

Understanding Illiberal Democracies, Liberal Autocracies, and
Everything in Between:
A Cross-National Examination from 1972-1996

by

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Paper prepared for review at “World Democratization 2000 – Rethinking Democracy in the
New Millennium”, February 16-19, 2000. University of Houston.

Acknowledgement: I would like to thank James Gibson for starting me on the quest for better
understanding about Liberal Democracy. Additionally, I would like to thank Monty Marshall for
access to his data. Any shortcomings with the analysis or understanding (or alternatively any
brilliant insights), I take as my own.

Abstract

Politicians, scholars and average citizens seem to be somewhat puzzled about certain combinations of polity structure: specifically, those so-called “Illiberal Democracies” and “Liberal Autocracies” that bring together elements of political rights with certain elements of political liberties. Within this paper, I attempt to provide a measurement for political systems that is sensitive to these complexities as well as analyze some of the explanations for why different combinations exist. Drawing on data taken from *Polity 98* and *Freedom House* for the period of 1972 to 1996 (by the year), it is clear that the different types of regimes observed up to 1996 are of greater diversity than any other historical time period (in absolute and relative terms). At the same time, from the results of multinomial logistic regression models, our understanding of the variety is rendered unbalanced in nature. Liberal Democracy and Illiberal Autocracy are well accounted for with variables including mass protest, economic development, regime durability, population size, political revolution, the number of countries on the border and in the region, and the magnitude of regional conflict. Illiberal Democracies and Liberal Autocracies are comparatively less well predicted, deriving in part because of their relatively small number and in part because of the particular variables that influence them (coups and the continued existence of the political system over time). The conclusion is straightforward: hybrids are unpredictable, they don't appear to last, and generally regimes are pulled to either the fully democratic or autocratic pole.

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Since its inception, democracy has been associated with many perplexing questions and issues. One of these enduring subjects concerns the proper understanding of political systems that combine elements democracy with autocracy (e.g., situations where institutional restrictions exist on central authorities in conjunction with systematic disregard for political and civil liberties) - what Fareed Zakaria (1997) has labeled "illiberal" democracy.¹ This type of system is difficult to comprehend for it challenges expectations that specific changes in government structure would accompany improvements in the way that citizens are treated by authorities (e.g., Russell [1938] 1988; Dahl 1971; Bunche 1973). This type of political system also presents something of a difficulty for policy makers because many have heralded that the solution for decreasing human rights violations and increasing the rule of law is through the establishment of democratic institutions.

Illiberal democracies show that these arguments do not always hold. Indeed, they reveal that states may look like a democracy (with elections, parties, and a judiciary), but that this does not mean that they will act like one with regard to their interaction with citizens. Additionally, there are situations where certain aspects of an autocratic regime exist (e.g., where there are no elections, no constraints on the executive), but where there is a certain magnitude of democracy present (e.g., a respect for political and civil liberties) - "Liberal Autocracies".² These governments present numerous puzzles as well.

Following the suggestion of Pye (1990) and others (Tilly 1998), this paper is directed toward rigorously improving our understanding of different political systems. My objective is to provide a preliminary assessment into what these different polity structures are composed of as well as where they come from (i.e., what factors help us in understanding their presence). The key in such an exercise is to challenge our current way of thinking about political structures and their measurement, specifically the way that we think about democracies as they are juxtaposed to autocracies. Only after we have broken out of the thinking in terms of polar opposites and

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contemplate polity structures (e.g., Eckstein and Gurr 1975; Ferguson and Mansbach 1996) will we better be able to address the intellectual and practical challenges presented by Illiberal Democracies and Liberal Autocracies – the hybrids.

To conduct the analysis, the paper proceeds through four sections. Within the first, I address how one would know democracy, autocracy and the two hybridic structures identified above when they saw them as well as what variables are associated with their respective polity structures. Following this, I discuss measurements for regime type and relevant causal determinants (e.g., economic development, protest, coups, revolution, regime durability, countries on the border or in the region, and different indicators of international conflict). Within the third section, multinomial logistic regressions, in conjunction with King et al.'s computer simulation program *CLARIFY*, are used to explore causal relationships. Data reveals that the absolute number as well as variety of political systems is increasing over time. Empirical results disclose that the two longest-standing polity structures (Liberal Democracy and Illiberal Autocracy) are well predicted by variables addressing political-economic context as well as domestic and international contention. By contrast, placement in the Illiberal Democratic category, relative to Illiberal Autocracies, requires the development of active civic engagement (protest), economic development, stable political systems, and limited population size. Interestingly, findings reveal that (all else being held constant) the path from Illiberal Autocracy is equally divided between Liberal Autocracy and Liberal Democracy, and from Liberal Democracy is consistently Illiberal Autocracy. If the third wave of democratization continues, therefore, we are less apt to see autocracies disappear than morph into other entities that retain many aspects of their prior existence. The conclusion reflects upon the reported results and develops numerous lines of inquiry that should be undertaken in the future.

1. DEMOCRACY AND POLITY STRUCTURE: UNDERSTANDING THE NATURE OF A THING

What is democracy? On this question there has been an extremely long debate.³

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Held (1996), one of the more prolific writers on the subject, argues that what has been referred to as democracy has changed significantly over time from “classical” models to “liberal” models to principles of “Democratic Autonomy.” Reviewing various definitions, Bollen (1993a, 5) maintains that “a definition of political democracy that everyone accepts is impossible.” For example, scholars like Downs (1957), Schumpeter (1950), Butler et al. (1981), Bogdanor and Butler (1983) and Posado-Carbo (1996) highlight elections and electoral behavior as the determining characteristic of a political system (generally with reference to democracies). This is important as it emphasizes mass participation of the population in the selection of its leaders – reaffirming popular control and/or a basic element of accountability. Such an emphasis also makes a focus on the magnitude (e.g., Vanhanen 1990) quite logical as a determining characteristic as well as the existence and behavior of political parties (e.g., Cutright 1963; Vanhanen 1990). Others highlight restrictions on the executives as the defining characteristic (Ward and Gleditsch 1997). Still others highlight the lack of political repression (e.g., Diamond et al. 1988; Gastil 1993).

Despite the apparent variety, there does appear to be a certain number of factors that are nearly always referred to. These factors are frequently conceptualized into two dimensions: 1) **political rights** (i.e., free and fair elections, institutions for making government depend on some measure of accountability), and 2) **political liberties** (i.e., freedom of expression, freedom of association).⁴ In line with these discussions, I conceive of these two dimensions as exactly that and overlay them in the following manner:

(Insert Figure 1. About Here)

When this is done, we observe four distinct combinations of polity configurations.

Most are familiar with quadrants 1 and 4, respectively, Liberal Democracy (i.e., “full” democracy) and Illiberal Autocracy (i.e., “full” autocracy).⁵ Within the former, many (if not most) liberties are protected and there are many rights. Within the latter, many (if not most)

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liberties are restricted and there are very few rights. These two have constituted the most frequently discussed polity configurations. The reasons for this focus are fairly simple. As Gurr (1974, 1504) states,

The most durable political systems (i.e., those that persist over time) are those which have responded to the stress of socio-economic change by assuming the task of managing it, whether directly by state control of the institutions of socialization of production, or indirectly by regulation and support of allied quasi-autonomous institutions. The "totalitarian" (autocratic) and "social-democratic" (democratic) polities, in short, seem to be variant means to the same end of political survival through managed change.

These are the most popular within academic discourse simply for they are the most well put together, what Lichbach (1984) calls "coherent" and the most numerous historically. With reference to these systems of government, individuals have puzzled over definitions, where/when they are likely to emerge, and why they collapse.

While theoretically and numerically dominant, however, autocracies and democracies are not the only two polity configurations that exist. As identified in the introduction, Illiberal Democracies (identified in quadrant 2) have proven to be troubling to categorize. These systems reveal that states can insincerely fit themselves into a democratic category – that is, they can manifest certain aspects of a democratic polity (the principally structural dimension) without the other aspect (the principally behavioral dimension), which many believe to be crucial in order for the system to work.⁶ In these cases, individuals can vote, but they are given no capability to exercise this behavior effectively – freely being able to investigate candidates, read an uncensored or state-dominated press, circulate amongst one's peers/others to discuss or organize/rally around issues of the day.⁷

Similar in its mixed nature, but seldom discussed (especially by democracy scholars) are Liberal Autocracies.⁸ In this context, the formal aspects of a democratic political system are non-existent (there are no elections or if there are any they are without choice). At the same time, however, there are political liberties. Individuals here are allowed to organize and thus in the heart of authoritarian Bolivia, 1978, one could see a hunger strike involving 1,200 individuals not only avoid repression but yield numerous concessions from the government (McManus and Schlabach 1991, chapter 3).

1.1 THE LOGIC OF POLITY CONSTRUCTION

Above the point was made that different polities existed (composed of varying combinations of liberalism and rights), in this section I attempt to contend with the question of why. In some of the earlier discussions about causal determinants of regime type (e.g., Lipset 1959; Moore 1966; Dahl 1971; O'Donnell 1979) and some of the more recent discussions as well (e.g., Bratton and Van de Walle 1994), individuals have discussed the "necessary conditions" and "prerequisites" for certain political systems – usually conceived in a static manner (i.e., as they attempt to understand why a particular type of system exists). This position emphasizes structure and downplays the importance of actors and probability. Latter, this view was challenged by those who advocated a more contingent, strategic approach (e.g., O'Donnell and Schmitter 1986). This position emphasizes structure less and privileges actors – usually conceived in a dynamic manner (i.e., as they attempt to understand why a particular change from one type of system to another occurs). My effort is more in line with the first, but it also draws on the second as it acknowledges that only when actors have mobilized around some structural factor, will action result.⁹

The argument of polity configuration advanced here is one based on the principles of contestation and accommodation (e.g., Oppenheimer 1914; Goldstein 1983; Gurr 1988; Tilly 1990; Collier and Collier 1991; Finer 1997).¹⁰ From this view, struggles involving super- and/or

subordinates are associated with different political systems as determined by the nature of the battles and the context within which the battles takes place. The systems vary in structure because certain aspects of struggle are resolved, while others are left alone.¹¹ While such a position may at first seem controversial, as Tilly (1998, 5) identifies,

Analysts commonly recognize the concentration of social movements (narrowly defined) in parliamentary democracies, the vulnerability of weakened despotic regimes to revolution, the greater frequency of coups d'état where military forces exercise great autonomy, and a miscellany of near-tautologies such as the prevalence of strikes under industrial capitalism or the concentration of peasant revolts in large-landlord systems.

Although this knowledge is prevalent, however, he then warns us that (Tilly, 1998)

we have no well-established general mapping of variation in the forms and dynamics of contentious politics across the multiple types of state regime.

While existing in the vacuum, I offer four brief outlines of possible intersections of different regime types (quadrants) and relevant characteristics below.

LIBERAL DEMOCRACY (QUADRANT 1)

This regime type should be affiliated with numerous factors. Huntington (1991, 106) notes that perhaps the most important factor is economic development which

(leads) to more widespread literacy, education, and urbanization, a larger middle class, and the development of values and attitudes supportive of democracy...

Such arguments are supported by numerous scholars (e.g., Lipset 1959; Dahl 1989, 251; Inglehart 1990). The likelihood of a polity being Liberal-Democratic should be increased by the number of years that the polity has been around without significant change – identifying the third wave. This follows from the fact that democracies tend to thrive on stable political relations. Additionally, protest behavior is likely to be found in democracies as well. As Tarrow (1989,

344) states, "(p)eople do not gain reform by acquiescing to authority; they achieve it by daring to demand more." Democracies should thus be somewhat rife with protest as they are indelibly open to redefinitions, reclassifications, reaffirmations, and retractions, but this level should not be excessive.

External factors enter to the extent that democracies are likely found where other states around them are engaged in similar levels of civic engagement. Here, the profound changes occurring in 1989 and 1990 would not be viewed as merely artifacts of neighborhood governments transforming as exclusively elite activity, but rather a diffusion effect of successive challenges to other governments, prompting individuals within another countries to challenge their leaders, and prompting leaders within these contexts to accommodate the challenges with democratic governance (Goldstein 1983; Starr 1991). Theories of liberalism would also seem to suggest that the number of countries interacting with a country would tend to increase the degree of democracy present through a process of cultural diffusion, openness, and communication.

ILLIBERAL AUTOCRACY (QUADRANT 4)

Political systems of this category are likely associated with political revolutions and coups in line with the arguments of Skocpol (1979) and others (e.g., Huntington 1964; Nordlinger 1977; Tilly 1990). These governments should tend to exist where there are large populations, for they would take the excessive demands placed on governments within these contexts as a cue to subsume other requests for political liberties and rights. Finally, in line with the third wave of democracy, one would expect that although the majority of the world still lives under this type of political system, the length of time the polity has been in existence should also be negatively related to presence within this category (as this forms the base category that everyone else is moving from). A rival hypothesis to the regional-neighborhood exists here as these political systems might emerge in a contentious geographic region where

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external threats compel domestic actors to act in a more authoritarian manner (e.g., Buzan 1983). Consequently, autocratic regimes thrive in highly contentious environments that exist within both internal as well as external domains.

ILLIBERAL DEMOCRACY (QUADRANT 2)

These governments are likely present when protest behavior or a coup occurs. Here, leaders are forced to make some concessions in order to stay in power. Such concessions would be less likely within a threatening external environment where leaders could legitimately “clamp down” on those that might threaten their rule. Factors such as economic development and population, which do not change much over time or place, should not have much of an influence on these systems as they would tend to exist within environments where strategic choices made by elites “in the heat of the contentious moment.” Finally, it is expected that the longer that a regime is in place, the higher the likelihood that it will move to one of the Liberal-Democratic or Illiberal-Autocratic poles.

LIBERAL AUTOCRACY (QUADRANT 3)

Similarly, I expect that the presence of Liberal Autocratic systems is increased by coups and political revolutions and decreased by the length of time that the political system is in existence and external threats. Elite behavior and conciliatory action is anticipated for political leaders may simultaneously wish to maintain a significant amount of control over political rights while at the same time be willing to acquiesce to certain improvements in citizen’s lives in exchange for continued power.

Causal relationships have been summarized in Table 1.

Table 1. Determinants of Polity Structure

Relevant Variables System Type	Economic Development	Durability	Population	Revolution	Protest	Coups	Neighboring Conflict	Neighborhood Contact
Liberal Democracy	+	+			+		+	+
Illiberal Democracy		-		+	+		-	
Liberal Autocracy		-		+		+	-	
Illiberal Autocracy		+		+		+	+	

2. DATA AND DESIGN

A thorough examination of the arguments made above requires both appropriate measurement as well as empirical investigation. While not completely satisfied with either the data that is available or the measurement strategy selected, the analysis provided here does prove useful for identifying some general observations about polity structure and causal determinants. The research also allows us to develop some very precise directions for future research.

MEASURING POLITY STRUCTURE ACROSS TWO DIMENSIONS

Given the efforts at conceptual development of autocracy and democracy, the lack of effort extended to operationalizing polity structure is surprising. No real indicators have been created for the purposes of characterizing general polity structures paying attention to multiple characteristics, for relatively long periods of time, except for Gurr's (1999) *POLITY* indicator. This measure has been used extensively in the areas of international relations, specifically that concerned with war, but has largely been ignored by scholars in comparative politics – outside the area of human rights violations (e.g., Davenport 1995; 1996; 1999).¹² Even the measures contained here have been inevitably turned into measures of democracy and autocracy. This was not initially intended by Gurr (1974) for he and his associates were attempting to provide a measure of overall “authority patterns” (i.e., “a set of asymmetric relations among hierarchically

ordered members of a social unit that involves the direction of the unit" [Eckstein and Gurr 1975, 22]) and not "democraticness", but subsequent developments of the dataset moved toward what the audience appeared to desire (Ward and Gleditsch 1997, 363-366). By making this transition, Gurr joins a large community of scholars who have dedicated themselves to the measurement of democratic political structures and it is here that my attention must turn.

As found, operationalizations of democracy have varied significantly. Some have maintained that democracy is dichotomous in nature – where you either are or are not democratic (e.g., Hewitt 1977; Muller 1988). Others suggest that democracy is a continuous measure – where there are relative degrees of democracy (and by definition autocracy). In making these categorizations, scholars have addressed exclusively one of the dimensions addressed above. For example, considering political rights, numerous scholars measure levels of democracy by magnitudes of voter turnout (e.g., Smith 1969; Vanhannen 1990), while addressing the subject of political liberties others suggest that democracy is best measured by considering the type of party representation that they have available (e.g., Cutright 1963). Additionally, scholars have attempted to combine dimensions (e.g., Dahl 1971; Bollen 1980; 1986; 1993a;b).¹³ Bollen (1993b) presents by far one of the most comprehensive efforts.¹⁴

For the purposes of this investigation, I use *POLITY 98* to measure the political rights dimension and *Freedom House* to measure the political liberties dimension across 164 countries from 1972 to 1996, by the year (composed of independent polities with populations greater than one half million). With these two indicators a categorical indicator is developed, which captures each of the quadrants identified above. This deviates from previous conceptions for I do not collapse the indicator in a dichotomous fashion, "flatten" out the measure by forcing one dimension, and I am not forced to rank the polity structures in some (arbitrary) sense. Each measure is discussed below.

POLITICAL RIGHTS: INSTITUTIONAL CHARACTERISTICS

The *POLITY 98* indicator is actually a composite score of different structural characteristics:

(Insert Table 2. About Here)

From the table, it is clear that different combinations capture distinct authority structures, being sensitive to the many forms that political systems might take. As stated by Ward and Gleditsch (1997, 364),¹⁵

Based on these characteristics, Gurr ... established simple additive measures ...

The intention was to characterize autocracies by the institutional monopolization of politics and power by the central government and to define democracies by the presence of "multiple institutionalized centers of powers, some of which are open to widespread citizen participation."¹⁶

Different scholars tend to use the measure in different ways, some just use the democracy and autocracy categories, respectively; others subtract the autocracy from the democracy score. As the three correlate highly with one another, I do not worry about such distinctions and merely focus on the democracy score. Here, category "0" designates full autocracies (e.g., Mexico 1972-1977; Libya; Uzbekistan 1991-1996) and category "10" represents full democracies (e.g., the United States, Uruguay 1989-1996).

POLITICAL LIBERTIES: BEHAVIORAL CHARACTERISTICS

The indicator used for this characteristic is somewhat less straightforward in nature, but nevertheless it seems somewhat well respected, widely used, and generally consistent with expert/anecdotal evidence.¹⁷ The measure, developed by *Freedom House*, is a categorical variable where individual countries are rated according to who comes "closest to the ideals of freedom of expression, assembly and demonstration, religion, and association" (McColm et al. 1991, 70). Idealized liberal regimes protect individuals from state-directed harm, maintain free

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economic activity, and strive for equality of opportunity. As designed, there are 7 points to the scale, with a "1" being applied to the countries that fits this ideal most effectively (e.g., Argentina 1986-1988; New Zealand) and a "7" being applied to "countries and territories (with) virtually no freedom" (e.g., Haiti 1991-1993; Albania 1972-1989) (McColm et al 1991, 72).

Although indicators for everything tend to be criticized, this one in particular has been particularly targeted. Some have been "put off" the measure because it is not clear how the coders derive their rankings. Unlike the *Polity* measure, there is no clear breakdown of what falls into different categories. Some have suggested that the measure was inappropriately used as an indicator of repression when it seemed to be representing "democraticness." I have tended to agree with these criticisms in the past, especially since my research has been based in human rights, while trying to assess the impact of democracy on this behavior. For the purposes of this study, however, and the generally positive evaluations that have been given to the measure in the recent past, I feel more confident about its application here.

BRINGING TOGETHER THE DIMENSIONS

In line with the figure provided earlier (Figure 1), to identify different polity structures I overlay the *POLITY* and *Freedom House* measures, using this as a basis to identify different regime types. The biggest problem with this effort arises in designation of "cutoff points". Whereas other conceptualizations of polity structure are directly comparable to the one identified above (e.g., Bratton and Van de Walle's [1994, 471] as well as Dahl's [1971, 7]), in this case I am forced to be a bit more precise by specifically identifying when Illiberal Democracies end and Liberal Democracies begin? Additionally, I must address where Liberal Autocracies begin and Illiberal Autocracies end? For this paper, understanding that the subject of proper assignments will require much more attention than is possible here, I have decided to put forward suggestions that rely upon the information provided within the two codebooks in conjunction with how individuals have actually used the data in the past.

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For the *POLITY* measure, one could make a case that regimes above a score of “8” are fully democratic (i.e., political rights exist) and those below this score are autocratic (or at least non-democratic). Within the former context, there are constraints on the chief executive, some form of competitive executive recruitment, some openness of the selection process, and some competitiveness in political participation. Within the latter, the various characteristics are more or less opposite (e.g., there are no constraints on the executive and so forth). For the *Freedom House* measure, the authors are more explicit about where they would place different regimes (i.e., where they would place the “cut off” point). From the coding procedure, category “2” (e.g., Panama 1990-1991) is relatively free and “3, 4 (and) 5 have progressively fewer civil liberties than those in category 2 (i.e., they are partly free)” (McComb et al 1992, 72). Using this information, I establish “3” (e.g., Albania 1992) as the cut off point and argue that those that fall above this category are illiberal (e.g., Hungary 1987-1988 in category “4”) and those that fall below it are liberal.¹⁸ This is displayed below in Figure 2.

(Insert Figure 2. About Here)

EXPLANATORY VARIABLES

As discussed above, there are numerous variables that are employed to account for variance in polity structure. As many are discussed elsewhere, my discussion of them is brief.

Internal Factors. The *Duration of Polity* structure (i.e., the number of years that a specific government has been around without significant change in its institutions [changes in the *Polity* score equal to or greater than 2 points]) is taken from the Gurr (1999) data. *Protest* is operationalized in line with the indicators developed by Davenport (1995). As designed, several dissident events are drawn from Banks' *Cross-National Time-Series Data Archive* (1998): strikes, guerrilla warfare, riots and protest demonstrations, and these are used to construct three measures: 1) cumulative frequency (i.e., the number of dissident events taking place during a particular year), 2) the degree of violence present (i.e., whether or not guerilla warfare or riots

take place), and 3) the deviance of protest behavior from the cultural norm (i.e., the degree to which dissent within a particular year deviated from the mean of the country's experience over the full time period under investigation). Banks was also used to capture more elite forms of conflict behavior such as *Coups* (successful and attempted); large-scale, mass behavior exceeding the parameters of protest in the form of *Revolution*, and *Population* (expressed in 100,000's).

External Factors. Following the suggestions of Summers and Heston (1988), who identify the problems with the use of GNP and GDP, *Economic Development* is measured with energy consumption per capita. This measure is also taken from Banks' (1998). There are four indicators for spatial context; all are drawn from the work of Monty Marshall (2000). The number of *Countries on the Border* represents the "Number of states with common land border to unit-specific state" (Marshall 2000, 3) and the number of *Countries in the Region* represents the number of countries within specific geographic locales.¹⁹ Two measures are provided for the magnitude of conflict experienced within the bordering countries (i.e., *Bordering Armed Conflict*) and the region (i.e., *Regional Conflict*). Relevant conflicts include: international violence, international war, international independence war, civil violence, civil war, ethnic violence, and ethnic war. Considering such factors as human resources (deaths, injuries, etc.), forced dislocations, and infrastructural damage, these indicators are coded on a scale from "1" to "7" (with "7" being the most severe) for each of the countries involved. This score is then summarily added to identify the total magnitude of conflict within neighbors or the region, respectively.²⁰

METHODOLOGICAL TECHNIQUE

To analyze variance in polity configuration, I employ the use of a Multinomial Logistic Regression (e.g., Aldrich and Nelson 1984; Hosmer and Lemeshow 1989). This strategy is utilized for there are four outcomes that are possible for the dependent variable, which are all

mutually exclusive and unranked. The latter characteristic is most important as (STATA 1999, 399)

(i)t is the unordered categorical property of (the dependent variable) that distinguishes the use of (multinomial logit models) from (regression) (which is appropriate for a continuous dependent variable), from (a model) (which is appropriate for ordered categorical data), from logit (which is appropriate for two outcomes and which can therefore be thought of as ordered).²¹

The model proves to be particular useful in the context of this analysis because it allows us to simultaneously examine conditions that are associated with polity structure as well as factors that will lead to other categories (through the examination of causal impacts across different values of the independent variables). The effort at comparative assessment is facilitated through the selection of the base-category (i.e., the value of the dependent variable that forms the basis of comparison across different values). Since the majority of countries in the world have historically been within the Illiberal Autocratic or Liberal Democratic categories, these were used as the base categories for estimation. Results thus identify the probabilities that different polity structures exist given the existence of particular independent variables.

Finally, as the coefficients reported from multinomial logit models are somewhat confusing (frequently sending individuals into discussions of "incidence rate ratios" – which are somewhat difficult to interpret), I use King et al.'s (1999) computer simulation *Clarify* to present results. This model uses Monte Carlo simulation to convert statistical results into theoretically and practically meaningful values. For this paper, results are computed into probabilities such that I will be able to say, for example, that when variable x takes a value of v events that the probability that the polity structure is going to be "3" (Liberal Autocracy) is z%.

3. EXPLORING POLITY CONFIGURATIONS: A FIRST LOOK

Perhaps the best way to begin the analysis is with a general overview of polity characteristics. As noted by numerous scholars (most notably Huntington 1991), the specific type of regimes has changed significantly over time. Drawing upon Gurr's *POLITY* measures (Figure 3 in the upper left corner, expressed in percentages), we are able to see that since 1810, there have been three waves of democratization (from 1828-1926; 1943-1962; and 1974 to the present) which have each (after periods of retraction) increased the number of democracies (as well as polities) found within the world. For clearer exposition, on the right hand side I have highlighted the third wave. Of course, this only considers the political rights dimension. When one factors in consideration of political liberties, then we are able to gauge the distribution of diverse political configurations discussed earlier (unfortunately, this can only be done for the 1972-1996 time period).

(Insert Figure 3. About Here)

Viewing the figures on the bottom, one can see that Illiberal Autocracies are still dominant as a percentage of all polities. Most of the political systems, even amidst the current period of global democratization, live in relatively autocratic governments. Liberal democracy (as a regime type) has made significant inroads during this third wave and thus by the 1996 time period, the first two polity configurations begin to converge in their presence within the global system. There are other changes in the global composition of political configurations. Liberal autocracies (which for much of the period forms the third largest category of regime type) have increased over time (somewhat waxing and waning throughout the 1972-1996 time period). By the 1992, Illiberal Democracies are about even with Liberal Autocracies as a percentage of all regime types, but despite the amount of attention they have received, they still only make up a relatively small number (e.g., 6 in 1992 within the sample observed as opposed to 15 Liberal Autocratic regimes in the same year).

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Regardless of the number, it is clear by the end of this time period, however, that the distribution of polity characteristics is more complex than at any time since 1972 and that if one extends this to 1998 (which is not shown here) the distribution becomes even more equitable. This trend differs from the conclusions of Ward and Gleditsch (1997) who argue that the structure of the democracy (i.e., the rights component) has simplified overtime to a relatively equitable bifurcation between full autocracies and democracies. At the same time, this difference makes sense for they identify that the *Freedom House* indicator was more responsive to the participation aspect of political democracy (Ward and Gleditsch 1997, 380). This legitimates the measure.

EXPLAINING CAUSAL RELATIONSHIPS: A SECOND LOOK

While useful, the discussion above only provides an assessment of distributions and trends. One is still left wondering what factors account for position on the polity scale. Running multinomial logit regression models, prior expectations were largely supported, there are some interesting differences also identified.

POLITY STRUCTURE WITH AUTOCRACY AS THE BASELINE

From the results, the model (which is provided within Appendix 1a) explains 26 percent of the variance in the polity measure. Concerning the broader structural characteristics, the probability of being placed in the Liberal Democratic category is enhanced by economic development, as indexed by energy consumption per capita, as well as by population size.²² Modernization theory is thus supported within this analysis although interaction effects between these two variables might suggest different relationships as the excess burden of a large population without the economic wherewithal to contend with it is likely destabilizing, leading to other forms of governance. In this case, it likely perpetuates the probability of being placed in the Illiberal Autocratic category as no other regime type is influenced by such characteristics.

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Addressing factors somewhat less impervious to human agency, below I explore other variables of interest. As presented within the figures, the y-axis represents the probability of a particular category being experienced and the x-axis represents the different values for the independent variables. The values themselves were selected from consideration of variable distributions (thus for example dichotomous variables are only examined for values when the condition of interest is present) as well as theoretical relevance.

(Insert Figure 4a. About Here)

Results are generally consistent with the brief sketches provided above, while at the same time displaying much greater complexity than suggested. The probability of placement within the Liberal Democratic category is enhanced by the overall amount of protest (near 85% at extremely high rates of occurrence), the length of time that the polity is around without change (near 20% at 30 years), and to a marginal extent political revolution (although increased frequency of this behavior exhibits a negative impact). It is plausible, therefore, to support the claim that (relative to Illiberal Autocracies - the base category) full democracies are differentiated by the continuous engagement of civil society within a stable political system.

External factors also influence the likelihood of being placed within the Liberal Democratic category. Countries with fewer countries on their border are more likely to fall within this regime type, while the number of countries in the region increases the likelihood of placement. States that do not immediately have concerns for their safety or the protection of their borders and who have a multitude of potential contacts in their home region are more likely to be Liberal and Democratic.

From the Illiberal Autocratic baseline, the two hybrids are not very comprehensible (i.e., not many variables are substantively important). While *Polity Duration* and *Violent Conflict* are statistically significant in their impact on Illiberal Democracy, they are ineffectual when one looks at the probabilities of being placed in this category, across different values of independent

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variables. Placement almost appears random. Liberal Autocracies are slightly better accounted for. Interestingly, when one considers the constants, it is found that all other things being held constant (i.e., all independent variables being held at their mean), Liberal Autocracies are almost as likely as Liberal Democracies. Moreover, coups increase the probability of being in this category, while the *Duration of the Polity* tends to diminish this probability (albeit slightly).

POLITY STRUCTURE WITH DEMOCRACY AS THE BASELINE

In almost complete juxtaposition to the findings above, Illiberal Autocracies are found to thrive off of domestic and international strife – although not all forms.²³ From the simulations (provided in Figure 4b below), one is able to see that at all levels of revolutionary activity, low levels of mass domestic conflict, and at most years of polity formation, these political systems are favored. This probability is subsequently increased when revolutionary activity worsens (i.e., continues) and decreased significantly when mass protest behavior expands in frequency as well as decreased slightly when the polity endures without change. Illiberal Autocracies decay through pressure exerted from below (as evidenced within the popular movements of 1989) as well as to a limited extent from internal dynamics (with its numerous organizational inefficiencies and diminished political legitimacy [Wintrobe 1998]).

(Insert Figure 4b. About Here)

Also different from the results above, it is clear that Illiberal Autocracies thrive within complex as well as contentious international contexts. The probability of these political systems is increased as the number of countries on the border rise as well as when the magnitude of conflict is worsened. The likelihood of Illiberal Autocracies is decreased, however, when the number of countries is increased, suggesting that certain aspects of the liberal thesis may be correct as the complexity of the external political environment seemingly compels political systems to adapt and open themselves internally in an effort to navigate through the exchanges that take place across societies.

As we move to our hybrid political systems, our capacity to explain polity structure is once again somewhat diminished. Illiberal Democracies are not well predicted by any variable. Across all statistically significant variables, when values are increased there is no increase in causal impact. This may bode well for those arguments that suggest that such regimes are fundamentally about negotiation, compromise and dynamic contingency – thus being less susceptible to this type of analysis. At the same time, this is uncertain because there has simply not been enough time for causal factors to either have their influence on polity configuration or for us to examine them rigorously in any great detail (hence the urgency contained within Zakaria's [1997] article). Liberal Autocracies appear to be strongly associated with coups (three successful or attempted one's result in a 33% probability of this category). Although not influenced to a dramatic extent, these systems also appear to thrive in relative contentious environments. As the magnitude of conflict within the region increases, the probability of Liberal Autocracy is increased. Mentioned above, this relationship may capture the attempt made by government authorities to maintain power within a potential crisis situation, while offering liberalization as an inducement to continue sacrificing democratic control and/or economic redistribution to non-military-related subjects.

4. A CONCLUSION AND AN AGENDA

The present study attempted to shed some light on the neglected subject of polity structure. The impetus for this effort emerged from a relatively animated discussion about new and/or questionable forms of political systems. Here, I have attempted to identify a way that we might be able to better understand these diverse polities as well as initiate an examination of why the different forms exist. For this, I relied upon data drawn from numerous datasets over the 1972-1996 time period and across 164 Countries.

From the results, certain inroads have been made with regard to our understanding of political systems. For example, the hybridic combinations of liberalism and democracy (i.e.,

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Illiberal Democracies and Liberal Autocracies) tend to be relatively small in number, although increasing, and not well explained by variables that work well in more traditional types of polities (i.e., Liberal Democracies and Illiberal Autocracies). Both hybrids tend to decrease as the institutions persist, suggesting that movement to one of the more traditional poles is undertaken over time. Additionally, some reaffirming insight into Liberal Democracy and Illiberal Autocracy has been provided. As anticipated, the probability of falling into the Liberal Democratic category is increased by mass protest behavior, political stability and the number of countries within the region, while the number of countries bordering a nation-state and revolutionary activity tends to decrease it. Illiberal Autocracies seem to falter within these same contexts. The latter seems to thrive when the society is new, convulsing with both internal as well as external conflict, and by an increased number of countries on the border. When the number of countries in the region increases, however, Illiberal Autocracies are decreased in likelihood.

In certain respects, the present analysis is disappointing in that the insight into the hybrids came up somewhat short. There were no "smoking guns" identified. In another respect, the analysis provides a rather sober conclusion that these hybrid systems are newly emerging as well as increasing in number (and thus worthy of attention), but still numerically in the minority, less susceptible to systematic analysis, and over time most likely to fall into the vortex of the Illiberal Autocratic-Liberal Democratic poles identified by Ward and Gleditsch (1997) – a pattern that has been operative for about 20 or 30 years. Additionally, the analysis provides an interesting beginning for further reflection about polity structure as it provides a measure that is predicted in a manner that we would expect (perhaps the best form of validity). Using this measure, five areas of additional investigation seem particularly worthwhile.

(Insert Figure 5. About Here)

First, the indicator of regime type developed should be further explored with regard to refining its' sensitivity to various polity combinations. For example, Peru between 1990 and

1996 manifested a *Polity* score of “7” but a civil liberty score of “3”, falling in the Liberal Autocracy category. Where should polities in this middle zone between extremes (or alternatively right at the boundaries of categories) be placed? Second, with the indicator one could rigorously begin to investigate the various paths to and from different political structures (e.g., like that suggested by Stepan [1986] or Karl [1990]). Considering Figure 5 (which represents a few examples of different political systems that have undergone change), it is clear that there are many trajectories that could be followed. The question is precisely why, how and how long?²⁴ Third, it would be useful to explore diffusion, lagged as well as simultaneous effects, identifying whether or not more dynamic relationships exist. For example, where an initial opening of the polity structure increases the amount of mass protest that (in turn) leads to additional democratization or alternatively a rollback to autocracy. Additionally, it may be the case that multiple regimes undergo similar types of changes at the same time, thus increasingly the willingness of other states to experiment. Fourth, it is clear that the brief sketches of theoretical relationships provided earlier need to be developed so that causal processes can be more clearly identified. We must simply address Tilly’s (1998) comment with greater effort than that provided here. Finally, public opinion literature on tolerance and various indicators of trust in government and efficacy should be used in order to predict polity configuration as well as movement from one system to another. This would assist us in understanding what types of transitions individuals are ready for as well as when. Such an effort would overcome an important weakness in the literature where behavior and attitudes are kept distinct, but which normally rely upon one another to establish causal connections as well as theoretical/practical importance.

As we continue to analyze the core and also the edges of democracy and more broadly polity configuration and understand the continual paradoxes of governance that emerge, efforts such as those identified above may invariably provide the best guide to improving our

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understanding of where we have been and also providing the tools to identify where we may be going.

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Endnotes

¹ This research is based on a somewhat limited assessment of various state characteristics. I highlight those that are relevant to a particular argument within the literature on democracy and autocracy. Other discussions (e.g., Eckstein and Gurr 1975; Finer 1997; Tilly 1998) would be better suited for a broader conceptualization of the problem.

² Plato (1974) refers to these political systems as “timocracies”, while Dahl (1971, 34) refers to them as “competitive oligarchies”. I select my phrase to maintain a certain degree of symmetry in presentation.

³ The motivations for studying the subject have been clear. As Russell (1938; 1992, 186-7) reminds us (t)he problem of taming of power is ... a very ancient one. The Taoists thought it insoluble, and advocated anarchism; the Confucians trusted to a certain ethical and governmental training which should turn the holders of power into sages endowed with moderation and benevolence. At the same period, in Greece, democracy, oligarchy, and tyranny were contending for mastery; democracy was intended to check abuses of power, but was perpetually defeating itself by falling a victim to the temporary popularity of some demagogue. Plato, like Confucius, sought the solution in a government of men trained to wisdom... To anyone who studies history or human nature, it must be evident that democracy, while not a complete solution (to abuses of state power), is an essential part of the solution.

What different individuals mean by the term is another matter.

⁴ As noted by Bollen (1993b), Dahl conceives dimensions differently but he does refer to a similar list of items. I will stay with Bollen’s suggestion.

⁵ An important dimension that is ignored here is that between different forms of autocracy as determined by the magnitude of power wielded by the central authorities over the populous and the desire to use that power across different levels of citizen’s lives (Friedrich and Brzezinski 1965 in Wintrobe; Kirkpatrick 1982 in Wintrobe; Wintrobe 1998, 7-15). The absolute extreme in this case is a totalitarian system where tremendous power is wielded and the state uses it within most aspects of its interactions with citizens [Arendt 1951/1973, 326] and other closed political systems). Somewhat less severe in nature are generally military dictatorships, sultanist, patrimonial, and neopatrimonial regimes. Finally, even less severe, because of their more individual concerns and more constricted access to coercive instruments, are “tyrannies” and “despots”.

⁶ Individuals sharing this opinion have in other contexts referred to these as “sham” or “hollow” democracies (e.g., Herman and Brodhead 1984).

⁷ Illiberal democracies are not a new phenomenon. Individuals that study democracies have long been attentive to such limitations (e.g., Russell [1938] 1988; Held 1995). Our apparent surprise is thus inconsistent with historical evidence.

⁸ One explanation for this neglect emerges from Bratton and Van de Walle (1994, 457) when they argue that since much of the democracy literature concerns only European (principally Western and Southern) and Latin American countries, the type of authoritarian systems that served as the “springboards” for the democracies under investigation were relatively uniform in nature. In this context, less attention had to be paid to the subject.

⁹ One might suggest that this is similar in some respects to Karl (1990).

¹⁰ Tilly (1998) argues that ideas of contention also lie embedded within numerous theories about regime types (e.g., Dahl 1971; Finer 1997). He tends to disagree that the nature of any relationship between contention and regime change/structure is straightforward enough to be estimated empirically. In support of his position I again reiterate that I have simplified the relationship between contention, accommodation and regime type for the purposes of initializing a much needed analysis of the basic parameters of the relationship. For example, I have ignored the influence of democracy on contention (Muller 1985; Tilly 1998), something that might influence the findings through a consideration of two-stage least squares or cointegration models.

¹¹ This goes against the arguments of Huntington (1984) for example who says that democratic regimes are seldom (if ever) instituted by mass action. Of course, this is specifically concerning regime emergence; this says nothing about normal existence within this type of polity.

¹² For examples of other early attempts see Mckinlay and Cohan (1975) and Hannan and Carroll (1981). Similar to many individuals before the emergence of scholars interested in measuring democracy in the 1960’s, these individuals appeared to be more interested in assessing the degree of military control/influence within the societies in question (viewed statically as well as institutionally) and not on particular aspects of rule in a behavioral sense.

¹³ The practice follows the diversity in conceptualization. As Bollen (1993a, 1209) notes, Some definitions of Liberal Democracy or similar concepts emphasize the democratic rule component (i.e., the extent to which the national government is accountable to the populous – political rights). Schumpeter (1950, 269) states that democracy “is that institutional arrangement for arriving at political decisions in which the individuals acquire the power to decide by means of a competitive struggle for the people’s vote.” Similarly, Moore (1966, 414), Lipset (1981, 27), Huntington (1984, 195), and others (e.g., Vanhannen 1990, 11) concentrated on the democratic rule dimension... In other definitions, the traits attributed to Liberal

Democracy fall under both dimensions (political rights as well as political liberties). Lenski (1966, 319) identifies universal adult suffrage, an aspect of democratic rule, and the freedom of organized political opposition, a reflection of political liberties, as basic to democracy. Therborn (1977, 4) lists popular representation, universal and equal suffrage, and freedoms of speech, assembly, organization, and the press as crucial variables of democracy.

¹⁴ Although well thought out and executed, my hesitancy to use this indicator is severalfold. First, several of the measures used by Bollen are not available over relatively long time periods. As but one example, the Banks data (1998) has been privatized and reformatted, the new version no longer including the freedom of group opposition indicator. Consequently, extensive analyses of the most recent time period could not be undertaken with the data used in the initial investigation. Second, Bollen was fundamentally interested in validating measures of a democratic index, not exploring the complexity of polity configurations. While useful, therefore, this work is not directly relevant to the current analysis.

¹⁵ As Ward and Gleditsch (1997) also identify, one should not be fooled by the apparent variance in components. Employing a Markov analysis to explore the probabilities that different *POLITY* characteristics change (from 1800 to 1994 across 161 polities), they find that most of the variance in democratic polity structure in the Gurr measure is attributed to restrictions placed on the executive, while most of the variance in autocratic polity structure is attributed to executive recruitment. Interestingly, they also find that the different characteristics over the time period under investigation tend to vary with regards to their influence. The most complexity in polity structure is exhibited up until 1980. After this time, executive constraint and recruitment wield clear importance within the respective democratic and autocratic indices. The measure works well for my purposes for the political rights dimension is intended to capture the openness of the political structure from elite interference. There is meant to be some limitation on executive/elite power so that the rest of the political system and society are able to exert some influence over the polity.

¹⁶ As but one indicator of measures validity, Jagers and Gurr (1995) ran correlations between the democracy and autocracy scores with Bollen's error covariance structures of selected aggregate variables, Gastil's (1987) aggregate sum of political and civil liberties as well as Vanhannen's index (1984), and found the correlation to be statistically significant at .88. As Ward and Gleditsch (1997, 379) conclude,

The results show that these four basic methods ... in different samples and different time periods share a large amount of covariance and in general point toward a broad aggregate convergence in the measurements.

¹⁷ It should be noted that Bollen's (1993a) analysis identifies a certain amount of measurement error with the civil liberties measure (preferring Banks' indicator of freedom of group opposition).

¹⁸ I acknowledge that this classification system is biased toward a strict definition of the Liberal Democratic category. For comparative purposes, I will later investigate models where Illiberal Autocracy is established as the base category. Within this context, a score of "3" on the democracy measure is used as the cut off point, over which regimes are classified as autocratic and under which regimes are classified as democratic (or at least non-autocratic).

¹⁹ These include: European (East/West), Middle East, West Africa, South-central Asia, North Africa, East Asia, East Africa, South America, South Africa, and Central American. Several countries are designated as "straddle states" as they fall in more than one region (e.g., Egypt which is between North Africa and Middle East, and Panama which is between Central and South America). Zaire and Sudan "straddle" three regions. In these different cases, the average of the multiple regional codes are used.

²⁰ It may at first seem strange to argue that conflict events matter internally and conflict magnitude matters externally, but it is maintained that this is the case for the former is more well known by government authorities and may have meanings that require more refined understanding. As such, frequency becomes a much more important issue as thresholds are likely established, which if exceeded results in government perceptions of threat (Davenport 2000). By contrast, the latter form of conflict is less well understood by "outsiders" and thus results in a more coarse kind of indicator.

²¹ A common threat to these models is what is referred to as "the Independence of Irrelevant Alternatives (IIA)" (e.g., Sowers et al 1999). IIA "means that the relative probability of choosing any two alternatives is independent of all other alternatives in the choice set" (Zang and Hoffman 1993, 194). This problem is not likely relevant here as multinomial logit models are normally applied to situations where some individual is selecting between various alternatives (e.g., when an individual is thinking about selecting one of three candidates to vote for). It may of course be the case that adding another category to the four identified might alter the causal effects, but I investigate this through the alteration of coding rules biased toward Liberal Democracies and Illiberal Autocracies. This should reveal any problems that exist with the choice set.

²² Analyses were also conducted with an indicator for the absolute number of polities in the global system and the results were not found to be dramatically altered. Additionally, correlation coefficients between the different indicators did not reveal that any independent variables were significantly related to one another above 51%.

²³ These results were obtained by making Liberal Democracy the base category and re-estimating the model. As these "coefficients would differ because they have different interpretations, but the predicted probabilities" (STATA 1999, 400) for the different variables would stay the same, I have not included these. They are available upon request.

²⁴ This counters the negative comments of Shin (1994, 148) as he states (with regard to existing measures of polity structure) that "nothing can be inferred directly from their scores about either the process of democratic politics in different democracies or the dynamics of democratic transitions and consolidations currently unfolding in many regions of the world."