

Research Note

REASSESSING THE THREE WAVES OF DEMOCRATIZATION

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INTRODUCTION

SINCE the publication of Samuel Huntington's influential 1991 study of democratization,¹ scholars have come to take for granted the notion that the spread of democracy has come in waves, with bursts of progress being succeeded by quite substantial reversals—the result being a flow and ebb marking a less than optimistic two-step-forward, one-step-backward pattern. According to Huntington, there have in fact been three distinct waves of democratization, with a wave being defined as a group of transitions from nondemocratic to democratic regimes that occurs within a specified period of time and in which those transitions significantly outnumber transitions in the opposite direction.² This is far from a linear process, however, as waves of democratization have been followed by reverse waves in which some of the democratic countries reverted to nondemocratic rule, leaving fewer cases of consolidated democracies behind. According to Huntington, the first “long” wave flowed uninterruptedly from 1826 to 1926, marking the emergence of democratic regimes as a nineteenth-century phenomenon. Following a reverse wave, the end of World War II provided the impetus for the second, short wave of democratization. Thereafter came an enormous global swing away from democracy in the 1960s and early 1970s, which, in turn, was succeeded by a third wave of democratization, which took off in the years following the end of the Por-

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¹ Samuel P. Huntington, *The Third Wave: Democratization in the Late Twentieth Century* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1991).

² *Ibid.*, 15.

tuguese dictatorship in 1974.³ Arguing from the vantage of the early 1990s, Huntington further contended that these waves have entailed a far from optimistic pattern of progress:

The proportions of democratic states in the world show a considerable regularity. At the troughs of the two reverse waves 19.7 percent and 24.6 percent of the countries were democratic. At the peaks of the two democratization waves, 45.3 percent and 32.4 percent of the countries in the world were democratic. In 1990 roughly 45.4 percent of the independent countries of the world had democratic systems, the same percentage as in 1922. . . . [I]n 1990 the third wave of democratization still had not increased the proportion of democratic states in the world above its previous peak sixty-eight years earlier.⁴

Moreover, he also suggested that, at the time he was writing, there were possible signs of the beginnings of a third reverse wave, in that three third-wave democracies—that is, Haiti, Sudan, and Surinam—had quickly reverted to authoritarianism.⁵

Although Huntington's study has been very influential, I wish to suggest that his analysis is nevertheless far from compelling. There are two problems. The first is largely conceptual: the analysis fails to provide a clear and meaningful distinction between democratic and authoritarian regimes. To be sure, Huntington's definition of democracy adopts Dahl in specifying the three requirements of competition, inclusiveness, and civil liberties.⁶ But in practice he focuses primarily on Dahl's dimension of competition and sometimes simply ignores the requirement of universal suffrage—that is, the equally important dimension of inclusion.⁷ Thus, Huntington's eventual classifications are more ambiguous and inconsistent, as for instance when he classifies the

³ By Schmitter's reckoning, there have been four, more compact waves. In addition to Huntington's second and third waves, he thinks there had occurred two other earlier waves; one spectacular but ephemeral wave began in 1848 and reverted in 1852, and the other major outbreak of democracy corresponded to World War I and its aftermath. See Philippe C. Schmitter, "Waves of Democratization," in Seymour Martin Lipset et al., eds., *Encyclopedia of Democracy*, vol. 2 (London: Routledge, 1995), 346–50.

⁴ Huntington (fn. 1), 25–26.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 14–15.

⁶ Robert A. Dahl, *Polyarchy, Participation and Opposition* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1971); Huntington (fn. 1), 7.

⁷ Huntington is not alone in this. Many other quantitative researchers focus almost exclusively on the degree of competition and make little or no reference to the extent to which the regimes in question are also inclusive. See, e.g., Kenneth A. Bollen, "Issues in the Comparative Measurement of Political Democracy," *American Sociological Review* 45 (June 1980); *idem*, "Liberal Democracy: Validity and Method Factors in Cross-National Measures," *American Journal of Political Science* 37 (October 1993); Raymond D. Gastil, "The Comparative Survey of Freedom: Experiences and Suggestions," in Alex Inkeles, ed., *On Measuring Democracy: Its Consequences and Concomitants* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Transaction Publishers, 1991); Keith Jaggars and Ted Robert Gurr, "Tracking Democracy's Third Wave with the Polity III Data," *Journal of Peace Research* 32 (1995); M. Alvarez et al., "Classifying Political Regimes," *Studies in International Comparative Development* 31 (Summer 1996).

United States until 1965 and Switzerland until 1971 as undemocratic, while some pages later indicating that both were democratic a century earlier.⁸ Moreover, he also appears to adopt other criteria for nineteenth-century systems, which are classified as having already become democratic when 50 percent of adult males become eligible to vote.⁹ Finally, early-twentieth-century Portugal is also considered democratic, even though only male citizens had then won the right to participate.

The second problem, equally acute, is empirical. In brief, Huntington has estimated the incidence of transitions to democracy in terms of the *percentages* of world states involved. Since the denominator in this equation, that is, the number of states in the world, is far from constant, this measure can be misleading. As we shall see, for example, the number of (minimal) democracies in the world grew from thirty in 1957 to thirty-seven in 1972, thus appearing to reflect a small but noticeable “wave” of democratization. Considered as a percentage, by contrast, this same period seems to have been characterized by a small *reverse* wave, in that the proportion of states that were democratic fell from 32 percent to 27 percent. The explanation for this apparent paradox is simple: largely as a result of decolonization in Africa, the number of independent states in the world—the denominator—grew from 93 to 137; hence, although there was an absolute increase in the number of democratic regimes, their proportion of world states actually fell.

In the subsequent sections of this research note I offer solutions to both of these problems, first, by specifying a tighter and more consistent distinction between democratic and nondemocratic regimes, and second, by taking into account the actual numbers of states that made a transition from nondemocracy to democracy, or vice versa. I conclude by proposing a reassessment of the three waves of democracy that suggests that there has been a first and major wave of democratization lasting from the early 1890s to the mid-1920s. This is then followed by a minor reverse wave that continues through the early 1940s, after which the trend turns upward again, although not in so pronounced a fashion as that suggested by Huntington’s data. Strikingly, no second reverse wave is really apparent. Rather, the period from the late 1950s to the mid-1970s may be characterized as one of relatively trendless fluctuation, leading to the breaking of a new wave of democratization in 1976 and the subsequent explosion of democratization since 1990.

⁸Huntington (fn. 1) 7, 14–17.

⁹*Ibid.*, 16.

These findings are important not only because they suggest a somewhat altered sequencing and a more accurate count of democratization waves but also because they cast real doubt on the appropriateness of the wave metaphor. With regard to the spread of democracy we certainly see flows; the ebbs, however, are less evident, indeed, are not really apparent at all from these data. Future studies should therefore also be cautious in comparing, explaining, and forecasting different waves of democratization.

THE PROBLEM OF CLASSIFICATION AND CONCEPTUALIZATION

Following Dahl,¹⁰ Huntington defines democracy as a political system that meets the three requirements of competition, inclusiveness, and civil liberties.¹¹ This definition, which basically corresponds to more recent attempts to define liberal democracy, has become increasingly important as scholars have drawn attention to the increasing number of countries that are characterized by inclusive suffrage and open competition but that at the same time lack a fully developed system of civil liberties.¹² These countries underline the fact that the dimension of civil liberties can be quite independent of the dimensions of competition and inclusion. In keeping with the more recent literature, these are defined here as “minimal democracies.”¹³

Although Huntington’s definition is clear in seeming to focus on liberal democracies, his actual classification of political regimes is not transparent.¹⁴ It is not at all clear, for example, how the dimension of

¹⁰ Dahl (fn. 6) emphasizes that there is no country in which these conditions are perfectly met; therefore he prefers the term “polyarchies” for political systems in which the conditions are sufficiently met and uses the term “democracy” for the ideal type. In this research the term “liberal democracy” will be used for Dahl’s polyarchies, because the term “democracy” is more common in daily language.

¹¹ Huntington (fn. 1), 7.

¹² Cf. Larry Diamond, Juan Linz, and Seymour Martin Lipset, *Politics in Developing Countries: Comparing Experiences with Democracy* (Boulder, Colo.: Lynne Rienner, 1995); Larry Diamond, “Is the Third Wave Over?” *Journal of Democracy* 7 (July 1996); Mark J. Gasiorowski, “An Overview of the Political Regime Change Dataset,” *Comparative Political Studies* 29 (August 1996); Andreas Schedler, “What Is Democratic Consolidation?” *Journal of Democracy* 9 (April 1998); Schmitter (fn. 3); George Sorensen, *Democracy and Democratization* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1998); Fareed Zakaria, “The Rise of Illiberal Democracy,” *Foreign Affairs* 76 (November–December 1997).

¹³ Multiple labels are applied to indicate the same concept; this type of regime has been variously described. It is called “formal” or “electoral democracy” in Axel Hadenius, “The Duration of Democracy: Institutional versus Socio-Economic Factors,” in David Beetham, ed., *Defining and Measuring Democracy* (London: Sage Publications, 1994), 69; and in Diamond (fn. 12). It is called “democradura” in O’Donnell and Schmitter, “Tentative Conclusions about Uncertain Democracies,” in O’Donnell and Schmitter, eds., *Transitions from Authoritarian Rule: Prospects for Democracy* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986), 9. And it is called “illiberal democracy” in Zakaria (fn. 12).

¹⁴ Dankwart A. Rustow, “The Surging Tide of Democracy,” *Journal of Democracy* 3 (January 1992), 121.

civil liberties is measured. In addition, what is sometimes neglected in Huntington's treatment is that account be taken of *both* of Dahl's other two dimensions, that is, universal suffrage—or inclusiveness—in addition to competition. Although it is a commonplace to incorporate the inclusiveness dimension into the *concept* of democracy, this dimension is often ignored in the actual *measurement* of democracy. It is therefore still necessary to underline the importance of this dimension. Indeed, it is surprising how many quantitative studies, like Huntington's, ignore the suffrage dimension and hence consider more exclusive regimes as also being "democratic."¹⁵ Bollen, for example, neglects this dimension almost entirely, arguing that (voter) participation is only marginally related to democracy, particularly because voter participation also has a symbolic value that is, or was, often employed in nondemocratic countries. Thus he cites data from the early 1970s to show that Albania, North Korea, the Soviet Union, Romania, and Bulgaria were among those countries recording the highest levels of electoral participation while noting that "very few researchers would consider any of these countries as highly democratic."¹⁶ Further evidence that Bollen cites against using electoral participation as a valid measure of political democracy is its low level of correlation with other attested indicators of democracy, such as the fairness of elections.

There is a danger here, however. By neglecting the inclusiveness dimension, one risks adopting a measurement of democracy that is biased or even racist or sexist. Bollen, to illustrate, will consider a regime with extensive opportunities for liberalization as democratic, even though only a very small proportion of the society (for example, only white men) may be allowed to participate.¹⁷ Further, although it is obviously true that electoral participation may be of symbolic value to authoritarian regimes, which cannot be considered democratic, this is hardly a compelling argument for excluding the dimension of inclusiveness altogether. In Dahl's initial formulation, such regimes were defined as inclusive hegemonies, that is, as inclusive regimes without competition. Finally, the fact that these two dimensions scarcely correlate does not constitute an argument against incorporating inclusiveness as a property of democracy; rather, this simply indicates that these are in fact

¹⁵ E.g., Bollen (fn. 7, 1980 and 1993); Gastil (fn. 7); Jagers and Gurr (fn. 7); Alvarez et al. (fn. 7).

¹⁶ Bollen (fn. 7, 1980), 373.

¹⁷ Likewise, in Gurr's Polity III data set the South African Apartheid regime gets a score of 5. This score is quite high on the scale from -10 to +10, especially if one bears in mind that the Fifth Republic of France gets a score of 6. The inclusiveness dimension is clearly ignored in Gurr's measurement.

two quite independent dimensions. For the purposes of this research note, therefore, regimes in which competition coexists with noninclusive suffrage—Dahl's competitive oligarchies—will be regarded as non-democratic regimes.¹⁸

What is required, therefore, is a classification that not only is transparent and consistent but that also incorporates inclusiveness. In fact, four main types of regime may be distinguished here: liberal democracies, minimal democracies, authoritarian systems, and interrupted regimes. A liberal democracy is a regime in which there is meaningful and extensive competition, sufficiently inclusive suffrage in national elections, and a high level of civil and political liberties. Minimal democracies are those political regimes with competition and inclusive suffrage but without a high level of civil liberties. Authoritarian regimes are those political regimes that fail to meet the first requirement of competition and/or the second requirement of inclusiveness. Finally, a country will be classified here as an interrupted regime if it is occupied by foreign powers during wartime, or if there is a complete collapse of central authority, or if it undergoes a period of transition during which new polities and institutions are planned.¹⁹

Not all of these criteria are equally susceptible to long-term historical analysis, of course, and a lack of comparable evidence over time makes it impossible to measure Dahl's third requirement of civil liberties.²⁰ Accordingly, this analysis does not include the waves of liberal democracies and is limited to the establishment and withdrawal of the minimal democratic systems.

¹⁸ It should also be pointed out that voter turnout is not an adequate indicator of inclusiveness, reflecting instead factors that have little to do with measuring the right to participate in national elections (inclusiveness). Rather, structural indicators such as the institutional guarantees to participate in elections are required to calculate this second requirement of democracy. This also means that the many rich data sets on voter turnout cannot be used in this research. These include, for example, Arthur S. Banks, *Cross-Polity Time-Series Data*, assembled by Arthur S. Banks and the staff of the Center for Comparative Political Research, State University of New York at Binghamton (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1971); Tatu Vanhanen, *The Emergence of Democracy: A Comparative Study of 119 States, 1850–1979* (Helsinki: Finnish Society of Sciences and Letters, 1984); idem, *Prospects of Democracy: A Study of 172 Countries* (London: Routledge, 1997); IDEA, *Voter Turnout from 1945 to 1997: A Global Report* (Stockholm: IDEA, 1997).

¹⁹ There are other quite equivalent and interesting classifications of democracy, but these are not useful for the present research. See Mitchell Coppedge and Wolfgang H. Reinecke, "Measuring Polyarchy," in Inkeles (fn. 7); Alvarez et al. (fn. 7); Gasiorowski (fn. 12). These classifications are available only for one specific year (e.g., Coppedge and Reinecke), or for a limited period since 1950 (Alvarez et al. [fn. 7]), or they are limited to developing countries (Gasiorowski [fn. 12]). What are needed in the context of this study are measures of democracy that cover both a long period of time and all independent countries.

²⁰ Gastil's data on civil liberties are available only for the period since 1973, and hence transitions toward liberal democracies can be determined and investigated only since then.

MEASURING MINIMAL DEMOCRACY

The first requirement of minimal democracies, the presence of competition, can be seen to be met if there exist institutions and procedures through which citizens can express effective preferences about alternative policies at the national level and if there are institutionalized constraints on the exercise of power by the executive. Indicators of these phenomena have already been collated in Gurr's well-known Polity III data set, which covers most independent countries on an annual basis from 1800 to 1994; it is therefore an ideal source to measure the presence of competition.²¹ Moreover, these data are also easily adapted to the definition of competition employed in this analysis.²² In operational terms, I will consider a national political system to be competitive if there is at least one executive chosen by competitive popular elections (if Gurr's indicator "competitiveness of executive recruitment" is coded 3 or 4); if all the politically active population has an opportunity, in principle, to attain an executive position through a regularized process (if Gurr's indicator "openness of executive recruitment" is coded 3 or 4); if alternative preferences for policy and leadership can be pursued in the political arena, such that oppositional activity is not restricted or suppressed (if Gurr's indicator "competitiveness of participation" is coded 0, 3, 4, 5); and if there are at least substantial limitations on the exercise of executive power (if Gurr's indicator "constraints on the power of the chief executive" is coded 4, 5, 6, or 7).²³

The second requirement of minimal democracies is that there be inclusive, universal suffrage at the national level. The norm of universality requires that all citizens of the state—without regard to sex, race, language, descent, income, land holdings, education, or religious beliefs—formally enjoy the right to vote and to be elected to public office. The fact that certain prerequisites are demanded, such as a minimum age, a sound mind, or the absence of criminal record, does not negate this principle. Only countries that at some stage meet the first requirement of competition from 1800 to 1994 are considered when measur-

²¹Ted Robert Gurr, "Persistence and Change in Political Systems," *American Political Science Review* 74 (December 1974); Ted Robert Gurr, Keith Jagers, and Will H. Moore, "Polity II Codebook" (Manuscript, University of Colorado, Boulder, 1989); Gurr, Jagers, and Moore, "The Transformation of the Western State: The Growth of Democracy, Autocracy, and State Power since 1800," in Inkeles (fn. 7); Jagers and Gurr (fn. 7).

²²Gurr himself talks about scores of autocracy and democracy, but it is nevertheless clear that what he is measuring is competition. That is why I label this scale a "competition-scale."

²³These choices are more fully explained in Renske Doorenspleet, "Democracy, Transitions, and Waves" (Manuscript, Department of Political Science, University of Leiden, the Netherlands, July 1998).

ing the inclusiveness of the system.²⁴ Levels of inclusiveness of the political system may be broken down into one of the following four categories: (1) no popular suffrage; (2) suffrage denied to large segments of the population (more than 20 percent is excluded); (3) suffrage with partial restrictions (less than 20 percent of the population is excluded); (4) universal suffrage or minor restrictions.²⁵ For the purposes of this analysis, countries are considered “sufficiently” inclusive to meet the criterion of a minimal democracy if they fall into the third or fourth category.²⁶ Should they fall within either of the first two categories or should they not meet the competition criterion, they are classified as authoritarian regimes. Reliable data on inclusiveness are of course difficult to obtain and to standardize, and I have had to rely on historical sources and various monographs for each country, as well as on *Keesing's Record of World Events* and many of the standard handbooks and almanacs.²⁷ The appendix gives an overview of the years in which political systems can be considered as both competitive and inclusive and hence are classified in this study as “minimal democracies.”

Interrupted regimes are defined as those countries that are occupied by foreign powers during wartime (for example, the Netherlands during

²⁴ Countries that did not pass the requirement of competition are authoritarian; therefore, in the context of this research there is no need to investigate the inclusiveness of these noncompetitive systems.

²⁵ Coppedge and Reinecke (fn. 19) used the same four categories in measuring inclusive suffrage for all political regimes in 1985. The authors dropped this variable (and dimension) of inclusiveness from the final scale because they came to the conclusion that it contributed very little empirically to the measurement of polyarchy. Consequently, their final scale is a unidimensional scale of contestation. This result is hardly surprising, in that by 1985 the dimension of “inclusiveness” had largely ceased to play an independent effect. In earlier stages of democratization, on the other hand, it is of crucial importance.

²⁶ This is in fact a critical choice: when do countries fulfill the requirement of inclusiveness sufficiently? Of course, if a country falls in the first category. But what if there are partial restrictions? In the event, however, only two countries appear to fall in the second category “suffrage with partial restrictions” (less than 20 percent of the population is excluded): Chile excluded 10 percent of the population by literacy requirements until 1970, and in the United States, a variety of devices, such as poll taxes, literacy tests, and property qualifications, prevented virtually all blacks (10 percent of the population) from voting. I decided to treat these two cases as exceptional ones and I will consider Chile in 1949 and the United States in 1920 as “inclusive” enough when they granted women the right to vote. It has to be pointed out, in addition, that a country is considered to be inclusive *since* the year in which the formal right to participate can be carried out, that is, since the year in which the first inclusive elections are actually held. Hence, although Dutch women had the formal right to vote already in 1919, they could not exercise this right until the 1922 elections; consequently, the Netherlands is classified as a “minimal democracy” only since 1922.

²⁷ Examples of the handbooks and almanacs that were used to investigate the inclusiveness over time of the political regimes in this study are Chris Cook and John Paxton, *European Political Facts, 1918–1973* (London: MacMillan, 1975); George E. Delury et al., *World Encyclopedia of Political Systems*, 2 vols. (Essex: Longman, 1983); Ian Gorvin et al., *Elections since 1945: A World-wide Reference Compendium* (Harlow: Longman, 1989); Lipset et al., eds., *The Encyclopedia of Democracy*, vols. 1–4 (London: Routledge, 1995); Thomas T. Mackie and Richard Rose, *The International Almanac of Electoral History* (London: MacMillan, 1991); Stein Rokkan and Jean Meyrat, *International Guide to Electoral Statistics* (The Hague and Paris: Mouton, 1969).

World War II), that experience a complete collapse of central authority, say, during civil war (for example, Lebanon, 1978–86), or that undergo a period of transition during which new polities and institutions are planned, legally constituted, and put into effect (for example, Argentina in 1982). Gurr's Polity III data set includes useful data recording these experiences, and in operational terms, I have chosen to classify countries as interrupted when they have Gurr codes of 66, 77, or 88.²⁸

WAVES OF DEMOCRACY

Having established these criteria, I now consider how the waves of democracy developed over time. First, and following researchers who measure democracy by taking account only of Dahl's requirement of competition, the empirical trends in the growth of "democratic" systems from 1800 to 1994, measured as a percentage of all countries, are summarized in Figure 1. This appears more or less to replicate Huntington's findings, albeit here updated to 1994. From these figures, his three waves of democratization can in fact be readily distinguished. In addition, Figure 1 shows that the staging points of democratization in terms of waves and reverses generally closely resemble those identified by Huntington: there is a first, long wave of democratization (1810–1922), a first reverse wave (1923–40), a second wave of democratization (1944–57), a second reverse wave (1957–73), and a third wave of democratization (since 1973).

Although these updated figures fail to confirm Huntington's statement that there is a less than optimistic two-step-forward, one-step-backward pattern, they nevertheless do show that the proportion of democratic states during the third wave rises well above its previous peaks. Huntington's less optimistic conclusions are probably simply due to the fact that his analysis ended in 1990, whereas in the following few years the proportion of democratic states increased enormously, from 43 percent in 1990 to more than 57 percent in 1994. This percentage is much higher than the percentages of democracies in the first peak; that is, it is higher than the 38 percent in 1922, and it is also higher than the 35 percent in 1960. So although the trend toward democratization as defined in these limited terms may not be irreversible, the long-term trend in Figure 1 does not appear to reflect a genuine two-step-forward, one-step-backward pattern and reveals no signs as yet (through to 1994) to indicate a third reverse wave.

²⁸ Gurr, Jagers, and Moore (fn. 21, 1989), 6–8.

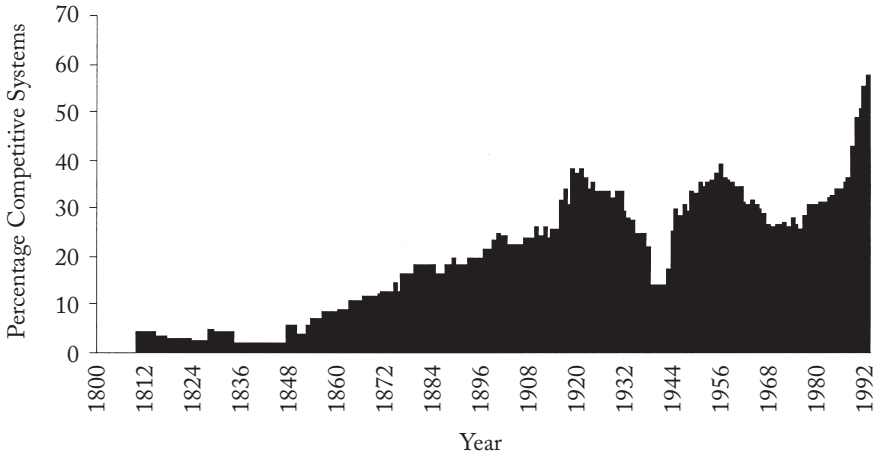


FIGURE 1
PERCENTAGE COMPETITIVE SYSTEMS
(BY YEAR)

WAVES OF MINIMAL DEMOCRACY

As is evident, however, these data fail to include the requirement of inclusive suffrage and therefore do not refer to the development of what we define as minimal democracies. Once this second measure is included for this more complete definition of minimal democracy, we may expect to see a very different pattern. As can be seen from Figure 2, which plots the percentage of minimal democracies from 1800 to 1994, this is in fact the case.

In this new application, the first wave can be seen to begin at a much later stage, confirming that democratization in this more complete sense (of taking among others women's citizenship seriously) is a twentieth-century phenomenon that develops also relatively abruptly. While there were as yet no minimal democracies as late as 1890, by 1923 almost a quarter of the independent political systems in the world had achieved that status. The first peak is lower in Figure 2 than in Figure 1, in that several competitive systems had not yet extended the suffrage to women (for example, Belgium, Costa Rica, France, Portugal, Spain, Switzerland) and hence, strictly speaking, cannot be considered as minimal democracies. The second peak, in 1955, is also slightly lower (by 4.5 percent) in Figure 2, in that Brazil, Peru, Sudan and Switzerland, while competitive, were not yet minimal democracies. The second reverse wave, which is now much smaller in comparison with Figure 1,

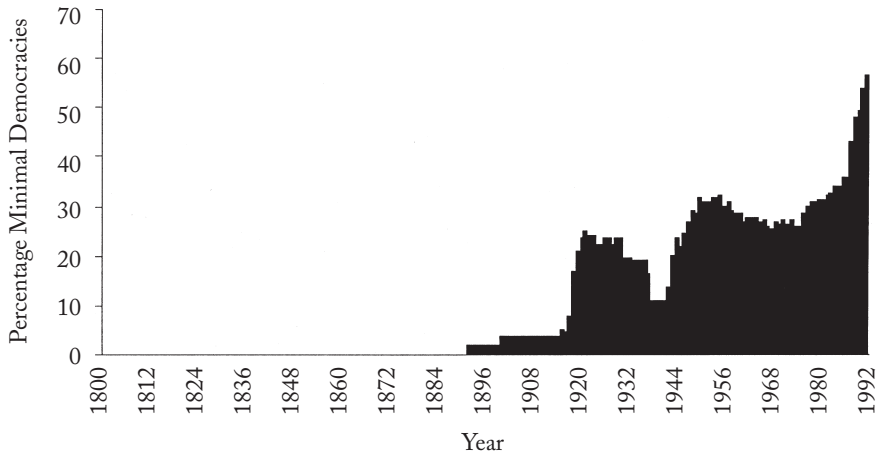


FIGURE 2
PERCENTAGE MINIMAL DEMOCRACIES
(BY YEAR)

results in a fall to 27 percent in 1973. However it should also be noted that from this point onward the percentages are the same in both figures, thus indicating that the requirement of inclusive suffrage no longer exerts any influence. Hence the third wave is also evident in Figure 2.

EMPIRICAL PROBLEMS

Until now, I have followed the researchers who studied the waves of transitions by focusing on percentages of democracies among world states.²⁹ But does such a focus really offer insight into the waves of transitions? Remember that a wave of democratic transitions is defined as a group of transitions from authoritarian regimes to (minimal) democracies that occurs within a specified period of time and in which the transitions significantly outnumber transitions in the opposite direction. In investigating such waves, the focus on percentages of democracies in the world can be very confusing, for two reasons in particular.

First, although there may be fewer minimal democracies during a reverse wave, this does not necessarily mean that those states have reverted to authoritarianism; it may mean, instead, that several states have experienced an interrupted period. Consider, for example, the first reverse

²⁹ Huntington (fn. 1); Jagers and Gurr (fn. 7); Kristian S. Gleditsch and Michael D. Ward, "Double Take: A Reexamination of Democracy and Autocracy in Modern Polities," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 41 (June 1997).

wave from 1923 to 1940, which seems to be evident in Figure 2. Indeed, there were certain democratic regimes, such as Poland, Germany, and Italy, which did retreat to authoritarianism during this period. There were, however, also other countries, such as Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Norway, and Denmark, that were minimal democracies in the 1920s and yet did not really step backward. What actually happened was that these countries experienced a difficult period of interruption following the German invasion and the subsequent foreign domination of their own national political regimes before being restored to democracy in 1945. In neither case, however, should they be considered to be part of a wave or reverse wave, in that they neither moved toward (in 1940) nor away from (in 1945) authoritarianism. While Huntington does not distinguish between such transitional regimes and genuinely authoritarian regimes (he simply considered transitional countries to be authoritarian), I believe this distinction to be particularly important. Thus, to gain a more accurate sense of (reverse) waves of democratization, it would seem more appropriate to exclude these interrupted cases and hence to plot only the genuine percentages of democracies and authoritarian regimes. The principal effect of doing this, of course, is to reduce the levels of the first reverse wave of transitions.

A second and more crucial empirical problem is that changes in the proportion of minimal democracies around the world can occur simply because the denominator (the number of states) itself changes. As can be seen from Figure 2, for example, the percentage of minimal democracies in the world falls from more than 32 percent in 1957 to 26 percent in 1972—an evident reversal, or so it would seem. Yet at the same time the sheer numbers of minimal democracies actually increased from thirty to thirty-seven, suggesting significant progress toward democracy. In fact, this apparent paradox is easily explained by reference to the widespread decolonization in Africa and the subsequent enormous growth of independent states from 93 in 1957 to 137 in 1972. Moreover, most of these new states were authoritarian—in 1972 only eight of the forty-four new states were democratic. Huntington considers this as part of a transition process, suggesting that these new states *became* authoritarian at independence.³⁰ In my view, however, this is certainly not evidence of a “global swing away from democracy”³¹ but is rather a process by which new authoritarian states were simply created or installed. Hence the second reverse wave that appears in Figure

³⁰ Huntington (fn. 1), 20–21.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 21.

2 should not be interpreted as exclusively reflecting regime transitions away from democracy; it also reflects the *installation* of many newly independent authoritarian regimes.

From this it follows that we can gain a better and more accurate insight into the real *transitions* toward (and away from) minimal democracy and hence into the waves of democracy by excluding those states that have either (1) experienced an interruption of their own national regimes or (2) become newly established as independent regimes,³² and by focusing on the real numbers rather than on the otherwise misleading percentages. In other words, by plotting the number of transitions from (independent) authoritarian to democratic systems less the number of transitions from minimal democracies to authoritarian systems over time, we gain a more accurate and meaningful insight into the question of whether the transitions to democracy outnumber the transitions to authoritarianism or vice versa. In 1920, for example, this difference is (+) 5, in that Austria, Czechoslovakia, Denmark, Estonia, and the United States each became a minimal democracy, while no single country followed the reverse path. In 1973, by contrast, the difference is (+) 1, in that two countries became democratic (Argentina and Turkey), while one other reverted to authoritarianism (Chile). The overall results of this revised analysis are summarized in Figure 3.

In order to effect a more appropriate comparison over time, however, it may still be necessary to build in some control for the growth in the number of states in the world, particularly since this may increase not only the probability that transitions will take place but also the difference between transitions to minimal democracy and transitions to authoritarianism. Consider the following hypothetical situations during two points in time: (1) there are 12 countries, of which 3 make a transition to authoritarianism and 4 to democracy; (2) there are 120 countries, of which 30 make a transition to authoritarianism and 40 to democracy. In the first situation, transitions to democracy outnumber transitions in the opposite direction by 1, while in the second situation the relevant figure is 10. In terms of relative proportions, however, the situations are identical, and hence each might be seen to reflect an equivalent "wave." Comparisons over time may therefore require the data to be standardized in the following manner:

³²One could object that I neglect the new state's choice of its own regime type by excluding those states that have become newly established as independent regimes. However, Huntington himself defines a wave as a group of transitions, and I do not regard as "transitions" the institution of new regimes as a result of decolonization. Processes of state building should be separated from processes of transition.

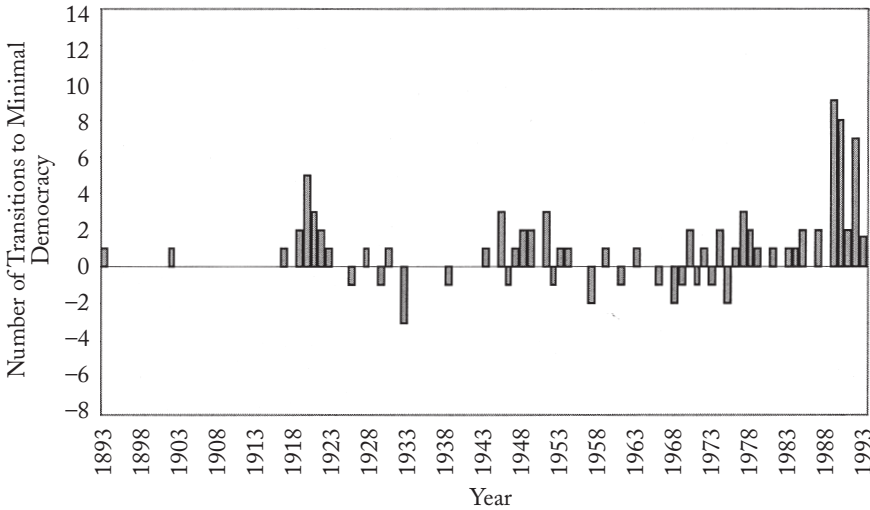


FIGURE 3
NUMBER OF TRANSITIONS TO MINIMAL DEMOCRACIES
(BY YEAR)

$$WT(t) = N(1994) * Trans(t) / N(t)$$

where

$WT(t)$ = weighted number of transitions in year t

$N(1994)$ = number of countries in 1994 (= 156)

$Trans(t)$ = number of transitions in year t

$N(t)$ = number of countries in year t

This formula takes the year 1994 as the standard against which the number of transitions will be weighted in this study. (See the appendix for the list of regime changes from 1800 through 1994.) The standardized data are summarized in Figure 4, with more detailed figures on the different waves indicated there being presented in Table 1.

Based on the standardized data and with a view to reassessing Huntington's three waves, the following periods can be distinguished: a first impressive wave of democratization in 1893–1924; a first reverse wave in 1924–44; a second wave of democratization in 1944–57; a period of relatively trendless fluctuation in 1957–76; and finally a third wave of democratization in 1976–89 that is then followed by the explosion of democratization since 1990. The first wave of transitions to democracy till 1924 is clearly very important and very striking. It is also clear that there has been a significant wave of democratization since 1976 and

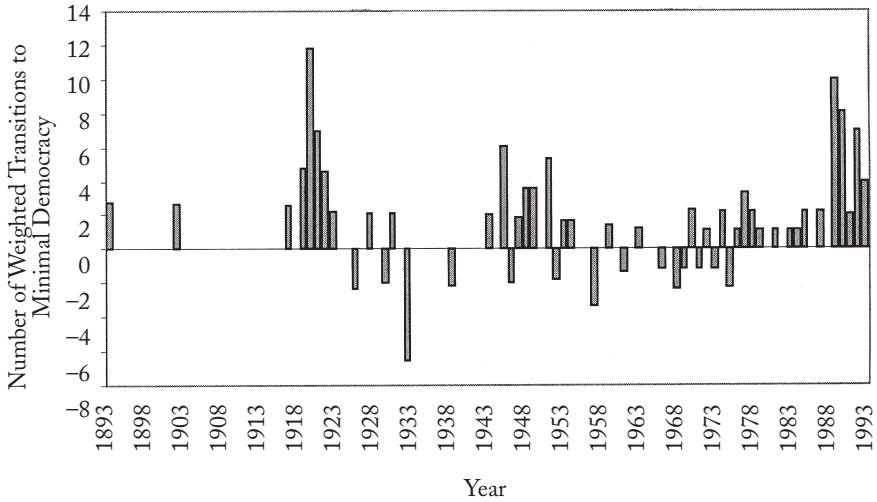


FIGURE 4
NUMBER OF WEIGHTED TRANSITIONS TO MINIMAL DEMOCRACIES
(BY YEAR)

that there has been a real upsurge of transitions to democracy since 1990. What is perhaps more striking, however, is that Huntington's other waves no longer emerge with such significance. Although the first reverse wave between 1924 and 1944 and the second wave of democratization during the mid-1940s and 1950s may still be distinguished, they are nevertheless not as convincing as seemed apparent in Figures 1 and 2. Moreover, there is no clear second reverse wave of democratization, which, according to Huntington, should have been apparent between 1957 and 1973. In fact, this period is better described as one of trendless fluctuation, in which there are waves of both authoritarianism and democracy.

CONCLUSION

This analysis has investigated the extent of the variation in transitions of political regimes that has occurred across different countries and over time. In studying the aggregated percentages of democratic regimes in the world over time, one can distinguish the three waves initially identified by Huntington. When the requirement of inclusive suffrage is imposed, however, the first wave is seen to begin much later, indicating that transitions to minimal democracy are a twentieth-century phe-

TABLE 1
REGIME TRANSITIONS PER WAVE

	<i># Transitions to Democracy</i>	<i># Transitions to Authoritarianism</i>	<i># Transitions Outnumbered^a</i>	<i># Transitions Outnumbered,^a Weighted by Countries</i>
First wave, 1893–1924	16	0	16	39
Reverse wave, 1924–44	3	7	–4	–9
Second wave, 1944–57	15	3	12	22
Fluctuation, 1957–76	16	18	–2	–3
Third wave, 1976–90	24	12	12	13
Explosive wave, 1990–94	34	4	30	31

SOURCES: For full details, see the appendix.

^aTransitions outnumbered refers to transitions to democracy minus transitions to authoritarianism.

nomenon. Moreover, the peaks of the first and second wave of democratization also appear to be lower. Nor has this research confirmed Huntington's statement that there is a less than optimistic two-step-forward, one-step-backward pattern. Although the trend toward democratization may not be irreversible, the long-term trends in Figures 1 and 2 do clearly point to more long-term progress than Huntington has suggested.

This analysis also suggests that the focus on percentages of transitions may prove quite misleading. Since these percentages are susceptible to changes in the numbers of world states as well as in the numbers of transitions themselves, it is argued that a more accurate and meaningful impression of the waves of democratization can be achieved by plotting the real numbers involved in both transitions from authoritarian to minimal democracy and vice versa. These numbers may also be standardized to facilitate a genuine comparison over time. This new approach suggests that while the first wave of transitions to democracy still appears to be very striking, there is no longer any strong evidence of a second reverse wave, and the explosion of democratization in the period 1990–94, in which an impressive total of thirty-four authoritarian regimes effected a transition to minimal democracy, emerges with real force.

Why are these findings relevant? First, this article shows how important it is to have a clear conceptualization and classification of “democratic regime.” Scholars interested in historical processes of regime changes in order to identify waves of democratization should always use a consistent distinction between democratic and authoritarian regimes. In addition, they should pay attention not only to the dimension of competition but also to the dimension of inclusiveness. This latter dimension is particularly important prior to the 1970s, when it discriminates powerfully between regimes. Since the 1970s, by contrast, almost all competitive regimes have been characterized by inclusive suffrage. By taking into account the dimension of inclusive suffrage, it can be seen that the first wave of democratization starts later and the second reverse wave is less distinctive.

Second, the findings in this research note emphasize that future researchers should be more attuned to the implications of the changing number of states over time. Researchers who focus on *percentages* of democratic regimes among the states of the world assume a fixed underlying geography; they typically think that the topology remains constant. World history, however, has witnessed the emergence of many new states, for example, as a consequence of the African decolonization in the 1960s and the independence of the former Soviet republics in 1991. By calculating the actual *number* of states (instead of percentages) that made a transition from nondemocracy to democracy or vice versa, one arrives at a better insight into the real waves of democratization.

Third, these results indicate that future studies should be careful in comparing and explaining different waves of democratization. Huntington himself recommends such a comparison: “If the third wave of democratization slowed down or came to a halt, what factors may produce and characterize a third reverse wave? The experience of the first and second reverse wave may be relevant.”³³ Although it is reasonable to expect that prior experiences suggest potential causes of future developments, future studies in which reverse waves are compared will be useless, because there are *no* clear reverse waves.

Finally, these findings are important not only because they suggest a somewhat altered sequencing and a more accurate count of democratization waves but also because they imply real doubt about whether the wave metaphor is the most appropriate way to conceptualize the problem. Since reverse waves are not really apparent from these data, it may be better to think in terms of “steps” toward democratization. There are

³³Huntington (fn. 1), 292.

certainly flows, but the ebbs are much less evident than had been averred. The way one counts influences how one thinks about the prospects for the continued expansion of democracy in the world. Many researchers simply expect a reverse wave in the near future and are waiting for it because they think that each wave is inevitably followed by a reverse wave. Are we on the edge of such a reversal? On the basis of the findings reported in this article, we know now that it is empirically possible for a wave of democratic expansion to be followed for some time not by a reverse wave but rather by an equilibrium in which the overall number of democracies in the world neither increases nor decreases significantly. It seems then that a period of trendless fluctuation is empirically more likely than a reverse wave.

APPENDIX: POLITICAL REGIME CHANGES, 1800–1994

A complete listing of regime changes is given in this appendix. Following each country is a list of all regime changes identified for that country. D indicates that a minimal democracy was established; regimes are considered as minimal democratic when they fulfill both the requirement of inclusiveness (measured by codings of the author) and the requirement of competition (measured by codings of Gurr's Polity III data set). A indicates that an authoritarian regime was established; regimes are considered as authoritarian when they do not fulfill the requirement of inclusiveness or the requirement of competition. I represents an interruption, interregnum, or transition period (measured by code -77, -66, -88 from Gurr's Polity III data set). Germany refers to Germany before 1948 and to West Germany after 1948; Czechoslovakia refers to Czechoslovakia before 1993 and to the Czech Republic after 1993.

Afghanistan 1800 A, 1992 I
 Albania 1914 A, 1915 I, 1925 A, 1939 I, 1945 I, 1946 A, 1992 D
 Algeria 1963 A
 Angola 1975 A
 Argentina 1825 A, 1830 I, 1835 A, 1852 I, 1852 A, 1946 I, 1948 A,
 1955 I, 1957 A, 1973 D, 1976 A, 1983 D
 Armenia 1991 D
 Australia 1901 A, 1902 D
 Austria 1800 A, 1805 I, 1806 A, 1809 I, 1810 A, 1818 I, 1920 D,
 1933 I, 1934 A, 1938 I, 1945 I, 1946 D

Azerbaijan 1991 A
Baden (1818–71) A
Bahrain 1971 A
Bangladesh 1972 D, 1974 A, 1991 D
Bavaria (1800–1871) A
Belarus 1991 D
Belgium 1831 A, 1914 I, 1915 A, 1940 I, 1945 A, 1949 D
Benin 1960 A, 1963 I, 1965 A, 1990 I, 1991 D
Bhutan 1907 A
Bolivia 1826 A, 1841 I, 1842 A, 1871 I, 1873 A, 1952 I, 1956 A, 1982 D
Bosnia 1992 I
Botswana 1966 A, 1969 D,
Brazil 1824 A, 1930 I, 1934 A, 1945 I, 1946 A, 1964 I, 1965 A, 1985 D
Bulgaria 1879 A, 1913 I, 1915 A, 1942 I, 1944 I, 1947 A, 1990 D
Burkina Faso 1960 A, 1977 I, 1978 D, 1980 A
Burundi 1961 A, 1965 I, 1966 A
Cambodia 1950 A, 1953 I, 1955 A, 1970 I, 1972 A, 1975 I, 1976 A,
1991 I, 1993 D
Cameroon 1961 A
Canada 1867 A, 1921 D
Central African Republic 1962 A, 1993 D
Chad 1962 A, 1978 I, 1979 I, 1985 A
Chile 1818 A, 1924 I, 1925 A, 1955 D, 1973 A, 1990 D
China 1800 A, 1860 I, 1862 A, 1911 I, 1912 A, 1913 I, 1914 A, 1939 I,
1946 A
Colombia 1832 A, 1860 I, 1861 A, 1958 D
Comoros 1975 A, 1990 D, 1994 A
Congo 1961 D, 1963 A, 1991 I, 1992 D
Costa Rica 1838 A, 1919 I, 1920 A, 1949 D
Croatia (1830–1915) 1830 A, 1860 I, 1861 A, 1868 I, 1869 A
Croatia (1991–94) A
Cuba 1902 A, 1916 I, 1918 A, 1952 I, 1955 A, 1959 I, 1961 A
Czechoslovakia 1918 A, 1920 D, 1939 I, 1945 D, 1947 I, 1948 A, 1968
I, 1969 A, 1990 D
Democratic People's Republic of Korea 1948 A
Democratic Republic of Vietnam 1954 A
Denmark 1800 A, 1901 I, 1915 A, 1920 D, 1940 I, 1945 D
Dominican Republic 1844 A, 1861 I, 1865 A, 1914 I, 1925 A, 1930 I,
1932 A, 1961 I, 1962 A, 1963 I, 1964 A, 1978 D
Ecuador 1830 A, 1980 D

- Egypt 1811 A, 1882 I, 1923 A, 1928 I, 1930 A, 1935 I, 1936 A, 1952 I, 1953 A
- El Salvador 1841 A, 1855 I, 1858 A, 1948 I, 1950 A, 1979 I, 1984 D
- Estonia 1917 A, 1919 I, 1920 D, 1933 I, 1936 A, 1941 I, 1988 I, 1991 A
- Ethiopia 1855 A, 1936 I, 1942 A, 1991 I, 1994 A
- Fiji 1970 D, 1987 A
- Finland 1916 A, 1917 D, 1930 I, 1931 A, 1944 D
- France 1800 A, 1851 I, 1852 A, 1860 I, 1863 A, 1870 I, 1877 A, 1944 I, 1946 D, 1958 A, 1969 D
- Gabon 1961 A, 1990 I, 1991 A
- Gambia 1965 A, 1966 D, 1994 A
- Georgia 1991 A
- German Democratic Republic (1949–89) A
- Germany 1800 A, 1907 I, 1813 A, 1868 I, 1871 A, 1918 I, 1919 D, 1933 A, 1946 I, 1949 D
- Ghana 1960 A, 1969 I, 1970 A, 1978 I, 1979 D, 1981 A, 1991 I, 1992 A
- Gran Colombia 1821–30 A
- Greece 1827 A, 1862 I, 1864 A, 1917 I, 1920 A, 1922 I, 1924 A, 1941 I, 1944 A, 1974 I, 1975 D
- Guatemala 1839 A, 1871 I, 1873 A, 1879 I, 1880 A, 1985 I, 1986 D
- Guinea 1958 A
- Guinea-Bissau 1974 A, 1994 D
- Guyana 1966 A, 1992 D
- Haiti 1820 A, 1915 I, 1918 A, 1946 I, 1950 A, 1986 I, 1988 A, 1990 D, 1992 A, 1994 D
- Honduras 1839 A, 1853 I, 1854 A, 1907 I, 1908 A, 1912 I, 1913 A, 1919 I, 1920 A, 1924 I, 1925 A, 1981 I, 1982 D
- Hungary 1867 A, 1918 I, 1919 A, 1944 I, 1948 A, 1956 I, 1957 A, 1990 D
- Iceland 1918 A, 1934 D
- India 1950 A, 1952 D
- Indonesia 1945 A
- Iran 1800 A, 1906 I, 1921 I, 1925 A, 1953 I, 1955 A
- Iraq 1924 A
- Ireland 1922 A, 1923 D
- Israel 1949 D
- Italy 1861 A, 1922 I, 1928 A, 1943 I, 1945 I, 1948 D
- Ivory Coast 1960 A
- Jamaica 1959 D
- Japan 1800 A, 1858 I, 1868 A, 1945 I, 1952 D

Jordan 1946 A
Kazakhstan 1991 A
Kenya 1965 A
Korea (1800–1910) A
Kuwait 1963 A, 1990 I, 1991 A
Kyrgyzstan 1991 D
Laos 1954 I, 1958 A, 1971 I, 1975 A
Latvia 1920 D, 1934 A, 1941 I, 1991 A
Lebanon 1944 A, 1971 D, 1976 I, 1990 A
Lesotho 1966 D, 1970 A, 1993 D
Liberia 1847 A, 1990 I
Libya 1951 A
Lithuania 1918 A, 1926 I, 1928 A, 1941 I, 1991 D
Luxembourg 1867 A, 1919 D, 1940 I, 1945 D
Macedonia 1991 D
Madagascar 1961 A, 1992 I, 1993 D
Malawi 1965 A, 1994 D
Malaysia 1957 D, 1969 A, 1971 D
Mali 1960 A, 1991 I, 1992 D
Mauritania 1961 A
Mauritius 1969 D
Mexico 1822 A, 1834 I, 1835 A, 1846 I, 1848 A, 1863 I, 1864 A, 1876
I, 1880 A, 1911 I, 1917 A
Modena (1815–60) A
Moldavia 1991 A
Mongolia 1924 A, 1993 D
Morocco 1800 A, 1912 I, 1956 A
Mozambique 1976 A, 1994 D
Myanmar (Burma) 1948 D, 1962 A
Namibia 1990 D
Nepal 1800 A, 1958 I, 1959 A, 1991 D
Netherlands 1815 A, 1922 D, 1940 I, 1945 D
New Zealand 1857 A, 1893 D
Nicaragua 1838 A, 1926 I, 1927 A, 1979 I, 1981 A, 1990 D
Niger 1959 A, 1991 I, 1993 D
Nigeria 1960 A, 1978 I, 1979 D, 1984 A
Norway 1814 A, 1921 D, 1940 I, 1945 D
Oman 1800 A, 1957 I, 1959 A
Orange Free State (1854–1902) A
Pakistan 1947 A, 1950 D, 1958 A, 1993 D
Panama 1903 A, 1990 D

Papal States (1815–70) A
 Papua New Guinea 1976 A, 1977 D
 Paraguay 1816 A, 1868 I, 1870 A, 1989 D
 Parma (1815–60) A
 Peru 1821 A, 1825 I, 1828 A, 1881 I, 1882 A, 1919 I, 1920 A, 1930 I,
 1933 A, 1978 I, 1980 D, 1992 A
 Philippines 1935 A, 1941 I, 1945 A, 1950 D, 1969 A, 1986 I, 1987 D
 Poland 1918 A, 1922 D, 1926 A, 1939 I, 1948 A, 1991 D
 Portugal 1800 A, 1801 I, 1802 A, 1807 I, 1820 I, 1823 A, 1833 I, 1834
 A, 1910 I, 1911 A, 1926 I, 1930 A, 1974 I, 1976 D
 Republic of Korea 1948 A, 1960 D, 1961 A, 1988 D
 Republic of Vietnam (1955–75) A
 Romania 1859 A, 1916 I, 1917 A, 1940 I, 1941 A, 1944 I, 1948 A,
 1989 I, 1990 D
 Russia 1800 A, 1812 I, 1813 A, 1905 I, 1906 A, 1991 D
 Rwanda 1960 A, 1994 I
 Sardinia (1815–60) A
 Saudi Arabia 1926 A
 Saxony (1806–71) 1806 A, 1813 I, 1814 A, 1848 I, 1849 A
 Senegal 1960 A, 1962 I, 1964 A
 Sierra Leone 1961 D, 1967 A
 Singapore 1959 D, 1963 I, 1965 A
 Slovakia 1993 D
 Slovenia 1991 D
 Somalia 1960 A, 1964 D, 1969 A, 1991 I
 South Africa 1856 A, 1902 I, 1908 I, 1910 A, 1993 I, 1994 D
 Spain 1801 A, 1808 I, 1814 A, 1836 I, 1837 A, 1869 I, 1871 A, 1874
 I, 1876 A, 1930 I, 1931 D, 1939 A, 1975 I, 1978 D
 Sri Lanka 1948 D, 1977 I, 1978 D, 1982 A, 1994 D
 Sudan 1954 A, 1964 I, 1965 D, 1969 I, 1971 A, 1985 I, 1986 D, 1989 A
 Swaziland 1968 A
 Sweden 1800 A, 1809 I, 1812 A, 1907 I, 1917 A, 1921 D
 Switzerland 1848 A, 1971 D
 Syria 1944 D, 1949 A, 1954 D, 1958 I, 1961 A
 Taiwan 1949 A, 1991 D
 Tajikistan 1991 A
 Tanzania 1963 A
 Thailand 1800 A, 1932 I, 1935 A, 1941 I, 1942 A, 1968 I, 1969 A,
 1973 I, 1975 D, 1977 I, 1978 A, 1988 D
 Togo 1961 A, 1991 I, 1993 A
 Trinidad 1962 D

Tunisia 1959 A
Turkey 1800 A, 1919 I, 1922 I, 1923 A, 1946 D, 1953 A, 1960 I, 1961 D, 1971 A, 1973 D, 1980 A, 1984 D
Turkmenistan 1991 A
Tuscany (1815–60) A
Two Sicilies (1816–60) A
Uganda 1962 D, 1966 I, 1967 A, 1979 I, 1981 D, 1985 I, 1986 A
Ukraine 1991 D
United Arab Emirates 1971 A
United Kingdom 1800 A, 1928 D
United Provinces of Central America (1824–38) A
United States of America 1800 A, 1920 D
Uruguay 1830 A, 1952 D, 1972 I, 1973 A, 1985 D
Uzbekistan 1991 A
Venezuela 1830 A, 1963 D
Württemberg (1800–1871) A
Yemen 1990 I, 1994 A
Yemen Arabic Republic (1918–89) 1918 A, 1946 I, 1948 A
Yemen People's Republic (1967–89) A
Yugoslavia 1921 A, 1937 I, 1939 A, 1941 I, 1944 I, 1946 A, 1951 I, 1953 A
Zaire 1960 I, 1965 A, 1993 I
Zambia 1964 A, 1991 D
Zimbabwe 1923 A, 1979 I, 1980 D, 1983 A