

◀ RESEARCH NOTE ▶

2,234 Descriptions of Democracy

An Update to Democracy's Ontological Pluralism

Jean-Paul Gagnon

► **Abstract:** In 2010 Milja Kurki explained that although scholars recognize that democracy is described in a variety of ways, they do not typically engage with its many and diverse descriptions. My aim in this agenda-setting research note is to tackle this quandary by first providing a minimum empirical account of democracy's descriptions (i.e., a catalogue of 2,234 adjectives that have been used to describe democracy) and secondly by suggesting what democracy studies may gain by compiling this information. I argue that the catalogue of descriptors be applied in four ways: (1) drilling down into the meaning of each description, (2) making taxonomies, (3) rethinking the phenomenology of democracy, and (4) visualizing democracy's big data. Each of the four applications and their significance is explained in turn. This research note ends by looking back on the catalogue and its four applications.

► **Keywords:** adjectives of democracy, big data, definitions of democracy, democracy, democracy studies, democratic theory, philosophy of democracy, types of democracy

Over the last two hundred years (see Supplement A in the online issue for evidence) it has been noted that there are many, if not “hundreds” (Collier and Levitsky 1997: 430–431) of ways to describe democracy. Yet we have made these recognitions about democracy's ontological pluralism (the view, as Turner [2012] explains, that a thing can exist in the world in many forms) without exactly knowing the minimum extent of democracy's descriptions. More importantly, we do not know what such knowledge might add to the field of democracy studies. As Milja Kurki (2010) explains, scholars often recognize democracy's ontological



pluralism but do not engage with it. Kurki goes on to say that this is perhaps a case of intellectuals shirking their duty to engage with ontological diversity. I believe another barrier has been that we do not have a catalogue or even an approximate estimation for the number of descriptions (i.e., theories, models, definitions, conceptions, ideations, iterations, illustrations, practices, names, frames, forms, etc.) that have been ascribed to democracy.¹ There is a practical reason for this lack. As we will see, constructing such a catalogue requires access to vast amounts of literature and the ability to search through it quickly.² Constructing this catalogue may reveal, as Aristotle (Ward 2008: 205) supposed, one or more underlying unities about democracy. This in turn could satisfy Guizot (1839: 7), who beseeches us from the past for a scientific definition of democracy, and satiate Tocqueville, who once asked for a clearer definition of democracy so that people will not “live in an inextricable confusion of ideas, much to the advantage of demagogues and despots” (quoted in Sartori 1987: 3).

Giovanni Sartori (2004: 786) offers a different reason for why we recognize but do not engage with democracy’s ontological pluralism. He says it is, at least in part, a symptom of the “belittlement of definitions [or descriptions]” that is entrenched in the American tradition of political science. Sartori sees three problems with this belittlement: “First, since definitions declare the intended meaning of words, they ensure that we do not misunderstand each other. Second, words are also, in our research, our data containers. Therefore if our data containers are loosely defined our facts will be misgathered. Third, to define [or describe] is first of all to assign limits, to delimit.”

Sartori is concerned about the proliferation of neologisms, epithets, and adjectives for democracy and has worked to counter this trend (e.g., Sartori 1987). His efforts have, however, been premature because he did not first cast a wide enough net when he sought to capture all of the claims about *what* democracy is. It is undoubtedly important to be precise with our descriptions of democracy. But it is equally important to know which descriptions exist, which are valuable to us now, and which should be removed from the canon. Further to this, not knowing the number of ways democracy is described means that we are unable to consider democracy’s definitions, data containers, and delimitations as a whole. Much as an archaeologist would spread out what she presumes to be the many pieces of a shattered artefact on a table, a scholar of democracy needs to identify and interrogate, and compare and contrast each description of democracy in turn. This will help us understand how these descriptions make up the whole and how many of democracy’s neologisms are formed. I believe the “belittlement of definitions” in American

political science is a symptom of having to make do without an empirically grounded understanding of democracy's descriptors rather than it being inherent to the discipline's character.

The lack of a comprehensive corpus of knowledge about democracy, one that would give scholars a more logical first position or point of departure in their study of democracy, inevitably means that our facts about democracy are misgathered. We are presently unable to interrogate descriptions of democracy from inside a coherent and ecumenical corpus of knowledge about it. Such an interrogation would enable us to see, for example, what information each description of democracy includes and excludes (i.e., what makes the description unique), whether two or more descriptions are in fact delimiting the same information and should therefore be consolidated into one, or if a description of democracy is a false positive – that it is *not* describing democracy but rather coopting its meaning for other, potentially nefarious purposes, as arguably happens with despotic democracy, autocratic democracy, totalitarian democracy, and populist democracy.

Kurki argues that this gap in scholarship has real – and negative – consequences because it means scholars either implicitly or explicitly advance certain descriptions of democracy at the expense of others. Kurki's analysis is mirrored in the literature critical of democracy promotion by the United States (Jahn 2012) and European Union (Gillespie and Youngs 2002: 10) or, conversely, by mainland China (Bryant and Chou 2016; Chou, Pan, and Poole 2016) and Russia (Salmenniemi 2012: 81), which each promote distinct models of democracy, such as liberal democracy, neoliberal democracy, or even authoritarian/illiberal democracy (Huntington 1996: 9; Zakaria 1997). An insistence on specific models of democracy can constrain the ability of citizens in parts of the world to cultivate alternate models that may be equally legitimate, if not more so. It restrains and constrains their ability to counterpromote democracy *with* democracy (Rosanvallon 2008; Rosanvallon and Gagnon 2014). Therefore, by enforcing specific descriptions of democracy, scholars may be doing a disservice to different ideas or practices of it out of ignorance. If Kurki is correct – and my sense is that she is – then providing an empirical update to democracy's ontological pluralism holds the potential to uncover dynamics of power in the knowledge of democracy (Bueger 2015; Hedstrom and King 2005). Understanding these dynamics could help us determine how certain descriptions of democracy are dominating others – both in epistemic (i.e., how do we know about democracy and why do we know it in these ways and not in other ways) and practical terms (i.e., how do we practice democracy and why do we practice it in these ways and not in other ways).

Taking this treatment of Kurki and Sartori together, it is clear that not engaging with democracy's ontological pluralism has produced a significant blind spot in democracy studies, for how can one know democracy without first knowing what is known about it?

Robert Dahl (1956: xix) helps us understand why this blind spot exists and persists. In his view democracy scholarship traditionally provides “to some extent arbitrary” descriptions of democracy. Arbitrary because the descriptions do not come from a comprehensive, empirically derived corpus of democracy's descriptions; rather, our descriptions come from a position of *not* knowing the corpus. In Dahl's view this does not matter, as a scholar's work on democracy has to start somewhere. In other words, “we should not worry about” describing and “that [descriptions] are to be kept loose” (Sartori 2004: 786). Dahl qualifies the arbitrary nature of democracy's descriptions when he writes “to some extent” because scholars often justify their descriptions: they give their readers historical, etymological, ethical, comparative, phenomenological, and moral if not conventional reasons for why they use a particular description of democracy and not another. These “to some extent arbitrary” and “loose [descriptions]” constitute a pragmatic and reasonable approach – this is because it was not possible in Dahl's time to either count democracy's descriptions or to try to make sense of that immense body of information. As David Held rightly says in an interview conducted several years prior (Held and Gagnon 2014), we can only work with the tools available to us. Yet if we *had* a tool that could reduce the arbitrariness of our descriptions – by giving the language of democracy an improved empirical footing – wouldn't we scholars of democracy and our discipline be the better for it?

Following this rationale, the aim in this agenda-setting research note is to break with our tradition of recognition but not engagement. I do this by giving a minimum account of the pre- and postpositive adjectives (e.g., representative democracy and democracy lite, respectively) that are used to describe democracy in English scholarly literature. This culminates in a catalogue (see Supplement B in the online issue for evidence) that contains 2,234 different descriptors for democracy, organized alphanumerically. I explain how I came to count these descriptors and not others – such as the synonyms of democracy. I then explain four ways that the catalogue can be applied and what, I believe, are its main points of significance. These are (1) drilling down into the meaning of each description, (2) making taxonomies, (3) rethinking the phenomenology of democracy, and (4) visualizing big data. The research note ends by looking back on democracy's 2,234 descriptors and its four applications to argue that this minimum approximation of its ontological pluralism points, initially, to the need for more research and, later, to the question of what democracy is and how it came to be so diverse.

Why Count Adjectives?

Two perspectives on knowledge creation demonstrate that democracy has been described in many ways. If we start from a Platonist perspective of knowledge creation, then there is an ideal type for each concept that exists in the phenomenological world. Inevitably this means there is no one true, real, pure, actual, or definitive description of democracy but instead *many* of them. The eighteenth and nineteenth centuries are, for instance, littered with lock-horn debates between rival absolutist accounts of democracy (e.g., the struggle in early-1800s America between popular Jacksonian democracy and restrained Van Buren democracy). Among the more significant examples from the twentieth century was the ideological struggle over democracy between the United States and the Soviet Union (Timasheff 1950). Both powers were rival claimants to the practice of “true” democracy, and both accused each other of being false prophets in this regard.

A non-Platonist perspective of knowledge creation also embraces the pluralism of concepts because a concept is created, altered, or carried by people who live in a particular place in time. Non-Platonism holds the view that concepts are sometimes the product of contingency. This means that there must be many descriptions of democracy and that they are likely going to differ, to varying extents, across time and place and from person to person *in* those places, as Doorenspleet (2012) suggests. When it comes to how knowledge about democracy is created – whether it is Platonic or non-Platonic – the results are undeniably plural.

This observation led me to wonder how many descriptions of democracy exist in the English literature. I discovered that democracy has at least 2,234 descriptors, ranging from basic sentence fragments, such as “torpedo-boat democracy,” to complex discourses, such as the ones devoted to “social democracy.” I write “at least” because, as I describe in the next section, the method used to find these descriptors was inductive. There are likely hundreds of other descriptors awaiting discovery – many of which can be found using a deductive method. For example, a research project has paired the word democracy with the *Oxford English Dictionary*’s complete list of adjectives from historical and modern English. An exhaustive Amazon-powered search of more than 260,000 word pairings (e.g., “a close-second democracy,” “a false-step democracy,” “a million-dollar democracy,” etc.) has been run in the Google Books database to find descriptors that do not appear in the catalogue.

I have chosen to concentrate on pre- and postpositive adjectives because my observations suggest they are the most common means for describing democracy in the English language.³ A prepositive adjective is where the descriptor appears directly before the word democracy, as in

the following: representative democracy, liberal parliamentary democracy, and semibarbarous Catholic democracy. A postpositive adjective is where the descriptor appears directly after the word democracy, as in the following: democracy proper, democracy lite, and democracy interrupted. There are more prepositive than postpositive adjectives.

The Method Used to Count Democracy's 2,234 Descriptors

An inductive method was used to build the catalogue presented in Supplement B. I was curious about the number of democracy's descriptors, and in 2010, with the aim of compiling a catalogue, I began a record of the ones I encountered when conducting other democracy-oriented research. By the end of 2014 I had found 507 descriptors. This triggered the release of a pilot study that was, in the main, devoted to refining the catalogue's methodology.

Following the results of the pilot study, the inductive method gained refinement as patterns became noticeable in what was a constantly growing catalogue. For instance, "green democracy" (Baber and Bartlett 2005; Dryzek and Schlosberg 1998; Saward 1993) was in the catalogue, so why not red democracy (Fernbach 1969; Price 2007), blue (Latta 2014), yellow (Steinbeck and Steinbeck 2011), rainbow (Taub 2002), black (Hine 2003; Joseph 1987), brown (Romulo 1944), pink (Klemperer-Markman 2015), gray (Ding 2001: 95), white (Olson 2004), or any other color or combination of colors (Cahan 2006: 1107) of democracy too?

And what of the antonyms to the adjectives in the catalogue (e.g., representative and *un*representative democracy) and other demonyms (e.g., American democracy, Saskatchewan democracy, Parisian democracy)?

In short, systematic lines of inquiry were developed, which I employed in a second wave of searches. This yielded an additional 1,727 descriptors, resulting in the 2,234 that appear in alphanumerical order in the catalogue.

The Applied Value of Democracy's Ontological Pluralism

There is an instinct to simplify ontological pluralism from the outset – to say, for instance, that "democracy is such and such" and to use that frame to adjudge which descriptors should be kept in the catalogue and which should be left out, or to articulate the theory that explains how democracy's plurality emerged and why this matters, or to deploy a series of critical discourse analyses using language processing software to uncover a helpful syllogism: that, for example, all descriptions about democracy

are associated with communication, and therefore, democracy is communicative. Inquiries of this nature are important but *secondary*. They should come only after more descriptors are found, after other relevant catalogues are compiled (e.g., on democracy's synonyms, predicate adjectives, and non-adjectival descriptions) in English and other languages, and after we have identified, digitized, and stored the publications that are appropriately associated with each descriptor. Following these preliminary steps will ensure that the secondary inquiries are more accurate and, subsequently, that the work to simplify democracy's ontological pluralism will have better outcomes.

Our *first* obligation is to let the descriptors speak for themselves. My model is the philosopher and cultural critic Walter Benjamin (1999: 460), who became preoccupied with the detritus of great cities like Paris and the ragpickers who collected it for repurposing and resale. It is important here to recognize that Benjamin did not rush to interpret what he found. "I needn't say anything," he writes. "I shall purloin no valuables, appropriate no ingenious formulations. But the rags, the refuse – these I will . . . allow, in the only way possible, to come into their own: by making use of them." Like Benjamin, I wish to avoid affecting *what is* by, for instance, omitting descriptors or laying upon them a theoretical rationale at the outset. It is important to let democracy's descriptors speak for themselves, and as Benjamin demonstrates, we can do this by making use of them.

What then, does the catalogue of 2,234 descriptors add to the discipline of democracy studies? It opens pathways for us to better understand, interrogate, and use its content. This data, as I explain below, can be applied in four ways. The first is to drill down into the meaning of each descriptor. The second, which derives its method from Foucault's work on the archeology of knowledge, is to use bibliometric data to create taxonomies of descriptors, as this reveals their informational infrastructure. The third is to rethink the phenomenology of democracy. The catalogue enables us to ask which of the 2,234 descriptions of democracy have been – or are – found outside of the literature – in the "real world" so to speak. The fourth and final application is to visualize democracy's big data as a three-dimensional, digital, "city of democracy." This visualization not only makes it easier to macro-theorize about democracy; it also offers its users a novel means to engage with knowledge about democracy (publications) and its producers (authors).

(1) Drilling Down: Tell Stories and Eliminate False Positives

Each descriptor in the catalogue holds a story of its own. We can zoom in to isolate a descriptor of our choice and drill down into it to understand who

used the descriptor and for what purpose. Take “brown democracy” (Friend 1988: 141; Romulo 1944: 128) as an example. This conception of democracy stems from the political theory of former Philippines’ journalist and World War II Colonel Carlos P. Romulo. In the early 1940s he argued that “the Pacific war has united the Asiatic peoples as nothing has in the past . . . a new consciousness is rising in the East, a consciousness of oneness and of unity” that will “see a Brown Democracy emerg[e] out of the Japanese debacle.” The case for a pan-Asian, transboundary, racial democracy premised on the emancipation of colored people and the resistance to Western and Japanese variants of imperialism was initially advanced by Romulo in his 1943 book *Mother America* (Romulo 1943: see especially 66). The book provoked a response from Rupert Emerson (1944) that was published by the *Far Eastern Survey* in March 1944. Although Emerson principally critiqued Romulo’s book for being Pollyannaish about the positive influence of the United States in the Philippines, he also questioned the vision of an anti-imperialist multinational democracy rising out of the ashes of the Pacific War. Romulo responded in July of 1944, agreeing with Emerson that it was “the advent of Western imperialism in the Orient” that “created divisions among the people” in the first place. But it was the war in the Pacific that “united the Asiatic peoples as nothing has in the past. The Japanese slogan of ‘Asia for the Asiatics’ has opened the eyes of the Orientals.” Romulo finishes his response to Emerson by qualifying that it was “the stress by Japanese propagandists on the color line” that “has served to bring the Indians, the Burmese, the Chinese, the Koreans, the Indonesians, the Malays and the Filipinos closer together. The effects of this propaganda will,” Romulo believed, “remain after the military defeat of Japan” (1944: 128).

Romulo’s brown democracy and the debate it sparked seven decades ago has lamentably been left untouched by scholars over this period. It is because I asked, after encountering “green democracy,” what other colors of democracy there might be in the literature that I stumbled onto Romulo’s conception of a pan-Asian, anticolonial democracy – a conception that no doubt deserves the attention of today’s historians of democratic thought and those pursuing the theory of international democracy (e.g., Bogdandy 2012; Görg and Hirsh 2011; Lynch 2000). Scholars can, for instance, explore why Romulo’s racial democracy, or some iteration of it, did not eventuate after the Empire of Japan’s surrender. Was it because Asian democratization was interrupted by the “new colonialism” (Frey 2003: 560) of the Cold War?

Zooming out and taking the full list of descriptors in again, we can see that drilling down offers a qualitative route for scholars to tell the stories behind democracy’s 2,234 descriptors. The process of drilling down opens the opportunity to debate the value of a descriptor within

our scholarly community. “Torpedo-boat democracy,” for example, is Ted Hopf’s (1994: 268) translation of the Russian term *minonostsa demokratiya*. The term is used only once in the Google Scholar and Google Books corpora. Hopf does not explain what this description of democracy means, as it appears in the bibliography to his book. The reference points us to the Russian broadsheet *Izvestiya* that published a story entitled *minonostsa demokratiya* on April 20, 1984. Archival research might uncover a fascinating story about a company of Russian sailors practicing democracy at sea, or it might be a contrived – and therefore probably useless – propaganda piece rich in double-speak and little else. If the truth is akin to the former, we will have found a valuable story to share. If akin to the latter, the descriptor will be a false positive and should be removed from the catalogue. In either scenario our action improves the quality of knowledge about democracy through elucidation (by adding appropriate data to the corpus) or elimination (by removing inappropriate data from it).

(2) Taxonomies, Archives, and Information Infrastructure

A taxonomy is a heuristic device (from the Greek word *heuriskein*, “to find,” “to discover”) that is used to classify objects and determine how they relate to one another over time. Using bibliometric data, we can construct a taxonomy of publications and organize them in a time sequence, one that shows if and how publications relate to each other through citation network analysis. As Foucault reminds us in his book *The Archeology of Knowledge* (1969a, 1969b), it is possible to treat a subject-specific body of publications as an archaeological site. Identifying the publications belonging to a specific subject – Foucault refers to them as “the archive” – and demonstrating how these publications may or may not link to each other helps us determine how a subject can be differently understood across discourses and over time (1969b: 261). It is “a comparative analysis that is not intended to reduce the diversity of discourses . . . but is intended to divide up their diversity into different figures” (1969a: 177).

Take the taxonomy of “Lincolnian democracy” as an example. Table 1, below, shows the fifty-seven publications that use this term (see Supplement C in the online issue for evidence). The taxonomy of the term begins at the top of the table with Lincolnian democracy’s earliest mention in 1920. It then it then tracks down to where and when the term appears over time and also its frequency of use. What Table 1 shows is that the term has been used not fewer than sixty-three times in ninety or so years, meaning it is a rare term. It also demonstrates that none of the publications refer to each other directly. The scarcity of the term and the lack of a citation network between publications points to two phenomena in this

particular archive. The first is that each work uses Lincolnian democracy as a small part of separate discussions, and the second is that there is no obvious discourse devoted to the term.

A proximal word analysis sustains this finding, as definitions of Lincolnian democracy differ in the archive. Most authors define it as

Table 1: A taxonomy of “Lincolnian democracy”

Year	Source
1920	Shaw, FN: 1
1924	DuBois, FN: 1
1927	Roeder, FN: 1
1941	Browder, FN: 1
1943	Author Unknown, FN: 1
1946	Author Unknown, FN: 1; Author Unknown, FN: 1
1947	Santee, FN: 1; Markham, FN: 1; Author Unknown, FN: 1
1950	Author Unknown, FN: 1
1953	Author Unknown, FN: 1
1956	Author Unknown, FN: 1
1959	Rosenberry, FN: 1; Kanamori, FN: 1
1960	Bittelman, FN: 3
1961	Randall, FN: 1; Jansen, FN: 1
1963	Planck, FN: 1
1964	Author Unknown, FN: 1; Anderson, FN: 1
1965	Grazia, FN: 1
1966	Wadia, FN: 1
1969	Cakravartin, FN: 2; Randall, FN: 1
1971	Liang, FN: 1
1972	Lewis, FN: 1
1973	Stone, FN: 1
1979	Sherwood, FN: 1
1981	Aquino, FN: 1
1984	Author Unknown, FN: 1
1985	Flanner, FN: 1
1987	Papo, FN: 1
1988	Author Unknown, FN: 1
1989	Roper, FN: 1; Evanoff, FN: 1
1990	Silver, FN: 1
1991	Clanton, FN: 1; Author Unknown, FN: 1; Buhle, FN: 1
1993	Teaford, FN: 1
1997	Wiebe, FN: 1
1998	Jameson, FN: 1
1999	Seldon, FN: 1; Jones, FN: 1; Polikoff, FN: 2
2003	Morrissey, FN: 1
2005	Chatturvedi, FN: 1
2007	Sisson, FN: 1
2008	Avim, FN: 1; Author Unknown, FN: 1
2009	Hassan, FN: 1; Sands, FN: 1
2010	Cullen, FN: 2; Davidson, FN: 2; Doli., FN: 1; Author Unknown, FN: 1

Legend: FN = Frequency number, or, number of times “Lincolnian democracy” was used in text.

“democracy for the people, by the people, and of the people” (which is the last line in Lincoln’s 1863 Gettysburg Address) or some variation of that phrase. But others see it as a liberal and social democracy; a racially exclusive democracy; the direct opposite of Aristotle’s definition of politics; a Western myth; another name for polyarchy; an idea of democracy that became perverted over time; the antithesis to totalitarian communism; an idea amenable to capture by dictators who adopt its appearance or phraseology; a gospel; a style of democracy that leads to a government that will be loved, esteemed, and respected by its citizens; and a US-American political tradition.

The disjointed structure of the information pertaining to Lincolnian democracy begs to be made sense of. Why, for instance, are there so many different definitions? Is there any way to give this body of literature a narrative – to plot in some sensible way to discover how and why Lincolnian democracy came to have so many meanings? When we try to answer these questions, the work of the archaeologist comes into play. Having collected the fifty-seven publications that use the term and having established that each is isolated inside the archive, we can now investigate whether these sites intersect outside of the archive (i.e., whether two or more definitions can be logically connected in a genealogical narrative of Lincolnian democracy). Playing the archaeologist in this way allows us to give a genealogical account of the evidence, to dismiss irrelevant information, and to devise a comprehensive narrative of the subject.

Over time, as the catalogue of democracy’s descriptors expands and becomes more sophisticated, it might be possible to give the whole its taxonomy – to start from the earliest known pre- or postpositive adjective and to track where and when new descriptors appear. We will then hopefully be able to tell *why* they appear where and when they do. As seen with the example of Lincolnian democracy, the simple exercise of setting publications out in a time sequence can help identify gaps, generate research questions, and ultimately advance our understanding of what democracy is and how its descriptions came to be so diverse.

(3) Rethinking Democracy’s Phenomenology

The catalogue invites us to rethink the phenomenology of democracy – the way democracy “is” in the world – within both contemporary and historical polities. That there are at least 2,234 descriptions of democracy means that some number of them will exist, either in practice or conception, within a polis and among its citizens (heretofore polity). If we accept that statement as true, then we find ourselves asking a rather interesting question: Can more than one understanding of democracy exist

simultaneously within a polity, and how do they coexist? This question leads to thinking about, for example, the *democracies* within a democratic regime. Or, more generally, of the blend of democracies that can be found within a polity and of how that blend defines a polity's democratic nature.

Consider, for example, the language that is conventionally used to identify democracy in a polity such as the United States. "American democracy" (the demonym) and "America's democracy" (the statonym), which represent subtly different perspectives on democracy in America, are singular. Although both descriptors imply it, this does not mean that democracy in the United States is *one* type of democracy out of a possible 2,234. An examination of the literature on democracy in America reveals that it is or purports itself to be: a federal democracy (Erk 2015) – there are, for instance, fifty separate democratic governments at the state level inside the United States and thousands more at the local level; a representative democracy (Toregas 2001: 235); a liberal democracy (Layne 2006: 14); a capitalist democracy (Goodwin 1994: 108); a prospective electronic democracy (Norris and Reddick 2012); an unequal democracy (Bartels 2016); an electoral democracy (Kropf and Kimball 2012); a white democracy (Pool 2015: 419); a violent democracy (Ross 2004); and so forth. Any circumspect analysis of American or America's democracy will reveal that it is a blend of numerous different – and sometimes commensurate or clashing – understandings and practices of it.

The catalogue, because of its plural nature, prompts us to ask which democracies are present in which polities and whether these blends of democracy differ between levels of government, socioeconomic or cultural contexts, perspective, and time. This fluid way of thinking about democracy is already present in the scholarship on measuring democracies. Democratic regimes are, for example, being measured for multiple coexisting practices and models of democracy, as political theorists and empiricists are increasingly seeing plural types of democracy simultaneously in play within them. "There is a widespread conviction," writes Markowski (2015: 40), "that we need to empirically disentangle this multifaceted concept [of democracy] and scrutinize the relationship between its particular components." He goes on to say that "in political practice there is a movement to improve our understanding of exactly what is meant by democracy in culturally divergent parts of the world and in particular countries." This is reflected in the work happening within the Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem) program (e.g., Coppedge et al. 2011; Coppedge et al. 2016), which argues that "any measurement scheme rests on concepts" and that "there is no consensus on what democracy writ-large means beyond a vague notion of rule by the people. Political theorists have emphasized this point for some time, and empiricists would do well to take this lesson to heart."

As V-Dem is an empirically driven program of research, it internalized this recognition by including the electoral, liberal, participatory, deliberative, and egalitarian descriptions of democracy as variables in their study (Coppedge et al. 2016: 4–6). Although these are clearly not the only descriptors for democracy, it is nonetheless an important step in the direction of detecting *democracies* – and not only, for example, its liberal representative iteration – within polities.

The catalogue makes possible the theory of “blended democracy,” which posits that the democratic nature of a regime is characterized by the types of democracy that can be found within it, how these types rise and fall in popularity, and how they clash or go together (Chou et al. 2017: ch. 2; Gagnon and Vasilev 2016: 2). Take the following example: in the late 1940s and 1950s United States, many in the post-war builders’ generation were satisfied with voting, elections, and multiparty representation. But the cultural revolutions of the late 1960s and early 1970s would come to challenge this understanding of democracy. Emancipation, desegregation, gender and sexual equality, and numerous other impassioned cries for political reform (especially coming from young people, women, and visible minorities) were lauded by Ralph Dahrendorf (in Crozier, Huntington, and Watanuki 1975: 192) as the immanence of the political public “for the first time in the history of democratic countries.” At the same time, Crozier, Huntington, and Watanuki (1975) reprimanded these developments as “participatory overload” and a case of “too much democracy.” Democracy in the United States was, at this point, in part characterized by a clash between representative and delegative as well as participatory and direct understandings of democracy.

Democratic regimes also demonstrate cases in which one type of democracy has been imported into another to either increase the quality of its democratic governance or improve its stability. A significant example in politics today is, as Carole Pateman (2012: 10) mentioned in her 2012 presidential address to the *American Political Science Association*, the uptake of deliberative democracy, “which puts communication” and consensus “at the heart of politics,”⁴ into electoral democracy, which places more emphasis on ballots and electoral systems. This is especially evident at local levels of government, where deliberative budgeting, deliberative polling, and other forms of deliberative mini-public are increasingly used (see Grönlund, Bächtiger, and Setälä 2014 and the Participedia project for more).

(4) Big-Data Visualization: Introducing the City of Democracy

Digital humanities allow big data to be visualized so that both writer and reader can see the material in a different but comprehensible form.

Visualizing the catalogue in this research note allowed me to think about democracy in macro-theoretical terms. Macro because thinking about the catalogue as a whole means theorizing about a body with 2,234 parts to it, and theoretical because this form of thinking can produce both descriptive and normative outcomes. But it is also a means to engage with a constantly growing corpus, a whole that changes over time, one that only exists because of its plural components. Visualizing the catalogue makes its corpus comprehensible without losing the specificity of its constitutive parts.

I have been visualizing the catalogue as a three-dimensional, digitally modeled, city of democracy. The idea to visualize the catalogue as a city came from Tocqueville. As Leo Damrosch (2010: 202–203) explains, when Tocqueville returned home from his visit to America, it took him eight years of further research and a number of geographical metaphors to bring coherence to the trunkful of notes on democracy he brought back with him. “I will be like a traveler who emerges from a great city and climbs a nearby hill” writes Tocqueville. “The farther away [the traveler] gets the more the people behind him disappear from view. Their dwellings merge together, he can no longer recognize the public squares, he can barely make out the streets. But now,” Tocqueville continues, “his eye takes in the contours of the town more easily and for the first time he grasps its shape.”

I decided to try to replicate Tocqueville’s metaphor. I used videogame design software to see what would happen when my avatar climbs a nearby hill and looks back on the catalogue visualized as a city. Each descriptor of democracy is a building. What I see are 2,234 buildings of various sizes, as preliminary research shows that descriptors can be ranked by the amount of publications each is associated with (e.g., according to Google Scholar and Google Books, the term “American democracy” appears in an estimated 864,000 publications, while the term “quiescent democracy” appears in only 21 publications). Building size in the city is tied to the descriptor’s ranking: the higher its ranking, the bigger the building; the lower its ranking, the smaller the building. The buildings are separated by streets.

The view of the city from the hillside shows its immensity. There are buildings everywhere. Moving my avatar, I walk down from the hill and enter the city. I am struck by how many people there are. Tens of thousands of people live here. They are the authors who used one or more of democracy’s descriptors in their work. Walking inside the city is like walking in a bustling metropolis. Every building and person is different, and each has its own story to tell. Some buildings contain rooms, which are generated by secondary adjectives. “Liberal representative

democracy” makes, for instance, a “liberal” room inside the “representative democracy” building. As is the case with the buildings, the rooms vary in size based on their ranking.

Rolling back on the mouse, my viewpoint changes from first-person streetview to the bird’s-eye view – similar to how Google maps customarily portrays urban spaces. The city and all its people now lie in two dimensions, and there is a toolbar on the screen with different functions that can be toggled. A click of the mouse on “affinity networks” (a button in the toolbar) sees buildings and people rapidly move on the map and settle in a new orientation: the city is now made up of neighborhoods where buildings and people are linked by their commonalities. Another click of the mouse in the toolbar, this time on “time sequence,” sees buildings and people move again. Now the left side of the city contains the oldest buildings and people and the right side the youngest. A forward roll of the mouse, after hovering the cursor over the left side of the city, sends my avatar back to the street level of the old quarter, where I can choose to click on a person and see their biographical data (e.g., list of publications, keywords, weblinks), or click on a building and see its bibliometric data (e.g., access its digital archive and see the names and number of rooms it has inside it), or walk inside a building to access the digital archive pertaining to one of its rooms (e.g., liberal representative democracy’s archive, which can be downloaded to my hard drive with the click of a button).

The city of democracy is, however, more than an exercise in visualizing big data; it is also a service, because anyone with a computer, internet connection, and the required software can enter the city and do as I have done – interact with immense amounts of knowledge about democracy. Once it is brought online, the city will also be updated annually, allowing users to track how the city changes over time.

Whether one’s avatar is outside, inside, or above the city, it becomes easier to macro-theorize about democracy. My time in the city led, for example, to an inquiry into its residents and how they gave meaning to the word democracy in their publications. I have empirical reasons to sustain the hypothesis that there are at least four ways to give meaning to democracy: the first is to do so without using pre- and postpositive adjectives (Type I); the second is by using only one pre- or postpositive adjective (Type II); the third is by using two or more pre- or postpositive adjectives (Type III); and the fourth is by using all pre- and postpositive adjectives (Type IV). Preliminary research shows that Type Is are uncommon, Type IIs are rare, Type IIIs are by far the most common, and Type IVs do not yet exist. The normative aspect of this work has to do with the Type IV intellectual. Are they not needed to advance a number of theoretical and

philosophical debates in democracy studies today? The work of the Type IV is to give the city its narratives, to explain its origins, and to point out its most recent trends. She searches for the city's commonalities and differences in order to define it. And she might point out that the city is not Western, Eastern, Northern, or Southern but rather global, for so much from the world seems to exist within it.

Looking Back on the Catalogue and Its Four Applications: The Road to Further Inquiry

Now that we have let the data speak for itself by using it in four applications – (1) drilling down, (2) making a taxonomy, (3) rethinking democracy's phenomenology, and (4) big-data visualization – we should take up Benjamin's invitation to understand what the data is saying.

Three points have emerged from this exercise. The first brings us back to Kurki, the one who started this exploration by arguing that although scholars recognize democracy's ontological pluralism, they tend not to engage with it. I have found that engagement can clearly benefit democracy studies and that our discipline has been missing out on a substantive part of itself. There are over two thousand descriptions of democracy whose stories deserve to be told, hundreds of taxonomies to make, dozens (or more) democracies to detect and analyze within polities, and, in time, a digital city of democracy to interact with. This is a productive space to be working in, with much research, experimentation, and discussion waiting to be done.

This brings us to the second point, which is that the catalogue can be made more complete. This requires finding more descriptors, identifying the literature appropriately associated with each descriptor, and digitizing that information. A catalogue with this level of completeness will allow us to bring the city of democracy online, to run macro-analyses on a democracy corpus containing hundreds of thousands of documents, and to start interrogating to what extent these multiple descriptions of democracy are repetitive, contradictory, or false. At the same time, we can work toward providing more ecumenical definitions for democracy that are firmly grounded in empirical fact and not opinion. There is scope here too to uncover the effect that influential thinkers have had on democracy by examining how they have privileged certain understandings of democracy over others.

The third point is that this catalogue is a gateway to finding better, more intellectually honest truths about democracy and how it has been variably understood in different times and places. As Gianni Vattimo reminds us in his explanation of weak theory, "the world is not simply given to us as pure, uninterrupted, unmediated reality" (Guarino 2011: 18);

instead, the world must be endlessly interpreted. If we accept Vattimo's position, then democracy must be interpreted through its ontological pluralism. Some might read this as a disaster for democracy, as confirmation of its unbridled relativism. But such a reading would be mistaken. Democracy's ontological pluralism is, I believe, its strongest virtue. Resilience theory provides a useful metaphor for what I mean. As Paul Nieuwenhuis (2016) – a sustainability researcher – writes, “When the environment inevitably changes, the resulting shifts in conditions . . . could mean that previously marginal species suddenly find themselves in the perfect situation. They can then become core species in the new system, while previously dominant species may come to play a more marginal role as conditions are now less favorable for them. As a result, the whole system can survive, albeit in a somewhat different configuration” and that “if those species that were marginal at first had not been there to take on key roles, the system would have collapsed.” So although many descriptions for democracy exist, this does not mean that democracy is lost to relativism; it means that some of democracy's many descriptions will be more relevant to different people depending on their historical, geographical, cultural, and economic circumstances and that this is a good thing so long as the form of democracy being advocated is not a false positive. It means that we need to figure out the origins of these descriptors – that is, tell the story of how democracy became so diverse and what that signifies for us today. It also means that we will need to navigate the ethics of using this information in contemporary politics, as the catalogue communicated in this research note sets a high bar when it comes to justifying our descriptions of democracy (e.g., why description *x* and not, for instance, two thousand others?). We will also need to debate different descriptions of democracy if only as a means to remove from the corpus those descriptors that are democratic in name only. This could, for example, lead to compiling a list of descriptors that show how democracy has been described in the Orwellian sense: where “elites manipulate electoral processes to lend an aura of legitimacy to predetermined policies that protect their power” (Bienefeld 1995: 114). And, if only to satiate the ghosts of Guizot and Tocqueville, we will need to work through this ontologically pluralist reality to discover definitions of democracy that do not suppress uncertainty, contingency, and neology but are, at the same time, not divorced from empirically grounded fact.

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►► **Jean-Paul Gagnon** is Assistant Professor of Political Science at the University of Canberra and a founding editor of *Democratic Theory*. A political theorist and philosopher, his work centers on democratic theory.
E-mail: jean-paul.gagnon@canberra.edu.au.

►► NOTES

1. Catalogues of democracy's descriptors are not to be found in studies focusing on information outside of scholarly literature either. It would be worthwhile to study how democracy is described in the traditional media, new and social media, and to continue doing so from the perspective of individuals through surveys and interviews (e.g., Evans, Halupka, and Stoker 2017), to compare and contrast these datasets, and to see how descriptions of democracy in them change over time.
2. Scholars have only recently gained the technological wherewithal to search vast amounts of literature through the click of a button. Henry Mayo (1959: vi), for instance, admits to having tried to count the medley of democratic theories in the literature (his aim was to introduce the reader to democratic theory), but he changed strategy as "it led only to confusion, and there seemed no end to the undertaking." Today, in comparison, we have knowledge-capturing organizations like Google that provide corpuses bearing immense amounts of scholarly literature for us to search through. We can also digitize literature, rendering it optical character recognition compatible, and analyze vast amounts of it by using linguistic and critical discourse analysis software. In short, a labor that just over a decade ago would have seemed endless (Google Scholar launched in 2004 and Google Books in 2005) is now accomplishable in a few weeks or months, depending on the scale of the study.
3. Although democracy can be described using predicate adjectives (e.g., democracy is old), or in narratives that do not use adjectives (e.g., "You can find democracy in ancient Greece"), or in discourses in which the word "democracy" is not used at all but explore demarchy, demoicracy, democrats, democratization, or polyarchy, or by discussing *democracies* as opposed to democracy, my observations suggest that pre- and postpositive (or pre- and postnominal) adjectives are the most common means for describing democracy. Therefore, a focus on these two types of adjectives will lead to a more comprehensive account of democracy's descriptive pluralism.
4. The full quote from Ercan and Dryzek (2015: 241) is that the "core" of deliberative democracy "is defined by putting communication at the heart of politics, recognizing the need for effective justification of positions, stressing the

pursuit of reciprocal understanding across those who have different frameworks or ideologies, valuing of inclusion and reflection, and suspicion of coercive, deceptive, and strategic uses of language.”

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