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Indicators of the Quality of Democracy:  
An Overview

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An Overview*

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**BADIA FIESOLANA, SAN DOMENICO DI FIESOLE (FI)**

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## **Abstract**

The main goal of this paper is to illuminate the discussion about the possible ways of defining and measuring the quality of democracy (QoD). It is argued that democratic regimes should primarily be distinguished on the basis of how they fulfil certain fundamental principles of political democracy, such as the degree of competition, representation, accountability and political equality. Moreover, by referring to the qualities, and not merely the quality of democracy, these regimes can also be analysed and compared having in mind given procedural characteristics (i.e. socio-economic, administrative-bureaucratic, political-constitutional and societal), or with respect to the elites-citizens relationship. As a result, the QoD is operationalised as the mix of the respective qualities of the regime (QoR), of society (QoSOC), of life (QoL), and of the state (QoST).

## **Keywords**

The quality of democracy (QoD), definitions, measurement indicators, polyarchy, the quality of life (QoL)

## **I. Introduction<sup>1</sup>**

Since the rapid growth of the number of self-declared liberal democracies in the world during the last three decades, the problem of defining and measuring the quality of democracy (QoD) has become increasingly important for both academic experts and political observers. The dual task of setting some minimal conditions for identifying political democracies among a quite varied set of regimes and describing their qualities in an increasingly interdependent international environment has been a major challenge for the students of democratisation. A number of recent publications have tried to address various aspects of the QoD in diverse international settings (Green and Skalnik Leff, 1997; Rose and Chull Shin, 1998; Lijphart, 1999; Schmitter and Guilhot, 2000). Nevertheless, most of these publications have either treated this topic rather superficially and, mostly, a-theoretically, or they have analysed only the results of better- and, respectively, lower-quality democracies, thus failing to make a clear distinction between ‘process and outcome’. Another problem associated with studying different features of the QoD has been that some social scientists have considered the socio-economic performance, the political stability, the cultural and ethnic homogeneity of the state and the citizens’ satisfaction with the various types of democratic regimes indicative of a higher-quality democracy without providing sufficient evidence of why this should be so and without explaining how this has been achieved in particular national (and international) social and political context.

Despite the growing number of intellectual contributions on these and other related subjects, there has still not been enough political research that has analysed the QoD systematically and comprehensively. The ongoing academic debate about the qualities of new and old democratic regimes is, therefore, aiming not only at recognising and defending high-quality democracies, but also at establishing some stable and clearly identifiable criteria for comparing and measuring political democracies.<sup>2</sup> The principal goal of this paper is to assist in plugging the existing gap between these two related fields of analysing the qualities of different types of democratic regimes by evaluating the possibilities of conceptualising and measuring the QoD.

This paper is divided into five sections. Section one deals with the genealogy and usage of the term QoD. Section two compares definitions of the QoD. Part three explores the opportunity of theorising and operationalising the notion of QoD for measurement purposes. Section four presents a conceptual model featuring various measurement indexes of the QoD. Finally, section five offers conclusions about how to analyse and measure the qualities of different democratic regimes in diverse socio-political settings.

## **II. Theoretical Antecedents and Empirical Research on the ‘Quality of Democracy’**

Primarily, it should be recalled that the academic interest in studying the quality of democracy is not so new. It dates back to the time when people began to make a clearer distinction between democratic and other forms of government, thus starting to investigate the possibilities of improving some of the features of the existing political system. In more recent times, various social science publications have attempted to deal with this issue much more profoundly and at length. They have compared and contrasted democratic and autocratic regimes (Friedrich and Brzezinski, 1961; Arendt, 1966; Linz and Stepan, 1978; Sartori, 1987), while trying to estimate the survival capacity of unconsolidated political democracies in an austere or more benevolent socio-economic domestic and international environment (Huntington, 1968; Rustow, 1970; Przeworski, *et al.*, 1996).

Since the retreat of communism as a dominant political practice (and ideology) in Eastern Europe and other parts of the world and the substantial weakening of various types of autocratic regimes due to the ‘global resurgence of democracy’ in the late 1980s and early 1990s (Diamond and Plattner, 1993), there has been a renewed, if not greater, attention to studying the problems of the quality of democracy. This has been due to a number of related and mutually reinforcing factors. First, this has been possible, because of the increased opportunities for conducting comparative research in many

heterogeneous places around the world like in Latin America, Central and Eastern Europe, Africa, Southeast Asia and the Caribbean. This has, in turn, contributed to a great improvement in the scientific knowledge on democratisation and the quality of democracy in several closely-linked social science disciplines such as political science, sociology and anthropology, as well as such sub-disciplines as ‘transitology’ and ‘consolidology’ (O’Donnell and Schmitter, 1986; Mainwaring, O’Donnell, and Valenzuela, 1992; Linz and Stepan, 1996a; Berglund, *et al.*, 2001). From the long list of social science theories related to the QoD, one can distinguish between the different kinds of ‘modernisation theories’, especially those related to studying the structural and socio-economic determinants of democracy like economic development, political culture, civil society, social welfare, market regulation, institution-building and the media (Diamond, Linz, and Lipset, 1989; Przeworski, 1991; Hadenius, 1992; Putnam, 1993; Volgy and Schwarz, 1997; Vanhanen, 1997; Elster, Offe, and Preuss, 1998). Secondly, the sharp rise in the number of countries attempting to become or, alternatively, those imitating to be liberal democracies, has called for improved criteria to distinguish between them, as well as between these two groups and the rest of the political regimes around the world. This has been done through developing better theoretical knowledge and practical skills in analysing the performance of democratising regimes, especially as regards their varying degrees of transition and consolidation (Gasiorowski and Power, 1998; Schmitter and Guillhot, 2000; Foweraker and Krznaric, 2000). Thirdly, following the preceding two observations, the research of various aspects of the QoD has become quite relevant, because, after the sudden collapse of communist and numerous other autocratic regimes, transition to ‘electoral democracy’ has arguably become much easier than a decade ago, but the deepening of democracy and improving the performance of democratic regimes have become much more difficult. Hence, this has proved to be a major problem for those trying to keep up with the progress of the states developing democracies on a larger scale—both regionally and globally (Schmitter and Karl, 1992; Schedler, 1998; Diamond, 1999; McHenry, 2000).

### III. Defining the QoD

Many scholars and practitioners have used the concept of the QoD without trying to define it (Linz and Stepan, 1996b; Baker, 1999; Commonwealth Secretariat, 2001; Green and Skalnik Leff, 1997; Rose and Chull Shin, 1998; Lijphart, 1999). Others who have attempted to do so have encountered serious problems in justifying their choice of the focus and content of definition. The process of conceptualising the QoD has resulted in predominantly minimalist definitions aimed at a narrow characterisation of selected aspects of this notion. For instance, drawing heavily on Robert Dahl’s authoritative idea of describing the underlining features of existing democracies, or *polyarchies* (Dahl, 1971), David Altman and Aníbal Pérez-Liñán (2001: 1) refer to the QoD as ‘the extent to which any given polyarchy actualises its potential as a political regime.’ Michael Coppedge (1997: 179-80) conceives of the QoD as the ‘relative degree of democratisation among countries’ that are already labelled as polyarchies. Robert Putnam (1993) parallels the QoD with institutional performance and government responsiveness in particular, while Juan Linz and Alfred Stepan (1996b: 32-3) additionally emphasise the quality of political society.

One of the most popular definitions of the QoD is the one proposed by Arend Lijphart (1993: 149), in which he argues that ‘the term ‘quality’ refers to the degree to which a system meets such democratic norms as representativeness, accountability, equality and participation.’ The emphasis here is twofold: first, on a number of democratic principles, and, second, on the degree to which the political regime meets these principles.<sup>3</sup> Consequently, the QoD is not conceptualised as a *discreet* phenomenon measurable at point of time, but as a *continuous* development both temporally and notionally, dependant on an entire set of processes determining whether the system is representative, accountable, participatory and equal to all citizens and groups.

Finally, it is useful to mention that any definition of the QoD should not only refer to certain characteristics of the political system itself (i.e. about *democracy*), but also about the notion of ‘quality’. In a recent overview of the significance of this concept in relation to the QoD, Leonardo

Morlino (2003) has pointed out that the term *quality* can lay stress on (1) the procedure as to how the political policy is organised, (2) the content of the regime's structure and policies, and (3) the result of the government's activity. Hence, it could be concluded that the notion of 'quality' itself contributes substantially to the *multidimensionality* and diverse understanding of the concept of the QoD.

Having the above in mind, the QoD can be defined as a relatively stable and legitimate arrangement, which conforms to the basic principles of democracy: competition, participation and representation, as well as to accountability and political equality. Moreover, under the existing constitutional rule, the rulers are not only expected to adopt and implement these principles in practice, but are also responsive to the needs of the citizenry, while, at the same time, the citizens are responsible for active participation in the social and political life of their country, region and city.

Clearly, this definition has two parts—a *procedural* and a *processual* one. The first reflects the necessity to stipulate the principles and norms compatible with the overall objectives of political democracy as a system of governance, which makes it eligible to be called a political regime of a superior quality. The second specifies under what conditions and how these key democratic principles are put into effect, while both rulers and ruled enter into a reciprocal relationship of responsibility in order to create a better-quality democracy.

In order to further elucidate the concept of the QoD, a reference will be made to only three particular aspects of this definition. By '*a relatively stable and legitimate arrangement*' it is implied that, first, the set of institutional, collective and interpersonal interactions and the ascribed values, that the QoD consists of, operates in a regular and predictable fashion, and, second, that it is perceived as morally justifiable and politically desirable by most of the populace living on the territory of a given polity.

By including the phrase '*the existing constitutional rule*' reference is made to the notion of the rule of law. In the academic literature, the QoD has been closely associated with this latter concept (Powell, 1982; O'Donnell, 1994, 1999 and 2000; Baker, 1999). This is not accidental, since, it is believed, that the 'democratic method' (Schumpeter, 1975: 271)<sup>4</sup> can hardly operate without the constraint of the law, which, even in countries where there is not a written constitution, is publicly agreed upon and sanctioned by the authorities because of its customary usage. Some authors have pointed out that principles and freedoms of liberal democracy are hardly applicable without the supremacy of the rule of law, because of the intrinsic tension between collectively established political rights and the legal, pre-political construction of agency (O'Donnell, 1999 and 2000; Morlino, 1998 and 2003). In other words, without some kind of legal basis, not only is the political arrangement deeply flawed, but the functioning of the political regime is impeded in light of the very limited type of citizenship and unreliable ways of interest intermediation it can offer to individuals and their groups in the contemporary world (Huber and Powell, 1994; Della Porta and Mény, 1997; Merkel and Croissant, 2000).

Being 'responsive to the needs of the citizenry' and 'responsible to actively participate in the social and political life' are essential requirements for the rulers and, respectively, the citizens attempting to achieve better-quality democracy. Nevertheless, these are relatively weak conditions compared to the realisation of the four key democratic principles of free and fair competition and participation, political representation, regular accountability on the part of the leaders and political (and social) equality for the greatest number of citizens. At the same time, however, the process of improving the QoD often necessitates 'informal measures', such as the voluntary (and, occasionally, compulsory) *cooperation* between the citizens and rulers, in order to promote the 'game of democracy' and democratisation.<sup>5</sup>

#### IV. Operationalising the QoD

One of the central questions regarding the operationalisation of the QoD is whether one should only focus on the qualities of the political regime, or on the socio-political conditions and processes that determine the performance, longevity and stability of that regime. Traditionally, it has been very difficult to disentangle the *type* of the political regime from a set of *ascribed qualities* that characterise



the most popular form of systemic governance today—liberal democracy. For a long time, a superior QoD has inevitably been seen as a *product* of the democratisation process and, especially, of the consolidation of democracy (Schmitter and Guilhot, 2000). In fact, most of the recent theoretical debates about the QoD have been initiated in the ‘transitology’ and ‘consolidology’ literature (Mainwaring, O’Donnell, and Valenzuela, 1992; Linz and Stepan, 1996a; Diamond, 1999; Berglund, *et al.*, 2001). It is also true that this kind of literature has generally attempted to make a clear distinction between the *process* and *product* of democratisation (Schmitter, 1997), but when discussion has gone beyond the variety of political regime (i.e. democracy, hybrid regime and autocracy), socially and culturally universalistic qualities of the political system such as better women’s representation, increased citizens’ electoral participation and improved minorities’ protection have been perceived as belonging to democratic regimes rather than to autocratic ones.

There exist two principal ways of operationalising and measuring the QoD. The first focuses on the political regime *per se* and tries to measure its *degree of ‘democraticness’* compared to other forms of political regime (on an absolute vs. relative scale). The second method looks at a variety of socio-political processes when the *democratic performance* of the government, civil society and political institutions is evaluated. However, as has been pointed out by numerous social scientists, one should not get confused by the possibility that autocratic and mixed regimes sometimes achieve better results than democracies with respect to social and economic development or success in war, because the subject of these types of analysis is political regime, and sometimes even state, performance only.<sup>6</sup> That is why, it is helpful to distinguish between such different interpretations of democratic performance as (a) regime’s endurance and longevity, (b) government efficacy and (c) delivery of liberal democratic values (which, hopefully, are not conflicting and mutually exclusive) (Foweraker and Krznaric, 1999). Some of the recent publications on *democratic performance* have focused on the political regime’s task of authoritatively allocating these values,<sup>7</sup> which is, in a way, an attempt to ‘square the circle’ by focusing both on the nature of the regime and the accompanying socio-political processes (Foweraker and Landman, 2002; Foweraker and Krznaric, 2003).

If one chooses to operationalise the QoD by exclusively centring on the political regime as such and not on its performance, it is important to differentiate between *intrinsic* and *extrinsic* qualities of the political regime (Foweraker and Krznaric, 1999). The *intrinsic* qualities might be linked to the observance of the procedural principles of democracy, to the constitutional type of the political system, the levels of corruption, and the rate of domestic political stability and violence (which, especially in the case of the latter may, nevertheless, derive from *extrinsic* sources). The *extrinsic* qualities should account for the international security position of the country and its economic and financial relations with other polities and international organisations. It should be noted, however, that it is very difficult to analyse the regime separately from the state, civil society or the international environment. That is why the selection of *intrinsic* as opposed to *extrinsic* qualities of the political regime is always arbitrary to some extent.

This last observation can, nevertheless, have serious implications for measuring the QoD. As a cursory overview of the literature on this topic reveals, most authors tend to mix *intrinsic* with *extrinsic* indicators of the QoD in their quantitative and qualitative analyses. For instance, Arend Lijphart examines this issue by looking at such disparate variables as electoral turnout, women’s participation, family policy, rich-poor ratio, inflation and economic growth (Lijphart, 1993 and 1999). Similarly, Bingham Powell (1982) mixes indicators of state stability and violence with citizens’ participation.

On the whole, students of democracy have not been very rigorous when selecting and combining various indicators of how to measure the QoD. The final result has been a heterogeneous mix of indexes attempting to measure virtually the same thing with quite different methods. Table 1 provides an example of some of the best-known indicators attempting to describe and measure certain qualitative aspects of political democracy.

**Table 1: Common Measures of the QoD**

Author	Indicators
Lijphart (1999)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Women’s parliamentary representation</li> <li>– Women’s cabinet representation</li> <li>– Family policy</li> <li>– Rich-poor ratio</li> <li>– Voter turnout</li> <li>– Satisfaction with democracy</li> <li>– Government distance</li> <li>– Voter distance</li> <li>– Corruption index</li> <li>– Popular cabinet support</li> </ul>
Valenzuela (1992) and O’Donnell (1994)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Absence of ‘reserved domains’</li> <li>– ‘Horizontal accountability’</li> </ul>
Huntington (1991) and Przeworski, <i>et al.</i> (1996)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– GDP per capita (and PPP)</li> <li>– Political stability and regime’s survival rate</li> </ul>
Gasiorowski and Power (1998)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Democracy persistence (and consolidation)</li> <li>– Time</li> </ul>

Finally, it should be stipulated that seemingly *more direct* measures of the QoD such as the citizens’ satisfaction with the political regime’s functioning (i.e. ‘satisfaction with democracy’) (Inglehard, Basanez, and Moreno, 1998; Rose and Haerper, 1998) and the approval rates of certain institutions and political leaders should not be taken as scientifically demonstrative of any long-term positive or negative trends related to the QoD.<sup>8</sup> The problem here is twofold: (a) the often limited impact of public opinion on the daily running of political life, and (b) the overall reliability of this kind of information aggregated through intermittently conducted opinion surveys. As already pointed out by some authors, on the one hand, ‘the purpose of politics is not simply to implement preferences, but instead to select them’, (Sunstein, 1993: 348) and, on the other, the process of selecting ‘the very criteria by which people discover their preferences in a competitive environment’ (DiMaggio and Powell, 1991) is often not completely transparent and it is subject to frequent mutations. Hence, both from a practical and a normative point of view, the QoD could not consistently be operationalised and measured in terms of the above-mentioned indicators.

## V. Measuring the QoD

The issue of measuring the QoD has been one of the most challenging for the academic community recently. Relatively little work has been done in this respect,<sup>9</sup> and, admittedly, much more lies ahead, especially as regards the production of comparative qualitative and quantitative indicators to evaluate the QoD in various settings.

Before proceeding with the evaluation of the indicators and possible models of measuring the QoD, two simple caveats with important theoretical and empirical implications need to be made. First and foremost, it is necessary to stipulate that, in order to be able to measure the various aspects of the QoD, one has to be sure that the political regime under consideration is a *political democracy*, albeit minimal, so that its qualities can be enumerated and evaluated. Second, it should be recognised that the qualities of the political regime are almost never identical in all types of democracy and are never concentrated at the same place within the political system, but are discernible at difference *sites* and in

different *configurations*. Consequently, it is more appropriate to speak of measuring the *qualities of democracy* (and even *democracies*),<sup>10</sup> rather than, merely the quality of democracy (QoD).

Implicitly, taking the above-mentioned caveats into consideration, one may conclude that measuring of the QoD is a stepwise process: first, checking whether the political regime in question is a *political democracy*, and, then, ensuring whether the entire set of qualities of the governing system are accurately described. What does this mean in practice? Primarily, political democracy has to be defined and operationalised. Once this is completed and there is certainty that the regime under discussion is a political democracy, then the qualities of the particular type of this kind of regime have to be identified and measured.

### ***Step 1***

Elsewhere, the author has provided a working definition of political democracy and has operationalised this concept (Andreev, 2001 and 2003).<sup>11</sup> This latter act has been performed by adapting the well-known procedural definition of *polyarchy*, or an imperfect but real existing version of democracy, proposed by Robert Dahl (Dahl 1971: 1-7). On the basis of the *polyarchy (modified)*<sup>12</sup> operational definition of political democracy, an *Index of Democratisation (IDEM)* has been constructed (Andreev, 2003: chapters 5 and 6). Seven general categories, or *building blocks*, have been singled out as the most important: a self-governing polity, free and fair elections, elected officials, a democratic constitution, freedom of expression, alternative sources of information, and associational autonomy. This set of civic freedoms and political rights has then been operationalised as 21 factor variables, distributed evenly among these seven building blocks.<sup>13</sup>

**Table 2: Factors of the IDEM**

#### ***I. Self-Governing Polity***

1. There is a national territory that clearly defines the borders of administrative jurisdiction of the state institutions.
2. Actors operating outside the polity's territory do not prevent elected officials from making binding decisions.
3. The constitution and other legal regulations are effectively applied to all groups and territories.

#### ***II. Free and Fair Elections***

4. Elections are conducted in a free and fair manner and are uncertain in their outcomes.
5. Those in positions of public authority and the major opposition parties respect the results of these elections.
6. Inclusive elections are conducted at most levels of political aggregation reasonably frequently and regularly.

#### ***III. Elected Officials***

7. Control of the agenda of the major institutions of government is in the hands of elected officials.
8. Veto groups do not constrain elected officials and the officials' constitutional mandate is not arbitrarily terminated.
9. The composition and term of office of government is not decided by a single person or political body, and appointments are not made without the holding of elections (except in cases explicitly described by the constitution).

#### ***IV. Democratic Constitution***

10. The constitution provides for equal political rights and civil liberties for all citizens and these are observed in practice.
11. There is a division of powers and the formal status of each state institutions is enforced by the rule of law.
12. A new democratic constitution is drafted and ratified, or the old one is substantially amended.

#### ***V. Freedom of Expression***

13. The regime has no political prisoners, and political terror and torture are absent.
14. There is freedom of expression and the regime does not retaliate with punishment against its critics (such as dismissal from work, legal prosecution and closure of newspapers and TV stations).
15. There are legal guarantees for the freedom of assembly and the right to strike (except for those providing essential services).

#### ***VI. Alternative Information***

16. The media is not a state (or private) monopoly and is free of government control.
17. There is a media law which establishes the rules of the media market, designates independent media authorities and guarantees access to alternative sources of information.
18. The plurality of opinion is protected by law and the equal and neutral coverage of various political points of view is observed.

#### ***VII. Associational Autonomy***

19. There is one or more legally recognised and tolerated opposition party.
20. There are trade unions and professional associations that are not controlled by state agencies or governing parties.
21. Citizens are free to form independent civic and interest organisations, including non-profit, educational, religious, ethnic and minority associations.

This measuring procedure has been tested with 20 post-communist countries from Eastern Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia, covering a period of eleven years (from 1989 till 2000 inclusive).<sup>14</sup>

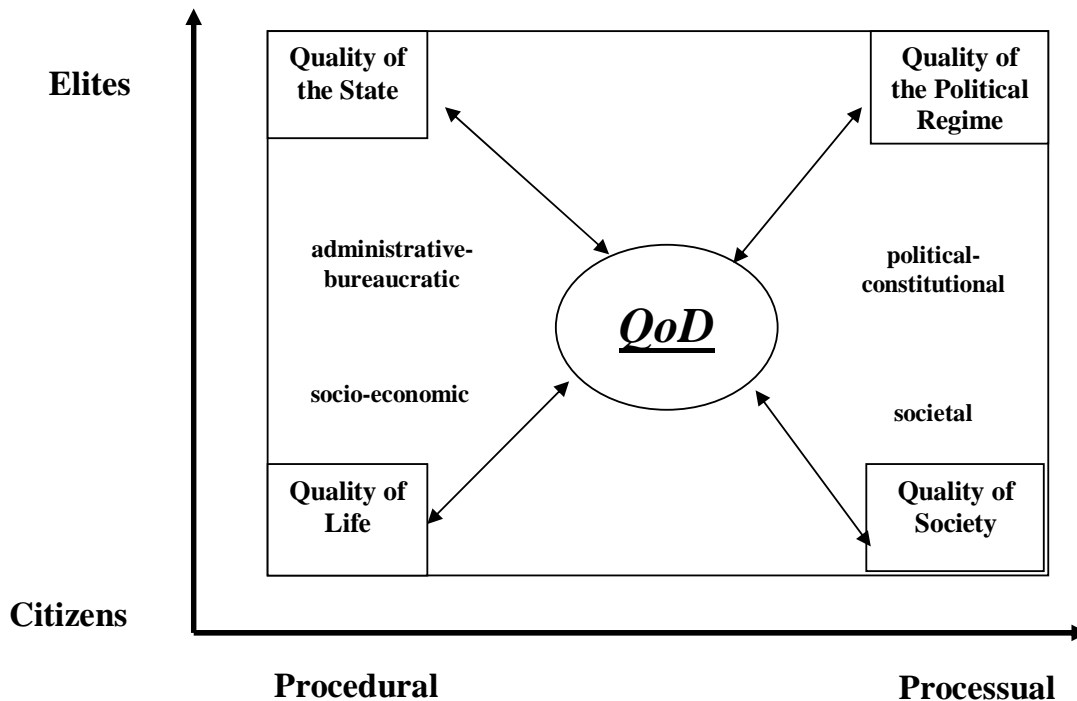
#### ***Step 2***

As already established in the second caveat above, it is assumed that the qualities of democracy concentrate at different *sites* and in various *configurations* within the political system. The real task here is to find out where and how these qualities cluster. Several scholars, some of them coming from different social science disciplines, have proposed a range of approaches towards describing selected qualities of the system of governance. The predominant number of studies conceives of the QoD as the **quality of the political regime (QoR)** (Gasiorowski and Power, 1998; Rose and Chull Shin, 1998; Schmitter and Guilhot, 2000; Altman and Pérez-Liñán, 2001; Morlino, 1998 and 2003). In fact, this study tends to concur with this range of opinions. Guillermo O'Donnell cautions, however, that, 'Democracy should not only be analysed at the level of the regime. In addition, it must be studied in relation to **the state**—especially the state *qua* **legal system**—and in relation to certain aspects of the **overall social context**' (O'Donnell, 2000: 4). Juan Linz and Alfred Stepan, moreover, explain that, 'Policy decisions by

democratic governments and legislators certainly affect the **quality of life**, particularly in the long run, but [...] the overall **quality of society** is only a small part of a functioning of democracy. [...] There are problems specific to the functioning of **the state**, and particularly to democratic institutions and political processes, that allow us to speak of the **quality of democracy** separately from the **quality of society**' (Linz and Stepan, 1996b) Alongside, the expanding academic literature on the QoD, as well as on the quality of the state (QoST) and society (QoSOC), there is also an even faster growing research, particularly in classical economics and in economic sociology and anthropology, on the **quality of life (QoL)** (Sirowy and Inkeles, 1990; Morris, 1991; Emizet, 2000; Hagerty, *et al.*, 2001).

Without attempting to be comprehensive, this series of scholarly investigations and academic sources, bearing direct relevance to the QoD as a system of governance, could be summarised and graphically presented as in the following scheme:

**Diagram 1: The Quality of Democracy and its Various Dimensions**



Having in mind that the QoD is a combination of varying sets of qualities, which shift from one location to another and merge in different clusters, it is a real problem to determine what is the relationship between the QoD and the QoR, QoSOC, QoL and QoST. The author of this work assumes that the best possible answer to this question depends on the concrete situation and on the method of analysis (i.e. on the type of dependent variable, on the relative weight of factors and on the endogenous and exogenous processes happening within and outside the political system). Trying to be more constructive, however, it might be presupposed (as illustrated in the scheme above), that certain social, political and legal-administrative principles determine the relationship between the QoD with the qualities of the regime, the society, the socio-economic life and the state. Moreover, it is presumed

that the QoD is also a function of the elites-citizens relationship, as well as of the procedural (more technical) and processual (more political) aspects of the operation of this system of rule.

### *Step 3*

Considering the results of the previous two steps, one can easily conclude that, in order to measure the QoD, one has to have a clear analytical focus and has to treat the QoD as the subject of research. As already discussed, however, the majority of definitions of the QoD usually stress either the functioning of *democracy* or the nature of its ascribed *qualities*. If one adopts the research method recommended by this paper—initially to be certain that *political democracy* really exists and then to look for and analyse its qualities—then, there still remains a dilemma how to differentiate between the various qualities of *political democracies*. Put simply, the QoD has to be evaluated either by measuring the QoR, or the QoSOC, or the QoL, or the QoST *separately*, or by measuring all of them *together*. In the first case a much-needed distinction between the different qualities of political democracy is achieved, while information is lost, while, in the second case, the situation is exactly the opposite—information regarding the political system has been preserved, while the qualities are evaluated as equally important and interrelated.

The preferred choice of the author of this publication is the second one, i.e. analysing and measuring the varying qualities of the QoD together. Needless to say, that a profound interconnectedness exists between the qualities of the regime, the society, the socio-economic life and the state. A tentative list of these qualities is proposed below, which provisionally distinguishes between them:

**Table 3: The QoD Factors**

<i>Quality of the State</i>	<i>Quality of the Political Regime</i>	<i>Quality of Society</i>	<i>Quality of Life</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Territorial integrity and good relations with the state's own neighbours</li> <li>➤ The rule of law is established on all groups and territories</li> <li>➤ Absence of 'reserved domains'</li> <li>➤ A system of territorial organisation and concentration (unitary/federal/devolved)</li> <li>➤ Degree of administrative centralisation/ decentralisation</li> <li>➤ Low levels of corruption</li> <li>➤ High GDP per capita</li> <li>➤ A fair system of recruitment</li> <li>➤ A working and professional bureaucracy</li> <li>➤ A predictable legal basis in most fields of political, social and economic life</li> <li>➤ Fiscal flexibility and predictability</li> <li>➤ State-civil society cooperation and sponsorship</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Elected official</li> <li>➤ A self-governing polity</li> <li>➤ Free and fair elections</li> <li>➤ A democratic constitution</li> <li>➤ Freedom of expression</li> <li>➤ Alternative information</li> <li>➤ Associational autonomy</li> </ul> <p style="text-align: center;">--polyarchy threshold--</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Institutional format: <u>Executive</u>: parliamentary/semi-presidential; <u>Legislature</u>: single-/double-chamber; <u>Legal system</u>: an independent judiciary; existence of an ombudsman; <u>party system</u>; and independent and transparent <u>media and information regime</u></li> <li>➤ Balance of power (between these institutions)</li> <li>➤ 'Horizontal accountability'</li> <li>➤ <i>A priori</i> and <i>a posteriori</i> accountability of decision-makers</li> <li>➤ <i>Responsiveness</i> of the rulers</li> <li>➤ Regime's stability and persistence</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Gender equality</li> <li>➤ Ethnic tolerance and cultural pluralism</li> <li>➤ High levels of educational attainment</li> <li>➤ Percentage of university students</li> <li>➤ Low levels of child crime</li> <li>➤ Low levels of domestic violence</li> <li>➤ Number of theatres, museums and other cultural and educational institutions</li> <li>➤ Rich /poor ratio</li> <li>➤ Young /old ratio</li> <li>➤ Rural /urban population</li> <li>➤ A universal acceptance of the rule of law</li> <li>➤ Societal consensus on major domestic and international social, political and economic issues</li> <li>➤ An independent and vibrant civil society</li> <li>➤ A <i>responsible</i> and active political society</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Guaranteed physical security and low levels of crime</li> <li>➤ Absence of torture and low levels of imprisoned persons</li> <li>➤ Relatively low level of unemployment</li> <li>➤ Extensiveness and efficacy of social welfare</li> <li>➤ Good educational, health care and housing policies</li> <li>➤ Possibilities for self-realisation and social recognition</li> <li>➤ Relatively high real purchasing power parity (PPP)</li> <li>➤ High-quality physical infrastructure, transport system and communications</li> <li>➤ Clean environment</li> <li>➤ A uniform and unbiased application of the rule of law</li> <li>➤ Low mortality rates of children and adults</li> <li>➤ Freedom of movement and residence (including outside the realm of the own polity)</li> </ul>

By drawing this table, the author's main objective is to provide *an example* of how to select and organise some of the possible factor-variables for measuring the QoD. Virtually all the qualities enumerated above find their place in the literature of democratisation and that of the QoD. However, *the debate* regarding the choice of criteria and the appropriate measurement procedure of the QoD is

*far from over*. It is necessary that this academic topic be explored further and in a much more concentrated fashion by an even larger number of studies in the coming years and decades.

## VI. Conclusion

The principal goal of this paper has been to shed light on the complex issue regarding the appropriate way of defining and measuring the quality of democracy (QoD). Although various qualitative aspects of the democratic regimes have continuously been discussed in the political science literature, their place has been relatively marginal and obscure compared to other research topics, such as the types of democracies emerging after transition, the role of domestic and international factors during democratisation, the impact of the socio-economic context on the consolidation of democracy, and the fate of political actors and institutions in a transitional or stable democratic setting. As demonstrated in this paper, this has not so much been a matter of *enumeration (mentioning)* of the political and social features of the political regime; rather, it has been a matter of *operationalisation* of these characteristics. This latter appears to be a higher level of analytical classification and differentiation of the endogenous and exogenous traits of the political systems, the purpose of which being a better theoretical understanding of underlying political processes and features. For instance, as regards the types of democracies existing in the world today, it is presumed that they should primarily be distinguished on the basis of the *degree* they fulfil the fundamental principles of political democracy: competition, participation, representation, accountability and political equality. Only afterwards, they can be compared on the basis of more procedural or processual characteristics (i.e. socio-economic, administrative-bureaucratic, political-constitutional and societal) or the elites-citizens relationship. As a result of this latter set of operations, the QoD can be defined and measured as a function of the quality of the regime (QoR), society (QoSOC), life (QoL), and the state (QoST).

It should be mentioned, however, that these, mostly normative considerations have a range of practical manifestations and implications, depending on a number of factors. For example, the different societal and political histories and traditions, the affinity with pluralistic and liberal values, the depth of understanding of and interest in the domestic and international political life—everything that can be summarised under the label of ‘political culture’, albeit subjective as it can be—can certainly play a crucial role in determining the relative quality of the political regime. Moreover, the external environment can also influence substantially different aspects of democracy. War, international economic and financial crises, migration, regional integration and disintegration, terrorism and ecological and natural disasters can have a significant impact on the future of democracy. Some of these factors are either *static* or *dynamic*, and they could be either *endogenous* or *exogenous* to the political regime. That is why, it is assumed, that certain qualities of the political democracies can be acquired, while others can change, depending on the social and political conditions characterising and surrounding the regime.

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## Notes

- 1 I am grateful to Philippe C. Schmitter, John Keane, Natalia Ajenjo-Fresno and Giovanni Navarra for helpful suggestions and criticism at various stages of researching and writing this paper.
- 2 A 'Quality of Democracy' working group with similar theoretical focus and research objectives has been set up at the Kellogg Institute at the Notre Dame University (USA) by Guillermo O'Donnell, Michael Coppedge and their associates.
- 3 Philippe Schmitter has, however, drawn my attention to the fact that it is not completely clear, why exactly these four political principles (representativeness, accountability, equality and participation) have been selected by Arend Lijphart.
- 4 Significant with respect to the discussion regarding the importance of the *rule of law* is the footnote that accompanies a section on the 'electoral method'—part of the so-called 'democratic method'. It reads: 'As in the economic field, *some* restrictions are implicit in the legal and moral principles of the community.' (Schumpeter 1975: 271, fn. 5).
- 5 For instance, Andreas Schedler (1999) speaks of 'recursive cycles of mutual accountability' between the rulers and the ruled, rather than a simple, exhaustive and unidirectional practice.
- 6 During the 1960s and 70s, some authors have tried to argue that the autocratic regimes are generally-speaking more stable and better performing economically than the democratic ones, especially in the developing world. See, for instance, Linz and Stepan, 1978; Powell, 1982; Huntington, 1984. Nowadays this trend does not seem to hold for the great majority of countries, but, nevertheless, the empirical caveat remains alive *vide* the impressive economic performance of autocratic and hybrid regimes such as Singapore, Hong-Kong, China and, most recently, Russia.
- 7 According to David Easton's classical definition of the political system, it might be viewed as a framework for the 'authoritative allocation of values.' See Easton, 1953 and 1965.
- 8 Moreover, it is quite difficult to distinguish between citizens' judgements about regime and government, on the one hand, and regime and governance, on the other.
- 9 For partial exceptions see Lijphart, 1999; Beetham, 1994; Beetham, *et al.*, 2002a and b; Della Porta and Morlino, 2001.
- 10 For this observation the author is indebted to Philippe Schmitter for his research on so-called *partial regimes* (see Schmitter, 1992 and 1996; Schmitter and Guilhot, 2000). This latter concept bears, in turn, similarity to Niklas Luhmann's notion of *subsystems* (see Luhmann, 1982, 1986 and 1995).
- 11 Political democracy is defined as: 'The political system of governance in which power is exercised by those elected by the citizens without exclusion and in which the rulers are held accountable for their actions in the public realm, while abiding to the principles of free competition and cooperation between the leaders who must validate at regular intervals by non-violent means their right to govern according to the constitutional and legal rules. Without exempting any officers who have the competencies to exercise effective administrative power within the territory of the state, the basic freedoms of association, information and expression are respected in all their legally recognised forms and manifestations.' (Andreev 2003: chapter 2)
- 12 The necessity to slightly transform and adapt Dahl's (1971) working definition of political democracy, or *polyarchy*, stems from the fact that the domestic and international conditions for democratisation of most polities in the world have substantially evolved since Dahl wrote his seminal piece. For instance, since the acceleration of the information and transportation revolutions, combined with the political effects of the fall of communism and other autocratic regimes at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the role of the media, the constitutional rule and the territorial (and extra-territorial) factors such as the control of the movement of persons, the shifting of state borders and the potential rise of nationalism, regionalism and different kinds of terrorism (national, ethnic and religious) have greatly increased.
- 13 Although the choice of factors, distribution, wording and relative weight of the variables (which in the case of the author's doctoral thesis is equal) might seriously be questioned, what counts here is the method of operationalisation of political democracy, which provides a certainty that: (a) political democracy really exists, and (b) the political unit is a functioning polity, abiding to and fulfilling the basic political principles of democracy—participation, representation, accountability and political equality.
- 14 For empirical evidence, please visit the author's website dedicated to the IDEM: <http://www.iue.it/Personal/Researchers/Andreev/>.

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