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Some Conceptual and Empirical Issues in the Study of Regime Change

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REGIME CHANGE AND REGIME MAINTENANCE
IN ASIA AND THE PACIFIC

In recent years there have been some dramatic changes of political leadership in the Asia-Pacific region, and also some dramas without leadership change. In a few countries the demise of well-entrenched political leaders appears imminent; in others regular processes of parliamentary government still prevail. These differing patterns of regime change and regime maintenance raise fundamental questions about the nature of political systems in the region. Specifically, how have some political leaders or leadership groups been able to stay in power for relatively long periods and why have they eventually been displaced? What are the factors associated with the stability or instability of political regimes? What happens when long-standing leaderships change?

The Regime Change and Regime Maintenance in Asia and the Pacific Project will address these and other questions from an Asia-Pacific regional perspective and at a broader theoretical level.

The project is under the joint direction of Dr R.J. May and Dr Harold Crouch.

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SOME CONCEPTUAL AND EMPIRICAL ISSUES IN THE
STUDY OF REGIME CHANGE

Stephanie Lawson

There is no richer field of enquiry in contemporary comparative politics than the
study of regime change and especially 'democratization'. Throughout the last two
decades, and especially in the 1980s, many authoritarian regimes around the world,
while perhaps not succumbing altogether, have certainly withered. The most exten-
sive changes have come about in Eastern Europe. In Southern Europe and parts of
Latin America too, democratization has gained in strength while in Asia, the Philip-
pines and South Korea have experienced similar movement. But in Asia the
repression of some democratization movements has also been severe — China and
Burma providing notable examples. Another exception to the democratization trend
was the coup in Fiji — the first in the Pacific. But in some neighbouring countries
such as Tonga and Western Samoa, resistance to traditional rule (although it is
relatively benign) is growing and more democratic institutions may emerge. South
Africa is still undergoing a significant transformation. Elsewhere in Africa authoritar-
ian regimes continue to predominate and are likely to do so for some time. There is,
nonetheless, a growing dissatisfaction with single-party rule which has generated a
'wave of demands for more pluralistic political institutions' (Joseph 1990:28).

Much of the recent scholarly work devoted to the process of democratization has
been of an empirical kind, although there has been concern also with constructing
general explanations for the breakdown of authoritarianism and the processes through
which democratization has taken place. Amongst the most comprehensive works of
this kind is the four-volume collection edited by Diamond, Linz, and Lipset (1988).
Other significant collections of studies have been edited by Enrique A. Baloyra
(1987), and by O'Donnell, Schmitter, and Whitehead (1986). The case studies in
these works provide a very substantial resource from which cognate studies in regime
change (and maintenance) can draw. Earlier studies, like that edited by John Herz
(1982), have provided similar resources, again largely through case study analysis.
Other writers have been concerned to provide explanatory models with particular
emphasis on those conditions most amenable to the growth and consolidation of
democratic politics (see, for example, Rustow 1970).
Despite the extensive scope of some of these works, there are several important subjects which receive very much less attention than they deserve but which are central to the whole issue of regime transformation. There is little attempt, for example, to examine the concept of 'regime' as distinct from 'state' or 'government'. It seems that each of these is, very largely, taken as given. Yet it is by no means clear that these terms convey, as a matter of course, a level of conceptualization appropriate to the scope or nature of regime change studies. If the relationships between these concepts are to be characterized with any precision, then, a clearer conceptual framework is an essential starting point.

Another problem involves the question of basic regime types, since a regime change necessarily implies a shift from one type to another. This, too, is central to the whole issue. The construction of elaborate, formal typologies is not necessary for the purpose of describing basic regime types, although these typologies may be important complements to the broader categories in terms of identifying distinctive modes of regime change and the varying ways in which democracy is institutionalized (Karl 1990). But a meaningful distinction between democratic and non-democratic regimes is essential when dealing with regime change in terms of 'democratization'. This may involve taking a stand on 'essentially contested concepts' like 'democracy' (Gallie 1956), and it is certain to attract some virulent accusations about ethnocentric bias. But this is better than having nothing to say at all, for as Daniel Levine points out, without an adequate concept of democracy the entire effort of attempting to understand regime change 'stalls virtually at the starting point' (Levine 1988:393). Also, although there may be 'an evolving consensus on what democracy means' (Forde 1990:351), this is no cause for complacency. The word 'democracy' has suffered too many abuses in its application for its meaning to be taken for granted. For the purpose of this discussion, my elaboration of democracy, and its antithesis, is one which sets up a dichotomous classification rather than a continuum on which more or less democratic (or authoritarian) regimes can be placed. This is not to deny the analytic utility of a continuum model for regime change studies, especially in empirical evaluations of actual regimes. But an adequate conceptualization — and an adequate continuum for that matter — requires the opposing types to be clearly delineated, and it is against such a delineation that 'real-world' regimes can be judged.

A third problem concerns the limited attention that has been paid to the role of some important institutional factors and/or agents in the process of democratization. Levine discerns, for example, that political parties in the O'Donnell et al. volumes are notable 'mostly by their absence' (Levine 1988:379). Nancy Bermeo (1990:369) makes a similar point, and urges that parties be brought back in to the analysis of regime change and the processes of legitimation. In terms of democratic consolidation, Gillespie also emphasizes the importance not only of political parties, but of
party systems as well (Gillespie 1989:111). An area of even greater neglect in regime change analysis concerns the question of constitutional political opposition, which is linked closely to the role of political parties and party systems. Although the importance of this kind of opposition is supported implicitly in democratization studies, it is rarely treated explicitly. Yet, as I shall argue later, constitutional opposition is crucial to the establishment and maintenance of democratic regimes and is therefore one of the most important indicators of democratization.

State, regime, and government

It is difficult to avoid engaging in the debate about the nature of the state when attempting to set up definitions, but the immediate conceptual or definitional problem cannot be resolved at this stage unless reference to the vast literature on the state is kept to a minimum. Having said that, it is important nonetheless to emphasize that the conception of the state should not be too narrowly construed, which it is if we view it only in terms of the capitalist-socialist dichotomization. As Sklar points out, the implication of this dichotomy is that the mode of economic production determines the nature and form of political power, thereby relegating to secondary rank such issues as the constitutional status of citizens and all that this carries with it (Sklar 1987:708). This is especially important when considering the notion of regime in relation to constitutionalism, which will be dealt with shortly. First, however, we shall look at some characterizations of "regime".

A regime may be thought of as the formal and informal organization of the centre of political power, and of its relations with the broader society. A regime determines who has access to political power, and how those who are in power deal with those who are not (Fishman 1990:428).

Fishman notes that this has implications for the question of regime type, which involves making distinctions between concepts such as democracy, totalitarianism, and authoritarianism (which will be addressed later). At a more basic structural level, he points out also that 'regimes are more permanent forms of political organization than specific governments' (ibid.). In other words, governments may come and go while the regime remains more or less in place.

Another definition is given by Calvert (1987:18) who says that 'a regime is the name usually given to a government or sequence of governments in which power remains essentially in the hands of the same social group'. This is consonant with the idea that a change of government does not (normally or necessarily) involve a change in regime. But it implies also that governments formed within or under a particular regime are all essentially of the same character. To the extent that these governments share a commitment, or at least conform to the broad rules and norms of the regime,
this is a valid formulation. But it does not necessarily follow that the same ‘social group’ is thereby accorded a continuous monopoly of power. This seems to imply that successive governments are virtually identical in terms of the interests that they represent. Although this may be true in some cases, an unqualified universal claim to this effect suggests a very static view of political activity at the level of government. It certainly accords little or no significance, say, to the dynamics or effects of party competition.

Although the notion of ‘regime’ in international relations theory is obviously situated in a different context of relationships, the formulation of definitions here provides some further insights relevant to the domestic arena. Stephen D. Krasner first defines international regimes as ‘principles, norms, rules and decision-making procedures around which actors converge in a given issue area’ (1983:1). This obviously cannot be applied in toto to domestic regimes since the actors within these are not restricted to given issue areas. The idea that regimes embody — or are an embodiment of — particular norms and procedures etc. is the key point, and this is applicable in a general way to the notion of ‘regime’ in both international and domestic contexts.

Of particular interest is the distinction Krasner makes between principles and norms on the one hand, and rules and procedures on the other, and the implications that this distinction has for detecting instances of regime change.

Principles and norms provide the basic defining characteristics of a regime. There may be many rules and decision-making procedures that are consistent with the same principles and norms. Changes in rules and decision-making procedures are changes within regimes, provided that principles and norms are unaltered (ibid.:3).

The key to the definition of ‘regime’ here is clearly related to the values embodied in the principles and norms, and implies that rules and procedures (which can take various forms and still be consistent with the character of the regime), derive from, and are secondary to, these values. A case of regime change, on this account, is therefore indicated primarily by a change in (or abandonment of) the principles and norms governing the nature of the regime. This accords with the view put forward by Budge and Farlie that political stability is predicated on 'the continuity of basic features of a regime ... while their non-continuance constitutes regime change' (quoted in Lane and Ersson 1987:279).

Krasner also considers the case of ‘regime weakening’, which may constitute a phase in regime change. This occurs where the relationships between norms, principles, rules etc. become less coherent, or where actual practice becomes increasingly inconsistent with the values or rules of the regime. Thus Krasner concludes, in general, that:
...change within a regime involves alterations of rules and decision-making procedures, but not of norms or principles; change of regime involves alteration of norms and principles; and weakening of a regime involves incoherence among the components of the regime or inconsistency between the regime and related behaviour (Krasner 1983:5).

We have so far identified some key characteristics of a 'regime', and have discerned as well certain important factors in relation to regime type and regime change. But we need to consider further the distinction between 'state', 'regime', and 'government'.

The state is frequently characterized as 'an inclusive concept that covers all aspects of policy making and enforcement of legal sanctions' while government 'is simply the agency through which the state acts in the political community' (Larson 1980:19). Following this general line, Calvert says that:

The state is the community organized for political purposes; the government is the individual or team of individuals that takes decisions which affect the lives of their fellow citizens. Governments succeed one another; the state endures (Calvert 1987:248).

Although these statements are helpful to a point, they do not give an adequate account of the state/regime/government distinction because they do not consider the notion of regime. The analyses of Chazan et al. (1988) and Fishman, however, do at least address all three concepts. As noted earlier, Fishman (1990) says that a regime is a more permanent form of political organization than a specific government. To be more precise, it should be added that a regime may endure — like the state — while the process in which political control of the state alternates between parties of government (and opposition) is much more fluid. To be more specific still, there may be a succession of different governments, but state and regime usually remain constant by virtue of the fact that the different governments exercise power within the framework of the established regime and without disturbing the fundamental structure of the state. This is clearly applicable to those political systems where there is a firm tradition of constitutional rule and provision is made for peaceful succession of government — normally by means of popular elections governed by the rules and procedures of the regime. In these cases a change in government does not in any way signify a change in the constitutional order. Here, then, the notion of regime is linked very closely to the ideas associated with constitutionalism and the rule of law, which in turn derive from a stream of thought which has its ancestry in Aristotle’s conception of politeia and Cicero’s constitutio (Maddox 1982:806-807). The idea of ‘constitution’ as developed from this stream encapsulates both the ‘total establishment of a state system’ as well as the ‘more restricting notions of the limitations on government power by the “power of the people”’(ibid.:808). The doctrine of consti...
tionalism that emerged emphasizes the importance of prescribing the specific limits of (constitutional) government, as well as the way in which politics and the affairs of the state are conducted generally. By prescribing such limits, and establishing the rules of political conduct, constitutionalism underscores the norms of democratic politics and gives rise to a much clearer distinction between state, regime, and government.

Constitutionalism is now a common tradition in the West, but is much less in evidence elsewhere. In non-Western states it is often much more difficult to distinguish between state, regime, and government and, in some cases, there may be no discernible distinction. Fishman notes, for example, that a defining characteristic of a totalitarian regime is the significant extent to which it penetrates the apparatus of the state (1990:428). It may be added that ‘government' in this case would be virtually synonymous with ‘regime'. This is obviously an important point when it comes to sorting out the essential differences between democratic and authoritarian regimes, which we shall come to shortly. For the moment, there is one further issue to be considered in relation to the state/regime distinction.

While Fishman says that a regime is more permanent than a government on the one hand, he argues also that it is typically less permanent than the state on the other.

The state, by contrast, is a (normally) more permanent structure of domination and coordination including a coercive apparatus and the means to administer a society and extract resources from it ... A state may remain in place even when regimes come and go (ibid.).

It is by no means obvious at first glance how state differs from regime in this formulation except in terms of its greater permanence. But an adequate conceptual distinction can be made by reference to where political power is located as opposed to how that power is exercised. States share a central common feature in that they exercise a monopoly of political power (whether this is ‘legitimate', or necessarily ‘coercive', power is another question). In other words, the state is the locus of political power. A regime, on the other hand, has less to do with power per se than it does with the way in which power is actually used. A regime, then, may be characterized as that part of the political system which determines how, and under what conditions and limitations, the power of the state is exercised. In other words, the concept of regime is concerned with the form of rule (Chazan et al. 1988:37). As a corollary, the regime also determines not only the manner in which governments are formed and carry out their functions, but also the basis of their legitimacy as well as the extent to which they are permitted to exercise authority. In summary, regimes embody the norms and principles of the political organization of the state which are expressed in the rules and procedures set out for governments to operate within.
As suggested earlier, these distinctions are much easier to make at an empirical level when dealing with Western democracies. But in non-democratic nations, including much of the Third World, such distinctions are not at all clear. Although this may create problems for analysis by obscuring some of the elementary forces at work in regime change and maintenance, the very fact that there are problems in differentiating between state, regime, and government in non-democracies highlights another important distinction: that between democratic and non-democratic regimes, which is the concern of the next section.

**Regime types: democratic and non-democratic**

It follows from the above discussion that it is at the level of how, and under what conditions and limitations, the power of the state is exercised that regime type can be distinguished. It also follows that in addressing this issue, a distinction must be made between democratic and non-democratic regimes. One objection that may be registered here is that such broad conceptual distinctions are not especially helpful when dealing with the intricate details of real-world regime changes. It is perhaps for this reason that some authors have been moved to construct, largely by inductive methods, very elaborate regime typologies which more closely reflect empirical reality. One recent example is that provided by Chazan et al. (*ibid.*:131ff). The types set out are: administrative-hegemonial, pluralist, party-mobilizing, party-centralist, personal-coercive, populist, and ambiguous). These typologies may well contribute to a better understanding of the extent to which regime diversity exists in places like Africa, where once the tendency of analysts was to ‘overhomogenize’ politics there by concentrating too hard on developmental similarities in regimes rather than divergences (Charlton 1983:32). Nonetheless, the inductive strategies employed in complex typologizing, while capable of producing low-order empirical generalizations, cannot logically generate comprehensive theories for comparativists to work with (see Gregor 1971:577–79). Further, most typological exercises are fraught with difficulty because, as Georges Balandier points out, the non-continuous categories they set up are not well-equipped to deal with transitions (Balandier 1972:44). My purpose here, then, is a very different one, and is prompted as much by a concern that the word ‘democracy’ has suffered some loss of meaning since being applied to (or claimed by) a wide variety of regimes, as by the more practical need to establish conceptual clarity in regime change theory.

As noted at the beginning, the literature on regime change is not only fairly vague on the state/regime/government distinction, but also tends to sidestep the problem of dealing with basic concepts like ‘democracy’. This is not a problem confined to more recent literature. Twenty years ago, Rodney Barker noted that many studies had
concentrated largely on the practical conditions under which democracy could best be achieved or sustained, or on those devices most appropriate to its operation. Democracy had become such a widely accepted 'good', that little attention was devoted to its grounds and its character (Barker 1971:24). Little has changed. In a section devoted to ‘defining some concepts’, in the O'Donnell et al. analysis, for example, scarcely a page is devoted to a discussion of democracy, and even so it is raised only in the context of ‘democratization’ (1986:7-8). In reviewing O'Donnell et al., Levine (1988:393) points out that although the editors ‘affirm a normative bias for democracy’, the level of actual discussion on democracy throughout the volumes ‘turns up a curiously empty set of concepts’ and that ‘democratic political arrangements are painted in neutral colors, characterized at best by the absence of negatives, with few positive virtues of their own. This is clearly illustrated in Adam Przeworski’s treatment of the ‘characteristics of democracy’ which are elaborated almost exclusively in terms of democracy as ‘a particular system of processing and terminating intergroup conflicts’ (Przeworski 1986:56). In reviewing the same volumes, Ian Roxborough (1988:362) attributes to Whithead the observation that democracy ‘means different things to different people’. And this no doubt suits many regime leaders because, as George Orwell so succinctly put it:

In the case of a word like democracy not only is there no agreed definition but the attempt to make one is resisted from all sides ... The defenders of any kind of regime claim that it is a democracy, and fear that they might have to stop using the word if it were tied down to any one meaning (quoted in Sartori 1987:4).

This raises the obvious question, which Giovanni Sartori poses as the title of the first chapter of his most recent work on democracy, ‘can democracy be just anything?’ (ibid.:3 [emphasis added]). My purpose here is to argue that the term ‘democracy’ cannot be employed in a relativistic manner, nor purely stipulatively. It describes a particular type of regime, not just any regime which lays claim to the title. By elaborating this argument, I hope also to show more clearly how democracy in contemporary mass polities requires certain minimal conditions to be satisfied before a regime can really be called ‘democratic’.

The etymological meaning of the word ‘democracy’ is clear enough: literally, ‘rule or power of the people’. As Eva Etzioni-Halevy reminds us, however, if the word is used in its literal sense in application to the real world of contemporary regimes, then we have no democracies at all, since in those regimes which are now commonly described as democracies ‘the people as a whole rule no more, and minorities of power holders — or elites — rule no less than they do in other regimes’ (Etzioni-Halevy 1989:x). Objections to elite theories have been canvassed in a
considerable body of literature, and I do not propose to review the arguments here. Suffice to say that in mass polities, the institutional means by which the concept of ‘the power of the people’ is expressed is through representative structures which implies, at the very least, elite management or control. But the political control which is granted to elites in representative democratic regimes is always temporary and always conditional. This particular issue will be investigated more fully at a later point, especially as it bears on the problem of identifying those institutional features of modern democratic politics. For the moment, my concern is still with the meaning of ‘democracy’ in a conceptual rather than merely etymological sense.

Part of the problem with a word like ‘democracy’ is that it is not simply a description of certain kinds of political institutional arrangements. It is clearly an evaluative word as well, and is almost universally acclaimed as something ‘good’ and desirable. This is one of the characteristics which Gallie says a concept must possess in order to count as essentially contested ‘it must be appraisive in the sense that it signifies or accredits some kind of valued achievement’ (1956:171). With democracy, there is little doubt that it satisfies this condition. Indeed, as Gallie notes, it has become established as ‘the appraisive political concept par excellence’ (ibid.:184).

But it was not always so, and it is only in the recent past that the speech act performed by the use of the word democracy has been transformed ‘from one of condemnation to one of commendation’ (Hampsher-Monk 1983:29). Also, as Sartori points out, it was not until around the end of the Second World War that serious disputes arose in an international context about the proper application of the word in describing actual regimes. Before then, he says, there seems to have been little doubt ‘that fascist and communist regimes were not democracies (they actually did not claim to be such) and that democracies were Western located and Western inspired’ (Sartori 1987:3). In the meantime, however, the word has been appropriated for use by all comers, and conferred on regimes which may now be democratic in name, but in substance reflect few, if any, of the features normally associated with the practice of democratic politics.

One of the reasons for this was the new international ideological environment created by the outcome of the war in which the triumphant Allied powers, especially the United States, vigorously promoted their own political ideals in all available forums. Under these conditions, it was often advantageous for powerful minorities ‘to adopt at least an appearance of sympathy for democracy’ in order to ‘defend and preserve their privileges’ (Whitehead 1986:8). Furthermore, the result of American foreign policy in its attempts to promote democracy (as opposed to communism) around the world, while at the same time establishing and preserving influence and strategic interests, has been to stretch the meaning of the word ‘to embrace an
extraordinary variety of friendly but repressive regimes' (ibid.:39). These have included such notorious cases as the rule of the Samozas in Nicaragua, Pinochet in Chile, Marcos in the Philippines, and Diem in South Vietnam.

What we have seen in the last few decades is, as Sartori wryly observes, 'hardly the ascendance of a common ideal that is warming the hearts of humankind' but rather 'an unprecedented escalation of terminological and ideological distortion whose end result eminently is obfuscation' (1987:4). Of course we cannot legislate for the correct use of words, but we can plausibly claim that some usages are invalid, or that those who lay claim to the title should at least demonstrate some commitment to 'the values or qualities for which “democracy” originally became a term of praise' (Hampsher-Monk 1983:31).

But Gallie's idea of the essentially contested nature of concepts like democracy appears to pose some problems for designating those minimal conditions which must be satisfied before a regime can be called democratic. Here is one conclusion of Gallie's general argument:

Recognition of a given concept as essentially contested implies recognition of rival uses of it (such as oneself repudiates) as not only logically possible and humanly "likely", but as of permanent potential critical value to one's own use or interpretation of the concept in question; whereas to regard any rival use as anathema, perverse, bestial or lunatic means, in many cases, to submit oneself to the chronic human peril of underestimating the value of one's opponents' position (Gallie 1956:193).

Gallie's point seems a compelling one, since any reasonable person will, at the very least, acknowledge that their own favoured interpretation is open to question and will welcome critical discussion. To do otherwise would seem dogmatic (and therefore not in the spirit of democratic discourse). And for Western scholars or proponents of democracy, an unwillingness to consider alternative interpretations will also attract accusations of ethnocentric bias. But if we accord to the concept of democracy the status of essential contestability in Gallie's terms, then it seems that we are obliged, ipso facto, to 'repudiate a wide range of restrictive or exclusivist, descriptivist or essentialist claims which are characteristically made for it by each of its rival users' (Gray 1977:336). And if we repudiate such claims, it does not seem logically possible to insist that there is a better conception of democracy or that there are any essential features which can be taken as characteristic of democracy. In this case, and if disputes about the meaning of the concept are indeed incapable of rational resolution, then it seems we are condemned to a world either of eternal relativism or scepticism. Andrew Mason puts this clearly. He says that if essential contestability theses are committed to the view that conceptual disputes are rationally unresolvable, they either
affirm the view that if a concept is essentially contested, it admits of a variety of different conceptions, and that none of these conceptions is better than the others from a shared or neutral standpoint — in which case they are relativist. Or they affirm the view that if a concept is essentially contested, it admits of a variety of conceptions, and that none of these conceptions can be justifiably regarded as better than the others from a shared or neutral perspective — in which case they seem to express a form of scepticism (Mason 1990:84).

The endorsement of relativist and sceptical views renders the concept of democracy practically and ethically unintelligible. It also means, for all practical purposes, that words like democracy can be left to the stipulative whim of any claimant. And as Sartori points out, whatever the fine points of the doctrine that 'words are mere conventions' may be, the implications are clear enough to grasp intuitively:

If words mean, in principle, whatever we wish them to mean, then we can only be heading towards Babel. Meanwhile, the applause goes to a Humpty-Dumpty society of word magicians that earn not only a living but a reputation by tampering with language and meanings (Sartori 1987:4).

Further, it seems that there is little point in persisting with discourse if there is no possibility of arguing for the superiority of any meaning or conception over another. If all conceptions are of equal value, then they have no value at all. Discourse, it seems, then becomes a form of sophistry in which opposite meanings can be derived from the same words to suit the occasion or to suit the particular interests of the speaker. What is lost also is the capacity to form a community of understanding for concepts like democracy, and the values associated with it like justice, equality, liberty, and community. And this means that mere expedience can serve in the place of reasoned speech over the most basic ideas of right and wrong.

My argument, in short, is that if we deny the possibility of superior conceptions of democracy, then we deny also the force of practical reason whereby the ability to assign value is lost in a void of conceptual relativism. Such a void robs the concept of democracy of a context of meaning and a community of understanding. And this is precisely what happens if scholars and others run for cover when faced with accusations of dogmatism or ethnocentric bias rather than supporting the values of democracy. To accept that particular conceptions of democracy amount to little more than 'epistemological imperialism' is to give in to a kind of ethical relativism. This is contrary to the 'powerful assertion' of democratic political theory which 'expresses a fundamental human aspiration, not confined to any particular territory or period of time' (Whitehead 1986:45). Further, appeals to relativism are themselves dogmatic because they seek to evade criticism, and indeed to make criticism impossible.

The claim that there may be superior conceptions of democracy, however, does not preclude an admission of fallibilism — which is itself a democratic attitude. Nor
does it imply intolerance of other points of view, although admission of a plurality of viewpoints, 'does not imply any weird equality of all sincere opinions as the truth' (Crick 1963:91). So toleration of different points of view does not signal acceptance of relativism. Rather, it is a position which allows for the legitimate expression of competing ideas without assigning to any of them the status of a universal truth on the one hand, but without consigning them to meaningless relativism on the other. This is, moreover, inherent in the concept of democracy itself. In other words, any conception of democracy worthy of the name implicitly provides for the free articulation of competing ideas, interests, policies, and so forth. Further, any regime which does not allow for this free articulation of ideas etc., is not worthy of the name 'democracy'. It is on this basis that I make an essentialist claim for a certain conception of democracy, which I shall shortly elaborate. First, however, one thing should be made clear. The claim is qualified to the extent that it is applied to contemporary mass polities. By this I mean that it would not necessarily be applicable, say, to the polity of the ancient Athenians, nor to other small-scale societies of the kind said to have existed in some parts of pre-colonial Africa where a communal style of discussion, participation, and consensus decision-making engendered a distinct kind of democratic practice (Nursey-Bray 1983:100). In other words, it is not a universalist claim, but an essentialist claim within certain limits.

Gallie's point about the essential contestability of the concept of democracy, especially in application to mass polities, may be objected to on the grounds outlined before, but there is little disagreement about the fact of its internally complex character. There is a number of significant dimensions, or sub-concepts, that are taken to be characteristic of democracy. These include the values mentioned above (viz., equality, liberty, community, and justice), as well as representative institutions, electoral systems, a plurality of political parties, constitutionalism, participation, free opposition, and so forth (see Maddox 1986:4). Some of these may be regarded as more important than others. This is what Gallie means when he says that the concept of democracy is internally complex in that it 'admits of a variety of descriptions in which its different aspects are graded in different orders of importance' (1956:184). Connolly elaborates the idea of internal complexity further by employing the notion of a 'cluster concept to which a broad range of criteria apply', and although the grouping together of a number of the criteria may, for example, qualify a regime as democratic, he says that it is not possible to 'specify an invariant set of necessary and sufficient conditions for the proper application of the concept' (Connolly 1983:14). While this may be so, it is possible to specify some criteria as necessary, if by no means sufficient, conditions in order to qualify a regime as democratic.
Constitutional opposition as a necessary condition for democracy

The particular condition put forward here as necessary for the application of the concept of democracy to regimes in contemporary mass polities is the presence of constitutional political opposition. This is not to disregard the importance of other elements or dimensions (including other types of opposition), nor is it claimed that the presence of constitutional political opposition is in any way a sufficient condition. Furthermore, just as there are no grounds for believing that there is only one kind of government that can properly be called democratic (Nelson 1980:2), there is no one particular set of institutional arrangements which alone secures the operation of constitutional political opposition in practice (although some may be better than others). Rather, my claim is based on the idea that constitutional political opposition is the sine qua non of contemporary democracy in mass polities and that its institutionalization in some form or another is required before a regime can be called 'democratic' with any real meaning. This is hardly a novel theme in the mainstream literature on democratic theory. As Dahl observed some time ago:

... one is inclined to regard the existence of an opposition party as very nearly the most distinctive characteristic of democracy itself; and we take the absence of an opposition party as evidence, if not always conclusive proof, for the absence of democracy (1966:xvi).7

The idea of constitutional political opposition reflects, amongst other things, a commitment to the right of political dissent within a general consensual framework as to how, and within what limits, that dissent can be legitimately expressed. It does not usually mean opposition to the regime itself, although particular opposition groups may argue against all or any of the regime's features and propose alternatives. But while ever an opposition remains constitutional, it does not seek to change or overthrow a regime by force. If it seeks to bring about changes at regime level, it does so only by means of the regime's own rules for change, which are normally expressed in a constitution.

In Western democracies, one of the prime purposes of a constitutional political opposition is to become the government, and to do so within the rules and procedures embodied in the existing regime. And it is opposition in this context that is the focus here. The government, for its part, is required to tolerate opposition, and 'the people' have the power to determine, periodically, which group has the right to rule.

...both government and opposition are bound by the rules of some kind of constitutional consensus. It is understood, on the one side, that opposition is directed against a certain policy or complex of policies, not against the legitimacy of the constitutional regime itself. Opposition rises above naked
contestation; it forsweares sedition, treason, conspiracy, coup d'etat, riot, and assassination, and makes an open appeal for the support of a more or less free electorate. Government, in return, is constrained by certain limitations as to the methods it can use to counter the opposition; the free expression of oppositional views is permitted both inside and outside the halls of the parliamentary body (Hofstadter 1969:4).

On this account, the power of the government in a democratic regime is, as suggested earlier, always conditional and always temporary. It is conditional because it is subject to the limitations on its power imposed by the doctrine of constitutionalism, and it is temporary because it is subject to the periodic judgement of the people, who may choose to replace it with an alternative government — the opposition. This is decisive for how, and under what conditions and limitations, power is exercised in practice.

The temporary status of a democratic government is especially important to the case I am making here, and is well illustrated by the following observation:

Here then is the acid test for democracy. Democracy may be defined by the toleration of opposition. In so far as alternative governments are allowed to come into existence and into office — democracy, in my sense, exists. In so far as opposition is persecuted, rendered illegal, or stamped out of existence, democracy is not present, and either never has existed or is in the process of being destroyed (Durbin 1962:558).

Had democracy been defined merely in terms of the toleration of opposition, the crucial point would have missed. Tolerated opposition of some kinds can be permitted in non-democratic regimes, but a democratic regime requires that an opposition must be able to become the government. In other words, it must have the constitutional status of a legitimate alternative government which the people have the power to choose to actually govern. So where there is no possibility of alternation in power between governing elements and oppositional elements through a peaceful process of fair and free elections, there is no constitutional opposition, and therefore no genuine democracy.

It follows from this that the legitimacy of constitutional opposition, and its right to become the government if so chosen by the people, is endorsed by the principles and norms of a democratic regime, and made possible in practice by its rules and procedures. Further, the conduct of democratic politics entailed by this formulation is contingent on a deeper commitment, by all elements, to the principles and norms of the regime than to their own particular platforms and policies (D'Agostino 1990:439). But as Rodney Barker points out, these notions do not flourish in any soil. They presuppose, amongst other things, 'certain qualities in the condition of political thinking' (Barker 1971:8). This is a problem I shall consider more specifically in relation to non-Western contexts shortly. For the moment, I want to address the third
point raised in the introduction, and that is the role of political parties and party systems.

In contemporary mass polities, or more specifically in representative democracies, political parties are central to the functioning of constitutional political opposition. Despite the criticisms which have been levelled at 'party government', it is hard to imagine a viable alternative to their capacity for 'bringing order out of the chaos of a multitude of voters' (Lord Bryce, quoted in Neumann 1956:396). The utility of party organization is not restricted to representative systems either, and the ubiquity of the political party certainly testifies to this. For although it had its origins in the rise of representative institutions and extension of the suffrage, the political party is now a feature of virtually every type of political regime. The viability of constitutional opposition in democratic regimes, however, depends very much on the existence of a competitive, adversarial party system, and such systems are by no means found everywhere. But let us first consider briefly the role of political parties and party systems in democratic regimes in terms of their importance for constitutional opposition.

Party systems produce both governments and oppositions — any political party can compete for office by presenting itself as an alternative government and it is through the competitive interaction between parties that governments are able actually to alternate in office. Accordingly, an important indicator of democratic maturity is when competitive elections between contending parties lead to a peaceful transition of power from one to the other (Gillespie 1989:112). This requires contending parties, and especially those who lose office as the government, to accept that their power is temporary as well as conditional. These norms are implicit in the notion of a democratic party system.

There is obviously a need of more than one party for there to be a 'system' of this kind, and the idea that there could be any sort of real competition for office with only one participant is logically absurd (Eckstein 1968: 439). Further, a single party cannot claim to represent an entire political community. In contrast, adversarial party systems operate on the fallibilistic assumption that no single party, or government, has all the answers, or that it can 'propel the polity on the course of some "general will"' (Maddox 1986:6). Further, party systems and constitutional opposition ensure that the majoritarianism implicit in democratic politics is a qualified one. 'The people' consist of the entire body of citizens — not just a majority — and constitutional opposition makes institutional provision for the expression of minority interests and dissent. But if the majority is a permanent one, then so too is the minority. These conditions are incompatible with democratic politics insofar as they tend to produce permanent governments and permanent oppositions, and power does not alternate (see Sartori 1987:32–33). This is less of a problem in Western democracies where shifting
coalitions of interests tend to produce more transient majorities and minorities, although it seems more problematic elsewhere, particularly in those societies characterized as 'plural'. This is just one of the difficulties posed for democracy outside the West. But the more basic problem of even establishing and maintaining competitive party systems which embody the notions associated with constitutional opposition is of prior concern.

Authoritarianism and its implications for opposition

Almost thirty years ago, when the 'new states' of Africa and Asia were just emerging from colonial rule, David Apter wrote that the (also new) governments of these states 'rarely see the necessity for a regular opposition party nor do they always accept the idea of opposition as a normal feature of government' (see Apter 1962:154 and Macpherson 1972:25). In many cases, it seems that little has changed and the idea of political opposition, rather than being seen as something of value in itself, is still regarded as anathema. Arguably, this view of opposition is not unique to the governments of ex-colonial states or 'new nations', but features in the thinking of an array of authoritarian governments which have sought to construct regimes in their own image, and indeed to mould the state itself along lines compatible with this image. It is for this reason that the state/regime/government distinction becomes more blurred in non-democracies. This directs our attention to antithetical regime types.

The antithesis of democracy is, of course, totalitarianism, and it is in this type of regime that the distinctions, and especially the practical distinction between government and regime, are virtually non-existent. Further, while the government constitutes the regime, it is also the case that the party, under the direct control of the leader, constitutes the government. This lack of definition between levels is implicit in the well-known catalogue of totalitarian characteristics first proposed by C. J. Friedrich (1954) to describe this unique form of autocratic domination, and later elaborated by a number of other commentators. The utility of this catalogue lies, amongst other things, in the distinct contrasts it provides with the 'contours' of a democratic polity, and which Graham Maddox draws with precision.

[W]here the totalitarian system pins all its faith in the messianic leader, the democratic ultimately trusts no individual or group without limitations and controls; where the totalitarian leader countenances no opposition, democracy insists upon it; where totalitarianism spurns or even destroys the rule of law, democracy steadfastly upholds it through the spirit of constitutionalism; where totalitarianism breaks down institutions of state and eschews democratic values, democracy endeavours to see them preserved in concrete form; where totalitarianism destroys all sub-state associations, demanding that all loyalty be given to the leader, and all effort expended in his cause, democracy values the private and social lives of the individual citizens within it (1986:4).
Totalitarianism, in the communist or fascist forms embodied in Stalin's Russia, Hitler's Germany, and Mussolini's Italy, cannot be applied accurately in describing more recent regime types. As Kitchen points out, although the dictatorships of the underdeveloped world may have learnt a great deal from fascist practice, they are not themselves fascist, and regimes such as those of Pinochet in Chile and Amin in Uganda differed in some essential respects from the fascist model (1976:91). Similarly, Schapiro (1972a) notes that it is easy to find elements of totalitarianism in other types of regimes — he lists historical examples such as Tudor England and Muscovite Russia. But these, and other regimes which we might justifiably regard as wicked and repressive, lack certain of totalitarianism's defining characteristics such as mass mobilization and mass legitimacy. However, just as democracy has become a universal word of commendation, so too has totalitarianism (and especially the variety 'fascism') become a word of almost universal condemnation and is often used as such. But as Schapiro concludes, 'to apply the term "totalitarian" to every form of morally reprehensible government is to render the term useless' (ibid.:94). As with the application of the word democracy, then, it is important to ensure that the words totalitarian and fascist retain their analytic value and are not used merely for polemical purposes. Accordingly, although I intend to describe next some features of party politics which are antithetical to the contours of democracy and reflect some aspects of totalitarianism, it does not follow that the regimes in which they operate are totalitarian. Rather, they are best described simply as authoritarian — a label which covers generally those regimes which are, to greater or lesser degrees, 'characterized by repression, intolerance, encroachment on the private rights and freedom of citizens, and limited autonomy for nonstatist interest groups' (Perlmutter 1981:7–8).

The particular focus for the next part of the discussion is on one-party (as distinct from one-party dominant) regimes. These clearly do not exhaust the category of nondemocratic types, but provide the most convenient contrast to the multi-party systems of Western democracies. Of particular importance is the notion, incorporated as a basic norm or principle of regimes in many one-party states, that society is (or ought to be) a harmonious unified whole. As with the classic conservatism of the West, and with the ideology of fascism, this implies an organic view of the state. The party is portrayed as the organizational expression of organic political society and is seen to embody the 'natural' unity of society.

In many cases, of course, the party is simply a ‘method by which a regime which was basically personal and dictatorial sought to give itself legitimacy’ (Schapiro 1972b:25). This is illustrated, for example, by the role of the Communist Party in Cuba which Castro has used as a vehicle to centralize power around himself (Griffiths 1988). Similarly, Saddam Hussein has used the machinery of the Iraqi Ba'ath Party — the guiding principle of which also emphasizes the fundamental unity of the people — as an effective instrument of control and manipulation in establishing
personal rule (Farouk-Sluglett and Sluglett 1988). The model of authoritarian presidential regimes in Latin America (which revolve around the rule of a 'strong-man' leader) also draws from an organic view of society and the state (Sondral 1990). In parts of Asia and Africa too, single party and personalized rule frequently reflects a unitary view of state and society (Jackson and Rosberg 1982). J.A.C. Mackie notes that the period of Sukarno's autocratic rule in Indonesia was marked, amongst other things, by a 'tremendous stress on ideology, indoctrination and the symbols of national unity and strength' (1974:95). It is through a unitary view, and the rhetoric that supports it, that mass mobilization can often be achieved and with it a semblance of legitimacy for the regime. Elections in these circumstances are a demonstration of support for the ruling party's mandate for continuance in office as well as its policies and there is no sense in which elections act as a mechanism for the transfer of power as they do in democratic regimes (Cammack et al. 1988:87; Hague and Harrop 1982:126).

The arguments employed by ruling elements for the suppression of political opposition in one-party regimes are usually linked to the idea of unity — 'there is no need for an opposition because the ruling party and the people are one' (Shils 1971:49). This is obviously more an aspiration than a reflection of reality. Most importantly, the aspiration seeks to deny a basic, ineluctable characteristic of the mass polity, which is as applicable to most of the Third World (or more so) as it is to the West, and that is social diversity or pluralism. Some of the clearest cases of one-party rule attempting to subsume a high degree of social pluralism through a unitary ideology are found in Africa. Here the processes of colonization and decolonization have produced weak states characterized by sharp, and sometimes apparently intransigent, divisions along linguistic, ethnic, religious, and other lines. Although there is a diversity of regime types (as reflected in the Chazan et al. typology mentioned earlier), it is nonetheless possible to identify unitary ideology as a fairly pervasive feature of post-colonial African politics, at least amongst incumbent political leaders. This has obviously proved, inter alia, to be a significant obstacle to the functioning of political opposition — both constitutional and otherwise — and therefore of democratic politics. Some have argued that the institutionalization of political opposition is essentially incompatible with the African style of politics and, especially, that expectations to the contrary reflect an ethnocentric bias towards Western norms of democratic political conduct. Further, it has been suggested that democratic practices are as much a feature of some African political traditions than of Western traditions and, in terms of egalitarian values, perhaps even more so (see Nursey-Bray 1983; Macpherson 1972:chapter 3). These, and some of the other points raised above, are worth some detailed consideration.
In the terms of modernization theory, internal integration of many of the new states of Africa was to be achieved through nationalist political parties which had won popular support through anti-colonial struggles, and which were therefore well-placed for promoting unity and development through mobilization of the populace. But on achieving independence, these parties lost the 'external enemy' which had previously been instrumental in securing a degree of national solidarity, and the solution to the ethnic and regional divisions which subsequently emerged as bases for party support, and therefore disunity in the state, was the one-party state (Riley and Parfitt 1987). The nationalist party, then, is the antecedent to the African 'party-state' the role of which was to create the new nation (Hill 1980). The clearest expression of the extent to which the party was seen to embody the aspirations of state was in the slogan of Nkrumah's government: 'The Convention People's Party (CPP) is Ghana' and 'Ghana is the CPP' (Riley and Parfitt 1987:162). This is, moreover, an explicit statement of the fusion of state, regime, and government through the party.

In the development of the African party-state, and the consolidation of state power, political opposition was curtailed or eliminated as ruling elites sought to entrench their positions. The justifications employed by leaders most often revolved around the need for unity in the new state's quest for integration and economic development. This unity was equated with political uniformity, while political opposition was frequently viewed as tantamount to treason (Chazan et al. 1988:46). Some party-states, such as Tanzania under Nyerere, were established through popular elections and have continued to allow some avenues for the expression of criticism. Many, however, have used ruthless methods of repressing opposition and, rather than promoting the stability and unity which was the ostensible aim of these parties, the elimination of opposition has led to subversion and a number of upheavals 'as those denied a fair say in running the affairs of their state have sought to change incumbent regimes by force' (Ibingira 1980:249).

A common legitimating theme running through much of the rhetoric supporting all kinds of one-party or party-state rule in Africa is the idea that this kind of regime is intrinsically African. Its proponents claim that it is 'rooted in the African culture' while the legitimacy of opposition parties is rejected as 'alien, capitalistic, and a relic of imperialism' (ibid.:252). Nursey-Bray sees this as emanating, in part, from the Negritude movement which inspired a 'broad effort to enunciate genuine African values, as against the oppressive and racist views of the colonizers' (Nursey-Bray 1983:97). Following this general line of thinking, many African leaders have claimed to be continuing a process of Africanization by dispensing with alien institutions (Chazan et al. 1988:45). This is comparable to the goals of some millenarian and nationalist movements in the Pacific where indigenous culture was, and is, promoted
as a preferable alternative to that of the ‘alien power elite’ (Linnekin 1990:165). It is resonant also with the idea of the ‘Pacific Way’ articulated by contemporary island leaders as a generalized expression and assertion of Pacific, as opposed to Western, political values. But sympathy with aspirations of this kind, although they have served to counter the negative, racist images of ‘indigenous people’ and their cultural heritage engendered by the old colonialists, should not obscure the other purposes which idealizations of a pre-colonial past can serve. In parts of both Africa and the Pacific, the rejection of Western democratic norms in favour of political systems allegedly based on ‘tradition’ is sometimes nothing more than a legitimating device for a variety of repressive regimes seeking to oppress or eliminate political opposition (Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983; Lawson 1990).

A further aspect of this issue is that appeals to tradition frequently involve the retrospective homogenization of a variety of relatively small societies (which between them displayed quite diverse patterns of political organization). The homogeneous image of the traditional ways is then projected back into the present thereby providing political leaders with a convenient unitary picture suitable as a contemporary standard for political practice. Although it is obvious that many contemporary states, and particularly those of Africa, are far from being culturally homogeneous internally, the unitary ideal is a powerful tool in the rhetoric of nation-building and is, as suggested earlier, especially suited to the ideological underpinnings of the one-party state (see Saul 1970:145).

The idea of the intrinsic ‘Africanness’ of the one-party state has been challenged by Ibingira. He points out, first, that there is obviously no such thing as a single African political culture and, even if one were to accept one-partism as African, it would be hard to cite an example of where it might have operated amongst the 2,000 or so ethnic groups which had very diverse systems of political organization, and some of which lacked entirely the central authority which is so essentially characteristic of the one-party state. He further points out that:

If any leader were to claim to be practicing the one-party system as an indigenous African system, he should candidly and logically answer the question, which one? For instance, what type of African one-party system, assuming one existed, did Obote impose on Uganda? If he were to base his concepts in the Langi traditions of his kinfolks, he would almost automatically alienate the majority of his countrymen whose systems ... differed from his. Which one-party system did Nkrumah, a Nzima, operate in Ghana among his diverse nationals? The claim of the legitimacy of one-party states as based on Africa’s past, therefore, is impossible to substantiate (Ibingira 1980:253).

It is clear that African politics today are very far removed from the culturally and structurally more homogeneous societies of the pre-colonial period which have been effectively subsumed under colonial, and post-colonial, state structures. So too, of
course, are Western democracies far removed from the polity of the ancient Athenians (which, as Aristotle pointed out, could only retain its character if it remained relatively small). What virtually all contemporary states in all parts of the world share, for better or for worse, are the conditions of the mass polity which are characterized by a high degree of social and cultural diversity — they are pluralistic rather than unitary. And while the idea of political competition between parties may seem ‘unnatural’ in Africa and in other parts of the Third World (Macpherson 1972:25) it seems nonetheless that it is the most appropriate avenue for the expression of the diverse interests of people in mass polities. Further, while the organization of political dissent and criticism through competing parties does not necessarily prevent violence, it is less likely to occur where political opposition is regarded as legitimate. When it is regarded as treasonous or seditious, as it is in many one-party states, and especially where state, regime, and government are ideologically fused, the worst excesses of political violence can be perpetrated. Adolfo Gilly illustrates this very clearly.

State-party regimes are characterized by an intrinsic difficulty, almost an inability, to absorb political change without entering into a regime crisis ... By identifying the ruling party both with the state and with the nation, they conceive of all attacks on the party as an attack on the state and interpret all proposals to change the government as an attempt to overthrow or destroy the state. This is the logic that led the Mexican regime to react against massive demonstrations for democracy with the killing of hundreds of students in Tlatelolco in October 1968 and led the Chinese regime to commit a similar massacre in Tiananmen in June 1989 (Gilly 1990:289).

The depiction of some of the worst consequences of authoritarianism, and much of the foregoing discussion generally, is aimed at defending a conception of democracy which clearly derives from a Western tradition of constitutional democracy, and which implicitly supports the norms and procedures embodied in Western democratic regimes. This should not be construed, however, as a defence of all aspects of politics and society in Western democracies — nor as a denigration of all non-Western political practices. Indeed, some of the principles of liberal–democratic government, especially those which place a strong emphasis on market freedom, are at odds with the democratic values attaching to other freedoms as well as the values of equality and community (see Cunningham 1990:99–110). In outlining some defects of constitutional government, Rawls points out that not only has there been a failure to ensure the fair value of political liberty, but measures to rectify this have never been seriously entertained. Further, the system has tolerated disparities in the distribution of wealth and property ‘that far exceed what is compatible with political equality’ (Rawls 1973:226). As with Rawls’s theory of justice, however, the discussion of democracy here has concentrated on ideals and values, ‘comparison with which defines a standard for judging actual institutions’ (ibid.:227).
Another point that needs to be emphasized is that the doctrine of constitutionalism requires more than a mere document, or a rhetorical commitment on the part of political leaders, to produce anything approximating substantive democracy. This is clearly illustrated in the case of the Philippines where, although the 1935 and 1973 constitutions enshrined democratic principles and structures of government, actual political practice reflected a considerable departure from constitutional theory (Reyes 1988:268). What is required, then, is a commitment to the values of democracy, and the espousal of democracy as a value in itself, rather than simply 'a convenient instrument to be adopted and discarded at will' (Gillespie 1989:96).

**Conclusion**

The issues canvassed in this paper have centred largely on making some important conceptual distinctions, both in terms of the formal political structures of state, regime, and government, and with respect to the analytical categories of 'democracy' and 'non-democracy'. This does not tell us much about the process of regime change itself, nor about particular modes of transition to democracy, but perhaps clarifies some of the difficulties posed for analysis when the question of 'democratization' arises, and most especially when identifying key indicators. This is particularly so when it comes to the institutionalization of party competition and of constitutional political opposition.

A regime can incorporate any number of the features of democratic politics, including constitutional provision for elections and so forth, but these are fairly meaningless unless an opposition is able to succeed legitimately to government in an open contest. It is only in these circumstances that the power of any government is genuinely both conditional and temporary in accordance with the norms and principles of a democratic regime. And it is only when alternation in government, or succession of government, can be achieved without a change in the regime itself that a necessary condition for democratization has been achieved. This by no means excludes revolutionary or other movements of the kind that have brought about the transformations in Eastern Europe from the category of democratizing forces. Rather, these are unconstitutional oppositional forces which are part of a process of change from a non-democratic to a more democratic regime. In this context, the process must be distinguished from the result. In other words, democratizing processes will frequently emanate from unconstitutional opposition elements (they are unconstitutional almost by definition because of the nature of authoritarian regimes), which oppose the regime itself. The end result of this, if democratization is actually achieved, is the institutionalization of constitutional opposition through the rules and procedures of the new democratic regime and in accordance with the new democratic norms and
principles that logically accompany it. Opposition will then be directed at other contestants for government power, and not normally to the regime itself. I use ‘normally’ as a qualifier here because there may be legitimate calls for changes to unsatisfactory rules and procedures in democratic regimes. If such changes are brought about, however, they reflect not another regime change as such but rather an intra-regime change of the kind described earlier which leaves the norms and principles unaltered.

This underscores the notion that constitutional opposition, operating within the rules and procedures of a democratic regime, does not seek to oppose the regime itself — only the government. In other words, the activities of a constitutional opposition are not regarded as treasonous but are pursued within a legitimate arena of political activity. This also highlights one of the critical differences between democratic and non-democratic regimes — the more democratic the political structures, the more clearly the differentiation between state, regime, and government (and party) is reflected empirically. And this is precisely because the activities of a constitutional opposition are legitimate and take place in accordance with the norms, principles, rules, and procedures of the regime. Similarly, the government is constrained by the same principles, rules, etc. — and is not in any sense synonymous with them. On the other hand, where political structures are less democratic (or more authoritarian), the distinctions between state, regime, and government become increasingly blurred and, in the case of totalitarianism, virtually disappear altogether. Where regime change is occurring in the direction of democratization, then, an important indicator is the extent to which state/ regime/government distinctions have become clearer and this in turn depends on the establishment of competitive parties and the institutionalization of constitutional political opposition. Further, this provides one of the simplest indicators, at least of a non-democratic regime: if a government cannot be changed without changing the regime itself, then the regime is not democratic. On the other hand, the institutionalization of constitutional opposition that makes democratic alternation between parties of government possible is only a necessary, and not a sufficient, condition of a democratic regime. It certainly does not guarantee the fulfilment of democratic values and aspirations in mass polities.

Notes

1 This definition suggests what I think is a fairly common, pejorative usage of ‘regime’. For example, in Western democratic states, ‘regime’ is rarely used to refer to a particular government (or sequence of governments formed by the same party). In the United States we would normally refer instead to the ‘Bush administration’ and in Australia to the ‘Hawke government’. Some might be tempted to use the term ‘Thatcher regime’ as a negative characterization of Mrs Thatcher’s relatively authoritarian leadership style and the nature of her government’s policies. But the term is
more commonly used to characterize authoritarian structures of government, which are sometimes personalized as in the 'Marcos regime', or are otherwise spoken of in terms of a wider structure such as a 'communist regime' or a 'military regime'. In these cases, the term is clearly employed as a pejorative label.

2 I use the term 'political system' as inclusive of state, regime, and government.

3 Although a state can be said to exist where there is an institutional structure of social control involving a monopoly of political power, a state does not necessarily exist wherever, or whenever, there is a society, for there are such things as stateless societies. This is relevant to broader questions of colonization and decolonization because in many cases the most profound effect of colonization was the imposition of a state where none had existed previously. On another point, political power cannot necessarily be viewed as coercive (see Clastres 1977: 14ff.).

4 This is consistent with Calvert's view of the state as 'the community organized for political purposes'. One can go further and talk of the state as a 'complex of institutions that constitute the organization of political authority' (Larson 1980:19), but here I think the concept of 'state' begins to incorporate 'regime' as well.


6 Where Thucydides presents the opposing speeches of Cleon and Diodotus in debating the fate of Mytilene, for example, it becomes all too clear how the meaning of concepts can be abandoned for the sake of expediency. Although Diodotus argues against the slaughter proposed by Cleon, he abandons any appeal to the concept of justice. James Boyd White (1984:76) points out that in sympathizing with the apparent leniency of Diodotus's position, the more profound implications of the discourse he uses can be overlooked, for 'in the rhetoric of Diodotus anything can be said, and it invites one to think that anything can be done. To speak that way is to lose the capacity to form a community with others or to claim a consistent character for oneself; indeed it is to lose the power of practical reason. Noam Chomsky conveys a similar perception of the rhetoric employed in debates over the Vietnam War in America. He detects a disturbing falseness in the emotional and moral posturing of those opposed to the war whose grounds for objection were based only on 'pragmatic considerations of cost and utility' (Chomsky 1969:11).

7 Constitutional political opposition is, however, a theme which is relatively neglected in democratic theory, perhaps because it is so taken for granted as an essential component of contemporary democracy. In Sartori's recent book (1987), for example, it rates no more than a single textual entry in the index, although he mentions in a footnote 'the centrality of opposition for democracy' (ibid.:172, n.4).


9 As Rosemary Brissenden (1974) notes, these legacies of colonialism feature in many parts of the Third World, but some of the problems of regionalism and communalism that they have generated do not differ all that much from those in European nations in dispute over places like Alsace or Trieste.
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