Complex Democracy: An Introduction

Volker Schneider and Burkard Eberlein

Abstract

This chapter introduces the present volume, which originated at a Berlin symposium in 2013, on the occasion of Gerhard Lehmbruch's 85th birthday. The chapter presents Gerhard Lehmbruch as an early pioneer of complexity thinking in the context of democratic theory. Such a complexity perspective suggests that democratic political systems cannot be reduced to purely electoral systems; rather, they are vertically and horizontally differentiated communication systems in which different organizational levels (intermediary organizations) and different forms of interest intermediations interact. Besides the electoral channel of territorial interest intermediation there are multiple channels of functional intermediation in which organized actors and other private interests are incorporated into policy-making. This understanding of 'complex democracy' permeates the present volume in which 17 original contributions focus on one of the three key aspects of the study of complex democracy: 1. the structural and institutional variety of existing democratic systems; 2. the ways in which democratic systems are affected by and respond to contemporary economic and financial crisis; 3. the long-term transformations of democratic systems, both in institutional terms as well as regarding its implications for policy.

This book originates in a May 2013 Berlin symposium that was held in honor of Gerhard Lehmbruch, one of the most distinguished post-war scholars of comparative politics, who celebrated his 85th birthday that same year.

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While many see in Lehmbruch an intellectual father of specific concepts, most prominently of neo-corporatism, we believe that the term 'complex democracy' best captures his seminal and wide-ranging contributions. To begin with, his pioneering work on negotiated forms of democracy (*consociational democracy*) revealed the varieties of democratic rule, moving political analysis away from a simplistic focus on the majoritarian, Westminster model and towards more nuanced and complex models of rule-making (Lehmbruch 1967, 2003). In similar ways, he challenged received notions of uniformly pluralist decision-making in representative democracies: developing the concept of neo-corporatism, to describe the close collaboration between the state and organized interests, significantly enhanced and 'complexified' our understanding of interest intermediation not only as a form of interest representation but also as a specific institutional arrangement in policy making (Lehmbruch 1977; Lehmbruch and Schmitter 1982; Schmitter and Lehmbruch 1979). In disaggregating societal levels and political domains by his studies on the meso-level of sectoral interest representation or the direct interaction of interest groups and administrative authorities by 'administrative interest intermediation' he gradually fanned out the intricate web between government and organized interests and made political analysis less holistic and more differentiated (Lehmbruch 1984, 1987, 1989, 1991). Particularly by his influential study of German federalism he stressed the tension between party-political elite competition and intergovernmental elite accommodation and conveyed a differentiated insight into how representative democracies need to reconcile different institutional logics in complex configurations of forces and rules (Lehmbruch 2000). And last but not least, by his contributions to the analysis of networked politics, particularly in his study of Japanese administrative interest intermediation, he emphasized the role of informal relations in politics and policy-making (Lehmbruch 1995). By his subtle and differentiated analysis in which multiple levels, relations, and logics in political interact Gerhard Lehmbruch can rightly be seen as one of the early pioneers of 'complex democracy.'

But what does 'complex democracy' mean more precisely, and how can we delineate this new perspective in contemporary research? Our basic presupposition is that a complexity perspective on democracy should be informed by complexity theory in a broader sense, i.e. complexity research as it emerged in other disciplines of contemporary sciences. Its core *problematique* there is to explain the emergence of order by self-organizing processes, and a number of overviews of this field have shown, its roots go back to cybernetics, general systems theory, and information theory (Mitchell 2009; Schneider 2012). During the last decades this perspective also was strongly shaped by the new "network science" (Newman 2010; Barabási 2014), and in the meantime, this type of theorizing also penetrated a range of social sciences' sub-disciplines. Because of the multiplicity of scientific fields involved in this debate, complexity theory encountered similar problems of polysemy as, for instance, other grand theories such as systems theory or governance theory. Some approaches see complexity as a function of the number of components and their interrelatedness. Others also conceive the degree of nestedness of a system or configuration as an important dimension of complexity. In this perspective it is possible to differentiate between various aspects that increase the complexity of a

Table 1 Facets of complexity

	Facets and dimensions	Explanations
1	Compositional	The number and diversity of components a system contains
2	Relational	The interrelatedness among the components in a system; this is not only a function of the number of the relations (density) but also of frequency (intensity) and diversity (multiplexity)
3	Ecological	The connectedness and nestedness of a system to its external environments and internal (subsystems) environments
4	Hierarchical	The differentiation and "modularization" of a system across its different hierarchical levels
5	Functional	The number and diversity of functions a system fulfills
6	Mechanismic	The number and diversity of mechanisms ("logics") operating in a system

Source: Schneider (2012)

given entity of complex. In this view Table 1 presents six different definitions of complexity, and each of them can be conceived of as a "facet of complexity".

If we apply such a multi-faceted perspective on democratic political systems, democracy cannot be reduced only to periodical elections of governments on the basis of party competition, as it is articulated by the concept of liberal democracy. Democracy is multi-faceted and develops only in institutionally and structurally demanding environments. Such a complexity perspective on democracy suggests that democratic political systems are vertically and horizontally differentiated communication systems in which different organizational levels (intermediary organizations) and different forms of interest intermediations interact. Besides the electoral channel of territorial interest intermediation (grey area in figure 1) there are multiple channels of functional intermediation in which organized interests and other entities such as large corporations, social movements, and scientific institutions are incorporated into policy-making (see Fig. 1). In addition, national political systems are also embedded or nested in international and transnational regimes as well as supranational political entities (Eberlein and Newman 2008). A complexity perspective thus takes this nestedness and coexistence of different levels and logics of a variety of institutional arrangements into account. It avoids holistic macro explanations in which homogenous large organized wholes are the shaping factors of political processes and thus inserts a whole spectrum of actors, institutional arrangements and network structures into political analysis which enable coordination, cooperation, and integration in politics and policy-making.

This understanding of complex democracy permeates the present volume and, importantly, lends some coherence to the 17 contributions written by companions of Gerhard Lehmbruch's academic career: former colleagues, students, and fellow scholars. Indeed, beyond a traditional *Festschrift* collection, this volume presents original contributions from renowned scholars that each focus on one of the three key aspects of the study of complex democracy that simultaneously correspond to the three parts of this volume:

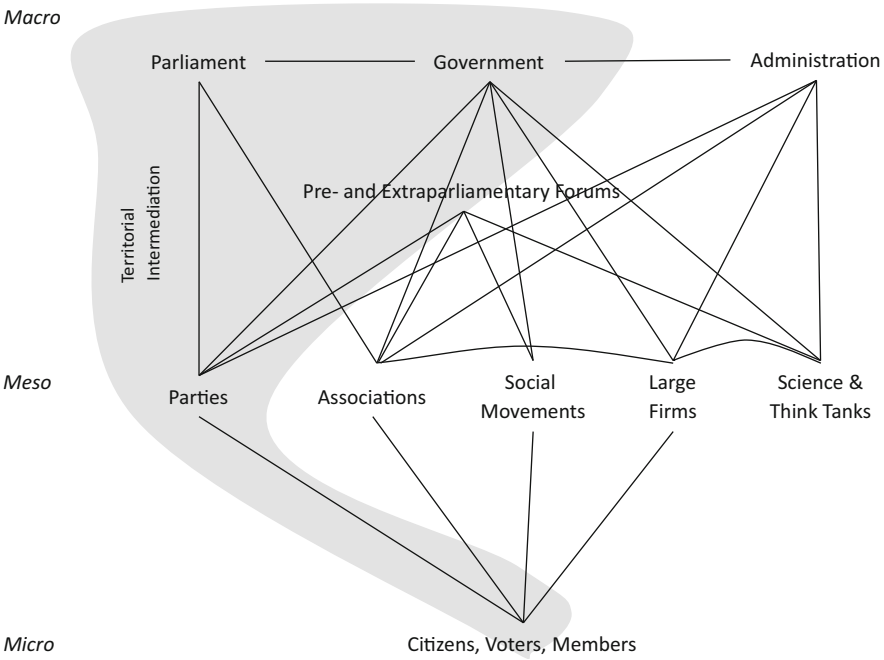

Fig. 1 The democratic complex

1. The ***variety*** of existing democratic systems: the multiple dimensions that make up the 'property space' of democratic systems, and in particular the different forms and loci of political power;
2. The ways in which democratic systems are impacted by and respond to contemporary economic and financial ***crisis***;
3. The long-term ***transformation*** of democratic systems, both in institutional terms as well as regarding its implications for policy.

1 Variety

The broadest perspective in the empirical analysis of existing democratic political systems is taken by *Hanspeter Kriesi* who has conducted a study that covers 69 countries, traditional and emerging democracies. His major finding is that democracies should be classified not only along two dimensions, as in Lijphart's seminal publications (Lijphart 1999, 2012). Rather, four dimensions should describe them. In addition to the consensus vs. majoritarian and the federalist vs. unitary dimension he emphasizes also the direct vs. representative dimension, and above all also the illiberal vs. liberal dimension focusing on a specific distribution of rights. In this context he also highlights the particularity of the Swiss case.

Manfred Schmidt, too, takes Lijphart's two dimensions as starting point, and gives a critical review of Lijphart's most recent comparison of 36 countries with respect to

structural properties and policy profiles. Like Kriesi also Schmidt tries to extend the number of democracy types beyond just two variants of democracy (majoritarian or consensus) while embracing the Lijphartian property space. He proposes four worlds of democracy that aptly represent the current state of democratic world development. In addition, he also critically assesses the use of Lijpharts macro structures for policy explanations without taking, for instance, party preferences into account. In this regard, Schmidt argues for a combination of comparative politics and policy perspectives.

Philip Manow's paper concentrates on role of class coalitions and the impact of cultural-religious cleavages in the evolution of modern democracy. With a focus on southern European democracies, Manow advances and tests the hypothesis that religious cleavages are the major determinants for the polarization of political space, and that the distribution of religious power explains to a large degree the subsequent strength of communist or left wing parties in France and Southern Europe.

Arthur Benz offers a more conceptually oriented piece to address the multi-dimensionality or complexity of democracies. He contrasts Lehmbruch's historical-institutionalist and qualitative approach to the comparative study of democracies to Lijphart's quantitative and essentially two-dimensional approach to investigate 'patterns of democracy'. A major argument advanced by Benz is that contemporary democracies should not only be characterized by varying structures of power sharing (majority vs. consensus), but also as complex configurations of coordination and decision-making. He finds that the path pursued by Lehmbruch is more promising to "substantially comprehend and theorize multidimensionality and dynamics of democracies".

Anton Pelinka's addresses the complexity of political historical cases and touches on a particular form of political power which is focused on language and related ethnic dimensions of political identity in the formation of a nation state. He analyzes the emergence of a specific Austrian identity and "peoplehood" in the historical context of the "Anschluss-Movement" after the First World War and its subsequent evolution during the Nazi period, and finally its dissolution in the postwar years. His conclusion is that Austria's current national identity "can be called post-ethnic. Austrian national identity is the result of a civic consensus: Austrians agree to form a specific kind of nationhood."

Also *Wolfgang Seibel*'s historical case study is dedicated to a highly specific political institution and configuration of power sharing by administrative interest-intermediation. He tells the story of the Treuhandanstalt, a semi-autonomous administrative body, in the privatization of the remaining industrial base of the former German Democratic Republic, and the complex integration of this institution into the German political and administrative network. He stresses institutional flexibility and active political networks of top-ranking administrative officials.

Colin Crouch's piece is based on the observation that large corporations have become increasingly powerful, and have gained privileged standing in and access to decision and policy making in democracies. In his analysis of corporate political power Crouch elects the innovative vantage point of a normative theory justifying that corporate power. While this would seem a theory 'that dare not speak its name', Crouch demonstrates how in fact the main arguments of this theory have become well rooted in contemporary normative assumptions, which poses grave challenges to liberal democracy.

2 Crisis

The second part of the volume features a number of articles that are related to the political impact of the current economic and financial crisis.

Fritz W. Scharpf focuses on the Euro crisis and more specifically on the present 'euro-rescuing regime'. He provides a normative assessment of its input and output-oriented legitimacy, on the basis of policy analyses examining the causes of present crises, the available policy options and the impact of the policies actually chosen. He concludes that the regime lacks input-oriented legitimacy and that its claim to output-oriented legitimacy is ambiguous at best. This leads him to explore potential—majoritarian or unilateral—exits from the present institutional constellation.

Philipp Schmitter puts his focus on patterns of interest intermediation and asks the question of how the economic and financial crisis in Europe will impact on neo-corporatist arrangements related to industrial pacts and social partnership. He advances the hypothesis that, under certain conditions, the crisis could lead to a revival of neo-corporatism at the sectoral level, particularly in small, homogenous and internationally vulnerable European countries—although this prospect seems less likely in other countries.

In his contribution, *Klaus Armingeon* and *Lucio Baccaro* shows a specific interest in the German response to the financial and economic crisis conditioned by its specific political-institutional and economic constraints. Germany is one of the few countries in which the recent crisis only had a small impact. That Germany has economically so successfully developed since the crisis is largely explained by its export strength, which in turn is explained by a degradation of industrial relations structures and labor market institutions, which had previously tamed the "trading state".

Berndt Keller's article sheds light on the often neglected, long-term consequences of austerity policies that have affected the public sector in the aftermath of the financial crisis. With a special focus on Germany, Keller demonstrates that public sector reform is driven by promises of short-term financial savings through cutbacks, and sorely lacks a strategic, long-term vision or plan, with threatening consequences for the welfare state.

Rainer Eising and his coauthors focus on EU financial market reform in response to the 2007 financial crisis. Their research seeks to identify the dominant governance modes of the EU reform process, and to assess the extent of actual policy change, based on three legislative cases of financial market reform. Regarding governance and democracy, they conclude, "the concern that responses to the crisis are mostly delegated to technocrats is not warranted."

3 Transformation

The various contributions in the third part of the volume take a long-term perspective on political development, through the identification of lasting transformations and political megatrends

Edgar Grande shows a passionate interest in large processes of institutional and structural political change. He identifies three dimensions in the transformation of

modern democracies—new trends in the arena of party government, drifts in the domain of negotiation democracy, and last but not least, an increased influence of mass media in modern politics, currently labeled as "media democracy". He stresses that all three transformations create tensions and incompatibilities in democratic governance.

The contribution of *Roland Czada* addresses the problem of informality and opacity of negotiated decision-making in pre- and extra-parliamentary policy forums that are highlighted by theories of post-democracy. One of the driving forces of these informal arrangements he sees in the increasing complexity of political problems. Based on an overview of the German context he argues against the conventional wisdom that these informal governance structures are increasingly subject to public scrutiny, transparency and discussion. He also sees a tendency towards more value-based forms of discourse, as opposed to settings of materialistic bargaining.

A classic issue in political development is the sustainability of democracy. *Ellen Immergut* and her co-authors deal with this important topic in their contribution that studies the differential capacity of political systems to recalibrate policy, i.e. to readjust political intervention—and to reallocate costs and benefits—in order to cope with important societal challenges. In particular, they investigate if some democratic institutions (of political representation) are more favorable for policy recalibration than others and how their interaction with institutions of interest intermediation intervene in the distribution of costs and benefits of recalibration. Through three policy case studies (citizenship, agriculture, and pensions) they demonstrate the impact of 'electoral vulnerability' of political leaders, mediated by the degree of interest intermediation, on the likelihood of policy recalibration.

By a comparison of environmental policy networks in the 1980s and 2010s also *Volker Schneider* contributes to an empirical reality check of the post-democratic transformation and democratic decline hypothesis. At the same time the article attempts to rejuvenate the power structure perspective and to link it to patterns of democracy and power-sharing perspective in comparative politics.

The final contribution, offered by *Klaus von Beyme*, appears to be focused on a rather unique problem. However, it reflects in fact some broader, long-term changes in cultural policy through which rights related to freedom of speech on religious issues are essentially reallocated. Von Beyme compares rules and policy change with respect to blasphemy and other forms of religious criticism, and provides some evidence that these new rules and codes are "chocking freedom worldwide" (Marshall and Nina 2011).

Taken together, the contributions to this volume highlight the continuing relevance of sophisticated institutional analysis of democratic development, a form of 'complex democracy' scholarship, as pioneered prominently by Gerhard Lehmbruch. Powerful forces of change, notably globalization and economic crisis, have undoubtedly transformed many conditions and features of (post-war) democratic governance, leading to reallocation of political power and shifts in arenas for decision-making. Yet, these developments make careful analysis of institutional legacies, logics, and constellations an ever more pressing task: if we want to better

understand how modern, complex democracies in more diverse societies can cope with the increasing tension between different, and sometimes incompatible demands and "logics", while upholding the fundamental promise of democracy, we first need to have a solid understanding of how exactly legacies and new developments combine in complex configurations. Only then can we reflect on potential avenues to govern divisions, cleavages and conflicts in productive ways. For this momentous task, Gerhard Lehmbruch's oeuvre remains an invaluable source of inspiration.

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