

Institutions and the Evolution of European Democracy

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Although democracy is often seen as an achievement secured once and for all at one point in time, when the suffrage was extended to the bulk of the population, for instance, in the late nineteenth or early twentieth century in western Europe, in fact, it is the product of an evolving process in which the institutions and ideals of representative government adapt to recurring challenges.¹ Democratic institutions are not static features of the political space but subject to continuous challenge and change.

Institutional flux is as evident today as it was a century ago. In Italy, strenuous efforts are being made to alter the constitution to cope with the collapse of the political formula established after the Second World War. In nations as diverse as Britain, France, Spain and Belgium, power has been devolved to regional bodies, some of which have many of the attributes of states. Across much of Europe, authority is being transferred to agencies that are virtually independent of popular control, including central banks, courts, and regulatory commissions. States that once relied on a civil service accountable to the political executive and legislature to ensure that policies are responsive to the populace now make increasing use of market competition and private-sector providers for that purpose. An expanding European Union is conferring substantial power on supranational institutions far-removed from the people, if not fully independent of them. These developments raise questions about the character and future of democracy in Europe that are addressed in many of the essays in this volume.

The purpose of this chapter is to place contemporary debate about European democracy in a wider historical context by considering how analyses of the institutions that underpin democracy in Europe have evolved over time in tandem with political developments. It is said that those who neglect history are doomed to repeat it.² That can be also true of social science. We depend on the insights of successive generations of scholars for much of what we know about democracy. By examining how their analyses shifted as European governance itself evolved, we can develop perspectives with which to understand the problems confronting Europe today. Although I restrict myself to a brief survey, those interested in the subject can follow the references back to deeper debates.

The Feasibility of Popular Government

In many European nations, substantial strides toward democratic governance had already been taken by the last decades of the 19th century. With measures such as the 1890 repeal of the anti-socialist laws in Germany and the passage of a French law on associations in 1901, basic civil rights of free speech and assembly were being secured across much of the continent (Goldstein 1983). However, the legislative politics of the time tended to follow models that left disproportionate political power in the hands of relatively-small economic and political elites. In nations that concentrated power in an elected assembly or parliament, as Britain did, the right to vote for members of the legislature was often restricted by property qualifications, not to mention resistance to female suffrage, which left two-thirds of the adult population without a vote. In nations, such as France or Germany, where universal male suffrage gave most households a vote, the power of the assembly was restricted, often by powerful second chambers whose members were chosen on terms that privileged the

old elites. Most European nations were still making a transition to democracy that was far from complete (Bermeo and Nord 2000; Ertman 1998; Rueschemeyer et al. 1992; Moore 1968).

In this context, the extensions of the suffrage that followed the end of the First World War came as a radical development, one that moved the continent from the elite-based politics of the previous century into an era of mass democracy in which the majority of the populace were to become the arbiters of who formed the government and made policy. Those seeking political power now had to win the votes of ordinary people, and political parties became increasingly important vehicles for their campaigns. On the left of the political spectrum, the continent saw the rise of what Duverger (1954) termed 'mass political parties' characterized by extensive organizations designed to mobilize working-class electors, alongside the looser groupings of 'cadre' parties that relied more heavily on the reputation of their candidates to attract votes. Mass politics and the mobilization of votes became a serious business.

At the same time, governments became larger and more interventionist. The effort to wage 'total war' between 1914 and 1918 had forced many states to take extensive control of the private sector. The early years of the century saw the first imposition of income taxes, new ministries of labour oriented to manpower planning, and the development of social policies aimed at those suffering from unemployment or old age. Although governments scaled down their activities after the war, levels of taxation and public spending remained substantially higher and demands for state intervention acquired a new legitimacy. The era of mass democracy coincided with the rise of the interventionist state, raising the hopes of some and fears of others that

pressure from the masses would force governments to intervene ever more forcefully into society and the market economy.

This was the setting for the analysis of democratic institutions just before and during the inter-war years. Well-aware that the world was changing, the most perceptive observers developed analyses of political institutions that reflected contemporary concerns about the feasibility of popular government. Prominent among them were the Italian sociologists, Mosca (1935) and Pareto (1935). Influenced by an Italian political system that was democratic in form but dominated by the political class of Piedmont, they argued that power is always distributed unevenly and that elites enjoy disproportionate power, even in democratic polities, by virtue of their privileged access to office or resources. In Mosca's view, societies differed primarily according to how their institutions provided for a 'circulation of elites'. Both saw democracy as a political system that offers the public some voice in the selection of the political elite but cannot erase fundamental inequalities of power, especially given the uneven distribution of resources in a capitalist economic system.

Like Machiavelli, Mosca and Pareto injected into analyses of democracy a realist note that was to be influential in subsequent decades. Schumpeter (1942) took up their perspective to describe democracy as little more than autocratic governance punctuated by periodic electoral campaigns. During the 1950s and 1960s, scholars undertook a series of empirical studies to establish whether democratic polities were dominated by a 'power elite' drawn from those of high economic and social standing (Mills 1956; Dahl 1961; Lindblom 1977). Their emphasis was on the discrepancy between the formal rules of democracy and its realities flowing from the embeddedness of the polity in social or economic systems marked by great disparities in power and resources.

In this work, we can see the precursors to rational-choice analyses that treat politics as little more than a struggle for material resources among self-interested elites. It is a reminder, relevant to current debates about the European Union, that even the most democratic regimes leave more power in the hands of the elites than the masses and that one of the key issues in any institutional design is whether it allows for an adequate circulation of elites, both to bring new ideas into government and to ensure that those entrusted with power remain accountable to a broader electorate. Elite theory also reminds us that political institutions cannot be understood in isolation from the economic and social systems in which they operate.

Max Weber (1957; 1968), perhaps the greatest institutional analyst of the early twentieth century, approached the developments of that era from a different perspective. He was struck by the growing organization of politics, marked by the rise of professional politicians and the progressive rationalization of the state, whose endeavors were now influenced by social science and implemented by large bureaucracies. Although Weber greeted these developments with some ambivalence, seeing them as part of a process of disenchantment whereby an ‘iron cage’ of reason settles over social life, he was one of the first to draw attention to the potential of bureaucracy as an organizational device for harnessing the collective action of many people to the service of a single set of goals. The contrast he drew was with patrimonial regimes that relied on clansmen, clerics or aristocrats to carry out the ruler’s will. Weber’s work suggests that effective bureaucracy is the indispensable concomitant to democracy, as many emerging democracies have found, and that the formal rules of law and regulations can be as effective as the traditional or charismatic forms of authority characteristic of earlier regimes.

In its most optimistic version, the Weberian perspective sees democracy as a system of rule that uses modern forms of organization to identify and serve the popular will, harnessing the power of science to the collective good. In the similar formulation of Beer (1974), the democratic state is seen as a political form that marries 'rationalism' to 'voluntarism'. As such, democratic nation-states are the quintessential political vehicles of modernity, forged from enlightenment ideals and agents for the implementation of such ideals. This vision of democracy is considerably more inspiring than that of elite theory but vulnerable to the critiques of a post-modernist age dubious about the power of reason and attentive to the repressive features of modern organizations (Foucault 1977; Herf 1984).

The Importance of Culture, Organization and Social Conditions

In the two decades after 1945, the defining fact for virtually all analyses of European democracy was the collapse of Germany's nascent democracy into fascism, holocaust and world war. Until then, it had seemed plausible that, once a nation secured democratic government, it would maintain it. But this notion, like other progressive visions of history, collapsed with the Weimar Republic. As a result, issues of stability became central to political analysis. Scholars turned their attention to the problem of identifying conditions that might assure the stability of democratic regimes.

Moreover, the collapse of the Weimar republic called into question traditional types of institutional analysis oriented to the constitutional or legal systems of nations. After all, Weimar had had a democratic constitution, carefully-designed to balance the need for decisiveness, epitomized by the observation of Mendès-France that 'to govern is to choose', and the desire to ensure responsiveness to a popular will. One of the legacies of Weimar was a new concern about powerful presidencies and

electoral systems built on proportional representation that feeds a literature of continuing importance (Sartori 1985; Shugart and Carey 1992; Lijphart 1999; Skach 1999). But the central reaction of the field was to turn away from constitutional issues to look toward society for the bases of democratic stability.

The problem was to decide which features of society most matter to the survival and functioning of democracy. This issue led many scholars to develop an intense interest in the study of political culture, on the premise that popular support for democratic values is a crucial bulwark for democracy. In some cases, this work moved well beyond institutional analysis. The pioneering studies of Almond and Verba (1963) used cross-national opinion surveys to develop models of the attitudes likely to be most supportive of democracy. Other works integrated the cultural dimensions of politics into analyses of institutions, seeing institutions as crucial to the construction of culture or culture as integral to the operation of institutions. In general, however, these analyses shifted attention away from constitutional arrangements toward the institutions found within a broader political arena, including political parties and interest groups.

The studies undertaken in this period reflect substantial variation in views about which institutions matter, how they matter, and in what culture consists. Eckstein (1961; Eckstein and Gurr 1975) developed a theory of the stability of democracy in which authority relations were central. He associated democratic culture with egalitarian authority relations of the sort developed by membership in secondary associations and argued that they could be used to consolidate democracy (see also Dahrendorf 1967; Hoffmann et al. 1963). Beer (1965; 1982) put more emphasis on the effectiveness of political parties and interest groups as vehicles for

the representation of interests and saw culture as the set of attitudes and operative ideals indispensable to a particular system of representation.

Some of the most important debates of this era centered on the contributions that political parties or interest groups can make to democracy and on the types of parties or interest organizations likely to be most effective. Michels' (1962) classic study of the German social democrats called into question the extent to which mass parties could support internal democracy, while others applauded their capacities to draw citizens who might otherwise be quiescent into active political participation (Verba et al. 1978; cf. Lipset et al. 1956). In the most influential contribution to this literature, Kirchheimer (1966) observed that the era of 'mass' and 'cadre' parties was over and that both type of parties were giving way to 'catch-all parties' built on the direct appeals of their leaders to the electorate rather than the involvement of the party rank and file.

Others focused their attention on interest groups (Ehrman 1957; LaPalombara 1964). How these groups contribute to the stability of democracy, however, became an object of contention. Dahl (1956; 1971) and others formulated a pluralist position, which held that democracy will be more stable where citizens are involved in many groups with overlapping memberships whose cross-cutting cleavages limit the development of factions rigidly arrayed against each other. But Lijphart (1977) pointed out that the stability of many nations divided along ethnic or religious lines, such as the Netherlands, Switzerland, Austria and Belgium, seemed to depend on a different type of political organization that aligns each group into cohesive pillars under leaders who agree to share power in order to avoid social conflict (cf. Barry 1975). He drew attention to the 'consociationalism' of the smaller European

democracies in terms that would influence scholars of 'neo-corporatism' (Katzenstein 1985; Schmitter and Lehbruch 1978).

Social conditions came to the foreground of political analysis in other ways as well during this period. Many believed that the principal threat to political stability stemmed from the potential for conflict among social classes. Memories of mass unemployment during the inter-war years were still fresh; communist parties were sizeable in many nations; the rhetoric of right and left was often strident; and a cold war lent urgency to the claims of each side. Partisan support fell largely along class and religious lines, and the dominant conceptions of political parties developed in these years saw them as reflections of social cleavages (Lipset and Rokkan 1969; Butler and Stokes 1969; Converse and Dupeux 1962; Przeworski and Sprague 1986). Accordingly, many believed that the stability of democracy depended heavily on socioeconomic conditions. Prosperity or shifts in social conditions that dissolve class divisions were expected to reduce the divisiveness of politics as well.

Throughout the 1950s, many waited with bated breath to see whether the class-based conflict that had been so divisive in inter-war Europe would reassert itself. By the early 1960s, however, Europe was experiencing levels of affluence never seen before as well as the growth of a prosperous and porous middle class. Analysts soon associated these developments with the growing moderation of party platforms on both the left and right, symbolized by 'Butskellism' in Britain and the Bad Godesberg program of the German SPD (Graubard 1964). Some went so far as to proclaim the 'end of ideology' (Bell 1960). In short, this was an era when politics was seen, for the most part, as an expression of socioeconomic conditions and the success of democracy widely associated with economic prosperity..

Technocracy, Neo-Corporatism, and the Romantic Revolt³

With the stability of democracy in western Europe apparently assured, political analysts turned their attention, during the late 1960s and 1970s, toward issues of institutional engineering. There was much to attract their attention. With the rise of ‘catch all’ parties dominated by their leaders, the influence of legislators began to decline in favor of the political executive. A series of studies documented the growing power of the Prime Minister and the erosion of ministerial responsibility to parliament in Britain (King 1969). Wright (1989) showed how the constitutional changes that moved France from the Fourth to the Fifth Republic and the initiatives of Charles de Gaulle reinvigorated executive governance, drawing a fractious party system into two blocs (Williams 1964).

At the same time, others were reexamining relations between politicians and civil servants. The adage that politicians make policy while civil servants implement it, if ever true, was clearly inadequate to describe the division of labour in an age of complex governance (Gordon 1971). Many observed that the upper civil service was becoming increasingly politicized (Suleiman 1974; Dogan 1975) and new models were sought to describe relations among politicians and officials (Kingdon 1990; Suleiman 1985; Auerbach et al. 1981; Hecllo and Wildavsky 1974). What these analyses documented was the end of a quintessentially-European system of checks and balances in which a highly-trained civil service equipped with its own *esprit de corps* was supposed to serve as an independent guardian of the public interest, against the more partial interests even of politicians. Least developed in Britain, where the public was thought to be protected by lines of accountability that render the civil service subordinate to ministers responsible to parliament, but most developed in Germany where the concept was prominent enough for Hegel to label civil servants

the ‘universal class’, this ideal had long been part of European conceptions of the state (Dyson 1980). Buttressing it were systems of administrative law dictating how authority should be exercised and agencies, such as the French Council of State, charged with ensuring those rules were followed. Although the probity of the civil service continues to be a valuable feature of European democracy, the days when officials could provide strong checks on their political masters were passing.

As the size, spending and scope of the state increased, notably through social programs that turned all European nations into ‘welfare states’, many analysts began to reconsider the dynamics driving policy making (Rose 1981, 1985). The ‘end of ideology’ celebrated by some seemed, to others, to herald the rise of ‘technocracy’ – government by experts overly dedicated to science or a purely-professional ethos rather than the well-being of the people whom governments were supposed to serve (Ellul 1964). As the endeavors in which governments were engaged became increasingly specialized, many asked how politicians with limited expertise could oversee policy effectively without becoming prisoners of the specialists they were supposed to direct. The civil service had become more political, but politicians were finding it more difficult to cope with the technical intricacy of their briefs. Concerns such as these were fueled by even more important developments in the nature of modern governance. The volume of technical regulations issued by governments was gradually exceeding the number of laws passed by legislatures, and states were creating increasing numbers of semi-independent agencies endowed with substantial regulatory power and specialized missions that could be difficult for laymen to understand let alone supervise (Bell 1973; Benveniste 1972; Jacoby 1973).⁴

On the left, developments such as these provoked a lively debate about the nature of the state in capitalist society that inspired a resurgence of institutionalist

analysis. There was general agreement that states served the interests of the capitalist class, but the issue was how and why. Miliband (1969) argued that states were responsive to business interests because the latter command more resources in the arenas of electoral and pressure-group politics than do workers. Poulantzas (1972) and others (Block 1987; O'Connor 1973; Althusser 1984), however, argued that the relevant outcomes were conditioned by the very structure of a state that is embedded in capitalist society, contending that the institutional structures of a liberal democracy force its leaders to maintain 'business confidence' in order to secure reelection. These debates inspired a wider revival of interest among political scientists in states and institutions (Evans et al. 1985; Bornstein et al. 1984; Lindblom 1977).

Others responded to these developments by inquiring more deeply into the networks that link specialists to governments, generating conceptions of 'policy networks', 'issue networks', and 'epistemic communities' to describe the relationships between professional communities and states and to chart the influence that professionals had acquired over policy making (Rhodes 1981; Heelo 1974; Haas 1992). Observing how dependent governments had become on the advice and cooperation of organized interest groups if their complex policies were to be successful, Beer (1965) described the rise of a new 'collectivist politics', showing how increases in the scope of policy had been accompanied by shifts in conceptions of representative government that accorded a new legitimacy to regular interaction between producer groups and governments.

Schmitter (1974) and others (Schmitter and Lehmbruch 1978; 1985; Winkler 1976; Berger 1982; Streeck and Schmitter 1986) expanded on this theme to note that governments were often now devolving authority onto producer groups in return for their cooperation in the administration of policy. This 'neo-corporatism' became

especially prominent when governments sought agreement from employers and trade unions to incomes policies designed to stem rising rates of inflation. Although a feature of governance across Europe during the 1970s, neo-corporatist arrangements were seen as most important and durable in nations whose producer groups were cohesively-organized (Goldthorpe 1984; Katzenstein 1985). Analyses such as these provided the inspiration for many of the institutionalist analyses of the 1970s and 1980s that linked patterns of policy to the organization of labour, capital and the state (Hall 1986; Cox 1986; Zysman 1983). Some saw neo-corporatism as an arrangement that delivers superior levels of economic performance (Przeworski and Wallerstein 1982; Alvarez et al. 1991; Cameron 1984). However, others were suspicious of such arrangements from a democratic perspective, seeing them as political cartels in which governments, no longer responsive to legislatures, now formed tight alliances with producer groups that suppressed dissent among the rank and file and limited the influence of other groups entitled to a voice in policy making (Offe 1982, 1985; Panitch 1981).

Popular concern about issues such as these erupted in the public arena during the late 1960s. In May 1968, barely four years after a distinguished group of scholars (Graubard 1964) had celebrated the political stability of postwar Europe, an unexpected alliance between students and workers almost toppled the French Fifth Republic. The revolt was initially sparked by a protest against government restrictions on student residences; and, in the weeks that followed, material demands were less prominent than the existential reaction of the young against the hierarchical structures of a state that seemed unresponsive to the concerns of ordinary people. Although demands about wages and working conditions fueled the strikes that hit many European nations in the following years (Crouch and Pizzorno 1978), there was an

anti-establishment character to protest in this period that lent political force to intellectual critiques of ‘technocracy’ (Inglehart 1977).

Concerns such as these acquired institutional vehicles in the ‘new social movements’ that developed rapidly across Europe during the 1970s as citizens mobilized against nuclear power or the stationing of nuclear missiles in Europe and in support of measures to protect the environment (Cooper 1996; Offe 1985). Reacting against a centrist establishment and ‘grand coalitions’ that seemed to shut many out of politics, these movements became important new institutions in the political arena and revived European democracy. Efforts to explain their appearance and fate in institutional terms led to new bodies of scholarship emphasizing the ‘political opportunity structures’ facing such movements, the resources central to mobilization, and the ‘collective action frames’ on which they drew (Kitschelt 1986; Tarrow 1994; Kriesi et al. 1996; McAdam et al. 1996; Klandermans et al. 1988). Others saw these new social movements as evidence of an emerging cleavage between an older generation preoccupied with material concerns and a new one born to enough affluence that it could be drawn to ‘post-materialist’ issues (Inglehart 1977).

This reaction against traditional social norms coincided with an intensification of distributive conflict that was fueled by and reflected in high levels of inflation (Goldthorpe and Hirsch 1978; Crouch and Pizzorno 1978). Facing lower rates of economic growth after the oil shocks of 1974, European governments struggled to satisfy the expectations for higher incomes and public spending that thirty years of continuous economic expansion had generated. In most cases, the growth increment no longer left room for private incomes and public spending to grow substantially at the same time. As a result, electorates became increasingly dissatisfied with governmental performance.

The academic response to these developments was a set of works arguing that contemporary governments were ‘overloaded’ (Crozier et al. 1975; King 1975; cf. Offe 1982; Beer 1982). The capacity of governments to supply collective goods no longer seemed to match the demands made upon them. Some attributed this imbalance to an erosion in traditional norms of authority that left the institutions normally responsible for social order unable to regulate popular demands. Others observed that many of the institutions regulating the distribution of resources were functioning badly in a context of high inflation. Industrial relations, for instance, had become increasingly conflictual. But, as the efforts of governments to rectify these problems failed, the state itself was widely perceived to have become inefficient. Politicians who had once been happy to take credit for economic growth began to seek a rationale for shifting responsibility for economic sacrifice away from the state. The result was a sea-change in the politics of Europe, during the 1980s, that can be characterized as a ‘move to the market’.

The Move to the Market

The relevant political developments are striking. Inspired by neo-liberal ideas that were expressed most forcefully in Britain by the Thatcher governments of 1979 to 1992, many European states began to sell off the public enterprises they had nationalized after the war. This ‘privatization’ was accompanied by widespread ‘deregulation’ designed to intensify competition in markets, including financial markets where governments had once exercised substantial control over the flows of funds (Vogel 1996).⁵ Most governments now encourage firms to seek finance on newly-expanded stock exchanges or international capital markets. As a result, governments have less capacity than they once had to direct industrial development or

stimulate economic expansion. In most countries, the rates of increase in levels of public spending and taxation have declined.

The point of most of these measures is to reduce the role of the state in the allocation of resources and expand the role of markets. The premise is that organizations facing more intense competition operate more efficiently, using fewer resources to produce goods or services of equivalent or higher quality. Some governments are now applying these principles to their own services, forcing their agencies to compete with private-sector providers or with other agencies, and subcontracting many endeavors that were once the responsibility of public employees to private firms. Public day-care centers now compete with private providers in Sweden, and health authorities in Britain compete with one another for clients.

From the perspective of democratic theory, these are consequential steps. To ensure that their actions are responsive to the needs of the populace, democratic governments have traditionally relied upon a chain of authority that links the providers of public services to superiors in a civil service hierarchy who are, in turn, responsible to Ministers reporting to a legislature elected by the people. Demands for better services flow from the electorate to the government through the political system. Market institutions, by contrast, render service providers responsive by allowing their clients to turn to other providers if they are dissatisfied with what they receive. One system relies on the 'voice' of the citizen to ensure responsiveness, while the other relies on the capacity of the client to 'exit' (Hirschman 1970). In some respects, then, the 'new public management' is changing the posture of the individual vis-a-vis the state from one associated with the role of a 'citizen' to one that more closely resembles that of a 'client'.

In large measure, it was the international dimension of this move to the market during the 1980s that rendered it so forceful and durable. Dissatisfied with poor levels of economic performance, the member states of the European Community agreed in 1985 to create a single continental market and to reinforce it in 1999 with an economic and monetary union that gave most of them a single currency. They dismantled barriers to trade and allowed the new European Union to make many decisions by (qualified) majority vote, effectively removing the veto each nation once had over decisions affecting it. At the same time, the European Court of Justice has increased its jurisdiction vis-a-vis national governments. In combination with the liberalization of world markets, these steps have increased the impact of market forces on most Europeans and reduced the capacities of national governments to counteract those forces (Streeck 1995; Scharpf 1999; Cerny 1999; Hirst and Thompson 1996).

The recent analysis of democratic institutions in Europe has been deeply influenced by these developments. Privatization, deregulation and governmental reform are now the subject of large literatures documenting their progress (Vickers and Wright 1989; Vogel 1996; Feigenbaum et al. 1998; Thatcher 1999). They have led some to reconsider the criteria used to determine whether an activity should be provided by the public or private sectors, which traditionally assigned to the state those likely to lead to a 'natural' monopoly or to generate significant 'public goods' (Self 1993). Others focus on the 'new public management' to explore the advantages of sub-contracting public services to private firms and the consequences of encouraging competition among government agencies (Barzelay 2001; Kingdon 1990).

A large body of scholarly work is now devoted to the European Union. For some years, this literature was dominated by debates about the factors that condition

further political integration, of special interest to institutional analysis because it ranged those who maintain that national governments control the process against others who argue that some elements of the dynamic escape government control because each step toward integration in one sphere generates unanticipated consequences that intensify pressure for integration elsewhere (Moravcsik 1991; 1998; Keohane and Hoffmann 1991; Pierson 1996). The latter often emphasize the orchestrating role of the European Commission and the importance of initiatives from the business community (Ross 1995; Sandholtz and Zysman 1989; Schmitter and Streeck 1991).

In recent years, this debate has waned in favor of more intensive studies of how the European Union operates and its effects on national policy (Héritier 1999; Héritier et al. 1996; Wallace and Wallace 1996; Pierson and Liebfried 1996; Scharpf 1999). In an influential series of works, Majone (1994; 1996) explores the implications of a regime that operates primarily through regulation. Tsebelis (1994; 1996) charts the shifts in power that have followed changes to the EU's rules for decision-making, stressing the importance of agenda control and veto points to the outcomes. Scholars have begun to compare the quality of governance in the EU to that of a nation-state, considering how multi-tiered governance structures affect the character of policies and responsiveness to the citizenry (Marks et al. 1996; Hooghe 1996; Scharpf 1999; Hayward and Page 1995). Some argue that, because the EU has been more effective at market-building than state-building, it lacks the capacity to provide social protection expected of states and is eroding the ability of its members states to provide such protection as well (Streeck 1996). Others question how democratic the EU is and explore the state of developments that might render it more so, including the construction of a European public sphere, the emergence of a

transnational party system, transparency in decision-making, and a stronger parliament (Williams 1991; Perez-Diaz 2000; Goetz and Hix 2000).

Contemporary European Democracy

As this survey indicates, the themes that figure most prominently in analyses of European democracy have changed substantially over fifty years in tandem with political developments. The insights this literature has generated remain relevant today but, considered together, they reveal subtle but pervasive shifts in the configuration of European democracy. Moreover, for all its power, democratic theory has not fully caught up with the realities of European governance. There are still substantial discrepancies between the classic concepts used to describe a democratic system and the actual operation of European polities. Consider a few examples.

1. We normally describe the relationship of the individual to the democratic state as one based on 'citizenship'. But the transformation of the state over the past fifty years now limits the adequacy of this description. In some nations, almost half of the populace receives the bulk of its income from the state in the form of pensions, social benefits, or salary. Government services are now so extensive that many individuals approach the state primarily as its clients, whether for day-care, health-care, agricultural support, or social services.

2. The state is traditionally defined as an entity that is 'sovereign' over its territories, but sovereignty has little meaning in a context where the European Union has the authority to enforce regulations on its member states, without the agreement of their national governments. Some suggest that the emerging system of European governance resembles that of the feudal era more than that of the post-Westphalian system of sovereign states (cf. Krasner 1999).

3. The European Union is usually seen as a democratic enterprise, but its governing institutions are more similar to those of the Second German Empire (1871-1914) than to those of most contemporary democratic states. The EU's rules for decision-making are so complex that few beyond those who operate them understand them. Its parliament, although elected, has limited powers and operates without an effective party system. Executive power rests with a Commission that is not subject to direct election.

4. We normally think of the legislature as the seat of political power in a nation and the body representative of the citizenry. Most European nations, however, now delegate substantial regulatory power to para-public agencies that make policy without consulting the legislature. Much of the activity we associate with 'representative government' now takes place, not around the legislature but in negotiations between officials and interest groups that by-pass it, and sometimes political leaders, altogether.

5. The essence of effective democracy lies in clear lines of accountability running from the government to an electorate that can use competition among political parties to hold it responsible for policy. In many parts of Europe, however, central governments now share so much power with state, regional or EU authorities that a good deal of policy is determined in inter-level negotiations so intricate that electorates cannot readily determine who is responsible for the results (Scharpf 1991; Marks et al.1996).

6. Although democracy is usually associated with government by representatives of the people or institutions responsible to them, many nations are now vesting greater powers in non-elected bodies, such as courts and central banks that have deliberately been insulated from political control. As a result, an increasing

number of matters that were once decided by governments are now being determined by bodies unaccountable to the electorate (Stone Sweet 2000; Hall and Franzese 1998).

Observations such as these lead some theorists to describe the political systems of Europe as 'post-democratic' (Pasquino 1998).⁶ This may be premature. Representative government has always been imperfect, and liberal democracy deliberately places limits on popular rule. What is less certain is whether the governments of Europe are now limited in the best possible ways. Despite the accomplishments of the literature surveyed here, conventional democratic theory is still somewhat at odds with the operation of European democracies. As European governance changes, we need new accounts of how governments work that can be used to assess the state of European democracy and, by the same token, democratic theories that take full cognizance of the dilemmas of contemporary governance.

Scholars are now studying these problems from a variety of perspectives (Gray 1997; Giddens 1998; Held 1987, 1995; Scharpf 1999; Krieger 1999; Beck 1986; Hoffmann 1982; Hayward 1995). Although this body of work encompasses many diverse approaches, a good deal of it revolves around four sets of issues widely seen as central to a more complete understanding of European democracy. Since they define much of the contemporary research agenda, I will conclude by briefly identifying each.

Many analysts are looking into the impact of international integration on the capacity of modern states to provide the kind of counterweight to market forces that Polanyi (1944) once identified as essential to the success and stability of democracy. In his classic formulation, Polanyi argued that states must temper market competition with social protection, but many question whether governments can still deliver such

protection in a context where their instruments have been depleted by more intense international integration (Garrett 1998; Rodrik 1996; Berger and Dore 1996; Hirst and Thompson 1996). As Scharpf (1999) notes, when governments are less effective, their legitimacy may decline. Some argue that the devolution of power to sub-national and supra-national levels of governance may provide solutions to these problems, but others contend that devolution simply intensifies the dilemmas by rendering policy making less transparent or purposive. Assessments of the political impact of globalization carry great implications for our understanding of European democracy.

Others are studying changes to the meaning of citizenship and the 'nation' inspired by the decline of traditional solidarities based on class or religion, the multiethnic character of European societies, and the expectation that people and foreign cultural forms will continue to flow across open borders. To paraphrase Anderson (1991), many European nations are 'reimagining themselves' and reconsidering the meaning of citizenship (Brubaker 1996; Favell 1998; Krieger 1999). Some analysts expect new forms of European citizenship to emerge that may be a prerequisite for the democratization of the EU (Soysal 1994; Benhabib 1999; Feldblum 1999). These works remind us that national ideals are an important component of the institutions that structure political life in Europe.

A very different body of literature is applying theories of delegation to the traditional problem of establishing lines of accountability in democratic polities. Pollack (1997) and others use principal-agent analysis to explain the structure of the EU and patterns of delegation within national polities (Moravcsik 1998; Przeworski et al. 1999; Tsebelis 1994). Some employ it to assess the ways in which relations among the executive, legislature and civil service are being reconfigured in national states, drawing on extensive work on these problems in the United States (Huber

1996; Barzelay 2001). These inquiries provide useful tools for assessing the degree to which the many non-elected agencies of contemporary states remain responsive to the electorate.

Finally, a number of analysts are reconsidering the contribution that the organization of civil society makes to the performance of democracies. Putnam (1995; 2001) argues that regular interchange among ordinary citizens generates a body of 'social capital' that can be used to improve policy and the accountability of governments. Rothstein (1998) explores the way in which levels of trust among the leaders of key social organizations and their followers affect neo-corporatist negotiations. Extending an existing literature about political participation, others assess the conditions that underpin civic engagement or trust in government (Hall 1999; Offe 1999; Norris 1999; Pharr and Putnam 2000). Such analyses link the organization of contemporary society to longstanding issues in the republican tradition of democratic theory.

In sum, we have learned a great deal about the institutions underpinning democracy in Europe over the past fifty years, but there is much still to be investigated. Because the character of democratic governance itself shifts over time, as the institutions and ideals underpinning it respond to changing circumstances, each new generation faces the challenge of devising and implementing an understanding of democracy appropriate for its time.

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Notes

¹ This point is a powerful theme of Beer (1965), where it was first impressed upon me, but it is also exemplified in the work of Vincent Wright, to whom this volume is dedicated and who has charted both the transformation of France from the Fourth into the Fifth Republic and the ‘retreat of the state’ across Europe in more recent years.

See especially Wright 1989; Vickers and Wright 1989.

² This observation is generally attributed to George Santayana (1905): ch. 12.

³ I borrow the term ‘romantic revolt’ from Beer 1982.

⁴ In Britain, these agencies are often termed ‘quasi-non-governmental organizations’ or QUANGOs.

⁵ As Vogel (1996 and Majone 1996) point out, of course, what I term ‘deregulation’ usually entails reregulation.

⁶ I am grateful to Richard Tuck for drawing my attention to this work.