

CDDRL

WORKING PAPERS

Number 55
May 2006

Political Regimes and Their Changes: A Conceptual Framework

Svend-Erik Skaaning

Center on Democracy, Development, and The Rule of Law
Freeman Spogli Institute for International Studies



This working paper was produced as part of CDDRL's ongoing programming on economic and political development in transitional states. Additional working papers appear on CDDRL's website: <http://cddrl.stanford.edu>.

Center on Democracy, Development,
and The Rule of Law
Freeman Spogli Institute for International Studies
Stanford University
Encina Hall
Stanford, CA 94305
Phone: 650-724-7197
Fax: 650-724-2996
<http://cddrl.stanford.edu/>

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

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

About the Author

Svend-Erik Skaaning is a visiting Pre-Doctoral Fellow (University of Aarhus, Denmark) at CDDRL. His research interests include Comparative Methodology (including QCA-methods), Civil Liberty, Political Development in Latin American and Post-Communist Countries, Democratization and Liberal Political Theory. The working title of his PHD project is “Democracy besides Elections: An Exploration into the Development and Causes of Respect for Civil Liberties in Latin American and Post-Communist Countries.” The dissertation addresses the extent of civil liberty (freedom of: opinion and expression, assembly and association, religion, movement and residence as well as independent courts) in 20 Latin American and 28 post-communist countries. Apart from tracking the development of respect for civil liberties from the late 1970's till 2003, it also attempts to explain the present level of respect by examining different structural explanations, such as historical experience with liberty, ethno-religious composition, modernization and natural resources (primarily oil).

Skaaning has constructed his own dataset and index on civil liberties based on coding of the State Department's Country Reports on Human Rights Practices from 1977 to 2003, which he uses in his descriptive analysis of the development and as the dependent variable in the subsequent causal assessment. In this stage of the research, he both undertakes intraregional analyses, utilizing the fuzzy-set method and OLS-regression, and interregional comparisons.

Skaaning received his B.A. (2000) and M.A. (2003) in Political Science from the University of Aarhus, Denmark, where he is also a PHD scholar in the final year. Parts of his MA degree were completed at Ruprecht-Karls-Universität (Heidelberg) and Freie Universität (Berlin).

Political Regimes and Their Changes

A Conceptual Framework

Since everything that has come into being must one day perish, even a system like ours will not endure for all time, but must suffer dissolution (Plato 1997: 262[546a])

Abstract

This paper elaborates a coherent conceptual framework – a necessary step prior to the development of specific theories and the deduction of hypotheses. Based on previous work on regime changes, it identifies what should be regarded central, peripheral, and distinct regarding political regime and affiliated concepts and rejects several alternative perspectives.

The paper suggests how we can systematize our research on regime changes by distinguishing between different phases and outcomes. Institutional perspectives that focus on both formal and informal institutions and that addresses the complex connection between rules, behaviour and attitudes are found to be the most plausible. The regime definition based on this insight points out four defining principles – character of rulers, access to power, vertical power limitations, and horizontal power limitations. Moreover, the political-institutional perspective put forward enables researchers to draw systematic distinctions between three crucial dimensions (the rule dimension, the behavioural dimension, and the attitudinal dimension) as well as different phases (transition, installation, and operation) and outcomes of regime changes.

Political regimes and regime changes have been among the major research agendas in the disciplines of Political Theory and Comparative Politics ever since the beginning of the first systematic reflections on politics in ancient Greece. Plato was one of the first to address both of these connected issues at the same time. In Book VIII of ‘The Republic’, he presents a theory of continuous constitutional decline. An aristocratic rule – his well-known ideal of a rule by philosopher kings – will, sequentially, turn into timocracy, oligarchic rule, and democracy, which will finally be replaced by despotism; the worst form of rule. Despite the originality of Plato’s reflections on the topic, their direct relevance to understanding the de-

velopment of political regimes of modern times (and probably ancient times as well) is rather limited. Fortunately, Plato is far from being the only one who has contributed with propositions about regimes and their changes. Especially the large number of regime changes and trend away from autocratic rule in the last 30 years, labelled the third wave of democratization (Huntington 1991), have initiated many contributions to this research field. But, then again, in the words of Gerardo Munck, “regime analysts have rarely stepped back and taken stock of the concepts that have framed their analysis” (1996: 1).

On this background, this paper seeks to contribute to the task of regime analysis by elaborating a conceptual synthesis based on preceding works on regimes and their changes and thereby providing a coherent framework facilitating a systematic organization of theoretical and empirical research. The clarification of concepts related to regime change and reflections on their internal relationship are necessary steps to be taken in the initial stages of research processes. With regard to studies on political regimes, scholars have to validate that their centre of attention in fact is the constitution of a political regime or aspects of it – and not another, although related, phenomenon. If they furthermore intend to capture transformational processes, they also have to make explicit how to distinguish between different types of developmental phases.

The present study will thus provide answers to two questions connected with this topic. The first question to be answered is: What is a political regime ... and is not? A second question to be dealt with naturally becomes: How can we systematize our research on regime changes by distinguishing between different phases and outcomes? As the intention is to answer these questions, the paper begins by distinguishing between essentially different types of regime conceptualizations. In doing so, the advantages of institutional perspectives including both formal and informal institutions will be emphasized as well as the relevance of

focusing on both rules, behaviour, and attitudes when studying political regime development. On this background, the conceptual analysis proceeds to clarify other central concepts such as transition, installation, and operation connected to this topic.

What is a Political Regime?

Every piece of rational instruction upon any matter ought to begin with a definition, so that everyone understands what the subject of discussion is (Cicero 1991: 4[I.7])

The first research question outlined in the introduction unmistakably points out that one of the main purposes of this concept analysis is to set up a solid regime definition. Before I embark on this task, I want to make clear that the definition exclusively concerns political regimes. In other words, the purpose is to single out and accentuate distinct political aspects of regimes. This specification ensures, for example, that it will be more manageable to set up a systematic and focused regime classification based on a somewhat narrow definition. Moreover, it appears more appropriate to deal with social, cultural, economic and other aspects as causes or effects of the political regime type instead of as an integrated part of it (Karl 1990: 2; Linz 2000: 57-8; O'Donnell 1999: 304). If they were included in the definition, certain important and interesting research questions concerning the relationship between the political regime and other aspects of the political system and the overall society risk to be obscured, even though they are "just too interesting to be resolved by a definitional fiat" (Alvarez et al. 1996: 18).

In order to end up with a fundamental and useful definition, I follow Giovanni Sartori's fourth guideline for concept analysis which states that, "In reconstructing a concept, first collect a representative set of definitions; second extract their characteristics; and third, construct matrixes that organize such characteristics meaningfully" (1984: 64). Hence, different

regime definitions – several with backgrounds in fundamentally distinct approaches – have been collected and, not very surprising, it turns out that empirical research is carried out on the background of essentially distinct regime concepts.

Insufficient Perspectives

One set of definitions primarily understands regimes as a ruling coalition or group, i.e., it primarily connects the concept with specific actors. The tendency to underestimate the significance of institutions in politics is most conspicuous in definitions with absolutely no references to institutions. This very much applies to Michael Mann's definition of a political regime as "an alliance of dominant ideological, economic, and military power actors, coordinated by the rulers of the state" (1993: 18, my emphasis), and to Peter Calvert's statement that regime is "the name usually given to a government or sequence of governments in which power remains essentially in the hands of the same social group" (cited in Pempel, 1998: 224[fn. 2], my emphasis). The accentuation of the actors in these definitions is so pronounced that the advocates of this perspective talk about regime strategies implying that the concept is deprived of any institutional content.

However, another variant of this perspective apparently holds a more balanced view on institutions as it introduces a distinction between actors and institutions in which both are part of the regime definitions. The advocates of this perspective, though, claim a one-to-one relationship between the dominant coalition/socio-economic alliance and the institutions (Pempel 1998: 20-1). Thus institutions are regarded as mere epiphenomena (cf. Riggs 1990: 235), that is, just as an expression of the actors' fundamental power constellation instead of playing any independent role.

Against this view, Ruth and David Collier have forcefully argued that the regime should not be confused with the particular incumbents of higher state or governmental positions or

the political coalition supporting these persons (1991: 789). Nevertheless, this is exactly what this perspective does. Whether a political regime is exclusively defined in terms of actors, or institutions are just treated as epiphenomena, both variants are affected by significant flaws. First of all, it is problematic that this understanding of regimes tends to diffuse and neglect the possibility of coexistence between the same actor constellation and different sets of institutionalized rules (Cardoso 2001: 127). To illustrate this point, the view implies that governments succeeding each other under the same institutional arrangement in fact should be seen as representing identical interests. Even though this postulate is undoubtedly correct in some instances, it does not have to be so. As a result political activity will appear to be very static, which does not correspond with the political competition in some political systems (Lawson 1993: 185). This particularly applies to democracies where governments succeeding each other often represent different interests, even if no noteworthy shifts have occurred in the basic constellation of the socio-economic groups.

Moreover, this perspective is too reductionistic in that it is unsuited to analyse the game between actors and institutions. This means that the conceptual map is not able to shed light on a regime's consolidation level or the extent to which it is accepted by significant political actors (see below). The same problem is present in connection with processes of installation – the setting up of a new regime type, in which different actors advance alternatives to the rules formerly structuring the political game – since the definitional battle on the formal and/or informal institutional arrangement is meaningless if institutions have no significant consequences. In this way, the narrow focus on dominant coalitions leads to an unfortunate limitation of the research agenda.

Yet another view regarding political regimes is promoted by researchers who do not put forward an explicit regime definition, but in its place contribute to the research on political

regimes by constructing quantitative indices of democracy. These researchers rank political systems on a continuum according to their democraticness. In the institutional view, democracy and other regime types are seen as object concepts (bounded wholes) in contrast to property concepts. If a concept is constructed as an object concept, it designates attributes gathered in a category (e.g., regime type), while a property concept designates a property (e.g., level of democracy) of particular phenomena (political systems), which can be more or less present (Sartori 1987: 182-5).

Both ways of conceptualizing are plausible (Collier & Adcock 1999), but a pure quantitative perspective is inflicted with some inopportune implications. First of all, certain interesting elements of the power constellations and actions of political actors cannot be illuminated properly if the political development is exclusively indicated by an index score. Secondly, the study of events requires definitions of boundaries in dichotomous terms because it is necessary to point out a temporal start and an end (Collier & Adcock 1999: 551). This is a rather central point in this context because each of the different regime phases (transition, installation, and operation – see below) are characterized by being demarcated by the respective end and beginning of the others.

A superficial use of indexes constructed on the basis of the data aggregation can also remove the focus from interesting trends on a disaggregated level (Collier & Adcock 1999: 553-4). It has, for example, been argued that it is possible to point out several major differences between particular regimes even though they are assigned similar index scores (Elklit 1993) due to the multidimensional character of the concept of democracy (and regime). Along these lines, most indexation attempts play down the problems linked with turning several dimensions into a single or perhaps two main dimensions (Munck & Verkuilen 2002: 22-7).

The division of regimes into types and subtypes gives another and, at times, more substantial information on a political regime than an index score, which can be of great analytical value because the causes and consequences of different regime types often diverge in significant ways. Furthermore, a simple indexation cannot capture a shift from one regime type to another and without any substantial changes in the level of political and civil freedoms, such indexation is not even able to note any change.

Formal and/or informal rules

As already indicated, treating regimes as institutions overcomes some of the difficulties connected with alternative perspectives. Therefore, nine regime definitions associated with this perspective constitute the basis on which the final regime definition is elaborated (Cardoso 2001: 126; Collier & Collier 1991: 789; Fishman 1990: 428; Lawson 1993: 187; Macridis 1986: 3; Merkel 1999: 71; Munck 1996: 5-6; O'Donnell & Schmitter 1986: 73[fn. 3]; Plasser et al. 1998: 4-5; Schmitter & Karl 1991: 76). Some other definitions affiliated with the institutional view do not play a prominent role in the concept analysis; either because of a diffuse content (e.g., Mainwaring 1992: 296), or because the concept content – in spite of the common focus on institutions – deviates from the main tendencies in the other definitions as they also include a focus on values, i.e., principles and goals (e.g., Easton 1965: 193).

The institutional view links the concept of regime with institutionalized rules – rules that demand, forbid, or allow certain acts (Ostrom 1986: 5; Rawls 1971: 55) and hereby constitutes a regime – but in spite of this common focus, institutional definitions can be subdivided into two essentially deviating positions. One of these equals the term political regime with pure formal aspects of political rule or, in other words, the formal (written) laws of a country supposed to regulate the overall political rule. This 'classic' institutional perspective that exclusively understands institutions as the formal rules collected in particular constitutions

has been highly discredited (Peters 1999: 6-7; Riggs 1990: 207-8) owing to a flagrant and significant flaw connected with analyses of mere formal aspects; such analyses are not very useful if the real political practice does not coincide with the formal rules that officially structure the political game. This point is important because of the pronounced discrepancy often found between formal and informal rules. The existence of regimes characterized by the presence of a formal set of rules without practical impact on political behaviour indicates the importance of not narrowing the concept of regime to include only the formal rules that are explicitly written down in a constitution and other bodies of laws. In an early and influential criticism, Harold Lasswell and Abraham Kaplan stated the necessity of drawing a distinction between the formal and informal political power structure (Lasswell & Kaplan 1950: 208; cf. Riggs, 1990: 207-9).¹

Then again, the lack of correspondence between formal rules and the observed behaviour is not a sufficient reason to completely omit studies of the rules actually respected; especially if the informal rules are widespread and ingrained (O'Donnell 1996: 40). According to Gretchen Helmke and Steven Levitsky, many outcomes that may be of interest to institutionalists are not adequately explained by formal institutional design, and many of the 'rules of the game' guiding political behaviour are not found in the formal rules; informal constraints more often shape actors' incentives in systematic and robust ways (2004: 725-6; cf. Roeder, 1993: 9-13).

There is an obvious need for greater attention towards the actual rules structuring political actions. If social and political actors respond to a mix of formal and informal constraints, then a sound institutional analysis requires scholars to examine both sets of rules. By broadening the scope of institutional analysis to include informal rules, scholars can gain a better

¹ Lasswell and Kaplan, however, exclusively link the regime concept with formal rules, and even though they point out that there are more than one way to classify power structures, their own division is based on the character of the dominant elite (1950: 130, 209) – just like the perspective focusing on a dominant coalition.

understanding of the incentives driving political behaviour. Most new regime definitions have benefited from this insight and, as a consequence, they are outlined inside an institutional perspective taking both formal and (explicit and implicit) informal rules into account. In this way, the concept becomes suited to focus on the real political practise without being forced to just consider a formal set of rules (Riggs 1990: 207-8). Hence, institutions should not be seen as contrasting the informal ways political power at times is accessed and exercised, but rather as different from the concrete outcome of the political process (Munck 1996: 4).

A potential pitfall of the distinction between written and unwritten rules and their joint incorporation in empirical analyses is that scholars risk treating informal institutions as a residual category. In brief, the concept of informal institutions unfortunately has the potential to encompass virtually all behaviour not accounted for by the formal rules, which makes it crucial to distinguish informal institutions from weak institutions. A lot of formal rules have no, or hardly any, impact on the rules being widely circumvented or ignored, but weak formal institutions do not necessarily imply the presence of informal institutions. It is also possible that there are no stable or binding rules, and that politics is characterized by extensively unstructured behaviour (Helmke & Levitsky 2004: 727). In order to avoid treating informal institutions as a residual category, Helmke and Levitsky have argued that “To be considered an informal institution, a behavioural regularity must respond to an established rule or guideline, the violation of which generates some kind of external sanction” (2004: 727), which appears to be a plausible and operational suggestion.

Acceptance

As was evident in the discussion above, the regime concept also covers a behavioural dimension because of the political actors’ undeniable importance. In other words, the actors’ significance has to be emphasized at the same time as we take the many political actions

affected by the structural frame constituted by institutionalized rules into account. The acceptance of institutions as a significant contextual factor forming, limiting and enabling the actions of political actors consequently does not mean that it makes sense to exclude the actors from the analyses. In contrast, the behavioural dimension accentuates that certain rules are only important if they are observed by the actors; due to the fact that the institutional setting is constructed by actors. Moreover, actors have to decide how to structure their choices and interaction according to these rules and, finally, the reproduction of the operative rules continuously depends on the actions taken by the actors (Munck 1998: 6).

To sum up, at least two essential requisites have to be fulfilled before you can talk about institutions, i.e., a substance – the formal and informal rules – and a certain scope of accept. In other words, a regime is not fully institutionalized until the constituting formal and informal rules are known and respected by practically all major political actors (cf. Mainwaring 1992: 296; Merkel 1999: 71; Schmitter & Karl 1991: 76).² The distinction between the level of formalization and the level of acceptance (institutionalization³) of the rules is presented in a simplified manner in table 1. First and foremost, the highly institutionalized rules should be in the center of attention (cf. the emphasized categories). Even though you might get the impression from the table that political regimes are composed of either formal or informal rules, it is more likely that the effective rules constituting such regimes actually consist of a mixture of both kinds. Hence, the predominance of informal rules concerning one regime aspect does not necessarily exclude the significance of formal institutions in relation to other aspects.⁴

² Thus, it is not (always) sufficient just to look at the governing elites as proposed by O'Donnell and Schmitter (1986: 73[fn. 1]).

³ That is, the process by which formal or informal rules acquire acceptance.

⁴ Notice, however, that formal and informal institutions are not necessarily conflicting/incompatible. They can also be complementary and “co-exist side by side and mutually reinforce and support each other” or they can be substitutive, i.e., “functionally equivalent to each other” (Lauth 2000: 25).

Table 1: Types of Institutionalization of Political Rule(s)

| | Level of acceptance | | |
|------------------------|---------------------|--------------------|-----------------------------------|
| Level of formalization | High | Medium | Low |
| High | Explicit regime | Explicit situation | Unstructured (political) behavior |
| Low | Implicit regime | Implicit situation | |

Regarding the three remaining (not emphasized) categories, it is not appropriate to speak of political regimes. Regarding the two associated with a medium level of acceptance, political situation has been suggested as an alternative term referring to periods characterized by weakly institutionalized political institutions that, nonetheless, have some regulatory impact on the political behaviour (Linz 1973; cf. Collier & Levitsky 1997: 446-7). This often applies right after a formation of an institutional arrangement. Finally, if the level of acceptance of both formal and informal rules is very low, the result will be a period of predominantly unstructured political behaviour.

Besides the rule dimension and the behavioural dimension, it seems reasonable to consider the regime concept to also comprise an attitudinal dimension, because acceptance can take place on both an attitudinal-normative dimension and a behavioural-practical dimension. It is doubtful, though, whether the attitudinal dimension contributes with any extra explanatory power not provided by the other dimensions (especially the behavioural) as it appears that attitudes towards certain institutions are only important to the extent they affect the behaviour of the actors.

Some researchers advance a pure instrumental view on this topic and argue that the assumption of strategic support exclusively based on self-interest gives a sufficient and plausible basis for evaluating the level of institutionalization (e.g., Przeworski 1991: 19-26). The argument goes that even if a regime lacks legitimacy – a felt sense of approved rightness – (normative) opponents might not actively oppose it if they doubt whether an alternative regime is both desirable and possible. Thus, what matters for the stability of any regime is not

the legitimacy of the particular dominating system but the presence or absence of preferable alternatives. A desirable alternative is really absent for likely regime opponents if they see no way to surmount the (armed) might of the present regime (Cook 2002: 76-7; Skocpol 1979: 32). Political behaviour is regular or irregular in relation to specific political institutions, and if you refrain from disobeying the prescriptions of the institutions your behaviour will be positively associated with the persistence of that pattern (Ake 1975: 273, 277) even if these actors do not see these patterns as legitimate. Consequently, it seems unnecessary to investigate whether the actors feel a normative commitment to the set of rules they respect.

Then again, there are some difficulties connected with an exclusion of a dimension referring to normative commitments towards the existing regime arrangement and its alternatives. The view is rather attractive owing to its simplicity, but the narrow perspective means that the important difference between instances where political actors observe certain rules because of normative commitment or – in contrast – exclusively because of strategic self-interest is obscured. This distinction is central because the latter case, where political actors accept institutions without being normatively committed to them, can lead to a change of the rules constituting the political regime in the near future instead of their continued existence. A risk affiliated with the narrow understanding of acceptance only focusing on behaviour is thus to claim that the rules in question are continuously being institutionalized, even though an impending change seems more likely.⁵

Drawing attention to an attitudinal dimension in addition to the behavioural dimension would be the most fruitful way to deal with this problem. Thus it would be possible to capture the dual character of the motivation behind acceptance, i.e., strategy and normative commit-

⁵ In Latin America, the rise of Alberto Fujimori in Peru and Hugo Chávez in Venezuela constitute incisive examples as they observed the regulations of the existing regime when they gained official political power, but soon carried through significant changes of the same rules. Also the sudden change from collective passivity to activity, which in many communist countries led to a sudden breakdown of the former regimes, indicates the need for research on attitudes; if possible.

ment. Institutionalization thus requires that the significant political actors respect a particular set of rules out of strategic reasons and, additionally, that actors normatively rejecting these institutions only play a marginal political role.⁶ Along these lines, a shift in power towards the political actors normatively rejecting the existing rules will have a direct impact on the institutionalization of these rules no matter if they strategically pursue their interest observing the existing institutions or not (Munck 1996: 5-6). This is actually the main reason why research on political actors' normative preferences and their relative importance in connection to the institutionalization of political regimes is of utmost relevance and importance.

Defining Principles

Altogether, the core of the regime concept consists of an institutionalized (accepted) set of rules but the relations regulated by the fundamental rules still need a further specification. The regime definitions sharing an institutional foundation are not identical so there is a discrepancy between the principles pointing out the defining properties of different regime types.

It is, however, possible to accentuate a number of common features. Whereas some definitions just emphasize the relationship between the rulers and the ruled (e.g., Collier & Collier 1991: 789; Fishman 1990: 428), a majority of the conceptualizations⁷ also cover the relationship between the different parts and functions of the political power center (e.g., Cardoso, 2001: 126; Merkel 1999: 71), which is a very reasonable suggestion. A political regime is thereby designated to be an institutionalized set of fundamental formal and informal rules structuring the interaction in the political power center (horizontal relation) and its relation with the broader society (vertical relation).

⁶ Note the difference from a requisite saying that all significant actors have to be normatively committed to the rules.

⁷ In one case, the horizontal dimension is not explicitly part of the regime definition but is included in the definition of democracy (O'Donnell & Schmitter, 1986: 8).

Specifying the horizontal relation, there has been a tendency to emphasize the relationship between the legislative, the executive, and the judicative powers (cf. Cardoso 2001: 126; Merkel 1999: 26; Macridis 1986: 5). One of the principles thus corresponds to this convention and concerns the degree and character of horizontal power limitation. Concerning the principles connected with the vertical relation, a more outspoken agreement exists. One of them highlights the method of access to the principal political posts (e.g., Collier & Collier 1991: 789; Merkel 1999: 71; Schmitter & Karl 1991: 76), i.e., the access to political power.⁸ Besides shedding light on the power access, the definition should also enlighten the other direction in the interaction between the ruled and the rulers, i.e., the active impact on society exercised on the background of control with political positions.⁹ First and foremost, it is important to accentuate the restrictions regulating the execution of political power; the function of the principle named vertical power limitation (e.g., Collier & Collier 1991: 789; Lawson 1993: 187).

Table 2 summarizes the character traits accentuated by the respective regime definitions. Apart from the three principles already mentioned, the table presents a fourth – character of rulers – which has also been identified as part of the regime concept (e.g., O'Donnell & Schmitter 1986: 73[fn. 1]; Munck 1996: 5-6).¹⁰ Especially with regard to non-democratic regimes characterized by rule of the people rather than (also) rule by the people, this last principle enables researchers to discriminate between regime types by calling attention to which (dominant) group the rulers/governors are selected by and/or from, that is, military, priesthood, party, etc.

⁸ This classificatory principle only has a vertical character under certain regime types, especially democracies, where the access to power is not exclusively elite based.

⁹ The omission of this trait among the regime definitions is rather uncertain because, concerning two of them (Munck 1996: 5-6; Schmitter & Karl 1991: 76), it is hard to say whether their principle referring to the rules followed in the making of collective binding decisions is just regards the horizontal relation or also the vertical relation.

¹⁰ Merkel does not include the particular principle in his regime definition, but, on the other hand, he uses it to distinguish between authoritarian subtypes (1999: 38).

Table 2: Defining Principles

| | Access to Power | Vertical Power Constraints | Horizontal Power Constraints | Character of Ruler(s) |
|-----------------------|-----------------|----------------------------|------------------------------|-----------------------|
| Cardoso | X | X | X | |
| Collier & Collier | X | X | | |
| Fishman | | X | | X |
| Lawson | X | X | X | |
| Macridis | X | X | X | |
| Merkel | X | X | X | (X) |
| Munck | X | (X) | X | X |
| O'Donnell & Schmitter | X | | (X) | X |
| Plasser et al. | X | X | X | |
| Schmitter & Karl | X | (X) | X | X |

Note: X indicates that the regime definition emphasizes the defining principles in question. A bracketed X indicates lack of clarity.

Summing up, political regime designates the institutionalized set of fundamental formal and informal rules identifying the political power holders (character of the possessor(s) of ultimate decisional sovereignty) and it also regulates the appointments to the main political posts (extension and character of political rights) as well as the vertical limitations (extension and character of civil liberties) and horizontal limitations on the exercise of political power (extension and character of division of powers – control and autonomy). These components constitute four distinct defining principles which make it possible – complemented with explorations into political theory – to extract attributes (defining properties). These can subsequently be systematically combined into categories constituting a regime typology. This task will, however, not be elaborated further here.

Excursus on Political System, State, and Government

It has been argued that it is important to distinguish between changes in government, state and regime (Fishman 1990; Lawson 1993). In such terminological clarification, it seems appropriate to set out with a definition of the overarching concept of political system, which naturally

leads us to David Easton's classical formulations (1965: 21). Even though his definition is widely recognized, it requires minor improvements. In my slightly revised version, the political system is defined as the sum of activity and interaction of the political actors through which values are authoritatively determined and distributed for a society. It thus designates the totality of political life in a society, where state, government, and regime make up some of the core elements.

Regarding a definition of the state, it is not possible to take Easton's stand as a point of departure. He actually rejects the theoretical usefulness of the concept due to its ambiguity (Easton 1981: 3), but even though the state surely is a very disputed and complex organization,¹¹ it is not an insurmountable task to provide an overall characterization. Based on similar attempts by Max Weber (1964: 1043) and researchers inspired by him (Skocpol 1979: 29; Rueschemeyer & Evans 1985: 46-7), I define a state as a rather permanent set of public administrative, enforcing, and judging organizations claiming and, generally, possessing a monopoly on the authority to make binding decisions for a specific territory.¹²

Finally, a government is defined as the public organization consisting of the small group of decision-makers who control and coordinate the execution of authoritative political decisions. For that purpose it makes use of the state apparatus (bureaucracy etc.) although it is not a part of it.

After this clarification, it is possible to determine the mutual relationship. Regimes are generally more permanent forms of political organization than governments. While a regime remains more or less the same, different governments can succeed each other since they can exercise power by accepting the rules constituting an established regime and without chang-

¹¹ Cf. the distinction between organizations and institutions suggested by Douglass North (1990: 4).

¹² Especially parts of the Marxist tradition have – as an alternative to an organizational view – represented a functionalistic view of the state (e.g., Cardoso 2001: 126). This perspective, however, is encumbered with a number of fundamental problems (Skocpol 1994: 36-7; Dunleavy & O'Leary, 1991: 3-4; 254-8).

ing the basic structure of the state. Whereas regimes are often more permanent than governments, states are generally more permanent than regimes, which might change while the state endures (Fishman 1990: 428). The state is distinct from the regime in that the state is the center of political power; regimes are less related to the political power itself than to the way it is structured. In this way, a regime structures the forming and decision-making of governments as well as their execution of state power.

The Development of Political Regimes

I may begin by assuming, as a general principle common to all governments, that the portion of the state which desires the permanence of the constitution ought to be stronger than that which desires the reverse (Aristotle 1988: 99[1296b])

Interestingly, but also quite reasonable, the rule dimension of the regime concept together with the behavioural dimension and, though to a lesser extent, the attitudinal dimension constitute components that can help structure the theoretical discussions and empirical investigations on political regimes and their developmental processes. The division of the political regime concept into these dimensions ensures that the crucial relationship between rules and actors is emphasized and the confusion of different aspects is reduced. The concept of political regime, as it is understood and defined in this paper, thus provides a conceptual foundation for the distinction between different regime phases that have played a central role in the study of regime changes – especially in research on democratization.

The transition phase has rather influentially been defined as the interval between one political regime and another in which the political rules of the game have not yet been clearly defined (O'Donnell & Schmitter 1986: 6). According to this definition, a transition begins by rejecting an established political regime and (most likely) ends with the construction of a relatively stable configuration of rules characterizing a new regime. Yet this understanding of

transitions covers three aspects of political regimes; each of them (potentially) constitutes a topic for separate analyses. Firstly, it would be profitable if researchers would distinguish between the shift from an established regime and the shift to a new regime (Rustow 1970; Munck & Leff 1997: 34; Munck 1998: 223[fn. 35]), where the last process (installation phase) focuses on the actors' designation of a new set of rules, while the first (transition phase) concerns the abandonment of existing rules. The third aspect – the new set of rules in itself – comes to light through a distinction between the process of installation and its outcome.

Accordingly, the subsequent operational phase is defined as the institutionalization process which begins with the (at least) partial agreement on a new set of rules by the governing elites and ends when this institutional arrangement is no longer operative (cf. Munck, 1998: 11-7). In contrast to other researchers, who only refer to a consolidation phase which is completed when a regime is considered stable (the only game in town) (e.g., Linz & Stepan, 1996: 5-7; Diamond, 1999: 65-9), the operational phase thus covers the enduring process of institutionalization and deinstitutionalization including both stable and unstable political orders, respectively characterized by a high and low acceptance of the defining properties that constitute a particular political regime. The operational phase is thus predominantly connected with one key aspect: the actors' acceptance or rejection (challenge) of the institutional setup designated in the installation process. The scope of this acceptance can – based on the above discussion – be subdivided into an attitudinal and behavioural part as it already has been done in several studies of consolidation processes in countries embarking upon democratization (e.g., Diamond 1999: 65-9; Plasser et al. 1998: 8-9).¹³

It is, in this way, possible to divide the developments of regimes into different, but potentially overlapping, phases based on the relationship between political actors and institu-

¹³ Even though Juan Linz and Alfred Stepan add a third constitutional dimension to the attitudinal and behavioural (1996: 6), this is just concerned with the habitual resolution of conflicts within the given specific laws, procedures, and institutions already covered by the behavioural dimension.

tionalized rules. In the light of the discussion above, the three phases are connected with different key analytical aspects as shown in table 3.

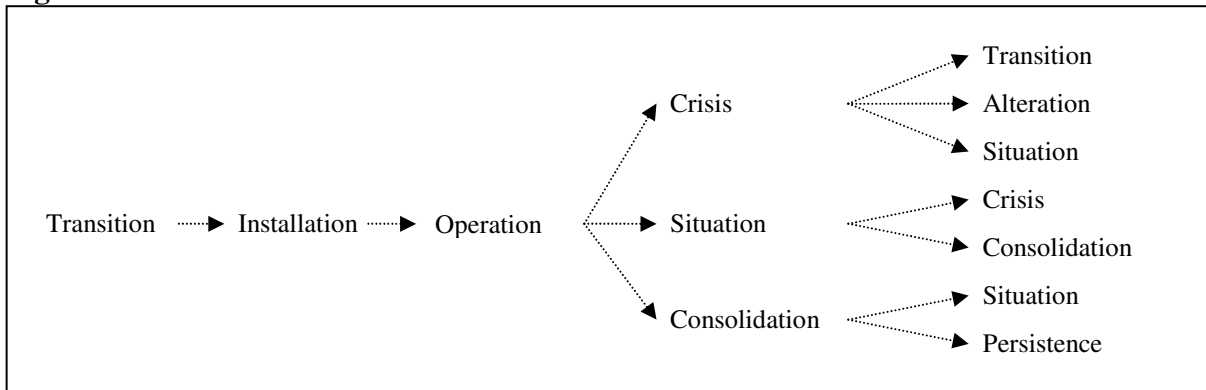
Table 3: Analytical Focus in Different Regime Phases

| Phase | Transition | Installation | Operation |
|-------|---------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|--|
| Focus | Rejection of Rules Transition Type | Designation of Rules Set of Rules | Acceptance of Rules Regime Type/Subtype |

Even though the analytical framework to a large extent builds upon insights provided by studies of democracies and democratization processes, there seems to be no compelling reason to believe that it cannot be used in connection with all sorts of regime developments since, basically, the same regime concept constitutes the foundation of all the different regime types.

In connection to the reflections advanced, figure 3.1 illustrates the (potential) phases and conditions related to the development of political regimes. Building on previous attempts with a somewhat similar intention (Morlino 1998: 18-22; Munck 1998: chap. 1; Svensson 1986), it demonstrates that a transition phase is generally followed by an attempt to install a new political regime. This could, for example, be the drawing up of a constitution or other formal regulations and/or the formation of new – or empowerment of already present – explicit or implicit norms. If, or more likely when, this period ends, these rules have achieved at least partial acceptance. This installation phase is then succeeded by an operational phase. Depending on the successfulness of the institutionalization process, this phase can be characterized by either the establishment of a consolidated (widely accepted) political regime, an incomplete partial institutionalization (situation), or a crisis – the contrast to consolidation.¹⁴

¹⁴ Even though crisis, situation, and consolidation, according to the figure, appear to be a tripartition, I use the concepts as indicators of positions on a continuum, i.e., a matter of degree, in that they express different levels of acceptance. By looking at the level of acceptance, it is possible to describe the political condition in a particular

Figure 1: Phases and Outcomes

In this context, crisis just means that a large part of the most significant political actors question or reject the institutional arrangement¹⁵ as a result of major structural challenges, conviction, or self-interest. Thus a crisis is reached when the regime becomes threatened, i.e., when non-acceptance or the imminent expectation of non-acceptance of the rules constituting a particular political regime becomes prominent (cf. Flanagan 1975: 55).

Should the new rules not achieve a sufficient level of acceptance, it may – shortly after the completion of an installation phase – result in such a crisis. Most radically, the low recognition of the regime can lead to a transition implying a rejection of the set rules, which constitute the defining properties of the regime, and the installation of yet another regime. Such a change in the regime can be identified relatively straightforward if the regime definition refers to a significant change of the political institutions along one or more of the constituting dimensions.

An alteration, which is a less dramatic answer to a crisis, is characterized by changes that do not concern the defining properties of the regime (on a high level of abstraction) to an

country at a particular point in time as being more or less stable instead of just analyzing lengthy periods (cf. Sanders 1981: 51).

¹⁵ These actors are most likely domestic, but the latest political developments in Afghanistan and Iraq underline that researchers also have to observe the potential impact of external actors.

extent implying that it is no longer the same kind of regime.¹⁶ To continue a crisis without notable changes is not a very likely condition because of the intense pressures. On the other hand, an enhanced (re)institutionalization of the institutional setup is also a possible outcome.¹⁷

If the governing elites are only partially successful in institutionalizing their grip on power, we have a situation; the process of regime building is incomplete because, even though most of the dominant actors accept the institutions, some of them, nonetheless, display an orientation of principled opposition. In this case, the character of the regime is not in doubt. At issue is rather that all relevant actors accept the proposed rules (Munck 1998: 16, 222[fn. 32]). A political situation can endure for a long time, but an increased or decreased acceptance can lead to consolidation and crisis respectively.

If the governing elites are successful in institutionalizing a set of rules, the process of regime formation is completed. Only such an outcome constitutes the successful foundation of a new political regime, and a continued successful reproduction of institutions means the persistence of a consolidated regime. No changes will take place in the basic principles of the regime, but minor adjustments will inevitably occur (Munck 1998: 16, 222[fn. 29]). A deinstitutionalization, on the other hand, can turn the consolidated regime into a condition of a political situation and perhaps, later on, an outright crisis.

Conclusion

Definitions are deliberately nothing but tautological statements. They are just starting points for explanations and are not explanations in themselves. Consequently, the value of a particu-

¹⁶ Such changes concern properties affiliated with a lower level of abstraction (e.g., a change in the type of government).

¹⁷ In this way, institutionalization can be a case reconsolidation if the regime was previously highly institutionalized.

lar definition depends on its acceptability to the scientific community and the extent to which it is useful in the research on political phenomena; theoretical as well as empirical. This paper has been concerned with the elaboration of a conceptual framework – a necessary step prior to the development of specific theories and the deduction of hypotheses. It identified what should be regarded central, peripheral, and distinct regarding political regime and affiliated concepts and rejected several alternative perspectives.

The political-institutional view offered clear advantages in comparison with its alternatives, especially because it recognizes that most political actions take place within the limits of pre-established institutional rules. It is important to focus on institutions because they function as a key contextual factor shaping and constraining political behaviour, but, on the other hand, the actors in themselves, who both build the institutional rules and choose to pattern their behaviour according to them, should not be neglected. Consequently, the complex connection between actors, their choices, and the resulting rules are all essential elements to be dealt with in research on political regimes and their development besides the structural conditions affecting the political processes.

On this background, a regime definition, which emphasizes institutionalized formal and informal rules regulating the relationship between the rulers and the ruled, was elaborated. It points out four defining principles – character of rulers, access to power, vertical power limitations, and horizontal power limitations – that signify core aspects of political regimes that can help to systematize further conceptual analyses as well as empirical studies. Moreover, the suggested political-institutional perspective enables researchers to draw a distinction between three crucial dimensions (the rule dimension, the behavioural dimension, and the attitudinal dimension) as well as different phases (transition, installation, and operation) and outcomes. Even though they, at least to some extent, have already been used to structure

research on regime development, there is still much to gain by utilizing these analytical distinctions more systematically and explicit in theoretical reflections and empirical examinations.

The next step would naturally be to link the defined concepts – political regime, transition, etc. – with other central concepts and bond them with more specific actor assumptions. In this manner, empirically testable models can be established based on theoretical reflections by using these concepts as explanatory or outcome variables. A complete conceptual and analytical framework for the analysis of political regimes and their development has not been provided but, on the other hand, some elucidation have been achieved and, at this stage, additional adjustments should rather be gained through empirical applications than pure concept analysis.

References

- Ake, Claude (1975). "A Definition of Political Stability", *Comparative Politics*, Vol. 7, No. 2, pp. 271-283.
- Alvarez, Michael; José A. Cheibub; Fernando Limongi & Adam Przeworski (1996). "Classifying Political Regimes", *Studies in Comparative International Development*, Vol. 31, No. 2, pp. 529-546.
- Aristotle (1988). *The Politics*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Cardoso, Fernando H. (2001). *Charting a New Course: The Politics of Globalization and Social Transformation*, Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers.
- Cicero (1991). *On Duties*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Collier, David & Robert Adcock (1999). "Democracy and Dichotomies: A Pragmatic Approach to Choices about Concepts", *Annual Review of Political Science*, Vol. 2, pp. 537-565.
- Collier, Ruth & David Collier (1991). *Shaping the Political Arena: Critical Junctures, the Labor Movement, and Regime Dynamics in Latin America*, Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Collier, David & Steven Levitsky (1997). "Democracy with Adjectives. Conceptual Innovation in Comparative Research", *World Politics*, Vol. 49, No. 3, pp. 430-451.
- Cook, E. Terrence (2002). *Nested Political Coalitions: Nation, Regime, Program, Cabinet*, Westport: Praeger.
- Diamond, Larry (1999). *Developing Democracy: Toward Consolidation*, Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Dobson, Stephen; G. S. Maddala & Ellen Miller (1995). *Microeconomics*, London: McGraw-Hill.
- Dunleavy, Patrick & Brendan O'Leary (1991). *Theories of the State: The Politics of Liberal Democracy*, Houndmills: Macmillan.
- Easton, David (1965). *A Systems Analysis of Political Life*, New York: John Wiley & Sons.
- Easton, David (1981). "The Political System Besieged by the State", *Political Theory*, Vol. 9, No. 3, pp. 303-325.

- Elklit, Jørgen (1993). "Is the Degree of Electoral Democracy Measurable? Experiences from Bulgaria, Kenya, Latvia, Mongolia, and Nepal", pp. 89-111 in David Beetham (ed.), *Defining and Measuring Democracy*, London: Sage.
- Fishman, Robert M. (1990) "Rethinking State and Regime: Southern Europe's Transition to Democracy", *World Politics*, Vol. 42, No. 3, pp. 422-440.
- Flanagan, Scott C. (1973). "Models and Methods of Analysis", pp. 43-102 in Gabriel A. Almond, Scott C. Flanagan & Robert J. Mundt (eds.), *Crisis, Choice, and Change. Historical Studies of Political Development*, Boston: Little, Brown and Company.
- Helmke, Gretchen & Steven Levitsky (2004). "*Informal Institutions and Comparative Politics: A Research Agenda*", *Perspectives on Politics*, Vol. 2, No. 4, pp. 725-740.
- Huntington, Samuel P. (1991). *The Third Wave: Democratization in the Late Twentieth Century*, Norman: University of Oklahoma Press.
- Karl, Terry L. (1990). "Dilemmas of Democratization in Latin America", *Comparative Politics*, Vol. 23, No. 1, pp. 1-21.
- Lasswell, Harold D. & Abraham Kaplan (1957). *Power and Society: A Framework for Political Inquiry*, New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Lauth, Hans-Joachim (2000). "Informal Institutions and Democracy", *Democratization*, Vol. 7, No. 4, pp. 21-50.
- Lawson, Stephanie (1993). "Conceptual Issues in the Comparative Study of Regime Change", *Comparative Politics*, Vol. 25, No. 2, pp. 183-205.
- Linz, Juan (1973). "The Future of an Authoritarian Situation or the Institutionalization of an Authoritarian Regime: The Case of Brazil", pp. 233-254 in Alfred Stepan (ed.), *Authoritarian Brazil: Origins, Policies, Future*, New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Linz, Juan (2000). *Totalitarian and Authoritarian Regimes*, Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers.
- Linz, Juan & Alfred Stepan (1996). *Problems of Democratic Transition and Consolidation: Southern Europe, South America, and Post-Communist Societies*, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Macridis, Roy C. (1986). *Modern Political Regimes: Institutions and Patterns*, Boston: Little, Brown & Company.
- Mainwaring, Scott (1992). "Transitions to Democracy and Democratic Consolidation: Theoretical and Comparative Issues", pp. 294-341 in Scott Mainwaring, Guillermo

- O'Donnell & J. Samuel Valenzuela (eds.), *Issues in Democratic Consolidation: The New South American Democracies in Comparative Perspective*, Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press.
- Mann, Michael (1993). *The Sources of Social Power. Vol. II: The Rise of Classes and Nation-states, 1760-1914*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Merkel, Wolfgang (1999). *Systemtransformation: Eine Einführung in die Theorie und Empirie der Transformationsforschung*, Opladen: Leske + Budrich.
- Morlino, Leonardo (1998). *Democracy between Consolidation and Crisis: Parties, Groups, and Citizens in Southern Europe*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Munck, Gerardo L. (1996). *Disaggregating Political Regime: Conceptual Issues in the Study of Democratization*, Working Paper 228, The Helen Kellogg Institute for International Studies.
- Munck, Gerardo L. (1998). *Authoritarianism and Democratization: Soldiers and Workers in Argentina, 1976-1983*, University Park: Pennsylvania University Press.
- Munck, Gerardo L. & Carol S. Leff (1997). "Modes of Transition and Democratization: South America and Eastern Europe in Comparative Perspective", *Comparative Politics*, Vol. 29, No. 3, pp. 343-362.
- Munck, Gerardo L. & Jay Verkuilen (2002). "Conceptualizing and Measuring Democracy. Evaluating Alternative Indices", *Comparative Political Studies*, Vol. 35, No.1, pp. 5-34.
- North, Douglass (1990). *Institutions, Institutional Change, and Economic Performance*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- O'Donnell, Guillermo (1996). "Illusions about Consolidation", *Journal of Democracy*, Vol. 7, No. 2, pp. 34-51.
- O'Donnell, Guillermo (1999). "Polyarchies and the (Un)Rule of Law in Latin America: A Partial Conclusion", pp. 303-337 in Juan E. Méndez, Guillermo O'Donnell & Paulo Sérgio Pinheiro, *The (Un)rule of Law and the Underprivileged in Latin America*, Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press.
- O'Donnell, Guillermo & Philippe Schmitter (1986). *Transitions from Authoritarian Rule: Tentative Conclusions about Uncertain Democracies*, Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Ostrom, Elinor (1986). "An Agenda for the Study of Institutions", *Public Choice*, Vol. 48, No. 1, pp. 3-25.

- Pempel, T. J. (1998). *Regime Shift: Comparative Dynamics of the Japanese Political Economy*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press.
- Peters, B. Guy (1999). *Institutional Theory in Political Science: The 'New Institutionalism'*, Pinter: London.
- Plasser, Fritz; Peter A. Ulram & Harald Waldrauch (1998). *Democratic Consolidation in East-Central Europe*, Houndmills: MacMillan.
- Plato (1997). *The Republic*, Ware: Wordsworth.
- Przeworski, Adam (1991). *Democracy and the Market. Political and Economic Reforms in Eastern Europe and Latin America*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Rawls, John (1971). *A Theory of Justice*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Riggs, Fred W. (1990). "A Neoinstitutional Typology of Third World Politics", pp. 205-235 in Anton Bebler & Jim Seroka (eds.), *Contemporary Political Systems. Classifications and Typologies*, Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers.
- Roeder, Philip G. (1993). *Red Sunset. The Failure of Soviet Politics*, Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Rueschemeyer, Dietrich & Peter B. Evans (1985). "The State and Economic Transformation: Toward an Analysis of the Conditions Underlying Effective Intervention", pp. 44-77 in Peter B. Evans, Dietrich Rueschemeyer & Theda Skocpol (eds.), *Bringing the State Back In*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Rustow, Dankward (1970). "Transitions to Democracy", *Comparative Politics*, Vol. 2, No. 3, pp. 337-365.
- Sanders, David (1981). *Patterns of Political Instability*, London: Macmillan.
- Sartori, Giovanni (1984). "Guidelines for Concept Analysis", pp. 15-85 in Giovanni Sartori (ed.), *Social Science Concepts. A Systematic Analysis*, Beverly Hills: Sage.
- Sartori, Giovanni (1987). *The Theory of Democracy Revisited*, Chatham: Chatham House.
- Schmitter, Philippe C. & Terry L. Karl (1991). What Democracy is ... and is not, *Journal of Democracy*, Vol. 2, No. 3, pp. 74-88.
- Skocpol, Theda (1979). *States and Social Revolutions*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Skocpol, Theda (1994). *Social Revolutions in the Modern World*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Svensson, Palle (1986). "Stability, Crisis and Breakdown: Some Notes on the Concept of Crisis in Political Analysis", *Scandinavian Political Studies*, Vol. 9, No. 2, pp. 129-139.

Weber, Max (1964). *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft*, Köln: Kiepenheuer & Witsch.