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Masters Thesis in International Relations and Diplomacy
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Tracing the Origins of Democratic Decay

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Introduction

On May 9th 2011 Francis Fukuyama gave a talk at the Hooglandse Kerk in Leiden to promote his new book, *The Origins of Political Order*. As opposed to his most famous (some would say infamous) work, 1992's *The End of History and the Last Man*, this new book addresses the question of how the basis of the modern state and notion of good governance was formed, tracing it back from the Ancient Chinese through the Holy Roman Empire and the Ottoman Empire to modern democracy from the Glorious Revolution to modern Scandinavian democracy (he seemed to imply that the ideal state today was Denmark). Though this mix of political history and anthropology was itself interesting, the most fascinating part of his discussion was his implicit yet regular references to the fragility of democratic institutions, which he warned are ever susceptible to degradation and decay. Others have taken note of this undertone, including Christopher Caldwell who wrote in a review of Fukuyama's new book for the Financial Times that "Fukuyama's grimmest message, though he never puts it quite so bluntly, is that moral and cultural progress might signal political and civilizational decay. Any system that is not defended ruthlessly will retribalise itself – or re-familialise itself – from within" (Caldwell 2011). Though Caldwell refers to Fukuyama's 16th Century Ottoman example for such a phenomenon, one could think of more famous examples, from the death of the Roman Republic at the hands of an imperial government to the tragic fate of the Weimar Republic or Pinochet's coup against the democratic government of Salvador Allende in Chile. In the project we propose to study the origins of this phenomenon, known as *democratic decay*, to seek to understand the causes and mechanisms which lead democracies – especially well established ones – to become less democratic or even authoritarian.

Drawing from the scarce pre-existing literature on the subject, we will conduct our study using the working hypothesis that all democracies – whether new or well established – are the result of a delicate balance of power; if this balance is for whatever reason tipped in the favour of any one individual or group, that party will use its dominance to neutralise its opposition and decrease the

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long term ability of competing factions to challenge its authority – thus effectively eroding civil liberties and slowly neutralising or eliminating the structural elements of the state which make it a functional democracy. Since it is rare, if at all possible, to witness an important political transformation with a clearly linear causal mechanism, we will concentrate on six cases selected for their explanatory value and apply a combination of process tracing and typological method to untangle the complex thread of causes and effects involved in democratic decay and categorise them according to their role in the phenomenon. If our hypothesis is correct, we shall find the presence of a severely weak opposition – by which we mean an opposition which has lost its ability to effectively provide an alternative to current governance – to be indispensable for democratic decay to occur, whereas the other factors will prove to be largely interchangeable and secondary to (though not necessarily dependent on) this weakness.

Since the complex relationship between the different intervening factors make this an exercise in process tracing, it is impossible at this stage to identify a clear set of dependent and independent variables. As such, we must formulate the research question as follows: What are the factors which lead democracies to become less democratic?

I – Theoretical Framework and Definitions

As mentioned above, there is little precedent for studying democratic decay, and we are limited in the number of pre-existing theories on which to base the present study. There is nevertheless a sizeable literature on the origins of democratic government which could help shed light on what it means to be a democracy, as well as some literature about democratic decay in new democracies which could also give us a few ideas of what makes democracy stick and what can make it crumble.

Concerning the origins of democratic government, the most well-known explanation is likely the liberal theory – first formulated academically by Lipset in 1959, but mostly known today

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in the form suggested by Friedman in 1962 – according to which democratisation is the natural result of industrialisation and economic growth. The theory, which has largely been adopted as a truism by many in the media, academia and government, is described in detail by scholars Inglehart and Welzel in their 2009 contribution to the American International Relations journal *Foreign Affairs* – "How Development Leads to Democracy". Here, the authors argue for an understanding of this theory – often referred to as "modernisation theory" or "industrialisation theory" – which is more enlightened and less post-colonial than older versions of the theory pushed during the Cold War. Indeed, although they warn that, despite what is sometimes assumed by the theory's proponents and critics alike, "modernization is not westernisation" (Inglehart & Welzel., p. 35); they nevertheless assure us that "a massive body of evidence suggests that modernization theory's central premise was correct: economic development does tend to bring about important, roughly predictable changes in society, culture, and politics", and that "other things being equal, high levels of economic development tend to make people more tolerant and trusting, bring more emphasis on self-expression and more participation in decisionmaking" (Inglehart & Welzel, p. 34-35), thus gradually paving the way to democracy.

One influential article of the aforementioned "massive body of evidence" in support of modernisation theory comes from economist Robert J. Barro in his 1996 contribution to the *Journal of Economic Growth*, entitled simply "Democracy and Growth". The article studies the correlation between democracy and growth through a series of quantitative analyses of 100 countries between 1960 and 1990. The study examines levels of GDP growth over that time period and democracy levels in these countries according to Freedom House (cited as "Gastil and his followers" (Barro, p. 10)), as well as a series of control variables including educational spending and a rule of law index measured indirectly by the strength of black markets. The study finds that improvements in standard of living – including but not limited to economic growth – "substantially raise the probability that political institutions will become more democratic over time" (Barro, p. 24); inversely, the study finds that "the overall effect of democracy on growth is weakly negative" (Barro, p. 23), indicating

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that not only does democracy not in turn encourage growth, it actually slightly slows it – these findings seem to confirm Lipset and Inglehart & Welzel's suggestions, while tempering the more zealous claims of Milton Friedman (who believed in a two way relationship between growth and democracy).

Nevertheless, another study for the US research group National Bureau of Economic Research (NBER) entitled "Income and Democracy" and conducted by Acemoglu, Johnson, Robinson and Yared in 2005 found differing results to those of Barro. These NBER scholars consciously review Barro's study (Acemoglu et al., p. 1) using the Polity Democracy Index as well as the Freedom House index used by Barro to study trends between 1960 and 2000, which are supplemented by a variety of historical sources so as to build a database stretching from the year 1500 to the year 2000; the authors then study observable trends over annual, five year and ten year terms, then over the full 1960 to 2000 period and finally over a long term period from 1500 to 1995. The authors, using regressions and testing for fixed effects and statistical significance, do find the effect of economic wellbeing to have a statistically significant impact on democracy levels, but the impact is so small that it is barely worth noting. Indeed the authors find that a 10% increase in GDP per capita only increases democracy levels by 0.007 points on Freedom House's 7 point scale over a five year period, noting in lieu of comparison that the difference in democracy levels between the United States and Colombia at the time of the study was of 0.5 points. Furthermore when the tests are repeated while controlling for fixed effects, the effect of GDP increases on democracy levels is found to be even weaker for the Freedom House data and negative for the Polity data; either way, both results are revealed to be highly insignificant. Overall, the results for the period between 1960 and 2000 reject Barro's findings (Acemoglu et al., p. 9-17). Further, using the Polity dataset as well as another by Maddison – both extending to the early 19th century – the authors repeat the studies for five and ten year intervals over a period from 1840 to 1940, then from 1840 to 2000, only to reach the same conclusions as with the previous timespan. Finally, the authors use historical sources to repeat the study over the period spanning from 1500 to 1995; this time, they find a strong,

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positive and statistically significant correlation between income and democracy. The authors interpret these results, in light of historical variables and fixed effects, as indicating that income and democracy are correlated but with no direct causality. Rather, the correlation is dependent on certain historical events – most notably colonisation – which has caused many countries around the globe to develop in a similar fashion over the centuries. In other words, rich countries tend to be democracies today because colonial powers have – for various unrelated historical and cultural reasons – chosen a path of democratisation, which has then been more or less adopted by their former colonies, depending partly on the level of colonisation they were subjected to (Acemoglu et al., p. 26-29).

When comparing the Barro and NBER studies, it seems that the results from the latter work hold stronger than those of the former for at least two reasons. The first reason is that NBER authors have used a much longer timespan for their analysis. Even if we can question the findings for the longer term studies (since, to their own admission, data stretching as far back as 1500 or even to the 1800s are significantly less reliable than data from the past 50 years (Acemoglu et al. p. 21)), we can nevertheless be sure that their data from 1960 onward are at least as reliable as Barro's. However, Barro's data are strictly limited to the Cold War era, during which time the few full democracies that existed were mostly NATO countries and thus had similar historical and cultural developments which Barro's study couldn't adequately test for. Further, the few non-NATO states which wished to embark on a road to democratisation would have effectively entrenched themselves in the US-led camp in the showdown between US and USSR, and thus would have had to adopt a similar economic system and participate in the same market as their American protector. Under these conditions, it is difficult to establish causality between economic wellbeing and democracy. By evaluating post-Cold War data, the NBER authors are better able to test for historical coincidences such as Cold War orientations. The second reason is, simply, that the NBER study used a greater number of datasets even for the epochal overlaps of the two studies, thus providing a broader view of the subject.

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The logic of modernisation theory is further explained away by a 2005 piece for *Foreign Affairs* by Bueno de Mesquita and Downs, entitled “Development and Democracy”. Here, the authors explore the mechanisms by which autocratic regimes can maintain a hold on power while still benefiting from economic prosperity. Indeed they argue that autocracies can encourage growth by adopting market economies while limiting the cultural liberalisation which supposedly ensues from neoliberal globalisation by using government resources to limit the coordination of opposition forces as well as any resource of coordination which could be used to threaten the autocracy, such as media and post-secondary education. Inversely, successful dictatorships know that allowing for other economic liberties and providing other public goods (primary education, healthcare, etc.) does not per se harm the regime and can actually help strengthen it. Indeed by examining the provision of public goods and coordination goods in 150 countries from 1970 to 1999, the authors notice that the autocratic regimes which fail are those which repress both types of goods, whereas those which repress only coordination goods continue unabated. Furthermore, with the success of this formula for dictatorship as seen in such states as China and Russia, more and more autocracies are learning how to survive and prosper in a market economy (Bueno de Mesquita & Downs, p. 80-86).

In conclusion to this segment on modernisation theory, we can see how economic wellbeing does not only fail to ensure democracy per se, but it can also be used to maintain autocratic rule. For the purposes of this study, then, we should consider that economic factors play a minor role at best in determining the level of democratisation in a given country; rather, it may be more useful to think of economic wellbeing as helping to strengthen existing regimes, regardless of whether or not they are democratic. With modernisation theory off the table, then, we should seek another theoretical framework on which to base the present study.

An interesting and influential alternative to the liberal theory of modernisation can be seen in Mancur Olson’s 1993 contribution to the *American Political Science Review* entitled “Dictatorship, Democracy, and Development”. In this study, the scholar draws on a combination of

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anthropological studies and international relations theory to map the origins of modern government in general, which he then uses to formulate a largely rationalist understanding of how the first democratic governments arose. Indeed, the author explains how anthropologists believe early forms of societal organisation were very loose, led by chiefs with very limited power and who were often rotating – in fact, in many early societies groups didn't even have a designated leader. This situation changed as some societies developed agriculture and settled into sedentary lifestyles. Since these societies were generally more prosperous than their nomadic counterparts, they would often fall prey to these nomadic contemporaries – which Olson refers to as "roving bandits" – who would pillage their villages, leaving chaos and devastation in their wake. Some of these nomads, upon seeing the advantages of sedentary life, would settle down in these agrarian areas, establishing themselves in a position of dominance and demanding a regular tribute from the original sedentary residents. These former nomads – referred to by Olson as "stationary bandits" – would be tolerated by their new underlings for two main reasons. On one hand, the stationary bandits knew they needed to rely on their underlings to provide for them in the long term, and thus limited their extractions so as to allow the underlings to prosper and continue to provide for the bandits. This made them preferable to roving bandits, who cared little for the wellbeing of the sedentary folk: they simply wanted to collect as much as possible from their plunder, regardless of whether they left enough for the locals to survive or even if they needed to kill some locals in the process. On the other hand, the new overlords would provide protection against their roving cousins, thus ensuring the long term safety of the workers. This was the origin of modern government, with the new lords drawing upon religion and myth to justify their rule through the ages – thus forming the basis for the first aristocracies (Olson, p. 567-569). However, Olson warns that "most dictatorships are by their nature especially susceptible to succession crises" (Olson, p. 572) and that "there is never a shortage of strong men who enjoy getting a fortune from tax receipts" (Olson, p. 573). This makes for an explosive situation, where contenders to the throne will likely take advantage of any opportunity, any weakness, to overthrow the regent and put themselves in their stead. Such a crisis

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can occur for a number of reasons, such as succession crises, a perceived weakening of the ruler or even an economic crisis. Indeed, Olson assures us that “resolute autocrats can survive even when they impose heinous amounts of suffering on their peoples. When they are replaced, it is for other reasons […] and often by another stationary bandit” (Olson, p. 573). Thus, although the author admits the possibility of copycats replicating the perceived success of other democracies, Olson explains that for democracies to emerge ex novo from autocracy a situation must arise in which a stalemate is reached between the forces who overthrew or inherited power from the previous rulers, as was famously the case in the emergence of democracy from monarchy in both ancient Athens and Rome. This image of democracy as a compromise, a delicate balance of power between competing forces, apparently strengthens Fukuyama’s warnings that democracy is liable to decay naturally if it is not actively maintained – or in Olson’s terms, if the stalemate between governing forces is not maintained.

As mentioned above, there exists some limited literature which addresses some sort of democratic failure in new democracies. One such text is “Why Democracies Survive”, Larry Diamond’s 2011 contribution to the *Journal of Democracy*. In it, the author warns of an unprecedented retreat of democracy worldwide, stating that “the years between 2006 through 2008 […] mark the first three-year period since the Cold War in which the number of countries declining in freedom exceeded the number gaining” (Diamond, p. 20). The author claims that this trend predates the current economic crisis, and rather than economic motives he cites bad governance – mainly in new democracies – as the main cause for this reversal, with citizens of neodemocracies becoming disenchanted with their new governments’ failed attempts at replicating Western standards of social wellbeing. Indeed the author warns that economic wellbeing itself is not enough to ensure democracy, stating that “where governance is bad – in particular, where corruption and abuse of power are rampant, and where inequality is extreme and intensifying – it may not matter

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much for democracy that the economy as a whole is expanding” (Diamond, p. 18) since the wellbeing from general market prosperity isn’t really affecting the average person.

In Philippe C. Schmitter’s 1994 contribution to the same journal – entitled “Dangers and Dilemmas of Democracy” – this scholar undertakes a more in depth analysis of what can make democracy retreat. Firstly, the author identifies two ways in which democracy can fail: a “sudden death” scenario, in which democracy is swept away rapidly (usually as the result of a coup); or a “lingering demise”, defined as a situation in which “democracy gradually gives way to a different form of rule” (Schmitter, p. 59). Next, the author identifies a series of dilemmas with which democracies are often confronted. These are grouped into two categories: intrinsic dilemmas, which are essentially a set of weaknesses inherent in all democracies, however old and well established; and extrinsic dilemmas, which “call into question the compatibility of emerging democratic rules and practices with existing social, cultural and economic circumstances” (Schmitter, p. 62). The former category is the most interesting one for the present study as it affects all democracies – including well established ones – and thus likely holds the most explanatory power; while the other category almost exclusively explains decay in new democracies. Unfortunately the article is mostly interested in this phenomenon in new democracies (Schmitter, p. 58), but the author does take the time to identify five dilemmas intrinsic to all democracies. The first, defined as “oligarchy”, is the innate tendency of all groups of people in power – whether a party, association, movement, etc. – to become increasingly oligarchic in their style of governance as they grow used to prolonged stays in power, thus gradually becoming less accountable. The second – “free riding” – involves the professionalization of politics as the average citizen increasingly takes good governance for granted and thus feels less and less inclined to participate in the political process; while the third, defined as “policy cycling”, represents a situation where a certain set of policies are repeatedly enacted and revoked by alternating governments, resulting in political inaction and impotence which breeds voter apathy and alienation. The fourth involves certain institutions which exist in democracies but which are necessarily undemocratic in nature (e.g. the army, the central bank, etc.) whose role in

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decision making tends to increase when faced with a competitive international environment such as a war or a recession, or, increasingly, international interdependence resulting from globalisation of governance (WTO, IMF, NATO etc.). The fifth intrinsic dilemma is a precision of the un-democratising effects of increasing international interdependence, which generally tends to limit the ability of elected officials "to control the decisions of transnational firms, the movement of ideas and persons across borders, and the impact of their neighbour's policies" (Schmitter, p. 63).

The author then moves on to a more detailed description of five extrinsic dilemmas which he claims are mostly the concern of new democracies, but one can easily see how established democracies are not entirely free of these dilemmas either. The first involves the definition of boundaries and cultural identities: for a state to be democratic it must first be established who will be allowed to participate in the democratic process of that state, but the establishment of state borders and national identities are usually highly dependent on historical factors which are largely undemocratic. The second is an inherent contradiction in capitalism: it is necessary for modern democracies to allow freedom of trade and enterprise in order for their citizens to pursue their independent interests, but capitalism is also by definition a system which redistributes goods according to individuals' market strength (usually measured in shares) rather than according to the real needs of each individual. Thus democracies must find a balance between market freedoms and control mechanisms to ensure some kind of redistribution of wealth; this balance tends to vary greatly from state to state. The third is a largely modern problem, where more and more citizens are using interest associations to voice their opinions rather than traditional parties: this means elected governments need to re-evaluate how much control they have over the functioning of society and how much they leave to civil society. The fourth is the omnipresent issue of corruption of officials, which is largely self-explanatory. The fifth has to do with internal and external security: external being the ability of the state to defend itself against foreign threats (the fact of having a democratic government does not make a state immune to attacks from other states – especially non-democratic ones, since democracies tend not to go to war with each other) and internal being the ability of the

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state to control organised crime, political violence, and other elements of society which threaten peace and stability – and thus the functioning of a healthy democratic process – from within the state.

Having gained an understanding of where existing literature stands on the issues of how democracies are formed and how they can be threatened, we can now formulate a working hypothesis on which to base the present study. Firstly, we have seen how modernisation theory is very limited in its ability to predict the rise and fall of democratic regimes, and thus that economic factors represent at best only one aspect of what explains democratic progress and decay. We have also seen how authors have examined a series of other factors which are believed to contribute to democratic decay in new democracies, some of which could also be applied to established democracies. Upon further reflection, however, we can see how these factors might complement Olson's theory of democracy's innate instability. Indeed, all the factors identified above – whether Diamond's bad governance or Schmitter's dilemmas – have the same effect of favouring one group in society over others. Since Olson maintains that democracies are the result of a stalemate between competing social forces, we can easily see how favouring one of these forces could have the effect of breaking or gradually eroding this stalemate, thus restoring some kind of autocratic rule.

In light of these observations, we propose to base our study on the following hypothesis: democracies are the result of a balance of power between competing parties; and when, for whatsoever reason, one party finds itself in a position of power, it will always try to secure its hold on power and neutralise its opposition. Democratic decay, then, is the result of a weakness of the opposition which – again, for whatsoever reason – renders it unable to check the ruling party's hold on power. Put more briefly, our working hypothesis maintains that democratic decay is the natural result of the inability of opposition to check or challenge the ruling party's power. In this formulation, "democratic decay" is understood as the process by which a regime gradually becomes less democratic – in Schmitter's terms, a "lingering demise" of democracy. "Democratic decay"

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does not mean what Schmitter refers to as “sudden death”: indeed, although there are likely to be similarities between the origins of gradual democratic decay and a sudden overthrow of a democratic regime, they are essentially two different phenomena and should be studied separately. Also, it is important to precise that in this hypothesis, “party” and “opposition” are not to be understood strictly in their parliamentary sense but rather as representing any individual or group which holds or intends to hold direct decision-making power or significant influence over such power in society (in particular, by the word “opposition” we of course intend a party which is not currently in power). If the hypothesis holds true in light of our study, we shall find the presence of a crippled opposition to be necessary for any instance of democratic decay, while other factors – such as corruption or free riding – will be found to be largely interchangeable, with no single other factor being causally necessary for decay.

Having now mapped out our working hypothesis from existing theory, we shall dedicate our next section to determining how best to test it.

II – Methodology and Case Selection

Fortunately for the purposes of this study (and unfortunately for democracy) the Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU) – a statistics-gathering branch of the world renown magazine of economics and political economy, *The Economist* – released their yearly Democracy Index report in 2010 with the title “Democracy in Retreat” in which, like Fukuyama, they warn that “even in long-established ones [democratic states], if not nurtured and protected, democracy can corrode” (EIU 2010, p. 1). In accordance with the title of their report, they alarmingly note that “there has been a decline in democracy across the world since 2008” (EIU 2010, p. 1) in all regions of the world, including Western Europe and North America. In particular, the United States has dropped .04 points on the EIU’s 10 point scale since 2008; while Germany and the Netherlands have witnessed the largest democratic decay in Western Europe, dropping .44 and .54 points respectively. But, most

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alarmingly, many states were downgraded in the EIU categorisation of regime types (Full Democracy, Flawed Democracy, Hybrid [between democracy and authoritarian regime] and Authoritarian). Four states – all European – moved from the category of "Full Democracy" in 2008 to "Flawed Democracy" in 2010; these states were France, Italy, Greece and Slovenia. In addition, three Latin American states – Honduras, Bolivia and Nicaragua – passed from the "Flawed Democracy" category in 2008 to the "Hybrid" category in 2010; and Fiji, Madagascar, Gambia and Ethiopia went from the "Hybrid" category in 2008 to the "Authoritarian" one in 2010. Only two states in the whole world were upgraded in between 2008 and 2010: Ghana and Mali, both going from the "Hybrid" to the "Flawed Democracy" category. In the follow up study conducted at the end of 2011 – entitled "Democracy under stress" – the image is not much better, with many scores stagnating at 2010 levels or even getting worse. Italy is one example of the latter case, having dropped a further .09 points from 7.83 in 2010 to 7.74 in 2011.

These figures show a bleaker image than that provided by other indicators of democratisation and political freedom, such as the famous Freedom House. It is of course extremely difficult to quantify something as contentious and ill-defined as democracy, so it is important for a study such as the present one to take these figures as general indicators which can serve as a starting point for a more descriptive qualitative analysis, rather than serving as absolute proof to any conclusions in and of themselves. Nevertheless, we esteem these EIU reports to be considerably more accurate and thorough in the general picture they can provide than other such studies, notably the aforementioned Freedom House indicators which are probably the most commonly used numbers when studying freedom and democracy in the social sciences. This is so for several reasons. Firstly, the Freedom House indicators give a score of 1 to 7 using only whole numbers, thus leaving little room to study gradual variations of democratic levels – something essential if we wish to understand the process of democratic decay in established democracies. Furthermore, these scores are given based on 25 questions about levels of freedom and civil liberties in each country, which are answered subjectively by those conducting the research. Another important shortcoming

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of the Freedom House indicators is that they then categorise states into three categories of regimes – "Free", "Partly Free" and "Not Free" – which, again, we consider to be too simplistic if we are to study gradual democratic decay. On the other hand, the EIU indicators – though far from perfect, as, again, no such study truly can be – are based on more thorough considerations of what it means to be a democracy and give further insight into subtle improvements and degradation than their Freedom House counterparts, thus providing a better starting point for the present study.

Briefly put, the EIU studies work as follows. The 10 point scale is based on 60 indicators which they group into five categories: electoral process and pluralism, civil liberties, functioning of government, political participation and political culture (EIU 2010, p. 31). These 60 indicators are comprehensive and deal with a variety of situations in which any one of these five categories can degrade. For example, in the civil liberties category there are indicators which check for the amount of media freedom; these indicators penalise countries in which there is too much government control of the media but also where the media are too concentrated in the hands of a few tycoons (EIU 2010, p. 40). The final score out of 10 – with integers up to the second decimal place – serves to place the countries into the four categories of regime type mentioned above, where scores from 0 to 4 qualify a country as an Authoritarian state, 4 to 5.9 as a Hybrid state, 6 to 7.9 as a Flawed Democracy and 8 to 10 as a Full Democracy. In both the 2010 and 2011 reports, the country with the highest score was not Denmark (who scored 3rd) but Norway with 9.8, and the lowest score went to North Korea with 1.08. There were 26 full democracies in 2010. In 2011 Portugal joined Italy, France and Greece in the ranks of Western European states downgraded from full to flawed democracies, bringing the total number of full democracies worldwide to 25.

With this kind of statistical database at one's disposal, it is easy to be tempted by a quantitative analysis with a large-N study in order to attain a clear, scientific and numerically expressible understanding of the process of democratic decay. Unfortunately there are a number of reasons why this would be undesirable – if not downright impossible – with existing understanding

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of what, how and when this decay happens. The first reason is the one already mentioned above: that democracy is contentious and hard to define, with no two democracies being exactly alike, and thus any numerical expression of democracy levels should be taken with a grain of salt. The notion of democratic decay is especially hard to measure, since it is – as we have seen – a usually gradual and subtle process, the details of which could easily be lost or scrambled by a statistical analysis. Even the EIU Index, though more sophisticated than other similar studies of democracy levels, should be used with caution, serving maybe as a starting point for a more in depth qualitative analysis but not as the core dataset of the study. Another reason why a statistical analysis of the subject would not be desirable with present understanding of the subject comes from the more obvious question of identifying the independent variables. We have indeed seen how little is currently understood of what causes democratic decay, making it difficult to pinpoint exactly which factors contribute to democratic decay. The most obvious suggestion would be to study the effects of economic factors on democratic decay, but we have seen how there is already ample research on the effects of growth and development on democratisation – furthermore, we have again seen how recent studies and statistical analyses suggest that economic factors represent only one piece of the puzzle at most. Keeping this in mind, it seems highly probable that such an analysis would be both redundant and inconclusive. Apart from economic factors, we have seen how there are few other existing hypotheses which could be used as independent variables. These variables are, furthermore, highly interconnected, making it difficult to establish a linear causal chain.

For these reasons we have elected to conduct this study in a more qualitative fashion. Based on what we have discussed, then, it would seem that the best analytical strategy would be to use a combination of process tracing and typological method to untangle the complex thread of causes and effects involved in democratic decay and categorise them according to their role in the phenomenon. Indeed we seem faced with what George and Bennett would describe as "interacting causal variables". According to these authors, the best way to study such interrelated variables is

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through process tracing complemented with typological theories (George & Bennett, p. 212). Indeed the authors stress that "the process-tracing method attempts to identify the intervening causal process – the causal chain and causal mechanism – between an independent variable (or variables) and the outcome of the dependant variable" (George & Bennett, p. 206). In the case of our research, this would entail a historical analysis of a limited number of cases chosen for their explanatory value. Through this analysis we should map the events that lead to democratic decay while hypothesising all intervening steps in the causal pattern leading from a specific event to the decay of democracy in order to untangle as much as possible the various causal mechanisms (George & Bennett, p. 207). Once we have mapped out the causal process as much as possible (it is unlikely that this type of research would yield a strictly linear causal chain) we can use typological theory to organise these causal processes into typologies or categories such as the ones we tentatively outlined above. George and Bennett distinguish typological theory from simple historical explanations as follows: "a historical explanation refers to a series of specific connections in an extant historical case, often supported by relevant theories. In contrast, typological theory identifies both actual and potential conjunctions of variables, or sequences of events and linkages between causes and effects that may occur" (George & Bennett, p. 236). Thus by categorising causal mechanisms into typologies they can be sorted into a kind of "cluster of causes and outcomes" for purposes of comprehension, in much the same way as pathologists organise causes and symptoms into syndromes for cognitive facility (George & Bennett, p. 235). These categories can then be ranked like syndromes into most likely and least likely cases, thus identifying which factors have a greater chance of causing democratic decay, which are less likely to do so and which (if any) are indispensable for that outcome. If our working hypothesis is correct, this research should show the "weak opposition" variable to be an indispensable factor for democratic decay to occur, whereas other proposed factors such as plutocracy or national-religious extremism will prove to be interchangeable triggers in an already degrading situation, like sparks igniting a gas leak. In the

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event that our initial hypothesis is incorrect, we may find that what we thought were triggers were actually the cause of the crisis; or we may find another single factor to be the original cause.

Having established which method we shall use to conduct this study, we can now identify which cases would best be suited to the purposes of our research. Since the study is chiefly one of process tracing, we should select a small number of cases based on their explanatory value. As such this study should follow the democratic decay of some of the key states which were downgraded between 2008 and 2011 in the EIU Democracy Index. The most obvious cases in this order are France and Italy, both EU member states and Western European nations with a long tradition of democratic government, both members of the G8 and both having fallen from “Full Democracy” status to “Flawed Democracy” status between 2008 and 2010 and staying there for 2011. The EIU points to plutocratic hold on media, autocratic management styles on the part of leaders, and rising nationalist and religious sentiment as influencing democratic decay in these two countries – making them an ideal testing ground for a variety of factors. Ideally, these should then be compared to cases of improvement in democracy for countries in the same geographical and cultural sphere in order to monitor opposite developments: in general, a factor which contributes to democratic decay should theoretically be absent or weakened in cases of democratic improvement while factors that help form and fortify democracy should be absent or weakened in cases of democratic decay; thus, comparing opposite developments should prove the best way to test the results of our process tracing. Unfortunately, however, there are no viable candidates for this kind of comparison. Indeed, there are only two cases in Western Europe of improvement between 2008 and 2010: Norway, with an increase of 0.12 (from 9.68 to 9.8 out of 10) and the UK with an increase of 0.01 (from 8.15 to 8.16). The increase the UK is not very significant and thus would not be particularly interesting when compared to France (which has decayed by -0.30 points between 2008 and 2010 - from 8.07 to 7.77) and Italy (which has decayed by -0.15 in that same time and a further -0.09 from 2010 to 2011, so from 7.98 in 2008 to 7.74 in 2011). As for Norway, its increase may seem relatively

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significant; but considering its already high score, an analysis of that country would be unlikely to hold much explanatory value in the study of either democratic decay or improvement. Although cases should ideally be compared within the same cultural zone, one could here make the case for taking an opposite example in Eastern Europe; but unfortunately the only significant increase in that region as listed by the EIU reports was in the Kyrgyz Republic, which is really more of a Central Asian country and thus would have little cultural relevance. This perceived trend of decay and stagnation, unfortunately, seems to hold true throughout the West (even into 2011); including in North America, with drops in the US and stagnation in Canada.

On the other hand, we have seen that there are two interesting cases in Africa of democratic growth: Mali and Ghana, both having risen from the regime category of "Hybrid" to "Flawed Democracy" between 2008 and 2011. Unfortunately, Mali has infamously undergone a partial coup in March 2012; it may be too early to tell what effects this will or has already had on Malian democracy, but they are likely to be dire. Nonetheless, the democratic improvements undergone in Mali up to early 2012 were impressive, and studying that period will doubtlessly still prove highly relevant for this study. With ample cases of democratic decay or failure in Sub-Saharan Africa, it should be then simple to compare opposite cases of democratic development for at least that region. Furthermore, we have seen how existing theory on degrading democracies has concentrated on new democracies: studying these cases of Sub-Saharan Africa should therefore prove extremely relevant in light of existing theory; the conclusions we draw from this can then be compared to our results from our Western European cases in order to see which elements of existing theories apply to democratic decay in established democracies and which elements are exclusive to new democracies; further, this will hopefully help to identify what factors of democratic decay are exclusive to cases of established democracies.

Our cases, then, shall be Mali and Ghana – for cases of improvement in levels of democracy – which we shall then compare to an opposite case of democratic decay in Africa – we suggest Ethiopia, which started off like Mali and Ghana as a "Hybrid" regime in 2008 but instead fell to an

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"Authoritarian" one by 2010. In order to avoid regional and cultural bias, we suggest also using another case of democratic decay in the third world. For this purpose, Nicaragua seems particularly interesting since it went through the opposite development of Ghana and Mali: it passed from a "Flawed Democracy" in 2008 to a "Hybrid" regime by 2010. These cases will then be compared to our examples of major decay in established democratic society: France and Italy; both, again, having decayed from "Full Democracies" to "Flawed Democracies" between 2008 and 2010, stagnating there throughout 2011.

III – Case Studies

a) Ethiopia

Ethiopia is a particularly interesting country for studying democratisation and historical developments in governance more generally, due to a number of historical and geopolitical reasons. Indeed, it is largely believed by anthropologists and other scientists interested in the origins of humanity to be the birthplace of the *Homo sapiens* branch of Hominids – in other words, the birthplace of modern humans – and thus has the longest tradition on earth of societal organisation by our species (Hunt, Oct. 2010). The East African country also has a long tradition of interaction with Europe and Western civilization, having adopted Orthodox Christianity at a time when the Roman Empire and the rest of Europe was still mostly Pagan – even the name Ethiopia derives from Greek, meaning "burnt face", and was mentioned in both the Iliad and the Odyssey. Furthermore, it is likely the African state which remained the most independent throughout the centuries, having only suffered European colonization for a brief six years from 1935 to 1941 at the hands of Mussolini's fascist Italy (Hunt, Apr. 2010). This long history of societal organisation, international interaction and national independence means it has had a comparatively long time to establish social order and assume democratic ideals with very minimal imposition from colonial powers, making it an ideal case for studying the process of democratisation in the third world.

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Ethiopia's centuries old imperial rule was finally overthrown by a Marxist junta – or *Derg* in Amharic, the country's official language – in 1974. This totalitarian regime was in turn replaced in 1991 by a rebellion led by the current ruling party, the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF). As their name suggests, the EPRDF came to power bearing promises of democratisation and liberalisation, which it appeared to stay true to for its first few years. Indeed, many apparent strides toward democratisation were taken, and the EPRDF government began the process of market liberalisation which to this day still sees significant strides in infrastructure, education and public health being taken (Hunt, Apr. 2010). Serious complaints both local and international of democratic decay only truly emerged after the contentious 2005 elections, when the EPRDF was first credibly challenged in a national election by two new party coalitions, the United Ethiopian Democratic Forces (UEDF) and the Coalition for Unity and Democracy (CUD). Though the elections took place on 15 May 2005, the final results were not announced for a long time, finally surfacing after months of counting on 5 September. The ruling EPRDF were reconfirmed as the majority force in parliament with 67.8% of the popular vote, gaining them 371 of the 547 seats. Though the opposition made important gains from the past election – the UEDF and the CUD combined gained 174 seats – they felt the election were unfair and called for re-voting in many constituencies, a move supported by most international observers including the EU (Abbink, p. 184). This position was backed by a series of mass protests, which was met with violent repression from the government, with many deaths and thousands more arrests. This was followed by a crackdown on media freedom and a clamping out of personal freedoms as the country gradually regressed into a virtual police state, culminating in a series of 2008 laws restricting the rights of political parties as well as NGOs and other elements of civil society. The resulting by-elections of that same year saw the EPRDF regaining the majority of lost ground, as well as a sharp increase in party membership from 760 000 in 2005 to 4 million in 2008 (Aalen et al., p. 203).

In light of previous reflections, this case brings two main questions to mind. Firstly, is this really a case of democratic decay? After all, even before the supposed stamping out of democracy

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after 2005 the EPRDF remained the only party to have won any elections since the Derg was overthrown in 1991. The second question, in light of our initial hypothesis, is the following: was this indeed a case of government increasing its hold on power in a moment of opposition weakness if this was the first time the opposition really challenged the ruling party?

To answer the first question, despite the lack of electoral alternation there are some elements which indicate a loosely democratic society. For starters, there was sufficient media freedom in the country that the EPRDF considered them a threat during the 2005 campaign and had many members of the press fined or jailed for allowing the opposition significant coverage. This strength of the independent media was such that authors Aalen and Tronvoll called it "*the* factor which made the population aware of possible alternatives to EPRDF in government" (Aalen et al., p. 200). There was also a significant – if only nascent – democratic culture, as voter turnout in 2005 was from 80 to 90 per cent – a number far higher than the average for most established democracies today (Abbink, p. 183). This could be explained away by citing forced voting and voter manipulation by the ruling party, as is the case in many authoritarian regimes, but the fact that many voted for the opposition and later took to the streets to contest the election results – even escalating protests in response to government crackdowns (Abbink, p. 192) – suggests that there was at least a significant minority of Ethiopians who believed in democracy and understood their democratic rights. Furthermore, there existed at least some limited judicial independence and professionalism in pre-2008 Ethiopia, as exemplified by the courts' refusal to accept the government's accusations of genocide against the opposition (Aalen et al., p. 197) and the High Court's ruling in favour of civil rights groups against new government laws limiting the ability of civil society organisations to observe the national elections (Aalen et al., p. 201). Finally, and perhaps most tellingly, a 1993 referendum in Ethiopia allowed the former Italian colony of Eritrea to secede peacefully from Ethiopia, thus severing its coastline and leaving the country landlocked. Although a border war was later fought between the two nations from 1998 to 2000, the sovereignty of Eritrea was never per se challenged by the government despite the succession's huge unpopularity among many Ethiopians

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(Hunt, Apr. 2010). Therefore, despite many autocratic elements existing in Ethiopian society even before 2005, we can see that society was significantly more democratic then than after the 2005 crackdowns and 2008 antidemocratic reforms. This maintains Ethiopia's status as a viable case for studying democratic decay.

The answer to the second question is less straightforward. Indeed, apart from the 1993 referendum which saw Eritrea leaving the country, Ethiopia did not witness any serious challenge to EPRDF authority until 2005 when the democratic backtracking truly began. As we have seen, this was met with a series of important protests, meaning opposition was likely stronger at this time than at any other time in Ethiopia since 1991. Nevertheless, the opposition parties chose to boycott parliament right at the height of anti EPRDF dissent, thus barring them of what little effective political power they had, arguably making them weaker than they had ever been (Aalen et al., p. 196). Furthermore, a more thorough analysis of democratic cutbacks show that the government had in fact begun tightening its grip on power in the aftermath of the 1998-2000 war with Eritrea (Aalen et al., p. 203). In this light, it could be argued that in 2005 we didn't really see a government stamping out democracy to counter a rising opposition, but rather an opposition making one last united stand against an increasingly totalitarian government.

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b) Nicaragua

Unlike Ethiopia, Nicaragua's societal structure is inherently post-colonial. Indeed, apart from its obvious belonging to the *hispanidad* – an incontrovertible cultural debt to Spain – Nicaragua has spent much of its history as an independent nation in longing for some kind of replacement for the Spanish monarchy (Colburn & Cruz, p. 105), thus submitting the Central American nation to a succession of autocratic regimes up until the 1990s. Nevertheless, the advent of democracy follows a broadly similar pattern to the one observed in Ethiopia: from the 1930s until 1979 Nicaragua was ruled by a virtual dynasty of dictators, all of the same Somoza lineage. The regime was finally overthrown in 1979 by a Marxist guerilla group called the Sandinista National

Liberation Front (FSLN). In an effort to reverse the trend of personalised politics to avoid both a return to a Somoza style dynastic succession and a Castro style personality cult, the FSLN was initially governed by a nine-member National Directorate; but in the following decade the regime would find itself increasingly oriented around leader Daniel Ortega. Nevertheless, years of economic malaise and foreign anti-government intervention – most notably from the United States – led Nicaragua to a national election campaign in 1990, which Ortega and his FSLN would lose to a loose coalition of both left and right parties headed by Violeta Barrios de Chamorro. Instead of creating a political force to fill the ensuing power vacuum, however, Chamorro dedicated her presidency to national reconciliation, thus leaving others to scramble to fill the vacuum with an intense political competition which would yield a new political landscape for the country (Colburn & Cruz, p. 109). In particular, many on the right felt nostalgic for the days of Somoza's party, the Nationalist Liberal Party, and decided to reform it with the name Constitutionalist Liberal Party (PLC) under the direction of Arnoldo Aleman, a former pro-Somoza youth leader during the time of the Sandinista insurrection (Colburn & Cruz, p. 110). Other parties also emerged, to the point that at the time of the 1996 elections there existed 23 parties and coalitions running for office; but the most powerful parties by far were the PLC and the FSLN, which Ortega was still trying to hold together. Due to restrictions on successive mandates, Aleman was replaced in the 2001 elections by Enrique Bolaños as head of his party; Bolaños won, but when allegations of corruption surfaced against his predecessor the new PLC president decided to push for abolishing the immunity from prosecution assured to Aleman under Nicaraguan law so that he could stand trial. In order to do this, Bolaños had to work against the majority of his own party who supported Aleman, and thus found himself working with various opposition groups – most notably, with Ortega himself (Coburn & Cruz, p. 111; Anderson & Dodd, p. 155-156). Although Aleman was eventually put to trial and found guilty, he did not end up serving his full sentence and soon returned to politics. However, Bolaños' move did have the effect of splitting his party in two, with a breakaway party named Nicaraguan Liberal Alliance arriving on the political scene with a prominent banker at its head, while Aleman was able

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to resume leadership of his PLC (when Bolaños ended his term in office) after cutting a deal in his own turn with Ortega to allow him to return to national politics (Colburn & Cruz, p. 112). Although the Sandinistas were themselves split by the secession of the Sandinista Renovation Movement (MRS), the divided political scene allowed Ortega to return to office in the ensuing 2006 elections with only 34 per cent of the vote (Colburn & Cruz, p. 112).

Having pulled off his unlikely political resurrection after years on the sidelines, Ortega began his new mandate by distancing himself from his previous term by maintaining cordial relations with the United States and IMF as well as establishing a good relationship with local and international business elites (Colburn & Cruz, p. 115). On the other hand, Ortega has forged and strengthened his country's ties with Venezuela as well as with more authoritarian regimes such as Russia and Iran. The FSLN leader has also cut back on artistic and academic freedom of expression, as well as made life difficult for dissenting journalists (Anderson & Dodd, p. 157-158). Furthermore, Ortega has been increasingly turning Nicaraguan politics into his own personal oligarchy, appointing his scarcely qualified wife as prime minister and making appointments in public administration and the judiciary according to personal loyalty rather than merit; not to mention the president's rarely transparent system for awarding government contracts or Ortega's own personal control of nearly half the national media (Colburn & Cruz, p. 116). Nevertheless, Ortega's new rule has resulted in modest growth for the Nicaraguan economy, and the Sandinista leader has been awarded by another term in office after the 2011 elections, despite facing a united coalition of left and right parties against him (Colburn & Cruz, p. 113-116).

In the Nicaraguan case, there is a clear regression from some form of democracy to some form or renewed but as yet still limited autocracy, heralding the warning by some that if current developments continue unabated they could "pave the way for a murky, but very real, "transition" to autocracy" (Colburn & Cruz, p. 107). In this light, the EIU's description of the situation as a slip from "Flawed Democracy" to "Hybrid Regime" seems quite fitting. Indeed, although democracy never truly reached the levels generally ascribed to Western democracies – with corruption rampant

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even in the best days of Nicaraguan democracy, and both major parties representing very evident relics of more authoritarian times – there were nevertheless some very clear signs of democratic practices taking hold at the institutional level, with parties generally accepting the democratic process and even with the advent of leaders such as Bolaños with a clear intent at reducing corruption and making governance more transparent. Furthermore, one of the happier relics of the Sandinista regime is 1988's Law 40 which established a somewhat independent and democratically accountable system of municipal governments, allowing for local democracy to flourish even as national democracy decays. Ortega has since begun undermining the autonomy of these municipal governments with the formation of unelected Citizens' Power Councils (CPC) overseen by his wife, but local politics has continued resisting centralist control from Ortega's government, even by municipalities under control of the president's own FSLN – albeit with increasingly limited success (Anderson & Dodd, p. 160-163). All this amounts very clearly to a gradual moving away from the country's once functional – though perhaps imperfect – democratic structure, previously described as follows:

> Nicaragua enjoys political pluralism. There are vigorous debates in the media and in Congress, and there are no restrictions on political participation or constraints on the expression of political views. There is, with some flaws, the rule of law. There are no political prisoners. In short, Nicaraguans are not being "suffocated".
>
> \- Colburn & Cruz, p. 106

So what factors have allowed for this regression from democratic functionality? Some of the blame unfortunately rests with a lack of democratic culture at the popular level. Indeed, despite parties themselves competing in a mostly healthy democratic fashion at the institutional level, the low level of education in general Nicaraguan society leaves most clueless about democratic practice in other societies. Combined with a high level of poverty, this has contributed to Nicaraguans generally supporting strong personalities rather than parties and political ideas – a trend largely nourished by political leaders who offer livestock and construction material directly to disfavoured individuals in attempts to garner their support (Colburn & Cruz, p. 111-114). Nevertheless, this

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cannot be seen as the main cause for the democratic decay witnessed in recent years, as both main parties enjoyed the direction of charismatic leaders with equal tendencies to "bribe" the population with subsistence goods, all the while respecting democratic process and nurturing a mostly healthy culture of parliamentary competition. Rather, Ortega's second rise to power seems to result from his tactful manipulation of a divided right, as the leader made deals with various opposition forces to aggravate their increasing differences. The role of popular apathy and incomprehension toward democracy, then, was not a leading role in the process of democratic decay but rather an absence of opposition to Ortega, failing to punish the FSLN leader for his authoritarian Machiavellianism – making Nicaragua a prime example for how a healthy democratic culture can prove a powerful political force at the grassroots level, and how, on the other hand, a lack of democratic culture is a dangerous weakness which autocratic leaders can and usually will exploit to their advantage.

c) Ghana

It is, arguably, considerably easier to identify a moment or period in which democratic institutions and practices begin to erode than it is to identify a moment or period in which a weak democracy becomes stronger; thus, one would expect it to be likewise more difficult to isolate the factors which contribute to democratic consolidation than to identify those which lead to its decay. Nevertheless, if we are to form a clear and credible idea of how democracies decay it is paramount that we test for opposite developments in an improving democratic situation, which brings us the next two cases of Ghana and Mali.

Ghana's period of colonial rule by the English came to an end on 6 March 1957 with the rise of African nationalist Kwame Nkrumah. At the time, Ghana was a vibrant center of African nationalist and Pan-African ideals, which helped foster an atmosphere of political activism and cultural renovation – elements which might have seemed fitting for a budding democracy (Josiah-Aryeh, p. 1-26). Nevertheless, Nkrumah began setting up a cult of the State around heroes of

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Ghana's independence, heralding an era of personalist authoritarianism hidden under the robes of a democratic state. Indeed, Nkrumah led Ghana in an experiment of African socialism which, like most far left regimes in the Cold War era, promoted a vision of democracy based on popular mobilisation guided by a vanguard revolutionary party, effectively resulting in a single party system. However, Nkrumah – like several other West African nations at the time – espoused a "heterodox" vision of socialism, a lighter version of the more orthodox Marxist-Leninist socialism adopted by such states such as Angola and Ethiopia: this meant that, among other things, Nkrumah's regime was at least disguised by a phoney electoral system rigged in his favour (Dickovick, p. 1121-1126). Nevertheless, Nkrumah's poor management of governance and the economy led to a military coup in 1966 which began a long period of instability and coups, lasting until yet another leftist regime was put in place by Flight Lieutenant Jerry John Rawlings in 1981. Despite an initial return to authoritarian leftism, aligning his government with such regimes as Gaddafi's Libya, another row with abysmal economic performances and intense foreign pressure led Rawlings to open up to democratic governance, first by introducing municipal elections in 1988 and converting to a fully democratic constitution with term limits in 1992. More surprisingly, Rawlings respected his two term limit by ending his presidency in 2000, even as his New Democratic Congress (NDC) party was defeated by main rival New Patriotic Party (NPP). The NPP's new president Kufuor, in turn, stepped down at the end of his two terms ahead of the 2008 elections. What followed was the most testing moment of Ghanaian democracy. Indeed, the elections yielded a very narrow difference between the two major parties, with the ruling NPP winning 49.13 per cent and the NDC receiving 47.92 per cent of the popular vote (Abdulai & Crawford, p. 30). However, Ghana's 1992 constitution stipulates that a party must gain more than 50 per cent of the vote to win the presidential elections, so the Electoral Commission (EC) called for a second round of voting. Initial results indicated that, this time, it was the NDC that found itself in the lead by a mere 23 055 votes; but since one constituency had been unable to vote, the EC refused to declare a winner until its citizens were given a chance to cast their ballot. In the

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meantime, each party accused the other of fraud and vote rigging, mobilising their respective supporters against the other as tensions mounted. Nevertheless, when the final results were announced – 50.23 per cent for the NDC – no major outbreaks of violence occurred, and the NPP accepted defeat and congratulated their opponents (Abdulai & Crawford, p. 30-31).

Having passed the test of successive governments from different parties alternating in power over two decades of mostly peaceful and fair elections, Ghana has marked itself as one of Sub-Saharan Africa's greatest success stories and raised hopes for further democratic consolidation in the West African nation – and even, perhaps, serving as a model for other African states to follow in future democratisation attempts. So what factors have contributed to this unexpected rise in democratic norms and practices? According to J. Tyler Dickovick, the main factor behind the success of democracy in countries like Ghana, Mali and Benin are direct yet unintended legacies of their leftist pasts. Indeed, by espousing socialist rhetoric to secure their hold on power, the leftist regimes in these countries shaped a new national culture of identifying oneself according to political orientation, all the while suppressing traditional ethnic identities (at least when it comes to political identification) – while on the other hand, being lighter versions of left authoritarianism than the orthodox Marxist-Leninist regimes, these countries did not develop a bloated military with the potential to strangle out any notion of popular sovereignty. As a result, when these regimes made the transition to democracy, they were more prepared to adopt a healthy democratic culture than most other African states, which are often plagued by ethnic strife and militaristic ambitions (Dickovick 2008). Particularly in the case of Ghana, this seems plausible given Nkrumah's 1958 Avoidance of Discrimination Act banning political parties from organising themselves around ethnic identities (Dickovick, p. 1125). This contrasts with the Ethiopian case, among others, where Marxism has indeed left a powerful military behind and where political alignments often mask ethnic tensions, as exemplified by the ruling party's favouritism toward the Tigray people (Hunt, Apr. 2010). Nevertheless, many other cases of democratic decay – Nicaragua is an obvious example, but we can expect similar findings for France or Germany – do not seem to be plagued by

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ethnic division or militaristic ambitions, making it difficult to conceive of such woes as being the single factor contributing to decay or advancement of democracy. Indeed, in Schmitter's terms, these correspond to extrinsic dilemmas in democracy: they are crucial issues in establishing democratic rule, but they hold little explanatory value in analysing the decay of already established democracies. The absence of serious ethnic strife, then, cannot fully explain the success of democratic governance in Ghana.

Another explanation for Ghana's success story attributes democratic consolidation to the country's decentralisation policy, which localises political activity, bringing politics closer to citizens and thus encouraging participation and democratic culture more generally. However, Crawford warns that, despite the successes of the decentralisation policy, this is not a magic bullet against political apathy and lack of accountability from democratic institutions (Crawford 2009). Indeed, we have seen that Nicaragua has a similar decentralisation policy as the one in Ghana, but this has not stopped it from receding into autarchy under Ortega.

Instead of identifying a magic bullet which could have saved Ghana from sharing the fate of many other Sub-Saharan African states, let us re-examine the series of events surrounding the contentious 2008 elections which allowed the West African nation to avoid descending into chaos and enabled a peaceful and democratic transition of power. As we have seen, each of Ghana's two main parties did initially contest the legitimacy of the other, accusing it – not without cause, in both cases – of vote rigging and, more alarmingly, amassing its own supporters in protest. Indeed, both parties organised mass rallies in which protesters carried sticks and machetes, with many businesses closing in anticipation of an outbreak of violence (Abdulai & Crawford, p. 31). Nevertheless, as we have seen, the EC refused to bow to the pressures of either party, waiting until all results were in before declaring a winner. Furthermore, many civil society organisations rallied to call for calm and respect in these contentious times, marking a strong democratic culture amongst contemporary Ghanaians. Indeed, a 2008 Afrobarometer survey found that – as in previous surveys from 1999, 2002 and 2005 – the overwhelming majority of the population support democratic rule, with 79%

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expressing a preference for democracy over other regimes regardless of surrounding circumstances, with similar numbers expressing a staunch opposition to presidential dictatorships, single party rule and military rule (84%, 81% and 79% respectively). This contrasts with the case of Nicaragua, where we have seen an apparent apathy toward democracy, with people willing to accept any regime which can promise their wellbeing at the moment. These figures are corroborated by increased participation in democratic practice, with voter turnout rising from 50.2% in 1992 to 72.9% in 2008 (compared to 61.7% in the United States for 2008) and many civil society organisations uniting to increase awareness among the population of proper democratic practices such as avoidance of double or underage voting and promotion of non-violent elections (Abdulai & Crawford, p. 30-35).

What these observations seem to indicate is that violence was avoided and peaceful and lawful democratic transition was assured in 2008 by structural aspects of Ghanaian society; namely a strong, independent and professional bureaucracy and a powerful and democratically dedicated civil society (Abdulai & Crawford, p. 30-35). This contrasts, notably, with the Nicaraguan case, where political parties may have seemed more cooperative and cordial among each other than in the case of Ghana but where institutional and popular backing for democratic practices was weak at best. These observations seem to back the notion of democracy as a balance of power between various social forces, where the weakness of some social forces will lead to an opportunistic power grab by the force or forces which find themselves in a new position of superiority.

d) Mali

As a French colony, Mali had an apparent advantage over other African states when it came to democratisation in that it was allowed some limited democratic practice by its colonial masters, notably in the post-World War II period when the anticolonial party *Union Soudanais-Rassemblement Démocratique Africain* (US-RDA) was tolerated – with the French nonetheless

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actively supporting the pro-colonial *Parti Progressiste Soudanais* (PPS). Despite colonial interference in Mali's limited democracy, the US-RDA won the 1956 elections and the PPS, accepting defeat, merged into this anti-colonial party (Wing, p. 86). This led to a decade of socialist single party rule under the US-RDA's leader, Modibo Keita, until a stumbling economy and a purge of his own party led to a coup by young military officials in 1968, setting up yet another single party autocracy led by General Moussa Traoré – this time rejecting socialism and setting up liberal economic reforms. In 1976, Traoré established his single party rule as law of the land in a constitution whose official aim was to enable a transition between military rule and multiparty democracy. Nevertheless, Traoré's autarchic rule grew increasingly contested as protests led by student groups as well as three failed coup attempts characterised the Malian political landscape in 1980. Mass repressions succeeded in calming the tensions, and Traoré managed to win the 1985 (still single party) elections with 99.94% of the vote (Youngblood-Coleman, p. 9). Nevertheless, mounting dissatisfaction with IMF-imposed austerity measures and international pressures – especially from the contemporary wave of democratisation throughout West Africa – forced Traoré to allow some limited political associations and independent press in 1990. Though he tried to withhold a full transition to multiparty democracy, this was enough for a handful of opposition parties to form and rally against the government in early 1991. These protests were eventually supported by a part of the military, culminating in 17 military officers arresting Traoré and suspending the constitution on 26 March 1991 (Youngblood-Coleman, p. 10), paving the way for multiparty elections a year later. These were won by *Alliance pour la Démocratie au Mali* (ADEMA), a new party made up of former clandestine democratic opposition groups working against Traoré since 1968 and led now by Alpha Konaré; though a surviving US-RDA did relatively well also, coming in second with 31% of the vote in the second round versus ADEMA's 69% (Wing, p. 87). By the second presidential election of this new era of multiparty democracy (in 1997), however, it became apparent that ADEMA had become the single dominant political force in the country, winning 84.4% of the popular vote right from the first round of voting – the closest

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opponent having gathered only 3.6% (Wing, p. 87). These results were largely contested by the opposition parties, who accused ADEMA of massive vote rigging and complained to the Constitutional Court. The Court's ruling echoed the concerns of the opposition parties, cancelling the election results and calling for new elections to be held a week later. Nevertheless, most opposition parties boycotted these elections in anticipation of renewed fraudulence, and with only one (minor) party providing opposing to Konaré he proceeded to win by 95.9% – voter turnout was at 30 percent (Wing, p. 86-89; Youngblood-Coleman, p. 10-11). Legislative elections followed in the summer months, with most opposition parties maintaining their boycott – this led to ADEMA gaining 128 of the 147 seats in parliament (Youngblood-Coleman, p. 11). Over the next year there was a feeling that the coup potential was elevated and indeed it was considered that both ADEMA and opposition forces were not held in high regard by the military, who were beginning to get restless (Youngblood-Coleman, p. 11). Nevertheless the regime managed to resist to the end of the decade, with 1999's municipal elections providing a more balanced result: ADEMA only won 59% of overall seats; though the second party only won 10% (Wing, p. 93). When the next presidential elections came around in 2002, Konaré accepted his constitutional term limits and stood down. This led to some disorder among the ranks of ADEMA who had difficulty agreeing on a candidate, resulting in some minor split off parties. Furthermore, Konaré surprised the nation by backing an independent candidate rather than anyone of his own party – this was former General Amadou Toumani Touré (commonly referred to as ATT), one of those responsible for overthrowing Traoré in 1991 – who won the elections with 28% of the vote in the first round and 65% in the second, versus ADEMA's new candidate Cissé who won 23% in the first round and 35% in the second (Youngblood-Coleman, p. 13). Touré was re-elected in 2007 for his second and final term, garnering 68% of the popular vote against 19% for his main rival Keita of the Rally for Mali party (RPM) (Youngblood-Coleman, p. 17-18).

Touré's term as president was terminated abruptly a few months before it was constitutionally set to end in 2012 as a new military coup led by Captain Sanogo ousted the

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government in March, claiming to be acting in punishment for a perceived inadequate response to the Islamist uprising in Northern Mali in January. In accordance with constitutional requirements, the head of the National Assembly – Dioncoundra Traoré of ADEMA-PASJ, a merger of ADEMA and another party – became acting president until the upcoming 2012 elections, though Sanogo initially refused to step down. To complicate matters, Dioncoundra Traoré was viciously beaten by a mob of pro-military activists inside the presidential palace, though he has since returned to office. Sanogo finally agreed to step down when he was promised the same retirement benefits usually reserved for former heads of state (New York Times, May 2012).

At a glance, it is easy to ask oneself how Mali qualifies as a case of democratic improvement, even when restricting one's analysis to the 1991-2011 period. Indeed there has been only one major transfer of power from one party to another at the presidential level – or rather, from one party to an independent candidate backed by a coalition led by the previously governing party – and even this came about with strong support from the outgoing president. Nevertheless, Mali is often regarded (or at least, was until the 2012 coups) as shining example of democratic success in Africa; in fact, this is due more to its system of decentralisation than to its national politics. Indeed, Mali has a long tradition of decentralised politics dating back to the age of the Mali Empire when it was seen as a way for powerful warlords to maintain their power and influence while still submitting to the emperor – which, among other things, helped preserve peace and cooperation among Mali's wide range of ethnic and linguistic groups. Today traditional decentralisation has undergone a democratic makeover; and indeed the expression for such governance in Bambara – the largest ethnic language group in the country – is *mara segi so*, meaning "bringing power home" (Pringle 2006). Nevertheless, despite these grand origins and traditions the reality of today's decentralised governance is less than exemplary, with local authorities often serving as extensions of the central government rather than as truly independent authorities. On the other hand, it is at the municipal level that party alternation is at its strongest,

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with ADEMA – though still the strongest party – having dropped in municipal seat holdings from 50% in 1999 to 14 percent in 2004 (Wing, p. 94).

Indeed Mali shares many structural and developmental similarities with nearby Ghana – with both nations coming to terms with authoritarian pasts and ethnic divisions by envisaging a decentralised form of democracy for the official purposes of bringing governance closer to new voters unfamiliar with the practices and norms of democratic participation. Even many of the difficulties identified in the Malian case, such as monopolising aspirations of powerful parties and electoral fraud, can be compared to similar developments in Ghana. However Mali did not have the moment of democratic triumph that Ghana experienced in 2008 when the country's structural stars aligned, so to speak, to produce a mostly smooth democratic transition against the apparent odds. As in the Ghanaian case, Mali had no shortage of political parties willing to contest the ruling ADEMA's hold on power; and as in the Ghanaian case, the political parties in Mali seemed committed to a certain degree of civility and respect toward the electoral process, notably by accepting term limits and the decisions of non-partisan institutions such as the Constitutional Court. In turn, these non-partisan institutions, again as in the Ghanaian case, proved competent and dedicated to the democratic process, notably by annulling the first elections of 1997 and calling for new ones to be held. Nevertheless, two main differences can be identified in the Malian case which likely hold some explanatory value as to why a similar experiment in democracy worked so well in one country while meeting with limited success in another. Firstly, most opposition parties chose to boycott the 1997 elections, thus abandoning their role as forces for institutional dissent precisely when they were most needed. Second, and perhaps more importantly, democratic culture has taken significantly less hold in Malian society than it has in Ghana. Indeed voter turnout has been almost consistently low, peaking at 38% for the presidential elections of 2002 compared to the 36% of 2007 and 29% in 1997 – turnout for municipal elections has been higher but still leaving much to be desired, reaching 43% in 2004 (Wing, p. 97). This has led Susanna Wing to esteem that "the current political situation results in no opposition from political parties, or even from civil society itself"

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(Wing, p. 94); this can doubtless be traced to a persistence of paternalistic mentalities among the general population, as exemplified with the general sentiment that "if local leaders were also members of the dominant political party then resources would flow to their communities more readily" (Wing, p. 89) – this mentality is reminiscent of that prevalent in the Nicaraguan case, where a mentality of supporting the strong and apparently benevolent in hopes of material rewards tends to overpower more democratic patterns of voter preference.

In conclusion to this section on Mali, then, we might say that decentralisation has led to limited success in democratisation by bringing the electoral process to a more tangible level for democratically inexperienced voters. Nevertheless, important lacunas exist in general democratic culture, which has significantly halted Mali's otherwise impressive trajectory of democratic growth – highlighting once again the importance of a strong and active civil society in promoting and maintaining democratic accountability.

e) France

When thinking of the processes and characteristics necessary for democratisation to occur, it is easy for someone of Western provenance to fall into Eurocentric fallacies. In particular, when examining the processes of democratisation in the aforementioned developing countries, someone raised in a European or North American setting might be tempted to see the dangers and growing pains of these processes to be the problem of perceived "others" – especially for someone born and raised after the Second World War, in a period of Western history where democracy and peace have been apparently relatively constant. Indeed, as the birthplace of democratic governance on a grand scale, most Western nations have had the advantage of decades – sometimes centuries – of democratic experimentation to find the institutions and practices which best suit the flourishing of democratic governance in their territories and cultures. Furthermore, centuries of colonialism and technological advance have left Western states in a clear state of economic and industrial advantage relative to other countries, which has likely played a major role in maintaining social order and

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respect for institutions, thus making it difficult for a rapid spiral of de-democratisation to occur. However, if this institutional longevity which characterises wealthy Western nations can give the appearance of eternal and immortal democracy, a broader look at the historical origins of Western democratisation reveals similar processes and pitfalls as the ones observed in the aforementioned developing nations – albeit with the various steps of this process prolonged over longer periods thanks to Western institutional longevity.

Of all Western states, France likely provides the best case for observing these processes. Indeed France is, first of all, the Western world's oldest surviving political entity: it traces the origins of its name, culture and – to a very large extent – territorial boundaries to the kingdom founded in the twilight days of the Roman Empire by a Germanic tribe known as the Franks. These "barbarians" – or, in Olson's terms, "roving bandits" – established their new state in what was the Roman province of Gaul, preferring its fertile lands to the largely undeveloped marshes and forests north of the Rhine which they once called home. Further, they established themselves as the new governing warrior cast over the industrious natives, the Gallo-Romans, who made up the new working cast in the emerging feudal system; this would form the basis for French nobility and monarchy until the French Revolution of 1789 – in other words, the Franks became Olson's "stationary bandits" for former Gaul. This brings us to the other reason why France is an ideal case for studying the democratisation process in Western society: apart from being the Western world's oldest state, it is also the first state in Continental Europe since the Roman Republic to experiment with democracy on a large scale – as opposed to a few small maritime republics which existed in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, such as Venice or the United Provinces. Indeed France began its democratisation process when revolutionaries, inspired by the philosophers of the Renaissance and the Enlightenment period as well as the revolution in the colonies of New England, started demanding a British style parliamentary democracy. The events which emerged from this uprising, beginning in 1789, would lead to a long period of revolution, establishing a theoretical republic which would be plagued by coups and anti-royalist persecutions known as the infamous Reign of

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Terror, and culminating first in a return to monarchy under emperor Napoleon I and then, following his defeat at Waterloo, a brief return to the traditional French monarchy in the first part of the 19th century known as the Restoration. The following century would be plagued by a series of revolutions and coups, an alternation of different regimes with different levels of democratic representation, finally brought to an end by the defeat of emperor Napoleon III at the hands of the Prussians in 1870. In this last chapter of French monarchy – known as the Second Empire – emperor Napoleon III had risen to power in a similar fashion as his uncle Napoleon I: in a coup whose official aim was to stabilise a turbulent republican experiment. Being born out of revolution and backed by the bourgeoisie (Feigenbaum, p. 68), the Second Empire was characterised by some limited democratic representation. Indeed, "the regime's consistent promotion of universal male suffrage – albeit in a plebiscitary form tightly controlled by the imperial state – provided French citizens nearly 20 years of experience with at least semicompetitive electoral politics, in a period when nearly every other European power sharply limited the right to vote" (Hanson, p. 1029). As a result, when the imperial regime was suddenly overthrown by the nascent German Empire in September 1870, there was some precedent for deliberative politics on which an eventual republic could be born. Nevertheless, the defeat of Napoleon III left the country in a virtual state of civil war as no single political force was strong enough to take over. Indeed, the period from 1870 to 1873 saw the former parties of the Second Empire pitted against each other in a struggle between republicans, two variants of monarchists as well as Bonapartists hoping for a return of Napoleon III from exile. Furthermore, several communes rose up in an attempt to establish some form of federalised socialism – the most famous example being the Paris Commune of 1871 – and several secessionist movements arose around the country. When the socialist scare of the Paris Commune uprising was finally extinguished by Adolph Thiers, his supposed Third Republic was accepted by competing forces as a temporary solution to peacefully resolve the issue of what type of government should be adopted. The tensions between these visions of France continued in a mostly peaceful parliamentary fashion until 1877, when republicanism officially triumphed in national

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elections by 4,367,000 votes to 3,577,000 votes opposed, thus cementing the Third Republic and democracy in France until its overthrowing in World War II by Hitler's Germany (Hanson, p. 1034-1050).

Nevertheless, the restoration of democratic governance after the end of World War II with the establishment of the Fourth Republic did not mark the end of troubles for French democracy. Indeed, the Fourth Republic was marred with political instability for the virtual entirety of its short history. This instability culminating in a series of political crises left France without an effective government for an entire month in 1958. This coincided with an explosive crisis in Algeria, then a French colony: after a significant growth in terrorist activities by Algerian separatist group FLN, the ethnic French living in the colony staged a series of protests and strikes demanding the formation of a government capable of dealing with the crisis and, above all, keeping Algeria French. Alarmingly, not only did the army declare their sympathy for the protesters, they effectively supported them by deliberately failing to stop them from storming Government buildings during a series of demonstrations on 13 May 1958. Fearing a coup, the divided French parliament swore in a government headed by Prime Minister Pierre Pflimlin with the largest parliamentary support of any previous government in the Fourth Republic. As a first step toward calming the emerging situation, Pflimlin gave General Raoul Salan, the senior general in Algiers, civil powers over the colony. However, on 15 May Salan made it clear he supported a new government in Paris headed by General de Gaulle, one of the heroes of the resistance against Nazi occupation and briefly Prime Minister in the immediate post-war period. Though parliament initially resisted such pressures, they eventually caved and swore the General in as Prime Minister on 1 June – caving, additionally, to de Gaulle's demands of 1) being granted special powers in dealing with Algeria, 2) the power of ruling by decree for the next six months and 3) the right to draw up an entirely new constitution. Thus was born the Fifth Republic, a regime largely created by de Gaulle for de Gaulle and widely criticised of being overly presidential and personalised in nature. The constitution was nevertheless accepted, though it was widely believed – falsely, as it

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would later turn out – that the regime would be a temporary one which would change when de Gaulle left office. Furthermore, as if general concerns about the personalised nature of his new constitution weren't enough, de Gaulle had a tendency to reinterpret his own constitution as he saw fit throughout his term in office. The General did not turn directly to voters for support until 1962, when he appealed to them only in the form of a referendum. Though proper elections were held in 1965 – which he won – general disapproval of de Gaulle's style of governance led to several assassination attempts, and finally culminated in the famous protests and strikes of 1968 which seemed pre-revolutionary in nature. Although he survived this crisis, de Gaulle eventually resigned when a proposed referendum on decentralisation was rejected in 1969 (Gaffney, p. 1-88).

Despite fears surrounding the personalised aspect of the Fifth Republic, the constitution was maintained by all de Gaulle's successors to date, including when France elected its first president from the Socialist party, Francois Mitterrand, in 1981. Indeed, following de Gaulle's departure from politics there were no major complaints of democratic shortcomings – in fact, the democratic potential of the new constitution was further developed as increased decentralisation was introduced in the 1980s as well as when an unexpected feature of the constitution was revealed when, on a number of occasions, parliamentary elections yielded power to a different party than presidential elections, forcing a period of inter party cooperation known as "cohabitation".

Nevertheless a new setback to French democracy arose surrounding the 2007 presidential election and the subsequent presidential term of recently defeated president Nicolas Sarkozy: this president provoked new accusations of excessively personalising presidential governance notably in relation to media influence, with Reporters Without Borders' media freedom ranking for France dropping from 31st place in 2007 to 44th after three years of Sarkozy's presidency (Delporte, p. 304). Indeed, although the increase in mass communication in recent years is seen as leading to a general trend in personalisation of politics throughout the West (Campus 2010; Garzia 2011), few world leaders have been accused of media manipulation more than Sarkozy. A former mayor in the rich town of Neuilly, Sarkozy quickly discovered the power of media in advancing one's political

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career and moved to set up media group Neuilly Communications through which he set out to make lasting personal bonds with journalists and media barons "cultivating an unusual closeness with them […] that verged on complicity" (Delporte, p. 301). During his 2007 presidential campaign and subsequent presidency, Sarkozy used his influence in the media to promote himself – appearing 224 times on prime-time television programs in his first four months in office, compared to his predecessor Chirac's 94 times for the equivalent period in 1995 and 75 times in 2002 (Delporte, p. 302) – as well as to control certain news stories which he found inconvenient or to appoint his friends to important posts in the national media (notably Laurent Solly, his former chief of cabinet, was given an influential role in the Bouygues group and TF1 despite his scarce experience in mass communications) (Delporte, p. 300-303). Sarkozy's personalised style of presidentialism also leaked into his style of governance as he promoted a strictly top down approach to the presidency, advancing an interpretation of the Fifth Republic constitution where "a President with a popular mandate exercises executive authority, which is implemented by the Prime Minister, the ministers, and the broader machinery of government", encouraging his Prime Minister to repeat that "the President "governs" and the role of the premier is one of loyal implementation" (Cole, p. 317). Nevertheless, Sarkozy's personalisation of politics combined with his perceived failure to resolve the prevailing economic crisis eventually led to a drop in popularity in the later years of his presidency, which was accompanied by increased criticism from the media – with many of the journalists of Sarkozy's circle of influence turning on him and, sometimes, revealing dirty secrets about Sarkozy's media influence – as well as divisions within his own party (Cole, p. 317; Delporte, p. 301-304). Sarkozy finally lost his presidency to the Socialist candidate Francois Hollande – who proposed a more grassroots approach to the presidency, styling himself as "Mr. Normal" – in the May 2012 elections, though the margin between the two was of less than 2% with Hollande passing at 51.9% of the popular vote in the second round (Chrisafis, 2012).

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In conclusion to this section on democracy in France, we can see how a long term view of the democratisation process in an established Western democracy reveals a non-linear development with similar perils and setbacks as witnessed in developing nations. In particular, we have seen how even after the Second World War democracy has found itself under serious stress in France on at least two occasions: first when a major crisis in the Fourth Republic parliament combined with growing tensions in the colonies resulted in a partial coup by General Charles de Gaulle, leading to a period of limited republican rule by an alarmingly and disproportionally strong president; and the second when a president with a disproportionally strong hold on the media brought back a similar style of top-down governance. Although neither occasions truly brought the country back into autocratic rule, this style of "republican monarch" (Cole, p. 314) with a "strong Bonapartist dynamic" (Hewlett, p. 406) seemed dangerously close to exemplifying the "electoral fallacy" which Susanna Wing warned about in estimating democratic success in Sub-Saharan Africa, specifying that the "electoral fallacy, in which elections are regarded as the sole determinant of democracy, can lead to premature pronouncements of democratic consolidation and therefore it is important to consider elections as just one part of constructing democracy" (Wing, p. 82) – a clear warning against presidents ruling with little or no parliamentary deliberation once in power. In both cases, it seems, democracy was saved and normal deliberative governance restored thanks to the dual forces of public pressure and institutional commitment to democracy from other organs of the state.

f) Italy

Italy had a relative advantage in its democratisation process over other Western nations in that it only came into existence as a state in the late 19th century, when the relatively rich and industrialised northern Italian state of Piedmont (a parliamentary monarchy in the image of then-contemporary France, its protector), inspired by nationalist fervour and a desire to become a major liberal power, unified the peninsula for the first time since a war between Byzantines in the South and Lombards in the North at the beginning of the Middle Ages ended in a stalemate, originating

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the North-South division which still plagues Italian identity politics. Despite having been born a parliamentary regime, however, democratic culture in the Kingdom of Italy was slow to take hold as the peninsula was largely under-industrialised and only one fourth of the population was literate – and indeed few people even spoke standard Italian. This meant that, among other things, independent newspapers were found to be mostly unprofitable; the few newspapers that were established, then, were for the most part controlled by political factions, initiating a trend of politicised media which has largely lasted to the present day (Mammone & Veltri, p. 85-97).

After the First World War, this nascent democracy would find itself under considerable stress as a series of crises shook the peninsula. The crises were a direct result of the war itself, starting, ironically, with a mass wave of newfound political awareness as Italians were compelled to pick sides in the debates surrounding involvement in the war, whose prolonged duration and high casualty rate forced itself into the daily lives of Italians. Political tensions continued to rise even after the end of the war, as the liberal elite found itself intensely criticised by two new political extremes for its involvement in the war and for its handling of the subsequent economic depression. On one hand, a staunchly nationalist voice arose denouncing the government's failure to win Dalmatia – the Adriatic coastline of modern day Croatia which was inhabited by a large Italian minority, having once been part of the Republic of Venice – in the ensuing peace agreements as a "mutilated victory"; on the other hand, the left denounced the premises of the war altogether, increasingly resenting the liberal elite for its involvement and encouraged by the victory of revolutionaries in Russia to organise mass strikes and demand a worker's state. Apart from their mutual opposition to the ruling liberals, however, the nationalists and socialists were also staunchly opposed to each other, with nationalists becoming particularly violent in attacking workers and their sympathisers. Caught up in the "red scare" of the times, the liberals were increasingly reluctant to denounce the nationalists in their violence against workers. As the leftist movement continued to gain sympathisers in the early 1920s, favouring the rising Socialist party, panicking liberals found themselves forming parliamentary alliances with the nationalists and their new party: Benito

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Mussolini's Fascist party. By 1922 the Fascists had come to be seen as defenders of private property and of national values against the rising red threat and their demonised Slavic influences; as a result, Mussolini found himself appointed prime minister despite his party's weak representation in parliament, in hopes that liberals could use the fascists for their interests. Instead, the following months would see the fascists increasing their relative power as Mussolini gradually concentrated political powers in his hands – the largely symbolic March on Rome ensued, confirming Mussolini's new dominance and beginning a series of world events which would lead to the rise of Hitler in Germany and World War II (Haywood, 2009).

Shortly after the defeat of Fascism in Italy by the Allies, the King was rejected in a referendum for his complicity in Mussolini's rise to power and in 1948 Italy became a republic. In Italy's restored democracy, three main political parties would come to dominate the political landscape: the centre-right Christian Democrats (DC), most often the governing party; the Communist Party (PCI), usually the largest opposition party but never in government; and the Socialist Party (PSI), one time governing party under Prime Minister Bettino Craxi and regularly serving as a coalition partner for the ruling DC. However, in the early 1990s the collapse of the Soviet Union resulted in a severe identity crisis for the PCI, resulting in internal tensions which would lead the party to split. At the same time, severe corruption scandals emerged involving the both the DC and the PSI, leading these parties to their own internal crises and subsequent splintering. The resulting power vacuum was quickly filled by a charismatic entrepreneur named Silvio Berlusconi, whose prominent role as head of Mediaset (a powerful media group) and owner of the popular football team AC Milan had already made him a national celebrity – indeed, the billionaire's financial holding company Fininvest controls not only Mediaset and AC Milan but also Italy's largest publishing company, a major film production company and an insurance banking company (Quigley, p. 438). Using his influence over the media, Berlusconi managed to project himself to the forefront of Italian politics by promoting himself as the saviour of Italy dedicated to a new form of politics, has indeed changed the face of Italian politics but without the promised

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"cleansing" effect of eliminating corruption. Quite the contrary, in Berlusconi's fifteen accumulated years active in politics he has been the center of a number of scandals which would have made even the most corrupt DC or PSI leader blush, ranging from corruption and false accounting charges to alleged mafia connections to prostitution rings for himself and his friends (the infamous "bunga bunga" nights at his mansion in Arcore). Always one to boast about his own controversies, Berlusconi himself claimed in 2008 to have endured a total of 2,500 court hearings and 577 police investigations; indeed it is estimated the media mogul has spent a grand total of $430 million on legal fees from 1994 to 2011 (Quigley, p. 438). Nevertheless, Berlusconi has never been successfully convicted in any of his innumerable court cases, often relying on immunity laws passed by his own government – sometimes even retroactively (Quigley, p. 437-439). Perhaps more alarmingly, Berlusconi gained a habit of circumventing parliamentary blockages by opposition parties by ruling through presidential decrees, a practice once reserved for emergency situations only but which has increasingly become the norm. Further, though some decrees become null if not voted into permanent laws after 60 days, others can become permanent laws immediately (Vassallo, p. 698-701). Even on the three occasions since 1994 in which he failed to make the prime minister's office, Berlusconi has remained at the forefront of Italian politics from his role in opposition and from his ever expanding influence on the media – further, when in office Berlusconi has also been able to influence the state own media company RAI, with accumulated influence on the media making Freedom House downgrade Italy's media freedom from "Free" to "Partly-Free" (virtually unheard of in Western democracies) (Mammone & Veltri, p. 86). In November of 2011, a deepening of the current economic crisis led the President of the Republic Giorgio Napolitano to fire Berlusconi, replacing him with a team of unelected technocrats led by Mario Monti. Though this has done much to calm market fears of Italy's economy collapsing as did that of Greece, this presidentially imposed government comes as yet another in a series of blows to Italian post-war democracy (BBC, 2012).

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IV – Interpretations

After analysing the historical development of democracy in six cases around the world, selected for their explanatory value and diversity, we can identify a few recurring elements which help explain the process and shed light on the factors which contribute to democratic decay. Perhaps the most evident and unexpected observation we can make is that the road to democracy is similarly non-linear across cases, and that even in industrialised Western nations the existence of a healthy democracy at any given time does not appear to guarantee its survival *in aeternum*. This is evident, for instance, with the rise of Mussolini in Italy or the fall of the First Republic in France at the hands of the Reign of Terror and Napoleon I.

Apart from this general observation, we can identify some recurring trends across cases. Perhaps the most common of these is the role of violence in regime change, either toward or away from democracy. Indeed all the above cases have had a moment of regime change through violence in the past century: Ethiopia had its Marxist revolution against the Derg, followed by its republican revolution against the Marxist regime; Nicaragua had its 1979 Marxist uprising; Ghana had its 1966 coup against the Nkrumah regime; Mali had a coup in 1968, another in 1991 and yet another in 2012; France had its Third Republic overthrown by a foreign power in WWII; and Italy was forced back into democracy by Allied forces after its defeat in the Second World War. As this list indicates, the violent nature of a regime change does not per se define what regime will follow, although coups generally seem to lead to authoritarian regimes – the exceptions being Ethiopia and Mali's coups in 1991 – while foreign interventions seem to lead to the defeated nation adopting the regime of the victor.

More to the point for the present study, however, is the observation that some regime changes occur without major violence and that these types of developments can lead both to and away from democracy. This was notably the case in Ghana where elections were introduced peacefully in 1992, or in Italy where Mussolini was allowed to take power without major violence in 1922. Further, we can see how the style of governance and levels of freedoms and rights can

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change more or less gradually within an otherwise stable regime: such was the case when Ethiopia enacted antidemocratic reforms in 2005 and 2008; when Ortega's government in Nicaragua, de Gaulle and Sarkozy's governments in France and Berlusconi's government in Italy took measures to empower their friends in more or less constitutional ways and change the functioning of the political system to suit their own benefits; or in Ghana when, in 2008, peaceful succession was assured between long-time rival parties with a history of violence in a highly contentious election in an entirely peaceful manner. So what commonalities, if any, can be identified between these cases of peaceful changes in democratic governance?

For starters, most of these changes occurred as a result of a crisis. In the cases of Mussolini and de Gaulle, these were major crises which, it was feared, would have led to violence if they had not been solved. In these situations, it is understandable how government might want a drastic change in direction in hopes of avoiding a perceived impending worse fate. The case of Ghana in 1992 was also one of crisis, but one of economic nature more than one of internal stability. However, in the cases of Ortega, Sarkozy and Berlusconi, there does not seem to be a major crisis at hand. Rather, these three leaders seem to have taken advantage of relative political strength to begin personalising their respective regimes. There is, of course, a degree of difference between these three cases. In the case of weakest change, that of Sarkozy, the leader in question does not seem to have an enormous lead on his adversaries, at least when compared to the other two cases. Rather, the little leeway Sarkozy seemed to have made in 2007 was largely of his own causation, rather than one based on some major structural weakness in the balance of power. As a result, opposing forces – parliamentary (the Socialist party and the FN in particular), institutional (the media) and civil (public opinion) – seem to have caught on to his manipulation tactics and punished him for them, first by increasingly undermining the second half of his presidency and then by an electoral defeat. The case of Berlusconi, on the other hand, the leader did not only have his own created strength to work with – a media influence much greater than that of Sarkozy – but also a clear weakness in parliamentary opposition. In fact, opposing parties continued providing weak

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opposition to his presidency as they struggled with their own internal division throughout the 1990s and 2000s. The result was that Berlusconi's only major opposition came from: the courts, which he chronically manages to circumvent; the electorate, who punished him on two separate occasions only to have him return to power after opposition parties proved incompetent in office; and finally from international actors such as the EU and the IMF whose mounting criticism over his handling of the economic crisis led the President of the Republic to strongly encourage him to step aside in favour of a technocratic emergency government. The case of Ortega, like that of Berlusconi, seemed based on a duality of personal strength (his ability to hold his party together and recuperate electoral favour) and weakness of opposing forces (divided opposition, poor democratic culture, institutional complicity, etc.). However, unlike Berlusconi, Ortega seems to have fewer forces mounted against him, which has allowed him to remain in power and with greater degrees of personalised power.

These three cases of democratic decay seem to confirm our initial hypothesis: that decay will occur when the balance of power between social forces is tilted in favour of one particular force – the degree of this decay, then, seems directly proportional to the power gap between the rising force and those opposing it. Moreover, further reflection shows how this conclusion also applies to the other observed cases of democratic decay. Indeed the crises which allowed for change in the cases of Mussolini, de Gaulle and Ghanaian transition to democracy in 1992 are essentially tantamount to major and rapid shifts in the balance of power – the degree of change, then, is dependent on the severity of the crisis and the ability of the emerging leaders to take advantage of them. For instance the Italian crisis of the early 1920s seemed destined not only to change Italy but all of Europe, while the French crisis of 1958 was strictly French and, what's more, mostly colonial. Furthermore, Mussolini had an organised party behind him as well as the support of most social forces against a perceived threat that had largely run out of steam (Haywood, 2009) meaning that, once he was given power, there was no serious force in Italy to oppose him; while de Gaulle, though given an extraordinary mandate, still met with regular opposition from opposing parties and

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civil society culminating in the 1968 movement. As for the Ghanaian case of progress in 1992, it can be noted that the crisis it resulted from was one which weakened the governing power without significantly strengthening opposing force: the result, then, was a gradual balancing of powers culminating in the 2008 elections, where the threat of a new crisis was averted by the ability of each force in society to play their assigned role in full but without the strength to surpass their constitutional mandate. More precisely, the potential showdown between the two main competing political parties was halted by a) the relatively equal strength of either party b) their mutual fear of an army intervention into their civilian affairs c) the arbitrating powers of the Electoral Committee and d) the strength of civil society. In other words, the case of Ghana in 2008 is precisely the opposite development than the one seen with Berlusconi, Ortega etc., with each balancing force of the democratic order playing its role beautifully. In particular, the comparison of the case of Ghana in 2008 with that of Mali at any election since 1992 emphasises the importance of an active civil society in the proper workings of the democratic system: indeed, though the cases of Ghana and Mali show many similarities – particularly after 1991 – the major visible difference is that in Ghana voter participation and enthusiasm has gradually and relatively consistently increased, with higher voter turnouts per election and higher levels of voter outrage to perceived corruption; while in Mali democratic culture remains weak as less than half the population turns out to vote, and those who do tend to re-elect the incumbent.

Conclusion:

In this paper we have set out to study the phenomenon of democratic decay by comparing six cases of perceived change in levels of democracy in an attempt to identify what factors cause democratic systems to become less democratic. Working with Olson's theory of the origins of democratic government and supplementing it with notions borrowed from Schmitter, we have formulated the hypothesis that proper democratic governance is held in place by a balance of power between competing social forces, and when this balance is disturbed a force will use this

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disturbance to increase its relative power. The compared analysis of our selected cases seems to confirm this hypothesis. Further, it would appear that the degree to which an emerging force manages to monopolise power is dependent on the tools it has at its disposal to increase its relative power as well as on the ability of opposing forces to counter its attempted rise.

Based on the results of the present study, we can also make a number of other interesting observations regarding contemporary democracy and the democratisation process. The first is that the process of democratisation, when undertaken, is relatively similar from state to state, regardless of culture or economic conditions. These conditions can, however, be used in the course of the democratisation process to favour a particular group. For instance, it would appear that economic wellbeing, though not necessarily conducive to democracy, does help maintain the existing regime and/or party in power, while an economic crisis seems to upset the dominance of the ruling power, thus weakening its relative power in society – the outcome of the crisis, then, is dependent on which force or forces can most profit from the weakened ruling elite.

Another interesting observation we can draw from the study is the non-linearity of democratic development: indeed, even in industrialised Western countries such as France and Italy the road to democracy has been littered with setbacks both major and minor. Based on this observation, then, we can assume that the maintenance of democracy is never a given, and that the possibility remains open for future decay both minor and major.

Perhaps the most interesting observation, however, is the role of civil society. Indeed it is the force which the least institutionalised power in any democracy, as the general population usually only has direct influence on governance during an election period. Nevertheless, we have consistently seen how the strength of democratic culture can be a defining feature in determining the degree to which competing forces can gain or lose power. In particular, when a force attempts to increase its own power in the face of weak institutionalised opposition, the strength of democratic culture can be the final determinant of how far into autocracy the rising power can take us.

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The scope of this study and the explanatory power of the results could nonetheless benefit from further analysis. Although we maintain that the level of research at the outset of the study was such that a limited case study was necessary to outline the general features of democratic decay, we can nonetheless presume that development of these findings using a larger number of cases – and perhaps a testing of the observed variables with some limited quantitative studies – could help deepen our knowledge of precisely which social power is most likely to take power in which situations; and perhaps even what kinds of constitutions are more likely to preserve the balance of power and thus avoid as much as possible future democratic decay.

Nevertheless, the present study has helped shed some light on how democratic decay occurs, and it is our hope that it might remind the reader that it does indeed occur, and is liable to occur in any given society however well-established democracy seems to be. This means, among other things, that when a government begins cutting back on civil liberties, however good the reasons may appear, this inevitably opens the door to further decay as it invariably tilts the balance of power in favour of a given social force. Although there is apparently no magic bullet against future decay, it would seem that an organised and informed population with a strong culture of participative democracy and a willingness to make its voice heard outside of designated electoral periods is the strongest available weapon to fighting decay and keeping government accountable to the people.

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