
UNIT 12 DEMOCRATIC TRANSITIONS: PATTERNS, MECHANISMS AND PROCESSES

Structure

- 12.1 Introduction
- 12.2 Defining Modern Political Democracies
- 12.3 Generic Concepts
- 12.4 Procedural Requisites
- 12.5 Operational Principles
- 12.6 Enabling Conditions
- 12.7 Challenging Democratic 'Conditionalities'
- 12.8 Components of Different Types of Democracy
- 12.9 Contingent Effects Democracy May Not Yield
- 12.10 Summary
- 12.11 Exercises

12.1 INTRODUCTION

The recent spread of democracy in Latin America and its persistence has been unprecedented. In 1978, military had withdrawn from power in the Andean country of Ecuador. Thereafter, in a short span of time, armed forces began organising elections and after handing over power to the elected civilian leaders returned to the barracks. In less than ten years, Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Ecuador, Peru and Uruguay, all had gone democratic. Even the long-established personalist dictatorships such as those of General Stroessner in Paraguay and 'Baby Doc' in Haiti fell to the tide of democracy. Central American countries of Guatemala, El Salvador and Honduras—after decades of civil wars and repression let loose by the military and the ruling oligarchies—also fell to the wave of democracy engulfing the region. Mexico, having never experienced democracy in the 20th Century, began a slow process of political liberalisation that eventually culminated in the victory of the opposition candidate in the presidential elections of 2000. As if not to be left behind, the 'socialist' Cuba of Fidel Castro has also lurched in its own way and at its own pace towards a sort of democracy.

While the outbreak of democracy by itself has been unprecedented, equally important has been the persistence of democracy. The 'founding elections' had ushered in the 'transition' to democracy; since then, successive elections have marked the onset of 'consolidation' of democracy.

Here two issues are of utmost importance. One, the "outbreak" of democracy in Latin America—and elsewhere too, for instance in Eastern Europe—has necessitated a rethinking about the theories of democracy. Experiences of Latin American and other countries are important in building new theories of democracy. Secondly, one also needs to find out the nature, scope and limitations, and conditions and institutions that have allowed for 'transition', 'consolidation' and possible 'persistence' of democracy in societies that are very varied and complex. In short, current

thinking is that democratic institutions and norms can be built with some care and farsightedness. Leading analysts of transition, including Philippe C. Schmitter, Guillermo O'Donnell, Laurence Whitehead and Adam Przeworski, among others, have taken cognizance of the changes in the meaning and contents of democracy. Philippe C. Schmitter and Terry Lynn Karl have summarised the principal arguments and concepts that surround the meaning of democracy in the transition cases. It is useful to describe some of their analyses about the concept and ideas of democratic transition in Latin America.

12.2 DEFINING MODERN POLITICAL DEMOCRACIES

Defining democracy is a very challenging task. In minimalist terms, it could mean a competitive electoral process in which citizens choose between rival elites at given intervals. If that be so, then many militarised political systems such as those of Central American countries could also easily be described as democracies. However, if the definition is expanded so as to include conditions such as the rule of law, issue-specific majorities, respect and accommodation of minority views and interests, non-discrimination between political parties of various ideological hues, and civilian control over military then these very countries, with the exception of Costa Rica, can as well be described as non-democracies. Then there are maximalist approaches to understanding democracy. At the political level alone, one may look into aspects such as the collective rights of minorities and ethnic groups, nature and level of decentralisation, accountability and representativeness of the institutions of governance, and sustained participation of the citizens rather than their mere voting in the elections held periodically and rule of law as being part of a maximalist democracy. Maximalist definitions also include aspects of social justice and equality between individuals, ethnic groups, and regions.

In short, democracy is a word that has been claimed by all kinds of rulers and polities. It was precisely to avoid such a debased meaning that one of the most distinguished political theorists Robert Dahl had chosen to introduce the term 'polyarchy', hoping that the term he is using, could be defined somewhat precisely. But there is no easy escape from the word 'democracy' as people use it when struggling for freedom; when seeking to improve their economic and social condition; or even by regimes that are patently authoritarian or when indulging in human rights violations.

It is interesting to note that there is some kind of a convergence among scholars about the meaning of the word 'democracy'. In this regard, four imperatives are noteworthy: (i) It is imperative to define democracy. (ii) It is equally necessary to find the generic concepts that identify democracy as a way of organising the relation between the rulers and the ruled; and which distinguish it from non-democratic forms of governments. (iii) Also required are the procedures i.e. the specific rules and arrangements that must be respected if the generic relation is to assert itself and persist. (iv) Beneath these (hopefully institutionalised) patterns of behaviour, it is further possible to discern two operative rules that make democracy work. These are rules of 'contingent consent' and 'bounded uncertainty'. Without these rules, it is doubtful whether the rulers would agree to play by the rules or that the ruled would feel obliged to obey the rulers.

Admittedly, democracy could be of various types. Also, no unique set of institutions is common to all democracies. Only by exploring the particular components of democracy that, for instance within Latin America, one can discern their variety and significance. Since institutions do vary and so do types of democracy, therefore, the effects of democracies also do vary from country to country. These effects are contingent upon the specific social and economic circumstances,

entrenched state structures and policy practices, etc.

Let us begin by analysing a generic definition: *Modern political democracy* is a regime or system of governance in which rulers are held accountable for their actions in the public realm by citizens, acting indirectly through the competition and cooperation of their representatives.

The ‘modern’ here signifies the mostly indirect democracies one sees now as compared to the direct democracies of, say, ancient Greece. ‘Political’ signifies a public arena where binding decisions are made for the polity as a whole; and the term ‘democracy’ here distinguishes itself from the economic and social democracies, which involve the transformation of property and production relations. (For the sake of brevity, the word democracy is used hereafter to understand and examine the ‘modern political democracies’).

12.3 GENERIC CONCEPTS

1. A *regime* (or system of governance) is an ensemble of patterns that determines (a) the *forms* and channels of access to principal governmental position; (b) the *characteristics* of the actors who are admitted to or excluded from such access; (c) the *resources* or strategies that these actors can use to gain access; and (d) the *rules* that are followed in the making of publicly binding decisions.

To produce effects, the regime must be so organised that actors become habituated to the patterns of behaviour. Norms of a regime may be constitutionalised or observed as prudence and precedents. These forms, characteristics, resources and rules are usually bundled together and given a generic label. Democratic is one such label used to classify regimes. (Authoritarian, oligarchic, monarchic etc. are others.) Democratic regimes, in turn, could have many sub-types.

2. The *rulers* are those who occupy dominant positions in the formal structures of governance. Democratic rulers have the authority to give legitimate commands to others. They differ from non-democratic rulers in the manners in which they become rulers and the norms which make them accountable. Put in another way, citizens in a democracy have not only rights but also obligations to accept as legitimate and therefore obey the commands which are based on fair norms and practices.
3. The *public realm* consists of the arena where binding norms of the society are backed by the coercive power of the state. Across democracies, the size of the public realm does vary, depending upon how public and private spheres have been defined and the way legitimate action and voluntary exchanges are worked out. While liberal democratic norms prefer a circumscribed public realm, social democracies and socialist regimes prefer a larger public realm through state ownership, regulations, and interventions, etc. Both are democratic, but differently. Development of private sector is no less democratic than the expansion of public sector of the economy; however, experience shows that if carried to the extreme, either would undermine the democracy by neglecting collective needs or by curbing individual preferences. Literature on democratic theories has for long but inconclusively dealt with the issue of balancing it out.

4. Only democracies have *citizens* using the broadest and non-discriminatory criteria for holding and electing offices. Democracies in the 20th Century have experienced the extension of citizenship rights to women, indigenous, and illiterates and the property-less so as to move citizenship towards universalism. Others have lowered the voting age (for instance, Brazil where 16 years old are eligible to vote), made voting compulsory, etc. although large segments of citizenry could still be under informal restrictions of some kind.
5. *Competition* has become intrinsic since modern political democracies are invariably indirect, except may be at local level in some countries. 'Factions', 'adversarial action' and 'particular interests' may not be desirable, but have become inevitable in modern democracies, giving rise to competition. Excessive factionalism has always been deemed a problem but no democratic polity can escape from it. As James Madison put it, two of the possible remedies for "the mischief of faction" are worse than the disease: (i) to remove its causes "by destroying the liberty that is essential to its existence", or (ii) "by giving to every citizen the same opinions, the same passions, and the same interests." The best one may hope is only to control the ill effects of excessive factionalism.

While factional or partisan competition is inevitable, democrats do differ on the forms and rules of competition. Importantly, it is along the lines of disagreement on principles and practices of competition that the sub-types of democracy are elaborated. (i) Forms of competition are important. The most common conception of democracy makes it virtually synonymous with the presence of regular, fairly conducted and honestly counted elections of uncertain outcome. At the extreme, the mere presence of elections—even ones from which specific parties or candidates are excluded or in which substantial portion of the population cannot freely participate—is also considered a sufficient condition for the existence of democracy. However, this is a fallacy; and at best can be called 'electoralism'. In between elections, however, individuals can still compete to influence public policy through a wide variety of other intermediaries—interest associations, social movements, etc. Modern democracy in other words offers a variety of competitive processes and channels for the expression of interests and values—associational as well as partisan, functional as well as territorial, collective as well as individual. All are integral to its practice. (ii) Rules of competition are equally important. A commonly accepted rule is majority rule; that is, a simple majority of votes cast as in India; it also could be 50 per cent plus one to become a democratic rule, as is the practice in presidential election of most Latin American countries. Other rules may also be operative like two-third majority for a constitutional amendment, consent of provinces etc. in a federal system. The problem however arises when 'numbers' meet 'intensities'. What happens when a properly assembled majority (especially, a stable, self-perpetuating majority) produces decisions that regularly and negatively affect some minority (especially a threatened cultural or ethnic minority)? In these circumstances, the actual practice of successful democracy tends to displace one of its central principles i.e. to guarantee and uphold the rights of minorities—political, economic, ethnic, and racial. Often, therefore, modern political democracies place certain matters beyond majorities such as by enshrining fundamental rights into the constitutions, by guaranteeing the autonomy of local or regional governments from the central government in a federation, by forming grand coalitions incorporating all parties in a 'consociational' power-sharing arrangement, or by encouraging social pacts for instance between labour and capital. The most common and effective way of protecting minorities however lies in the everyday operation of interest groups and social movements. These are different 'intensities' of preferences, which bring some influence on

those chosen according to the majority principle. Another way of putting this intrinsic tension between ‘numbers’ and ‘intensities’ would be to say that ‘in modern democracies, votes may be counted, but influences are also weighted’.

6. Democracies work on the basis of *cooperation*. Actors need to combine by some voluntary process to make binding decisions for the polity as a whole. They must cooperate in order to be able to compete. They must be capable of engaging in collective action through political parties, associations, and movements that can select candidates, articulate preferences, petition authorities and influence policies. Beyond this unavoidably adversarial aspect, democracy should also encourage citizens to deliberate among themselves, to discover their common needs and resolve their possible conflicts without relying on some outside political authority. The ‘classical’ conception of democracy had stressed upon these aspects and they remain true to modern democracies as well. Some contemporary theorists have erroneously stressed on individuals always maximising their own rational interests as if democracy is a kind of marketplace. Cooperation and voluntaries for autonomous group action is called civil society. Associations that remain independent of the state but exert influence on its decision-making powers check the arbitrariness of the rulers as, at the same time, make citizens aware and tolerant of the preferences of others. A civil society strengthens the virtues of civic action and improves the quality of democratic governance.
7. The principal agents of modern political democracies are *representatives*. Citizens may elect them or support the parties, movements etc., which they lead. These are political professionals pursuing a life-long vocation, often described as ‘political elite’ or ‘political classes’. The way a group of representatives is composed and held accountable is important in a democracy. Democracies have multiple channels of representation—some are elected for a period and may be responsible for approving all decisions that are binding; others may be located in specialised agencies empowered to make public decisions. Then, there are leaders of associations of civil society representing and promoting various causes, besides leaders of the social movements and political parties. A major implication of this proliferation of groups and modes of political expression is that recent and fragile democracies—in Latin America and elsewhere—must live in ‘compressed time’. Unlike in the older democracies of Europe and US, where time allowed the gradual evolution of a civil society, in ‘transition’ democracies—through varieties of initiatives and for varied reasons—all manners of parties, associations and movements are, and will be, present during the transition, and all of them seek to influence the political outcome with their highly diverse opinions, passions and interests.

12.4 PROCEDURAL REQUISITES

The above defining components of democracy are still vague. They can give rise to a considerable variety of institutions and sub-types of democracy and cover as well, a wide range of programmes. For democracy to survive and work effectively a specific set of procedural norms must be followed and, civic rights must be respected. A polity that does not impose such restrictions upon itself, that is, a polity that is not subject to ‘rule of law’, cannot be considered a democracy. These procedures do not define democracy, i.e. they do not guarantee the accountability of the rulers to the citizenry but their presence is indispensable to the persistence of democracy. They are necessary but not sufficient ‘conditions’ for its existence.

Robert Dahl had offered the seven most generally accepted “procedural minimal” conditions that

must be present for modern political democracy, or 'polyarchy', to exist. These minimal conditions are: (i) Control over government decisions about policy is constitutionally vested in elected officials. (ii) Elected officials are chosen in frequent and fairly conducted elections in which coercion is comparatively uncommon. (iii) Practically all adults have the right to vote in the election of officials. (iv) Practically, all adults have the right to run for elective offices in the government. (v) Citizens have a right to express themselves without the danger of severe punishment on political matters broadly defined. (vi) Citizens have a right to seek out alternative sources of information. Besides, alternative sources of information exist and are protected by law. (vii) Citizens also have the right to form relatively independent associations or organisations including independent political parties or interest groups.

To these seven 'procedural minima', scholars examining the 'transition' democracies have added two more conditions: (viii) popularly elected officials must be able to exercise their constitutionally mandated control over government decisions without being subjected to informal overriding constraints imposed by non-elected officials. This is intended to cover instances where military or other entrenched interests/groups such as bureaucracy or business retain some autonomy or immunity from elected officials or exercise some control/veto over their decision-making powers. Simply stated, democracy requires civilian control over military (or any other non-elected officials); otherwise many 'militarised polities' would have also to be called democracies. Mere 'electoralism' of some kind is not democracy. (ix) The polity must be self-governing, i.e. it must possess a minimal capacity to act independently from constraints imposed by some other overarching political system or external agencies.

12.5 OPERATIONAL PRINCIPLES

The above-mentioned component processes and procedural norms help one to identify what democracy is but they do not tell us much about how it actually functions. The simplest answer is "by the consent of the people". The more complex answer is "by the contingent consent of politicians acting under conditions of bounded uncertainty." Let us elaborate on the meaning of 'contingent consent' and 'bounded uncertainty'.

1. **Contingent Consent:** In a democracy, representatives agree to compete in such a way that those who win or exercise greater influence over policy will not use their (temporary) political superiority to impede those who have lost; and those who have lost will respect the right of the winners to make binding decisions. In their turn, citizens are expected to obey the decisions ensuing from such a process of competition, provided its outcome remains contingent upon their collective preferences as expressed through fair and regularly held elections or through open and repeated negotiations in the future. The challenge is to find a set of rules that embodies contingent consent, not a set of goals that command widespread consensus. This 'democratic bargain', to use Robert Dahl's expression, varies from society to society, depending upon cleavages and subjective factors such as the degree of mutual trust. It may even be compatible with a great deal of dissension on substantive policy issues.
2. **Bounded Uncertainty:** All democracies involve some degree of uncertainty. Who will be elected and what policies they will pursue? Polities that do not have such uncertainty are not democracies. But the uncertainty embedded in the core of all democracies is bounded. Not just any actor can get into the competition and raise any issue he or she pleases to raise;

there are previously established rules that must be respected. Not just any policy can be decided and implemented; there are contingencies that must be respected. What the emergent practice of democracy does is to define and delimit 'normal' uncertainty with regard to actors and policies. These boundaries vary from country to country. Constitutions delimit the boundaries; and, through competition and cooperation among associations and interests also such rules of contingent consent are worked out. Whatever the rhetoric—and at election times, it can be really very wild—once the rules of contingent consent have been agreed upon, the actual variation in the conduct of actors and policies is likely to stay within a predictable and mutually acceptable range.

It is to be noted that these operative principles of democracy—abstract in themselves—lie behind the generic concepts and formal procedures discussed earlier.

Also notably, these two operative principles rest on rules of prudence and not on some deeply ingrained norms of mutual trust and tolerance, moderation, compromise and sense of fair play, and respect for authorities etc. Often in the past, democratic theory had argued for a prior existence of 'civic culture'; that is, the aforementioned norms must develop and be gradually transmitted through its working, if democracy is to consolidate. On the basis of current cases of democratisation, civic culture is better thought of as the product, and not the producer of democracy. In 'transition' democracies, a kind of *modus vivendi* of contingent consent and bounded uncertainty can emerge from interaction between antagonistic and mutually suspicious actors.

12.6 ENABLING CONDITIONS

In the 1960s, writings on democracy had often asserted that some specific kinds and numbers of economic, social and cultural 'prerequisites' that are essential for a stable democracy have been identified. However, first the emergence of authoritarian regimes, despite the presence of these prerequisites or conditions; and, later, the transitions to democracy in the 1980s in countries where these prerequisites were not present have made scholars question these 'prerequisites'. It is worthwhile to briefly examine some of such 'prerequisites'.

1. Levels of economic development with indicators such as per capita income, etc. were considered as prerequisites. A wealthy economy presumably allowed citizens high levels of education, literacy, urbanisation, and mass media exposure, etc. "The more well-to-do a nation", wrote Seymour Lipset, "the greater the chances that it will sustain democracy".
2. Another set of prerequisites insisted on aspect of 'political culture', which is the system of beliefs and values in which political action is embedded and given meaning. A 'participant' political culture meant fuller participation; a 'parochial' political culture meant complete abstinence of citizens from governmental activities. It was also suggested that some beliefs are congenial to democracy, others are not: Protestantism, it was thought, inculcates values of equality, enterprise and honesty in public life; while Catholicism breeds values of inequality, hierarchy and corruption. It was argued that some cultures/religions promote trust, accommodation and tolerance; while others border on violence, distrust and conflict. In other words, a pro-democratic system of values and beliefs was deemed a prerequisite for a stable democracy. Instances of failure of democracy were often attributed to anti-democratic

values and beliefs prevalent in a society.

3. Others examined the historical conditions and configurations of major events. Theories of 'crises and sequences' argued that the order in which various crises of 'modernisation' appeared and were settled determined whether economic and social transformations were conducive to the development of democracy. For instance, it was argued that democratic regimes were more likely to succeed if problems of national identity were resolved prior to the establishment of a central government; and even more so if both of these events had preceded the formation of mass parties.

Barrington Moore Jr. had contended that democracy is more likely to appear where the economic and social power of the landholding aristocracy has declined relative to that of the bourgeoisie; and where a repressed peasantry has been replaced by a wage-earning working class and a class of small landed proprietors. In understanding the authoritarian regimes of Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras and pre-1979 Nicaragua, the domination of a very repressive landed oligarchy still does find a large acceptance among scholars as responsible for absence of democracy in the region. In contrast, democracy in Costa Rica—another Central American country—is often attributed to the existence of a large class of yeomen farmers.

4. Others especially those writing from the dependency perspective treated external influences as the most powerful set of preconditions. Dependency theories contended that the insertion and mode of continued insertion of Latin America in the global capitalist economy—with all its distortions of economic productive structures and relations, and distortions in class formations and social relations—make authoritarianism a logical byproduct. The various structural crises that import substitution industrialisation strategies have faced in the 'delayed and dependent capitalist' economies since the 1930s explain the failures of democratic experiments and the persistence of authoritarianism of one or the other form. Guillermo O'Donnell and Fernando Henrique Cardoso had argued that as dependent economies became more complex, more penetrated by foreign capital and technology, and more reliant upon low wage, militaries and technocrats moved to the front stage to oust the unruly and ineffective 'populist' democracies in the 1960s.

In explaining the external factors in the outbreak and promotion of democracy, Samuel Huntington takes a different line of argument. He has suggested that the rise and decline of democracy was directly related to the rise and decline of the global power of US rather than to the strength of capitalism and market mechanisms. In the 1960s, authoritarianism arose particularly in Latin America as US influence and power experienced a relative decline. In the 1980s, the spate of democratic transitions, Huntington argued, could be credited to US policies to restore American power by rolling back revolutionary forces and promoting electoral reforms in the region.

12.7 CHALLENGING DEMOCRATIC 'CONDITIONALITIES'

The experiences of regime transition in Latin America and elsewhere have challenged virtually all these prerequisites and preconditions. The hypothetical association between national wealth and democracy perhaps may be used to explain the timing of transition in the case of Brazil which had experienced major social and economic transformation during the military rule (1964-84) but it

cannot be used to explain the transition in Peru, Bolivia etc., where democracy came under conditions of economic stagnation, foreign indebtedness and a regressive redistribution of income. Relatively high levels of per capita GDP, urbanisation and literacy rate had—contrary to expectations—brought authoritarian rule in Argentina in the 1960s.

Similarly, if the political culture of Latin America was all along deemed anti-democratic, how could the same countries make a successful transition to democracy in the 1980s? Catholic Church took an active role in the transition to democracy in Brazil, Chile, Peru and got involved with the Sandinista revolutionary movement in Nicaragua thus rendering the ‘anti-democratic bias’ of Catholicism implausible.

In the same way, the dependency framework had harped on external factors, viz. inclusion of Latin America into the global capitalist system as responsible for the serial structural crises since the 1930s and the prevalence of authoritarianism. In the 1980s, the adverse effects of dependency were more prominent in the form of declining export earnings, indebtedness, dislocation in the domestic production, and demand and wage compression besides support for authoritarian regimes by US administration; yet these countries made a breakthrough for democracy precisely under these very so-called adverse conditions.

Thus the search for causes rooted in economic, social, cultural, or international factors—useful as they may be—have not yielded a general law of democratisation; nor is it likely to do so. Besides, one single factor or set of factors cannot explain emergence of democracy in all the varied countries.

If that be so, what possibly could be the conditions or preconditions for the emergence of democracy? Let us discuss some of them.

1. There may be no single precondition that is necessary for the emergence of a democratic polity; and surely, there is no single precondition that is sufficient to produce such an outcome. This does not mean that democratisation is random or haphazard or indifferent to the conditions discussed above. What is called for is a greater sensitivity to the considerable variety of contexts that have been associated with successful transitions in the past and can be expected to support transitions in the present and the future. Actors and forces that stand for democracy can be assured that the conditions in their nations do not *a priori* condemn their efforts to failure. Since searching for some common conditions that account for the presence or absence of democracy is futile, a more modest effort at building a more contextualised approach to the study of democratisation is called for.
2. What the literature in the past had considered as preconditions may be better conceived as the outcome of democracy. Patterns of higher economic growth and more equitable distribution, higher levels of literacy and education, levels of urbanisation and social communication, etc. are better treated as outcomes of stable democratic processes in the long run, rather than as preconditions. For instance, protracted functioning of democratic institutions can be expected to produce a civic culture that stands for tolerance, accommodation, fair play, and rule of law.
3. Capitalism, high levels of economic development and the persistence of democracy are empirically correlated but only over the long run. Many developed economies had in the

past fallen to authoritarianism, for instance Germany to Nazism in the 1920s. India and Costa Rica have sustained democracy under conditions of relative poverty and underdevelopment.

12.8 COMPONENTS OF DIFFERENT TYPES OF DEMOCRACY

From the preceding discussion, it is clear that no single set of actual institutions, practices or values embodies democracy, though there are several concepts that are associated with democracy. They become especially important when it comes to distinguishing between sub-types of democracy. Polities make a transition from authoritarianism not to democracy but to democracies. They mix different components to produce different democracies. Importantly, they do not constitute different stages of democracy, rather they form a matrix of different combinations—all of which are democratic but differently so. Some of the components of democracy are as follows:

1. **Consensus:** All citizens may not agree on the substantive goals of political action or on the role of the state; even if they did, it would certainly make governing democracy easier.
2. **Participation:** All citizens may not take an active and equal part in politics; although it must be formally and legally possible to do so, and it would be desirable if they did so.
3. **Access:** Rulers may not weigh equally the preferences of all citizens—individuals or groups—but citizens should have an equal opportunity to access the powers that be.
4. **Responsiveness:** Rulers may not always follow the course of action preferred by citizens; but they must be held ultimately accountable through the processes of representation.
5. **Majority rule:** Majority of votes or representatives alone cannot become the basis of laws and allocations.
6. **Parliamentary sovereignty:** The legislature may not be the only body that can make rules or even the one that must have final authority in deciding what is binding on the public as a whole. Although where executive, judiciary or other public bodies do make that ultimate choice, they too must be capable of being held accountable for their actions.
7. **Party government:** Rulers may not be nominated, promoted and disciplined in their activities by well-organised and programmatically coherent political parties. Although where they are not, it may prove difficult to form an effective government and even more difficult to carry out intended policies.
8. **Pluralism:** The political process may not be based on a multiplicity of overlapping, voluntaristic, and autonomous private groups. Although where there are monopolies of representation, hierarchies of associations and obligatory membership, it is likely that the interests involved will be more closely linked to the state and the separation between the public and private spheres of action will be much less distinct.
9. **Federalism:** Democratic polities may not be federal but some dispersion of power across units—territorial and/or functional—is characteristic of all democracies.
10. **Presidentialism:** The chief executive may or may not be directly elected and may be single or collegial but some concentration of the authority to act for the polity as a whole is present

in all the executives in all types of democracies.

11. **Checks and Balances:** Different branches of government may or may not check and balance each other constitutionally; what however is required is that governments—be that by an assembly, by executive concentration, by judicial command, or even by dictatorial fiat—must be ultimately accountable to the citizenry as a whole.

The aforesaid are often presented as essential components of democracy. Instead, they should be recognised either as indicators for delimiting one or another type of democracy, or as useful standards for evaluating the performance of one or another particular type of regime.

12.9 CONTINGENT EFFECTS THAT DEMOCRACY MAY NOT YIELD

The preceding discussion has attempted to convey the generic meaning of modern political democracy without identifying it exclusively with some particular set of rules and institutions, and without confining it to some specific culture or level of economic development. One may ask here about what democracy is not and may not be capable of producing?

1. Democracies are not necessarily more economically efficient than non-democracies. This may especially be true for the period of transition from authoritarianism to democracy when the propertied classes or bureaucracies or some other powerful groups may feel that their rights and special privileges are being threatened; and they may respond by indulging in capital flight, disinvestments, sabotage, etc. Transitional democracies may therefore do well by not touching the property rights or privileges of special groups. This may often lend transitional democracies an elitist and ephemeral character. Only with the persistence of democracy, one hopes that some benevolent effects may be felt on the issues of income distribution, etc. Otherwise, it is certainly too much to expect that these improvements will be immediately seen and realised in the wake of transition.
2. Nor are democracies necessarily more efficient, administratively. In fact, their capacity to take decisions may even be slower than the authoritarian regimes they replace, if only because more actors need to be consulted, bargains worked out, and consensus evolved. The costs of political pay-offs may even be higher; and popular satisfaction with policy performance may not even seem greater. This could especially be true of the transitional democracies.
3. Democracies are not likely to appear more orderly, consensual, stable or governable than the autocracies they replace. This may be due to the freedom conflicting interests enjoy. In transitional democracies, it could also be on account of continuing disagreements over the newly emergent rules and institutions. Transitional democracies are more likely to face such problems since such products are mostly the result of imposition or compromises. Rules and institutions are also often initially quite ambiguous in nature and uncertain in effect, at least, until actors have learned how to use and manipulate them. What is more, they come after serious struggles and high ideals and expectations. Groups and individuals with their recently acquired autonomy are also likely to test specific rules, protest against the performance of particular institutions, and insist on renegotiating their part of the arrangement. Therefore, the presence of anti-system parties should hardly be surprising, nor should they be taken as a failure at democratic consolidation. What counts in the end is their willingness, no matter how reluctant, to play according to the general rules of bounded uncertainty and contingent

consent.

‘Governability’ is a relative characteristic of all types of regimes, not an exclusive property of democracy. Given the exhaustion and popular discredit of various types of autocracies, it may seem that only democracies—of whatever type—can be expected to govern effectively and consensually in the contemporary period. But this can be only a contextual argument. After all, there are many instances when democracies also have lost capacity to govern. Citizens have become disenchanted with their performance; or political elites for their own reasons had fiddled and sabotaged the principles of contingent consent and bounded uncertainty.

4. Democracies may be relatively more open societies and definitely more open polities than the autocracies they replace but they are not necessarily more open economies. Many ‘old’ democracies have grown up practicing economic protectionism and state ownership. Scholars do not doubt the long-term compatibility of democracy and capitalism but there are tensions between the two. What is problematic are the short-term policy trade-offs. Particularly transition democracies are faced with these challenges and tensions since democratic pressures and expectations have to be adjusted to the processes of economic liberalisation.

It is unlikely that the current phase of democratisation in Latin America will necessarily bring in its wake economic growth, social peace and justice, administrative efficiency, political conformity, free markets, and ‘the end of ideology’. No doubt, having some of these qualities would make the consolidation of democracy easier, but they are neither prerequisites for it nor are they immediate product of it. What one should be looking for and hoping for is the emergence of an ensemble of political institutions that can compete with each other in forming governments and influencing public policy, that can channel social and economic conflicts through regular procedures; and that have sufficient linkage to civil society to represent their members/voters and commit them to collective course of action. The ‘Democratic Wager’ is that such a regime, once established, will not only persist by reproducing itself within its initial ‘confining conditions’, but will also eventually expand beyond them. Among regime types, democracies alone have the generic capacity to modify consensually their rules and institutions in response to changing circumstances. They may not immediately produce all those desirable public and private goods mentioned above, but they do stand a better chance of doing so eventually than do autocracies.

12.10 SUMMARY

Broadly speaking, the focus of this unit is to contextualise the democratic transition that began in Latin America in the late 1970s and continued since then to a point that many observers describe as consolidation of the democratic processes. Since the definition of democracy as a concept is fraught with considerable ambiguity more so in the actual functioning of regimes which are identified as democratic, an effort was made in this unit to describe at length the procedural requisites, operational principles and enabling conditions that paved the way for democratisation of polities and relate it to the political processes of Latin America in recent decades. While it is difficult to offer any definitive prognostications on the future course of the democratic processes in Latin America, yet it may be stated that the socio-political economic challenges confronting the fledgling democracies are immense and the positive outcome of the democratic transition/consolidation is still debatable.

12.11 EXERCISES

1. Against the acknowledged generic concepts of democracy explain the procedural requisites and operational principles that will make democratic regimes viable. Draw examples from Latin America.
2. What do you understand by the term 'democratic conditionalities' and how do they challenge the functioning of democratic regimes in Latin America?
3. Briefly explain the components of different types that make democracy workable with reference to Latin America.
4. Political democracy and economic development reinforce each other. Discuss in the context of recent Latin American experience.