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## **Focus on elections: Remarks on the Contemporary Methodology for Classifying Non-Democratic Regimes**

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### **Abstract:**

*This article describes and analyses current trends in classifying non-democratic regimes. A brief overview of the basic typologies (J. J. Linz, S. P. Huntington, W. Merkel) is given first. The article then focuses on the methodology currently used for classifying non-democratic regimes, one which is connected to a significant degree with the theory of so-called hybrid regimes. Placing a strong emphasis on the texts of L. Diamond, A. Schedler, S. Levitsky and L. A. Way, the authors attempt to illustrate the methodological consequences the application of this theory has for the relevant area of political science. The authors particularly concentrate on the exclusive role of the elections as a variable of classification, or, respectively, on the concept of elections as a criterion applied in a continuum between electoral democracies at the one end, and competitive authoritarianisms at the other. This paper provides a critical reflection on this approach and points out its methodological limits. According to the authors, elections can be used to discriminate between democracies and non-democracies, however, within the category of the non-democratic regime one needs to apply a different set of criteria in order to be able to discriminate further.*

*Keywords: Theory of non-democratic regimes, democracy, authoritarian regime, theory of hybrid regimes, liberal democracy, electoral democracy, pseudodemocracy, electoral authoritarianism, ambiguous regimes, competitive authoritarianism, hegemonic authoritarianism, minimum criteria for democracy.*

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The ambition to introduce order into the sphere of models and types of states and regimes is one of the basic characteristics of political theory. Already Aristotle, with his famous six-part typology of polities, introduced into the theory of politics the two basic themes that remain pertinent to this day – *who* and *how* (or rather *for whose benefit*) *rules* – as well as a proposal of criteria for discriminating between the individual types of polities (regimes, constitutions) (see e.g. Císař 2003: 49 – 56 for a perspective in Czech). There is no need to develop this historical perspective any further in this text, as it is enough to say that we encounter this ambition at every stage in the development of political thought – the theoretical or paradigmatic choices made at any given moment having little bearing on it. Both fascination with differentiating the just, good state or government from its vicious opposites, and the general search for, or even construction of, this just and good state, seem to be timeless.

At the same time, however, it is necessary to state with some scepticism that there is no unified and generally accepted method for *classifying political regimes* in political science. There is not even a consensus that political science is able to create such a classification. As such, we are approaching the theme of the methodological limits of the social sciences here. To be able to proceed further we must admit first the possibility, and second the usefulness, of this attempt at classification. At the same time we need to note that in any debates on this topic there is a tension between the genuinely existing regime types on the one side, and the theoretically formulated categories (ideal types) on the other. The latter, although “based on observation, are not descriptions of any actual institution” (Mulgan 1998: 84). This tension has significant consequences for the present text.

As the remarks above indicate, the primary purpose of this paper is to describe and comment on the contemporary transformations of classifications (typologies) of non-democratic regimes. We will primarily use data gathered after 1989 in the so-called post-communist studies. To be more specific, we intend to evaluate the arguments and methods of some contemporary attempts at classification in this field and point out some potential risks associated with the theory of so-called hybrid regimes. The implicit goal of the text, linked as it is to the specialization of the journal in which it is published, is to judge the limits of the

application of the elections *qua* the key criterion in differentiating between the various types of non-democratic regimes.

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Decades of transformation of theories of non-democratic regimes naturally brought about a large number of suggested typologies of those regimes. Not all of them were based on the same postulates, and not all of them followed the same criteria. Two representative scholars are worth mentioning here: Edward Shils and Samuel P. Huntington.

In his text *Political Development in the New States* (1960, 1962) E. Shills offered the academic community his categorization of political systems comprised of five models: four models of non-democratic regimes plus the category of *political democracies*. Shils distinguished (1) *tutelary democracies*, (2) *modernizing oligarchies*, (3) *totalitarian oligarchies*, which are divided into two categories, *bolshevik* and *traditionalist*, and finally (4) *traditional oligarchies*. This categorization was primarily reacting to the contemporary (end of 1950s, beginning of 1960s) need for order in the colourful group of new states in the so-called Third World, which was going through intensive wave of decolonisation at the time. The theory of modernisation provided the frame for this typological effort; as such the key criterion used by Shills to create each category was the method which the given regime selected for overcoming traditional socio-economic and political-cultural forms and achieving the desired modernising (in the wide meaning of this word) effects. This applies especially to the first three types; the traditional oligarchies, on the other hand, applied a conversely oriented method, namely a desperate defense of traditions and evasion of the risks of modernisation (Shills, 1960 and 1962, respectively; in Czech, see Říchová 2000: 259 – 263 and Balík 2003: 264 – 266, respectively).

The paradigm of modernisation was also respected in S. P. Huntington's typology of non-democratic regimes (for an overview in Czech, see Říchová 2000: 267 – 272 and Balík 2003: 266 – 268). Huntington's famous concept of *pretorian society*, characterised by a high level of political participation, limited

institutionalisation and rampant corruption, where the social atmosphere drowns in conflict and various social groups and even some institutions (first and foremost the Army) resolutely enter the sphere of politics, was a key classificational antipode at the time to the concept of totalitarianism of Zbigniew Brzezinsky and Carl J. Friedrich (1956). Huntington (1968: 192 – 263) distinguished three types of pretorian societies according to the level of participation of the population: *oligarchic* (low level of participation), *radical* (medium level of participation) and *mass* (high level of participation).<sup>2</sup>

Since the 1970s Juan José Linz's now classic contribution (Linz 1973 and 2000) has dominated debates on the typologizing of non-democratic regimes. His positions, both in methodology and classification, were partially problematized after 1989. We comment elsewhere on the validity of those objections (Balík & Holzer 2006). Even Linz himself (together with Alfred Stepan) modified some of his propositions, and the classifications stemming from those propositions, under the influence of empirical facts, reflecting first the ferment in some of the Soviet-dominated countries in the 1980s, and later the wave of collapses of communist regimes in Central and Eastern Europe, in Caucasus and Middle Asia at the turn of 1980s and 1990s.

Linz and Stepan above all re-classified the original four basic types of non-democratic regime (totalitarian, authoritarian, traditional and dictatorship) into different four categories, that is, into *totalitarian*, *post-totalitarian*, *authoritarian* and *sultanistic* regimes (Linz – Stepan 1996: 38 – 54). As far as the methods of studying non-democratic regimes are concerned, this was, without exaggeration, an epochal transformation, because the key variables used in the typologization of this group of regimes changed. The question: *How do non-democratic regimes work?*, that is, how is power executed, organized, issues of interconnections between the power and the society, or the role of citizens in the system arranged, no longer seems so important (Linz 2000: 159 – 160) – and this is true both at the level of possible practical application of this theory, and at the level of purely theoretical abstraction. Attention was shifted to the question: *How do non-democratic regimes end?*, or whether they

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<sup>2</sup> See Řířhová (2000: 270 – 272) for details, including the comments of Huntington's adversaries.

can end at all (cf. for example the claim that totalitarian regimes cannot end);<sup>3</sup> and if they can indeed end, How can they arrive at the moment when the transition to democracy starts? But also, What are the conditions, the strategies used? What kind of actors are present (or not present)? And, How is this likely to shape the outcome?, etc.

Because the constructs of transitology had a strong influence on political theory at the time, political theory focused on the question of the influence of the previous type of non-democratic regime on the systemic transition towards democracy or, respectively, on the following consolidation of democracy (this being often a possibility rather than a prospect). From the point of view of the theory of non-democratic regimes, it was the concentration on defining the sum of minimal "implications" for the tasks of transition and consolidation towards democracy which constituted the important shift in methodology (Linz – Stepan 1996: 55ff.). It should be mentioned at this point that this shift was linked with omnipresent optimism which suggested the darkest future for non-democratic regimes and a victorious spread of democracy all over the world.

From the number of new terms seeking to denominate contemporary transformations of non-democratic regimes in the world we will be interested here only in attempts to create new general typologies of non-democratic regimes. Not all of the typologies fall automatically under the so-called hybrid paradigm, the ruling one in this area of political science in the last decade of the previous century. Isolated, area-limited concepts with no ambitions at comparing or classifying (e.g. M. McFaul or F. Zakaria), or texts which are mostly overviews (D. Collier and S. Levitsky among others), will not be analysed in this paper. With this in mind, we will open our topic by considering contributions from three authors representing different scholarly traditions: Wolfgang Merkel, a German political scientist, Paul Brooker, who represents the Anglo-Saxon school, and the Hungarian political scientist Attila Ágh.

Merkel is interesting both for his argument and for an attempt to cover as many of the modern non-democratic regimes as possible, including those which

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<sup>3</sup> The fact that the concept of totalitarian regimes is so static and does not explain the demise of given models was always one of the main arguments of its opponents.

appeared as a result of the third wave of democratization in the post-communist area, thus leaving no space for exceptions or deviant cases.

On the general level, Merkel respects the division of non-democratic forms into totalitarian and authoritative. In the first group he distinguishes *communist*, *fascist* and *theocratic* regimes (Merkel 1999: 50 – 52). The category of authoritarian regimes is larger: the subtypes are again *communist* (see below for the concept of *Parteidiktatur*) and *fascist*, and then the „classic“ authoritarian regimes, that is *military*, *organic-etatist*, *racist*, *modernizing*, *theocratic*, *dynastic* (*royal* and *monarchic*) and *sultanistic*.

Using this typology, Merkel intended amongst other things to solve the problem of the different degrees of intensity of totalitarianism/authoritarianism in the different evolutionary phases of communist and national socialist systems. Depending on the answer to the question *Who holds the power?* Merkel distinguishes *Parteidiktatur* and *Führerdiktatur*. In the case of communist regimes, it is only the latter of those two forms that can be an actual totalitarian system, whereas the model of *Parteidiktatur* signals *only* an authoritarian basis. As far as fascist regimes are concerned, Merkel is convinced that only the *Third Reich* between 1938–1945 was totalitarian. All of the other fascisms in the shape of *Führerdiktatur* represent again *only* an instance of authoritative form. Let us consider Merkel's classification of non-democratic regimes as a proof of the fact that reflection on modern non-democratic forms of regimes can respect Linz's methodology of the study of those regimes.

In his book *Non-Democratic Regimes. Theory, Government & Politics* (2000) Paul Brooker first recapitulates the classic concepts of totalitarianism (Arendt 1951 and 1962, Friedrich & Brzezinski 1956, Schapiro 1972) and authoritarianism (Linz 1964 and 1973, O'Donnell 1973, Perlmutter 1981). Those authors concentrate on the question: *How do dictatorships govern?*, which in Brooker's view is often unnecessarily ambitious. Brooker recommends seeking the answer to a subtler question in our attempts to identify the type of any given non-democratic regime: *Who or what governs?* According to Brooker, it can be either (1) army or (2) party or (3) leader.

Within the framework of those basic categories Brooker (2000: 36 – 58) then comments on the various theories and approaches belonging to one of the three aforementioned variants: from *movement-regime* of Robert C. Tucker (Tucker 1961) and Huntington's wide array of *one-party systems* (Huntington 1970), through variously defined *military regimes* of Samuel E. Finer (1962), Amos Perlmutter (1974 and 1977), Eric A. Nordlinger (1977) and S. P. Huntington again (1968), and finally to what are often minute nuances of *personalist types* of non-democratic regimes – beginning with a classic Weberian perspective and ending with more contemporary contributions (e.g. Zolberg 1966; Roth 1968; Eisenstadt 1973; Linz 1975; Jackson – Rosberg 1982 and others).

A significant part of Brooker's monograph is dedicated to the analysis of models of individual non-democratic regimes, that is to the description and analysis of their motives, ideological roots, ways of gaining legitimacy, and consolidation, but also naturally the *possibilities* associated with their establishment, and finally their "degeneration" into potential democracies. Some of the last chapters are dedicated to imperfect transitional regimes, that is semi-dictatorial and semi-democratic variants of regimes; others form a sceptical inquiry into the proclaimed twilight of non-democratic regimes. Brooker's treatment of his theme is therefore well-balanced: his ambitions at typology are linked to the classical models of the 1970s and 1980s, but this does not prevent him from accentuating new topics, especially the hard times the non-democratic regimes experienced at the end of 1980. However, he does not necessarily intend to construe this contemporary trend as a definitive and general perspective.

Central European political science produced no generally conceived classification of non-democratic regimes in the 1990s nor any at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, not even in a smaller, area-limited framework. We therefore mention here Atilla Ágh's contribution (1998) more or less as an illustration. Ágh confronted the results of the transitions in Central and South-Eastern Europe after 1989 with the democratic ideal and identified two categories of "post-communist" hybrid regimes: (1) *semi-democracies*, where alternation of governments is complicated yet possible in elections (for example Slovakia during the rule of V. Mečiar, Croatia, Macedonia or Romania), and (2) *pseudo-democracies*, where the political opposition is legal but

does not have the means to win power peacefully in elections, and is therefore condemned to use non-electoral means (Serbia or Albania).

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To understand how revolutionary the changes in classification of non-democratic regimes are we need to look into the theory of hybrid regimes which is linked with the paradigm of transitology that became dominant in the 1990s (see Balík – Holzer 2006). This scholarly perspective has brought about a range of attempts to name and define the allegedly new, never-before-seen types of non-democratic regime. Those numerous contemporary new types usually arose from imperfect or unfinished partings from non-democracy. The ability to embark on a voyage of liberalisation and subsequent democratization was attributed solely to authoritarian and post-totalitarian regimes. This meant focusing on the extremely fluid dimension between the authoritarian and democratic regimes. The attack was then concentrated on the very category of authoritarian regimes, whose fairly wide definition meant that when evaluating the outcome of the third wave of democratization, "authoritarian regime" became a "container" encompassing nine out of ten new examples of "modern" non-democratic regimes cited in literature (Linz – Stepan 1996: 55 – 65). One of the implicit aspirations of this text is to answer the question as to whether this category has lost its basic value, its categorial clarity and its applicability.

By no means should this signify that the theory of hybrid regimes has ousted from contemporary political science all other attempts to deal with the issue of new types of non-democratic regime. According to Andreas Schedler (2006: 3 – 5) there are three alternative conceptual strategies by means of which one can perceive the post-transition non-democratic regime types. The famous concepts of delegative democracy of G. O'Donnell (1994) and non-liberal democracy of F. Zakaria (1997) belong to the category of so-called *defective democracies*. The second strategy uses traditional methods of research and is represented here by the theory of *new authoritarianisms*. The ambition to understand and define the ostensibly unique post-

transition non-democratic regime type is typical of the third strategy of *hybrid regime*.

As we can see, Schedler does not classify non-democratic regimes. What he tries to achieve is the organization of methodological options associated with their study and the variables emphasized by those methods. On a general level Schedler's text nevertheless implicitly tends towards the hybrid paradigm, since it explicitly concentrates on the functional logic and perspectives of *electoral authoritarianism*. This is one of the key concepts of a new typology of contemporary non-democratic regimes which is tied to the theory of hybrid models. And their analytical and typological methods are precisely the subject of the present paper. Texts by Larry Diamond (*Thinking About Hybrid Regimes*, 2002: 21 – 35), Andreas Schedler (*The Menu of Manipulation*, 2002: 36 – 50) and Steven Levitsky with Lucan A. Way (*The Rise of Competitive Authoritarianism*, 2002a: 51 – 65) provide representative material for analysis, not only because they are ambitious attempts to define and order the various types of hybrid regimes, but also because they work precisely with those criterial tools that are typical of the hybrid paradigm. Indeed, those tools are present in the texts mentioned in an almost pure form.

Let us begin with a seemingly banal observation: the first task a of scholar who tries to classify non-democratic regimes is the very separation of the non-democracies from the democracies, that is, to identify the two most basic *categories of regimes*. As Giovanni Sartori (1993) has already shown, the questions as to *whether* a certain regime is a democracy or not on the one hand, and *to what degree* it is democratic on the other hand, are totally different. However, they are not mutually exclusive, but rather supplement each other, though the priority must always be given to the definition of the corresponding category. It is only later, inside the specific exclusively defined type of regime that we ask how well a specific regime corresponds to the definition created, and that we study variations in practice, etc. (cf. Sartori 1993: 183 – 186).

We need to stress here that to a certain degree adherents to the theory of hybrid regimes give up on defining an empirically consistent format that would define the boundary between democracies and non-democracies. Rather than soberly

concentrating on the verifiable, empirically graspable and therefore comparable data, they emphasize approaches which speculate about various sums of abstract qualities which the contemporary democracy should – according to them – unquestionably fulfil. Such approaches more or less ignore complications relating to the *measurement* of social phenomena.

From the methodological outputs of the various authors we can establish only the following axiom: the more we “load” the concept of democracy with a sum of certain expectations, the more we complicate our way to a relevant and verifiable classificatory analysis. Conversely, for the purity and openness (and therefore transparency) of a method of classification it is advantageous to concentrate on the smallest number of criteria possible (ideally on one criterion only) – but also on criteria whose definition (contents) is truly valid.

In this sense it seems natural to choose the classic concept of Joseph A. Schumpeter<sup>4</sup> from the pool of possible definitions of democracy. Schumpeter’s minimalist definition conceives democracy as a system where the legitimacy of power is based on periodic and open competition for the votes of the electorate (see Schumpeter 2004: 287 – 320). It therefore fulfils at least one of the aforementioned conditions: it is based on one key criterion, that is the presence of elections. This technicist concept is clearly contradictory to the modernist social-liberal calls for guarantees of a maximalist set of civic and political equal rights (see for example the works of David Held), including the rights of groups (typically of women – cf. the texts of Susan Moller Okin, Anne Phillips, Iris Young and others). In a sense, those dominate the theory of democracy at the end of the second and beginning of the third millenium.

What do we gain if we say that *mere* form, that is, the existence of democratic institutions, is not enough to determine if the regime studied is democratic or not? How does this affect our attempts to distinguish between democracies and non-democratic regimes? If we state that elections can mask an authoritarian dominance and their presence is not a sufficient guarantee of free and fair competition, is this statement really adequate from a methodological point of view? Does it help to attain a *pure and applicable* classification of categories of political regimes? Or does it on

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<sup>4</sup> Cf. e.g. Hloušek – Kopeček (2003a: 178 – 192).

the contrary complicate it, and transfer the whole issue into an area where comparison is difficult?

Thanks to such questions we arrive for the first time in this text at the necessity to comment on the role of elections as the basic criterion. To put it succinctly: the presence of elections expresses a plural socio-political arrangement in the given polity. The dilemma is now expressed as follows: in defining the democratic format, is it right to limit this plurality to the question of the free electoral competition of political parties and movements for power (that is to Linz's sphere of *political society*), or should we equally request plurality in other spheres affected by the political processes in the given regime?

A sober, realistic answer which respects the already stated preferences of the authors is: in democracies it is precisely the election which is the most natural – and to a significant degree exclusive – arena where the redistribution of power is made legitimate. By competing in an election any actor becomes a political actor. In democratic political practice it is exclusively the legitimacy created by the electoral competition which creates the entitlement to attain and execute power. This concept falls within the boundaries of classic theory, which distinguishes authoritarian regimes from both democracy and totalitarianism by observing that they are not based on either the legitimacy arising from election or the legitimacy arising from revolution.

Other general principles of political competition, such as the concept of conflict (what is normal versus what is excessive?), the concept of state (is it all-powerful or limited?), whether the actors are able or unable to leave the political scene, whether there is space for new actors to enter into – those principles are unquestionably relevant variables which can be used to test the *degree* of democracy in the regime studied, but not the very presence of democracy. In other words, phenomena such as freedom, order, transparency, responsibility, the rule of law, etc. are worth scholars' attention, but only as variables indicating the quality of a given democracy. They cannot be used to establish the (non)existence of democracy as such.

We therefore do not need to be offended by a number of scholars, including L. Diamond, who distinguish between e.g. *electoral democracies* (in Schumpeter's sense) and *liberal democracies* (Diamond 2002: 25 – 27). This means distinguishing

the regime type *within* the set of democratic regimes. The adjective, typically *liberal* (or, in E. Shils work, *political* – cf. Shils 1960) gives the noun a concrete content. The noun defines the form and procedure, whereas the adjective suggests the quality. For the presence of fair, competitive and multi-party elections is a primary characteristics of both liberal and electoral democracies. At the same time the practice of *electoral* democracy is exhausted by the very act of election.

In their judgement of electoral democracy all the observers, including the opponents of a wide, participative theory of democracy, can therefore agree on one thing: they (neutrally) point out the absence of adequate civic activity as defined in the concept of *civic political culture* of Gabriel A. Almond and Sidney Verba (1971). They differ in their evaluation of the desirability of such phenomena, but that is a theme which falls outside our interests at this point. What exactly the electoral democracies miss in comparison with liberal democracies is then an issue of definition: for example, Schedler mentions the absence of attributes such as *checks and balances*, bureaucratic integrity or even-handed justice (Schedler 2002: 37 – 38): others point out the absence of the strict and verifiable honouring of political liberties and civic rights, in the sense of the *rule of law*. What is important for us here is that the very category of democracy is not questioned.

Conversely, an argument based on analysing election results seems inadequate. How to interpret an election in which one actor absolutely dominates, or the winner is an openly non-democratic actor (non-democratic in his rhetoric, not his praxis, as the latter would mean that the format of the election is no longer democratic)? Those questions are relatively common. But such observations do not mean that the democratic format of the regime studied is questioned. In transitology, there is a general thesis which states the following: a power-equilibrium of actors who negotiate the new rules of the game during processes of transition helps the finding of a democratic point of departure and the subsequent democratic consolidation. In a post-transition situation, however, the phenomenon of one actor dominating might be a natural effect of the electoral model used without any necessary relationship to the theory of democracy and without any classifying power. The success of a non-democratic actor does not on its own implicate a non-democratic regime format. As has already been suggested by Klaus von Beyme

(1999: 295 – 304), the presence of anti-systemic organization is one of the symptoms of processes of consolidation. It indicates the third phase of the *consolidation of political actors*, leading to the establishment of a complex component substructure within the political system. This does not mean that we should ignore such phenomena which can complicate the perspectives of democracy in the regime studied, of course. But they are not sufficient for the pure and generally applicable criterion we seek. The simplest sign indicating to us that we are dealing with democracy therefore remains the indeterminacy of the results of elections.

And yet there is a factor which, at the level of the analysis of outputs of elections, complicates justifications for subsuming electoral democracies under the category of democracies. The situation where free and fair elections do not lead to the replacement of elites – which is an unspoken, but *required* effect of elections – represents an interesting defect. It is not our goal here to explain why the opposition is unable to strip the ruling party of power, although searching for an answer to the question as to *why* the possibilities given to the voters by open electoral format are not *adequately* exploited is certainly exciting. To challenge the whole regime type – even if we are aware of the existence of a predominant type of party – would be questionable from the point of methodology. The reason is that the scholar is obliged here to leave his method – that is, concentrating on one election – and to apply a diachronic analysis, which spreads his interest over several elections in a row. How many times the given actor has to *dominate* is a speculative question: the most often mentioned number *three* enjoys no empirical support.

However, it seems we have identified a criterion which has a real relationship to the democratic minimum and is at the same time measurable and thus methodologically valid. Concentrating on this variable may truly problematize the classificatory purity of the relationship between the institutional electoral format and a general democratic framework.

Despite this sceptical remark, we believe that the non-normative scholarly approach we just described is important. If it is not respected, any attempt to categorize any type of regime whatsoever is rendered problematic.

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From the point of view of methodology the real problems emerge when one disrespects the exclusive connection between the given variable and the appropriate substantive. The terms *electoral authoritarianism* and *competitive authoritarianism* are flagrant examples of this. As follows from our previous comments, we are either dealing with authoritarianism, or with elections and competition. A symbiosis is impossible, even if the theory of hybrid regimes works with it.

It is now time to uncover the basic methodological mechanisms on which attempts at a new classification of non-democratic regimes are based. This classification is linked with the paradigm of transitology and respects the methods of Freedom House (hereafter referred to as FH), a methodology that is often cited, but not nearly often enough critically treated.<sup>5</sup> FH's evaluation of regimes is based on observing three indicators of guarantees of political rights and civic liberties, the openness of a given country and the chances of future democratization. FH does not always make its own observations, and sometimes uses second hand data produced by local and foreign observers. Fortunately this reliance does not seem to compromise the quality of FH's reports. The three indicators are as follows: (1) the percentage of Parliamentary seats held by the party in power, (2) the percentage of votes obtained by the presidential candidate of the ruling party, (3) number of years the current elite holds power. The types are defined by variable scores, which lend the boundaries between the types an ostensibly strict, though hardly verifiable mathematical character. The non-democratic scale goes from partially-open systems, represented by *electoral authoritarianism* and *pseudodemocracy*, to politically closed systems: *competitive authoritarianism*, *hegemonic noncompetitive authoritarianism*, and implicitly even *totalitarianism*.

Let us now remind the reader that according to the FH methodology *liberal democracies* achieve scores lower than 2.0 (in Latin America up to 2.3). Liberal democracies are followed by a questionable category of regimes defined through a combination of multiparty electoral competition and authoritarian dominance. The existence of democratic institutions (including elections) in those regimes is supposed to mask (render legitimate) the authoritarian execution of power. The ruling party cannot generally be stripped of power – or rather, to do so takes long-term pressure

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<sup>5</sup> Despite our scepticism, we have to admit that in some polities the institute of independent monitoring teams is sometimes the only possible method of obtaining relevant electoral data.

from united opposition forces supported by the mobilized polity. Authoritarianism is supposed to coalesce here with electoral praxis; the regimes hold competitive elections *de iure*, but the flaws of the electoral competition are significant and even the outcome of the election can be predicted. Those regimes, all of which achieve scores between 2.3–4.4, are called *electoral democracies* (score of 2.0–3.5), *electoral authoritarianisms* and *pseudodemocracies*.

These are followed by regimes without electoral competition, which are the *classic, politically closed authoritarianisms*. Among these are *ambiguous regimes* (score of 3.4–5.4), a term which should express the vagueness of the boundary between electoral democracy and competitive authoritarianism, as well as between *competitive authoritarianisms* (score of 4.2–6.6), *hegemonic non-competitive authoritarianisms* (score of 4.4–7.6) and *classic authoritarianisms* (score of 6.5–7.7). The distinction between competitive and hegemonic authoritarianism is defined by the nature of the opposition in Parliament (more than 90% of seats are occupied by the ruling party) and the share of the votes obtained by the winning presidential candidate (more than 75%).<sup>6</sup>

This overview is given here as an illustration only. We do not intend critically to analyse its values, although, for example, the distribution of individual terms (e.g. its pushing of authoritarianism into an extreme polar position, more suitable to totalitarianism) seems rather questionable. The aim is to look closely at the individual types, imagine the arguments of its originators and uncover their motives and blind spots.

The first problem lies in separating electoral democracies from electoral authoritarianisms. This theme is treated at some length by L. Diamond (2002: 27–29). Bearing in mind his cautious remarks on the haziness of the regimes studied and blurred boundary between them, we have to say that his definition, which understands the difference between those regime types to be in “free, fair, complex

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<sup>6</sup> Let us mention here some of the suggested trends: the number of politically closed regimes and generally of regimes with score higher than 6.5 should decrease, while the number of pseudodemocracies and various authoritative forms should increase. *Military regimes* have pretty much disappeared. It also seems that there is little correlation between the size of population of the country and its regime type; it is still true, however, that countries which have less than a million inhabitants tend to be liberal democracies.

and meaningful elections” (Diamond 2002: 27), seems debatable to us. And Diamond has no choice but to aim, as always, at the problem which lies at the core: how to understand – and apply – elections as the criterion which distinguishes between the regimes?

Diamond starts answering the question by pointing out that elections cannot be understood solely on the basis of their formal properties, and that we should therefore pay attention to other factors as well, for example, the ability of the opposition and its candidates to lead an election campaign or the process of vote counting. Rather than talking about measurable degrees, Diamond proposes to talk of trends in which we can see how much the parameters of democracy are violated. As Diamond says (with a healthy dose of scepticism), even in democracies electoral competition is not always completely equal (actors have different levels of funding at their disposal, unequal access to state support, etc.).

Crucial, however, is his characterization of free and non-free elections. According to Diamond, an election is free if the the following points are true:

- the barriers preventing the actors from entering the scene of politics are not substantial;
- the candidates and supporters of individual parties enjoy a natural freedom;
- the candidates and supporters of individual parties have roughly equal access to public media;
- the voters are not deciding under any pressure;
- the administration of the election is executed by an independent and competent body;
- the counting of votes is free from tampering;
- the army, police and courts of law do not abuse their powers;
- the government and the state bureaucracy do not enter into play;
- the rules are transparent and known;
- independent monitoring is possible and
- there is a right to appeal (Diamond 2002: 28 – 29).

Conversely, the election is not free if there is observable violence organised by the state or by some of the actor(s). This could, for example, involve a criminalization of independent behaviour, the terrorising of adversaries, etc. Diamond adds that we should carefully evaluate the scale, model and context of this violence. With reference to Levitsky and Way, he believes that the boundary beyond which transgressions are unacceptable is constituted by a situation where the *minimum criteria for democracy* are not met. In other words, the opposition clearly does not have equal chances (Diamond 2002: 29). With reference to those two definitions, Diamond then proceeds with the assumption that the less an election studied is fair, competitive and free, the less democratic the regime is.

No matter how long Diamond's list of characteristics of (non-)free elections is, substantial questions remain. How to set the boundary between the pure (democratic) and impure (non-democratic) nature of elections? And: Is it possible to classify the types of non-democratic regimes *solely* on the basis of an analysis of their elections? The fact that Diamond's arguments are fixated mainly on the *quality* of electoral (non-)competitiveness makes them methodologically questionable. By giving up on distinguishing between the two basic regime categories and by focusing on a qualitative continuum he admits that even authoritarianism can be compatible with elections. Making democracy and authoritarianism mutually permeable is a methodologically unacceptable step – even if we bear in mind our observation that a rise of authoritative methods and procedures is possible within the democratic format.

If we now return to Diamond's dilemma, namely, what to do with the boundary between electoral democracy and electoral authoritarianism, we can say that the best explanation of the whole problem is that the problem does not exist at all. If in the regime studied we can observe that the phenomena of the given elections fulfil the basic criteria of the concept of election (the election is periodic, the parties can freely participate, formal standards are fulfilled), then whatever the election result (even if, for instance, a non-liberally oriented actor wins, or the result repeats itself and is then in a sense predictable), there is no reason to use the category of authoritarianism. If, on the other hand, the institution of elections is used

solely as a Potemkin village, then we cannot talk of elections at all and the term *electoral authoritarianism* is a nonsense.<sup>7</sup>

This situation is in no way changed by introducing the auxiliary category of *ambiguous regime* which should separate electoral democracies from electoral authoritarianisms. Despite being fairly common, this is clearly an ill-defined category of regimes on the allegedly “blurred boundary between the electoral democracies and competitive authoritarianisms”, ones which the observers are unable to attain consensus about (Diamond 2002: 26). Besides, Diamond does not list reasons why those *ambiguous regimes* should be located exclusively in the transitional space between the two aforementioned subtypes. Why, for example, should any other regimes about which there is no consensus, regimes that cause controversy amongst the experts or regimes that cannot be clearly classified, why should they not be called *ambiguous regimes*? In an academic context, this explanation is far too clumsy.

The distinction between electoral democracies and electoral authoritarianisms by way of elections is also a crucial theme for Andreas Schedler (2002).<sup>8</sup> Schedler alerts us to the fact that elections can be both an expression of the triumph of democracy and a tool of authoritarian manipulation. They can be organized so scandalously that no one takes them seriously, but they can also be an opportunity for power struggle so unique that no one can allow themselves to ignore them. He also admits that his *set of democratic norms* needs to be balanced by the observation that „empirical reality is fuzzy“ (Schedler 2002: 38).

Schedler is explicitly interested in regimes that use neither a democratic practice of government nor overt repression. Such regimes organize elections in the hope of maintaining the out- or inwardly oriented appearance of legitimacy, but also as a way of keeping the existing elites in power. The unspoken meaning of their

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<sup>7</sup> It is probably still useful to distinguish between authoritarian regimes that go the extra mile and manipulate the elections and others which do not bother with this masquerade. If the reader is not satisfied with finding a variable for categorization, that is fulfilling the basic scientific aspiration, we can offer an argument speculating that this distinction suggests something about the nature (and eventually the perspective) of the regime studied. We could talk here of *open* vs. *closed* or *shy* versus *ostentatious* authoritarianisms.

<sup>8</sup> It is interesting that Schedler does not believe this decision to be incompatible with Linz’s classic distinction between democracies and authoritarianisms.

elections is to “reap the fruits of electoral legitimacy without running the risks of democratic uncertainty” (Schedler 2002: 37). With reference to R. A. Dahl, Schedler thus defines seven signs (or dimensions) that the election ought to fulfil in order to be called democratic (the *normative premises of democratic choice*), but also (in parallel) seven coercive electoral strategies. When applying the analysis of elections to the spectrum of regimes from liberal democracies to electoral authoritarianism we are again faced with some sort of a qualitative electoral continuum.

The seven attributes of democratic elections are defined by Schedler as follows (2002: 39 – 41):

1. *electoral empowerment*. This means that in an election the postulate “power proceeds from the people” is fulfilled. An election is thus the most important instrument of collective decision making (the object of choice);

2. *freedom of supply*. Political alternatives (candidates, parties) out of which the citizens choose during an election can be freely formed (the range of choice);

3. *freedom of demand*. Citizens can freely examine the alternatives offered and make their preferences on the basis of freely available, non-censored information from multiple sources (the formation of preferences);

4. *scope of inclusion* in election. The right to vote is given equally to all adult members of the polity, their social, educational, ethnic, etc. position notwithstanding (the agents of choice);

5. *insulation* in election. The ballot is made in secret and in person, as a means of protection from inappropriate external pressure (the expression of preferences);

6. *integrity* of election. Voting is equal, because each individual has one vote. This is guaranteed by a professional, competent and neutral electoral management body (the aggregation of preferences) and

7. *irreversibility* of election. The election result must impact the power arrangements. Whoever holds power realises (and ends) his mandate according to the rules given in the constitution (the consequences of choice).

In contrast to these qualities Schedler (2002: 39 – 46) lists the following properties typical of elections in non-democracies:

1. *reserved positions and domains* in elections. The organisational or legislative spheres of elections are more or less closed or at least under control and therefore relegate the citizens to a secondary position, which is also a situation of a procedural subordination (the object of choice);

2. *exclusion or fragmentation of opposition forces* in elections. Various strategies complicating and sometimes even preventing the free constitution of the opposition camp and cooperation within it are employed. This sometimes leads to *elections without choice* (the range of choice)<sup>9</sup>;

3. *repression and unfairness* of an election. Political and civic rights are violated and access to information and finance is unequal (the formation of preferences);

4. *formal and informal disenfranchisement*, based on any potentially distinctive signs or attributes (most often ethnicity), and on both legislative and practical levels (the agents of choice);

5. *coercion and corruption* in elections, most often by bullying the opposition candidates and their supporters, but also by buying votes, bribery etc. (the expression of preferences);<sup>10</sup>

6. *electoral fraud and institutional bias*. The existing elites are able to influence the electoral competition and influence the redistribution. Starting with the registration of voters and candidates and ending with the vote counting itself, they thus attempt to avoid losing the election (the aggregation of preferences) and

7. usage of *tutelage and reversal* during and after the election. The ruling political elites are thus able to influence their re-election or even guarantee it. However, if they really and openly ignore the election results, or are willing to use non-electoral strategies in order to grasp power (e.g. a coup), it is problematic to consider this an instance of electoral authoritarianism as this behaviour is symptomatic of the "classic" authoritarian regime (the consequences of choice).

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<sup>9</sup> Schedler reminds us here that in many models undergoing a transition a structured party system is absent or very fragmented. Authoritarian elites can take advantage of this in order to prevent a truly operational bloc of opposition from appearing (Schedler 2002: 42 – 43).

<sup>10</sup> As Schedler notes, the problem of patronage belongs here as well. However, patronage does not necessarily always have an anti-democratic dimension, although it generally exhibits the tendency to expand into clear electoral inequality (Schedler 2002: 44).

According to Schedler, together these democratic dimensions form a whole which he calls the *chain democratic choice* and as such all of them must be fulfilled. If even a single rule is broken, the other parts lose their meaning and the democratic minimum is not achieved. The election is then not *less democratic*, but *non-democratic*. According to Schedler, from the point of view of the classification of regimes this means trespassing the boundary between liberal and electoral democracies. Simultaneously, questions arise such as: Do patronage and the formal persecution of candidates, for example, truly represent threats of the same kind? Schedler admits that the tactics used by authoritarian elites are as varied and inventive as the tactics used by elites in democracies.

In Schedler's words, a scholar has to find an answer to two different challenges if (s)he wishes to categorize a political regime. First, (s)he has to reckon with the fact that by its very severity, that is by demanding the presence of the complete set of aforementioned qualities and attributes, the concept of democratic elections as *bounded wholes* not only precludes any kinship with authoritarianism, but also problematizes the variedness and dichotomous nature of individual concepts of democracy. Second, the idea that democratic elections have a coherent set of qualities opens the way towards the "contextualization of comparison" between electoral regimes. In other words, the application of the "chain of democratic choice" represents an opportunity to uncover any attempts on the part of authoritarian elites to attack the election as the basic democratic procedure. This is a methodologically relevant observation. However, the question remains – why talk about less democratic elections at all? Why not simply state that in such a situation it is not an election at all?

Let us now focus on a third concept which is problematic both by name and in definition. Under the rubric of Steven Levitsky's and Lucan A. Way's *competitive authoritarianism* (2002a: 51 – 65) we discover models which for one reason or another (e.g. external pressure of the international community, internal political circumstances, etc.) keep the formal democratic institutional structure: namely, a combination of a division of power and competitive elections. They do this in order to

legitimize their existence, and are thus not compatible with the classic definition of an authoritarian regime by J. J. Linz.

The adjective *competitive* suggests that the electoral victories are achieved in more or less standard fair and political competition, without significant manipulation or election fixing. This means not only that opposition forces exist and are legal, but that they can also compete in elections and achieve successes that are often remarkable. In addition, there are independent media (which are absent in a classic authoritarian system), justice and a third sector. However, the position of current incumbents is not directly threatened; they do not always keep the rules of the election, but rather change them and use the structures and resources of the state to bend them. The elites are not afraid to bully and discredit the opposition candidates, independent non-governmental organisations or journalists (though they rarely eliminate them); they control the dominant state media and use their potential in electoral campaigns, etc. All of this is done in a hidden, non-transparent fashion (involving bribery, bullying, discrediting), or – as is quite common – under the rubric of lawful regulation (accusing opposition candidates of tax evasion or other “common” petty crimes).

It is worth mentioning that in addition to the electoral arena Levitsky and Way emphasize another three arenas where the opposition can partake in the struggle determining the character of the regime: legislature, judiciary and media. At the level of the legislature, it is the opposition’s ability to create a power alternative to the Executive that is important; at the level of judicial power, it is the ability to stop certain legislative steps, or to keep at least a partial independence in individual cases. In the sphere of the media it is a spectrum of independent, potentially critical monitoring and investigative journalism.

At the core of the concept of competitive authoritarianism lies the emphasis on the existence of legal opposition whose prospects are not so bad after all. The possibility of alternation of the elites in power is open, as likewise are alternative scenarios of development or alternative interpretations of the current state of affairs, which represent a significant difference to the situation in a classic model of authoritarianism.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Slovakia during the era of Vladimír Mečiar or Romania in the 1990s were, among others, considered by Levitsky and Way to be examples of competitive authoritarianisms.

L. Diamond refers to this study of Levitsky and Way in his description of the differences between *competitive authoritarianisms* and *hegemonic authoritarianisms*. However, in his opinion the arenas mentioned above are not all equally suitable for quantification and therefore for comparison. Diamond considers the judicial and media arenas to be problematic from a methodological point of view; however, in evaluating the electoral and legislative arenas one should be able to appreciate their non-democratic character adequately.

Most interesting is Diamond's attempt to define (and, with reference to the methods and data of FH, also to quantify) criteria which could be used to measure the *authoritarian competitiveness* in any regime. According to his criterion for the composition of a Parliament, the non-democratic space begins at the ruling party's 70% majority of seats. According to his second criterion concerning the percentage of votes given to the winning presidential candidate, 75% marks the threshold between democracy and non-democracy. His third criterion, which concerns the period the non-democratic elites are able to keep their power, is not quantified at all (either in years or electoral periods), despite the fact that Diamond provides a range of examples; the reader must therefore be satisfied with the statement of at least a medium long continuum of rule of the same elites.

Both of the abovementioned terminological dilemmas, namely, searching for the boundary between electoral democracies and electoral authoritarianism and defining the concept of competitive authoritarianism, produce similar and, in our opinion, difficult-to-solve methodological problems. They disrespect the necessity that the definition is to be made through the noun of the regime category *first*, in this case either democracy or authoritarianism; and only *later* through the adjective specifying the appropriate type. The main problem clearly does not lie in the extraordinary importance attached to the phenomenon of an election as a key criterion; the main problem lies in a false application of election. Elections can serve to differentiate between democracy and authoritarianism, but only under specific (abovedefined) conditions related to a sober stance towards the theory of democracy. If, like Diamond and Schedler, we use elections as some sort of criterial continuum, we necessarily give up, in our differentiation of regime categories, on the

lucidity in our classification. To elevate a classic theme of political science – the description and analysis of electoral competition – into a paramount, deciding position, is then methodologically relevant, but only in defining regime category.

Levitsky and Way offer, on the one hand, a methodologically more relevant approach to the classification of non-democratic regimes, because they do not concentrate solely on the phenomenon of the election, but identify other relevant arenas whose study conveys information about the character and thus type of the examined non-democratic regime. On the other hand they regretfully turn the whole classification of democracies on its head by saying that the regimes they studied are *both* competitive and authoritarian. However, because competitiveness is fulfilled solely by the existence of elections, and is therefore the exclusive sign of democracy, competitiveness in authoritarianism is a contradiction in terms. We must not let ourselves get confused by the banal and completely natural fact that even inside democratic forms of government authoritarian ways of executing power are used; not every flaw of democracy (and often it can be only considered a flaw in the spirit of modernistic liberalism) is enough to stigmatize the regime with the term “authoritarianism”. And after all, even authoritarianisms have their faults, the sphere of politics is often not ideally closed and they constitute a category that is able to democratize itself; the methods of such democratization are defined in studies of transitology. However, if we are dealing with a consolidated authoritarianism, competition must not be present.

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We would like to end this paper with the following remarks. The authors of new typologizations or those who modify existing ones should not ignore Sartori’s classic comments on the categorization of political regimes and on the philosophical aspects of dealing with the terminological base of social sciences (Sartori 1993). They should always bear in mind the methodological canon which says that one should define the regime category first and only then the type of regime within the category. In other words, authoritarian models are not *less* democratic than democracies; they are *non-democratic* models. But one also needs to remain aware

that those terms we use are ideal; neither democracy, nor authoritarianism (and not even totalitarianism) are absolutely present – but also not absolutely absent. They are subject to confrontations with concrete, transient reality; they grow and strengthen, or wither and die away in day-to-day processes.

We believe that separating democracy from non-democracy (which in this paper is represented almost exclusively by authoritarianism) is facilitated the most adequately by applying the criterion of presence/absence of open, fair and competitive elections. We are aware that the study of elections is a rather volatile affair, that it offers a sum of data which invites mathematical or statistical analysis, but also a range of non-empirical, value-based or value-biased insights, reasonings and statements. The study of elections opens multiple pathways. One can start by focusing solely on their formal side, namely their legal definition and proclaimed procedural façade; but such a reduction (understandable, for example, in the study of law) does not represent a course that would give an adequate answer in political science. We must critically monitor other, often more practical factors: the openness of the process of nomination, the models of support in the voter–candidate relationship, or the real course of the electoral campaign. We are not under the delusion that those are variables which would be easy to judge in the empirical-analytical format.

If we are explicitly to define the limits of using elections as a criterion of classification, we have to say that an isolated statement made about one election alone is always tentative; equally problematic is the method of synchronous comparison of two elections in different countries (even though they might seem formally identical at first); to say that an election in one country is more democratic than in another country is problematic at best – unless one undergoes as wide a contextual analysis as possible and judges the general cultural and political traditions of the given country, which constitute the local colour of the given election. Even if the reader can think of a multitude of examples that contradict this, and some of those might be almost ridiculously obvious, it is not an argument to the contrary – if there is at least one example which fulfils our observation made in the previous sentence.

Diachronic comparison seems to be more reliable. This involves comparing two elections in one country one after the other. This is possible even when the two elections take place in different format setting and thus seem at the first sight to be empirically non-comparable; but precisely the reasons which led to certain legislative change can yield interesting information not only about the general political culture of the given polity, but also about the elections themselves. It thus seems that a political scientist has the right to claim that the election in such and such a year in such and such a country was more or less democratic than the previous election; what he is comparing is a developmental trend. IN this way, we have identified the minimum comparative, empirical-analytical approach which respects the framework of categorization of elections.

If we come to the conclusion that we are not studying real election, then the regime is not democratic, but authoritarian. This means that for the purpose of classification the study of elections becomes irrelevant. To identify the type of non-democratic regime studied we would need to focus on different variables and factors. This would go beyond the subject of the present article, though we by no means hide our affinity to the classic approach of J. J. Linz.

Although the methodological limits of the study of contemporary non-democratic regimes, the imperfection of the tools used in research, and the inadequacy of criteria used for the analysis, comparison and possible classification of those models<sup>12</sup> can all seem frustrating (Diamond's text, but also others end in this vein), they are only partially founded. Many problems can be avoided by concentrating on the empirical indicators and adequately defining one's goals.

Finally it is worth mentioning that the contrast between attempts at typology or modelling, that is methodological approaches which require a certain amount of creative scholarly elegance (and which in this sense look "lifeless") and the diversity of everyday life, which naturally "resists" typologization and pigeon-holing, is still valid. Reality necessarily and always transcends the boundaries of man-made "artificial" categories, given that the specific, real regimes change their shape during time. A political scientist cannot but accept the unenviable position of an observer stumbling along in search of those constant changes. This is just one more reason to

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<sup>12</sup> Other texts on this topic were not treated in this study; see e.g. Munck (2006: 27 – 40).

respect the proven methods build on empirical data and experience and not to let ourselves to be carried away by ideal concepts disconnected from reality.

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