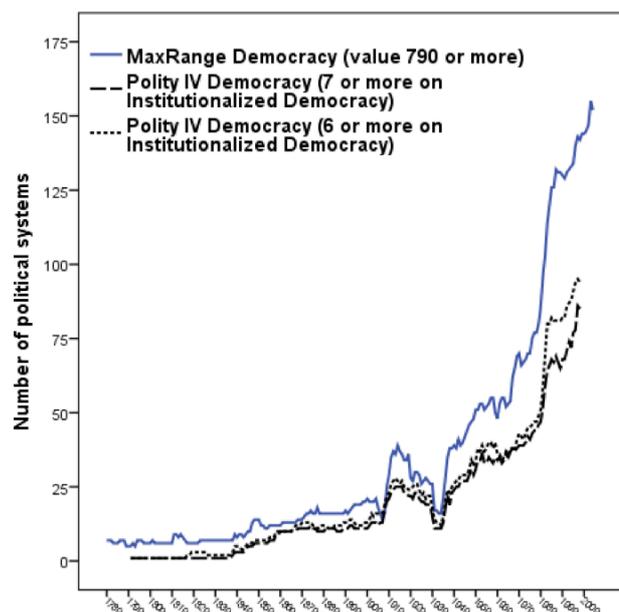


MaxRange Data

Background

Though there are some shorter time-series data sets on political institutions, such as the Freedom House, the Economist Intelligence Unit (EUI), the Institutional and Elections Project (IAEP), and the Adam Przeworski Democracy and Dictatorship data sets (Przeworski 1991), there have only been three data sets that go as far back as the early 19th century: Polity IV (from 1800), the Boix, Miller, and Rosato Political Regimes data (BMR, from 1800) (Boix et al. 2012), and the Vanhanen Polyarchy data set (from 1810) (Vanhanen 2003). The two last data sets are interesting but very limited in variable structure: both relate to Dahl's definition of democracy as based on contestation and participation (Dahl 1971). Vanhanen defines a democracy index by combining the share of party representatives not belonging to the largest party in the elected parliament and participation in the elections (Vanhanen 1997). In the BMR data set that runs to 2007, democracy versus non-democracy is given as a binary interpretation on the basis of the same distinction. This means that neither Vanhanen's Polyarchy nor the BMR give indications of political regime institutions in its details and variety, but rather provides us with an index of democracy. These two databases are also no longer updated.

Polity IV data, on the other hand, covers all nation states with a population of more than 500,000 inhabitants starting from 1800 (Jagers and Gurr 1995; Gurr 1974; Marshall and Jagers 2002, 2010; Eckstein and Gurr 1975). In this continuously updated data set, a complex structure of innovative measurements of institutions is measured. We argue that it would be much simpler and scientifically useful if traditional definitions are used. If needed, a complex structure can later be invented on the basis of quite formal, well-known, and uncontested definitions and operationalizations.



MaxRange Data

Our research here has the competitive empirical advantage of sole access to an extremely promising new data set on political institutions in all countries of the world since at least 1789, on a monthly basis, and since 1600 on a yearly one. This data set, MaxRange (and its new version MaxRange2), created by Max Rånge, consists of variables of political regimes coded on a 1-1000 categorical (and not necessarily linear) scale. Codes for binary variables on all the political institutions underlying the categorization of the variable political regimes have partly been created in their initial form (with Mikael Sandberg). The yearly data set has 54,127 country-year cases so far, and more have been added for the years back to 1600. The monthly data set, so far stretching back to 1789, has 12 times more cases (649,524), which make it by far the biggest and most comprehensive political regime data set in the world. MaxRange can be merged with other data sets, such as Polity IV (1800-). Since the previous version of MaxRange, limited by its 100-degree scale, has now been updated into a 1000-degree scale of political systems, we refer to this later version as MaxRange2.

MaxRange2 thus has several advantages compared to other available data:

1. A monthly time-series from 1789 for a longer time than any other data set, making in particular the study of transitions more detailed and reliable, since they normally occur on more detailed time-scales than years (however, this is not the subject here);
2. Yearly data available from 1600, i.e. at least 200 years longer than any other comparable time series data set;
3. A formal and “normal” classification of democratic and non-democratic regimes in categories on the basis of non-abstract definitions like: “monarchy,” “parliamentarism,” “Head of State elected,” etc., lacking in previous time series data.
4. The 1000-degree scale is more detailed than any other institutional data set. The scale defines both the classifications described above and is used for dummy variable creation, so that singular institutions are coded in a way that creates up to 1000 different systems’ unique combination of these classifications.

In the coding of political regimes, political systems, and institutions, MaxRange focuses on: (1) General level of democracy (2) the institutional structure, (3) the strength of the executive, (4) normal vs. interim status of the regime (particularly useful in transition studies), (5) the Head of State position, (6) the concentration of powers to the executive, (7) the Head of Government position, a number of institutional dummies indicating presence or absence of a number of formal institutions, and summarizing all previous dimensions, finally (8) a simplified executive strength variable.

By the variable (1) institutional structure, various forms of executive powers and systems are defined as formal institutions or complexes of institutions, such as parliamentarism, presidentialism, semi-presidentialism, interim, military, colonial structure (see appendix and our descriptive article, forthcoming). By the variable (2) executive strength, MaxRange provides the degree to which political system executives have constitutional powers: dominating, absolute, or weak executive powers. In the variable (3) normal vs. interim systems, regimes are evaluated in the relation to their degree of “normality” in contrast to being in an interim, therefore unstable condition. In cases where institutional constructs are of interim type, some important classifications are made, such as military junta or martial law institutions. These categorical values make possible more detailed transition studies since they are unique monthly data.

The (4) Head of State variable indicates whether the nation-state is a republic, a monarchy, or has any unified head of state at all. In the (5) executive concentration variable, we find values of the executive powers in terms of whether they are concentrated, separated, or undefined in this respect. Similarly, in the (6) Head of Government variable there are values indicating who is fulfilling that function; a president, prime minister, monarch, or any other defined head of the executive. In the last variable (7) simplified strength, MaxRange provides a simplified summary of the degree to which executive powers are either decentralized, centralized, or balanced as an account of the overall character of the state.

The resulting political institutional scale positions each political system each month since 1789, or year since 1600, on a 1-1000 scale, where the degrees from 760-1000 are defined democratic. MaxRange2 differs from Polity IV data with respect to the measurement of democracy mainly in that it is a longer data set (from 1789 rather than 1800 in this case), and that more nations are included since Polity IV only includes nations with populations greater than 500,000. MaxRange also includes several other smaller political units, namely those that proclaimed themselves independent. However, in addition to that, MaxRange2 is more inclusive than is Polity IV in the measurement of democracy (value 6 or above on the institutionalized democracy variable, the value indicated as threshold for democracy on the Polity home page).