, reversing electoral outcomes by aborting the electoral game leads not to electoral authoritarianism, but to plain (nonelectoral) authoritarianism.

This list of electoral sins raises intriguing questions. Our metaphor of a democratic chain of choice suggests that in normative terms all strat-

egies of electoral containment are equivalent. To what extent is this true? Is it the same to shut out competitors as to buy off opposition voters? Is it the same to manipulate the mass media as to rob an election? The chain of choice also suggests that authoritarian transgressions are equivalent in practical terms. If this is true we may expect them to work like the tubes of a pipe organ. If some go down, others must go up. But to what extent and under which conditions are authoritarian rulers free to pick from the menu of electoral manipulation? Which combinations and sequences of nondemocratic strategies are viable and which are likely?

Unfortunately, scholars of comparative politics do not currently know much about the conditions under which authoritarian actors pursue, or stop pursuing, certain strategies or bundles of strategies. But perhaps the story of Mexico under the hegemony of the PRI can prove informative. There, the ruling party covered the country with a far-reaching web of control mechanisms that ranged from restricted civil liberties to exclusionary electoral rules. In the early 1980s, as the PRI came under pressure to permit democratization, its first response was to apply the “brake” of electoral fraud as a means of stopping opposition parties from making gains. As clean-election reforms gained ground, the PRI’s electoral containment strategy shifted toward efforts to exploit the ruling party’s privileged access to state resources and the mass media. Later, as the media became more open to the opposition’s message and the electoral playing field grew more level, local PRI bosses played their last card by resorting to voter intimidation and vote buying—mostly without effect. This appears to be a plausible strategic sequence, but we do not yet know whether it is generalizable or unique to Mexico.

Electoral Authoritarianism in the World

How can we recognize an electoral authoritarian (EA) regime? No current index of democracy is tailored to register particular authoritarian fractures in the chain of electoral choice. Still, even if we lack good longitudinal data, the careful classification of regimes by 2001 provided by Larry Diamond (on pp. 21–35 of this issue) permits to establish the current incidence of electoral authoritarianism in the world with reasonable confidence. In his classification of 192 independent states, Diamond relies on a combination of Freedom House scores, electoral data, and informed judgment. His regime typology differs from my own in one respect: He introduces finer distinctions in the space between electoral democracy and closed authoritarianism. We reserve this space for the broad category of “electoral authoritarianism,” while he divides it three ways—into ambiguous regimes, competitive authoritarianism, and uncompetitive authoritarianism.

The distinction between competitive and uncompetitive regimes highlights a crucial source of variation among EA regimes: the

TABLE 2—THE REGIONAL DISTRIBUTION OF POLITICAL REGIMES IN THE DEVELOPING WORLD, 2001

WORLD REGIONS / REGIME TYPES	LIBERAL DEMOCRACY	ELECTORAL DEMOCRACY	ELECTORAL AUTHORITARIANISM	CLOSED AUTHORITARIANISM	Σ
ABSOLUTE FIGURES					
Eastern Europe	11	3	5	0	19
Central Asia & Caucasus	0	0	7	1	8
Latin America & Carib.	17	11	4	1	33
N. Africa & Middle East	1	0	10	8	19
Sub-Saharan Africa	5	10	26	7	48
South, SE & East Asia	2	8	6	8	24
World	36	32	58	25	151
WITHIN REGIONS (%)					
Eastern Europe	57.9	15.8	26.3		100
Central Asia & Caucasus			87.5	12.5	100
Latin America & Carib.	51.5	33.3	12.1	3	100
N. Africa & Middle East	5.3		52.6	42.1	100
Sub-Saharan Africa	10.4	20.8	54.2	14.6	100
South, SE & East Asia	8.3	33.3	25	33.3	100
World	23.8	21.2	38.4	16.5	100
ACROSS REGIONS (%)					
Eastern Europe	30.5	9.4	8.6		
Central Asia & Caucasus			12.1	4	
Latin America & Carib.	47.2	34.4	6.9	4	
N. Africa & Middle East	2.8		17.2	32	
Sub-Saharan Africa	13.9	31.2	44.8	28	
South, SE & East Asia	5.5	25	10.3	32	
World	100	100	100	100	

Source: Author's calculations based on Larry Diamond's Table 2 on pages 30–31 of this issue (with small adjustments).

competitiveness of their party systems. While democracy is “a system in which parties lose elections,”¹⁸ electoral authoritarianism is a system in which *opposition* parties lose elections. Still, the relative strength of opposition forces varies substantially among electoral autocracies. In what I wish to call “competitive EA regimes” authoritarian rulers are insecure; in “hegemonic EA regimes” they are invincible. In the former, the electoral arena is a genuine battleground in the struggle for power; in the latter, it is little more than a theatrical setting for the self-representation and self-reproduction of power. Conceiving both competitive and hegemonic regimes as subtypes of electoral authoritarianism sets us looking for the broad “family resemblances” that unite them. For the present purpose, it allows us to collapse both into one broad category.

“Ambiguous” regimes, of course, are harder to classify. Assigning them to either side of the democratic-authoritarian divide involves a certain dose of arbitrariness. Preferring to err on the authoritarian side, and thus to classify democratic regimes as nondemocratic rather than the other way around, I count as electoral democracies only those ambiguous regimes listed by Diamond that show average Freedom House scores lower than 4.0 (Indonesia, Mozambique, and Paraguay). All others I sort into the electoral authoritarian box. Table 2 sums up the resulting distribution of regime types within and across world regions.

The table excludes industrial democracies (Western Europe and Japan) as well as Pacific island states. In addition, it divides the heterogeneous world of postcommunist countries into Eastern Europe (19 countries, including the Baltic republics) and Central Asia and the Caucasus (8 countries).

What does the broad regional distribution of regime types look like? To begin with, the picture is somewhat less bright than one might expect as the “third wave” of global democratization rolls toward its thirtieth anniversary in the year 2004. Less than half (45 percent) of all countries outside the realm of established Western democracies qualify as either liberal or electoral democracies. The remainder host variants of authoritarianism, with EA regimes making up more than two-thirds (69.9 percent) of all autocracies. Overall, electoral autocracies have become the most common and closed authoritarian regimes the least common regime type, with the former representing 38.4 percent and the latter 16.5 percent of all countries in our basket.

Beneath broad global trends lie remarkable geographic variations. Eastern Europe and Latin America are fertile soil for democracy. Around three-quarters of the countries in each region (73.7 percent in Eastern Europe and 84.8 percent in Latin America) rate as either liberal or electoral democracies. These two regions together account for 77.8 percent of all liberal democratic regimes and 43.7 percent of all electoral democratic regimes in the developing world. By contrast, Arab countries, sub-Saharan Africa, the Caucasus, and Central Asia are homes of electoral authoritarianism. The percentage of countries hosting EA regimes runs as high as 87.5 percent in Central Asia, 54.2 percent in sub-Saharan Africa, and 52.2 percent in North Africa and the Middle East. Sub-Saharan Africa alone accounts for nearly half (44.8 percent) of all EA regimes. The most even regime distribution is to be found in South, Southeast, and East Asia. In this large and diverse part of the world, electoral democracy and closed authoritarianism form the most frequent categories, each covering one-third of the countries. Still, a sizeable share (one-quarter) of Asian countries are electoral authoritarian regimes, with the region accommodating about 10 percent of all EA regimes worldwide.

The Power of Elections

Tremendous variation exists within the wide family of electoral autocracies. They show substantial differences in the strategies of electoral containment they employ as well as in the degree of political legitimacy they enjoy. Clearly, some are more repressive than others and some are more popular than others. Furthermore, electoral autocracies vary dramatically in their resilience, longevity, and trajectories of change. Some have been known to collapse in a matter of days: Fujimori’s rule in Peru and Slobodan Milošević’s in Serbia come to mind. Some have oscillated

between electoral authoritarianism and a more closed variety: One thinks of Pakistan and Nigeria. Other electoral authoritarian regimes such as Kenya, Malaysia, and Turkey have been surviving for decades. Still others, such as Senegal, Mexico, and Taiwan, turned into well-known success stories of gradual democratization. Driven by spiraling pressures of electoral competition and democratizing reform, they have made sustained progress toward liberal democracy.

But when are authoritarian elections regime-sustaining and when are they regime-subverting? What makes them now instruments of power, now levers for the opposition? Why do they sometimes keep authoritarian rulers in the saddle, and at other times lift them right out of their stirrups? To a large extent, it is the strategic interaction between authoritarian incumbents and the democratic opposition that determines how the structural ambiguity of electoral autocracies plays out. Yet the ultimate arbiters of the game are the military and the citizenry. The former have the power to abort it by force, the latter to subvert it through their votes. At times, the international community also may tip the balance. Unfortunately, the new global agenda after 11 September 2001, which clearly gives priority to security over liberty, may well end up favoring electoral autocrats over democratic electorates.

NOTES

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1. For similar recent diagnoses, see Thomas Carothers, "The End of the Transition Paradigm," *Journal of Democracy* 13 (January 2002): 5–21; Juan J. Linz, *Totalitarian and Authoritarian Regimes* (Boulder, Colo.: Lynne Rienner, 2000), 33–34; and Andreas Schedler, "The Nested Game of Democratization by Elections," *International Political Science Review* 23 (January 2002): 103–22. On "diminished subtypes" of democracy, see David Collier and Steven Levitsky, "Democracy with Adjectives: Conceptual Innovation in Comparative Research," *World Politics* 49 (April 1997): 430–51.

2. M. Steven Fish, "Authoritarianism Despite Elections: Russia in the Light of Democratic Theory and Comparative Practice," paper presented at the 2001 Annual Meeting of the American Political Science Association, San Francisco, 30 August–2 September 2001, 18.

3. Robert A. Dahl, *Polyarchy: Participation and Opposition* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1971), 2.

4. Samuel P. Huntington, *The Third Wave: Democratization in the Late Twentieth Century* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1991), 7.

5. Guy Hermet, Alain Rouquié, and Juan J. Linz, *Elections Without Choice* (New York: John Wiley, 1978).

6. See also Guillermo A. O'Donnell, "Democracy, Law, and Comparative Politics," *Studies in Comparative International Development* 36 (Spring 2001): 13; and Adam Przeworski, "Democracy as a Contingent Outcome of Conflicts," in Jon Elster and Rune

Slagstad, eds., *Constitutionalism and Democracy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 61–63.

7. On electoral observers' checklists, see Jørgen Elklit, "Free and Fair Elections," in Richard Rose, ed., *International Encyclopedia of Elections* (Washington, D.C.: Congressional Quarterly Press, 2000), 130–35. On the idea of democratic regimes as "bounded wholes," see David Collier and Robert Adcock, "Democracy and Dichotomies: A Pragmatic Approach to Choices About Concepts," *Annual Review of Political Science* 2 (1999): 557–60 and 562.

8. Richard M. Locke and Kathleen Thelen, "Apples and Oranges Revisited: Contextualized Comparisons and the Study of Comparative Labor Politics," *Politics and Society* 23 (September 1995): 337–67.

9. J. Samuel Valenzuela, "Democratic Consolidation in Post-Transitional Settings: Notion, Process, and Facilitating Conditions," in Scott Mainwaring, Guillermo O'Donnell, and J. Samuel Valenzuela, eds., *Issues in Democratic Consolidation: The New South American Democracies in Comparative Perspective* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1992), 64–66.

10. Michael McFaul, "Russia Under Putin: One Step Forward, Two Steps Back," *Journal of Democracy* 11 (July 2000): 23.

11. Joel D. Barkan and Njuguna Ng'ethe, "Kenya Tries Again," *Journal of Democracy* 9 (April 1998): 33.

12. Larry Diamond and Marc F. Plattner, "Is Iran Democratizing?" *Journal of Democracy* 11 (October 2000): 107.

13. William F. Case, "Can the 'Halfway House' Stand? Semidemocracy and Elite Theory in Three Southeast Asian Countries," *Comparative Politics* 28 (1996): 459 and 453.

14. Fareed Zakaria, "The Rise of Illiberal Democracy," *Foreign Affairs* 76 (November–December 1997): 22.

15. See Frederic C. Schaffer, "Clean Elections and the 'Great Unwashed': Electoral Reform and Class Divide in the Philippines," paper presented at the 2001 Annual Meeting of the American Political Science Association, San Francisco, 30 August–2 September 2001.

16. See Robert A. Pastor, "The Role of Electoral Administration in Democratic Transitions: Implications for Policy and Research," *Democratization* 6 (Winter 1999): Appendix.

17. J. Samuel Valenzuela, "Democratic Consolidation in Post-Transitional Settings," 62–64.

18. Adam Przeworski, *Democracy and the Market: Political and Economic Reforms in Eastern Europe and Latin America* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 10.