2. The Rise of Complexity: Internal Differentiation of Political Systems

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Introduction

The previous chapter described the evolution of the political system and of individuality as the guiding principle for the emergence of democracy – the embodiment of the imperative to include the individual in the political system. In this chapter, we take a closer look at how these and other developments are linked to political systems' *milieu intérieur*. A political system – and thereby the whole population of political systems – adjusts to the dynamics of modern society and the challenge to hold ready collectively binding decision-making capacities by constant internal functional differentiation. This multifaceted and continuing internal differentiation over time, and, as a result of it, the rise of the enormous complexity of modern polities, are the focus of this chapter. To facilitate a detailed analysis and attain the research interests pursued in this book, we make a heuristic distinction between two dimensions of internal functional differentiation of political systems – vertical and horizontal – and we study these dimensions separately, to the extent possible.

The first dimension we examine is the emergence of *vertical levels* of decision making in a political system. Traditionally, polities – from small city states to hegemonic empires – have featured levels that vary greatly in size, number, and complexity, from simple to multilevel structures. Various types of polities and divergent ways of internally organizing these polities have co-existed over the course of pre- and early modern world history. However, since the establishment of the Westphalian international order in the 17th century and, at the latest, in the aftermath of the two world wars in the 20th century, countries (often nation states) have come to represent the dominant form of global political segmentation (Meyer et al., 1997). In the process, the polities in the current world society have come to look intriguingly similar. Countries are now the standard notion of a modern polity and they constitute the most crucial ordering unit in the population of political systems in modern world society. Comparative analyses of political systems, therefore, usually focus on countries' characteristics as represented

by the properties of their state organization at the national level, an organization that emerged to represent the political system's decision-making organization and core self-conceptualization (Luhmann, 1995). However, to grasp modern political systems in all their complexity, it is not sufficient to study the nation-state level alone. Indeed, multiple other levels are relevant for collectively binding decision making, from local communities to global governance, and these levels must be integrated into both the study of political differentiation in general and comparative analyses in particular and over time. Therefore, the first half of this chapter briefly traces the evolution of forms of multiple levels of political rule before concentrating on an analysis of the multilevel differentiation of polities found in contemporary world society. The text then reviews the common structure and (inter)relations of government and governance at different levels and discusses recent trends of decentralization that now compete with the formerly sacrosanct status of country-level polity formation.

Notably, with regard to vertical level structures, today's world displays a remarkable continuity or path-dependence. Whereas segmentation at the country level, as well as attempts at supra-level decision-making structures, is a rather new and sometimes forced phenomenon that often results in artificial and rather unstable ordering units, smaller-scale (i.e., regional and local) segmentation is a much more sustainable phenomenon that is hardly ever altered at a later point, even under conditions of regime change or revolution. We discuss both how this pattern may explain the existence of a dichotomous plurality of political regime characteristics within a single polity, and why this may further justify, heuristically and analytically, regarding vertical differentiation as (sub)system building per se. We opt to treat these all as empirical questions and we discuss why and how we do so.

The second dimension of internal differentiation the chapter explores is the horizontal differentiation of political systems into *functional subsystems*, *institutions*, and *organizations*. Beyond what is understood as "the state", which comprises institutions of ultimate decision making at a given level of the polity, there are many additional elements constitutive of a political system. These elements include, for instance, the internal structures of the modern state, most prominently *government*, including political leadership roles, ministries and parliaments, and administration across different levels, but also *organizations*, such as parties, mass organizations, and lobby groups; crucial political *processes*, such as elections and diplomacy; and forms of a political public from which a *public opinion* is derived and channeled into political decision making. We briefly discuss some of these constitutive elements of modern political systems and highlight some striking examples of their ongoing differentiation and other recent dynamics affecting them.

Our examination of horizontal differentiation produces several significant findings: Modern political systems in today's world society, both democratic and

authoritarian variants, adhere to a basic global set of subsystems and institutions, a specific semantics, a repertoire of procedures and symbols, and formal inclusion roles. Arguably, this similarity developed and continues to develop in coevolution with vertical differentiation, although horizontal differentiation appears to be the more dynamic variant. Moreover, while the convergence of polity properties is noteworthy in and of itself, it also seems to generate further challenges. Over the course of internal differentiation of political systems during the last century, a double conceptualization and semantics of democracy emerged: The political system in modern society with all its internal horizontal differentiation came to be treated as equivalent to democracy and has been termed democracy. At the same time, given the evolution and resilience of *modern* autocracies that are also grounded on an adherence to forms of functional differentiation, democracy has become a regime type, implying the degree of differentiation and the values that steer political decision making in a polity – an aspect discussed in more detail in Chapter 6. We refer to this convolution of converging differentiation and diverging regime characteristics in our description of the contemporary internal properties of political systems and we discuss how this complex relationship can inspire future in-depth empirical research. Finally, some very new pathways of horizontal differentiation emerge in the 21st century, which seem to already have a tangible impact on the constitution of political subsystems, organizations, institutions and processes and on how political decisions are made. These pathways include, for example, the increased internationalization of political organizations and their activities, the virtualization of public opinion, and the jolting of traditional party systems by new expectations and a global wave of populism.

The theoretical focus in this chapter lies in the observations and resulting hypothesis mentioned above, namely, that we find globally reproduced (i.e., standard) and ongoing forms of internal differentiation and related semantics of the political system and that, arguably, these patterns of rising complexity are in the first instance widely independent of regime types, which can range from democracy to authoritarianism. One natural caveat to this conclusion is that the existence of multiple levels of decision making and a specific set of political institutions, organizations and other features in the world today does not necessarily represent true functional equivalence, or the global diffusion of institutional models (Stichweh, 2000), but rather might be a type of irrelevant nominal or formal copying. Thus, in addition to describing the internal differentiation of political systems, the chapter incorporates analyses of the degree of autonomy of decision making as well as the available inclusion roles (performance and public roles as introduced in the previous chapter) and the access to these roles at the different levels and in the different domains of the political system. Altogether, this chapter contends that the existence of differential inclusion roles at different levels and in different subsystems of the political system increases the chances of the co-exis-

tence of diverging forms of inclusion (and exclusion) and bipolar regime features, democratic and authoritarian, in one and the same polity – an observation that Chapter 6 will take up again. While this is not a new phenomenon, it seems that a modern, functionally differentiated society and – maybe counter-intuitively – the persistent internal differentiation of the modern political system make this coexistence more likely.

I.   Pre-modern Polities: Unique, Stratified, Unintegrated

Before we turn to the vertical and horizontal differentiation of the political system in two separate approaches, some brief deliberation about the evolution of polities over the course of pre-modern history seems warranted. The previous chapter explicated the evolution of the political system as a function system in society. Here, we provide a short overview of the major features of yet "un(der)differentiated" polities. This is, by necessity, an extremely general and abstract depiction that does not claim to be either exhaustive or valid for all possible cases and the whole variety of polities in ancient and pre-modern history. For example, we do not provide an accurate and comprehensive explanation of the history of (nation) state building;[1] neither does this section discuss different types of government or regimes (e.g., monarchies or republics), which are touched upon later in this chapter, and again in Chapter 6. This brief analytical synopsis is rather meant to substantiate the argument that the evolution of the system of nation states, which became the principal idea of a modern polity and the common self-conception of the organization of political systems in contemporary world society, was a dramatic development that is immediately relevant for many of the other analytical observations that form the core topics of this chapter.

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1   Even the concept of *the state* itself remains highly amorphous and contested in the social sciences. Some claim the concept is analytically applicable to all forms of the organization of rule in a polity that are somewhat more complex than ancient chiefdoms, while others apply it more strictly to the increasing self-conceptualization of the organization of rule and especially the monopoly of the legitimate use of physical force that emerged in the Middle Ages and underwent significant transformations in the following centuries; see the reflections of Durkheim, for instance, as edited by Giddens, 1986, and also Elias, 2000; Mann, 2012. The same contestation exists for the term "nation state" and its suitability for describing the development and type of polities that exist today. Tilly (e.g., 1975), for instance, introduced the differences between *national states* and *nation-states*. Here, however, as the intricacies and explanation of state building are not our main interest, we use the more common terms "nation state" and "country" to denote the predominant type of polity in world society in the last 400 years and especially the last approximately 75 years.

The diverse populations of traditional polities

Historically, there were large differences between polities. In pre-modern times, there was no standard size and form of polity: Everything and everyone rulers had the means to claim and defend, by, for instance, the extortion of material or religious/civilizational power or marriage, belonged to their sphere of reign. Principles of rule by domination over *subjects* and over *territory* co-existed and often overlapped. In fact, absent universal principles of law and integrity, the concept of sovereignty did not yet exist, and expansion as well as loss of territory and people was always possible. The size of a polity was therefore flexible and units varied greatly, while in addition, for ages, small city states could coexist with a huge trans-regional empire in the same or another region of the world. Even un-ruled or unruly "gray areas" in-between were a possibility. At the same time, rule over a given polity conflated several functions; there was no functionally differentiated political system. States were rather a system of all-out domination by a ruling group in one society, which was usually small and exclusively defined, by, for example, religion and divinity, nobility, charisma or ethnicity.

With the possible exception of ancient city states, patterns of political rule were the most important bearer of the stratified order of society: The hierarchy of authority – including the whole state's administration – reflected the social stratification of the time, and vice versa. In a monarchy or empire, for instance, the king or emperor was at the top of this imagined pyramid and represented the richest, most knowledgeable, best trained (in law or religion, for instance), most advanced and cultivated element in society. The ruler assembled only a small "state" of almost equally equipped persons, mostly high aristocracy, who filled the most important offices, possessed the most land and other valuables and had the most privileges. At the lowest level of the social hierarchy were peasants, individual households and slaves or other unfree labor. The latter were usually in no way an imagined part of or had any direct links to the state (see below). Social and economic or religious status and state offices were intrinsically connected and often interdependent in pre-modern states. In Europe, these structures prevail until the early 20th century, and some would argue that in other world regions, especially in authoritarian settings, the situation has still not changed (Wimmer, 1996, Ch. 7; Brennan, 2015; Geertz, 1963, pp. 105-157; Luhmann, 1991; 1997, pp. 678-706).

This meant also that the authority and "responsibility" these rulers claimed over their jurisdictions was usually considered absolute, but could range in degree, from very little or no duty and sometimes even outright predation, to the organization of rites, markets, security, and later public welfare. Other *issues* that a pre-modern polity was occupied with – often conflating the domains of religion, economy, general public order, and others – included, for instance, taxation (spontaneous or regular), organization of labor (partial or full; slavery, feudal

structures, etc.), weapons and military, monopolies (such as salt, grain, alcohol, or later money [coinage]), roads and waterways. Altogether, before the establishment of representative politics and public law, this set of issues, i.e. the subject matter a ruler or a state felt responsible for, was surprisingly limited and relatively stable over time and across geographical areas – even across world regions.

Internally, the way that pre-modern polities were structured varied greatly as well. Some, especially ancient smaller polities such as segmentary and early stratified societies (i.e., tribes, chiefdoms, early feudal states), as mentioned, could have a rather simple hierarchical structure, often comprising basically one level of uni-centric rule and decision making, representing a simple binary relationship, i.e., rulers and ruled, center and periphery. Domination was rarely incurred voluntarily, and rather was established and upheld by violent and flexible, even arbitrary, top-down interventions implemented by an unsystematic array of local agents and/or an army, or, as the size of the polity increased, princes or non-kin wardens and later governors and other types of proxy rulers. In other cases, polities, often in larger territories, had several levels of rule and a sophisticated structure of institutions and offices. These structures, however, could take on different characteristics: They could be rather flexible, as in the kinship- or nobility-based personal union states of the early Middle Ages (Stammesherzogtümer; Personenverbandstaat), in which case a ruler's reach extended as far as there were vicegerents upholding the rule; they could be relatively static and spatially defined, as in the Chinese empire (especially in the form of its vast bureaucracy stretching across its entire realm[2]); or they could fall somewhere in between, like the Roman Empire or European feudal states in the late Middle Ages. That is, at least some pre-modern states already featured a differentiated structure of social strata interrelated with a complex system of political offices, a difficile law code implemented by highly trained elites, and a system of government with a structure of ministries and offices and complex bodies of administration (Durkheim, 1964; Ertman, 1997; Parsons, 1977; Stichweh, 1991; see also the latter half of this chapter).

However, internal differentiation was not systemic in these earlier variants of states. The limited differentiation just described was usually only observable at the center, in other words, at the highest level of rule and government, and was not projected downward. At lower levels in the government hierarchy, the state's complexity was usually not replicated, rather, power and decisions were simply extended. Most often, what unfolded at lower levels of traditional government or in peripheral provinces entailed something more like a decentral exertion of the

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2 This bureaucracy was coupled however with a system of *tributary* relations and *suzerain* peripheral entities, which enabled the Chinese court to establish quasi-domination over external communities and to reap the material benefits connected to this influence, without having to conquer, claim and defend these communities territorially; see, for example, Gernet, 1996.

center's power than a differentiated or even autonomous decision-making process. Of course, some decisions were made "locally" and some of those that came in the form of top-down mandates were adjusted to conditions on the ground, but there was rarely any equivalent to the framework of legally defined intergovernmental or multilevel relations that exist today. One could object that in earlier and later forms of empires and federations, for instance even in the Roman Empire, under conditions of less unitary rule, subaltern units were sometimes only loosely connected to the ultimate center of power. As long as obligations were fulfilled (mostly taxes and military duties) and no secessionist activities were entertained, decentral and peripheral units possessed significant discretion or self-government over their own local affairs. While that is a valid qualification, this type of internal ordering is still very different from a completely formally institutionalized and constitutional arrangement in which almost all aspects of political relations between different levels of government are regulated and meant to both avoid conflicting responsibilities and safeguard equality and peace between the governmental subdivisions and among all citizens. Even when constitutions existed in pre-modern polities, they usually meant the codified law of the land that prescribed some sort of social morality and governed rights and obligations in the relationships between the ruler and the ruled/the population, the relationships among the ruled themselves, and – for instance, at the earliest, in the case of the Roman law of nations – the relationships between polities (e.g., laws of war and peace). In the later Middle Ages in Europe, with the rise of the territorial state, the reliance on "cooperation" between otherwise self-governed communes was shifting to a more unitary reach of the central state throughout its entire jurisdiction on the basis of unified laws, norms and other regulations – with varying degrees of success (Landwehr, 2000). However, this was also very much based on the governing of interpersonal relationships (for instance, king – duke/governor – village community) and the aforementioned norms, rather than on multilevel governance. Even under conditions of early constitutional representative government, which embraced institutions of parliament and delineated relations between the heads of government, lords, and commons, for instance, these relationships were of a personalized nature, linking representatives of selective social strata and the regent. Under all these circumstances, it is difficult to identify a standard model of regulating the relationship between the central authority and political subdivisions, and of governing multilevel relations in pre-modern polities and states. Any that did exist followed widely different patterns. Systematic regulation of the relationship between different levels of decision making and between different branches of government was an early modern concept that arose only gradually with the birth of the international system in the late 17th century and the Enlightenment, ideas of individual political representation and modern constitutions in

the 18th century (Stollberg-Rillinger, 2000; Wormuth, 1949), and it was not universally applied before the post-imperial age in the 20th century.

What and who is a polity?

Closely linked to the above aspect and, arguably, more importantly, pre-modern states were not necessarily an integrated and essential element of the societies in which they were found. Thus, even within a somewhat defined polity, confined territorially or otherwise, the individual – although formally a subject of a certain ruler or government – was not necessarily in any way directly connected to the ruling patron. Although certain interactions and events may have made it unmistakably clear that the individual was in some sort of relationship with, was answerable to, or was bluntly subject to some authority, or even several competing authorities (e.g., "feudal anarchy" [Hintze, 1970]), theoretically, it could just as well be that these interactions or contacts never materialized. Full inclusion of every individual in the sphere of politics did not exist.[3]

Furthermore, the general principles governing who was a subject to which forms of rule varied enormously. In the majority of cases, especially in European empires and kingdoms, this question was answered by referring to territorial principles: whoever stayed in a certain territory was subject to those who could claim a prerogative there. In other cases, such as the lands governed by Chinese imperial rulers until the intrusion of imperial powers in the late 19th century, rulers tolerated diverging or temporary loyalties and were more lenient toward "foreign subjects" on their soil. In the Chinese case, aliens were exempt from the absolute claim and reach of the court as long as they had no hostile intentions and did not destabilize the Chinese state (Gernet, 1996).

Notions of universal membership did not exist in pre-modern states, or only very weakly so. The broadly defined question of whether membership in the sense of simply "belonging to" a polity (i.e., being under the authority of XYZ) was of primary importance at all, is interesting. Who counted? For a ruler or government, it was beneficial to know not only the extent and properties of the territory, but also the size of the population that fell under one's authority, in other words, how many

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3   Since this is a very broad-brush description of phenomena across different epochs, it is at certain points necessary and revealing to state some caveats. For instance, Wimmer (1996) described graphically how in ancient city states (Sumerian, Egyptian and Greek, for instance), local temple bureaucracies "regulated almost all aspects of residents' lives", in that all means and all fruits of production were pooled by them and distributed again collectively. Bookkeeping related to all these details and all involved men was a crucial task of urban (public) administration. Later, however, in pre-modern empires, these structures and the pervasiveness of bureaucracies was limited to the center and never really reached all the peripheries, especially not rural areas, according to Wimmer (1996, pp. 227-228, 291-292).

heads and, even more importantly, households belonged to it. The history of the *census*, as the institution embodying this act of counting, demonstrates the value of this information. While censuses were conducted almost everywhere, including in the ancient city states, the Incan and Chinese empires, India and the Middle East,[4] its early purposes seemed to be almost exclusively "economic'" – knowing how many subjects held what property and could be taxed accordingly or could be conscribed. Consequently, it is possible that only those relevant in these regards were counted. Later, with the development of public health, prosperity and welfare as a goal of state action, and finally the rise of the idea of representative government, censuses were systematized and included more and more information about the surveyed individuals in order to define needs and constituencies.[5] In earlier times, however, not every individual was counted, nor was there the idea of a single overall collectivity, equivalent with the exact sum of people under one's authority. The public interest, if we accept a predecessor of this idea for pre-modern polities, was always abstract, was determined by the ruler or central authority, and did not usually require a collection of individualized bottom-up information.

Citizenship in a narrower sense, understood as membership that allowed for participation in political affairs, in other words decision making (such as referenda, senate/parliament elections, running for public offices), was a concept known and practiced to varying degrees in some traditional polities, mostly early "republics", e.g. the smaller city states of ancient Greece and Rome. Later and in larger polities, the concept applied mostly to the population immediately surrounding a political center.[6] However, this was not a common principle across all types of polities: One struggles, for instance, to find even faint traces of this ideas in (East)

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4 Censuses are even described in the Bible, but primarily as something suspicious and evil: In 1 Chronicles 21, for instance, Satan incites David to conduct a census, and when he does, Israel is stricken by God in revenge. Interestingly, a distinction was made between "aliens" (2 Chronicles 2:17) and "non-aliens" equivalent to "those who drew their sword". This is not described for censuses in other (real) contexts.

5 Intriguingly, even in modern states where regular censuses are institutionalized, their underlying rules and scope are a topic of fierce debate. See, for instance, the current massive conflict in the United States over the upcoming 2020 census and whether it is legitimate to include a "citizenship" question. Time and time again throughout earlier and contemporary American history, it has been considered to be non-constitutional, as the constitution only requires that "all *people*" be counted. At the same time, the category "race" is no longer a highly contested issue in the United States. See, for example, Hobson, 2019; Michaelson, 2019.

6 On ancient Greece and Rome (*civitas*), see Morris and Scheidel, 2009; Edwards and Woolf, 2003. There are no commonly shared and accepted concepts of *citizen* and *citizenship* in the social sciences, as there are wide differences between citizenship as an empirically observed phenomenon and citizenship as a normative notion; see Gosewinkel, 2001; Janoski and Compion, 2015. Bestowing and taking on the role of a *citizen* in a voluntarily organized political public (*civil society*), is not what is meant here, but the topic will be dealt with later in connection with horizontal diffe-

Asia (Loewe, 2006). Further, no matter how inclusively or universally these forms of codified citizenship were formulated and conceived of at the time, they (and the rights and obligations attached to them) usually still applied to only some, maybe most, but never all subjects or individuals in a given polity. Throughout history until quite recently, in addition to conditions such as being "free" (i.e., not a slave), a man, and an adult, we find prerequisites, such as military merits or land ownership, that served as a basis for citizenship (Wilsher, 1983). In a stratified society, given the already highly selective group of persons directly included in political affairs, these prerequisites further emphasize the non-universal nature of both membership in the polity and participation in or influence on decision making for the polity.

Intriguingly, ascriptions and categories that later became the basis for "imagined communities" that nation states rally around, such as ethnos or religion, did not serve as primary principles of inclusion or exclusion of individual members in most traditional polities.[7] Rather, submission or allegiance – coerced or voluntary – to the ruler(s) while on his or her turf, seemed to be the norm.[8] Whereas this may not be true for all epochs and regions, and was probably most inconsistent in European and Middle Eastern history, this generalization may render the existence and self-conceptualization of large, diverse, multiethnic and multicultural, but relatively stable and long-lived political entities (Egypt, China, Arabia, Rome, and even Habsburg[9]) throughout history more comprehensible. One way of distinguishing this form of membership definition, or authority over political subjects, is via the use of the term "resident" or "denizen" instead of citizen. We will later see why this distinction may continue to make sense even in modern political systems. Thus, whereas this chapter is not primarily about citizenship in particular or about inclusion in general, this excursion is warranted as it will soon become clear why the internal differentiation of political systems and the change from

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rentiation. Neither is citizenship used here in the broad sense that today would denote a full set of legal rights, or "civil rights".

7 This is not meant to gloss over the existence of brutal exclusion or expulsion from a social community on the basis of religious affiliation, other crucial categories, or general public morale. Here, the focus is on the relationship of subjects/persons to a ruler/government of any kind.

8 In liberal political theory à la Locke, Rousseau, or Kant, this would be the "social contract", in other words, a voluntary conceding of authority to a Leviathan for the goal of pursuing the common good, survival and reproduction. Even in Aristotelian logic, this type of agreement constituted the political community. How decisions were to be reached varied widely across these schools of governance, but the principles guiding who belonged to the community (beyond primary categories such as gender or age) can arguably be said to have been more open for these theorists, before the dawn of the nation state era; see, for example, Treisman, 2007:

9 See, for instance, the interesting description of related dynamics in Austria-Hungary in von Hirschhausen, 2009.

subject to citizen, or in a broader sense, the emergence of the imperative of individual (and equal) inclusion in the modern polity, are intrinsically linked.

Altogether, this brief historical summary highlights the wide variety of forms of polities, which are vastly different and relatively fluid in size and internal organization. In the absence of an identifiable, sufficiently differentiated political system, what was decided upon, how binding these decisions were, and where and to whom they were applied were not only often contested in the polity itself, but also must be answered completely differently for each polity, when compared diachronically and synchronically in retrospect. Even more interestingly, the changes that occurred with the transition to modernity gradually led to more similarity and even standardization of the answers to the questions of *what is decided upon*, *at which levels*, and *for whom* in a polity.[10] These shifts are usually thought to be most clearly represented by the establishment of the international structure of country-level states, most often nation states, and the following section will again emphasize why. However, we also show that ordering the world into relatively standard units of polities that, in general, feature similar internal constitutions and establish basic rules for conduct between them does not come close to reflecting all these changes. Indeed, the characteristics that constitute the modern political system extend well beyond these features, and it is both interesting and beneficial to explore these characteristics by analyzing internal differentiation in both the vertical and the horizontal dimension, as we do now. At the same time, this brief historical sketch is worth keeping in mind, as there may be interesting residuals of traditional polities and forms of authority and decision making even in today's political systems that may inform our discussion of political regime differences at a later point.

II.   Vertical Levels of Decision Making in the Political System

Initial observations: Today's world of countries – an amazing convergence

One of the main phenomena described in the previous section is that one is hardly able to identify standard forms of polities and standard ways of organizing authority within a polity in pre-modern societies. With the rise of a functionally differentiated society and the inclusion revolution of modernity (Stichweh, 2016a), this scenario changes completely. It seems that there is now a common form of ongoing vertical functional differentiation that constitutes the modern political system, which we describe in the following sections. We use the term "vertical differentiation" to describe the ongoing creation of a plurality of levels of collectively binding decision making. We are not interested in providing an exact explanation

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10   The questions "by whom" and "how" will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 6.

of the break between pre-modern and modern polities and the evolution of a functionally differentiated political system in modern society, as this has been done exhaustively in the extant literature and has been discussed in Chapter 1. Neither do we address the debate on whether what is observable has its origin in the global diffusion of *one* model or represents an independent but functionally determined isomorphism.[11] An impressive body of literature has contributed to the rather deductively focused theory-building on state formation (see, e.g., the concise summary in Wimmer and Feinstein, 2010). Here, a more inductive route is pursued, and arguments are built on the basis of abstraction from contemporary empirics. We take the above-mentioned conditions of modernity for granted in our analysis of modern political systems.

It is a welcome peculiarity that the break that came with the establishment of the post- Westphalian landscape of states has created a much more "manageable" population of polities for scholars interested in systematization, especially when compared to the wild array of polities observed before that time. As Tilly noted, "Around the year 1500 one could count circa 500 more or less sovereign political units in Europe, while in the 20th century, there were only 25-30 left" (1975, p. 15). Currently, there are about 50 sovereign states within the area commonly defined as Europe. Intriguingly, these shifts occurred in a relatively short amount of time – at least compared to several thousand years in the history of *polities* – and they occurred globally. In fact, as many observers have noted, the emergence of the idea and then the system of nation states was a global one, a "co-evolution" (Wimmer, 1996; Waltz, 1979; Meyer et al., 1997; Stichweh, 2000). Putting it briefly, due to the "segmentary differentiation" of the political system in world society (Luhmann, 2002, p. 227), scholars now deal with a landscape of relatively stable units and can concentrate on their internal make-up. In the following, we will certainly not do justice to the extremely exciting and dynamic period of the roughly 300 years between 1648 and the mid-20th century, but we try to avoid being overly confined by phenomena observable in the European case. In the empirical analysis, we will therefore focus mostly on the contemporary phase, that is, we will primarily address the political divisions of world society as they have existed since roughly the end of World War II and the abolishment of most colonies in the 1960s.

Most remarkably, the configuration of polities as it has existed since the mid-20th century has remained relatively unchanged. Although their number fluctuates a bit, the overall tendency is an expansion of this pattern, and over time even

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11 For instance, while the nation state concept, sovereignty and the importance of borders seem to have clearly originated in Europe, constitutionalism appears to have been only really nurtured after its export to the New World in the United States of America, while a rational bureaucracy was standard in imperial China long before it was seen as *the* feature of early modern European states (UK, Prussia, etc.).

the numerical changes appear rather insignificant (Wimmer and Feinstein, 2010). Possibly the most crucial rupture in the entire epoch was the end of the Soviet Union, which resulted in the rebuilding of the political order across an entire region of the world. In short, the main ordering criterion for polities in the world today are countries, and they must be congruent with sovereign states. Whenever this status is unresolved, it is at that very moment contested – and often extremely contentious (e.g., in the case of Taiwan, Palestine, Kashmir, Krim, etc.). Because discernible addresses in the form of countries are necessary in the world political system, the disintegration or dissolving of countries and state sovereignty is immediately met with international efforts at "nation/state building", as this seems to be the only way to safeguard functioning political communication in the current world society (Luhmann, 2002, pp. 225-226). Despite myriad differences in detail, nation states attempt to look the same "from the outside". That is, their functional isomorphism is accompanied by an intriguing omnipresence and uniformity of symbols that are meant to signal – and sometimes try to anticipate – state-ness vis-à-vis each other. Every country has a national flag, an anthem, national holidays and ceremonies (including recurring parades), and – with very few exceptions – constitutions that mostly follow a standard form,[12] as well as many other symbolic elements.[13] This is true even for the abovementioned cases of contested sovereignty.

Notwithstanding the multi-level structure of polities, the national level is still where the center of political power lies, even in federal states and even in times of global governance, as we discuss later. As far as the way international political cooperation in many problem areas has evolved (climate, health, trade, etc.), most of the decisions made at these levels are not collectively binding and can be overridden by national sovereignty. For example, no matter how fiercely the global community demands specific action, the Brazilian government still decides how to deal with fires in the Amazon that endanger the world's largest rainforest and one of its most important "carbon sinks" (Andreoni and Londono, 2019). The European Union may be the only exception so far, as by today it can, on a supranational level, decide on policies and enact laws that then become effective in all member states;

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12 See for example, Ragnhild Zorgati's (2017) interesting study of the emergence of contemporary Tunisia's constitution, which is basically a history of convergence in form and content, modelled after a prevalent international standard and aligned with the United Nations Human Rights Convention. This approach required the authors to tone down the parts of the constitution based on religious rules.

13 The same is true for most regional and local political communities, but less so for supranational ones. However, local insignia and regional holidays do not share the collectively binding status that the national ones enjoy, in the form of bank holidays, flag rallies, and other events and symbols.

although these laws and policies still need to be ratified and implemented in and by each state individually, and monitoring their compliance is not always easy.

This is closely connected to the final interesting observation: the country as a polity unit is also crucial for defining modern universal membership in the political system, even in times of cosmopolitanism and virtual means of participation. In this regard as well, a country marks the most crucial defining unit for collectively binding decision making. That is, every individual is assigned at least one country's citizenship. So-called "statelessness" is regarded as a problem that cannot be accepted (Batchelor, 1998) and for which solutions must be found. Also, exclusivity, that is, the fact that dual citizenship is treated as an exception rather than the rule (i.e., one *must* have one and can often *only* have one nationality as membership in a crucial polity) bespeaks this status and its importance (Low, 2015; Spiro, 2011). Immigration and asylum rights further indicate how fiercely these principles are upheld. Visa rules (i.e., approaches to temporary residence in a polity) may be an additional indicator (Mau et al., 2015; Laube and Heidler, 2016). The political system therefore, more than any other function system in society, requires and even enforces membership of each person within one given, mostly territorially defined jurisdiction – although for most members this remains a passive one (observer role). The ambition of modern "direct authority" (Luhmann, 2002, p. 212) necessitates that each individual must register, even in the local state, in order for the authorities to gauge the scope of their responsibilities and in order to be included in the outputs of the political system – compare this to the discussion of censuses above.

Altogether, a country (in most cases a nation state) has come to be the only surviving unit of crucial importance to circumscribe a polity. Empires, kingdoms (for our purposes meaning territories that overlap with family structures), tribal and nomadic states, and all other pre-modern types of polities no longer exist, at least not as alternatives. There are of course absolute and constitutional monarchies and the Commonwealth, among other examples, but these do not overrule the system of countries and the necessity to declare the country status. Furthermore, observers sometimes widely diverge on how to characterize a given modern polity internally, that is, its political regime type, ways of political operation, and other aspects. For instance, there is an ongoing debate on whether modern China should still be described as an empire rather than as a nation state, due to its definition of secondary membership criteria and its attitude toward the rest of the world (e.g., Shue, 2018).[14] However, it is equally true, empirically, that the People's

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14 See also the arguments brought forward in debates about China's "empire-like" contemporary foreign policy, for example, the debate held at the Free University of Berlin in December 2018 [in German]: https://www.einsteinfoundation.de/en/veranstaltungen/meetingeinstein/gunter-schubert-imperiales-china/.

Republic of China adheres to the world system of states and formally fulfills all the criteria observers would apply to define a modern country.

Finally, formal equality or levelling in this case does not mean the absence of (functional) asymmetries between countries. Obviously, some countries are seen as rather dominant in a region or even globally, meaning that they have the power to enforce their will upon other countries, or they claim to have or are bestowed with more say in institutions with regional or even international decision-making capacity. It seems that this power is often related to a country's size, but even more importantly, its access to and use of resources and its resulting economic weight and military might. These differences coagulate, for example, in institutions such as the G8 (currently G7) and G20, or the United Nations Security Council. These selected groups of countries can make or initiate decisions with potential effects for all other countries, in other words, the whole of world society. Observations of this asymmetry have been included in more historical studies of colonialism and post-colonial studies, and they have inspired the world systems analysis of Wallerstein (1976), as well as the various other strands of dependency theory (Chase-Dunn, 2015). Recently, scholars in the field of International Relations are debating whether we see the end of US hegemony and a shift towards a new "Asia-Pacific century", implying, in particular, the rise of China to superpower status and its increasing ambition and ability to influence global affairs (Wilkins, 2010). In system theory, the "inflation" and "deflation" of power as a medium in the world polity has not yet been treated exhaustively though (Stichweh, 2000). In addition, there may also be somewhat more "hidden structures" of asymmetry at play among the different segments of the world polity. For instance, smaller countries often rank highest in global democracy and human development indexes, among other comparisons.[15] They probably benefit from the fact that horizontal functional differentiation results in a shared standard repertoire of modern polities, including a set of state institutions, expectable public services and forms of inclusion (Stichweh, 2000) that may be easier implemented in smaller and more homogenous contexts; a notion that the following section will take up again. These and other aspects are fascinating phenomena and obviously important points of departure for empirical studies in order to further understand political differentiation at a global scale.

Hence, although it can be argued that country-level polities, or nation states, are the globally preferred unit of segmentation and, even more importantly, are the most decisive political unit in today's world society, students of political systems must delve deeper. In the following, we will continue by analyzing the levels

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15 See, for instance, the United Nations' Human Development Reports, http://hdr.undp.org/en (accessed 10 November 2019), or the Freedom House Freedom in the World Reports, https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/freedom-world-2019 (accessed 10 November 2019).

and forms of vertical differentiation in and of a polity. Are they just extensions of central authority, or can they, for instance, form political (sub)systems of their own?

Consequences of the global preference for country-level segmentation for vertical differentiation

Above, we have stressed the status of countries as the decisive modern polity and the dominant self-conceptualization of political systems. More than that, semantically, a *country* is now associated with a specific size and – more importantly – complexity. In other words, a certain degree and form of internal functional differentiation is expected for county-level units. Thus, it seems odd that units such as Brunei, Lichtenstein, the Vatican or Singapore exist at the same level as other countries, since in the common understanding a country – although varying in size – usually displays multi-dimensional complexity and features several discernible subunits. Small city state-type countries may appear strangely one-dimensional and at the same time overloaded, as they must feature all the elements of a country-type polity – including offices and ministries of all kinds, a diplomatic apparatus, an army (of some form at least) – in order to be recognized as such and to take part in the "international community" (see below). This scenario again highlights the amazing convergence of today's polities, as in this formal realm even these exceptional cases did not simply preserve a form of organization that, arguably, would likely fit their conditions (including geographically, demographically, socio-economically, etc.) "better".

At the same time, one could be equally surprised by countries that appear "huge" in terms of territory and population as well as internal heterogeneity, and that want to and manage to preserve integration as countries, instead of disbanding (e.g., Brazil, Russia, China, India and maybe even the United States). How can such a country hold ready the capacity to make collectively binding decisions that reflect all necessities and demands, and the ability to safeguard the implementation of these decisions? The same questions might apply to a very sparsely populated and large country such as Norway, where the state seeks to reach even the extreme periphery, instead of simply pooling everything in and around a center, or settling for an easy two-pronged structure (e.g., center plus one level of peripheral "garrisons"). In cases such as these, enormous resources are dedicated to establishing authority and upholding and reproducing the crucial organizations, roles and processes (see the section on horizontal subsystems) of the political system across different levels within these "boundaries", while potentially encountering decisive counter-tendencies (Rokkan and Urwin, 1983). While it may seem tautological or entirely unconnected at first, the establishment of the global system of states gave rise to certain ways of answering to these challenges by facilitating,

or even requiring the internal vertical differentiation of polities, while the ongoing evolution of this multilevel differentiation created a shared global repertoire of institutional solutions that in turn reinforced the idea that what constitutes a modern political system is equivalent with a country-level polity (Gellner, 1983; Meyer et al., 1997). Yet, as we discuss below, the synchronization of vertical internal differentiation in contemporary world society is an ongoing and eventually relatively open process.

Modern multi-level polities: Nation state building as centralization

Works in the history of state formation provide functional explanations of the differentiation into units of varying size and a governmental organization, mostly a bureaucracy, that could take care of the basic operations (e.g., tax collection to uphold defenses such as an army; the management of the latter and the drafting of military personnel; other obligations stemming from interrelations with a clergy), and was observable even in the case of pre- and early modern polities (Tilly, 1975; Wimmer and Feinstein, 2010). As mentioned before, however, this differentiation into political offices and operations usually played out in the horizontal dimension that the latter half of this chapter explores, and its results and effects were highly particularistic. The central authority's relations to subdivisions in the polity were usually volatile, malleable and often personalized, and membership and participation in political operations was stratified and non-inclusive. Also, as Wimmer aptly summarized, early political differentiation resulted in a specific type of both hierarchically stratified and politically decentralized society, which was mainly self-organized at the local level and often went without a state-typed organization (1996, p. 331). This changed with the establishment of the modern polity and a functionally differentiated political system, which retains the principle of local self-government but established the full internal integration and penetration of the state as well as inclusive membership in a given polity.[16]

The factors conditioning this development are manifold, they cannot all be isolated from each other, and some of them go back in time, to the beginning of early modern states. While we do not aim to provide explanations for the emergence of these conditions here, it is necessary to name them as part of the environmental factors that produce and act upon political systems in today's world society. To

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16 As mentioned before, we are not pursuing an explanation of state formation in this chapter. There are several excellent studies on this topic that do not need to be paraphrased here; see, for instance, a review and summary of the most seminal studies in Wimmer, 1996 and James, 1996. Rather, we take the existence of modern states as the main organization of a functionally differentiated political system for granted and are more interested in an analysis of the latter's internal functional differentiation.

recapitulate (some of this was discussed in Chapter 1), a country-level polity in today's world involves

- *autonomy* and *sovereignty*, including the integrity of the state's territory and therefore the maintenance and protection of physical borders vis-à-vis an international environment; the maintenance of public order internally;[17] and readily obtainable revenue (often collected and generated through taxes) to finance public government administration and services;
- determining a people/the population as a collectivity (in many but not all cases this is equivalent to a nation); granting and enforcing *citizenship*, which is the imperative embodiment of individual equality, inclusion, and protection; and providing the means and institutions for representing this people (directly, indirectly, or abstractly in terms of a public interest and common good) in collectively binding decision making;[18]
- (to support the operations in the second point and because modern states are now usually welfare states) providing certain *goods*, *services* and other *outputs*, such as health care and primary and secondary education to all citizens – often including all residents; sometimes, but only in extreme exception, even all individuals currently in the purview of a polity –, and providing the grounds for making binding decisions for them (see the parallel development of the function system of law that is discussed again in Chapter 5).

Many, if not all, of these aspects are also intimately related to the horizontal differentiation of political systems, which we discuss again in the next section. Let us first examine the consequences this development had in a vertical perspective.[19]

Scholars have shown that the establishment of the nation state in early modern Europe, and later all units worldwide, meant a *centralization* of authority to fulfill most of the above-listed functions. Determining a territory and defining and securing its borders was one challenge, but integration inward was also a difficult task – not least in order to maintain exactly this territorial sovereignty and autonomy. The example of Norway is once again illustrative. Another example is

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17 While invasion (and war) is still a lurking danger, mutual acceptance of sovereignty is the dominant rule. Border protection therefore has become much more a question of population control; see Laube, 2013. However, there are regions where this is reversed, and martial border protection co-exists with relatively loose mobility control; see Plümmer, 2017; The Economist, 2019.

18 Previously, this was based on the principle "no taxation without representation", which only included those that *could* pay taxes.

19 One might object that this is a "chicken and egg" type question, in other words, an analogous process for which there may be other explanations of what came first or has resulted in the other. Here, the decision is to take the emergence of the (nation) state system in Europe between the 17th and 20th century as a point of departure and to explain a major part of the vertical (maybe even horizontal) differentiation starting from this basic assumption.

the case of Chinese nation-building at the beginning of the 19th century, when peripheral communities somehow had to be redefined or even created anew. Fixed borders were something alien to China, which had been operating on the basis of a civilization-defined empire with concentric circles of influence and tributary relations extending from its center, and an extensive degree of tolerance for fluidity and obscurity in its periphery (if it was seen as such at all). With the forced drawing of border lines and the establishment of sovereign state power under the new Republic of China in 1912, there was increased activity in the borderlands, especially registering and securing resources, fostering defense and avoiding insurgencies (Opper, 2019). However, central authority in Republican China was weak and so was the attempt to stabilize rule everywhere. With the founding of the People's Republic in 1949, borderland occupation and permeation were taken to the extremes. Even today, the nation's major political goals include the directed settlement of people, especially Han Chinese, along the borderlines and the enforced *peopling* of the entire country (Hansen, 2006). With such enforcement, however, comes the necessity to uphold communicative integration, in other words, information flow, new decision-making requirements, and other developments that preserve political operations.

Furthermore, creating a supra-unit, a country, seems to make sense, as defense and other resource-heavy and vital operations can be organized more efficiently for a given community; similarly, locating responsibilities such as garbage collection and policing, as well as other elements of upholding public order at the very local level does. Under the constitutional arrangements of modern polities (see below), different responsibilities could be – and had to be – organized at different levels. Yet, what used to be delegation became differentiation.

At the same time, the centralization of territory, resources and power in modern countries, and the parallel differentiation into different levels was accompanied by the need to meet increasing membership claims from the (former) periphery and the collectivity of the included. It seems to be widely accepted that in social communities, deciding on the issues in a specific subunit as well as the issues concerning the polity as a whole, requires some sort of "closeness" or "proximity". The idea of representative government only magnifies this. It is therefore not sufficient to have organizations, such as parties or mass associations, or institutions such as a parliament, through which interest representation in a modern polity is supposed to work, as well as different political performance or public roles, in only one dimension and only at the most central level (see below). In order to hold ready the potential to make decisions and to address *all* and everybody in a given polity in a timely manner and at any time, these functional bodies and roles must be replicated at more or less regular intervals.

Integration, or: How many levels?

How are these intervals defined? There is no rule of thumb, but there seem to be certain historical patterns. In many cases the subdivisions in today's polities are historical subdivisions that were either relatively independent or existed in a loose form of federation or union before they (were) gathered under a type of modern central authority. What previously were often hierarchies of personalized relations or volatile dependencies through coercion and extraction, for instance, in the phase of centralization now grew into one organism. Interestingly, as research on the nation state has shown, the creation of an entirely new structure of subdivisions is the exception. Especially in contemporary Europe, while questions of "nationality" may be contested at the level at which countries (national states) were defined at some point in time,[20] there is still a remarkably stable patchwork of sub-national administrative subdivisions that were (re)defined along the lines of older cultural or linguistic boundaries, former duke- or kingdoms, and the like (Hooghe and Marks, 2016; Wimmer, 1996). However, the same can be said for other world regions, such as China, where subnational units, from provinces down to counties and villages, are mostly the same as they were thousands of years ago under imperial rule (Chung, 2016; Opper and Andersson, 2018). Post-colonial states are an exception that in some way corroborates this observation. Here, former patterns that were eradicated in the course of initial artificial state building are frequently evoked again when countries undergo further re-division following an often unstable phase after their liberation. Based on this observation, one could possibly go so far as to claim that the segmentary differentiation as it exists *within* most countries today, is often a more long-term and sustainable process and phenomenon than the often artificial, forced and much younger definition of country-level polities as the main segmentary differentiation in the political system of world society.

One does not have to take sides in this discussion and can simply conclude that historically defined units are often assembled under a (new) centralized authority. For some this means a gain in resources and even autonomy, while for others it means a loss of resources. As a whole, however, this pattern implies a leveling

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20 Tilly contested that European nations are actual nation-states, in which ethnicity, linguistics and cultural borders are equivalent with borders of sovereignty and authority as embodied by a country (1975). The same claim is made in quantitative studies of Europe and other world regions that show how division lines (e.g., language, traditional institutions) rarely overlap with national state borders and often run across many of these borders (e.g., Connor, 1972; Lopés-Alves, 2011). If this is true for Europe, an examination of post-colonial national state building provides an even stronger case. In the latter, however, these inherited lines were often not reflected in the new polity, not even in the definition of its subdivisions, with grave consequences, as is widely known.

of the differences that potentially existed between the formerly diverse units in different world regions. Compare, for instance, the former asymmetries between the strong position, even autonomy, of medieval European cities, which had, for example, their own codes of conduct and law ("Stadtordnung") for residents and the treatment of aliens, legislation, police, and markets in a patchwork of feudal order, and the rich but powerless Chinese cities under imperial rule, which were embedded in a predominantly rigid bureaucratic network and therefore, strictly speaking, only another outpost of the imperial court (Mumford, 1961; Hanagan and Tilly, 2011).

Finally, almost all countries now display subdivisions around a 3-plus level structure (national – regional – communal/grassroots). That is, in a country of average size and population, there is never just a dual structure (central – communal), and most countries even have something like counties or prefectures that constitute a fourth level (Hooghe and Marks, 2016). This structure seems to become a type of path dependency that is not altered again, even under conditions of regime change or revolution. There may be upscaling and downscaling of the size and number of entities at one of these levels, but rarely is one of the levels in the governmental hierarchy completely abolished. That is, there is a lot of *re-scaling* (Denters et al., 2014) but usually no re-shuffling, and this seems true in all world regions.

Multilevel relations

If sub-dividing and re-combining was an issue among and in polities all along, what is different now? As mentioned, subdivisions are now integrated in a centralized and differentiated structure of a country and nation state. With this arrangement arose the necessity to formalize the relationships between units in ways that could ensure they would not overlap, conflict and destabilize the overall polity. Chosen solutions to this challenge vary from more hierarchical to more collaborative forms of ordering these relationships.

The two dominant models found worldwide are country-level polities that are organized as unitary or federal states. The historical research on nation state formation tends to choose either bottom-up or top-down explanations of the preference for either one or the other (Wimmer and Feinstein, 2010). We do not have to engage in these speculations as they are not ultimately relevant for our approach. However, it makes sense to note that it seems to be a rather uncontested observation that unitary state structures usually rest upon and are reminiscent of older, traditional forms of governing in a previously existing polity. This is probably clearest in cases in which a relatively strong bureaucratic state was previously in place and permeated a given territory, as in China. In contrast, newly founded countries that merge formerly independent units tend to be federal states. As of

yet, however, there are no large-scale worldwide studies that could convincingly explain this observation.[21] The two models differ regarding the organization of the relationship between the various levels of government, mostly in terms of finance and budgeting, authority over legislation and the implementation of policies, often judication, and the successive organization of representation (e.g., composition and filling of chambers, formal voting authority on national level legislation, etc.) to reproduce proximity as mentioned above. Furthermore, neither the unitary nor the federal structure work without friction, and all polities experience inter-level conflicts. One such conflict is the constant information problem, as described by two governance scholars: "For central government, relying on subnational government for policy implementation means bringing in street-level professionals with close proximity to policy targets while at the same time creating a principal-agent problem" (Peters and Pierre, 2016, p. 129).

However, these aspects are more relevant for governance studies after all. For us, it is probably more interesting to note that there seems to be no clear division between these models that would overlap with the existence of more traditional-authoritarian and democratic regimes, that is, in terms of their preference for one or the other model. A federal model in the first instance seems to suggest – formally-legally – much more decentralized authority and autonomy, and – normatively – usually implies more tolerance for "diversity" within the polity. The early modern monarchy versus republic divide does not imply a preference for one or the other and neither does the current autocracy/democracy divide, although authoritarianism is often associated with more unitary structures and this may be supported empirically, especially looking at more than just the formal institutions. How do autocracies deal with the control-effectiveness dichotomy just mentioned, for example, that is built into the differentiation of levels of decision making? Having plural levels of decision making always involves a loss of control potential that might be problematic in autocracies. On the other hand, a plurality of levels seems to promise greater effectiveness in the realization of policies, based on the ability of more adequate local adjustment: something that appeals to autocracies as long as they try to win legitimacy by claiming to be effective policy makers. Hooghe and Marks, based on their study of regional authority in democracies and new democracies, hypothesize that "democracies (...) have higher levels of regional authority than dictatorships", since "a dictator strives to centralize authority in his own hands to sustain his power and extract rent" (Hooghe and Marks, 2016, p. 65). But again, this assumed bias "is not a black-and-white phenomenon" (Hooghe and Marks, 2016, p. 33) and must be empirically tested. At least in their self-description, authoritarian regimes also evoke the "federation" and

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decentralization theme, and this seems to be an aspect worth examining, even if just for the issue of the diffusion of modern political semantics.

What is now important is to connect the long-term evolution of formal-institutional vertical differentiation in the modern state organization with most contemporary observations. There are two main trends that emerged over the course of the last few decades that provide new theoretical stimuli: *decentralization* toward the *local* and toward the *global level.* How does this finally tie in with our overarching interests, for instance, the question of how new forms of ongoing vertical differentiation square with the previously uttered hypothesis that a country is (still) the most decisive polity in today's world society?

Decentralization 2.0 and system building

The smaller, the better? Thickening of sub-national politics

Polities have always experienced periods of centralization and decentralization over the course of history, but there has been a clear global tendency toward decentralization since the later phase of the 20th century. There is wide agreement that one of the most obvious processes of differentiation in contemporary political systems is the yielding or concession of decision-making authority to a subordinate (usually most communal) level or entity. The burgeoning "local governance" literature of recent decades reflects this conclusion. Scholars have widely noted that "the relative importance of subnational governments has been on the rise" internationally (Weitz-Shapiro, 2008, pp. 286-287), that local and regional governments' authority has increased in recent decades (Hooghe and Marks, 2016), and that more and more actors engage with local authorities and are involved in different forms of local politics (Peters, 1998; Tang and Huhe, 2014).

While the observation appears to be uncontested, it is difficult to come up with a convincing explanation for this development. One factor may be the globalized Eigenwert of the "local",[22] which is also linked to the proximity and rep-

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22 Compare also how local and regional identity is increasingly evoked in current political debates, for instance when populists and especially far-right parties and groups in Europe cite the value of traditional local and regional identity and thereby homogeneity and its meaning for "better" policy making in opposition to national and supra-national decision making (which is in fact coupled with an anti-immigration stance). This "localism" approach is also observable in other contexts, although not necessarily as a party politics issue. In China for instance, there is an ongoing discourse about local or provincial cultures that form the basis for economic and political path-dependencies, over time and independent of the form of government and rule (imperial, Republican era – Guomindang ·[KMT], People's Republic – Chinese Communist Party [CCP]). Today, for instance, this runs counter to major CCP rhetoric and results not only in the uneven implementation of administrative reform ("compatible" vs. "not compatible with the local culture"), but also differential economic policies and support for entrepreneurship. Localism

resentativeness aspect introduced above. The semantics of "subsidiarity", which finds its strongest expression in the European Union (Peters and Pierre, 2016), is one illustration of this idea. In general, subsidiarity denotes not only the practical conviction that decisions can be made more efficiently at the local level, but also a normative drift favoring autonomous decision-making as often as possible and in the "smallest" possible – that is (in many cases) the most decentralized – units. Interestingly, this seems to be a globally shared norm; at least, the inclusion of the semantics of "decentralized" and "local governance" is observable in the self-conceptualization of political systems across regime boundaries. However, whether this norm can compete against others or is curtailed in practice is highly dependent on other circumstances. For instance, some observers note that the shifts observable in autocracies should be called "deconcentration" instead of "decentralization" (Hooghe et al., 2010, p. 59). We revisit the regime aspects below.

Scholars also point to the decline of the traditional welfare state model, or at least a transformation of how welfare is usually organized: Traditionally, a central authority is also the source of funding for all the polity's core performances (policies, services), for which it further delegates implementation and oversight responsibilities. Instead, these authors now call attention to an evident global tendency toward austerity and business-style conduct ("management") of public administration since roughly the 1990s, which has led to a down-sourcing of many public services to lower-level governments, combined with the need and expectation that they allocate their own resources to fund both these delegated mandates and new ones (Peters and Pierre, 2016; Tang and Huhe, 2014). The "New Public Management" logic was accompanied by a transformation of local public administrations, in which they became more accessible, their operations became more transparent, and the relationship between the incumbents of performance and audience roles was further levelled (e.g., via the "one-stop-shop" logic) (Ongaro, 2004; Pollitt and Bouckaert, 2004; Wiggan, 2007). Not only does this mean that the relationship of administrative bodies to their publics is converted from subject handling to client services, but also that reforms of public administration and local governments introduce new secondary performance roles,[23] such as those

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can, for example, result in a strategy that bets on state-level enterprises in one region and on private companies in another, or defines exclusive new experimental zones solely on the basis of the perceived dominant "local innovative and entrepreneurial spirit". See, for example, the works of Sonja Opper, who studied the socio-cultural evolution of entrepreneurial culture and politics in China and has shown the stability of these patterns over a period that stretches from the beginnings of larger human settlement clusters until today (Opper and Andersson, 2018; Opper, 2019).

23 Secondary performance roles are performance roles assumed temporarily or partly by laymen/amateurs or non-professionals. They can also be defined as activist alternatives to purely public roles, see Stichweh, 2016a, Ch. 1.

generated by expert and public hearings, etc. Finally, connected with the decentralization of many issues, there also arose new inclusion demands by members of the local public. New forms of environmental-related NIMBY protests, for instance, often steered by locally differentiated organizations (as discussed later), are now more than ever facilitated by the digitalization of information, organization, participation chances and other elements.

Adding to the surprising continuity and stability of subnational units over the course of history, a new "thickness" seems to have emerged. Together with trends we describe in our discussion of the horizontal dimension later, subunits in a polity (country) seem to be able to form ever more autonomous units and thereby potential political systems of their own. The emerging forms of new problem processing can potentially usher in a generation of new problems that are only observable and only relevant for a given level. This seems to be the case where there exists, for example, enough information to autonomously decide on issues and to distribute values in a given community, which were traditionally pooled at the national level (expertise, finances, etc.), or when new political issues are produced and considered to be specific for this particular community.[24] Furthermore, individual members as well as incumbents of both performance and public roles at the local level may also become better equipped and informed in order to decide on the issues at stake than was previously possible (via information technology, education, mobility and experiences, for instance), and there are new dedicated and independent local organizations, such as exclusively local parties; for example, "Freie Wähler" (independent voters) in certain communes in Germany, or the CSU as a party only for the state of Bavaria.

When the perceived value of the issues that are decided upon locally finally overrules the importance and status that an individual member or given collectivity assigns to membership in a country-level polity, the old idea of a central authority that gravitates toward the highest level of government in a country may fade or become much weaker than in the former phase of modern nation state building.

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24 Take for example the attraction of investment (including especially foreign direct investment) and new sources of revenue via business taxes at the communal level – a problem that applies to communal units in Germany as well as China. This may not be a topic for the levels above or below in the hierarchy, but maybe at that specific level, for a county-level government, for instance, it is crucial. There are then offices and agencies that are created specifically to take care of this issue, which are not replicated at other levels in that country, and may even conflict with the other levels' interests and principles (e.g., political restrictions on accepting FDI from certain countries [as in the case of Germany vis-a-vis China]).

The larger, the better? Polity-independent problem governance

Something similar is observable in the opposite direction, in other words, in the decentralization toward autonomous problem identification and decision making at higher levels, or better, in larger units and collectivities. While not intending to paraphrase the impressive body of literature on regional and global governance here, from our perspective, however, it is worth noting again that what appears to have happened is the following: The creation of the modern country-polity in the last 400 years seems to have brought with it a relatively inward orientation, one could also say restraint – a population of political systems that have a spatial reach because of a defined, most crucial level of membership and thereby an ultimate scope and reach of the binding decisions made. There have long been issues that required regional (i.e., transnational) processing, such as transportation, including rail and water ways, post, and bilateral tariffs, but they were mainly practical, regulatory issues that in some way emerged from a basic decision that had already been made. Relatively similar is the more modern variant of this situation that Peters and Pierre (2016) and Hooghe and Marks (2016) called "multilevel governance" and that is largely independent of the countries as a unit, in other words, a form of governance stretching across a "region" that includes units at different subnational levels (for instance, across several counties, together with another province and maybe even across borders to similar units in another country). These occurrences are somehow still spatially bound and clearly polity-linked, based on geographical conditions or a softer "identification" with a region and its specificities and perceived needs. In the end, this form of differentiation based on issues does not seem to be so different from the decentralized local governance described above.

Then there is, however, the intensification of *global issue governance*, that has occurred since the end of World War II and the renaissance and actual institutionalization of organizations such as the United Nations and other global forums. This, first, includes the identification of problems that appear to be of global concern. These could be issues that have long been processed in the political system of some countries, but are receiving new attention, weight and diffusion at and via the international level. Beyond that, however, it also entails the identification of genuinely *new* and, one could say, truly global problems, such as international large-scale migration, epidemics, and, possibly most strikingly, resource protection and climate change, which seem to transgress the problem-solving capacities of existing polities. Under this aegis, and overriding even ideological and regime differences,[25] completely new political structures arose, especially in the last 30 years. Different from the traditional regulatory issues and procedures, these is-

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25 Autocracies, however, appear to be more selective in their commitment to global governance arrangements than democratically ruled countries. Furthermore, there are indications of an in-

sues now also have global publics, with specific opinions and globally inclusive activities (including protest), which are increasingly considered.

As is widely documented, these developments have led to norm and value diffusion that now impacts problem definition and decision making at many different levels and transgresses the usual polity boundaries. The newly emerging global "issue contexts" and epistemic communities that develop around a problem that may come to be defined as a political problem, for instance, may force a national polity to address issues such as minority protection or control of specific pollutants that were not previously defined as falling within the purview of the political system.

What further distinguishes the global problem arena from within-polity decentralization is that non-contingent values seem to impact the definition of political problems in a different way here. The orientation toward scientific results or the appeal to human rights and fully equal valuation of every individual, even somehow planetary values (conservation, sustainability, etc.), often form the basis for the decision to regard an issue as a political problem, as well as for the measures chosen or suggested to address the issue. These values may be very different from the values that, either contingent or non-contingent, are formed by or impact on country or local polity-based problems and solutions, and which potentially never would have become relevant at all at the latter level.

This all suggests a type of system building around issues at the global level, but the readiness to make collectively binding decisions here is much less palpable. Global "responsibilities" seem much more retractable: the issues once considered the responsibility of subnational levels in a given polity (e.g., education, health care) seem to "stick" there much more strongly than issues that were addressed at regional and supranational levels (e.g., EU, NATO, Middle East/African Union; non-proliferation politics; greenhouse gas emissions). While organizations such as the UN represent global institutions, they, at least to date, do not form polities, and as such lack the institutional thickness described above. Membership at the individual level is less clear (it is usually established by the fact that the country of which one is a citizen is itself a member of these organizations) and is less consequential. On the one hand, beyond being human, there are no inclusion criteria, but on the other hand, because everyone is an inclusion address, any appeals or claims become murkier. Thus, whether we see a weakening of the meaning of membership and inclusion via national citizenship here is much less tangible.

In a nutshell, there is now an undeniable tendency toward the identification and handling of political problems at different levels in and beyond "constitutionally" defined polities. Whether this is in every case equivalent with genuine

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creasingly stronger intra-autocracy collaboration at the global level; see, for example, Erdmann et al., 2013.

system building is an empirical question. For the time being, it seems that in an era of nation states and as long as binding national level citizenship exists and represents the institutionalization of the imperative of equal and individual inclusion, an array of vital decisions remain undeniably bound to country-level polities and politics.[26] In the end, however, this bond may also depend on the evaluation of the importance of certain issues at the individual level.

Level differentiation, inclusion and regime bipolarity

So far, the question of system building has mainly been approached by focusing on the problems that are identified and processed by the political system. There are some further observations that may advance our analysis, namely, the relatedness of multilevel differentiation, inclusion and regime bipolarity.

The conflict between norms and "procedural values", which is inherent in debates about whether *smaller and more direct* or *larger and more aloof* equals better outcomes, runs through the history of polity building. This conflict is, however, also directly linked to the regime question, and here inspires equally ambiguous arguments, ranging from concern with functionality and efficiency to normative preferences for universal and equal individual inclusion. The size, representativeness, and responsiveness nexus is, for example, reflected in Robert A. Dahl and Edward R. Tufte's seminal work, which took up the strands found in traditional political philosophy and asked, "How large should a political system be in order to facilitate rational control by its citizens?" (Dahl and Tufte, 1973, p. 1) and "What is the appropriate political unit for expressing one's identity as a member of a community" in times of increasing complexity and diversity in an urbanizing and globalizing world (Dahl and Tufte, 1973, p. 3)? At the time of their study, the authors' empirical approach, a comparative analysis of different countries, offered no clear answer to these theoretical questions, as they found that "[n]o single type or size of unit is optimal for achieving the twin goals of citizen effectiveness and system capacity" and "[i]n the extreme case, a citizen could be maximally effective in a system of minimal capacity for dealing with major issues (e.g., international violence) or minimally effective in a system of maximal capacity for dealing with major issues" (Dahl and Tufte, 1973, p. 138). As indicated above, more than 40 years after Dahl and Tufte's seminal publication, these questions linger and translate

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26 Take, for instance, abortion laws in the United States. While it is still up to each state to decide whether to allow abortion, it is ultimately the US Supreme Court (with judges appointed by the president; Cottrell et al., 2019) that provides the basic ruling. It appears that the current trend in Supreme Court decisions may ultimately lead to a revision of the overall legislation, shifting a once relatively liberal legislation to a much more conservative one. See also Chapter 5 on the concession of autonomy.

into research on community participation and local self-administration, suitable design for constituencies, representation in and control of transnational and international organizations, and many other aspects (see, e.g., Denters et al., 2014).

Complementary research on preferences around the world, including in non-democratic contexts, may add an interesting perspective. In China, for example, where there is a long tradition of favoring centralized authority combined with decentralized governance and a strong valuation of the local (因地制宜), political regime characteristics play an important role. Public trust in the central government is surprisingly strong in China compared to other countries[27] and is always significantly higher than trust in local authorities. While the lack of democratic decision making and oversight applies to every level of the polity, central authorities in China are, to a surprising degree, believed to be more willing and able to act in accordance with the overall public interest than corrupt local incumbents.[28] Still, this does not necessarily mean a preference for democratic decision making and equal inclusion – it could also reflect a preference for non-contingent values, such as knowledge/science (technocracy) and elitism (expertocracy), which is probably believed to rather be present at higher levels. Interestingly, this is somewhat reminiscent of arguments that appear, with an opposite direction, in discussions about the "democracy deficit" of decision making in the European Union or in other regional and international contexts.[29]

Beyond a normative perspective, the general experience seems to be that the more local in the political hierarchy the unit of analysis, the *more* inclusion into collectively binding decision making is found (and vice versa), even if it "only" means more information, an expansion of public roles (e.g., the number of individuals addressed by a policy) or new secondary performance roles that arise through administrative reforms. After all, under conditions of modernity and differentiated levels of decision making, the individual is included in more than one political system. Furthermore, while there is maybe one main polity today in which ultimate membership still makes a crucial difference (i.e., citizenship in a country as described above), multilevel differentiation can mean inclusion at one level under conditions of exclusion at another. For instance, as a citizen of the European Union and the European Economic Area, an individual can participate in local elections in another member state after some time (usually three

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27 Other countries, especially democratic ones, usually show the exact opposite; see e.g. Hibbing and Theiss-Morse, 2002; Lewis-Beck et al., 2014; Li, 2010; Li, 2016.

28 Tang and Huhe (2014), in a large-scale quantitative analysis of several Asian countries, showed how more political interaction at the local level in the course of recent political decentralization increased individuals' access to information and overall activity in local affairs, but also fuelled concern about problems such as corruption and further diminished trust in local governments.

29 See, for example, the collection of studies on the legitimacy of regional integration in Hurrelmann and Schneider (2015).

years of residency) and can vote for the representatives of this other country in the elections for the European Parliament, but cannot take part in national elections. However, a person could become a member of Greenpeace, or a local interest organization, for instance, and lobby heavily for a reform of specific environmental policies in this country. In China, while the individual does not have any say in national-level politics, as a registered resident in a village he or she can participate in direct elections of the local leader and the members of the village administrative committee, who in turn usually decide on the distribution of collective land and revenues, which are some of the most crucial resources for rural residents. Or residents can protest a waste incinerator scheduled to be built in the vicinity that might seriously impact the locality's developmental planning, but cannot vote on the course of energy politics at the national level in China.

Regarding the polity as a whole, moreover, multilevel differentiation and the existence of differential inclusion roles also increase the chance of an open, dichotomic plurality, meaning that there can always be oscillations between the two poles of democracy and authoritarianism at different levels within a national polity and beyond (e.g., in the form of *enclaves*) – observations that Chapter 6 discusses in more detail. There is, in fact, research that points to this phenomenon in different contexts. The "deep south" paradigm in the United States is a particularly strong example, showing that there can be authoritarian structures at the local level in an overall democratic country (Mickey, 2015). Augustina Giraudy (2015) explored what she called "pathways of subnational undemocratic regime continuity within democratic countries", in her research on Argentina and Mexico. Other studies, in turn, have corroborated the finding that autocracies especially tend to distinguish between different tiers of the political system, which are then related to different principles and degrees of inclusion in collectively binding decision making. For instance, whereas the national political leadership is unchallenged and inaccessible and governmental outputs are determinate in the first place, modern variants of outcome-oriented "adaptive authoritarianism" often rely heavily on local (sometimes experimental) adjustments or even alterations of policies – processes that include different forms of participation by the "affected" parts of the population. This scenario has been described for the case of Russia (see, e.g., Moser, 2015; forthcoming) and the People's Republic of China (see, e.g., Florini et al., 2012; Schubert and Ahlers, 2012). Finally, it is possible that traditional traits of authority or even types of independent sub-polities, in the form of, for example, clans, dynasties, castes, clientelism, or mob/gang structures, survive at individual levels; or that there are different value bases or preferences (Catholicism; xenophobia) that impact decision making at one level or in one unit, which may completely differ from that observable at others levels in the same polity.

Comparative research on political systems in general, and on political regimes specifically, could definitively make use of approaches that focus on multilevel

differentiation and decentralization. Altogether, while there are plenty of empirical insights into the dynamics of internal differentiation and trends of decentralization based on studies in democratic contexts, there is no comprehensive body of research on authoritarian contexts, possibly due to the tendency to treat autocracies as monolithic units. In fact, large-scale studies usually use characteristics at the country, i.e. national, level as a unit of comparison and then abstract to all other levels from there.

One way to analyze multilevel differentiation from the perspective of our overarching research interests, is, as mentioned in the introduction, to empirically explore the following questions:

- Are there issues that are or become an *exclusive domain* and *responsibility* at a specific level, (e.g., at the communal level or the supranational level)? Does this level have the authority to make autonomous decisions, make these decisions collectively binding, and organize their implementation?
- Are there particular inclusion roles ([secondary] performance and public) that form at this level? Are they independent of roles at any other level?
- What are the principles and processes guiding how decisions are made (including contingent and non-contingent values; see also Chapter 6)?

This matrix can be applied to any level and for any institutional configuration in which collectively binding decision making occurs, for example, at the grassroots and community, regional, trans-regional and trans-boundary, national, international and global levels. In research on the bipolarity of authoritarianism and democracy, such an approach could help distinguish between superficial or nominal institutional isomorphism and real functional equivalents in today's world society.

These ambitions also motivate the observations and questions that form the basis of the following section. Examining the vertical differentiation of levels helps us to transgress the limitation of the country unit and the nation state level in research. However, there are more, and more complex, structures in a political system that should be considered. In addition to examining multilevel variation, we need to identify and precisely describe the relevant subsystems and other institutions and elements of *horizontal differentiation* in modern political systems.

III. Political Subsystems, Horizontal Structures and Institution Building

The simultaneous emergence of universality and regional specificities of political systems

As described in the previous section, pre-modern polities were usually built around a centralized system of rule and domination, often conflating the domains of religion, economy, warfare, control of the general public order, and others. If the given rule was not merely tyrannical or completely predatory, authorities were occupied with almost all matters pertaining to steering community life, for instance, taxation (spontaneous or regularly scheduled), internal and external security and order, organization of labor (partial or full; slavery, feudal structures, etc.), judication, weapons/military, monopolies (such as salt, grain, alcohol; or later money, i.e. coinage), roads and waterways, and religious and cultural activities. Decision making was highly centralized and traditionally limited to the discretion of the solitary ruler, with limited external deliberation. More complex polities, however, also had institutions such as councils, ministries or other types of consultants to the ruler (see also Chapter 3 on knowledge). The information that formed the basis of these decisions was usually derived from a paternalistic evaluation of the conditions in and of the realm, and from limited bottom-up reports and petitions. As mentioned before, states emerged as the common form for a political organization that can be distinguished from primeval and simple forms of rule such as chiefdom. From their early variants onwards, states came to be identified by the following functional areas and elements (Wimmer, 1996, pp. 227-229):

- *bureaucratic administration*: to help with processing information, including keeping archives, calendars, other measurements, values, currencies and prices, managing correct script and written communication throughout the polity, and other related tasks;
- *jurisdiction/judicature*: to overrule self-help and complement local community mediation and arbitration, and to advance public order and stability by seeking to avoid or end violence/feuds; in pre-modern times not necessarily independent from the ruler/government and the collective administrative organs;
- *taxation*: to absorb "free-floating revenues" beyond infrequent gifts and tributes or predation, based on a system of regular collection, and, especially in pre-modern times, not linked to reciprocal benefits but as a means of patrimonialism; and
- an institutionalized *army*: to defend the polity against external threats as well as internal instability, often as a standing army (especially in empires, to se-

cure garrisons and borders), and often but not always distinguished from the unarmed majority of the population (as in Egypt or China).

The set of issues and institutions varied, of course, but once established, the problems or subject matter for which authorities felt responsible was surprisingly limited and relatively stable over time and across geographical areas – even taking different world regions into account.

In the history of Europe, some degree of differentiation emerged in the polities of the later Middle Ages and the early modern era, which in other regions was only triggered by state building in the 20th and 21st century. In Europe this included, for instance, the gradual differentiation of societal estates and their political representation; the formal separation of the central authority and the state from institutions of the clergy, which for long periods continued to assume exclusive responsibility for issues such as education, medical care, and poverty relief; private publishers; and early forms of assemblies and parliaments. Self-conceptualization and legitimation of state action became increasingly oriented at public welfare and the common good, and later also "(the pursuit of) happiness" for everyone in the polity. The normative and practical ideal of the separation of power, executive – legislative – judicative, took root in early modern Europe (Wormuth, 1949), and a process of the juridification of politics emerged that was meant to safeguard the universal validity and application of authoritative decisions in the polity, and allowed citizens to not only solve conflicts among themselves, but to increasingly provide avenues to claim their eligibility for political goods and services vis-à-vis the state and individual authorities. In the period of transition from the late Middle Ages to early modern times, the police force developed as the embodiment of the application of the monopoly of the legitimate inward use of force by the state. Over the centuries, the police came to represent the enforcing institution for all sorts of responsibilities ("policy") the government took upon itself as the ordering organ of society (Stichweh, 1991). Outwards, manifest structures emerged around the necessity to identify and to communicate with other nation state-type addresses. A polity no longer dealt with another polity only occasionally in the form of, for instance, war, marriage among the nobilty, or trade, but the emerging equalization of segments of the world polity created a pressure to establish constant "foreign relations". Therefore, a country's army came to be flanked by a whole apparatus overseeing foreign affairs, which not only included foreign offices and the institutionalization of routine diplomacy (Hennings and Sowerby, 2017), but also institutionalized intelligence services and espionage. Furthermore, over the last roughly two centuries, trade unions, political parties, and other organizations emerged and diversified political structures and the political process as well as the addresses included in this process.

Interestingly, while all these early forms of horizontal political differentiation are exhaustively described in accounts of European and North American history (see theoretical foundations and summaries of the literature in Luhmann, 1997, 2002; Stichweh, 1991; Wimmer, 1996), we know less about how these processes materialized in other regions of the world. For instance, while separation of state institutions from the clergy has been either less relevant in primarily secular contexts such as China, in other cases it was a later development or is still an absent phenomenon. The same might apply for transformations of social stratification and the related differentiation of the political status of members of a polity. While estates in Europe became meaningless, a clear system of social stratification (e.g., castes, lineages) may have never clearly existed in some societies or may continue to be influential for political inclusion in others. In addition, the emergence of a differentiated police, separate from the military and meant to safeguard the state's collectively binding decisions, may not have followed the same route as it did in Europe. While there are plenty of excellent and comprehensive studies of individual countries, it is probably fair to say there are not sufficient comparative historical analyses of the differentiation of the political system and of further horizontal differentiation across world society.[30]

However, although this process may have looked, and may still look, vastly different in different regions and even in each individual polity, all modern political systems, democratic or authoritarian variants, seem to currently feature a basic global repertoire of subsystems, semantics and symbols, as well as inclusion roles. Since the mid-20th century and at the latest after the Cold War with the end of the merely two-dimensional ideological block confrontation, this repertoire has become ever more similar. Arguably, there are differences and there are cases in which very particular institutions or inclusion roles remain (such as the Guardian Council and the Council for Discernment of Expediency in Iran [Schirazi, 1997] or the People's Political Consultative Conference in China [Sagild and Ahlers, 2019a]), but even these outliers coexist alongside the full array of standard political organization(s) that seem to be replicated in all political segments, i.e. countries, of world society. Other observers have noted this isomorphism on a macro scale and demonstrated how "through both selection and adaptation, the system has expanded to something close to universality of the nation state form" (Meyer et al., 1997, p. 158), resulting in a similar set of nation-state properties. However, these analyses rarely include detailed accounts of these internal properties and their ongoing differentiation.

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30 Intriguingly, almost all existing seminal studies at some point refer to the same limited set of examples from Non-European societies, for example, the Tokugava Shogunat in Japan, based on the same limited selection of case studies literature (e.g., Eisenstadt, 1993, 1996).

Before we embark on such an endeavor ourselves, one last preliminary remark and potential caveat to our argument seems worth mentioning: The only clear notable exception to isomorphic formal representations of both vertical and horizontal functional differentiation are probably the enduring versions of (hereditary and elective) *absolute monarchies*, of which a small group remain, including Saudi Arabia, Vatican City State, Brunei, Oman, Qatar, Eswatini, and the United Arab Emirates. These countries constitute some form of unitary, religiously legitimized concepts of rule reminiscent of traditional, pre-modern polities. Due to the pseudo-religious political ideology and leader cult on which the Kim dictatorship is founded (Lankov, 2013; Fifield, 2019), North Korea is sometimes also labelled a quasi-absolute monarchy. In these remaining examples of absolute rule, there is very little vertical multilevel differentiation, as instead of implementing autonomous regional or local tiers of government, these polities usually install family member or other loyal kin as governors who extend the reach of the royal court into all subnational entities (see, e.g., for the case of Saudi Arabia, Al-Rasheed, 2010, Champion, 2003). Like in the historical variants of authoritarian rule outlined above, horizontal differentiation is also limited here, and the number of political performance roles beyond ruler, for instance, is kept to a minimum, while there are support and consultation structures, such as a state bureaucracy and advisory bodies with no decision-making power surrounding the center. Existing responsibilities and functional units, such as ministries, diplomatic missions and other governmental posts, either fall within the immediate domain of the ruler himself, or are staffed with kin and clients – a phenomenon that also occurs in modern democracies but is there considered deviant and to be avoided, and is either legally prohibited or at least perceived and labelled as a violation of a widely shared modern political norm ("clientelism", "nepotism"). Even in modern authoritarian systems, such as under the rule of the Communist Party of China, open nepotism in recruitment procedures for political offices is *pro forma* prohibited or must be especially legitimated; favoritism is no longer a sufficient condition, and an incumbent's qualification for a specific political performance role must be publicly established. Altogether, these very special cases, we would argue, do not significantly contradict our overall observations and arguments. They, to the contrary, add weight to the aforementioned pledge for meticulous empirical research that encompasses the diversity found in different world regions and the value of diachronic studies when approaching internal differentiation and the evolution of democratic and authoritarian political systems.

To decide, or not to decide:
Approaching the dynamics of horizontal differentiation

In modern society, the function of the political system is to hold ready the capacity to make collectively binding decisions. Accordingly, we suggest using "to decide/ not to decide" on something as the major distinction informing differentiation. Defined so broadly, it may help explain how complex the political system in the ever more complex environment of modern society became, and how it constantly needs to further differentiate its subsystems and institutions in order to observe or even mirror the complexity of other function systems of society, and anticipate dynamics in these other function systems in order to safeguard the continuous capacity to make collective binding decisions for society (Luhmann, 1989; Easton, 1967; see also Chapter 4). Although the basic set of these institutions has remained relatively stable for the last few centuries, new institutions arise for almost every issue or problem area that comes to be defined as something the political system should decide on. This already implies that beyond what is usually termed "government", or "the state", which comprises institutions of ultimate decision making at a given level of the polity, there are many more elements constitutive of a political system. Yet, the classical description and conceptualization of horizontal differentiation of the political system is arguably somewhat constraining when attempting to gather and understand the entire range of contemporary empirical observations. In other words, against the background of continuous horizontal differentiation, there is also a constant need to refine the possible range of subsystems, organizations and institutions that constitute today's political systems. For example, it appears that non-governmental organizations and social movements, the shifting nature of political parties and parliaments, the virtualization of public communication and opinion, and a range of other potential candidates should be considered when studying the structures that are relevant for political communication, decision making, inclusion roles and responsiveness in a given contemporary polity. This attention is also justified if scholars attempt to include empirical findings from autocracies. Altogether, looking at the horizontal differentiation of political systems, it seems fair to say that there are formal functional standards of the institutional make-up in the world population of political systems. Yet, as mentioned earlier, scholars must always accommodate regional (and otherwise founded, e.g., ideological, regime) differences between political systems, including, for example, differences in individual elements or processes that are part of the subsystems or institutions of modern political systems (see Volume II of this book).

In the following section, we discuss those elements that are unique to the political system and constitutive of its autonomy, with no claim of completeness. A later chapter specifically examines structural coupling and concessions of auton-

omy that involve other functional systems of society. Again, the goal here is not to meticulously explain the genesis of subsystem and institution building or to paraphrase the existing literature.[31] We limit our account to presenting selected observations of contemporary horizontal differentiation in political systems that we believe can provide the foundation for future empirical and theoretical explorations.

Some spotlights on continuous horizontal differentiation: political institutions, organizations and processes

Government and ministries

Historically, government structures and ministries were chiefly organized around a handful of responsibilities, such as taxation, policing and defense/warfare, deemed important for maintaining the integrity of the collectivity and for sustaining a system of rule. Today, the complex structure and array of ministries, agencies and other governmental bodies reflects the scope and nature of the issues the political system is now responsible for, that is, is supposed to decide upon. While in democracies, some of the decision-making about these issues is further outsourced to non-majoritarian organizations (see Chapter 5), in general, the structure of ministries gives a relatively good impression of a government's priorities and the career of policy issues. There are several core functions always present and usually separate, such as trade and economy, defense, and justice; but beyond that, there is usually no rule or constitution prescribing a specific structure of ministries. See, for instance, the history of ministries such as "social affairs", "labor/employment", "environment(al protection)", or "consumer protection" worldwide. Furthermore, with each new incoming cabinet and often at any time during a government's term, ministries can be rearranged, merged, dissolved and relabeled. While this is often explained by changes in the public budget, it can also hint at shifting priorities and trends in the conceptualization of political problems. Is "energy" (production and security) an individual entity, or does it fall within the realm of the ministry of commerce or the ministry of the environment, for instance, and which of those units is responsible for the regulation of "whaling" in certain countries where that is an issue? Is "nuclear safety" a prominent issue and why is it a part of the Ministry for the Environment and

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31 For Luhmann, "state-ness" entailed the classical trias: parliament, government and public administration, and the system of law which he described as a function system of its own. Before this differentiation, "states" according to his understanding did not exist. As subsystems of the political, he identified politics (meaning political decision-making, usually by the executive), party politics, and the public sphere ("Öffentlichkeit") (1997, 2002). Altogether, his theory of internal functional differentiation of the political system is not exhaustive and has sometimes been criticized for being merely based on his observation of democracies.

Nature Conservation in Germany? And why was "Heimat" (the official English translation used is "community") suddenly added to the German Federal Ministry of the Interior in 2018 (and both merged with the Building Department, which had so long been a part of the Ministry of Transportation)? The same is true for the vertical allocation of issues and ministries in a polity: while autocracies tend to be more unitary and rather replicate a functional pattern found at the central level, with a few exceptions that are seen as national matters (e.g., defense), in democratic systems, especially federal ones, subnational tiers can – to a certain degree – decide on their own ministerial or departmental structures, combinations of responsibilities, and even denominations.

Organizing government around problems is, in itself, not a characteristic of modern political systems. The relatively uniform global establishment of subdivisions that build capacity for collectively binding decisions in specific fields, however, should be seen as part of the "worldwide cultural and associational process" (Meyer et al., 1997) surrounding the constant evolution of modern nation states, regardless of regime differences. At the international and global level, these patterns are not replicated. There are a range of international organizations and entities of the United Nations Organization that address issues of general concern and of specifically global or planetary concern. However, these organizations are not as interdependent as the parallel issue-bound units within countries are, nor do they usually make binding decisions that can be enforced in a defined collectivity. For all polities at the country level and below, however, government below the immediate leadership level is organized around collective problems. This arrangement not only facilitates, internally, the processing of difficult policy issues, but also helps to identify counterparts when countries (or other levels of government) deal with each other. For instance, during bilateral state visits, details of trade agreements or defense collaboration are not discussed by the two heads of state, but rather by the relevant ministers and their specialized staff – and, increasingly, governmental-external or non-governmental actors (see below).

Overall, how a polity arranges its functional responsibilities, ministries and departments may vary, but there is always such a structure and elements of this structure look alike to a certain degree. Interestingly, it is within this structure that performance roles of very different provenience meet and merge. This is most obvious in the governmental bureaucracies of democracies, where, commonly, elected representatives and often party candidates (who are "fremdreferentiell" [Luhmann, 2002]) and appointed professional officials (who as bureaucrats are "selbstreferentiell") come together (see also Chapter 5).

Public administration and bureaucracy

In general, political bureaucracy and public administration in different areas and at different levels of the political system is seen as a "corrective" between the legislative branch (that produces political decisions), and existing laws, the expectations of the population, and the values and norms of society as a whole. Ideally, this is where political decisions are finally made "feasible" (Weber, 1922) and where their effective implementation is prepared and organized (Parson, 1937, 1966). Scholars have also found that this sphere is a realm of irrationality and arbitrariness, conservatism and inefficiency (Merton, 1940), and "useful illegality" (Luhmann, 1964).

In traditional polities, e.g. in the large historical empires, bureaucracy already involved professionalism and specialization, but was usually congruent with the mere exercise of centralized authority across space and different levels based solely on the interpretation of top-down verdicts. Today, this pattern often survives in authoritarian contexts, especially absolute monarchies. However, even in current autocracies, forms of a modern bureaucracy coexist (see the example of Saudi Arabia [Hertog, 2011]). Modern public administration can be regarded as a subsystem in and of itself that includes structural coupling with other functional systems of society. This arrangement involves a considerable degree of agency among the incumbents of performance roles, which usually leads to decisions that are factual and pragmatic decisions ("Sachentscheidungen") and not necessarily majoritarian/democratic ones (see also Chapter 5).

At the same time, another trend that seems to be a fruitful basis for more empirical research is the evolution of bureaucratic performance roles themselves: worldwide, political offices and a professional civil service often co-exist in a bureaucracy. This means that there are non-permanent elected and non-elected, i.e. assigned political leadership positions coexisting with non-elected – and often permanent – departmental staff. Take, for example, local attorneys general, their chief prosecutors, and the rest of a state's or county's department of justice in the United States. Access to performance roles in the political administration can thereby look very different in different countries, as well as at different levels of the same polity in a single country. How exactly does this affect how decisions are made and implemented in each case?

Finally, access to performance roles in the administration as well as interaction with these roles on the part of audience roles is increasing, while at the same time the asymmetry of these two role types is becoming less pronounced. Treutner described this dual trend as the shift from "subjects" to "clients" (1994). The shift seems to be affecting both the general structures of administrative communication as well as the inclusion of administrative clients in specific processes, for instance, via practices of public deliberation (see, e.g., Dryzek, 2006) and thereby the creation of *secondary performance roles*. Interestingly, this dynamic appears to

be largely independent of the political context (i.e., the regime type) and occurring across the globe, as self-descriptions and the repertoire of modern public administration have become more similar over recent decades (see, e.g., Pollitt and Bouckaert, 2004; Treutner, 1994).[32] Promising areas of relevant empirical and comparative research include continuing and often globally synchronous administrative differentiation as well as the worldwide emergence of secondary performance roles, access to these roles, and how all this is in each case related to forms of political inclusion and responsiveness.

Political leadership roles

A similarly interesting type of political performance role is the role of the "leader" of a community, especially the leader at the top of a national polity. Democracies and democratic constitutions, in particular, institutionalized the distinction of and differentiation into office and incumbent as well as term limits and, in general, an orderly leadership change. Theoretically, the distinction between office and person is also a characteristic of modern autocracies, but in their case, the specification of the top office(s) as well as leadership change is a more volatile aspect. The Communist Party of China, for instance, has practically abolished the personal cult after the era of Deng Xiaoping in the late 1980s and early 1990s, and has held on to this principle, together with the institutionalization of term limits, for the last roughly 30 years. Someone had to fill the office of the general secretary and state president and this person was found through a nomenklatura system and party-internal elections. Until very recently, with the second term of Xi Jinping, which began in 2018, the CCP was even openly committed to the idea of "collective leadership", that is, the promotion of a team, consisting of president and premier (prime minister), as is common in other countries. During the term of Hu Jintao and Wen Jiabao (2003-2013) and the initial years of the term of Xi Jinping and Li Keqiang (2013-2018), this arrangement worked. Recently, however, developments in China appear to have reversed this reform, as term limits for Xi as president were abolished in March 2018 and at the same time Premier Li Keqiang began to withdraw from the public eye in propaganda and press reports. A similar reversal occurred in Russia, with the re-emergence of Vladimir Putin as president in 2012, after he had served as prime minister under interim president Dmitry Medvedev to circumvent the limit of two consecutive terms, which was in place at that time. It is now unclear when Putin will step down, if ever, who could be his successor and what this leadership change would look like.

Coming back to the fact that polities differentiate between political performance roles, it is interesting to note that the terms currently used to refer to heads

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32 Arnstein (1969) provided some helpful heuristic approaches for distinguishing "tokenism" and genuine accessibility of and public participation in local administration.

of state worldwide have remarkable semantic similarity:[33] presidents, prime min-
isters, chancellors, and their combination (Helms, 2005). The mere denomination
alone does not reveal anything about the actual distributions of power or – in
countries where there is a combination of these two top offices, usually republics –
the functional division of labor between these offices. Compare, for instance, the
office of the president in Germany with its counterparts in France or the United
States. As diverse as democratic constitutions are regarding the details of govern-
mental procedures and interrelationships, top political offices are labelled very
similarly. Modern autocracies nominally model their leadership offices around
the same semantics. A remaining alternative to the dominant designations is the
highly personalized "supreme" or "great leader" category, which was traditionally
used in fascist, far-right and communist systems. This label has recently been and
still is used in some contexts, for instance, in Iran, Croatia/Bosnia and Herzego-
vina (1990s), Kazakhstan, North Korea, for Chavez in Venezuela, and in Turkmen-
istan – thus, the label now denotes pseudo-communist, Islamic-fundamentalist
regimes and some individualist-kleptocratic rulers of the totalitarian kind. But
even where this label is used, it usually applies only to the national-level leader
role. How power and political functions are distributed beyond that is an empir-
ical question in each case. While this title is a signifier of a surviving traditional
form of rule and types of authoritarianism, it can still be accompanied by other
(formally) functionally differentiated levels and performance roles below the top
leadership level.

Furthermore, as Chapter 6 discusses further, it is interesting to analyze the
merits or qualifications necessary to be elected or selected for a leadership office
in a polity, or even for any other political office. Is it charisma, general abilities
and performance record, or professional knowledge and capability that makes a
difference? And are these values stable over time or highly fluid? Is there societal
consensus that a political leader ought to be a political "lay" person with other
persuasive qualities, or a highly educated or seasoned professional or performer
with specific but reproducible experience in certain fields (i.e., law, engineering,
or administration) deemed important for the job? The answers to these questions
are usually intimately connected to the observable notions of regime legitimacy
found in a polity. Even among democracies the relevant shared values may vary;
for example, there are differences between Switzerland (where incumbents of
offices are usually not even full-time on the job), France (which has a special-

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33 See, for example, the semantic analysis in Elgie, 2019. For subnational and supranational offices,
there is a bit more variety, it seems. The EU has presidents of the European Commission, the Par-
liament and the Council. Heads of international organizations are secretaries general, heads, or
chairs; while locally, heads of government are governors, first ministers, or chief executives, for
instance, followed by even more variance: mayors, prefects, magistrates, and others.

ly tailored and exclusive education system for politicians) and the United States (where having early success in raising funds for an electoral campaign is an officially sanctioned attribute that candidates must exhibit) in this regard. In modern autocracies, charisma is usually reserved for the top leader, while specialists are preferred for other offices in the leading government positions. Absolute kleptocracies, of course, do not need specialists in any field other than predation, as government is not expected to work efficiently at all.

Finally, what all these different observations reveal is that although there are historical forms of co-rule, often termed "diarchies", and though many if not most countries today use a combination of an overall head of state and a head of the administration/executive, there is always a power asymmetry and usually everyone within the polity knows which performance role, i.e. which office is the most powerful one. There can always be only one top authority; there is almost never real "collective leadership". And as differentiated as other political performance roles may be – extending infinitely in a horizontal dimension – given the stability and constraints of the polity as such, it seems there is always an element of asymmetry, as there is always one leadership position, one leadership role needed. Someone ultimately has to decide. Sometimes, when so much power is accumulated in one leadership role and by a particularly charismatic incumbent – often coupled with a crisis through which he/she leads the country – this power role may even culminate in a "quasi king" status, as, for instance, in the cases of Charles de Gaulle (France) and George Washington (USA) (Ahlers and Stichweh, 2019, p. 822). In democracies, this asymmetry is ideally mediated by the fact that parliament, for instance, counts as an equal branch of government (see below), and that actual decision-making practices (*checks and balance*) depend on whether authority is organized in a presidential system or a parliamentary system, and on the power of the judiciary to interfere in the case of constitutional violations, or on the leader's embeddedness in a party to which they must remain loyal, at least to a certain degree, among other things. Ultimately, in a democracy, the demos ought to be in the most powerful position as it can oust the incumbent of even the most superior leadership position through a vote. However, as Levitsky and Ziblatt (2018), among others, impressively demonstrated with the help of historical analysis, and as the events of recent years have made clear, these checks and balances of power do not come about automatically and there is no guarantee of ultimate democratic resilience. Part of the explanation may be that these checks and balances come into play at different times during the political process and during a political term, and they (especially the democratic vote) follow a certain schedule and certain regularities. For instance, in a larger polity, general votes of confidence cannot be held any time this confidence seem to have eroded or is shaken. In the meantime, power asymmetry and asynchrony among political performance roles and the fact that there is always one leader can make a crucial difference. Most

often, it is not institutions, but "procedural norms", in the words of Levitsky and Ziblatt, that help constrain these asymmetries. For the last five decades, it seems that the existence and the application of such norms could be taken for granted in the democratically ruled countries of the world. Recently, however, especially the 21st century versions of populism have appeared to revert value structures and dissipate these procedural norms, as Chapter 6 will discuss. Almost immediately, populist administrations set out to particularly undermine checks and temporal constraints on leadership power and thereby existentially endanger democracy.

Parliamentary bodies

All modern polities institutionalize some sort of parliamentary body or representative assembly and replicate these at several levels of their political system. In some world regions, these representative bodies have a long tradition. Current-day Afghanistan, Pakistan, Mongolia, Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan still have a Loya jirga ("grand assembly") that originated in Altaic cultures and was institutionalized in the era of Genghis Khan. In Europe, estate representation at the royal courts slowly developed into a more diversified representation in the 17th century and then into a party system in modern parliaments. As noted in the first half of this chapter, representation could mean having representatives (of a group or a region) in service at the center of power in a unitary system or building a cascading and interlinked ladder of representation at each level of the polity, which is often the case in federal systems. China, in contrast, did not have any of these structures until local "soviets" and a national congress were established, or more accurately, imported, in the early 20th century based on those that had been developed earlier in the Soviet Union. There was no institution of representation, but rather just a structure of centralized and top-down administration. At most, as in other traditional political order systems, this meant conceding aspects of decision making to local councils or other kinds of governing or administrating bodies without any linkages between one another – a form of self-rule, rather than representation.

No matter the different regional traditions, it seems that all current political systems feature some type of parliamentary body. Within these modern bodies, there are an endless number of committees that help members of parliament work on any issue the assembly plans to vote on. In other words, today's parliaments have come to constitute not only an institutionalization of representation, or of support for or checks on the executive organs, but also a considerable issue-processing subsystem of its own, meant to process an ever-increasing quantity of political problems and complexities. Parliaments can raise issues that the executive does not have on its agenda yet. In this way, the strict division of those "in power" versus those "in opposition" is blurred. This blurring depends on the specific constitutions of each parliament and whether and how issues can be brought up,

and there are marked differences between polities that have a two-party struc-
ture and those with a multi-party structure as well as between those with a single
chamber system and those with a bicameral system. In addition, the executive,
(i.e., the party/parties in power) can simply push their decisions through by re-
lying on their majority in parliament, even though this may not be an automatic
process in multi-party structures (compare, for instance, the differences between
the US system and the German or French systems). In general, however, parlia-
ments can wield considerable systemic political power of their own: they address
the media and the general political public, they institutionalize performance roles
and secondary performance roles of their own, and they feature overall structural
coupling with other function systems of society. This is assisted by the virtual-
ization of political communication and public opinion (see below). For instance,
representatives no longer only talk to their specific constituencies; via social me-
dia platforms they can easily address anyone in (and beyond) the polity. A recent
focus on how minority far-right parties in many established democracies in Eu-
rope succeed in shaping political discourse and formal discussion, not only via
their general campaigns and statements, but also, in particular, by proposing top-
ics for parliamentary debates, is one recognizable variant of this trend that may
further weaken the "government/opposition" division in parliamentary bodies
(Franzmann, 2016, 2019).

Furthermore, while there are many fine studies of parliaments in democracies
(e.g., Brichzin et al., 2018) as well as their internal properties, ways of selecting
members, procedural characteristics and work styles, parliamentary bodies in au-
tocracies are not well studied. This is possibly because in an authoritarian context,
where there is a stark hierarchy between performance roles, with the top lead-
ership positions usually unchallenged by any other branch of government, these
parliaments are usually not taken seriously as institutions of representation or
checks and balance. But here, again, the ongoing differentiation of parliaments as
important bodies of problem communication and processing in modern politics
may increasingly come into focus. While parliaments are very seldom platforms
of particularistic representation and usually do not consist of freely elected mem-
bers, research has shown that they can act as institutions of indirect, collective
representation and as consultative bodies in modern autocracies.[34] An ever grow-
ing number of constantly changing problems is worked on in a variety of com-
mittees, commissions and groups; proposals are written to serve as a means of
supporting agenda setting; and external experts are invited to attend and speak
at hearings on whatever issues the institution choses to address or is tasked with
processing. Considering the wider array of functions parliamentary bodies ful-
fill in modern political systems, even their authoritarian variants may turn out to

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34 For studies on the Chinese case, see, e.g., Manion, 2015, 2017; Sagild and Ahlers, 2019b.

be interesting subjects for empirical and comparative research on differentiation, inclusion, and responsiveness.

Elections and other forms of political voting

For most scholars of political science and within political system theory, elections are treated as equivalent with the final differentiation of the modern political system (Luhmann, 2002). Elections are the foundation of democracy and the core event of the democratic political process. They are considered the most crucial selection mechanism of the personnel for major performance roles such as leadership positions and parliament mandates, and of a candidate's or a party's political program. Elections are usually held at all levels of a polity as well as within political organizations, e.g., parties and associations. In autocracies, elections are usually merely a ritual, given that free elections with an actual choice hardly ever exist. However, this procedure is nevertheless formally copied in autocratic systems, even if elections are rigged or of limited functionality (Schedler, 2006). This nominal presence shows that elections have emerged as the globally dominant semantics of performance role selection and its legitimation. Even in autocracies, no matter how unfree or unfair the election may be, the political leadership usually still ensures that elections are held at the national and/or the local levels, in the form of either popular or "inner-party" voting. Also, in all regimes, a whole industry emerges around elections. Campaigns have to be held and candidates presented with much pomp. This is also due to the fact that it has become widely necessary to point towards some kind of political competence, instead of underlining the candidate's extra-political mission or ascriptive powers as was the case in earlier epochs and may still be the case in the remaining forms of traditional authoritarianism.

As the above brief descriptions already insinuated, the existence of general elections per se does not make a democracy. Again, the function of elections and the forms of inclusion involved in the election processes need to be scrutinized in great detail in order to reach any conclusion about the regime type prevalent in a polity. The late granting of suffrage to women worldwide, or the turbulent history of enfranchisement and disenfranchisement of the African American population in the United States of America are just two examples that show how much the implementation of elections can be at odds with the idea of equal citizenship and universal suffrage even in modern democracies (Levitsky and Ziblatt, 2018; Parsons, 1965). Unresolved tensions concerning the form and expected function of elections also become obvious, for instance, in the continuing debate about the institution of the electoral college in the United States, or the vehemence with which the Trump White House enacted a Presidential Advisory Commission on Election Integrity to investigate disputed claims of widespread voter fraud, complicate voter registration and promote a redrawing of constituencies, which would

all increase the weight of votes for the Republican Party in a given area. In Europe, the Brexit drama brought questions about the representativeness and legitimacy of the idea of the democratic majority principle to the forefront again: What is the necessary minimum turnout for an election in order to count as a valid decision? And how to legitimize that the decision reached in a process during which this quorum was hardly met should be binding for the rest of the collectivity? Making participation in an election mandatory for citizens is therefore sometimes chosen as a way of trying to secure a majority decision in polities around the world. Moreover, it may be interesting to look at cases in which contemporary alternatives to political elections are considered and tested again, such as selection for public office by lot, or "sortition" (Delannoi and Dowlen, 2016), and why.

Formal membership, in general, is usually a precondition for inclusion in elections and other voting procedures. While participation in general or national elections is usually contingent upon citizenship, some countries have moved to allow for voting in local elections and community affairs based on legal resident status, which usually comprises a couple of years of uninterrupted work and residency in a foreign locality. As has been mentioned before, this once again bespeaks our observation of different forms of inclusion at different levels of the political system: while smaller-scale polities react and adapt to social trends in the 21st century, such as increased individual mobility (including dual citizenship) and global migration, national-level membership, and the political rights and forms of inclusion that follow, remains sacrosanct and relatively exclusive as the example of suffrage vividly illustrates. Furthermore, it is interesting to analyze and compare how citizens' voting rights are further regulated within polities today, and, in particular, what individual characteristics and qualifications, such as minimum age, literacy, "sanity", or others, these rules are referring to (see also Chapter 3).

Finally, while general and local elections come in many forms and can be found in both autocracies and democracies, referenda, or other forms of direct voting on specific issues, seem to be a procedure that is only really possible and imaginable in democracies. Only when an authoritarian government can control the outcome of a referendum vote beforehand will it permit such procedure, which is then only meant to bolster decisions already taken.[35] Otherwise, public votes are seen to potentially destabilize and discontinue authoritarian rule, like in the case of the referenda organized – though unsuccessfully – by the opposition in Venezuela in recent years. Altogether, however, observers note a global increase in the call for and use of referenda (Seales, 2016). And, interestingly enough, we now often see especially proponents of populism, as in the case of far-right parties in Europe,

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35 A good example is probably the 2017 referendum among the citizens of Turkey about changes in the constitution that would grant President Erdogan more powers. The changes were approved by a 51.4% majority on the basis of a turnout of 85% (BBC, 2017).

referring to referenda as the ideal way of decision-making for the collectivity. At least that is what they propose as long as they are in the opposition, so that this call appears primarily as a vehicle in their campaigning for political support. Yet, there also still seem to be huge regional differences in the declared preference for and the feasibility of plebiscites and referenda.

Overall, it will be interesting to track whether this trend can be seen as an indicator of further differentiation or transformation of the institution of voting in today's democratic political systems. Other embodiments of ongoing internal differentiation that we discuss in this chapter, such as the withering of political parties as direct platforms for particular interest and issue representation, the virtualization of public opinion, and the competition of forms of protest and movements with outcomes of regular elections and majority decisions, seem to be somewhat related to the semantical and practical rise of referenda in 21st century political systems.

Political parties

Like parliaments mentioned above, parties as core political organizations have undergone some major shifts in the history of modern political systems. Interestingly, parties developed only in the later 18th century and were originally not regarded as a formal part of the state structure, not even of the formal decision-making process. Their general function was collective interest representation of formerly excluded social groups–especially the working class population–and a sort of lobbying for political issues not yet in the purview of the government at all, as a counterweight to the nobility, estates and monarchy, and other social elites which held decision-making positions. With the emergence of general elections, the distinction between parties as the bearer of the binary logic of government/opposition in modern electoral democracies, and its function as a membership organization meant to bridge the whole political process from the voter, to the candidates for office, to the party group elected into parliament, and, finally, to the candidate for top leadership roles, emerged. At the same time, their neutral function as reducers of complexity in the political process, for interest representation and the preparation of political decisions, as well as "gatekeepers" and the selection of suitable candidates for performance roles, was questioned by observations such as the "iron law of oligarchy" (Michels, 1915). This observation also involves that what was once an individual's motive to join a party and what he or she campaigned for when running for office may eventually be altered by the logics of the party organization and of government as a whole. These alterations potentially involve that the need for consensus replaces strong positioning, hierarchies distort the equality of voice, access and decision-making power, and specific interest representation is overridden by general power play. To the contrary, independent, i.e. non-party aligned, candidates for leadership positions beyond

the local level, have, over roughly the last century, been very rare and their success needs extraordinary circumstances, such as financial resources, networks stemming from former party membership, or the support by others in power, among other things. Party membership and party organizations have, so far, been the necessary precondition to develop and supply incumbents of performance roles in democracies. Recent observations may come to shake up this understanding though, as we will discuss below.

Parties may therefore be much more complex organizations than just media or bridges between the collectivity of citizens in a polity and the rulers, or between interests and ultimate decisions. Among the many things that could be said about political parties, a few facets of contemporary differentiation will be highlighted here that illustrate points of departure for exciting empirical studies in line with our overall research interests:

First, the non-binding preparation of decision making that is described as one of the main functions of political parties can be expected to happen no matter whether a party is on the governmental or the opposition side. When a party is in power, these decisions may ultimately materialize, of course. When a party is part of the opposition, too, providing alternatives for future decision making are the groundwork of a party's program and the promises with which it seeks to gain votes. In order to win an election, a party and its candidates, it is described, need to communicate to the public their "capacity to govern" (Reese-Schäfer, 2002). Voters would need to be able to trust that the party and the elected representatives will be able to follow through with the program and the policies they promised, and this confidence is why voters would cast a ballot in favor of this party and candidate. Interestingly, it seems that the current rise of populism as well as fringe parties around the world may be an indicator of a declining need to evoke and prove the capacity to actually govern in order to be able to prepare or even influence decisions. For example: The thrust with which new populist far-right parties in the multi-party-systems of Europe gained votes and entered parliaments obviously worries established parties. In order to react to what appear to be changes in the preferences of a considerable part of the voters, they may sometimes begin to proactively include some shades of these alternative, more right-wing policy propositions into their own party programs, in order not to cede more votes to the new competitor. Small and rapidly emerging new parties can thereby alter other parties' "non-binding preparation of decisions". The same has probably happened before, around the rise of the Green parties worldwide. The case of far-right parties, however, may still be a bit different and it may have different implications, for reasons we will state below and because their proclaimed goal is usually to re-enact a more traditional form of polity and politics. This involves, for instance, the re-strengthening of exclusively national polities, anti-globalism, beliefs and feelings instead of knowledge and expertise, authoritarian decision-making, uni-

ty over diversity, and conservation instead of innovation; aspirations that run counter to the ideas of a polity and of politics that emerged and were fairly dominant in the later 20th century.

Another trend that is connected to the aforementioned observation, one could argue, is that over the course of roughly 200 years of parties as crucial organizations in the political system, political issues have become ever more complex. There is no longer just one big question about whether the state should provide social security to citizens, how much taxes should be raised, or whether to go to war with another country, as was the case in the early era of parties. Alongside the general differentiation of party systems, the number of issues that need to be processed and decided upon, ad-hoc and long-term, in myriad party sub-groups, small parliamentary committees, ministries and general assemblies, grows steadily. This makes the bridging and mediating function of parties much more difficult. While a voter might be aware of a party's general position on the scope of public welfare services, the principles of taxation, or the preference for economic growth versus resource protection, and other specific areas of individual importance to him or her, it will not necessarily be clear or known what position the same party represents when dealing with highway fees, same-sex marriage, or research funding. At the same time, parties constantly screen society for new topics on which decisions seem to be imminent, and adapt these for programs and policies tailored to their electorates – old and new ones – even before voters may have ever heard about these issues or have reflected on ways to approach it (see also Chapter 4 on responsiveness). In both cases, a lot of trust and ex ante support is necessary. Facing the enormous catalogue of issues for which political decisions are sought today, no one can ever have a complete orientation. And one does not need to, as long as one is satisfied with the overall sum and initiatives the party promotes, and can tolerate solutions one does not approve of in policy areas that are considered not so important to oneself. In case this is no longer satisfactory, one can vote differently in the next election (Merkley et al., 2019). On the contrary, it is possible that an issue of importance or a desired solution is not promoted by any party or candidate, and one can then choose to tolerate this vacuum for a while hoping for future attention, alienate oneself from active participation in politics and from the party system, or protest (see below).

Ever more complex knowledge needed to draft non-binding policy decisions in today's society is another important factor impacting on parties and how they operate. As there is no knowledge germane to the political system, it is no problem for democracies to accept incumbents of performance roles who are total "lay" persons. It suffices, in fact it is principally required, as a qualification that they, besides charisma, can convey their ability to implement the voters' will and – based on these demands – are able to gather the knowledge, expertise and experience necessary to prepare policy solutions. For this purpose, representatives

can usually rely upon professional staff in party committees and the governmental administration; they do not need to possess all knowledge and understanding themselves. The role of those who do in fact possess factual and specialized knowledge, and who are not in the first instance party loyalists, becomes ever more important.[36] Extrapolated to the systemic level, this tension between the ever-growing complexity of issues and the democratic ideal of a direct transmission of the will of the people eventually leads to an occasional conceding of autonomy over decision-making to non-majoritarian institutions and other function systems, as Chapter 5 will discuss more broadly.

These developments appear to also have consequences for the way parties function more generally. Representation of a static social class or group as was the case when parties emerged, transformed into offering a specific dogma and/or manageable set of solutions for the individual voter's choice. Currently, it seems, that together with the expansion of policy issues and the diversification and decentralization of levels of decision-making that was discussed in the previous section, the basis for supporting a party moves away from a focus on specific issue governance and tilts back to more abstract collective alignments. But this time, these collective abstractions no longer represent static social *cleavages* and related ideologies, as Luhmann (2002) already described, but instead increasingly come in the form of more diffuse values and identities to rally around. These values then help to safeguard the necessary trust in the competency of the elected party and office incumbents to decide in a way that the voter can agree with. However, as most established parties have weakened their ideological profiles (that were historically based on Conservatism, Christianity, Socialism, Anti-Communism, for instance) over the course of the last decades, new, more fundamentally-oriented or populist parties may benefit from this trend of confronting over-complexity with general orientations.

Finally, one core manifestation of the types of populism and personalism that emerged around the world at the beginning of the 21st century, is the sharp distinction between the party collective and individual candidates for or in leadership positions. It will be interesting to trace empirically whether this tendency, in the long term, will have an effect on parties' core function of selection, preparation and installation of political personnel. As the last chapter will describe, populists traditionally come from outside of the established party system; once successful, they build a new party around themselves. Or they emerge within a party – if they have not changed parties at least once along the way already – and then claim to work against its "rotten structures" from the inside. For the latter variant,

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36 See also the study of social networks among legislators in the United States Congress by Christian Fong (2020), who showed how much the legislators' voting decision is often based on exchanges of expertise across party lines, even in times of strong partisan polarization.

Donald J. Trump's campaign, and the theory of the "deep state" in Washington D.C. that is popular among his base, is a good example. The so-called deep state implies that positions in government and administration, mainly the career posts in departments and agencies, are filled with members of a corrupt network who harmfully neglect the will of the American people and therefore need to be purged by the president and his allies. Interestingly enough, the targets of this campaign also include registered Republicans and career officials who have served under alternating presidents of both parties. This seems to imply that while the party provided a platform for the candidate to run on, his ascent to power has upended the principle of mutual loyalty. The Republican Party, naturally clinging to the power and fallouts that the presidency entails overall, does so far not move to intervene in or stop these smear campaigns or retaliations, although Trump's actions go against not only members but also proclaimed goals and values of the Republican Party. Other recent cases of successful populists in Europe represent more classic stories of independent campaigning and newfound parties.[37] The question in all these episodes of populism and personalism, though, is how sustainable a focus on one person will be and to what end, and whether these experiences will have lasting effects on established party organizations and their political function around the world.

While all the above summaries of the function of political parties and their ongoing differentiation into altering means of party organization, personnel recruitment and logic of representation, was naturally geared more towards democratic political systems, some reflections on political parties in authoritarian contexts seem warranted. Like parliaments and elections, political parties here often just seem to be window dressing, i.e. formalistic copies of democratic institutions meant to legitimize autocratic rule, without any real power in the political process. Yet, in some cases party organizations and membership in parties and mass organizations is very important, as is, not least, suggested by the semantics

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37 Interestingly, as has historically been the case with alliances between promoters of extremist political currents and ideologies, we see also global structures of direct communication, learning and emulation between populist parties. The teams and allies of Donald Trump in the United States, Jair Bolsonaro in Brazil, UKIP and the Brexit Party around Nigel Farage in Great Britain, and Marine Le Pen in France, among others, seek exchange and connections, often very publicly. They frequently praise and refer to each other's successes and claim to be part of one "movement", although it does not really become clear what strategies and goals this movement actually pursues, beyond some shared preferences for nationalism and anti-globalism as well as anti-immigrant policies among its proponents. Furthermore, this alliance appears rather virtual and based on individual personal exchanges, instead of being structural. Different from 20th century populism, authoritarian ideologies and movements, today's populists thus, so far, appear to rather work towards power and dominance (maybe even autocracy) in their particular national settings, but do not necessarily aim at world rule.

of "one-party regimes/rule" and "one-party states". The Chinese Communist Party is probably the most compelling contemporary example of such a one-party system, in which a party does not function as an interest organization, but instead constitutes the whole state structure. It is not restricted to the domains of parties in a democracy, which have to cope with the fact that rule is only temporary and that their suggestions for political solutions are always competing with others. In China, although there is formally a state structure and bureaucracy that is separate from the Party since the beginning of the Reform era in the 1980s, the CCP copies that same structure again in both the horizontal dimension and across all levels and thereby in fact dominates all crucial decision making, including in other function systems. In addition, incumbents of positions in either domain can move back and forth between these two structures without restrictions. The party is therefore probably more important as an organization, or actually subsystem, here than in other current authoritarian regimes, where parties are more or less just an imitation of modern politics and, at most, used to demarcate those belonging to the network in power and those who will never get a chance to exercise power. Furthermore, even one-party systems change over time, as the Chinese example can illustrate again. Party membership, for instance, is not absolutely obligatory anymore in order to fill lower-level political (and other) performance roles in China today; overall loyalty to the CCP regime is enough. And although party membership still offers additional inclusion chances, it is not the only relevant mechanism anymore. Prerequisites for Communist Party membership in China were ideologically – actually functionally – modified over the course of the last two decades, as the CCP now even welcomes private entrepreneurs and claims to represent them, while at the same time it can tap into these new member groups as a resource for information gathering and policy reform by allowing them some (orderly) voice in the political process.[38] That means, in most authoritarian regimes, party membership can at the same time foster inclusive and exclusive structures and it is always worth looking beyond the general categorization "one-party state" to understand forms and effects of ongoing differentiation in each case.

Other political organizations:
NGOs, interest organizations and political issue networks
While we elaborated above how crucial party organizations and party membership are in democratic and many authoritarian political systems, democracies tend to not only rely on parties as organizations of political agenda setting and the

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38 See, for example, Sagild and Ahlers, 2019a. In general, see especially Heberer's thorough reflections on the concept of representation and its application to and in China (2019). See also Volume II of this book for more details.

preparation of collective decision making as well as personnel recruitment, but to a large degree on other organizations and communities, too. Among these other organizations, so-called non-governmental organizations (NGOs), interest associations, foundations, and lobby groups stand out. While they may all have very different origins and operate in many different ways, and it is therefore hard to lump them together in a generalizing description, their core goal and modus operandi is to influence collectively binding decision making.[39] These organizations usually have a very specific issue area they are engaged in, such as environmental protection, health, support for the arts, or labor conditions, and they try to promote their preferred understanding and approach to these problems through non-profit, public and non-public measures. Apart from interest articulation and norm communication, consultation and advocacy vis-à-vis government-internal and -external addressees, these organizations have come to also function as a steppingstone for members to take on (secondary) political performance roles. Different from the ones usually sought by party members, these are mainly positions in the governmental agencies and ministerial bureaucracy, not necessarily executive or leadership positions.

Furthermore, while NGOs and interest associations can work at very different scales – think of a local group that promotes car driving restrictions in the city center vs. a global one like the International Labor Organization – and are usually oriented at very particularistic interest representation, they can be much more transnationally or even globally oriented than parties. They, much more naturally, often conceptualize themselves as members of a Weltöffentlichkeit ("world public") who inject political processes with normative interventions and practical solutions for specific issues of – in their view – global concern. On the one hand, this is where these organizations often draw legitimacy and strength from, but it can also constrain them, because it may render identifying and addressing the relevant polity that is responsible and able to address the problem in focus much more difficult. On the other hand, state actors have in recent decades also understood this ambition and the effects of these local and global organizations and networks for the political system, and they have moved to include members of NGOs and interest organizations in public hearings, governmental commissions, and as bearers of "track 2"-diplomacy initiatives upon state visits. As a consequence, we can observe a striking global convergence in the semantics pertaining to these organizations. But what is now called a "non-governmental organization" around the world, may be embedded and operate in very different local and regional po-

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39 There are exceptions to this among NGOs. Some of the organizations in this broad group may just see their purpose in providing platforms for – often charitable – community engagement or services directed at very particular groups, without aiming at the collectivity as a whole and at political decision making in general in a polity.

litical settings. Authoritarian regimes, in particular, usually seek penetration of society not only via political party organizations, but also through what actually are mass organizations with obligatory membership, such as youth leagues, women's associations, or trade unions. These organizations are often just sub-organizations of the ruling party or clique, and not formally independent associations like in democracies. Another prevalent phenomenon in autocratic contexts is that authorities encroach upon independently evolving grassroots organizations and – if they do not force them to shut down completely – incorporate or convert these organizations' services and activities into the structures of public goods provision that the state officially takes credit for. A close examination of these different realities around the world, for instance, an analysis of the actual autonomy of these organizations from governmental or party structures, the way that the policy suggestions they produce are processed, as well as their self-conceptualization and societal acceptance, can add valuable perspectives to our understanding of differentiation, inclusion and responsiveness in modern political systems.[40]

This said, in many ways NGOs therefore increasingly complement the functions of political parties as core organizations of the political system, although they are organized and operate differently and although they and their members lack a clear and majoritarian mandate. Finally, there may, however, be some cases in which trans-regional and trans-national organizations and networks can actually enfold a distinct relevance for collectively binding decision making, or at least for a broad distribution of public goods (Hooghe and Marks, 2016; Witt, 2005). This status then runs counter to the dominant multi-level differentiation and segmentation of the political system. Examples of such transregional non-governmental (and initially not even political) organizations are, for instance, "parallel" or "grey states" as they may be found in the Muslim brotherhood, or Catholic organizations such as "Opus Dei" or the Jesuit order as older prominent examples. So far, however, these last examples do not seem to indicate a significant and stable trend of differentiation, although it can still be interesting to study such cases in light of our interest in regime bipolarity and forms of political inclusion.

Protest and movements

Protests and movements are social phenomena that are undoubtedly relevant politically, but there is no clear agreement on how to treat these phenomena theoretically. Both are events and mechanisms that are not confined to the political system, as they can occur as forms of contention, complaints, or resistance in other function systems as well (Hirschman, 1970). Due to this ambiguity probably, protest and movements are on the one hand usually not included in descriptions

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40 See Volume II of this book for empirical analyses of different world regions, especially Russia and China.

of established institutions and processes of the political system, while they are on the other hand universally regarded as one of the cornerstones of citizens' political rights in a democracy. Against this background, one can probably best characterize them as an informal corrective, a disturbance and irritation, triggered by disagreement over a decision – or non-decision – and staged as an attempt to bring about a change of course.

Observable forms of protests can encompass participatory publics, actions through formal channels (depending on the context, these could embrace, for example, debate, petitioning, or strike) as well as informal, even illegal means, such as disobedience, occupation, violent protest, riots, revolt, or coups d'état. They can involve both individual and collective acts, although it is commonly the latter that has the potential to actually affect collectively binding decision making in a polity. Political protest can be both very specific and more abstract and appear at all levels of the political system: it can take the form of local protests directed at a specific political project or problem, a nation-wide protest calling for removing the current political leadership, or international activism targeting global economic inequality. The semantics "social movement", it seems, is invoked when there is a specific issue at stake, but maybe not a clear address in the political system (i.e. a particular level or institution of decision making) to turn to, or rather when there are several, for instance in environmental or labor movements. The movement is then usually either demanding this issue to be raised and recognized as a political problem in the first place, or to alter the political solutions offered for this issue at that moment.

In a democracy, citizens enjoy legal protection in the sense that political protest is not retaliated against, as long as the related action does not break any laws. To the contrary, in autocracies, broadly speaking, laws are often enacted proactively to prohibit any such irregular actions that could include opposing the ruling power, which puts citizens in legal jeopardy. More often than not, protests or broad-based movements are simply not tolerated and they are deterred by raw force, meaning that those engaged in them may also have to fear for their lives. There is, however, also ample research showing that this broad-brush summary does not always paint the whole picture, especially when ones takes into account multilevel differentiation in an authoritarian setting. While movements or forms of oppositional action at the national scale are usually not tolerated in autocracies, local instances of disobedience and specific localized protests are sometimes permitted under certain circumstances, as they also serve as an important mechanism to gather information and to control subordinate levels of government and leaders, or put more abstractly: to generate responsiveness (see O'Brien and Li, 2006; Frye and Borisova, 2019).

Finally, over the last two to three decades, increased global mobility and digitalization, especially the rise of social media, can be seen as developments that

directly affect the occurrence, nature and strategies of collective political protest in both democratic and authoritarian settings. Together with other phenomena outlined above, such as the surge of populism, the ever-growing complexity of policy issues (e.g. climate change) including the disagreement over whether to meet these challenges with expertocracy or ideology, the changing status of parties and the parallel solidification of global political interest-based organizations, among other things, there is the potential that protest comes to represent one case of a more substantial differentiation in today's political system than the theoretical literature was so far able to acknowledge. Research will need to confirm whether protests and movements represent a fundamental potential for signicicant political inclusion in the form of an extra-parliamentary, extra-party and maybe sometimes even extra-legal claim or corrective (e.g. in the case of the different "Occupy" movements, or initiatives such as Extinction Rebellion, etc.). It might indicate a new type of political inclusion that is neither dependent on formal membership in a specific and confined polity or organization – something that all other political institutions, organizations and subsystems rely upon –, nor does it necessarily require the identification of a formal or even exclusive address in the political system or in the world polity. Not least, the self-conceptualization of protest actors and movements, including the ways that their legitimacy and representativeness is argued for or against, will make this a paradigmatic context for studying democratic and authoritarian regime features in both a vertical and horizontal dimension in the political system.

Increasingly autonomous relevance of "public opinion" and the virtualization of political inclusion

Closely connected to the developments just mentioned, a few thoughts on the different forms of a political public from which a "public (political) opinion" is derived and channeled into agenda setting in the political system today seem warranted. Galloping digitalization and groundbreaking innovations in the field of information technology referred to above, appear to strengthen the role of and the increasing autonomous relevance of public opinion and thereby a virtualization of political inclusion, from which potential further and probably quite significant differentiations can arise.

Both tendencies can be observed in contemporary political systems largely independently of the regime type under scrutiny. Conventionally, the free formation, competition and the institutional processing of public opinion(s), counts as one of the cornerstones of modern democracy. Public opinion can find its expression in traditional and new (social) media debates, protests and petitions, and other representations of voice in a diverse population ("published opinion"), but it attains its most tangible form when it is purposefully investigated and utilized for political purposes. The extreme prominence of public surveys, for instance, in the

United States and – albeit to a lesser degree – European politics, in order to anticipate election results and to detect major collective political demands and their distribution, is one exemplification of this desire to constantly feel the pulse of *the* public opinion. As this collective singular already implies, for incumbents of political performance roles and those in positions of power it is most relevant to know what issues are deemed politically important and which related political proposals will be appealing to the majority, or at least to majoritarian groups in a polity. This can, however, also mean that public opinion can have an impact on political decision making on a specific issue that is rather independent of other democratic institutions such as parties and elections – especially the more sophisticated and pervasive the continuous screening of public opinion becomes. For example, when chancellor Angela Merkel, a physicist, announced shortly after the Fukushima disaster in Japan in 2011 that Germany would definitively phase out nuclear energy, she – so the often-used explanation – reacted to the public opinion palpable at that time. This decision was a real U-turn that was neither part of her party's, the CDU's, program nor an issue that Merkel ran on in her campaign. Quite the contrary: her government in 2010 had just proclaimed an extension of state support for the operation of nuclear power plants; a decision that completely revised the course of the previous government of the Social Democrats and the Green Party who, as a major issue on their agenda, had announced the end of nuclear energy in Germany in 2000. This episode, among other things, earned her the nickname "Stimmungskanzlerin" ("mood chancellor"). Interestingly enough, as such mockery implies, a political decision and probable change of course that appears to be an irregular response to a somewhat perceived public opinion usually attracts criticism: As much as it for some observers may embody a reaction to popular demands and thereby an adherence to the principle of democracy, it may for others appear to be just a response to the 'loudest' voices, not necessarily the majority. In the latter reading, hasty reactions to a somewhat defined public opinion may therefore have the potential to reduce leadership, predictability and trust regarding party programs and candidates in particular and the democratic political process in general, and seem to verge on populism.

Yet, real populism to an extreme degree utilizes a constructed public mood. Populist leaders not only claim to be speaking *for* the people. They also try to appear to be speaking directly to and *with* the people. For populists it is necessary to show that they want to and can invalidate established ("ineffective") institutions and norms. For this purpose, modern communication technology is very relevant as it helps to circumvent traditional media and filters of both the political messages that are sent out to the people and of the published opinions that reach the political authorities. Donald J. Trump is probably the most prominent example of this "unfiltered" communication and mood intervention via Twitter, but others,

such as India's current president Narendra Modi, have also tried to copy his style quite successfully.[41]

From another perspective, evoking public opinion via social media or other means can of course also be employed by other members of the polity in order to influence political decision making, via, for instance, protest, defamation ("shit storms"), online petitioning, and other means. Here again, this influence is exerted outside of elections or party representation and those engaging in it do not even have to officially proof formal citizenship in a polity to be included in these processes. Appearing to be a potential future voter who could vote in opposition or act as a multiplicator of an opposing opinion, is usually enough. Besides, as has been mentioned before, modern communication technology also aides the rapid formation and diffusion of opinions in a global public ("Weltöffentlichkeit") that in turn may affect domestic politics again.

But "public opinion" can also be an element of modern authoritarian politics, especially as a means of information gathering, a feedback mechanism, and for indirect agenda setting. This is especially true for regimes that live in constant fear of stability-eroding opposition and are thus interested in acting, at least partially, in response to public demands and opinions about certain issues (see Wang, 2008), and which lack other channels through which these can be collected and processed. This is of course not an open and free process, as non-contingent value patterns and the overall taboo of discussing solutions that would imply an end of the current regime usually predetermine what is debatable (see also Chapter 6). Modern autocracies, however, find ways to screen the feasibility of implementing certain decisions and to anticipate and control a tipping of the public mood that could turn the odds against them. Again, it is not just any published opinion but a perceived critical or majority opinion that counts in this context. Minority opinions do not count here and are simply suppressed. In other words, autocracies do not rely on public content, but they need to subdue open discontent. New communication technologies are also employed in authoritarian contexts for exactly all these purposes. After a period in which new social media and the internet were seen as nails to the coffin of autocracies, i.e. as possessing an almost automatic democratizing power and heralding the end of oppression and disinformation (Allen-Ebrahimian, 2016), it is observed more recently that this cat and mouse game can in fact be dominated by autocrats who skillfully employ modern information and communication technology in order to gather and control "public opinion" in their realms (Göbel, 2013).

No matter how far they are able to test, censor and engineer public opinion domestically, today's autocracies usually also worry about public opinion that trans-

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41 See, for example, a comprehensive analysis of Trump's "Twitter presidency" by McIntire and Confessore (2019).

gresses the boundaries of their polity. Published opinions about their regime in general, critique of their domestic and global actions, and other current trends in the "global public" are not controllable, unlike debates within the polity; and they have the potential to impact upon the domestic mood. The outbound activities of democratic countries, supposed to tilt relevant moods elsewhere in their favor in order to achieve national goals, has inspired much debate and coined scholarly paradigms over the last decade (e.g., the debate about US-American "soft power"). Yet, most recently, boundary-spanning propaganda and indirect and direct interventions by autocracies in other polities in order to influence public opinion and even election outcomes and national decision making has become an equally hot topic of interest in political practice and theory (Diamond et al., 2016; Mueller et al., 2019).

IV. Conclusion

The more complex the societal environment, the more complex the political system's internal environment needs to become in order to hold ready the capacity to make collective binding decisions; the more issues become a vital part of political decision making, the further the political system differentiates internally. This chapter has illustrated these dynamics of differentiation by analyzing the ongoing evolution of multiple levels, institutions and organizations of the political system on both the horizontal and vertical dimensions.

One may argue that the break observable between pre-modern polities, which displayed a degree of differentiation – for instance, the diffusion of political authority and decision making across different levels, offices and roles – and modern ones is not so great, or is just a matter of degree. This argument, however, can be rebutted with a reference to the relevance of this differentiation. In pre-modern times, no distinct political system existed. Central authorities and their peripheral branches in pre-modern states were often struggling to or refused to make collectively binding decisions for the whole polity: among other things, they usually did not sufficiently and consistently identify the political collectivity to which their decisions would apply and could not rely on a generally shared understanding of this collectivity, and there was no legal system in place to facilitate homogeneous decision-making throughout the polity. In a modern political system, decisions (through full inclusion and citizenship) potentially apply to all members of a polity. Specifically, the observation of ongoing vertical differentiation of different levels of collectively binding decision making raises the question of whether these levels themselves build new political systems. As noted above, this is an empirical question; however, using it as a heuristic point of departure could help scholars explore and answer some of the puzzles of political convergence and divergence within polities that we have briefly described above. Vertical and hor-

izontal internal differentiation of the political system goes hand in hand with the emergence of the inclusion formulas of modernity: the more complex a polity and its different levels and subsystems, the larger the variety of inclusion roles available – and this pattern holds even for modern autocracies. Given the plurality of levels of decision making internal to any polity, new political inclusion roles can arise at all these levels and diversify political systems. In other words, with rising complexity and the differentiation of decision making at different levels, the chance of the coexistence of differential inclusion roles increases – and this seems to be true for both democracies and modern autocracies.

Furthermore, current political systems across the globe seem to agree on a certain set of issues for which a society seeks collectively binding decision making (e.g., welfare, security, environmental protection). Together with the evolution of countries and nation states as the decisive form of political segments in world society, this congruence has led to increasing similarity among the population of political systems in regard to not only a multi-level system of governance and political inclusion but also internal horizontal differentiation. Our analysis, however, cannot stop at proclaiming a formal and maybe empty global institutional isomorphism. Yet, regime differences can no longer be illustrated simply by pointing to the lack of specific institutions associated with a democratic polity; rather, the distinctions are found in other details. The differences usually rest upon non-contingent values that inform, for example, the general orientation of decision making, the definition of and access to inclusion roles, and the characteristics of political procedures that define the relationship between subsystems and institutions as well as the different levels in the political system. There may also be a layer of a primary form of organization – possibly a specific elite group, a party state organization and bureaucracy as in the case of China, clergy as in Iran, a monarchy as in Saudi Arabia, or oligarchy organizations as in Russia – that stretches across all other levels and subsystems and that, notwithstanding all possible differentiation in general, dominates these levels and subsystems (see also Chapter 6).

Finally, this chapter shed light on issues pertaining to the question of potential future paths for differentiation in modern political systems of both prevalent regime types. Interesting dynamics are emerging in the context of the specific circumstances of the beginning of the 21st century: the further decentralization of decision making at different levels, shifting authority toward both the more local and the global level, which competes with the centralization of authority and the capacity for collectively binding decisions in and for a country-level polity that is usually located at the national level. At a time of both increased global mobility of individuals and communicative exchanges between different collectivities as a whole, as well as populism and a re-focusing on forms of a traditional territorial definition of and identification in politics, these coexisting trends may begin to clash more openly and strongly (e.g., the populist narrative of the evil "globalists").

At the same time, the increasing virtualization of a political public and the use and misuse of information technologies can create new forms of inclusion at any level and can initiate the transformation of conventional political organizations and subsystems. The principal diagnosis is therefore maybe not necessarily that the overall status of the nation state in the 21st century is declining, but rather that the new, additional forms of individual inclusion that arise globally through the ongoing vertical and horizontal differentiation of political systems are becoming less bound to the nation state, or country, as the dominant political segment in world society. How the current trends develop and how polities conceptualize and accommodate this internal diversity and potential divergence are intriguing questions that the other chapters in this volume as well as the empirical studies in Volume II explore further.

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