

A Conceptual Framework for a Cross-national Democracy Barometer

Democracy is a form of government designed to provide a central role for the governed; its origins can be traced to ancient Greece. Ancient democracies were widely viewed as inferior forms of government and were virtually non-existent for centuries. The accumulation of historical happenings and conceptual innovations culminated in the gradual reemergence of democracy, beginning in the 17th century. Today variants of representative democracy are widely viewed as the only legitimate form of government (Fukuyama 1992). Liberal, representative democracies are viewed as a more advanced evolutionary state of electoral democracies (Diamond 2002).¹

To some, the source of democracy's current stature is simply that it has proven superior to all other forms of government throughout the 20th century. To others, democracy's allure derives from the belief that, for all of its shortcomings, a properly designed democratic regime can provide for a unique and on-going form of governmental responsiveness. This responsiveness is rooted in institutional mechanisms that provide for electoral accountability and both channel and check the exercise of governmental power. These uniquely democratic mechanisms provide for the structure, stability, and dynamism needed to deal with challenges and problems affecting the advancement of societal welfare.

Though democracy has been discussed and practiced since ancient times and is widely heralded in contemporary times, there is no universally accepted *theory of democracy*. That is to say, there is no consensus among scholars on how the *demos* should be incorporated into the governance structure, or on how democratic institutions and processes should be designed and operated. Given this diversity of views, it is not surprising that – despite a number of imposing efforts – a widely accepted, cross-national index of democracy does not exist. This point is underscored by a recent review essay by Munck and Verkuilen (2003). In perhaps the most comprehensive review of cross-national measures of democracy to date, they are critical of everything from the conceptualization of democracy, to the quality of the data used, to the way that variables are aggregated into a composite index.

This state of affairs is lamentable. Without a valid and reliable cross-national index it is not possible either to measure the diffusion and consolidation of democracy or to gauge its impact on societal welfare. Thus, one of the goals of this effort is to generate a democracy barometer that is capable of gauging the extent to which nations have established a democratic political order. The conceptual and the methodological underpinnings of this effort are developed here. The first section addresses conceptual issues. Its principal challenge is to assimilate the diverse approaches to understanding democracy into an encompassing theoretical framework, one that is useful for gauging its

¹ Liberal here is, of course, used in the classic sense, not the ideological sense. It refers to limited popular government that provides fundamental liberties to individuals and places constraints on what government officials can do.

impact on societal welfare in a cross-national setting. The second section sketches the plan to be used in operationalizing the proposed conceptual framework.

Conceptualizing Democracy

Shapiro (2002) notes that approaches to democratic theory fall into two broad classes, substantive and procedural. Substantive approaches conceive of democracy in terms of a system that generates a set of desirable social outcomes (justice, equality, peace, liberty, etc.). Procedural approaches conceive of democracy in terms of a set of institutions, processes, and mechanisms that integrate a popular component into governance structures. Despite the existence of these two classes of democratic theory, students of comparative politics who have attempted to develop cross-national gauges of democracy have almost exclusively adopted procedural approaches (Munck and Verkuilen 2002:9).

There are sound reasons for the scholarly convergence on process models and these reasons are reinforced by the overriding purpose of this effort: to study the relationship between democratic regimes and societal welfare.² Thus, the conceptual foundations of this effort will be grounded in a process model, a Schumpeterian model of democracy as elaborated upon by Robert Dahl (1971). While the purposes of this research reinforce the commitment to a Schumpeterian process model, it also leads to incorporate several factors that have not been widely used in comparative efforts to gauge democratization.

Representative Democracy and the Role of Electoral Competition

The central theoretical challenge faced by efforts to develop cross-national gauges of democracy from process models is formidable. It is to identify institutions and processes that aggregate individual preferences into collective actions in a manner most consistent with democratic principles. Elections have been at the core of most national-level democracy indexes. Most of these indexes have drawn on Schumpeter's groundbreaking work on the importance of electoral competition (1947), which sees the discipline provided by competitive electoral mechanisms as the source of democratic responsiveness. Schumpeter argued that democracy is "that institutional arrangement for arriving at political decisions in which individuals acquire the power to decide by means of a competitive struggle for the people's vote (1947:269)."

Despite telling criticisms of the utility and functioning of elections in democratic orders,³ and the discipline's flirtations with approaches that emphasize such mechanisms

² While understanding the relationship between democracy and societal welfare is an extremely important focus, it has hardly been the primary focus of empirical democratic theorists. Indeed, more attention has been paid in empirical scholarship to examining such things as: 1) mass-elite linkages; 2) the factors that lead to the emergence of a democratic regime; 3) the consolidation of nascent democracies; and 4) the duration of democratic regimes.

³ Arrow (1951) demonstrated long ago that it is virtually impossible to maximize social utility functions through electoral mechanisms. Others have demonstrated that a simple procedural rule like electoral

as deliberation and various forms of elite mediation, Huntington argues that the Schumpeterian mode of analysis “had won” by 1990. He goes on to assert that a broad consensus had emerged that procedural conceptualizations based on electoral competitiveness “provided the analytic precision and referents that make the concept [democracy] a useful one (Huntington, 1991: 7).

While the importance of Schumpeter’s seminal insights is undeniable, democratization scholars have been most directly influenced by Dahl’s extensions of Schumpeter’s ideas. Dahl’s analysis in *Polyarchy* (1971) has been of most relevance to comparative research.⁴ *Polyarchy* outlines what Dahl views as the defining attributes of democratic regimes as well as the factors that affect democratization. To Dahl the defining characteristic of democracy is “the continuing responsiveness of the government to the preferences of its citizens, considered as political equals (1971:1).” He sees three necessary but sufficient conditions for a democratic political order (Dahl, 1971: 2). All citizens must have the ability to:

1. Formulate their preferences.
2. Signify their preferences to their fellow citizens and the government by individual and collective action.
3. Have their preferences weighed equally in the conduct of the government.

Dahl elaborates on the institutional guarantees needed to secure each of these conditions and identifies eight institutional guarantees (see Figure D-1): freedom to form and join organizations; freedom of expression; right to vote; eligibility for public office; right of political leaders to compete for support and votes; alternative sources of information; free and fair elections; institutions for making government policies depend on votes and other expressions of preferences. He also notes that these various guarantees can be folded into two dimensions: contestation and inclusiveness.⁵

majoritarianism can generate perverse consequences, particularly when it undermines the capacity of a current minority to become a majority in the future. Finally, work on electoral behavior in the survey research tradition has undermined the confidence of many observers in the effectiveness of elections in monitoring and disciplining the behavior of governmental actors.

⁴ Other key works by Dahl on democratic theory include, *A Preface to Democratic Theory* (1956) and (with Charles Lindblom) *Politics, Economics and Welfare* (1953).

⁵ The centrality of the ideas in Dahl’s conceptual scheme is evident in the definitions of democracy used by those who have engaged in comparative research on democracy. Lipset (1959:71), for example, defines democracy as “a political system which supplies regular constitutional opportunities for changing the governing officials, and a social mechanism which permits the largest possible part of the population to influence major decisions by choosing among contenders for political office.” Schmitter and Karl (1991:?), in addressing what democracy “is and is not” assert that democracy is a political system that “operates by the contingent consent of the governed by politicians acting under conditions of bounded uncertainty.” Huntington identifies democracies in terms of “the extent that its most powerful collective decision makers are selected through fair, honest, and periodic elections in which candidates freely compete for votes and in which virtually all the adult population is eligible to vote (Huntington 1991:7). The importance of Dahl’s concepts of contestation and inclusiveness are also evident in Przeworski et. al.’s minimalist approach to identifying democratic regimes (Przeworski, et. al. 2000:14-22); they focus on contestation because they note the pervasiveness of universal suffrage in the Post WW II era.

Liberal Constraints and the Role of Checks and Balances

Dahl's conception of polyarchy provides the core of the conceptual framework to be used here in constructing a cross-national barometer of democratic orders, as it does most earlier efforts. But our concern with the relationship between democratic regimes and societal welfare sensitizes us to the shortcomings of an approach that relies almost exclusively on electoral mechanisms, institutions, and processes. This leads us to incorporate a liberal/republican dimension. It is relevant because it recognizes factors that limit both the *reach* of state power and the *unbridled* use of governmental power.

The experiences of the last wave of democratization in Latin America, as well as Southern and Eastern Europe, have made many scholars increasingly skeptical of the bona fides of what Diamond (2002: 28-29) calls "electoral democracies." Diamond, himself, contends that electoral democracies are democracies in only the most minimal sense. Critics of electoral democracies contend that they do not provide for political accountability, which is the key to governmental responsiveness in democracies. This can be seen in the work of Guillermo O'Donnell, who argues that a truly accountable political system requires three components. One is a *democratic* component, which enables citizens to participate electorally and choose their rulers. The second is a *liberal* component, which limits the power of the state to encroach on the basic rights of individuals. The third is a *republican* component, which limits governmental power through institutions of horizontal accountability and the rule of law (O'Donnell 1999).

The limitations on governmental power implicit in O'Donnell's liberal and republican components of government were an important part of the revival of democracy as a viable form of government in the late 18th century. These limitations are also an important part of democracy's appeal, as well as its reputed comparative advantage in providing for societal welfare. Indeed, most theoretical analyses of the relationship between democracy and various aspects of societal welfare (especially economic aspects) implicitly or explicitly use a liberal conception of democracy (i.e., one that includes both liberal and republican components in O'Donnell's framework). This can be seen most clearly in the recent review entitled *The Democracy Advantage: How Democracies Promote Prosperity and Peace* (Halperin et. al. 2005). Indeed, observers such as Fareed Zakaria (2003) view the republican components of liberal democracy as absolutely vital to governmental performance. Thus, they argue that republican institutions should be consolidated before electoral institutions are introduced, a view that was widely shared in the Cold War era. Because of the importance of this liberal/republican dimension to democratic regimes, it will be an integral part of the democracy barometer developed here.

Liberal Democracy: A Conceptual Overview

Integrating the traditional preoccupation over electoral mechanisms with liberal constraints leads to a conceptual framework with four broad dimensions, which is depicted in Figure D-2. The first deals with the existence of sovereign representative

institutions. The second relates to the integrity of electoral processes. The third is a responsiveness dimension that corresponds to the capacity of policymaking institutions to be responsive to citizens' preferences. The fourth is a liberal constraints dimension.

The *existence of sovereign representative institutions* dimension included in Figure D-2 is often missing in efforts to construct cross-national gauges of democracy. Scholars tend to either assume the sovereignty of extant democratic institutions or incorporate judgments about sovereignty into evaluations of the competitiveness and/or openness of the contestation system. But sovereignty is truly separate from notions of openness and our concern with the relationship between democracy and welfare underscores the need to incorporate sovereignty explicitly into the model. The failure to differentiate between sovereign states and those with non-existent or compromised sovereignty will only muddy the relationship between regime traits and welfare outcomes.

The *integrity of electoral processes* dimension in Figure D-2 is a fairly standard component of cross-national indices of democracy. The subcomponents of this dimension relate directly to Dahl's framework that is reported and coded in Figure D-1 (D1 to D8). Legal eligibility restrictions relate to D4; campaign barriers to D2 and D5a; selection procedures to D4 and D5; a multi-party system to D1, D2, D5, and D6; and the level of threats and intimidation to D1 and D2. Binding elections relate to D8; regular elections to D5a; inclusive elections to D3; free elections to D7; fair elections to D7; informed elections to D2, D6, and D7; provisions for direct democracy to D8. The *responsiveness of policymaking institutions* dimension in Figure D-2 is seldom used in efforts to gauge democracy, but it is essential to understanding the relationship between regime traits and welfare. It derives from D8.

The *liberal constraints* dimension, as conceived here and depicted in Figure D-2, is more comprehensive than what is included in extant democracy indices, many of which do not include liberal or republican checks on governmental power. As noted earlier, however, the centrality of these checks in discussions of regime traits and societal welfare make them essential to the present effort.

Operationalizing the Conceptual Framework

Table D-1 provides a tentative listing of the sub-dimensions embedded in Figure D-2 as well as the source of the data that will be used to operationalize that sub-dimension. Much of the data needed to operationalize the constructs embedded in Figure D-2 will come from conventional archival sources. Other data will come from one of original research efforts that are unique to the SID and discussed on this website.

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Figure D-1

A. The Institutional Guarantees Needed to Permit Citizens to Formulate Preferences

1. Freedom to form and join organizations (D1)
2. Freedom of expression (D2)
3. Right to vote (D3)
4. Eligibility for public office (D4)
5. Alternative sources of information (D6)

B. The Institutional Guarantees Needed to Permit Citizens to Signify Preferences

1. Freedom to form and join organizations (D1)
2. Freedom of expression (D2)
3. Right to vote (D3)
4. Eligibility for public office (D4)
5. Right of political leaders to compete for support (D5)
6. Alternative sources of information (D6)
7. Free and fair elections (D7)

C. The Institutional Guarantees Needed to Permit Citizens' Preferences to be Weighted Equally in Government

1. Freedom to form and join organizations (D1)
2. Freedom of expression (D2)
3. Right to vote (D3)
4. Eligibility for public office (D4)
5. Right of political leaders to compete for support (D5)
 - 5A. Right of political leaders to compete for votes (D5a)
6. Alternative sources of information (D6)
7. Free and fair elections (D7)
8. Institutions for making government policies depend on votes and other expressions of preferences (D8)

Figure D-2
Outline of Democracy Conceptualization

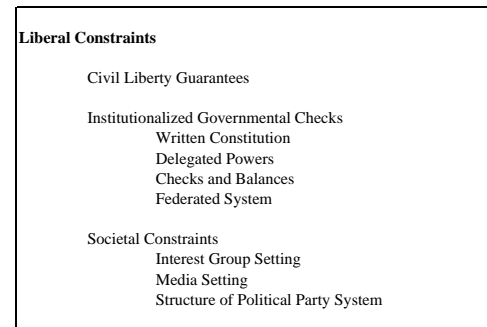
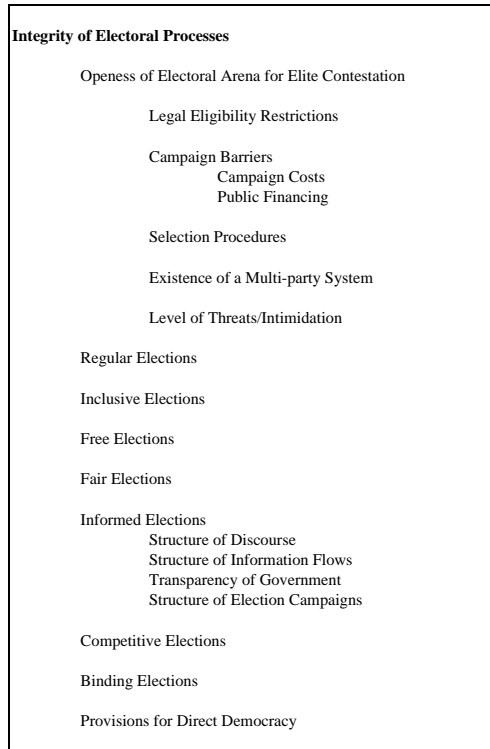
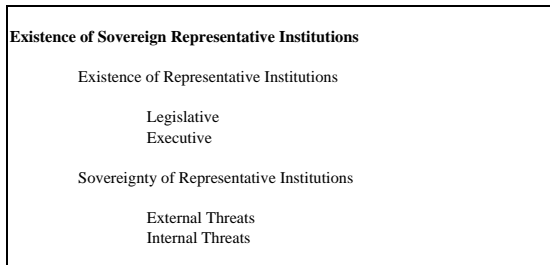


Table D-1
Summary of Research Strategy to Gauge
the Central Dimensions of a Liberal Representative Democracy

Theoretical Dimension	Source 1	Data Source Source 2	Source 3
Existence of Sovereign Representative Institutions			
Existence of Representative Governing Institutions			
Existence of Elected Executive	Constitutional Review	Archival Source	
Existence of Elected Representative Assembly	Constitutional Review	Archival Source	
Sovereignty of Representative Governing Institutions			
External Threats			
Occupying Army?	COW Data	Event Analysis	Textual Analysis
Internal Threats			
Military			
Civilian Control of Military	Textual Analysis	Event Analysis	Expert Analysis
Is There a History of Military Interference?	Textual Analysis	Event Analysis	Expert Analysis
On-going Pattern of Military Interference	Textual Analysis	Event Analysis	Expert Analysis
Civilian Commander in Chief	Constitutional Analysis		
Religious Leaders			
Is there a state religion?	Constitutional Review	Textual Analysis	Expert Analysis
Is There a History of Religious Interference?	Textual Analysis	Event Analysis	Expert Analysis
Integrity of Electoral Processes			
Openness for Elite Contestation			
Legal Eligibility Restrictions on Candidates			
Restrictiveness Scale for Executive	Constitutional Review	Textual Analysis	Legal Analysis
Restrictiveness Scale for Legislature	Constitutional Review	Textual Analysis	Legal Analysis
Party Restrictions			
Banned Parties	Constitutional Review	Textual Analysis	Event Analysis
Required Parties	Constitutional Review	Textual Analysis	Event Analysis
Existence of Multi-party System			
Average of Number of Party Measures	Archival Analysis	Archival Analysis	
Campaign Barriers			
Campaign Costs			
Financial	Textual Analysis	Legal Analysis	
Filing	Textual Analysis	Legal Analysis	
Public Financing of Campaigns	Textual Analysis	Legal Analysis	
Selection/Nomination Procedures			
Executive			
Formal	Legal Analysis	Textual Analysis	Constitutional Review
Informal	Textual Analysis	Event Analysis	Expert Analysis
Legislature			
Formal	Legal Analysis	Textual Analysis	Constitutional Review
Informal	Textual Analysis	Event Analysis	Expert Analysis
Level of Intimidation to Opposition Parties			
History of Banning Parties -- Recency	Textual Analysis	Event Analysis	Expert Analysis
Frequency of Elite Intimidation Tactics	Textual Analysis	Event Analysis	Expert Analysis

Table D-1
Summary of Research Strategy to Gauge
the Central Dimensions of a Liberal Representative Democracy

Regular Elections				
Structured Elections				
Regular		Legal Analysis	Textual Analysis	Constitutional Review
Structured Discretion of Incumbent		Legal Analysis	Textual Analysis	Constitutional Review
Unstructured Elections				
Unfettered Discretion of Incumbent		Legal Analysis	Textual Analysis	Constitutional Review
		Source 1	Source 2	Source 3
Inclusive Elections				
Citizenship Provisions		Constitutional Review		
De Jure Suffrage		See Coppedge and Reini		
Class Restrictions		Constitutional Review	Archival Analysis	
Gender Restrictions		Constitutional Review	Archival Analysis	
Racial/Ethnic Restrictions		Constitutional Review	Archival Analysis	
Religious Restrictions		Constitutional Review	Archival Analysis	
Other Restrictions		Constitutional Review	Archival Analysis	
De Facto Suffrage				
Class Restrictions		Textual Analysis	Event Analysis	
Gender Restrictions		Textual Analysis	Event Analysis	
Racial/Ethnic Restrictions		Textual Analysis	Event Analysis	
Religious Restrictions		Textual Analysis	Event Analysis	
Other Restrictions		Textual Analysis	Event Analysis	
Free Elections				
Secret Ballot		Constitutional Review	Textual Analysis	
Voter Intimidation/violence				
Magnitude				
Number of Incidents		Event Analysis	Archival Analysis	Textual Analysis
Seriousness of Incidents		Event Analysis	Archival Analysis	
Source				
Military		Event Analysis	Archival Analysis	Textual Analysis
Government		Event Analysis	Archival Analysis	Textual Analysis
Resistance Movement		Event Analysis	Archival Analysis	Textual Analysis
Fair Elections				
Equality of Vote				
One person/one vote		Constitutional Review	Legal Analysis	
Majority Rule				
Extent of Bias in Electoral System		Constitutional Review	Legal Analysis	Seats to Votes Ratio
Existence of:				
Vote Buying		Event Analysis	Archival Analysis	Textual Analysis
Patronage Systems		Event Analysis	Archival Analysis	Textual Analysis
Fraud				
History of Blatant fraud		Event Analysis	Archival Analysis	Expert Survey
Call for Independent Observers		Event Analysis	Archival Analysis	Expert Survey
Assessment of Independent Observers		Event Analysis	Archival Analysis	Expert Survey
Informed Elections				
Structure of Discourse/Deliberation				
Freedom of Expression				
Strength of Legal Commitment		Constitutional Review	Event Analysis	Textual Analysis
Length of Legal Commitment		Constitutional Review	Event Analysis	Textual Analysis
Instances of Book Banning, Newspaper Closures, etc		Event Analysis	Archival Analysis	Textual Analysis
Freedom of Assembly				
Strength of Legal Commitment		Constitutional Review	Event Analysis	Textual Analysis
Length of Legal Commitment		Constitutional Review	Event Analysis	Textual Analysis
Instances of Forcefully Ending Demonstrations		Event Analysis	Archival Analysis	Textual Analysis
Freedom of Association				
Strength of Legal Commitment		Constitutional Review	Event Analysis	Textual Analysis
Length of Legal Commitment		Constitutional Review	Event Analysis	Textual Analysis
Instances of Banning Parties or Groups		Event Analysis	Archival Analysis	Textual Analysis
Structure of Information Flows				
Media Freedom				
Do Newspapers Need a License to Operate?		Althaus Subcontract		
Are Newspapers Financially Independent?		Althaus Subcontract		
Are there Employment Restrictions on Reporters?		Althaus Subcontract		
Does Government have Power of Prior Restraint?		Althaus Subcontract		
Editorials Critical of Government				
Frequency		Event Analysis		
Intensity		Event Analysis		
Transparency of Government Operations				
C-Span?		Althaus Subcontract		
Official Record of Proceedings		Althaus Subcontract		
Freedom of Information Acts		Althaus Subcontract	Legal Analysis	
Structure of Election Campaigns				
Length		Legal Analysis		
Openness		Event Analysis		
Combativeness		Event Analysis		

Table D-1
Summary of Research Strategy to Gauge
the Central Dimensions of a Liberal Representative Democracy

	Source 1	Source 2	Source 3
Competitive Elections			
Executive			
Normal Margin of Victory			
Years of Party Control	Archival Source	Archival Source #2	
Swing in Executive Vote (if applicable)	Archival Source	Archival Source #2	
Legislature			
Relative Size of Largest Party	Archival Source	Archival Source #2	
Change in Makeup of Legislature	Archival Source	Archival Source #2	
Swing in Legislative Vote	Archival Source	Archival Source #2	
Binding Elections			
History of Government Suspending Elections	Textual Analysis	Event Analysis	Expert Survey
History of Government Overturning Unsatisfactory Election Results	Textual Analysis	Event Analysis	Expert Survey
Provisions for Direct Democracy			
Referendum	Constitutional Review	Legal Analysis	Event Analysis
Initiative	Constitutional Review	Legal Analysis	Event Analysis
Recall	Constitutional Review	Legal Analysis	Event Analysis
Responsiveness of Policymaking Institutions			
Legislature			
Capacity			
Administrative Budget	Archival Source	Archival Source #2	
Staff Size and Support	Archival Source	Archival Source #2	
Independence			
Executive Power to Disband Legislature	Constitutional Review		
History of Disbanding Legislature?	Textual Analysis	Event Analysis	
Power to Rule by Executive Decree?	Constitutional Review		
History of Ruling by Executive Decree?	Textual Analysis	Event Analysis	
Bureaucracy			
Capacity			
Budget	Textual Analysis	Archival Source	Archival Source #2
Insularity			
Civil Service System	Archival Source	Archival Source #2	
Transparency			
Corruption Scale	Archival Source	Archival Source #2	
	Source 1	Data Source Source 2	Source 3
Liberal Constraints on Governmental Power			
Institutional Constraints			
Existence of a Written Constitution	Constitutional Review		
Guaranteed Individual Freedoms	Constitutional Review		
Use List of Liberal Guarantees from Rule of Law Analysis			
Delegated Powers	Constitutional Review	Event/Archival Source	Expert Survey
Checks and Balances	Constitutional Review	Event/Archival Source	Expert Survey
Institutionalized	Constitutional Review	Event/Archival Source	Expert Survey
Observed	Events Analysis		
Federal Structure	Constitutional Review	Event/Archival Source	Expert Survey
Others	Constitutional Review		
Societal Constraints			
Civic Associations			
Types	Archival Source	Event Analysis	Mass Survey
Vitality	Archival Source	Event Analysis	Mass Survey
Interest Groups			
Types	Archival Source	Event Analysis	Expert Survey
Independence	Archival Source	Event Analysis	Expert Survey
Strength	Archival Source	Event Analysis	Expert Survey
Interference, Intimidation	Archival Source	Event Analysis	Expert Survey
Structure of Party System			
Number of Principal Parties	Archival Source	Secondary Source	
Structure of Media System			
Decentralization of Ownership	Archival Source		
Number of Outlets per capita	Archival Source		