Relative Non-Elite Power

Kenneth Bollen's Theory of Democracy and an Agenda for Democracy Measurement

Kenneth Bollen is arguably the most important figure in the methodology of democracy measurement. In an early paper, Bollen (1980) defined democracy as "the extent to which the political power of the elites is minimized and that of the nonelites is maximized". Considering this definition as theory, I argue that Bollen's definition is superior to the Dahl-Schumpeter model cited in most democracy measurement methodology - more general, more precise, more scalable, less derivative and less tendentious - but examine the problems involved in his use of "political" and "minimized/maximized". Considering his operationalization of this theory, I argue that the operationalization of Bollen & Paxton (1997), "Democracy before Athens", is superior to that in the bulk of his work - both in terms of the theory of Bollen (1980) and on the methodological standards recommended in his work on structural equation models - though giving attention to the serious problems that led to his operational choices. Finally, I sketch out an agenda for work on the measurement of democracy following from these conclusions - an agenda for measuring relative non-elite power.

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Methodological writings on democracy measurement commonly begin with some reference to theory, but this rarely amounts to more than a nod – an acknowledgement that the definition of democracy is contested, followed by the citation of either or both Dahl's *Polyarchy* (1971) and Schumpeter's (1942) definition from *Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy*. Rarely do such references offer any reason for following those authors beyond conformity (or, put another way, authority). The principal exception to these inadequacies is found in the writings of Kenneth Bollen.

Bollen is by no means a "theorist", if one pictures by that someone like Habermas, Mouffe or Held. He is very much a methodologist, best known for his work on structural equation modeling, in which field his (1989) textbook *Structural Equations with Latent Variables* is the classic reference. His widely cited methodological work on democracy measurement (1980, 1986, 1990, 1993; Bollen & Grandjean 1981, Bollen & Jackman 1989, Bollen & Paxton 1998, 2000) has made him, as it were, the "dean" of democracy measurement[1]. Yet, his methodological work stands out not only for a statistical sophistication twenty years ahead of its peers, but for its attention to theory.

In his seminal (1980) paper, Bollen defined "political democracy" as "the extent to which the political power of the elite is minimized and that of the nonelite is maximized." He then cited this definition in Bollen & Grandjean (1981), Bollen & Jackman (1985), Bollen (1986), and Bollen (1990). In Bollen (1993), he explicitly shifted to examining "liberal democracy", which he distinguished as only one type of democratic government and defined as "the extent to which a political system allows political liberties and democratic rule" (a definition he then followed in Bollen 1995, Bollen & Paxton 1998 and 2000, and Bollen 2009)[2].

In the present paper, I will provide an extended argument in favour of the conception provided in Bollen (1980). Considering it first as theory, I will argue that Bollen's definition is more general, more precise, more scalable (in two distinct senses), less derivative and less tendentious than the Dahl-Schumpeter definition cited by most democracy measures. I will, however, offer two criticisms: first, of his formulation of the issue in terms of "minimizing" and "maximizing"; and, second, of his use of "political." Considering the conception then in operational terms, I will argue that its operationalization in Bollen & Paxton (1997), "Democracy Before Athens", is superior to that in most of Bollen's work, on the methodological ground of directness (recommended in Bollen 1989) and as a substantive realization of the theory. I will, though, address the serious and genuine problems which he cites as the reasons for his operational choice. In conclusion, finally, I shall sketch some ideas for a research agenda towards an improved measure of democracy, following from these arguments.

Now, I fully appreciate that "democracy" is a paradigm of an "essentially contested concept" (Gallie 1956) and grant that, in certain, very specific, senses, "there is no point in arguing about what a 'correct' definition is" (Guttman 1994, cited in Munck & Verkuilen 2002). In that spirit, it is not my intention to argue about the "correct" definition of democracy, as such. Rather, I wish to set out the case for why one would prefer this definition to others – "why" here in the sense of under what conditions, for what kinds of problems and for what purposes. My interest in democracy measurement

1 Bollen (1990) was the lead-off paper in a special issue on the topic, subsequently reprinted as Inkeles (1991), and continues to be cited, 20 years later, 5-7 times per year. Bollen (1980), at 30, continues to be cited 6-12 times per year. The paper which has since replaced them in graduate syllabi, Munck & Verkuilen (2002), cites Bollen's work as the principal exception to the "sparse attention" paid to "the quality of the data on democracy".

2 Inclusion of "democratic rule" as an attribute of "liberal democracy" is clearly unsatisfactory, as it uses the term being defined in the definition. Elsewhere he uses popular sovereignty, electoral rights and political rights in its place. As we shall see in considering Bollen's operationalization of his (1980) definition, it is, in fact, this concept of "liberal democracy" which he operationalizes from the start, despite distinguishing it as only one democratic possibility. This has important implications for the argument.

arises from the inadequacy of existing measures to the kinds of problems I wish to address with them and a decent respect for the opinions of my fellow scholars requires that I should declare the causes which impel me to pose those problems in such terms.

THEORY

The definition I will be defending is that of Bollen (1980), "the extent to which the political power of the elite is minimized and that of the nonelite is maximized," as elaborated and exemplified in the whole body of his work. I will be contrasting this with what I am calling the Dahl-Schumpeter definition.

Schumpeter (1942) offered up the definition, "the democratic method is that 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." (p. 269) By this definition, the essential feature of democracy is the competitive election. It takes for granted a social arrangement in which those who have "the power to decide" are distinct from "the people", focusing rather on how such "individuals" come to have such power. Although the definition frames democracy as a method for arriving at decisions, it is actually ambiguous, since the result of the competitive struggle isn't a decision, but only individuals with the *power* to decide.

Dahl (1971) actually offers quite a different definition, characterizing democracy as "the continuing responsiveness of the government to the preferences of its citizens, considered as political equals" (p. 1) – where the kicker is the invocation of political equality[3]. However, this is immediately relegated to the status of an ideal (p. 2) and focus is shifted to eight alleged "institutional guarantees"[4] and, more particularly, to two "dimensions" that are taken to summarize those "guarantees" – contestation and participation. What's more, participation is taken as almost universally achieved, such that the variation between polities lies almost entirely in the extent of contestation (pp. 5, 10). In the process, the difference between Dahl's definition and Schumpeter's largely disappears – the residual difference lying in the degree of tolerance extended to "fraudulent" rather than "free and fair" elections[5]. To that extent, then, I feel justified in speaking of a single "Dahl-Schumpeter" model, admirably summed up by Huntington in the *The Third Wave* with, "Elections, open, free and fair, are the essence of democracy, the inescapable sine qua non."

The Case for Bollen's Definition

Again, I will argue that Bollen's definition is more general, more precise, more scalable (in two distinct senses), less derivative and less tendentious than the Dahl-Schumpeter definition cited by most

3 To whit, "no authority can be democratic unless it is based on some principle of political equality." (Dahl 1970, p.12.) Dahl (2006) offers a sustained consideration of political equality, but no new measure. There has been considerable research on responsiveness, participation and political equality, of which the most prominent is that of Verba and his colleagues (Verba & Nie, 1972; Verba, Nie & Kim, 1978; Verba, Schlozman & Brady 1995) culminating in the APSA Task Force on Inequality and American Democracy (published as Jacobs & Skocpol 2005). Despite this, there seems to be, as yet, no standard measures and cross-national datasets of political (in)equality comparable to the Freedom House or Polity measures of "democracy." Cf. Dubrow (2007, 2008).

4 Namely, the freedom to form and join organizations, freedom of expression, the right to vote, eligibility for public office, the right of political leaders to compete for support (more specifically, for votes), alternative sources of information, free and fair elections, and institutions for making government policies depend on votes and other expressions of preference (p. 3).

5 A difference which recurs in the most popular measures between the "minimalist" criteria of Alvarez, et al. (1996) and those used by Polity, Freedom House and others.

democracy measures.

More General

The Dahl-Schumpeter model is institutionally specific. It locates democracy in the singular mechanism of the competitive election, if with debate regarding the conditions of competition. By contrast, Bollen's definition has the advantage of generality, specifying no mechanism. Generality is important in so far as there are things which ought properly to be included as democratic which the Dahl-Schumpeter definition would exclude, but which Bollen's would include.

To see how, let us consider the most obvious case first. Directly democratic mechanisms – referenda, citizen assemblies – have been subjected to a variety of now-familiar criticisms and, clearly, there is a entirely defensible case that they should not be taken as the *only* democratic mechanisms. Yet, following the Dahl-Schumpeter definition, we find ourselves faced with the opposite absurdity. Given that definition's focus on elections, directly democratic mechanisms appear as, at best, democratic in a derivative or secondary sense – and potentially even as *un*democratic.

A defining feature of Athenian democracy, such as it was, and the personnel selection mechanism said by Aristotle to be the signature of democracy was *selection by lot*. Election, of course, was deemed to an oligarchic mechanism[6]. Yet, following the Dahl-Schumpeter definition, election is democratic and selection by lot isn't. Indeed, quite specifically – selection by lot does not involve "contestation" in any way.

Similarly, another mechanism that will be familiar to most academics from its use in departmental administration, *rotation in office*, also wouldn't count as democratic, since it involves no contestation. "To be ruler and ruled in turn" is a familiar formula from the ancient experience of democracy, speaking directly to contemporary criticisms of direct democracy, yet the rotational and sortitional mechanisms that gave it flesh are ruled out by definition.

There are questions other than state personnel selection and mechanisms other than these that history lays in front of us with democratic credentials, some of which we shall touch on in later points, and there are undoubtedly mechanisms that have yet to be tried. But it suffices here to note that there are alternative mechanisms to the competitive election that *have* clear democratic credentials, but are excluded by the Dahl-Schumpeter model. Bollen's definition, however, provides us with more flexible and inclusive criteria, within which mechanisms such as these make straightforward sense.

More Precise

The flip side of the generality of Bollen's definition is its greater precision. There are things which ought properly to be excluded from counting as democratic, but which the Dahl-Schumpeter definition would include. Bollen's definition, on the other hand, would not.

The stand out issue in this case are the paradoxical "warlord" democracies (Wantchekon 2004) and some of the other so-called "illiberal" democracies (Zakaria 1997, Schedler 2002) that have occasioned much debate. By focussing on the one mechanism of competitive elections, it becomes entirely possible to speak of a state as "democratic," even in the face of its explicit rule by oligarchs. That an elite, however closed and self-serving, may practice some form of alternation in forming governments, the

6 Aristotle [1944], *Politics* IV.9 1294b8-9, "I mean, for example, that it is thought to be democratic for the offices to be assigned by lot, for them to be elected oligarchic."

timing of which is determined by the outcome of an election, is entirely plausible. That such an elite arrangement constitutes anything "democratic" may follow from the Dahl-Schumpeter model, but strikes many as absurd.

Bollen's definition provides the precision lacking to handle such a case. There is a plausible intuition behind admitting such cases. One would expect that the people, the non-elites, must have more genuine power in such cases than where no reference to popular election is made, albeit they may have little in either case. The opposite intuition is equally plausible. Whatever arrangements the ruling orders may make amongst themselves for the distribution of offices makes little or no difference in a context where the power of non-elites is comparatively minimal. This is not so much a matter of cases being misclassified, as it is of looking for one's answers in the wrong place – in the mechanism, rather than in the people.

More Scalable, in the sense of levels of application

There is a further aspect of generality that I think is worth separating out. I am here calling it "scalability", in the sense in which this term is used in project management.

All of the existing measures of "democracy" refer solely to the level of the nation-state, the recognized state members of the official interstate system. That this is not the only level to which the concept applies is not a particularly controversial claim. Dahl himself, for example, specifically speaks of democracy as something that must be investigated at the "sub-national" level, including in firms, unions, universities, and churches (1971, pp. 11-14). Significant currents of work are presently underway, trying to understand what democracy might mean at a transnational level, be that regional or global. The "small group" is one of the most intensely investigated levels of democratic process, with more recent work examining processes in social networks. Substantial, if perhaps more controversial, currents of work are investigating what democracy might mean in the household, in gendered and sexual relations more generally, in racial relations, and in the relations our species has with other species and the planet as a whole.

While the Dahl-Schumpeter model may handle sub-national state and local governments reasonably well, it is not clear that it even addresses other kinds of settings. Certainly, the familiar multi-party election, whatever its merits, is not a meaningful process in the context of the household or a network. Even where it could be meaningful, like in a firm or a church, it is hardly clear that it would be an optimal process – as my first remarks on generality will have made clear. Bollen's definition, however, speaks to each level or context with equal force, precisely because it speaks to a *relation* – of "elite" elements to "non-elite" elements – and their contrasting levels of power, rather than to any mechanism.

More Scalable, in the sense of having a natural scale

One of the principal challenges faced by existing measures that they actually recognize is their lack of any natural scale. Much research has been done based on a dichotomous conception of "democracy" – a state is a liberal democracy or it is not – for all that intermediate cases clearly exist, suggesting some kind of continuum. This is one of the points for which Bollen's methodological criticisms are best known, his argument for a continuous conception (Bollen & Jackman 1989) having been explicitly rejected by some (Alvarez et al. 1996) and made a matter of "pragmatic choice" by others (Collier & Adcock 1999).

Of greater concern, however, is the variance truncation (Landman & Häusermann 2003) found even in

the efforts to implement continuous conceptions, beginning with Dahl's (1971) suggestion to simply sort countries into ten ordinal classes. The resultant measures are effectively indicators of "not-(liberal)-democracy" rather than of "democracy," and states tend to pile up at the bounds. The underlying dichotomous thinking remains, as becomes most clear in the research that purports to overcome this truncation by studying the "quality" of democracy as something completely different from, and presupposing, the "presence" of democracy.

In contrast, Bollen's definition has obvious and natural end-points, albeit both ideal – namely, the total power of the elite (zero democracy) and the total power of the non-elite (perfect democracy). This permits variation amongst so-called "autocracies" and so-called "democracies", as well as amongst the intermediate cases. Moreover, this definition obviates the irritating "there must be cases" argument (Munck & Verkuilen 2002, amongst others), with its implicit commitment to dichotomy, since every case necessarily has some score on this scale.

Less Derivative

One of the most puzzling issues one faces when reading Schumpeter and his followers is to understand why one ought to consider his definition a definition of "democracy". Granted, his definition is unquestionably a much more accurate and useful characterization of the practices of certain states who in the mid-twentieth century insisted that they were "democracies" than is anything one might find in, say, Rousseau. This leads some to call it an "empirical" theory of democracy (Cnudde & Neubauer 1969). But, of course, it is not at all an accurate or useful characterization of the practices of certain other states who in the mid-twentieth century *also* insisted that they were "democracies," including some who insisted they were *more* democratic than Schumpeter's preferred exemplars. That makes it a suspiciously selective empiricism. And, it leaves it open to question what justifies calling it a theory of *democracy*, rather than of, say, "NATO/OECD state politics".

Bollen's definition offers us a way to answer that question. Competitive electoralism is democratic to the extent that it increases the political power of non-elites and decreases the power of elites. In (1980), Bollen presents this as contingent, "elections and political liberties ... may increase the political power of the nonelite." (p. 372) In (1990), he is more definitive, "Differences in political rights and liberties correspond to differences in the relative political power of the elites versus the nonelites." (p.10) Yet, even in so doing, he allows that this is only an indirect gauge (p. 9).

We are, in fact, back to the plausible intuition raised in discussing precision. It certainly seems that universal elections *ought* to increase the power of non-elites. That they *do*, however, is not something any existing measure can test. Given the evidence of such as O'Donnell & Schmitter (1986) that electoral processes are demobilizing, and in light of the very large turn away from voting seen in the most longstanding electoral regimes over the past decades, such a limitation should give us cause for concern.

What is perhaps more important, this is hardly the only such plausible intuition. To choose only the least controversial, it would seem that extensive civil liberties ought to increase non-elite power even more than elections – yet it is the elections that are treated as the "minimal" condition, rather than the rights. This is where the question of the generality of one's definition begins to bite.

Bollen's definition allows us to see how the standard model can be taken as a characterization of democracy. It does this by showing how that model is derivative of a more general model – typically held up as one of the goals of good science. But, by doing so, it also makes clear that there are

alternatives – and at least opens the possibility that some of those alternatives may be more consequential.

Less Tendentious

The Dahl-Schumpeter model and the measures following from it have been criticized from the start as tendentious. They were (and are) criticized as simply an ideological front in the Cold War, with the NATO/OECD countries standing as the paragons of "democracy" and the Warsaw Pact/CMEA countries as the icons of "autocracy." They are criticized as a parochial expression of imperialism, with the former imperial countries as the paragons of "democracy," while the former colonies are, at best, "politically underdeveloped." Perhaps most pervasively today, they are criticized as mere tools of *realpolitik* by the wealthiest and most militarily powerful states. Evidently, the states that these criticisms identify actually are the ones existing measures tend to rate best. That doesn't make the criticisms true of course, but the problems outlined so far hardly help matters.

The standard model does not allow consideration of mechanisms other than competitive elections or of levels other than the state (and some of its internal organs), despite the fact that there are states, and popular movements around the world, which have quite explicitly made the case for other mechanisms and other levels being most consequential for democratizing power in their areas of concern. The preference for dichotomous conceptions of "democracy," even if sometimes suppressed and implicit, cannot be innocent when it authorizes claims that certain states "are" democracies, and hence worthy of loans, aid, military and technical assistance, while others "are not," and hence appropriate for invasion or subversion. And, it is hard to rebut claims of parochialism and ideology in the face of a widespread Schumpeterian selective empiricism.

Bollen's definition provides one with a clear out. It leaves room for mechanisms, levels and contexts other than those favoured by Western governments. It does not assign states into "democracies" to be cheered and "autocracies" to be booed, but permits recognition of the limited power of non-elites in all states, even the most advanced. It does not make the state constitution the principal focus of its attention, focusing rather on popular power. And, that makes all the difference.

What is tendentious about the standard model is that it reifies a particular variety of state constitution as the exclusive paradigm of "democracy." But that constitution is by no means the only possible "democratic" constitution. Indeed, in most uses, democracy is not even about state constitutions. It is about the power of the people, understanding by "the people" the non-elites. Some state constitutions are, clearly, more compatible with higher levels of popular power than others and some (conceivable) state constitutions are more conducive to increasing popular power than others. But from the point of view of popular power, every state constitution is only an instrument. If one seeks a measure of popular power, one looks for a measure of democracy. When one finds only measures of state constitutions, there is a clear need for something new.

Two Problems with Bollen's Definition

Now, having made the case for Bollen's definition, allow me to offer two caveats in clarifying it.

Minimized/Maximized

First, a comparatively technical issue, but one with important ramifications. In his canonical formulation in (1980), Bollen defines democracy as the extent to which the power of non-elites is

maximized while that of elites is *minimized*. Perhaps it is only to the ears of those of us trained in the dark arts of economics, but such a formulation, taken seriously, seems necessarily incomplete. If we are to take the maximization/minimization reference seriously, then we would need to ask "relative to what?" Optimization implies constraints and no constraint is specified in the definition. That is not to say that one could not think of relevant constraints – Dahl (1971) concludes his first chapter with one such model and Boix (2003) offers another – or to say that such constraints might not be salient in one way or another. But, without specifying a constraint, the definition remains incomplete.

Fortunately, Bollen clarifies his point and in precisely the manner which one would expect. Immediately prior to first introducing his definition, he comments that it is the "*differences* in the political power held by the elite, relative to the nonelite, that helps identify how democratic a nation is." (1980, p. 372) In introducing his definition in Bollen & Jackman (1985), he refers to "the *relative* distribution of political power between elite and nonelite groups" (p. 29) And, in Bollen (1990), he asserts "it is the relative balance of power between elites and nonelites that determines the degree of political democracy." (p. 9) Importantly, he also makes clear that the "more equal [the distribution of political power in a nation], the more democratic the system." (Bollen & Jackman 1985, p. 29) Democracy is "the degree to which political power is evenly distributed in a society." (Bollen & Paxton 1997, p. 15) So, "maximized" and "minimized" are not intended as technical terms, but only to say that democracy increases as the relative power of non-elites goes up (which requires that that of elites goes down).

This may seem like mere word-smithing, but there is a crucial issue that turns on this, the one I discussed in terms of the superior scalability of Bollen's conception, in the sense of having a natural scale. Democracy has no *theoretical* limit that kicks in prior to the total power of the non-elites, i.e., perfect equality, the elimination of the distinction elite/non-elite. An increase in relative non-elite power is always an increase in democracy. By contrast, there is the version of "democracy" sold in texts like Boix (2003), with its explicitly equilibrium model, that presumes that democracy reaches a maximum long before the relative power of non-elites reaches its theoretical limit, indeed, that presupposes that the theoretical limit of non-elite relative power is *non-democratic*. So the question has substantive bite.

Political

My second caveat is more substantive. Bollen is always very careful to specify that he is speaking of "political" power, "political" democracy, "political" equality, in line with authors like Dahl. Rarely does he offer any explanation of what he takes that distinction to mean, relying instead on the presumed familiarity of references to the "political system." The most extensive account appears in Bollen & Paxton (1997), in introducing an analysis of pre-modern societies:

> Political power concerns the ability of individuals and groups to influence the decisions of the society. ... Decisions such as whether a society should move or stay, fight or have peaceful relations with neighboring groups, build or destruct shelters, or other such society-wide actions ... " (p. 15)
>
> We focus on society-wide decisions rather than day-to-day, more technical, or familial decisions. Specialized areas might have "experts" making the decisions. For instance, a family's decisions on child-rearing could be dominated by one person with decisions on weapon construction by another. We attempt to focus beyond these microdecisions and limit ourselves to broader decisions that affect the entire society. (p. 43, note 4 (referring back to p. 15))

Moreover, in discussing confounding factors in democracy research, he repeatedly wants to distinguish his concern from what he calls "social or economic democracy" or "egalitarian societies." Initially, in

(1979), this seems to reflect a dialogue with Hewitt (1977), who drew a useful distinction between "simple democracy" (competitive electoralism) and "social democracy" – by which he meant having strong socialist or labour parties who were often in government – in order to look at determinants of income equality in Western countries. By (1990), it has become a much broader and more definitive distinction, "Another common practice is to confuse political democracy with social or economic democracy. The distribution of wealth, work place "democracy," or the health of the population are not part of the concept. These are important in their own right and should not be confounded with national levels of political democracy." (p. 12-13)

I see two key objections to Bollen's arguments. One is that it is not at all clear that "power" breaks down so neatly into "political", "economic" and "social" boxes. The other is that it is not at all clear that decisions break down so neatly into "society-wide" ones and "more technical or familial" ones. Clearly, what is an appropriately "political" and "society-wide" decision, and what is more appropriately "economic", "social", "technical" or "familial", has been the principal content of political debate over at least the last century. Both drawing the distinctions – in an effort to exclude the state from certain acts – and not drawing the distinctions – to induce the state to take certain acts – have been put forward as promoting or defending democracy. It seems wrong to enforce a resolution by definitional fiat.

Let us take two comparatively simple examples. As a mechanism for increasing the relative political power of non-elites, however narrowly construed, it would seem decidedly plausible that increasing the incomes and/or assets of non-elites relative to those of the elites *ought* to have considerable affect. Arguably, it could have greater affect than the opportunity to vote, hence the famed call for "bread not the ballot." Introducing self-management practices into workplaces could very plausibly increase the relative political power of non-elites, narrowly construed – this being exactly the argument of Pateman (1970). As soon as we start looking at particular mechanisms, this seemingly easy distinction of "political" from "economic" and "social" immediately starts to break down.

Certainly the most significant example is the contest between the "People's Democracies" of the Warsaw Pact/CMEA and the "Bourgeois Democracies" of NATO/OECD over the second half of the twentieth century. Bollen is admirable for actually, and consistently, recognizing that the people's democracies made a claim to democracy. Yet, in operationalizing his conception of "political democracy," he clearly felt it necessary to address the criticism that it simply became bourgeois democracy under another name (1980, pp. 372-3). His response involved trying to distinguish between capitalism and socialism as "economic systems" and his "political" democracy. What that response fails to acknowledge is that the people's democracies actually put forward an alternative set of "institutional guarantees" on the explicit grounds of increasing the relative power of non-elites – guarantees of which the single party state was one. They may have been wrong. They may have had a good idea, but failed in realizing it. But if so, those are empirical questions, not definitional ones.

What does seem definitional is that whatever makes "democracy" "democratic" does so whether the "democracy" in question is a "political" one, an "economic" one, a "social" one, or whatever other qualifier one wishes to add. We can, of course, distinguish between democratizing different types of organizations (states, firms, households, etc.). How democratization occurs, and the degree to which it occurs, in one type of organization almost certainly differs from how and to what extent it occurs in others. In that respect, it is undoubtedly possible to distinguish the degree of democracy prevailing with respect to some state ("political") from that prevailing with respect to, say, some firm ("economic"). In fairness, this may be all that is intended by the invocation of "political" – democratizing the state. And, unquestionably, we as analysts will want, at times, to have indicators that will allow us to distinguish

these and consider their relations. The core of my argument here is that, while that may point to different *operationalizations*, there is no distinction necessary at the level of definition, of *theory*.

Conclusion, Part I

It is to the question of operationalization that we now turn. Before doing so, it remains to sum up these theoretical reflections. If we accept the case I have made, we will want to accept Bollen's conception, if not the exact wording of his definition. As we have seen, he himself commonly speaks of his conception in terms of relative political power, rather than maximizing and minimizing. Moreover, it is clear that democracy increases with the relative political power of non-elites. Since we are talking about *relative* power, the increase of one side entails the decrease of the other, making mention of the decrease redundant. Then, if we accept my contention that the modifier "political" at best imports an operational issue into a definitional exercise and can therefore be dropped, we have our final theoretical definition. Democracy is *relative non-elite power*.

OPERATIONALIZING THE THEORY

In considering Bollen's definition as a theory, I compared it with a definition proposed by others. In looking at how he operationalizes his theory, I will be comparing two alternatives put forward by Bollen himself.

In a brief Appendix to (1979), then more fully in (1980), Bollen provided a detailed account of his construction of an Index of Political Democracy for all independent countries in 1960 and 1965. It is important first to note that, in order to get to an operationalizable version of his definition, Bollen introduces his concepts of popular sovereignty and political liberties, and makes the claim we saw above (in the argument that his definition is less derivative), that these "correspond" with differences in relative non-elite power. He grants that this indirect, but suggests that it is the best we can do.

He used six indicators. As indicators of political liberties he used press freedom, freedom of group opposition and government sanctions, taken from, respectively, Nixon (1960, 1965), Banks (1971) and Taylor & Hudson (1971). As indicators of popular sovereignty he used fairness of elections, taken from Taylor & Hudson (1971), and executive selection and legislative selection – i.e., whether the chief executive is elected and whether the legislature is elected and effective (the product of two separate indicators) – both taken from Banks (1971). Each indicator is linearly transformed to the arbitrary scale of 0 to 100 and the overall index is the simple average of those scaled scores[7].

In Bollen (1980) and Bollen & Grandjean (1981), he used confirmatory factor analysis, in a structural equations modeling context, to investigate the properties of his index – its reliability, convergent validity and dimensions – and the systematic error (bias) introduced by including stability in a measure of democracy. In (1986), he began to further explore issues of measurement error in indexes of political democracy. This led to (1993), where, following an assessment of systematic and random measurement error in eight related measures, he constructed a new Index for 1980. This used Freedom House's measure of political rights (Gastil 1985) and the freedom of group opposition and effectiveness of legislative body indicators from Banks (1979), once again rescaled and averaged. Further tinkering resulted in the Liberal Democracy Series I measure for 1972 to 1988, available in Bollen (1998) and described in detail in Bollen (2009). This averages Gastil's political rights and Banks' legislative

7 Bollen is careful to note (see note 9, pp. 376-7, of Bollen 1980) that this scaling is purely arbitrary. A score of 0 does not represent the lowest possible degree of political democracy, nor does a score of 100 indicate the highest possible degree of democracy. This is in clear contrast to the natural scale available from using his definition directly.

effectiveness together first, and caps them with the extent of suffrage as reported in Paxton, et al., (2003), before averaging the result with Banks' freedom of opposition variable.

Despite the changes in detail in the construction of his indexes, it is clear that Bollen stuck consistently with indicators of what he now calls democratic rule (popular sovereignty) and political liberties. Importantly, this consistency was not affected by his shift from describing his index as a measure of "political democracy" – an indirect measure of relative non-elite power intended to be acceptable to both "people's" and "bourgeois" democrats (1980, pp. 372-3) – to describing his index as a measure of "liberal democracy," frankly acknowledged to be only one possible variant of democracy (1993, p. 1208).

By contrast, in Bollen & Paxton (1997), "Democracy before Athens", he and his coauthor did something quite different, an approach they note "has not been tried before and may apply to other societies as well." (p. 15) In the context of comparing classical Athenian democracy to that found in hunting and gathering societies, they estimate a direct measure of the distribution of political power from available qualitative accounts using Lorenz-type curves and Gini coefficients. Their method, in their own words:

> Following our working definition of democracy, we measure democracy as the distribution of political power in a society, using the notion of political units. For ease of quantification, we assume that the total number of political units available to a society equals the number of adults in that society. Thus, in a perfectly equal society, each person would have one unit of political power and the Lorenz curve would be a straight line with a Gini coefficient of zero. Since no society is perfectly equal, some people have more than one political unit while others have less than one. As the Lorenz curve departs from perfect equality, the Gini coefficient increases. To determine the amount, we need to provide estimates of what groups in a society have more or less political power than their share.
>
> To make our calculations, we need (1) divisions within the society between groups of people who might have more or less political power, and (2) estimates of the population size. (p. 20)

They make direct estimates of the power of each of the identified groups (four to eight groups, depending on the society), plot the resulting points and calculate a coefficient. As their estimates are direct, there is no way to validate them. They depend on their "reasonableness." However, they also vary their estimates to allow for a range of plausible values and to test the sensitivity of the resulting coefficient. The results, not surprisingly, show that even the most equal estimates of power in Athens are more *un*equal than the least equal estimates of power in hunting and gathering societies.

The Case for Bollen & Paxton (1997)

I want to make a case for the preferability of a method like that of Bollen & Paxton (1997) (henceforth, "the (1997) method") for measuring democracy over the method used in Bollen's various other papers. Of course, I unambiguously endorse Bollen's efforts in those to investigate the properties of various indexes and to try to build explicit, replicable measurement models that identify and minimize systematic and random measurement error. But, his chosen operationalization lets go of most the available advantage of his theoretical conception.

My case for the (1997) method is comparatively simple.

First, in Bollen (1989) he offers the explicit directive to prefer the most direct measures available (p. 180?). This advice has a clear cut reason. Indirect measures are proxies. They only stand-in for what one wants to measure. They may vary in ways or to degrees that the target variable does not. Use of

multiple indicators, preferably from multiple raters, can be expected to help mitigate this to some degree, but the problem remains. To give only one, suggestive, example, by most measures there has been no change in the degree of liberal democracy of the leading Western powers in some decades. This seems intuitively plausible. Yet, there is also a widespread sense that the relative power of non-elites in those same countries has been falling steadily, if not sharply, over those same decades. The sense may, of course, be wrong. But it is at least suggestive that a liberal democracy measure, no matter how well constructed, is not necessarily a reliable indicator of relative non-elite power.

More importantly, the (1997) method more clearly operationalizes Bollen's substantive theory. It requires identifying "elite" and "non-elite" population fractions, lining them up and comparing their relative quantities of power, with the results of the comparison available as a single number. Quite clearly, it better captures the advantages of that theory which I identified in the first part of this paper. It takes advantage of that theory's natural scale, rather than requiring recourse to an arbitrary scale whose location and variation on the natural scale are completely unknown[8]. It takes advantage of that theory's greater generality and broader range of applicability, being applied to societies that do not use any of our mechanisms (and who would likely reject most of them, if offered), that do not even possess "states" (which we typically treat as the natural home of the concept), that (in the case of Athens) existed long before any of our modern institutions, and that are far smaller than most populations we would recognize. It allows consideration of the mechanisms actually in use in those societies, rather than tendentiously reifying any one mechanism.

Further to both these points, it is worth noting Bollen's own early remark (1979, p. 580, n. 8; cf. 1980, p. 384) as to the limitations of his political democracy index, to whit:

> ... there are no indicators of the class, sex, and race composition of the political elite. Nor is there a measure of how "open" the elite is in its recruitment of new members. Measures such as these would provide additional measures of popular sovereignty and the extent to which a "power elite" exists in countries which meet some of the other, more common conditions (e.g., fair elections and political liberties) of democracy.

The (1997) method has other more generally desirable properties.

It does not restrict itself to the formal constitution of offices. Bollen and Paxton actually ignore the differences between, say, the *strategoi* and the *nomothetai*, the *hippikai* and the *hoplitai*. The differences in power between men and women, citizens, metics and slaves, quite plausibly swamps any differences between particular office holders. This also allows them to consider channels of power other than the official.

In identifying "elites" and "non-elites," it makes explicit allowance for what we now call "intersectionality" – that the membership of social groups intersect, such that there are not just two classes, but multiple, internally differentiated ones. Indeed, methodologically it rather *depends* on intersectionality, since the greater the number of groups after all relevant distinctions have been applied, the greater the number of data points available.

Although Bollen and Paxton have little option but to directly estimate the power shares of the groups they identify, having only qualitative evidence available, the method does open the possibility of estimating those shares on the basis of quantitative evidence. In which respect, it is notable that they do

8 Conceivably, the ordering of states on a liberal democracy scale could be perfectly right on the natural scale, yet where the whole liberal democracy scale itself occupies only a small range, at a low level, on that natural scale.

permit consideration of power resources that are not exclusively "political," such as ownership of a !Nore amongst the !Kung and the frequency of violence against women.

It also, as Bollen and Paxton actually do, permits estimation of the uncertainty attached to a measure and the sensitivity of the measurement to alternative assumptions.

Three Challenges for Generalizing the Method of Bollen & Paxton (1997)

In so far as my case for the (1997) method amounts to a criticism of Bollen's liberal democracy indexes, it is only fair to consider the three reasons he cites for not having used a direct measure in the first place. Those reasons are genuine challenges, which must be faced. The (1997) method suggests that they may not be crippling. But they deserve serious consideration.

Elites

In (1990), Bollen asks, "How do we determine the elites and nonelites in each society." (p. 9) Clearly, there has been an enormous amount of research undertaken on class, social stratification, inequality, various bases of inequality, on elites *as* elites and on the mass of the population. On the one hand, this suggests we should have quite a well developed evidence base from which to answer Bollen's question. On the other hand, it also suggests that the task is by no means straightforward.

That both elites and non-elites are complex, internally differentiated, and dynamic constructs should constitute a starting point, as my comment about intersectionality and the (1997) method might attest. With respect to elites, Bollen's own list of "the members of the executive, judicial, and legislative branches of the government as well as leaders of political parties, local governments, businesses, labour unions, professional associations, or religious bodies" suggests some of the lines of this differentiation. The social composition, individual membership and relative power of both sides are always changing, if clearly not all on the same time scale.

Representation

In Bollen & Paxton (1997) they highlight the problem of "representation," noting, "One problem is calibrating what happens to political power when representatives replace the face-to-face interactions and decision making that occurs in direct democracies. ... The division of political power is less clear when representatives intervene between the population and decision makers." (p. 16) This seems to me to be the least troubling of the three problems raised.

As just noted, Bollen recognizes elected representatives as members of the elite. That some members of the elite acknowledge duties of certain sorts to members of the non-elite is not something unique to "representative democracies". There is, of course, a literature on representation which would have a bearing on this question. But, just as Bollen and Paxton were able to ignore the differences between offices in ancient Athens, relative to the much greater differences between citizen males and all others, I suspect the salience of "representation" happens at a much more fine-grained level than needs concern us.

Power

In (1980), Bollen says, "The major difficulty is that there is no widely accepted unit of measure for political power. Unlike in a study of the distribution of income, the number of 'dollar-like' units of

political power held by the various groups in a country cannot be evaluated." This is, certainly, the most substantial problem, as the Community Power debate which accompanied the first efforts at democracy measurement will have made clear. There has been progress since then in measuring power, though standard power indexes depend on having decision-making bodies with a closed, fixed population, specified decision rules, and known preferences to make their calculations.

Again, the (1997) method demonstrates the possibility of circumventing this problem. If subjective ratings are considered workable for liberal democracy indicators, there seems no obvious reason why similar subjective ratings of power shares should be more objectionable. At the same time, as already noted, the possibility of such subjective ratings on the basis of qualitative evidence points to the possibility of using contemporary quantitative evidence, which may well end up making possible an assignment of power shares on the basis of existing "objective" data series. This, it seems to me, remains a question at the core of the research agenda of developing a new measure.

Conclusion, Part II

Alternatives to the (1997) method of measuring relative non-elite power are conceivable and are likely worth exploring. Certainly, there has been considerable criticism of the use of Gini coefficients as measures of inequality in other contexts, to which the (1997) method must also remain liable. To that extent, I am not necessarily *recommending* this method, *per se*. Rather, it provides a clearly superior alternative to a liberal democracy measure (Bollen's or anyone else's) as a measure of relative non-elite power. It shows what such a measure ought to be able to do and sets a standard against which alternatives can be assessed. Indeed, most basically, it demonstrates that it is possible to actual *measure* relative non-elite power.

AN AGENDA FOR DEMOCRACY MEASUREMENT

Having built a case for conceptualizing democracy as relative non-elite power and having shown at least one way in which one might go about operationalizing this, I wish to end with a few ideas for a research agenda around developing a new, more adequate, measure of democracy.

First, for all that I have argued for the desirability of having a theoretical definition of democracy that applies more broadly than simply to states, I think it is necessary, for the purpose of being able to compare and contrast one's results fruitfully, to focus first on developing a measure of democracy in the context of states. This is not as obvious or unproblematic a statement as it might seem, as the state itself can be viewed as a mechanism and its democratic consequences weighed.

A considerable quantity of work would be required to amass a set of measurements for all states following the (1997) method for even a single point in time, yet much of the value of any measurement series lies in its variation over time. This suggests to me that it could be useful to focus initially, for exploratory purposes, on a handful of states – say, the United States and the Soviet Union/Russia, as the most prominent powers of the twentieth century, perhaps somewhere like Brazil or Argentina with a very volatile political history, then somewhere with a very stable history, like Sweden or New Zealand.

In pursuing those explorations, one line would be to try to develop (1997)-type measurements for multiple time points. Another would be an "expert panel" survey of area specialists asking for their direct subjective estimates of relative non-elite power over an extended period. A mass survey to the same effect could also provide a useful view. In the interest of triangulation, comparing these attempts at direct measures with the set of existing measures of liberal democracy – and, for that matter, with a

measure of “people's” democracy, should that exist or be possible to develop – would be at least a useful exercise.

The goal of these exploratory investigations, though interesting in themselves, would be to try to identify regularly produced data series (and here I have in mind the kinds of economic and social series commonly maintained by national bureaus of statistics) that align with, or at least track, the kinds of variation found via more involved, subjective means. This is not so as to replace a “democracy” indicator with some other kind of indicator, but rather to hopefully find more “objective” (and perhaps less labour-intensive) ways to generalize and extend production of the indicator. This may not prove possible and a ramped up version of the exploratory processes, by then hopefully standardized, may prove the most fruitful option. But I continue to suspect that power, when measured at a population level (i.e., a measure of democracy), will tend to follow (some) other series.

Extended out to that point, these ideas clearly degenerate into hopes and suspicions. What remains solid, however, is that Bollen's theory and the example of Bollen & Paxton (1997) give us a place to start in building a measure of democracy as relative non-elite power.

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