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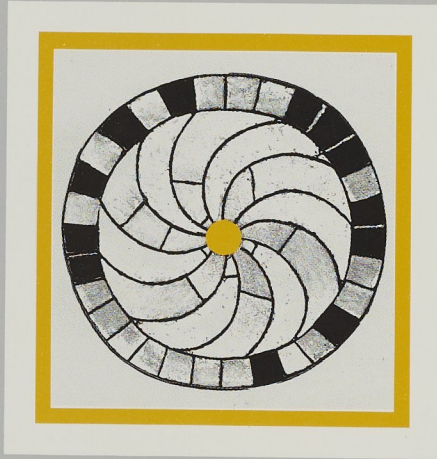
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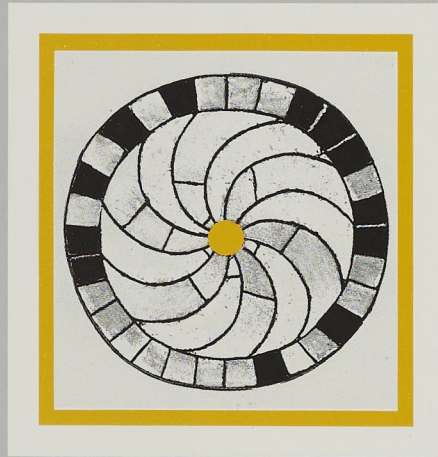
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# Rethinking Democracy

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**Institutionalism, majority versus  
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the media**



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Global Environmental Change  
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*Cover:* A symbolic representation of the cosmos,  
fourteenth century. The Friday Mosque,  
Kermanshah, Iran. Rapho/Michaud.

*Right:* Frontispiece of *Discours sur l'origine de  
l'inégalité* by J.-J. Rousseau, 1755, detail of  
engraving by N. Ponce from Ch. N. Cochin,  
eighteenth century. Bibliothèque nationale/R. Viollet.



# Majority rule in theory and practice: the tenacity of a flawed paradigm

Arend Lijphart

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## Introduction

The 1990s are likely to become the 'decade of democracy': more and more nations are contemplating the establishment of democratic systems, actually instituting democracy, or consolidating existing systems of democratic rule. This trend encourages us to reflect on the meaning of democracy and its various forms. I shall argue in this article that two basic models of democracy should be distinguished – majoritarian democracy and consensus democracy – but that there is a strong and dangerous tendency to define democracy almost exclusively in terms of the former. Majority rule suffers from a serious contradiction between its theory and its practice. In theory, majority rule tends to be regarded as the crucial decision rule – and hence as the defining criterion – of democracy. In practice, however, strict application of majority rule is extremely rare. Especially with regard to the most important decisions and to issues that cause deep splits in societies, democracies almost uniformly deviate from majoritarian decision-making rules, to adopt mechanisms more likely to rally a broad consensus.

The existence of this gap between the theory and practice of majority rule is important for two reasons. One is that most of the democratizing and newly democratic countries need

consensus democracy even more than the stable and mature democracies that have been in existence for a long time, because they tend to suffer from more serious internal cleavages and face more sensitive and divisive issues. The second reason is that the view equating democracy with majority rule is so strong and widespread as to constitute a major obstacle to any serious consideration of the consensus model. Democratization means the drafting of democratic

constitutions, and the careful drafting of a new or improved constitution starts badly if it takes the majoritarian definition of democracy as its only point of departure.

Let us begin with a brief and preliminary description of the differences between the two conceptions of democracy, both based on the standard definition of 'government by and for the people'. They differ radically with regard to a fundamental

question raised by this definition: who is to do the governing and to whose interests should a government be responsive when the people are in disagreement and express divergent preferences? One answer is: the majority of the people. The alternative is: as many people as possible. Accordingly, the majoritarian model of democracy concentrates political power in the hands of the majority, whereas the consensus model tries to share, disperse, restrain, and limit power in a variety of ways.

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My argument will proceed in four steps. First I shall discuss the extent to which democracy tends to be conceived in purely majoritarian terms. Second, I shall follow the logic of the principle of majority rule, and define what a purely majoritarian democracy looks like. Third, I shall demonstrate that this pure model of majoritarian democracy is completely at variance with actually functioning democracies and democratic traditions in all parts of the world. Finally, I shall speculate on the reasons why the majority-rule paradigm continues to dominate, despite its being so completely out of touch with the reality of democratic practice.

### **The democracy = majority rule equation**

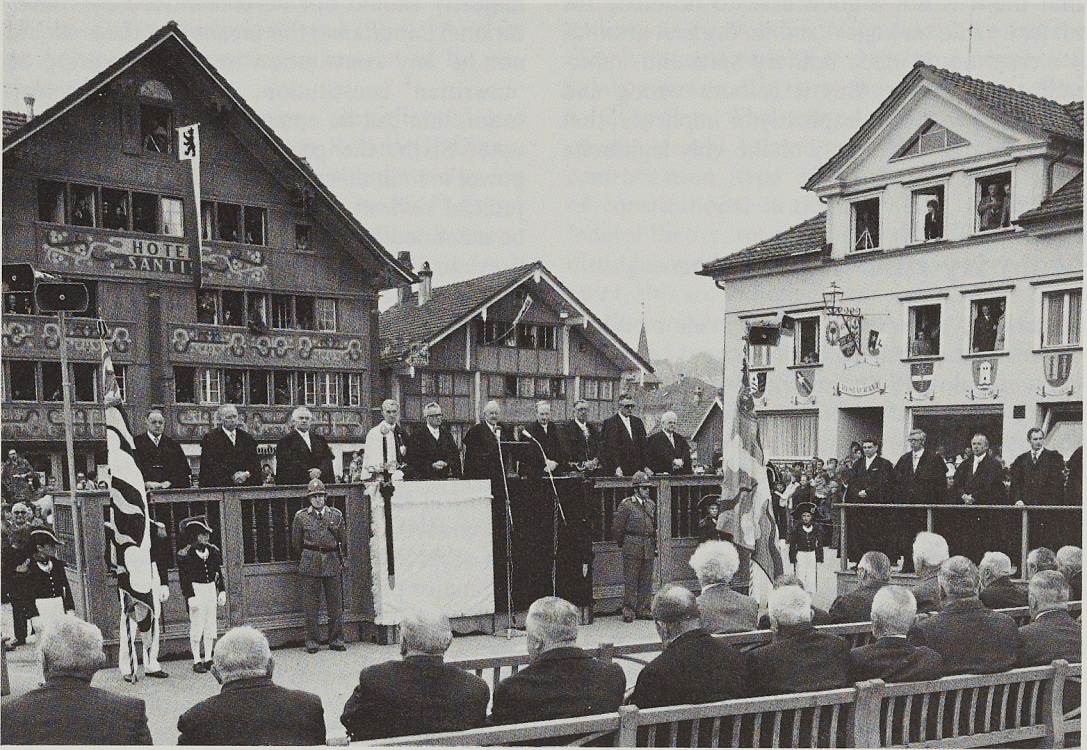
Pennock begins his discussion of majority rule with the following statement: 'We must note at once that rule by the majority is often alleged to be the very essence of democracy'.<sup>1</sup> Recent pronouncements by spokesmen at the two extreme ends of the political spectrum – the American conservative columnist, William Safire, and the South African Communist leader, Joe Slovo – illustrate Pennock's assertion very nicely. In a commentary about developments in South Africa, Safire argued that democracy means real political equality and 'one person, one vote', to conclude 'that means majority rule'. And to make his point unmistakably clear, he added that 'no democrat can oppose the idea of majority rule'.<sup>2</sup> Slovo was quoted as saying 'We should stop playing with words. We know only one kind of democracy and that is majority rule'.<sup>3</sup>

Two explanations for these remarkably apodictic statements may be advanced. One is that the term 'majority' is very flexible and ambiguous, consequently, 'majority rule' does not necessarily mean rule by a bare majority (50 per cent plus one). As Sartori points out, 'there are at least three magnitudes subsumed, often confusedly, under the majority rule heading: (a) qualified majorities (often a two-thirds majority); (b) simple or absolute majority (50.01 per cent); (c) relative majority, or plurality, that is, the major minority (a less than 50 per cent majority)'.<sup>4</sup> Sartori is undoubtedly right but if majority rule can mean rule by groups ranging

from mere plurality to complete unanimity, it becomes so broad as to be meaningless. Moreover, it seems quite clear to me that the likes of Safire and Slovo do not have such a broad definition in mind when they equate democracy with majority rule: they mean a bare but absolute '50 per cent plus one' majority.

The second explanation has greater merit. It may well be argued that statements like those of Safire and Slovo should not be taken literally and do not mean absolute and unrestrained majority rule. Even when they do not explicitly add that majority rule must be limited by minority rights, they implicitly mean to make this reservation. For instance, Dahl argues that 'no one has ever advocated, and no one except its enemies has ever defined democracy to mean that a majority would or should do anything it felt an impulse to do. Every advocate of democracy . . . and every friendly definition of it, includes the idea of restraints on majorities'.<sup>5</sup> As an illustration, Dahl quotes from Abraham Lincoln's First Inaugural Address: 'Unanimity is impossible; the rule of a minority, as a permanent arrangement, is wholly inadmissible; so that, rejecting the majority principle, anarchy or despotism in some form is all that is left'. As Dahl points out, Lincoln certainly did not mean to quarrel with the many limits on majority rule in the United States Constitution. Neither did Alexis de Tocqueville, who nevertheless made the following very strong majority-rule statement: 'The very essence of democratic government consists in the absolute sovereignty of the majority; for there is nothing in democratic states which is capable of resisting it'.<sup>6</sup> I shall return to Lincoln's and de Tocqueville's statements later.

Even if we concede the point that restraints on majorities are usually assumed when majority rule is used as the defining criterion of democracy, Dahl points out that this still leaves the issue of what form these restraints take or should take: (1) ethical and cultural restraints, primarily operative at the level of individual consciences, (2) social checks and balances, or (3) legal and constitutional restraints?<sup>7</sup> The first type consists of informal limits, the third of formal restraints, and the second a combination of the two. For instance, a flexible multiparty system can operate as an informal social mechanism checking straight majority rule, but the emergence and maintenance of such a party system can be



Swiss democracy is the most consociational: a *Landsgemeinde* in the Canton of Appenzell Inner Rhoden exercising direct democracy. Adult inhabitants of the canton, including women for the first time in 1991, vote by raising their hands. P. Koch/Rapho.

encouraged by the formal-legal framework of the electoral system used in a country.

Yet informal restraints on majority rule only barely modify absolute majority rule. One may hope and trust that majorities will act with prudence and restraint, but any limits the majority imposes upon itself can also be removed by it. As Spitz points out, such 'self-denying and self-controlled limits should not blind us to the actual ability of majorities to control all of government – legislative, executive, and, if they have a mind to, judicial – and thus to control everything politics can touch. Nothing clarifies the total sway of majorities more than their ability to alter and adjust the standard of legitimacy.' And she adds, revealing herself to be a committed majoritarian: 'In democratic theory it is hard to imagine who else might make such decisions'.<sup>8</sup> Kendall reached the same conclusion about John Locke's position with regard to majority rule. Despite Locke's

strong concern for and commitment to individual rights, his preferred political system relied exclusively on informal restraints on the majority – which means that, in the final analysis, Locke can be regarded as a majority-rule democrat.<sup>9</sup>

The situation is quite different when the restraints are of a formal-legal or formal-constitutional nature which cannot be changed by bare majorities. But it is absurd to qualify such a dispensation as majority rule without adding the proviso that it is not unlimited. Sartori argues that majority rule used to be 'only a shorthand formula for *limited* majority rule, for a restrained majority rule that respects minority rights. Until a few decades ago this was well understood. I doubt that this is still the case today.'<sup>10</sup> Perhaps it has 'gone without saying' for so long that majority rule does not mean absolute majority rule that we have started to forget this crucial proviso. I am not arguing here

that there is not a good case to be made for majority rule on logical and theoretical grounds – a case that is made both by Spitz and, reluctantly, by Locke. But it is both wrong and dangerous to argue, explicitly or implicitly, that majority rule is the only or the only legitimate form of democracy.

## Majority rule in practice

So far I have discussed majority rule merely as an abstract principle. Let me now bring this discussion down to the empirical earth by asking: what would a democratic government based squarely on majoritarian principles actually look like? In answer, I shall make three simplifying assumptions. One is that the government we have in mind is a representative rather than a direct democracy. Given the large populations of most countries, direct democracy is exceedingly rare, so this assumption hardly requires an apology. My second assumption is that representation takes place primarily via political parties, which entails somewhat greater simplification but is still quite realistic and reasonable. The third assumption is somewhat more far-reaching: I shall assume a parliamentary form of government rather than a presidential form or some hybrid of the two. Later, I shall discuss the complications added by presidentialism.

Since majority rule means that political power is, or should be, concentrated in the hands of the majority, my question can be phrased as: which political forms, institutions, and practices are optimal for concentrating power in the majority's hands? Majority rule is maximized, first of all, if one political party, supported by a majority in the legislature, controls the cabinet. Second, this one-party majority cabinet should predominate over the legislature, in which one or more other parties will also be represented. Third, the legislature should obviously be unicameral in order to ensure that there is only one clear majority, that is, in order to avoid the possibility of competing majorities that may occur when there are two chambers. Fourth, the governmental system should be unitary and centralized in order to ensure that there are no clearly designated geographical and/or functional areas which the cabinet and the parliamentary majority fail to control. Fifth, the cabinet and the parliamentary

majority should not be constrained by constitutional limitations; this means that there should not be any constitution at all, or merely an 'unwritten' constitution, or a written constitution that can be amended by simple majority vote. Sixth, the courts should not have the power to limit the majority's power by exercising judicial review, though if the constitution can be amended by majority vote (according to the previous characteristic), the impact of judicial review would be minimal anyway because it can easily be overridden by the majority.

These six characteristics of majoritarian democracy are all logically derived from the principle of concentrating power in the hands of the majority. Three further characteristics can be added, not on logical grounds but because empirical analysis has shown that they increase the chances that one-party dominance will in fact occur. The first is a two-party system: when two major parties dominate the party system, it is highly likely that one of them will emerge as the winning or majority party in every election. In turn, a two-party system is enhanced by a plurality form of elections (according to 'Duverger's Law', to which only minor exceptions have been discovered)<sup>11</sup> and to the extent that there is only one dominant cleavage, typically the socio-economic or left-right division, in a country and its party system.<sup>12</sup>

The nine contrasting characteristics of consensus democracy – or non-majoritarian democracy – can be formulated by logical derivation from the nine characteristics of majoritarian democracy, that is, by taking the opposites of each: (1) broad coalition cabinets instead of one-party bare-majority cabinets; (2) a balanced power relationship between the cabinet and the legislature instead of cabinet predominance; (3) a bicameral legislature, particularly one in which the two chambers have roughly equal powers and are differently constituted, instead of unicameralism; (4) a federal and decentralized structure instead of unitary and centralized government; (5) a 'rigid' constitution that can only be amended by extraordinary majorities, instead of a 'flexible' written or unwritten constitution; (6) judicial review of the constitutionality of legislation; (7) a multiparty instead of a two-party system; (8) a multidimensional party system, in which the parties differ from each other on one or more issue dimensions in addition to socio-economic issues, for instance,

along religious, cultural–ethnic, urban–rural, or foreign policy dimensions; and (9) elections by proportional representation instead of by plurality.<sup>13</sup>

I borrowed the terms ‘majoritarian’ and ‘consensus’ democracy from Robert G. Dixon, Jr, and my lists of contrasting characteristics are similar, though not identical, to his.<sup>14</sup> Other scholars have made similar distinctions between the two basic types of democracy. What I call majoritarian democracy is called ‘populistic’ democracy by both Dahl and Riker; and what I call consensus democracy corresponds roughly to Riker’s ‘liberal’ democracy and to a combination of Dahl’s ‘Madisonian’ and ‘polyarchal’ democracy.<sup>15</sup>

### The rarity of majority rule in contemporary democracies

Even a very casual application of the above lists of contrasting characteristics to contemporary democracies reveals the numerous exceptions to majority rule: for instance, coalition cabinets, multiparty systems, proportional representation, bicameral legislatures, judicial review, and federalism are all common democratic patterns. Moreover, a more systematic mapping of contemporary democracies according to these criteria shows that majoritarian democracy is very much the exception rather than the rule. I have made such an effort in *Democracies* for the 21 countries that have been democratic without major interruptions from approximately the end of the Second World War until 1980: 15 West European democracies plus the United States, Canada, Israel, Japan, Australia, and New Zealand.<sup>16</sup> (Because French democracy underwent major changes in the transition from the Fourth to the Fifth Republic, I treated the two Republics as separate cases.) In a subsequent co-authored analysis, the cases of the three newly democratic Southern European countries were added: Spain, Portugal, and Greece (based on their democratic experience from the mid-1970s to the mid-1980s).<sup>17</sup>

The positions between majoritarianism and consensus occupied by these 25 democracies are shown in Figure 1. Empirical analysis demonstrates that the several traits distinguishing the two basic forms of democracy cluster along two principal dimensions, on which the figure

is based. The first may be called the executives–parties dimension since it groups the closely related variables of the type of cabinet, cabinet power, the party system, and the electoral system. The second dimension consists of the closely related variables of degree of centralization, type of legislature, and degree of constitutional flexibility. Since, in classical federal theory, these are also the characteristics distinguishing federalism from unitary government, this second dimension may also be called the federal–unitary one.<sup>18</sup> In order to calculate the scores for each country along the two dimensions, the individual variables were operationalized and, since they were measured on different scales, their values were standardized (so as to obtain a mean of 0 and a standard deviation of 1). The values along the two dimensions are the averages (again standardized) of the variables included in them. Positive values in Figure 1 indicate majoritarianism, negative values consensus.

Figure 1 shows that only two countries can unambiguously be labelled majority-rule democracies: New Zealand and, to a lesser extent, the United Kingdom. All other democracies diverge considerably from the majoritarian model.<sup>19</sup> Moreover, a closer inspection of the British and New Zealand cases reveals that they may be regarded as mainly but not purely majoritarian, and that, significantly, their deviations from pure majority rule have to do with the management of serious societal cleavages. New Zealand uses an adjusted system of plurality elections in which several districts are reserved for the Maori minority so as to guarantee Maori representation in parliament – which would be much less likely if pure plurality were used. In the United Kingdom, government policy toward deeply divided Northern Ireland has evolved in a clearly consensual direction: the British have instituted proportional representation in this province for all elections except those to the House of Commons, the aim being to establish a broad coalition government including both the Protestant majority and the Catholic minority. Of course, the British bicameral legislature is also a deviation from pure majoritarianism but, since the power of the House of Lords is extremely limited, this represents only a slight exception.

The remaining 23 democracies deviate even more clearly from pure majority rule, although



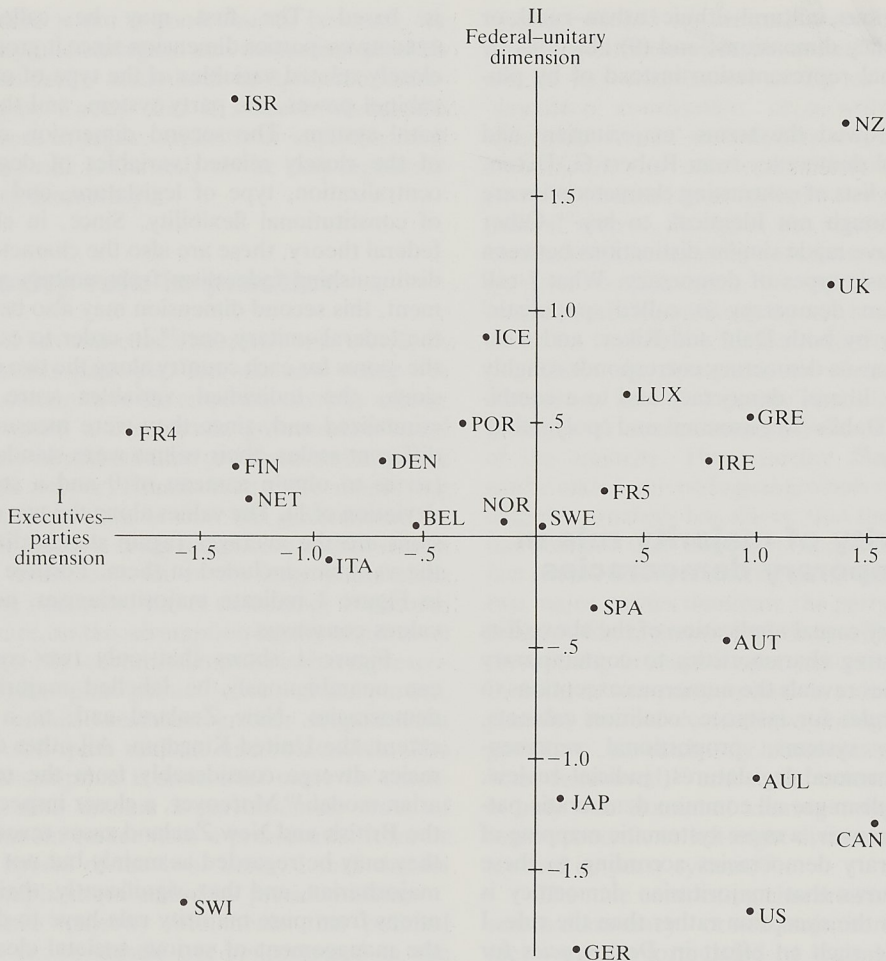


Figure 1. Twenty-five democratic regimes plotted on the two majoritarian-consensual dimensions

Note: AUL stands for Australia. AUSA Austria, FR4 the Fourth French Republic and FR5 the Fifth French Republic.

Source: Arend Lijphart, Thomas C. Bruneau, P. Nikiforos Diamandouros and Richard Gunther, 'A Mediterranean Model of Democracy? The Southern European Democracies in Comparative Perspective', *West European Politics*, Vol. 11, No. 1, January 1988, p. 12.

only one – Switzerland – is a virtually pure consensus democracy. Most countries are located somewhere between the extremes of majority rule and consensus. Moreover, the picture presented by Figure 1 still exaggerates majoritarian tendencies because computation of the majoritarianism–consensus scores, as explained above, based on the relative positions of countries between majoritarianism and consensus virtually guarantees that equal (or almost equal) numbers of countries will be located to the right and to the left of the vertical axis, and

above and below the horizontal axis. If we were to use absolute values, there would be a general shift toward the left and the bottom of Figure 1 – that is, in the direction of consensus democracy – because for almost all differences between majority rule and consensus, the consensus characteristics are much more common.<sup>20</sup>

In the 25 democracies in Figure 1, coalition governments occur much more frequently than one-party cabinets; legislatures tend to be considerably more influential than the docile House of Commons in London; 15 countries have

bicameral legislatures; 21 have written constitutions protected by a qualified-majority amendment procedure and/or judicial review; 19 countries use proportional or semi-proportional representation; and multiparty and multidimensional party systems are much more common than two-party and one-dimensional party systems. The only characteristic on which majority rule appears to be the winner is unitary government: only six of the 25 democracies are formally federal: the United States, Canada, the Federal Republic of Germany, Switzerland, Austria, and Australia. On the other hand, two (Belgium and Spain) should be regarded as at least semi-federal, and several of the formally unitary states (notably the Scandinavian countries and Japan) are in fact quite decentralized – comparable to federal Australia and Austria.<sup>21</sup> This single exception does not affect the overall pattern, which is much closer to the consensus than to the majoritarian model of democracy.

An additional remarkable, but often overlooked, fact is that in the two mainly majority-rule democracies, New Zealand and the United Kingdom, the majorities that rule are usually artificial ones in the legislature, and are not based on popular majorities. ‘Winning’ parties in Britain since 1945 and in New Zealand since 1954 have never won majorities of the total vote. In this important respect, even these two countries cannot really be regarded as good examples of majority rule.

One possible objection to the above arguments is that it is based on only 25 cases which are not a representative sample of the world’s democracies: they are mainly West European and all belong to the industrialized world. If we were to cast our net more widely, we should also include some of the more recently independent countries with a British political heritage, such as Jamaica and Trinidad and Tobago, which practise democracy roughly along British lines. On the other hand, we should then also include federal India, federal and strongly coalitional Malaysia, and the Latin American democracies, virtually all of which use proportional representation. My estimate is that the overall pattern would not change appreciably if we extended our sample from the original 25 to, say, the roughly 50 contemporary democracies.

A further counter-argument is that majoritarian traditions in the non-Western world are stronger than in the 24 Western countries (Japan

being the only non-Western country in the set of 25 in Figure 1). This point is made forcefully by the Philippine statesman and scholar Raul S. Manglapus in his recent book *Will of the People*, significantly subtitled *Original Democracy in Non-Western Societies*, the main aim of which is to disprove ‘the notion that despotism is the natural non-Western way of life’ – a notion expressed by Claire Booth Luce, whom he quotes, to the effect that ‘three quarters of the nations of the world [that is, the non-Western world] are not culturally adapted to democracy’.<sup>22</sup> He presents massive evidence of democratic traditions and practices in all parts of the non-Western world, and particularly important for our purposes – almost all his examples show that the non-Western democratic tradition is much more consensual than majoritarian. In his own words, ‘the common characteristic’ is ‘the element of consensus as opposed to adversarial [majoritarian] decisions’,<sup>23</sup> and he repeatedly describes the non-Western democratic process as a ‘consensual process’ based on a strong ‘concern for harmony’.<sup>24</sup>

Earlier writers had reached the same conclusion. For instance, Rupert Emerson is in error when he identifies the ‘assumption of the majority’s right to overrule a dissident minority after a period of debate’ as a ‘Western assumption’ – this being specifically British – but he is undoubtedly right when he argues that this assumption ‘does violence to conceptions basic to non-Western peoples’. Although there are important differences among the traditions of Asian and African societies, ‘their native inclination is generally toward extensive and unhurried deliberation aimed at ultimate consensus. The gradual discovery of areas of agreement is the significant feature and not the ability to come to a speedy resolution of issues by counting heads’.<sup>25</sup> Similarly, Michael Haas argues that there is a typical ‘Asian way’ of decision-making based on such ideas as *mufakat*, a Malay term for the ‘principle of unanimity built through discussion rather than voting’, and *mushawarah*, the ‘traditional Indonesian method of coming to agreement not through majority decision but by a search for something like the Quaker ‘sense of the meeting’.<sup>26</sup> And in his famous study of West African politics, Sir Arthur Lewis emphasizes the strong consensual democratic traditions in this area: ‘The tribe has made its decision by discussion, in much the way that coalitions

function; this kind of democratic procedure is at the heart of the original institutions of the people'.<sup>27</sup>

The evidence is overwhelming that majoritarian democracy is the exception rather than the rule in actual practices and traditions in all parts of the world. In fact, it is highly exceptional, limited to very few countries – mainly the United Kingdom and countries heavily influenced by the British political tradition.

## Majority rule as a Kuhnian paradigm

How can this striking discrepancy between the theoretical prominence and the empirical rarity of majority rule be explained? The answer, it seems to me, is that majority rule is a 'paradigm' as defined by Thomas S. Kuhn: a basic concept, model, or approach, that is widely accepted – and rarely seriously examined – in a particular field of study. It is a typical feature of such a paradigm that discrepancies between facts and theory are not sufficient to lead to its abandonment: 'There are always difficulties somewhere in the paradigm–nature fit', but these tend to be either disregarded or viewed as remediable by means of small adjustments.<sup>28</sup> In the case of the majority rule paradigm, discrepancies are generally explained away by saying that they are just slight exceptions to an interpretation of democracy that remains basically valid. Its tenacity can also be partly explained in terms of its beautiful, and hence seductive, simplicity – much simpler and more attractive than the notion (stated, for instance, by Jean-Jacques Rousseau), that the democratic decision-making rule may range from majority to unanimity, depending on the importance and urgency of the issues involved.<sup>29</sup>

Kuhn also argues, however, that when a discrepancy becomes a major anomaly, it is no longer possible to ignore it or to explain it away, and the flawed paradigm is toppled in a 'scientific revolution'.<sup>30</sup> It is hard to regard the discrepancy between the theory and practice of majority rule as anything less than a striking anomaly. We therefore need further explanations why the expected scientific revolution has failed to occur. Let me advance, somewhat tentatively and speculatively, four such explanations.

One explanation is that while political science is practised world-wide, it is especially strong in – some would say dominated by – the Anglo-American countries. And in this area, the weight of British practices and traditions is proportionally much greater than in the world as a whole. However, this argument begs the question of why the non-majoritarian features of the United States political system have not been able to serve as a sufficient counterweight to British majoritarianism. The US Constitution is based on such Madisonian principles as separation and division of powers, checks and balances, minority protection, extraordinary majorities, and so on – the very opposites of simple majoritarianism. Dahl, for instance, describes Madisonian democracy and populist (majoritarian) democracy as the two principal contrasting conceptions.<sup>31</sup> The additional explanation is that many American political scientists, from Woodrow Wilson to the Committee on Political Parties of the American Political Science Association, have tended to be Anglophiles, strong admirers of British politics, and interested in reforming US politics along British majoritarian lines.<sup>32</sup>

A different explanation – my third – is that, if the essence of Madisonianism is the restraint of the majority's power, the US political system has some striking un-Madisonian characteristics. The most important of these are the concentration of executive power in the hands of one individual, the election of the president by a majoritarian method, the one-party composition of the cabinet, the predominance of the plurality method in legislative elections at all levels, and the two-party system. For all of these reasons, the United States is classified as mainly majoritarian on one of the dimensions – the executives–parties dimension – in Figure 1. Only with regard to the federal–unitary dimension is the United States strongly consensual. In the light of these majoritarian characteristics, the statements by Lincoln and de Tocqueville, cited earlier, become more understandable. It is also important to realize to realize that presidential government has ambivalent consequences for the degree of majoritarian or consensus government: on the one hand, it means separation of powers – a consensual characteristic – but on the other hand it means highly concentrated executive power and, since for the election of a single official proportional representation can-



A problem that might be resolved more easily in a consensual rather than majoritarian democracy: Navajo-Hopi Indians demonstrating for their lands in 1986 in the USA. M. Roessel/Rapho.

not be used, necessarily entails the application of plurality or a similar majoritarian electoral method.

A fourth explanation is suggested by Dogan and Pahre who argue that scientific innovation is more likely to occur at the margins than in the core of fields and disciplines.<sup>33</sup> The study of democracy, dominated by political scientists, has been at the very core of political science, which may have been an obstacle to innovative and original thinking. Prominent mainstream political scientists – like Dahl and Sartori whom I have quoted frequently – have made a major contribution to the better understanding of majority rule by pointing out that it is not the only form of democracy. But it seems significant that the most important frontal assault on majority rule (by a convinced democrat) was launched by a political scientist working in the new public choice tradition – Riker, arguing the logical flaws and inconsistencies of majority rule and the superiority of liberal democracy<sup>34</sup> – and

that the first modern consensus theorist was Sir Arthur Lewis, an economist rather than a political scientist. It is worth presenting the essence of Lewis's position in his own wise words: 'The word "democracy" has two meanings. Its primary meaning is that all who are affected by a decision should have the chance to participate in making that decision, either directly or through chosen representatives. Its secondary meaning is that the will of the majority shall prevail.' The second meaning, Lewis writes, violates the primary rule if representatives are grouped into a government and an opposition, as in Britain, because it excludes the minority from decision-making for an extended period. Majority rule can still be acceptable in homogeneous societies, but in countries with deep societal divisions, 'it is totally immoral, inconsistent with the primary meaning of democracy, and destructive of any prospect of building a nation in which different peoples might live together in harmony'.<sup>35</sup>

These four explanations of why no revolution against the paradigm of majority rule has taken place should obviously not be read as justifications for the absence of such a revolution. To restate my argument at the beginning of this article, I believe that the narrow and unrealistic equation of democracy with majority rule is not only theoretically untenable but also misleading and hence practically very dangerous when used as a guideline for writing new democratic constitutions. In my opinion, we should

revolt against majority rule as the sole criterion of democracy, replace it with the broader conception of democracy that also includes consensus democracy, accept that, in practice, the world's democracies and democratic traditions are much closer to the consensus model than to the majoritarian model, and take the consensus model as our point of departure – particularly, as urged by Lewis, in designing democratic constitutions for the many divided societies in today's world.

## Notes

1. J. Roland Pennock, *Democratic Political Theory*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979, p. 370.
2. William Safire, 'The Suzman Plan', *New York Times*, 7 August 1986.
3. *San Diego Union*, 7 May 1990, based on a report from the New York Times News Service.
4. Giovanni Sartori, *The Theory of Democracy Revisited*. Chatham, N.J.: Chatham House Publishers, 1987, p. 221.
5. Robert A. Dahl, *A Preface to Democratic Theory*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1956, p. 36.
6. Abraham Lincoln, *First Inaugural Address*, and Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, cited in Dahl, *A Preface to Democratic Theory*, p. 35. Let me add a contemporary example of a statement by a practising politician, President Jimmy Carter. In his 1978 address to the United States Naval Academy, he proclaimed that his government was strongly committed to democracy and 'particularly dedicated to genuine self-determination and majority rule in those areas of the world where these goals have not yet been attained'. In a later part of his speech, he described American democracy in quite different – consensual instead of majoritarian – terms: 'We are . . . strong because of what we stand for as a nation [including] the right of every individual to speak out, to participate fully in government and to share political power'. 'Speech of the President on Soviet-American Relations at the U.S. Naval Academy'. *New York Times*, 8 June 1978.
7. Dahl, op. cit., p. 36.
8. Elaine Spitz, *Majority Rule*. Chatham, N.J.: Chatham House Publishers, 1984, p. 203.
9. Willmoore Kendall, *John Locke and the Doctrine of Majority Rule*. Urbana, Ill.: University of Illinois Press, 1941.
10. Sartori, op., cit., p. 31.
11. See William H. Riker, 'Duverger's Law Revisited', and Maurice Duverger, 'Duverger's Law: Forty Years Later', in Bernard Grofman and Arend Lijphart (eds.), *Electoral Laws and Their Political Consequences*. New York: Agathon Press, 1986, pp. 19–42, 69–84.
12. See Rein Taagepera and Bernard Grofman, 'Rethinking Duverger's Law: Predicting the Effective Number of Parties in Plurality and PR Systems – Parties Minus Issues Equals One'. *European Journal of Political Research*, Vol. 13, No. 4, December 1985, pp. 341–52.
13. See Arend Lijphart, *Democracies; Patterns of Majoritarian and Consensus Government in Twenty-One Countries*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984, pp. 1–36.
14. Robert G. Dixon, Jr., *Democratic Representation: Reapportionment in Law and Politics*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1968.
15. Dahl, op. cit., esp. pp. 1–89; William H. Riker, *Liberalism Against Populism: A Confrontation Between the Theory of Democracy and the Theory of Social Choice*. San Francisco: W. H. Freeman, 1982.
16. Lijphart, op. cit., esp. pp. 211–22.
17. Arend Lijphart, Thomas C. Bruneau, P. Nikiforos Diamandouros and Richard Gunther, 'A Mediterranean Model of Democracy? The Southern European Democracies in Comparative Perspective'. *West European Politics*, Vol. 11, No. 1, January 1988, pp. 7–25.
18. See, for instance, K. C. Wheare, *Federal Government*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1946; Daniel J. Elazar,

- 'Federalism', in David L. Sills, (ed.), *International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences*, Vol. 5. New York: Macmillan and Free Press, 1968; Carl J. Friedrich, *Limited Government: A Comparison*. Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1974; Ivo D. Duchacek, *Comparative Federalism: The Territorial Dimension of Politics*. New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1970.
19. See Robert W. Jackman, 'Elections and the Democratic Class Struggle', *World Politics*, Vol. 39, No. 1, October 1986, pp. 132-5; Anthony Downs, 'The Evolution of Democracy: How Its Axioms and Institutional Forms Have Been Adapted to Changing Social Forces', *Daedalus*, Vol. 116, No. 3, Summer 1987, pp. 129-34.
20. This point is made with special force by Robert A. Dahl, *Democracy and Its Critics*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989, pp. 156-60.
21. For the decentralization scores, see Lijphart, op. cit., p. 178.
22. Raul S. Manglapus, *Will of the People: Original Democracy in Non-Western Societies*. New York: Greenwood Press, 1987, pp. 5, 10.
23. *ibid.*, p. 69.
24. For instance, Manglapus, *ibid.*, pp. 78, 82, 103, 107, 123, 129.
25. Rupert Emerson, *From Empire to Nation: The Rise of Self-Assertion of Asian and African People*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1960, p. 284.
26. Michael Haas, 'The "Asian Way" to Peace', *Pacific Community*, Vol. 4, No. 4, July 1973, pp. 503-5. The definition of *mushawarah* is from Herbert Feith, 'Indonesia', in George McT. Kahin (ed.), *Governments and Politics of Southeast Asia*. Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1959, p. 192.
27. W. Arthur Lewis, *Politics in West Africa*. London: Allen & Unwin, 1965, p. 86.
28. Thomas S. Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970.
29. Rousseau speaks of a range of qualified majorities between a simple majority and unanimity, and argues that two maxims should determine the proper position on this range: 'One, that the more important and serious the deliberations, the closer the winning opinion should be to unanimity. The other, that the more speed the business at hand requires, the smaller the prescribed difference in the division of opinions should be. In deliberations that must be finished on the spot, a majority of a single vote should suffice. The first of these maxims appears more suited to laws; the second, to business matters. However, that may be, it is a combination of the two that establishes the proper ratio of the deciding majority'. *Social Contract*, Book 4, Chapter 2, cited in Dahl, 1989 op. cit., p. 355.
30. Kuhn, op. cit., pp. 82-90.
31. Dahl, 1956, op. cit., pp. 4-62.
32. See especially Woodrow Wilson, 'Cabinet Government in the United States' and 'Committee or Cabinet Government?', in Ray Stannard Baker and William E. Dodd (eds.), *College and State: Educational, Literary and Political Papers (1875-1913) by Woodrow Wilson*. New York: Harper, 1925, Vol. 1, pp. 19-42, 95-129; and Committee on Political Parties, American Political Science Association, *Toward a More Responsible Two-Party System*. New York: Rinehart & Company, 1950.
33. Mattei Dogan and Robert Pahre, *Creative Marginality: Innovation at the Intersections of Social Sciences*. Boulder, Col.: Westview Press, 1990.
34. Riker, op. cit.
35. Lewis, op. cit., pp. 64-6.



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The previous issue (No. 128, May 1991) of the *ISSJ* mainly dealt with the extension of representative, pluralist regimes to new areas of application. This issue broaches a number of questions concerning the substance of such regimes. The intellectual debate on democracy is a continuing, albeit often neglected, necessity in the old democracies. In addition, the thirst for democracy felt in so many developing countries with vastly different economic, social and cultural features makes it an even more urgent requirement. We hope that the articles in this issue, written by some of the leading scholars in the field will contribute significantly to this debate.

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