26. Power concentration and power diffusion: a new typology of political-institutional patterns of democracy

Julian Bernauer and Adrian Vatter

INTRODUCTION

Let's face it: for years (Bernauer & Vatter, 2012, 2017, 2019; Vatter & Bernauer, 2009; Vatter et al., 2014), we have attempted not to cite Lijphart (1984, 2012 [1999]) too exclusively in our research, mainly failing heroically. So, why not fully acknowledge that our 'Theory of Power Diffusion' would simply not exist without especially his *Patterns of Democracy* book, both in its 1999 and the updated 2012 version. Of course, we have always acknowledged this influence. Furthermore, we have considered other work (e.g., Ganghof, 2005, 2012; Gerring & Thacker, 2008; Roller, 2005; Steiner, 2012; Taagepera, 2003), also inspiring some theoretical and empirical amendments. But the main inspirational credit must be given to Arend Lijphart.

This – arguably in good parts justified – high level of attention to Lijphart's approach does not give full justice to some recent theoretical and empirical developments, many of them assembled in this book. In this contribution, we present our 'Theory of Power Diffusion', show it at work using an updated database now covering an updated time period (1990–2022), and sketch potential avenues for further research in the light of the literature.

PATTERNS OF DEMOCRACY

Bernauer and Vatter (2012, p. 438) present the idea of Lijphart's *Patterns of Democracy* in condensed form:

> In a nutshell, the ideal types of consensus and majoritarian democracy differ in the extent to which power is concentrated or shared in the political system. Using principal component analyses, Lijphart (1999) uncovers latent dimensions of democracy, finding what he labels an 'executives–parties' dimension and a 'federal–unitary' dimension. These represent vertical and horizontal types of power sharing. Each construct is derived from five politico-institutional variables. For each politico-institutional variable of the two dimensions, a majoritarian or a consensual manifestation is possible. Consensus democracy ideally displays multiple parties, multiparty government, a balance of power between the executive and legislature, a proportional electoral system, interest group corporatism, a federal structure, bicameralism, judicial review, a rigid constitution and an autonomous central bank.

Maybe – and somewhat embarrassingly more to the point – when prompted with 'Please summarize Arend Lijphart's theoretical approach in [the] book Patterns of Democracy in 50 words', ChatGPT glosses over the word limit and returns (OpenAI, 2024):

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> Arend Lijphart's *Patterns of Democracy* proposes a consociational and consensus-based model for stable democracies, emphasizing power-sharing and cooperation among diverse groups. This approach advocates proportional representation, coalition governments and inclusive decision-making to mitigate societal divisions and ensure effective governance.

Later, a similar essential description of the *Theory of Power Diffusion* is found in Bernauer and Vatter (2019, p. 6):

> In theoretical terms, the literature on consociational democracy … features both a treatment of institutions of power sharing as well as of the crucial behavioural elements at the level of political elites. The core argument is that without a 'spirit of accommodation' (Lijphart, 1968), 'amicable agreement' (Steiner, 1974), or, in other words, deliberation, consociational arrangements are bound to fail. To be sure, we do not attempt to measure the quality of deliberation, but treat it as a latent variable between institutional power diffusion and outcomes, and assume that power diffusion generally provides favourable conditions for consensus-seeking.

In short, we do not alter Lijphart's approach completely, but seek to spell out a latent micro-foundation which has implications for the measurement model.

The Critics

Lijphart's (1999) monograph *Patterns of Democracy* has quickly garnered much attention and due praise as well as critique (Bormann, 2010). In the 2010s, Lijphart (2012) published a second edition, which largely retained the approach of the first edition with an updated database. To pick a few of the scholars commenting on the work, let's start with Schmidt (2000, pp. 346–51), who lists a number of critical points and among other things questions Lijphart's (2012 [1999]) sample selection, differences between country groups as well as the lack of arguments regarding the causal chain from patterns of democracy to outcomes. Two notable conceptual comments include Schmidt (2000, p. 349) pointing out how majoritarian systems are able to implement policy change more quickly in the face of a sudden crisis as well as his rather majoritarian assessment of direct democracy (judges without further differentiation): 'Aber plebiszitärdemokratische Arrangements enthalten besonders scharfe mehrheitsdemokratische Waffen!' (Schmidt, 2000, p. 350).[1]

Schmidt (2000, p.349) also praises the work for its transparency, allowing the reader to assess it critically. Vatter (2009) criticizes Lijphart (2012 [1999]) for not considering important democratic institutions such as direct democracy in his analysis. Taking direct democracy (referendums) into account as an additional variable, Vatter (2009) shows that there are not just two but three dimensions of democracy in advanced democracies. He calls this third dimension the 'top-to-bottom' dimension of democracy.

To add another general critique raised, Armingeon (2002) is sceptical towards Lijphart's (2012 [1999]) concept for mixing institutions and behaviour. Along these lines and beyond, Ganghof (2005, p. 408) points to the inherently 'one-dimensional' (government by a majority versus government by as many people as possible) nature of Lijphart's (2012 [1999]) conceptualization, an unclear definition of what is meant by 'majority' as well as a lacking distinction between institutions and behaviour both theoretically and in their measurement. What is more, the two dimensions distinguished are rather of a different nature: the 'executives–parties' dimension is (at its core) a causal chain from electoral over party systems to cabinets, while the

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'federal–unitary' dimension is a collection of veto players, both evaluated as theoretically and empirically unsuccessful (Ganghof, 2005, pp. 409–11; see also Taagepera, 2003).

In Chapter 25 of this volume, Ganghof integrates debates about 'forms' and 'models' of democracy, where Lijphart's work discussed here represents the latter (see Ganghof, 2021). He points out that the separation of power as well as executive personalism need to be considered in a typology of political systems, across presidential, parliamentary and mixed specimens. Regarding Lijphart's *Patterns of Democracy*, Ganghof's (2024, p. 396) main point is that he regards 'both polar models of democracy as being majoritarian', hence breaking the approach of majoritarian versus consensus democracy.

From a methodological stance, Shikano (2006, pp. 76–7) relies on bootstrap samples to show that the results of the principal components analysis used in the original study are not robust enough to derive two dimensions from the data. Along similar lines, Bernauer and Vatter (2019) question the measurement model used and propose a latent structural equation model, taking into account levels of measurement, interrelations between variables (as also pointed out by Ganghof, 2005 and Taagepera, 2003) and their varying level of reflection of the underlying 'power diffusion' in the political system.

But let us also have a look at Lijphart himself and his level of self-reflection. He has admitted: 'I consider myself to be a straightforward empiricist, so theoretical debates don't really have implications for my work'.[2] To name another instance of Lijphart's self-reflection, consider *A Different Democracy* (Taylor et al., 2014) and its discussion in an interview with Matthijs Bogaards (Bogaards, 2015). There, Lijphart reiterates his stance on theory, stating: 'Rational choice too often focuses on problems that are too small and not that interesting in themselves' (cited in Bogaards, 2015, p. 94). He also expresses the idea that his main focus has been on the quality of data, and not extravagantly complex methodology beyond correlation, regression and factor analysis. Hence, potential avenues for improvements have always been open both on the methodological and theoretical sides.

POWER DIFFUSION AND DEMOCRACY

As noted, the critique on the Lijphartian framework, especially from the theoretical angle, is far-reaching and deserves serious attention. In prior work, Bernauer and Vatter (2019) suggested contributions as compared to *Patterns of Democracy* in three areas: (1) theoretically, seeking to add to the micro-foundation of the macro-level relationships between patterns of democracy and outcomes; (2) methodologically, taking the measurement levels of and interrelations between indicators seriously; and (3) empirically, widening and updating the database (e.g., in terms of the time frame and the country sample).

In hindsight, these choices seem appropriate, but are relatively close to the work of Lijphart (2012 [1999]) – especially in theoretical terms – and lead to 'kind and gentle' revisions. We discuss in more detail whether and how this is a problem considering recent developments in the literature in the outlook section of this chapter.

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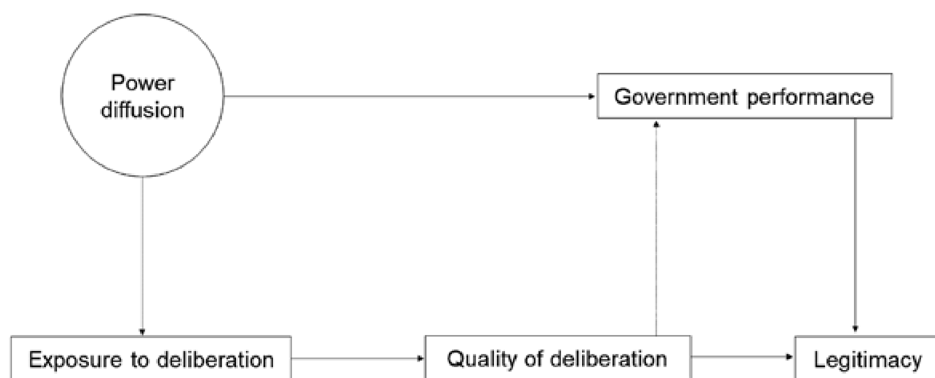
A Theory of Power Diffusion

Sometimes, there is talk of 'empirical theory of democracy'. This does not ring well with serious theorists. Fortunately, the impression left by Lijphart (2012 [1999]) can be unravelled and theoretical thickness added by going back to earlier accounts of power-sharing.

The thrust of Bernauer and Vatter (2019, p. 22) is to spell out the theoretical foundations of *Patterns of Democracy* informed by Lijphart's earlier research (1968, 1977), as well as further scholarship such as that of Steiner (1974, 2012) on deliberation (Figure 26.1). The departure point (Bernauer & Vatter, 2019, pp. 19–24) is that there is a recent disconnect between macro-level institutions and concepts such as a 'spirit of accommodation' (Lijphart, 1968) or 'amicable agreement' (Steiner, 1974), which had been more present in concepts such as 'consociational democracy' (e.g., Lehmbruch, 1967; Lijphart, 1968, 1977; Steiner, 1974). Steiner et al. (2004, pp. 74–87) have previously highlighted the association between political institutions, including grand coalitions, proportionality, federalism and 'veto votes', with social segmentation and favourable elite behaviour in theories concerning political systems in divided societies. Turned on its head, this implies that any misfit between institutions and (elite) behaviour tends to prevent potential integrative outcomes, as could be observed for instance in Bosnia and Herzegovina (Hulsey & Keil, 2019).



Note: Solid lines: observed relationships; dotted lines: unobserved relationships.
Source: Bernauer and Vatter (2019, p. 22).

Figure 26.1 Deliberation as a micro-foundation for the macro-level effects of power diffusion

Ideally, the 'Theory of Power Diffusion' as described would be followed up with a measurement of deliberation (see Mansbridge et al., 2012, pp. 4–5 for a definition). There have been attempts to capture deliberation as an intervening variable between institutions diffusing power and societal outcomes, with one prominent instance being the Discourse Quality Index capturing aspects of parliamentary debates centred around participation, justification, respect, demands, counterarguments and constructive politics (Steiner et al., 2004). Given the large country sample and the multiple arenas involved, measuring for instance the Discourse Quality Index would be difficult (but see Mueller et al., 2023). Instead, we depart

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from the findings of Steiner et al. (2004) and similar assumptions by Gerring and Thacker (2008, pp. 172–8) and assume a mechanism connecting institutional power diffusion and the quality of deliberation. This also resembles an approach of systemic deliberation (Parkinson & Mansbridge, 2012) moving beyond small scales in deliberation research, and fits with 'empirical' institutionalism (Lowndes & Roberts, 2014, p. 31) as well as 'actor-centred institutionalism' (Mayntz & Scharpf, 1995). In short, we assume that the general actor-level degree of things such as arguing, demonstrating, expressing or persuasion should rise with stronger political-institutional power diffusion.

Operationalizing Power Concentration and Diffusion

To establish an analysis of empirical patterns of democracy in line with the power diffusion approach, we rely on the strategy outlined in Bernauer and Vatter (2019), with a database update extending the coverage from (mostly) 1990 to mid-2022, compared to the original time frame of mid-2015. The operationalizations are consistent with the earlier data. The additional data collected is assembled on the GitHub repository also housing the replication code and data for Bernauer and Vatter (2019).[3] There, the codebook and the sources are documented as well.

Regarding the update of the database, it is essential to note significant variations between the distinct dimensions under study. The dimension with the most detailed temporal variation is the proportional power diffusion dimension. For decentral power diffusion, we run checks on the institutions involved, but arrangements such as federalism are known to be rather stable.[4] Lijphart (2012 [1999], p. 250) diagnoses similar differences between the two dimensions covered: 'There are more shifts from left to right or vice versa than from higher to lower locations or vice versa – a pattern that reflects the greater stability of the institutional characteristics of the federal-unitary dimension because these are more often anchored in institutional provisions'. Direct democracy is somewhere between the two other dimensions, especially as our measurement involves its actual use next to the more stable institutional provisions.

While proportional and direct power diffusion exhibit more nuanced trajectories, which form the focal point of subsequent analyses, we briefly discuss potential changes in decentralized power diffusion since 2015 here.[5] Countries relatively rarely change from federal to unitary or vice versa. The United Kingdom has not only left the European Union (EU) but has also seen multiple challenges to its unitarism (Guderjan, 2023). Similar developments can be observed in Spain, and India has returned to dominant party federalism. Regarding judicial review, Czechia, Romania and El Salvador have lost some degree of power diffusion, while Malta has gained some. Also note that some more sophisticated measures such as 'executive–legislative' relations are taken from one-time measurements and spotty data exist in the case of fiscal decentralization.

Table 26.1 provides an overview of the data collection, with an emphasis on the update of the database as well as the persisting limitations of the measures used.

Measurement Model

Bernauer and Vatter (2019) have proposed a measurement model accommodating a few improvements over Lijphart's (2012 [1999]) factor analytical approach. Aside from theo-

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Table 26.1 Political-institutional indicators, measurement, main sources consulted and notes on update

Dimensions and indicators	**Main sources (Bernauer & Vatter, 2019)**	**Notes (update, outlook)**
Proportional power diffusion		
1. *Electoral system:* Gallagher index of electoral disproportionality	Gallagher (2015); other sources such as Interparliamentary Union (www.ipu.org)	Data widely available
2. *Party system:* Effective number of parliamentary parties	See electoral system	Data widely available
3. *Cabinet type:* Ordinal contrast between: (1) one-party minimal winning, (2) multi-party minimal winning, (3) minority and (4) oversized cabinets	Armingeon et al. (2014); Döring and Manow (2015); other sources such as Interparliamentary Union (www.ipu.org); presidential systems coded as (1)	Further editions; see https://cpds-data.org/
4. *Executive–legislative relationship:* Index of formal parliamentary powers and resources	Modified version of Fish and Kroenig (2009)	Likely outdated for some countries, indicator would benefit from renewed measurement
Decentral power diffusion		
5. *Constitutional federalism:* Ordinal measure of territorial power sharing: (1) unitary, (2) semi-federal and (3) federal	Lijphart (2012 [1999], p. 178); Lundell and Karvonen (2003); cross-checks using Armingeon et al. (2014); Dominican Republic coded as unitary; reform in Belgium (1993) considered	See notes in text: changes in United Kingdom, Spain and India
6. *Fiscal decentralization:* Share of subnational in total taxes	Armingeon et al. (2014); Vatter and Bernauer (2011); Database of Political Institutions, accessed via Teorell et al. (2015); World Bank (www1.worldbank.org/publicsector/decentralization/fiscalindicators.htm)	See notes in text: spotty data
7. *Bicameralism:* Four-fold classification by power symmetry and partisan congruence: (1) no bicameralism, (2) weak bicameralism, (3) medium bicameralism and (4) strong bicameralism	Armingeon et al. (2014); Lijphart (2012 [1999]); Lundell and Karvonen (2003); Vatter and Bernauer (2011); reforms in Belgium (1995), Iceland (1991) and Norway (2009) considered	
8. *Constitutional rigidity:* Ordinal index of the required majorities for change: (1) low, (2) medium and (3) high	Rescaled version of Siaroff (2009, p. 218)	
9. *Judicial review:* Ordinal index of the strength of judicial review: (1) no or little, (2) medium and (3) strong	Lijphart (2012 [1999], p. 215); Siaroff (2009, p. 218); Vatter and Bernauer (2011)	See notes in text: changes in Czechia, Romania, El Salvador and Malta

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Dimensions and indicators	Main sources (Bernauer & Vatter, 2019)	Notes (update, outlook)
Presidential power diffusion		
10. *Presidentialism:* Classification into: (1) parliamentary, (2) semi-presidential and (3) presidential systems	Cheibub et al. (2009), accessed via Teorell et al. (2015); cross-checks and recoding using in particular Lijphart (2012 [1999]) and Schmidt (2019); focus on the actual strength of presidentialism	
Direct power diffusion		
11. *Direct democracy:* Quasi-continuous index of direct democratic power diffusion (initiatives and referendums)	Our own calculations, mainly based on data from Centre for Research on Direct Democracy, Zurich (www.c2d.ch/) and IRI/DI Navigator to Direct Democracy (http://direct-democracy-navigator.org/countries)	

Source: Bernauer and Vatter (2019, pp. 62–63).

retical and measurement critique, the original method – i.e., principal components analysis – arrives with a few implicit assumptions. These include that all variables have equal weight and are independent of each other. Our factor analytical item response theoretical approach implements the idea that latent variables driving the four dimensions specified exist and that indicators are to varying degrees reflections of these. Notably, this also captures some of the causal interrelations highlighted by the critics (Ganghof, 2005; Taagepera, 2003), making them explicit and in a sense controlling for their interconnections.[6] We reprint the conceptual idea in Figure 26.2.

Also, the approach is Bayesian, which is not a goal in itself but rather serves to introduce flexibility into the modelling toolbox (Jackman, 2009, p. 471; see also Jackman, 2010). The structure presented in Figure 26.3 is fully acknowledged in the factor analytical/item response theoretical approach (see Bernauer & Vatter, 2019, pp. 84–9 for formulas). It starts from the assumption of four latent dimensions of power diffusion of the proportional, presidential, decentral and direct types. The continuous indicators involved (electoral disproportionality, effective number of parties, decentralization and direct democracy) are treated as continuous and assigned a normal distribution. This constitutes the 'factor analytical part' of the model.

Furthermore, the different levels of analysis are considered relying on multilevel models for the electoral as well as the yearly decentralization data (Gelman & Hill, 2007). Cross-dimensional effects are incorporated and controlled for, namely that presidentialism affects parliamentary power and cabinet type by design. A similar element is added for the relationship between direct democracy and cabinet type. Ordinal logit models are used for the categorical indicators, namely federalism, bicameralism, constitutional rigidity, judicial review and cabinet type (at the level of elections). This constitutes the 'ordinal item response theoretical' part of the model. Cabinet type also receives a multilevel component at the country level.

To identify the model, the latent dimensions of proportional, decentral, presidential and direct power diffusion receive standard normal distributions (mean 0 and variance 1). Additionally, the signs of several parameters and country scores are constrained, not impeding the results but preventing mirror solutions (see Bernauer &Vatter, 2019, p. 89). The Bayesian multilevel models are estimated using R in combination with JAGS ('just another Gibbs

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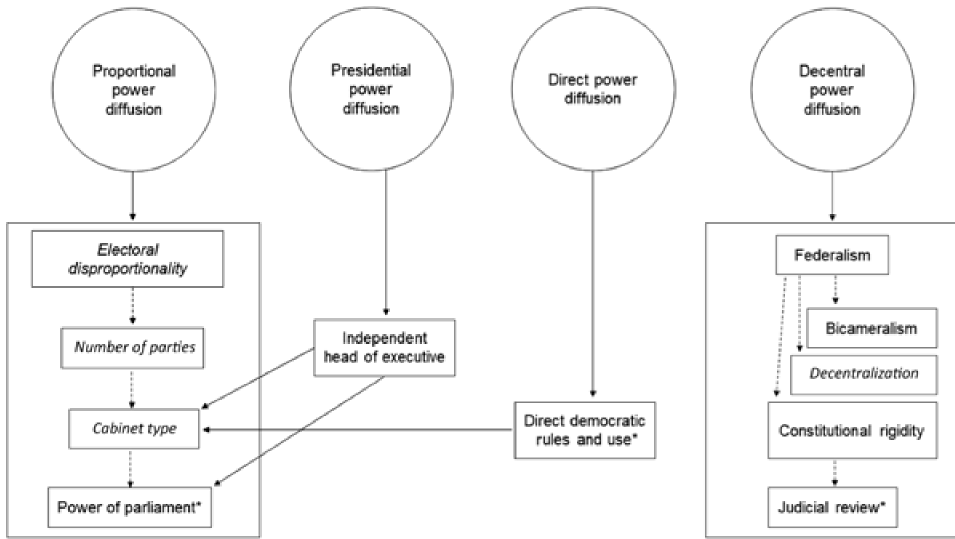

Note: * = Institutional indicator mixed with behavioural elements. Italics indicate fully behavioural indicator. Solid arrows = Causal relationship considered in the model. Dashed arrows = Relationship assumed to be driven by latent levels of (proportional or decentral) power diffusion.
Source: Bernauer and Vatter (2019, p. 26).

Figure 26.2 A measurement model of power diffusion

sampler'). Posterior distributions of the parameters are estimated based on three Markov chain Monte Carlo-simulation chains with 20,000 iterations each for adaption and inference, relying on diffuse priors and checking for convergence. Note that the results of the models are intuitively interpreted as distributions with confidence intervals in the Bayesian framework (Kruschke, 2010, p. 665).

Patterns

Figures 26.3 to 26.5 display the coefficients estimated as well as the 95 per cent highest density regions of the Bayesian estimation for three models: one for the period 1990–2015, replicating Bernauer and Vatter (2019), one covering 1990–2022 (full updated period) and finally a model for 2016–2022 (updated period only).

The replication for 1990–2015 in Figure 26.3 reproduces the results previously reported in Bernauer and Vatter (2019, p. 90). When comparing the results for the full updated period (Figure 26.4), it is evident that the findings remain largely stable. The new data have mostly changed for the 'executives–parties' dimension. Therefore, our focus is on this dimension for comparison. Intra-country electoral disproportionality and the between-country effective number of parties even exhibit slightly stronger relationships with latent proportional power diffusion, underscoring the robust patterns of proportional power diffusion.

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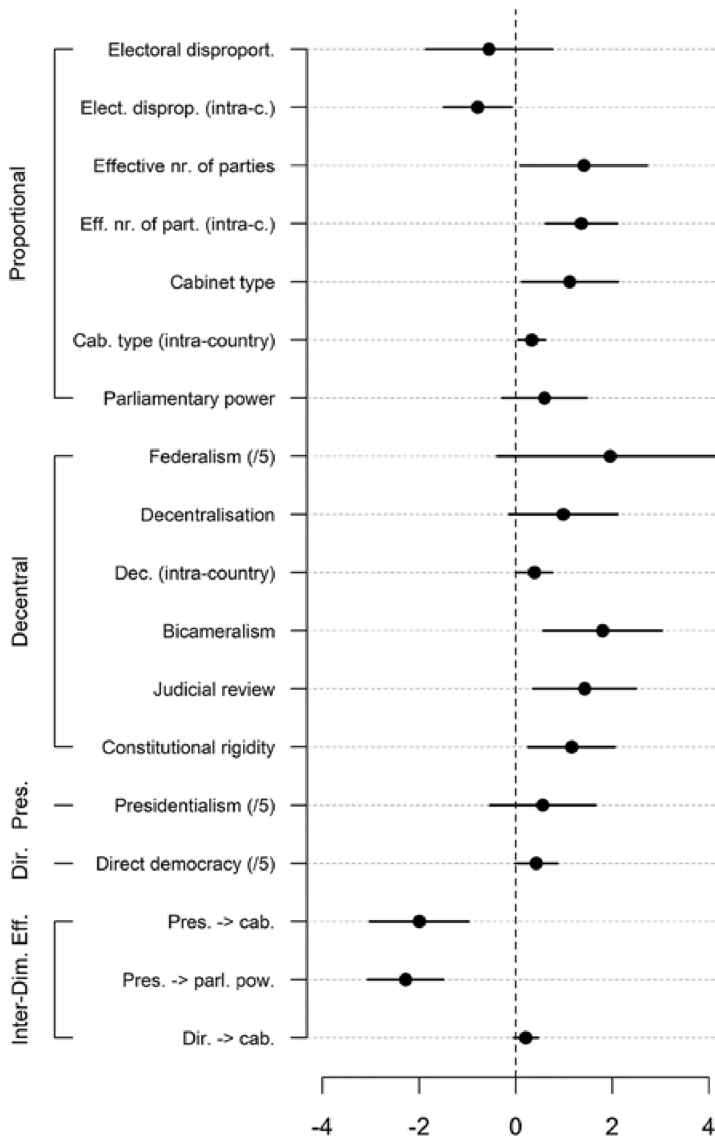

Note: Medians and 95 per cent highest densities.
Source: Bernauer and Vatter (2019), with own updates.

Figure 26.3 Coefficients of the measurement model (1990–2015)

The patterns evaluated for the updated period of 2016–2022 in Figure 26.5 should be interpreted cautiously due to the relatively short time frame. Nonetheless, by concentrating on the first dimension once more, similar patterns can be observed.

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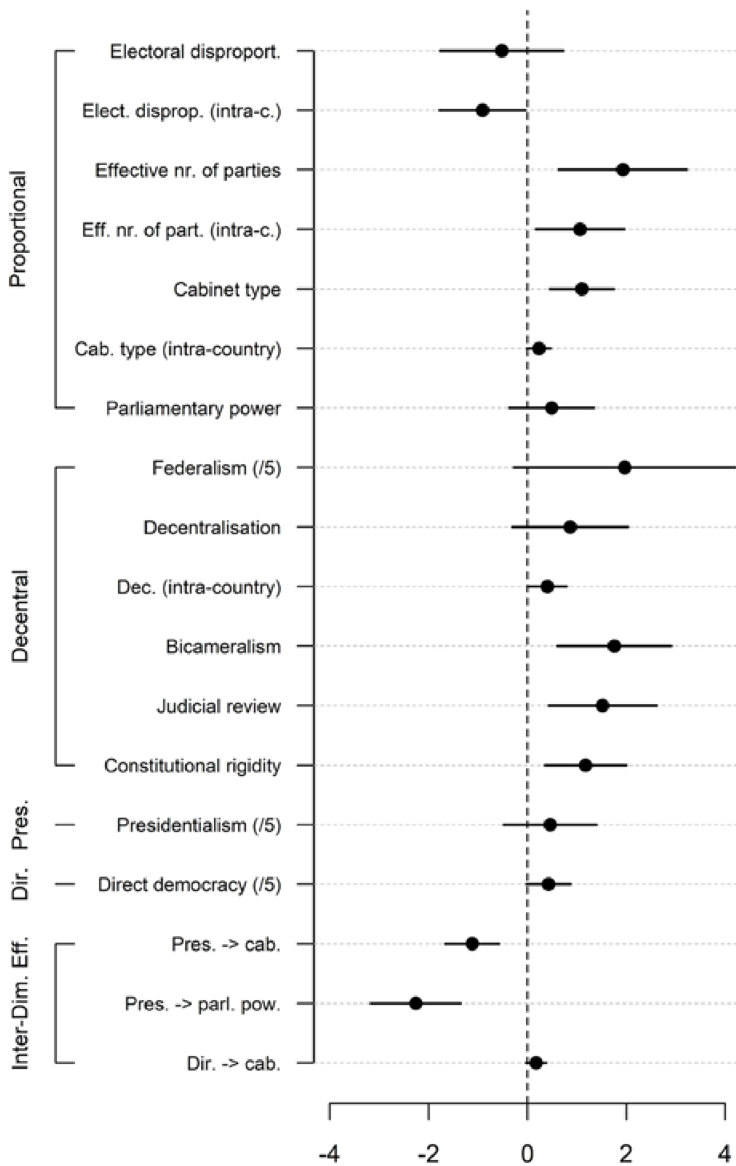

Note: Medians and 95 per cent highest densities (full updated period).
Source: Bernauer and Vatter (2019), with own updates.

Figure 26.4 Coefficients of the measurement model (1990–2022)

In sum, and taking into account that we have mainly fresh data for the indicators of proportional power diffusion, there is clear evidence that the patterns persist for the extended period (1990–2022).

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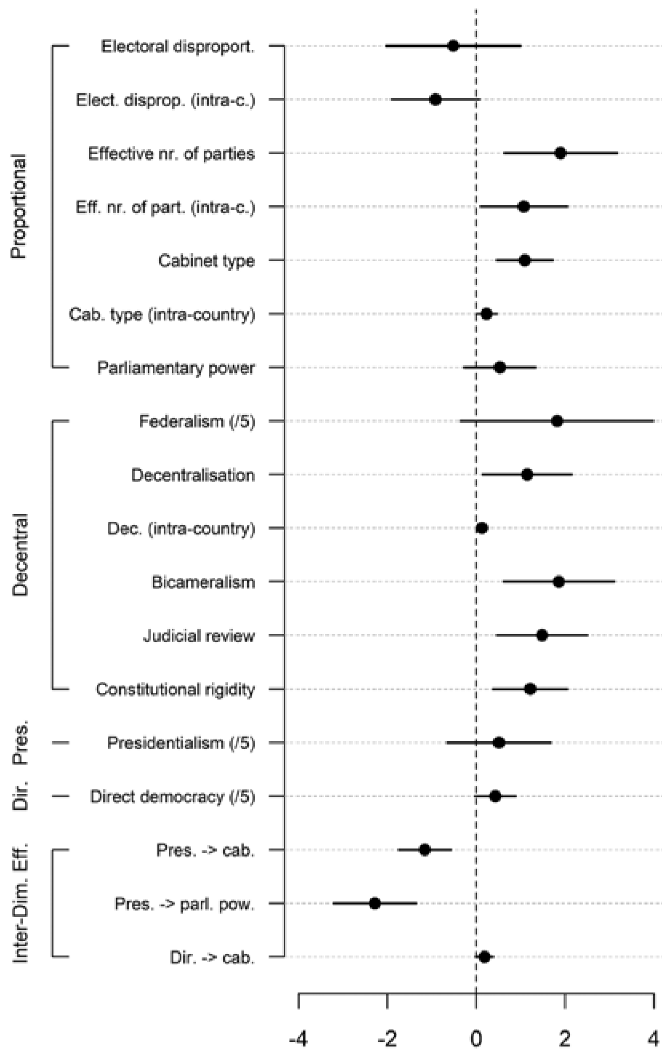

Note: Medians and 95 per cent highest densities (updated period only).
Source: Bernauer and Vatter (2019), with own updates.

Figure 26.5 Coefficients of the measurement model (2016–2022)

CONVERGENCE AND TRAJECTORIES OF POLITICAL SYSTEMS

The second analytical part of this chapter explores the trajectories of political systems, following the strategy outlined by Vatter et al. (2014) to assess the development of patterns of democracy. Hence, our emphasis is on the convergence of political-institutional patterns on the proportional power diffusion dimension, given its relatively susceptible nature for change (see also Bernauer & Vatter, 2019). In contrast, the 'federal–unitary' dimension more closely

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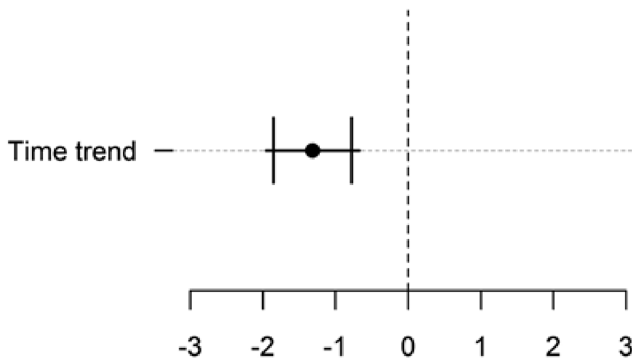
resembles veto players that could potentially mitigate change on the first dimension, similar to direct power diffusion, although direct democracy is considered a dynamic institution. Earlier findings indicate a trend towards divergence with an increase in the number of veto players. Specifically, it was observed: 'countries with few veto players are the most vulnerable to external pressures to converge to some model type of democracy, where globalization appears to be but one of the possible explanations' (Vatter et al., 2014, p. 920). Bernauer and Vatter (2019) extend the analysis from 19 to 61 countries. In the subsequent analysis, we replicate this approach to a certain extent but also explore the direction of change. Therefore, we model not only the variance of proportional power diffusion but also its mean to capture trends. Initially, we evaluate the results of an 'empty' model; a model without additional covariates, to provide insights into convergence patterns.

Figure 26.6 reports the findings of the 'empty' model. The simple graph focuses on the effect of time on the variance of proportional power diffusion. The results indicate a clear overall trend towards *less* variance between 1990 and 2022, suggesting convergence without considering explanatory factors or the direction of the trend.



Note: Medians and 95 per cent highest densities.
Source: Bernauer and Vatter (2019), with own updates.

Figure 26.6 'Empty' model of the variance of proportional power diffusion (1990–2022)

But *why* exactly do democracies become more similar over time? This is the question that we explore by estimating two substantive models. One model introduces explanatory variables for the variance of the proportional power dimension to explore the determinants of convergence, while another model includes independent variables for the mean of the proportional power dimension.[7] The model explaining the variance is presented in Figure 26.7. The rationale behind this model is the expectation that specific subgroups of countries may exhibit more or less convergence for identifiable reasons. In this sample, time frame and specification, there is a *slight but systematic trend towards convergence* on the dimension of proportional power diffusion. This is evident as the effect of the linear time trend variable on the log variance of proportional power diffusion is negative. Notably, and possibly due to the inclusion of the recent years combined with turmoil in the EU, there is no indication of convergence among EU members: while these have similar systems to begin with (negative coefficient of 'EU mem-

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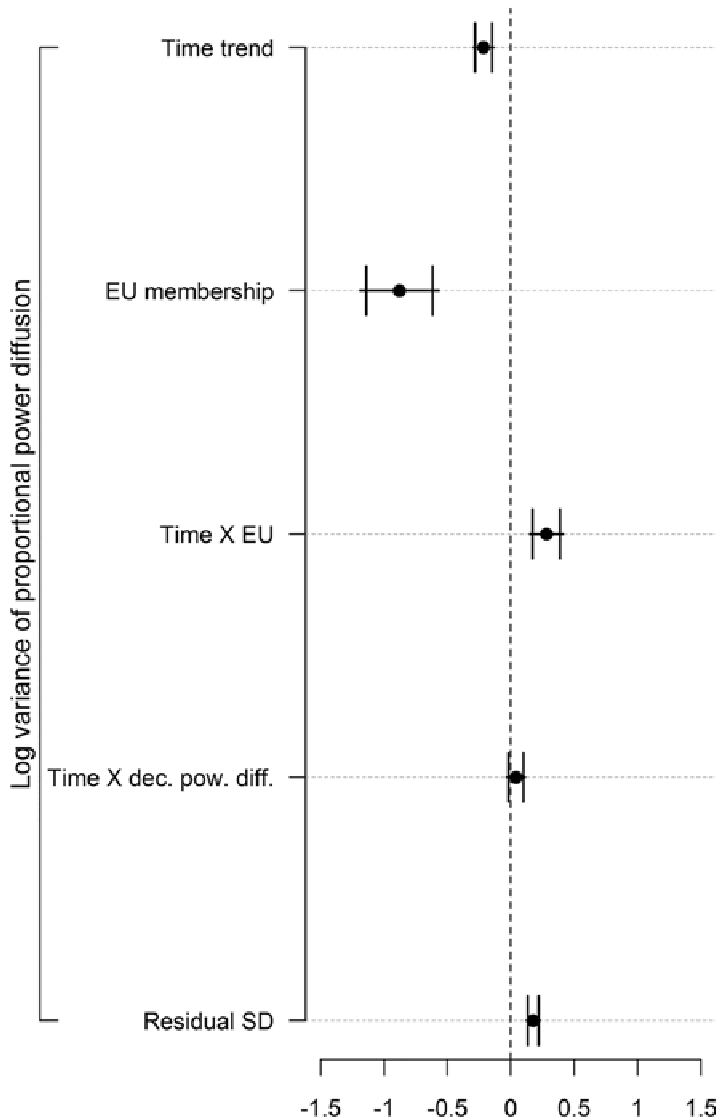
bership' on the variance of proportional power diffusion), the interaction with time displays a positive sign, suggesting recent divergence instead.

In the final step of the analysis of convergence of political systems, the set of explanatory variables from the variance model is incorporated into the model of the mean of proportional power diffusion. As these variables are included as interactions with the linear time trend variable, this setup tests the expectation that EU member states and political systems with



Note: Medians and 95 per cent highest densities.
Source: Bernauer and Vatter (2019), with own updates.

Figure 26.7 Model of the variance of proportional power diffusion (1990–2022)

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constraints on the dimension of federal–unitary power diffusion evolve in a certain direction. Note that the variable 'EU membership' is located at the country-year level as some countries such as Austria or Finland entered the group in the 1990s, a number of Central and Eastern European democracies in the 2000s and 2010s and we also need to consider Brexit in early 2020.

In Figure 26.8, we present the 'location' submodel, providing insights into the direction of change. We learn that proportional power diffusion tends to increase over time. EU member states are inclined to exhibit more proportional power diffusion, but this tendency diminishes over time. Moreover, the trend towards more proportional power diffusion is countered by the presence of higher levels of decentral power diffusion. The finding regarding EU membership aligns with the convergence model where the time spent in the EU is linked to less convergence. In the mean model, it becomes apparent that EU member states were initially more proportional, but have recently shifted more towards majoritarian traits on the proportional power diffusion dimension. Hence, we have some evidence that the reduced convergence is due to a certain directional trend. It is plausible that these trends are influenced by EU membership or institutional 'contagion' between neighbours, but this is subject to further research.

The observation that decentral power diffusion hinders a shift towards more concentration of power makes sense, as more diverse political groups having access to power can potentially veto decisions. This dynamic underscores the rationale behind actions taken by the ruling elites, who might, by so-called 'authoritarian power grabs', 'executive aggrandizement' or 'rule of law backsliding' (e.g., Laebens, 2023; Levitsky & Ziblatt, 2023; Pech & Scheppele, 2017), attempt to remove undesired checks or veto players in institutions like courts, judicial reviews or central banks. It is worth noting that this suggests a potential reverse effect on decentral power diffusion, although it is not explicitly investigated in this analysis.

CONCLUSION

Researchers in the tradition of Arend Lijphart seem to be stuck between a rock and a hard place. While the general trend in the social sciences is towards things such as machine learning methodologically or formal modelling theoretically, a broad, largely empirical approach might appear anachronistic. At the same time, there is beauty to it in several aspects. First, global trends in democratic architecture are very much of general interest. Second, contextual data are useful for many more fine-grained research enterprises. And third, there is no rule that comparative-institutional research itself cannot evolve and pick up theoretical and methodological advances.

Along these lines, Bernauer and Vatter (2019) introduced a follow-up to Arend Lijphart's (2012 [1999]) *Patterns of Democracy* that emphasizes a theoretical micro-foundation in deliberation and incorporates methodological innovations in measuring what is referred to as power diffusion, along with exploring its effects. This chapter reintroduces the 'Theory of Power Diffusion' in the context of contemporary literature. The data set is expanded to cover the period 2016–2022, and the dimensionality of power diffusion, along with global trends towards convergence towards more proportional power diffusion, is examined. We find that patterns of proportional power diffusion can be replicated for the updated period, and that a global trend towards convergence on the proportional power diffusion dimension towards *more* power diffusion exists. Furthermore, the findings reveal that veto players tend to safe-

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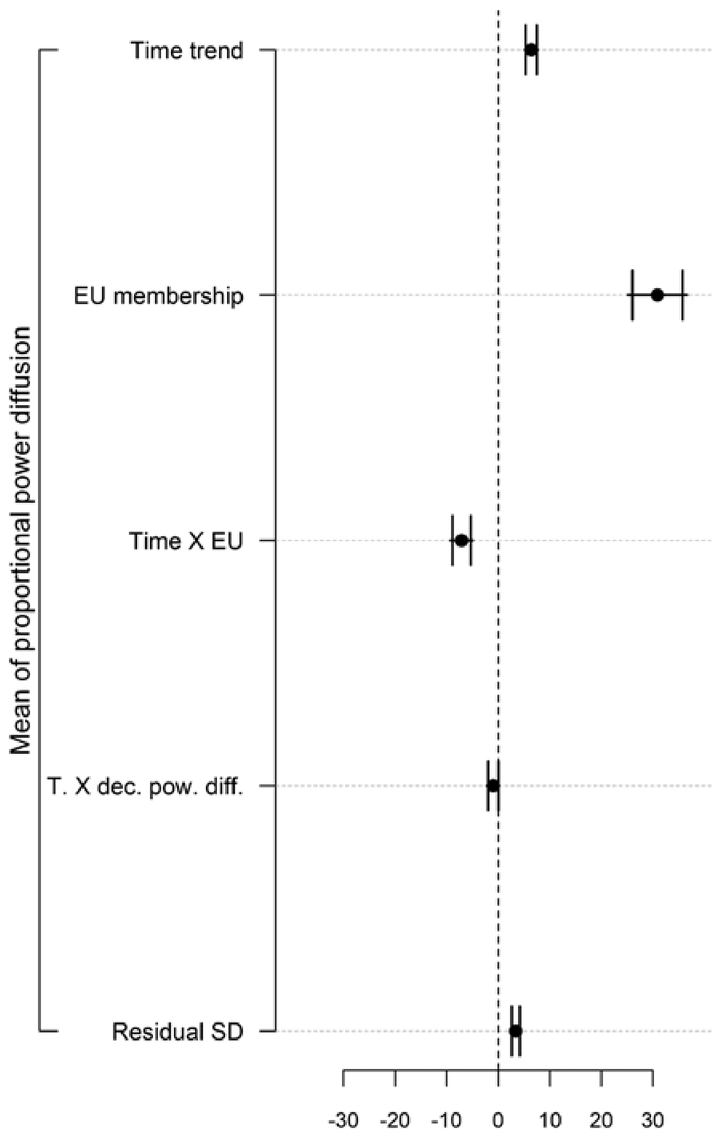

Note: Medians and 95 per cent highest densities.
Source: Bernauer and Vatter (2019), with own updates.

Figure 26.8 Model of the mean of proportional power diffusion (1990–2022)

guard proportional power diffusion, and EU membership is linked to both convergence and a higher degree of proportional power diffusion, although the latter has diminished recently.

Having revisited the framework laid out in Bernauer and Vatter (2019), we still need to be open to other strands of research to achieve accumulative theoretical and empirical progress

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(see Chapter 25). Closing the chapter, we summarize a potential agenda for further research on political-institutional patterns:

1. Our theoretical argument runs via the idea that some political institutions encourage deliberation while others do not. A closer look into the black box would help to shed more light on the accuracy of these assumptions, which have so far informed the measurement model and the hypotheses but have not yet been assessed directly. Measuring deliberation empirically has been realized but is not an easy task (see Bächtiger et al., 2005; Steiner et al., 2004). The challenge is to find a way of combining the comparative method with measures of those decisions that actors take. This requires both conceptual work and considerable resources.
2. Advances in machine learning, automated text analysis and other computational social science approaches facilitate the broadening of the input side in covering political-institutional context factors. For example, annotating provisions in parliamentary standing orders could enable the automatic detection of similar rules in additional texts, assisting in obtaining repeated measures of complex factors such as the power of parliament versus the executive branch, automatically updating the measurement of executive–legislative relations. Likewise, existing large-N (textual) data collections, such as the full texts of constitutions provided by the Comparative Constitutional Project (Elkins & Ginsburg, 2022), could be systematically studied and correlated with other institutions in the political system. This approach might involve exploring the congruence between constitutional and more practical power diffusion.
3. We also note that there is a recent trend towards democratic backsliding, and central banks are under attack in Argentina and constitutional courts are under pressure in Central and Eastern Europe (e.g., Little & Meng, 2024; Treisman, 2023; Waldner & Lust, 2018). In times shaped by full-scale wars and global turmoil, this is alarming and also points to potential relationships between institutional architectures and the level of democracy.

With these entry points for further research at hand, there is no expectation that scientific research on the architecture of democracy will dry out. Such research holds undeniable relevance, especially considering the global trend towards democratic backsliding (though contested in its scope; e.g., Little & Meng, 2024; Treisman, 2023), which frequently begins with the poor performance of democracies. This, in turn, is influenced by political-institutional patterns (see Levitsky & Ziblatt, 2023).

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NOTES

1. This could be translated as: ‘But plebiscitary-democratic arrangements contain particularly sharp majority-democratic weapons’.

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2. www.theory-talks.org/2008/05/theory-talk-8.html.
3. https://github.com/julianbernauer/powerdiffusion.
4. While federalism, as an institutional device for power-sharing between various levels of government, remains stable over time, the 'territorial architecture of governance' evolves dynamically. This evolution can be observed, for instance, in the context of decentralization or devolution (see Hooghe et al., 2016).
5. We thank Rahel Freiburghaus for her advice on potential changes regarding these institutions. All possible errors in interpretation are ours.
6. See Bernauer and Vatter (2019, pp. 84–9) for the mathematical equations involved in the empirical measurement model.
7. We refrain from combining both as this could overwhelm the model and produce spurious findings.

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