complices in the silences deep-seated in the liberal project.

See also: Capitalism; Citizenship and Public Policy; Civil Society, Concept and History of; Democracy; Economic History; Governments; Liberalism; Marshall, Thomas Humphrey (1893–1981); Moral Sentiments in Society; Nations and Nation-states in History; Political History (History of Politics); Political Science: Overview; Property Rights; Public Policy Schools; Rule of Law; Socialism; Sovereignty: Political; Welfare State

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Policy History: Regimes

The concept of regime has multiple cognate meanings. Most broadly, it is used as a synonym for ‘political system,’ connoting the most general institutions and processes characterizing the exercise of political power. More narrowly, when power is so tightly centralized and controlled that the dictator seems to constitute the entire political system, regime is used to refer to the paramount political elite, as in the Franco regime of Spain or the Nasser regime of Egypt. In international relations, regime refers to the set of principles, norms, rules, and decision-making procedures that actors mutually recognize and adhere to in their interactions. The core meaning of regime shared by these usages refers to the formal and informal rules and institutions that both reflect and shape the distribution and organization of political power and that constrain to various degrees the actions of power-holders. In this article, regimes and the
Regimes are composed of two forms of constraints on despotic power. On the one hand, rulers may share in the context of state building and with reference to the concepts of state and government. Next, research into the origins of regime types is surveyed, with special reference to the causal role of public policies. Finally, the causal role of regime types on public policy is considered.

1. Regimes and State Building

The topic of regimes assumed increasingly greater importance in the politics of the West in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries as state building extended the infrastructural power at the disposal of central rulers. Infrastructural power (Mann 1984) is an attribute of states, and refers to the capacity of state agencies to monitor society, regulate social and economic activity, sanction certain forms of collective action while prohibiting other types, adjudicate disputes, and engage in other activities dedicated to extracting human and fiscal resources to reproduce and enhance state power. Despotic power, on the other hand, refers to varying degrees of formal and informal constraints on rulers; as an attribute of regimes, it measures the capacity of rulers to act without consulting and bargaining with other political, economic, and social groups. While in many historical empires despotic power was virtually unlimited, the practical effect of the absence of constraints was acutely mitigated because, weak in infrastructural power, the state lacked the logistic capacity to implement the ruler’s whim. State formation in Western Europe threatened to combine high levels of infrastructural power with high levels of despotic power.

European state formation, however, was accompanied by the structural differentiation of the realms of politics, economics, and civil society. Over time, although operating at a variable pace in different political units, the separation between public and private became more and more evident in both theory and practice. While structural differentiation created new opportunities for rulers to extract physical and material resources, rulers increasingly had to bargain and consult not only with traditional political actors and organizations, but also with representatives of new classes and organizations. Extracting resources, moreover, soon imposed new demands for state coordination and regulation to match the increasing complexity of economy and society. Struggles over the content of public policies such as taxation and military conscription became, by the nineteenth century, intertwined with struggles over the form of the regime itself. Over the long term, state power was both massively enhanced and, via changes in the regime, the disposition of state power by rulers was made subject to new constraints and redirected to new aims.

Regimes are composed of two forms of constraints on despotic power. On the one hand, rulers may share the political stage with other collective actors possessing political power, such as parliaments, independent judiciaries, and even legally autonomous executive agencies. On the other hand, and perhaps more importantly, rulers may be compelled to negotiate with actors in civil society, such as capitalists, large landowners, religious organizations, labor unions, and diverse interest groups, who possess resources that can be converted into political power. The distribution of power (the relative strength of actors) and the organization of power (the institutionalized forms of interaction) act as constraints on despotic power and thus constitute regimes.

The concept of regime thus falls midway between those of state and government. State refers to the relatively permanent organizations of territorial-based rule used to generate power via coercion and administration; government refers to incumbents holding offices that deploy that power. Regime refers to the organization of power generated by the state and exercised by rulers and other state officials. It thus defines the routinized relations between rulers and other agents within the political apparatus, on the one hand, and between the state and civil society, on the other hand. Critical components of the regime are the formal and informal mechanisms for selecting leaders, procedures for representation and consultation, and rules by which decisions are made.

2. Types of Regimes

The semantic field of regime types is not timeless, but has instead been composed of those types considered legitimate contenders in distinct historical epochs. Thus, in ancient Greece, political theorists judged the best regime from among democracy, oligarchy, and monarchy. In post-feudal Europe, the main alternatives were absolutist versus constitutional regimes, distinguished by whether monarchs exercised both executive and legislative powers or shared legislative powers with an assembly. During the Cold War, regimes were trichotomized into democratic, authoritarian, and totalitarian regimes. With the collapse of the Soviet Union and the transition to democracy made by both authoritarian and former communist countries, current research treats almost exclusively democratic and authoritarian regimes.

Democracy is an example of what philosophers call an ‘essentially contested concept,’ a concept that straddles the divide between empirical and normative criteria. These normative criteria are evident in the proliferation of subtypes of democracy characterized by rival contentions about the proper goals of democracy, ranging from the defense of individual rights and freedoms of liberal democracy to the extension of rights to the economic and social realms in social democracy (Gutman 1993).
Wishing to avoid the complex debates surrounding this array of goals to be pursued by a regime in order for it to be called a democracy, most scholars engaged in empirical work on political regimes in the post-World War Two period have subscribed to a strictly institutional definition of democracy. In an early and still influential statement, Joseph Schumpeter (1942, p. 269) identified close links between democracy and capitalism, and defined the former as an 'institutional arrangement for arriving at political decisions in which individuals acquire the power to decide by means of a competitive struggle for the people’s vote.' A minimal procedural definition, however, runs the risk of committing the 'electoral fallacy:’ the failure to recognize situations in which civilian political leaders gain access to office via popular mandate but do not truly represent the electorate; because they win elections via corruption and manipulation of the political process; because they do not exercise de facto control over non-elected military officers and state officials; or because civil society does not have the informational and organizational capacity to monitor government actions and express dissatisfaction with policies. In any of these scenarios, elections do not produce genuine accountability of elected officials to the electorate. In many circumstances, then, it may be difficult to distinguish analytically between the institutional procedures of democracy and the goals democratic practices are designed to achieve. Indeed, insofar as both politicians and the electorate understand elections as an opportunity to exchange loyalty for material benefits and readily assent to these practices, then elections may be understood as opportunities to express mutuality and reciprocal solidarity, not as a means of holding governments accountable. In this scenario, votes may truly reflect genuine preferences of the electorate yet, given the cultural construction of the meaning of elections, it is not clear whether to label this regime democratic (Schaffer 1998).

One way to bridge the institutional and the goal-oriented approaches is to return to the definition of regime and consider democracy as a constraint on power. Modern democracies emerged in national political systems that were products of centuries of state formation, producing far greater infrastructural power than any political systems in the past. Barring constraints on despotic power, rulers of modern states would be capable of achieving their preferences by directly imposing them on all other actors expressing rival preferences, by firmly controlling the processes by which decisions are made to pre-empt the expression of rival preferences, or even to shape the consciousness and preferences of less powerful actors. Consequently, unconstrained rulers with infrastructural power at their disposal would be relatively certain of prevailing in conflicts with other power-holders or actors in civil society. Moreover, insofar as the structures of modern states are relatively durable, unconstrained rulers would have relatively permanent power. Finally, in the absence of constraints, power could be deployed in any and all realms of society, polity, and economy.

Movements for democracy were efforts to contain the arbitrary exercise of power and to redirect its use toward new goals by making governments accountable to and representative of an electorate whose membership was enlarged in the nineteenth century and swelled in the twentieth century. These goals were achieved by placing constitutional limitations on the actions of governments, establishing rights of citizenship, and licensing citizens to participate in the formation of governments and the formulation of policies. As a result, despotic power was sharply constrained: outcomes of conflicts over access to office or policies enacted while in office became increasingly uncertain, and any advantage enjoyed by political leaders became both increasingly temporary and subject to constitutional limitations. The basic principles of democratic regimes, in other words, are that power can be exercised in only a delimited realm of areas; the outcomes of all political conflicts are uncertain; and, therefore, governments are temporary (Przeworski 1991, Lawson 1993).

Making these principles of uncertain, temporary, and restricted exercise of power concrete requires a range of specific institutional arrangements that permit civil society to express preferences and monitor government adherence to them, and that permit an opposition to challenge governments in power with a genuine possibility of becoming the government. Eight institutional criteria are necessary for citizens to have the opportunity to formulate preferences, communicate them to governing authorities, and have those preferences considered in the conduct of government: freedom to join and form organizations; freedom of expression; the right to vote; the right to hold office; the right of political leaders to compete for support; alternative sources of information; free and fair elections; and institutions for making government policies depend on votes and other expressions of preference (Dahl 1971).

By focusing on the institutional arrangements that make the exercise of power relatively restricted, uncertain, and temporary, this definition treats all nondemocratic regimes as a homogenous residual category. In fact, via reference to more specific attributes of the distribution and organization of power, a number of subtypes of authoritarian regimes can be identified, including but not limited to autocratic, totalitarian, absolutist, traditional, monarchic, oligarchic, and sultanistic regimes. By the same token, democratic regimes can—and for many purposes should—be disaggregated into numerous subtypes. Examples of 'modified' democracy in which some features of full democracy are absent include 'controlled' democracy in which some segments of the political spectrum are banned from competition, and illiberal democracy in which civil liberties are incompletely recognized.
3. Origins of Regime Types

The major cleavage in theoretical debates over the origins of democracy and dictatorship divides structuralist accounts that assign primary causal weight to situational factors from agency-based accounts emphasizing the role of political actors who are relatively unconstrained by environmental factors. Structural explanations can in turn be subdivided into nomothetic accounts positing quasi-universal trajectories of socioeconomic change affecting regime types and historically specific explanations. Among the latter, of particular importance are theories that view regime types as functions of particular constellations of public policies.

3.1 Universal Preconditions

Building on ideas that originated in ancient Greek political thought and that can be traced through the Enlightenment, the most influential theories of regime change in the post-World War Two period have been those that understand economic development and cultural change to be important, if not absolutely necessary, influences on democratization. Studies relying on increasingly refined conceptualizations, reliable data bases, and sophisticated statistical techniques have largely replicated the findings of earlier, relatively crude empirical studies: a strong relationship exists between the level of socioeconomic development—essentially, increasing wealth accompanied by multiple correlates—and democracy. A number of scholars have suggested that this relationship verges on the status of a sociological law.

Several analytic defects, however, motivate scholars to propose alternative theoretical positions. First, questions remain about the causal mechanisms underpinning the statistical relationship between prosperity and democracy. One of the earliest statements of this hypothesis briefly alluded to a number of causal pathways by which increased wealth would promote the spread of values of moderation and toleration, thereby immunizing polities from extremist politics (Lipset 1959). The articulation of increasingly sophisticated statistical studies linking socioeconomic development to democracy has not been accompanied by commensurate analysis of the intervening causal mechanisms. There is yet no systematic evidence that economic development is causally related to democracy primarily via changes in values. Consequently, many studies of political culture and democracy reject the claim that pro-democratic changes in values are necessarily preceded by socioeconomic development. Instead, the cluster of attitudes seen as conducive to democracy has been attributed to political learning, political socialization, institutional change, international diffusion effects, and habits learned from the routine practices of politics itself (Diamond 1993). Even these sources of democratic norms of moderation and tolerance, once decoupled from economic development, have been only contingently tied to democratization.

A second problem stems from the ambiguous specification of the causal relationship between wealth and democracy: rising wealth has been hypothesized both as helping to sustain democracy, but also as helping to generate democracy. Statistical tests have frequently conflated the two issues, despite warnings by prominent scholars to maintain the distinction and treat the two issues separately. When statistical tests are designed to discover the exact nature of the empirical relationship, the best evidence is that heterogeneous factors account for the origins of democracies; once established, rising levels of wealth help to stabilize democracy without causing it (Przeworski and Limongi 1997).

Finally, in response to democratic breakdowns in the 1960s and 1970s, scholars criticized the universality of the claim, restricting its validity to the earlier developers in Europe and Anglo-American countries, and contending that modernization in later developers would issue in diverse trajectories of political change. In one variant of this position, scholars argued that economic modernization in the twentieth century might actually require a set of public policies such as capital accumulation and investment in heavy industries that could only be implemented by authoritarian political systems; developing countries faced the terrible dilemma of a trade-off between prosperity and political liberty. Alternatively, socioeconomic modernization disrupted people from old patterns of culture and social interaction, and raised their expectations of increasing material gain. When these expectations could not be met, and in the absence of robust political institutions such as mass parties, political instability and military rule typically followed.

Thus, by the mid-1970s, the prospects for new democracies were considered highly unfavorable. Either economic development would be associated with authoritarian governments or, if one maintained loyalty to the modernization hypothesis, given the global recession of mid-decade and the debt crisis that spread through the developing world in the early 1980s, democracy-inducing development was not on the horizon. Political scientists were thus caught largely by surprise by the wave of democratization that began in Southern Europe in the mid-1970s and spread, over the next two decades, to Latin America, Eastern Europe, Asia, and Africa.

3.2 Process-based Theories

Reacting to the predictive failures of both modernization theory and its critical rivals, scholars articulated
a model of regime change that downplayed the role of sociological, cultural, and economic conditions and highlighted the importance of relatively indeterminate transition processes. These transition processes are indeterminate because imperfect information, malleable interests and identities, rapidly changing strategic calculations, and a strong role for contingent events combine in various permutations to preclude structuralist accounts of regime change. In other words, during periods of regime transitions, when previous rules and institutions have been suspended, actors typically find that their identities and interests are subject to change; consequently, it becomes extremely difficult to devise coherent strategies driving goal-oriented behavior; and events that might previously have been considered routine may take on additional significance, forcing actors to recalculate their strategies and their goals. All of these factors do not aggregate into a single model or theory of regime change; rather, they all suggest why the constraints exercised by structural conditions will be loosened, opening up considerable space for politicians to exercise initiative and craft novel outcomes that might have seemed otherwise infeasible. Just as there are no inexorable preconditions for democracy, seemingly unavoidable democratic breakdowns in the past could have been avoided by only incremental changes in actors’ perceptions that would have permitted a greater degree of trust and collaboration on behalf of shared goals. Finally, to the extent that relevant actors cannot predict outcomes, normal social science methodology oriented to discovering law-like behavior will be inappropriate to the analysis of democratic transitions (O’Donnell and Schmitter 1986).

The focus on actors and their strategic interactions has undoubtedly been a useful corrective to analyses that focused exclusively on environmental factors. But actor-oriented models may have gone too far in their rejection of any meaningful role for structural conditions, prompting critics to charge this literature with excessive voluntarism. Reviewers of this literature have regularly claimed that its authors too readily dismiss the importance of a range of structural factors other than the level of economic development. Moreover, they point out, it has proven difficult for transitions scholars completely to excise structural factors that regularly appear, either in explanations of individual cases or in the acknowledgement of the ‘long-run’ causal impact of macro-level factors. Methodologically, these analyses have been overwhelmingly based on countries that have successfully democratized. Persistent authoritarian regimes have not been systematically incorporated into the analysis of regime change. This bias in the selection of cases and the failure to consider the full range of structural factors raises the strong possibility that those cases that democratized might all share one or more structural factors distinguishing them from those cases that have not democratized.

3.3 Macro-historical Analyses

It seems highly likely, therefore, that subsequent research will continue to draw on a third approach to regime change: macro-historical studies. These analyses occupy a middle position between the universalism of modernization theory and the particularity of transitions studies by wagering that a relatively delimited set of historically specific constellations of structural factors can be identified that will account for regime change in clusters of cases. In contrast to the emphasis on values and cultural change of modernization theory, the causal mechanisms adduced by these approaches are typically rooted in the conflictual relations of rational actors pursuing their interests.

A seminal work in this approach is Barrington Moore Jr.’s (1966) analysis of the divergent regime outcomes associated with European economic modernization. For Moore, various relations between the crown, landed aristocracies, and urban bourgeoisies at the time of the commercialization of agriculture determined whether modern regimes would be democratic or authoritarian. For democracy, a strong bourgeoisie had to be the dominant partner of landed elites in a coalition that sought to check royal power. When bourgeoisies were not available to play this leading role, divergent relations between landed elites and peasants determined whether twentieth-century authoritarian regimes would be fascist or communist. Recent theorists follow Moore’s suggestion that the relative strength of classes determines regime outcomes, but propose that the key to democracy lies in the weakening of antidemocratic landed classes and the strengthening of pro-democratic urban working classes (Rueschemeyer et al. 1992).

A second approach focuses less on relative class power and more on the consequences of divergent patterns of interclass coalitions. In this approach, groups embroiled in political-economic conflicts seek allies from among urban workers or rural cultivators, or both, as a means of vanquishing rivals. Regime outcomes are by-products of the political bargains sealing these class alliances (Luebbert 1991).

Another macro-historical approach links regime outcomes to patterns of state formation. As European rulers sought to increase tax burdens and to recruit manpower from their populations, they were forced to bargain with other power-holders who controlled access to those resources: landed elites and urban capitalists (Tilly 1990). Those bargains had a powerful influence on the structure of ensuing states and on the nature of the political regime. The availability of liquid capital in countries such as England and Holland, for example, tended to produce less bulky state apparatuses and more restrictions on despotic power, as holders of moveable assets otherwise beyond the reach of rulers were able to secure some control over public policy and more transparent and accountable administrative procedures in exchange for financing war-
making and state building. Indeed, in these instances, many of the limitations on despotic power established in the late medieval period such as parliaments, independent judiciaries, rudimentary rights, and the rule of law persisted into the early modern period and beyond to the twentieth century (Downing 1992). In contrast, in regions where urban capitalists were few in number and limited in wealth, rulers tended to bargain with landed elites. In these cases, medieval limitations on despotic power were abolished, absolutist regimes were established, and the prospects for stable democracy in the twentieth century were diminished.

These state-building patterns have not been reproduced outside of Europe. Instead, a repeated theme of non-European political development has been the deviation from European patterns due precisely to the existence of wealthier European states that financed non-European state formation, precluding rulers in the periphery from the need to bargain with their own populations. Assuming some conditional relationship between taxation and representation, the reliance of states on external sources of finance such as flows of foreign aid or sale of commodities by state-owned companies forms a potent obstacle to democracy. Moreover, the sale of advanced military hardware and the training of officer corps in both external and internal warfare gives third world states a powerful coercive edge over their civil societies and often gives military officers an edge over civilian officials. Finally, in times of crisis, foreign interventions have and undoubtedly will continue to shape regime outcomes in the non-European world.

At their best, macro-historical analyses are equally attentive to historical particularity, large-scale global processes, and the linkages between situational variables and individual action. But the search for clusters of variables explaining groups of cases can easily be replaced by purely idiographic explanations of individual cases, especially as the wealth of plausible hypotheses and of partially confirmatory evidence renders difficult the extension of any one model to multiple cases in different world-historical settings. Moreover the link between macro-structural variables and individual action is more often imputed than carefully theorized and researched. Finally, in light of efforts to capture at least some particularity of individual cases, there has perhaps been insufficient attention to hypotheses motivating more universalistic theories, such as the development of capitalism. It has been noted with increasing concern, for example, that recently created democracies in Latin America and elsewhere may be grafts of formal institutional structures on to deeply antidemocratic behavioral patterns. To what extent can these variants of democracy be explained by late development and global capitalism? Scholars seeking middle-range hypotheses have underemphasized this sort of research, the provenance of large-n statistical studies. Future research may have to give even more weight to both nomological theorems and the specification and verification of macro-micro links.

4. Regime Types and Public Policy

Political scientists have frequently invoked regime types as an influential cause of public policies, particularly in the study of the political determinants of economic policies. In the 1960s, scholars openly wondered whether economic development in the postcolonial world would require authoritarian governments. By the mid-1970s, the end of the postwar growth period and manifestations of domestic political instability prompted some theorists to suggest the onset of a crisis of democratic governability in the advanced industrial nations as well.

In the short term, the hypothesized implication of democratic regimes is the ‘political business cycle.’ According to this theory, instrumentally rational political leaders who seek above all else to win elections will use their power to alter the economy by reducing unemployment in the period leading up to elections. After being rewarded by voters with re-election, leaders will impose austerity policies to eliminate the inflation induced by pre-election policies. Under democracy, then, economic policy would always be held hostage to the goals of egoistic politicians, resulting in regular macroeconomic instability that follows a ‘stop-and-go’ pattern. Over the longer term, the hypothesized consequences of democratic regimes were even more alarming. In the well-known analysis of Mancur Olson (1982), special-interest groups formed, under most circumstances, distributive coalitions that sought to increase the economic welfare of their members, typically via pushing for policies that were highly detrimental to overall growth, such as protection or halting the spread of labor-replacing technology. Under conditions of liberal democracy, there were no impediments to the growth of distributive coalitions other than collective action problems within each organization, problems that were likely to be overcome with sufficient time. Consequently, the fastest growing of the advanced economies in the postwar period were those like Germany and Japan which had experienced a fascist interlude that had eliminated most special-interest groups, granting them a period of rapid growth before the inevitable decline set in. The basic logic of these arguments was applied to the developing world as well. Given a trade-off between consumption and investment, democratic governments were seen as more likely to engage in vote-buying behavior and thus less likely to impose policies that delayed consumption on behalf of capital accumulation and long-term growth.

More recent research and theorizing have cast considerable doubt on these arguments. While data
demonstrates a political business cycle in some countries, that evidence is equivocal. When larger samples of countries are studied, the evidence for a business cycle is very weak. One reason that no such cycle can be shown to be consistently evident is that voters, while certainly influenced by economic matters, are best understood as considering both retrospective and prospective components of the economy, effectively canceling out the efforts of politicians to manage the economy for electoral gains (Lewis-Beck 1988). Arguments about the long-term effects of democratic regimes on economic performance also ignored a host of institutional factors that have considerable impact on economic policy-making and performance. States with democratic regimes, for example, display considerable diversity in their structures of interest aggregation and articulation; they thus offer considerably different prospects for particularistic interests to gain access to policy makers and correspondingly different opportunities for policy makers to act autonomously. More importantly, economic performance is closely linked to the specific features of non-regime institutions. The structure of financial system intermediation and of the trade union movement, for example, have powerful effects on growth, inflation, and unemployment rates as well as on the capacity to adjust successfully to international economic change. Broadly similar arguments about the developing world attribute level of development more to specific institutions such as bureaucratic structures and financial systems than to regime types. Indeed, numerous studies have demonstrated that even authoritarian regimes frequently sacrifice long-term investment to short-term political calculations, and that democratic regimes often have the legitimacy and popular support needed to enact painful reforms.

See also: Democracy; Democratic Transitions; Development and the State; Development, Economics of; Dictatorship; Globalization: Political Aspects; Leadership: Political; Modernization, Political: Alternate Paths; Modernization, Political: Development of the Concept; Nations and Nation-states in History; Parliamentary Government; Policy History: Origins; Policy History: State and Economy; Power: Political; Presidential Government; Sovereignty: Political; State Formation; State, History of; State, Sociology of the

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