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Hybrid what?
The contemporary debate on hybrid regimes and the identity question.

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Abstract

After a decade during which the image of an undying and relentless third wave of democratization overshadowed the actual nature of many processes of regime transition throughout the globe, the notion of hybrid regime has finally gained scholars’ attention. Unfortunately, the contemporary launching of different lines of inquiry, along with the rapidity according to which a considerable amount of literature has been published, has resulted in a certain confusion. Because of the scant dialogue of these studies with each other, the current research on hybrid regimes is failing the important goal of building a shared theoretical ground. All this hampers the accumulation of knowledge and undermines the value of future research. The aim of this paper is to call the attention on this issue and to contribute to fill this gap. It will try to do so starting from quite a basic point: the actual identity of these regimes.

Introduction

Nowadays the so called hybrid regimes – here defined in the in the most neutral meaning of political entities characterized by a mixture of institutional features which are typical of a democracy with other institutions typical of an autocracy – are one of the most discussed topic in the field of democratization. It hasn't always been so. Just a few years ago their very existence was considered more than arguable. Around the end of the '90s the debate was still influenced by the allure of the dramatic number of regime transitions that, starting from the middle of the '70s, so profoundly marked the last decades of the twentieth century. The same events that Huntington collected under the label of 'third wave of democratization' (1991).

As soon as these hybrid regimes attracted scholars' attention, they triggered a lively debate and provoked an immediate proliferation of studies. By and large, the research has followed three main directions: the study of their origins; the theorizing about their functioning; the analysis of their ability to stabilize and survive. These three lines of inquiry are perfectly complementary, and together they form a consistent and comprehensive research agenda. The praiseworthy rapid development of the new subfield, however, is in striking contrast with the feeling of being lost typically associated with the study of this literature. How is it possible to learn so much about hybrid regimes while still feeling so uncertain about their understanding?

The fact is that the rapidity according to which a considerable amount of literature has been published resulted also in a certain confusion. While rushing in the attempt to make up for the lost time, something has been missed out. A gap, in particular, is occurring between an ever-advancing literature tackling substantial questions about hybrid regimes and the discussion of an issue whose analysis has remained in its embryonic stage: the very identity of these regimes. Despite of the high level of expertise in the domain that has been reached during the last decade, the research concerning the identity question has remained surprisingly neglected. The causes of such an unbalanced advancement of the debate should be partly traced back to the scant dialogue of existing studies with each other. More often than not, existing studies do not even try to build new analyses on an existing common background conception of hybrid regime.

The continuation of such a bad practice is likely to result in a proliferation of terms and it would be hard to tell whether they are synonyms or not. A situation which would be not dissimilar to that described around the half of the '90s by Collier and Levitsky (1997), against the future recurrence of which the same authors tried to caution: "if research on democratization degenerates into a competition to see who can come up with the next famous concept, the comparative study of regimes will be in serious trouble" (ibidem: 446). Most importantly, however, the underdevelopment of the analysis of an issue that should lie at the very basis of any debate – the identity of its object of interest – undermines the possibility of accumulating in a profitable way all the expertise that has been produced so far. If the debate on hybrid regimes rests on such unsteady foundations, the risk is to keep on talking about a phenomenon without being able to seize it.

The aim of this paper is to start filling this gap, and to sew up the tear occurred within the debate on hybrid regimes. In the attempt to avoid the trap of an excessive vagueness, in particular, this paper will try to answer a simple, but fundamental question: what really are hybrid regimes?

The paper is organized as follows. The first two paragraphs are essentially introductory. An overview on the debate will account for the path that led to the progressive acknowledgment of the existence of hybrid regimes. The mapping and the review of the existing studies will then follow. The second part of the paper, in turn, will be devoted to the analysis of the issue under examination, namely how existing studies dealt with the identity of hybrid regimes and how to overcome the obstacles highlighted. Defining the identity of an object of research requires the reconstruction of the background concept of that notion, i.e. the "constellation of potentially diverse meanings associated with a given concept" (Adcock and Collier, 2001: 530). Accordingly, the analysis will focus on how the notion of hybrid regime has been variously conceptualized and, in particular, on the position it has been assigned with respect to the 'classical' regimes types of democracy and autocracy (paragraph 3). After having highlighted the conceptual differences, it is also necessary to

assess whether they translate in different empirical referents or whether, despite of these differences, analysts are all talking about the same phenomenon (paragraph 4) . Once a group of regimes upon which judgements converge in defining them ‘hybrids’ will be selected, the paper will finally turn to a more empirical approach (paragraph 5). By recoding the regime variable of a recent research on the survival of hybrid regimes according to the results of the above mentioned analysis, the replication of that study will try to assess whether its conclusions hold. This could be thought of as a raw measurement of the effect that the underdevelopment of the identity question concerning hybrid regimes might have on our knowledge.

Paragraph 1: hybrid regimes within the broader debate on political regimes

The branch of comparative politics devoted to the study of political regimes has always proceeded by cycles, whose sequence, by and large, has followed the course of the international political events. The existence of similar trends is one the reasons why during the last decades of the 20th century the literature on new democracies and the literature on their non-democratic counterparts have known such an unbalanced development.

During the ‘60s and the ‘70s, facing the resiliency of few pre-War regimes, the failure of many democracies in Latin America, and the political evolutions of many new independent countries of Asia and Africa, scholars focused their efforts to grasp the origins and nature of the emerging regimes. Right then, in order to make sense of those non-democratic regimes which could have been hardly defined totalitarian, the term ‘authoritarianism’ saw the light (Linz, 1964). And to the same period also belong some of the most influential studies on authoritarian rule (Huntington, 1968; O’Donnell, 1973; Linz and Stepan, 1978; Collier, 1979; Jackson, 1982¹).

Since the early ‘80s, however, scholars’ attention has been almost entirely captured by that phase of democratic resurgence which had started a few years before in Mediterranean Europe and was progressively overwhelming region after region: Latin America, South-Eastern Asia, the entire communist world – Eastern Europe, the Caucasus, Central Asia – and finally sub-Saharan Africa. The so-called transitology literature had its founding fathers in O’Donnell, Schmitter and Whitehead, who in 1986 co-edited the publication of the results of the Transition from Authoritarian Rule project, to date one of the most comprehensive studies on the field. But it’s Samuel Huntington a few years later which best captured the significance of that moment with the image of a ‘wave of democratization’ (1991). The wave metaphor had a vast success. Hundreds of studies have been published since the early ‘90s, including distinguished works, such as Linz and Stepan’s study on the dynamics of transition and consolidation of democracy (1996), and the several volumes edited by Larry Diamond (1995; 1997; 1999), which carried on the project Democracy in Developing Countries started in 1989 with Linz and Lipset. Even more important, Huntington’s analysis had the merit of triggering a lively debate that led to the revision of many existing theories and several myths about the functioning of democratization, its causes and consequences, such as the modernization paradigm (Lipset, 1993; Przeworski et al. 2000; Boix, 2003) and the IR sub-field on the democratic peace (Russett, 1993; Owen, 1994; Mansfield and Snyder, 1995; Bueno de Mesquita et al., 1999).

For more than a decade, the academic and political discourse on regime change has remained under the spell of the glaring image of a relentless global democratic trend. That image, unfortunately, had also the effect of obscuring the actual nature of several new regimes, whose democraticness was

¹ Just to add a few words about the cited literature, which would deserve more space and attention than I have. Huntington traced the political decay of many developing countries and the rise of praetorianism to the instability derived from too rapid socioeconomic changes and the contingent expansion of political participation. In a similar vein, O’Donnell tried to explain the failure of democracy in Latin America in correspondence to a phase of economic development and the subsequent rise of bureaucratic authoritarian regimes. Linz and Stepan analyzed the dynamics that caused the breakdown of many recent and old democratic experiments of the twentieth century. Collier and Jackson, in turn, respectively focused of the specific authoritarian models emerged in Latin America and sub-Saharan Africa.

uncertain. Rather than stressing the peculiar nature of these regimes, the common approach was to consider them still *in transition*. By the end of the '90s the limits of the so-called 'transition paradigm' (Carothers, 2002) became evident. In a crescendo of awareness scholars first started questioning the future prospects of the wave (Sartori, 1995; Diamond, 1996); then depicted quite pessimistic scenarios (Kaplan, 1997; Zakaria, 1997); and finally realized that several new imperfect democracies would have been more correctly defined in different terms (Diamond, 2002; Schedler, 2002; Levitsky and Way, 2002). The immediate benefit of this new perspective has been a more realistic picture of the last phase of the twentieth century. Rather than a *mass democratization*, the third wave represented a period during which a dramatic number of authoritarian regimes experienced deep processes of political transformation, which not necessarily led to democracy. This change of perspective also had the effect of re-directing scholars attention towards the domain of non-democracy. As it is easy to guess, however, after two decades of carelessness, the state of development of this sub-field of research was...just bad. Our knowledge of this other side of politics was more or less at the same level of the late '70s. The gap became soon evident when scholars tried to trace these new controversial cases of non-democracy back to the only available, but old, typologies of authoritarianism: military regime (Schmitter, 1971; Stepan, 1971; Finer, 1975; Jackman, 1976; Perlmutter, 1977; Nordlinger, 1977); single-party system (Huntington and Moore, 1970; Linz, 1975; Sartori, 1976); sultanistic regime (Linz, 1975), and so on. This is by and large the moment when the notion of hybrid regime finally got enfranchised. Having realized the inapplicability of the old categories to the new non-democratic regimes that emerged during the third wave, the label 'hybrid' – neither democratic nor authoritarian, in the classical meaning of the two terms – met an increasing attention. The delay according to which hybrid regimes have entered the debate, and their existence have been taken seriously, however, has been rapidly made up.

Paragraph 2: mapping the debate on hybrid regimes

As soon as hybrid regimes gained scholars' attention, they triggered a lively debate. The challenge issued by hybrid regimes stirred up the curiosity of experienced students of democratization, as well as of young researchers. Hundreds of studies have seen the light since that moment. As it is easy to guess, however, the sudden proliferation of publications has been somewhat chaotic. In an attempt of making sense of this whole body of literature, it is possible to identify three main lines of inquiry. The research on hybrid regimes has focused either on the study of their origins, on the theorizing about their functioning, or on the analysis of their ability to survive.

The origins of (of the debate on) hybrid regimes

A first strand of the debate investigates the origins of hybrid regimes. It is presented as the first because of its specific focus, but also because it is the crossroads of two longstanding questions, namely whether hybrid regimes are outright instances of political regimes and whether they represent something new in the history.

Speculations about those political regimes that, after the breakdown of the authoritarian status quo, were undergoing a process of radical transformation have existed since the earliest phases of the third wave. The idea of a "political gray zone" between democracy and autocracy (Carothers, 2002: 9) filtered already in O'Donnell and Schmitter's notions of "democradura" and "dictablanda" (1986: 9). These labels, along with the plethora of diminished types of democracy that Collier and Levitsky collected in 1997, however, were coined for naming regimes which were assumed to be – and often effectively were – in a phase of political transition. Huntington was explicit in considering similar 'half-way house' situations as temporary and precarious (Huntington, 1991: 137). The outcome of these transitional phases was of course uncertain, but, as Diamond put it at that time, "the presence of legal opposition parties that may compete for power and win some seats in

parliament, and of the greater space for civil society that tends to exist in such systems, provides important foundations for future democratic development” (1989: 25).

Since the moment it has been clear that for several countries the transitional phase was over and the outcome was not democratic, the debate has gained self-awareness. The borders of the gray zone soon became too vast and blurred and its content too heterogeneous. In order to tidy it up, analysts have distinguished a class of “deliberately, carefully constructed and maintained political systems” (Ottaway, 2003: 7) from situations of protracted transition (Eisenstadt, 2000) – slowly democratizing countries that were characterized by a prolonged phase of institutional fluidity. The term ‘hybrid regime’, as a consequence, was no longer indicating a sort of residual category where everything but cases of either full democracy or plain autocracy – whatever these categories should mean – could be included for the sake of simplicity in the classification of political regimes.

That clarification represented the first necessary step before delving into the very hybrid nature of these regimes, which is, by definition, ambiguous. An hybrid regime is the result of a mixture of democratic and autocratic institutional traits that are formally inconsistent with each other. The goal, therefore, was to specify the composition of that amalgam and to disentangle it. The relationship between the democratic and the autocratic institutional component has been typically described as a tension between a formal and substantive dimension. An hybrid regime, in other words, is characterized by the coexistence of nominally democratic institutions – a multi-party system, competitive elections, a legislature – with the persistent practice of authoritarian patterns of governance, the latter leading to the systematic alteration of the rules guaranteed by the former (Schedler, 2002; Levitsky and Way, 2002; Ottaway, 2003).

While the specific combination of formal and informal institutions is now commonly acknowledged as a salient trait of these regimes, more contested is the novelty represented by hybrid regimes in the political landscape. On the one hand, there’s a tendency to describe hybrid regimes as a by-product of the third wave. To be sure, no one really claims that hybrid regimes made their appearance in the late ‘90s. Institutional hybrids, analysts generally agree, “are not new” (Diamond, 2002: 23). At the same time, there are authors who stress how hybrid regimes “have clearly proliferated in recent years” (Levitsky and Way, 2002: 60), so that they now represent “the modal type of political regime in the developing world” (Schedler, 2006: 3; see also Brownlee, 2007: 25). Similar positions implicitly put the emphasis on the role played by the third wave of democratization in the shaping of the idea of how politics should be structured inside a country. In particular, they stress the discontinuity that the third wave – especially when it *crossed* the end of the Cold War – marked with the past with respect to the need of enjoying democratic legitimacy that every government now faces. Even more than the greater number of democratic regimes in the world, according to this perspective, the emergence of hybrid regimes as a global phenomenon demonstrates that after the third wave no government can plainly reject democracy.

This view is somehow contested by an increasing group of scholars. Where the former see an element of novelty, the latter see continuity. The fact that the existence of regimes that mimic democratic procedures has recently attracted scholars’ attention is welcomed, but does not mean that we have to limit our attention to the third wave period. From an enlarged perspective, on the contrary, it would be evident that the existence of these practices has been frequent at least since the end of World War II (Geddes, 2005; Gandhi, 2008; Boix and Svolik, 2008). The collection of studies edited in 1978 by Guy Hermet and colleagues on those political regimes holding “elections without choice”, for instance, reminds that similar cases emerged already in the wake of decolonization. According to this opposite argument, the role of the third wave tends to be downplayed. If the adoption of seemingly democratic institutions is interpreted mainly as an advancement in the institutionalization of a political regime (Gandhi, 2008; see also Huntington, 1968), the proliferation of hybrid regimes should be better considered a continuation of that process. The very notion of third wave, as a consequence, loses a considerable part of its significance.

The functioning of hybrid regimes

If this first strand of the debate is somehow introductory and its reconstruction has required some temporal trespassing, the second line of inquiry here examined can more easily be confined to the last decade and goes directly to the heart of the phenomenon of hybrid regimes. Its main goal is the analysis and understanding of the actual functioning of an hybrid regime. The point at issue, in particular, is to assess whether, despite of their apparent inconsistency, the combination of democratic and autocratic institutions proves to be effective in shaping the management of politics and, if it is the case, how.

A first, raw, distinction could be made between who assigns hybrid regimes – their democratic component in particular – a role which is mainly token and who, on the contrary, emphasizes the peculiar political dynamics triggered by the interaction between the democratic and the autocratic components. The former typically stress how the institutionalization of periodic and formally competitive elections has the main function of ‘dressing’ a regime according the modern democratic fashion. Rather than being a mere façade, however, this positively contributes to the legitimization of a regime in the eyes of the international community (Carothers, 2002: 12; Levitsky and Way, 2002: 63; Lust-Okar and Jamal, 2002: 343; Schedler, 2002: 36). Without dismissing similar arguments, several authors shift the analysis of the functioning of hybrid regimes from the focus on their democratic surface to the underlying mechanisms that their institutions are able to set up. The quest for legitimacy, they argue, is one among several strategic goals that can be achieved throughout the fine-tuning of authoritarian institutions with the introduction of democratic elements. The attention usually focuses on the effects of hybrid arrangements in the shaping of internal political actors’ behavior. The latter may be subdivided in a few categories: the broader citizenship and the civil society; the organized political opposition; the ruling elite itself.

A few studies look either at the symbolic power of periodic elections as the performance of a national fiction, equivalent to a collective ritual (Weeden, 1998: 505), or at their demonstrative power as a strength display of the government (Geddes, 2005: 17; Magaloni, 2006: 9) – often with the help of some expedient in order to pump electoral results up. Others highlight the role of elections and of legislatures as a discontent valve that thwarts the rise of violent rebellions from below (Brumberg, 2002; Gandhi and Przeworski, 2007; Lust-Okar, 2002; Schedler, 2010, Gandhi, 2008). Several scholars, in turn, emphasize how elections – but parties as well – serve as an instrument of communication and of gathering information about citizens’ preferences and orientations (Magaloni, 2006: 8; Brownlee, 2007: 9; Reuter and Gandhi, 2011: 89), which eventually might be used for overcoming the so called credibility dilemma (Wintrobe, 1998) and adjusting government’s public policies (Miller, *forth.*). Also more specific groups of the civil society are under the influence of hybrid regimes’ institutions. Elections, parties, and legislatures may, in fact, translate in as much channels for patronage, thus feeding clientelistic practices (Lust-Okar, 2004; Reuter and Gandhi, 2011).

The main subjects to be involved by the functioning of hybrid regimes’ institutional apparatuses, however, are the members of the so-called ‘political society’. Several studies uncover the influence of hybrid regimes’ institutions on the relationship between the executive and the organized political opposition. The call of elections for assigning legislative seats in a multi-party system is largely seen as a mean for both co-opting the opposition (Lust-Okar, 2002 and 2004; Gandhi and Przeworski, 2001, 2006, 2007; Gandhi, 2008; Lust-Okar and Gandhi, 2009; Magaloni, 2006; Reuter and Gandhi, 2011) and fragmenting it (Lust-Okar, 2002 and 2004; Haber, 2006; Lust-Okar and Gandhi, 2009). The presence of a legislature also facilitates policy compromise (Gandhi, 2008), while the periodicity of elections has the additional advantage of enforcing the government’s commitment to accept a future defeat (Magaloni, 2006).

Hybrid institutions, finally, target the regime elite itself. Organizing the elite within the cadres of a political party which is periodically expected to compete for being reconfirmed at the head of the executive is an effective instrument of elite management (Magaloni, 2006; Brownlee, 2007; Blaydes, 2008). First, it solicits intra-elite cooperation in order to close the ranks and work together

toward the common goal of holding power (Buono de Mesquita et al., 1999; Gandhi and Przeworski, 2006 and 2007; Gandhi, 2008). Second, it promotes the power-sharing and the distributions of benefits deriving from the active support to the government (Magaloni, 2006; Boix and Svobik, 2008). Third, it significantly reduces the threats of defection coming from the original support coalition by offering a mechanism of career advancement (Magaloni, 2006) and of control (Cox, 2009), as well as the threats coming from the military (Geddes, 2005 and 2008).

Albeit different and sometimes contrasting, all these analyses share a common denominator. Their conclusions all agree on the need to take hybrid regimes' institutions seriously. Even more interestingly, they all draw this conclusion by starting exactly from the apparent incoherency of these institutions with each other. According to these studies, hybrid regimes seem to function not despite of, but because of the combination of democratic and autocratic institutions and the combination of incentives and deterrents resulting from their interaction.

Tab. 1 The functioning of hybrid regimes: institutions and their effects

Effect		Institution		
		<i>Elections</i>	<i>Parties</i>	<i>Legislatures</i>
Target: Citizens / Civil Society	STRENGTH DISPLAY	✓		
	NATIONAL FICTION	✓		
	DISCONTENT VALVE	✓		✓
	INFORMATION GATHERING	✓	✓	
	CLIENTELISM	✓		
Target: Opposition	COOPTATION	✓	✓	✓
	OPPOSITION FRAGMENTATION	✓	✓	✓
	POLICY COMPROMISE			✓
	COMMITMENT ENFORCEMENT	✓		
Target: Elite	ELITE CONTROL		✓	
	COUPS / THREATS PREVENTION		✓	
	COOPERATION	✓	✓	
	POWER SHARING	✓		✓

The survival of hybrid regimes

A third strand of the debate on hybrid regimes carries the discussion about their functioning to a more substantive level. If the institutional apparatus of an hybrid regime works, if it is not simply an unintended outcome of an unsuccessful process of democratization, it is also possible and incumbent to study the specific goals whose achievement it has been created for. Accordingly, the analysis of the effects of an hybrid institutional apparatus on the behavior of political actors is followed by the investigation of its long-term political consequences. Among them, the ability of hybrid regimes to stabilize, to endure and their prospects of eventually democratize, have attracted much attention.

The idea that hybrid regimes are intrinsically instable was somehow implicit in the early transitology literature. During the early phases of the debate, it has been said, hybrid regimes were

typically reckoned transitional stages along the path of democratization. Even if the more recent developments, with few exceptions, has abandoned similar positions, there still exists ground for questioning the stability of hybrid institutional arrangements.

Instability may derive from the inescapable tension between institutions which, in principle, are incompatible with each other. If it was the case, hybrid regime would actually be more prone to regime breakdown (Epstein et al., 2006: 555). A few authors, in particular, stress the destabilizing potential that democratic institutions, albeit distorted, may have (Levitsky and Way, 2002: 58-59; Howard and Roessler, 2006: 366; Schmotz, 2011: 19) and thus the fragility typically associated with hybrid regimes (Hadenius and Teorell, 2006: 23; Bunce and Wolchik, 2008). Others, finally, trace the causes of hybrid regimes' instability to non-strictly institutional factors, such as the propensity of elite's members to defect during periods of bad economic performances (Reuter and Gandhi, 2011).

Despite of the fact that the conclusions of these studies seem to indirectly support the expectations of the early days of the third wave of democratization, a much larger number of scholars take an opposite stand. Their analyses all point at the surprising resiliency that hybrid regimes are showing (Rose and Shinn, 2001: 333; Brumberg, 2002: 57; Carothers, 2002: 13; Ottaway, 2002:8; Merkel, 2004: 50; Morlino, 2009: 284). In patent contrast with the above arguments, indeed, their ability to survive is typically traced back to the very combination of authoritarian and democratic traits. The grafting of democratic institutions onto an authoritarian trunk, in particular, is increasingly recognized as instrumental to the hold on power of an incumbent government (Bueno de Mesquita et al., 2002: 575) and to the strengthening of the regime itself. Virtually every explanation of the functioning of hybrid regimes, in fact, could be thought of also as a fine-grained survival strategy. The opening of a legislature and the introduction of multi-party competitive elections – the general argument goes – and the way their presence influences the dynamics of the political game, may ultimately result in the enhancement of the regime. This supports the conclusion that these regimes represent a solution to the issue of managing the process of renewal of an existing regime, rather than of transition from it. Accordingly, as long as elections are a means for gaining foreign support (Schedler, 2002), displaying government's invincibility (Magaloni, 2006), relieving popular discontent (Brumberg, 2002), they promote the stability of the regime. Similarly, to the extent that multi-party competition for entering the executive or the legislative becomes a tool for fragmenting the oppositions (Lust-Okar, 2002), co-opting some of its members (Lust-Okar, 2002; Gandhi, 2008; Boix and Svobik, 2008), gaining information about citizens' needs and political preferences (Magaloni, 2006; Brownlee, 2007), monitoring and managing intra-elite dynamics (Magaloni, 2006; Blaydes, 2008), it ensures the survival of the status quo.

The analysis of how and how long hybrid regimes can survive leaves a further issue open, namely the effects of their institutions on the future prospects of democratization of a country. Albeit clearly interrelated, the answer to the first question does not determine the answer to second one. On the one hand, asserting the volatility of hybrid regimes does not imply predicting the likelihood that they will give way to a democratic regime. Indeed, scholars seem to be equally divided between those who reckon democratization a likely outcome (Howard and Roessler, 2006; Hadenius and Teorell, 2006; Bunce and Wolchik, 2008) and those who find no significant support to this hypothesis (Epstein et al., 2006; Schmotz, 2011) and caution that cases of regime crisis leading to a succession in the executive should not necessarily be recorded as instances of democratization (Levitsky and Way, 2002). On the other hand, authors which agree on hybrid regimes' stability do not necessarily share the same opinion as for the likelihood that these regimes will be ultimately followed by democracy. While most of them show pessimism about that possibility, a few authors have portrayed different and more promising scenarios. Although there's little ground for asserting that hybrid regimes are prone to regime breakdown, according to these studies the most recent empirical evidence seems to suggest that these regimes enjoy a sort of advantage, should they enter a crisis and collapse (Haber, 2006: 705; Brownlee, 2009: 531; Miller, 2012: 21).

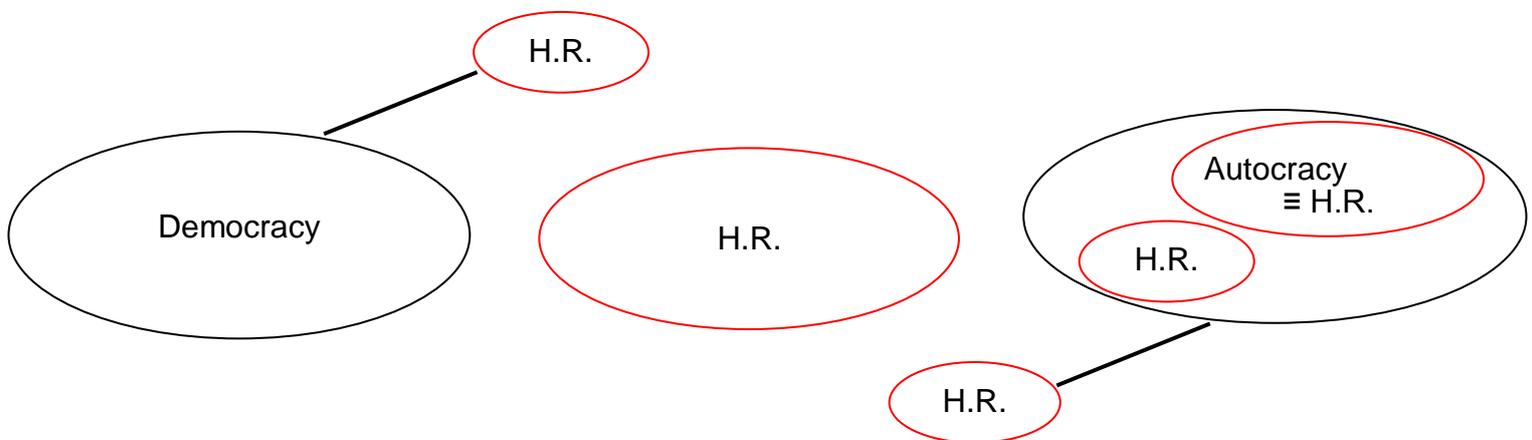
Paragraph 3: hybrid regimes and the identity question

The three main strands that the debate on hybrid regimes has followed so far complement each other. Disentangling the institutions that compose the amalgam typical of an hybrid regime is a necessary step before theorizing about how these institutions work together and how their coexistence shapes the behavior of the political actors. This, in turn, is essential for the subsequent analysis of the long-term effects of an hybrid institutional apparatus on the longevity of a regime. Together those three lines of inquiry confirm how seriously hybrid regimes' institutions are now taken as an element affecting the life and the fate of a country. The understanding of the phenomenon of hybrid regimes has infinitely benefitted from those analyses. They have contributed to unravel several controversial issues and there's no doubt that what we know about these regimes today is way more than we did just ten years ago.

At the same time, taken as a whole, this body of literature is not able to wholly eliminate the ambiguity that surrounds hybrid regimes. We just can't avoid the feeling that something is still missing. Upon closer examination, we may note that this uncertainty derives from the absence of a clear answer to quite a fundamental question regarding the identity of these regimes: what really are hybrid regimes?

A profitable accumulation of knowledge requires a clear answer to that question. A clear answer, in turn, requires the research on hybrid regimes to rely on a solid common ground, a minimum level of agreement about the identity of the object of interest which is shared, by and large, by everyone. The importance of that issue is in striking contrast with the poor status of its analysis. More often than not, similar discussions are neglected. The debate on the identity of hybrid regimes, indeed, seems to be stuck to what should have been its very starting point: the acknowledgment that they are instances of political regime, rather than protracted transitional phases between an authoritarian past and a democratic future. A point that remains still open to several alternative solutions: what specific type of regime are they? As it is often the case, the less an issue is explicitly discussed, the more the opinions diverge. Virtually every conceivable answer to the identity question has found its own supporters. Among them, it is possible to identify up to five main alternative positions. Hybrid regimes have been alternatively conceptualized and classified as either a diminished type of democracy, a diminished type of authoritarianism, a third intermediate type of regime, a downright instance authoritarianism, a specific subtype of autocracy.

Fig.1: Alternative conceptualizations of hybrid regimes



Defining an hybrid regime as a diminished type of democracy was as fashionable an approach during the '90s – suffice it to mention terms such as 'semi-democracy' (Diamond, Linz, Lipset, 1989), 'delegative democracy' (O'Donnell, 1994), and 'illiberal democracy' (Zakaria, 1997) – as outdated nowadays. The idea, however, is still echoing in Merkel's four types of 'defective democracy' (Merkel, 2004; see also Morlino, 2009) and, more recently, in the concept of 'flawed democracy' (The Economist Intelligence Unit, 2011). A democracy is defective if "one of the partial regimes of an embedded democracy is damaged in such a way that it changes the entire logic of a constitutional democracy" (Merkel, 2004: 48). That definition helps to clarify what a diminished type of democracy is: a regime that fulfills most of the minimal requirements for being democratic, but falls short of the expectations of a full scale democracy. A diminished type of democracy is something less than a democracy.

A similar, but diametrically opposite perspective takes authoritarianism, rather than democracy, as the root concept starting from which to coin a diminished type. This approach has O'Donnell and Schmitter's notion of 'dictablanda' (1986: 9) as a forerunner, but has known the greatest success during the last decade in response to Linz's explicit call (Linz, 2000: 34). Following the publication of a 2002 special issue of the *Journal of Democracy* dedicated to hybrid regimes, in particular, concepts such as 'electoral authoritarianism' (Schedler, 2002), 'competitive authoritarianism' (Levitsky and Way, 2002), but also 'semi-authoritarianism' (Ottaway, 2002) and 'liberalized autocracy' (Brumberg, 2002) have soon become familiar. Among them, the first is somehow paradigmatic. An electoral authoritarian regime plays "the game of multiparty elections (...) yet it violates the liberal-democratic principles of freedom and fairness so profoundly and systematically as to render elections instruments of authoritarian rule" (Schedler, 2006: 3).

Diminished types of democracy and of autocracy share a common problem. In theory, they are coined in order to pursue "analytical differentiation while avoiding conceptual stretching" (Collier and Levitsky, 1997:430). A diminished type represents a radial category anchored to a central, prototypical one; the full complement of attributes owned by the latter being not necessarily shared by one of the former (Collier and Mahon, 1993: 848). In practice, this solution fails the goal of clarifying the actual identity of an hybrid regime. The flexibility that makes diminished types attractive, in fact, comes at the cost of a greater uncertainty. The proximity of a radial category with both its original full-type and the other side of the classificatory framework multiplies the occasions of misusing the label of a diminished type. A further difficulty, finally, derives by the co-presence of diminished types of both democracy and autocracy. Even those attempts to integrate them into a common classificatory framework (Bogaards, 2009) have missed the goal of providing clear-cut guidelines. The choice of conceptualizing hybrid regimes as diminished types of either democracy or autocracy, however, shows its major limits when the focus shifts from theoretical discussions to empirical analysis. Evidence of this difficulty is represented by their infrequent use in cross-national comparative studies. With few 'quantitative' exceptions (Howard and Roessler, 2006; Brownlee, 2009), as a matter of fact, diminished types have known their success especially in case study analyses (Beichelt, 2004; Henderson, 2004; Croissant, 2004; Baeg Im, 2004; Case, 2009 and 2011; Langston, 2009; Bunce, 2010; Levitsky and Way, 2010).

Coining a third, independent type of political regime located in between democracy and autocracy is probably the most natural way to conceptualize hybrid regimes. In its original acceptance, after all, the notion of hybrid regime was meant to differentiate a set of countries characterized by a mix of autocratic and democratic features (Karl, 1995) and, accordingly, that were neither complete democracies nor full scale autocracies. The 'revolutionary' idea of breaking the traditional regime dichotomy "democracy vs. autocracy" has attracted the curiosity of several authors. This resulted in the proposal of some refreshing new ways for classifying political regimes (Wigell, 2008; Gilbert and Mohseni, 2011; Miller, 2012). With a few exceptions, however, this approach is by far the most prone to ambiguities. On the one hand, the third type risks to become a sort of residual category including a variety of regimes which diverge from one another in a number of dimensions while sharing the sole property of being something different from both democracy and autocracy

(Mainwaring et al., 2001; Bowman et al., 2005; Bunce and Wolchik, 2008; Ekman, 2009; Zinecker, 2009; Gerschewski and Schmotz, 2011). That risk is also common in the interrelated practice of creating intermediate types from continuous measures of political regimes. Categories such as Freedom House's 'partly free', Polity's 'anocracy', and the Economist's 'hybrid' have membership criteria which can be satisfied by several different combinations of disaggregate scores. The ultimate consequence of *residualizing* the category of hybrid regimes is the loss of its analytical usefulness. Too much heterogeneity within a category makes it hardly applicable for research purposes. On the other hand, it has been said, because of the blurriness of the borders between a third type and a diminished type, it is not rare that instances of the former have borrowed a term typical of the latter. Categories of hybrid regimes created with the explicit aim of being part of a tricotomous classification have frequently adopted labels such as "semi-democracy" (Mainwaring et al., 2001; Reich, 2002; Bowman et al., 2005), "partial democracy" (Epstein et al. 2006), as well as "electoral authoritarianism" (Wigell, 2008; Miller, 2012).

The willingness to limit the room for misunderstandings probably explains why an increasing number of analysts have opted for a simpler solution to the question regarding the identity of hybrid regimes. If it is now clear that they are not democratic, the argument goes, why don't just considering them outright authoritarian? According to this analytical perspective, the process of 'hybridization' should be thought of as a (more or less recent) evolution of authoritarianism, or even better as the adaptation of an autocratic regime to the contemporary challenges. The choice of maintaining a dichotomous approach to regime classification may sound too sharp, but it certainly has a point. It is parsimonious and it avoids efforts in re-framing existing classificatory schemes in order to include new regimes types, which often end up with innovative but hardly workable frameworks. Consistently with the decision of including hybrid regimes in the authoritarian domain, the task of assigning them a specific label becomes negligible. Authors typically refers to hybrid regimes as mere instances of authoritarianism 'with nominally democratic institutions' (Gandhi, 2008: 34), or, more specifically, 'with elections' (Lust-Okar, 2002; Bueno de Mesquita et al., 2003; Geddes, 2005; Haber, 2006); 'with parties' (Ezrow and Frantz, 2011); 'with legislatures' (Wright, 2008; Boix and Svobik, 2008). Note that, in contrast with diminished types, these complements limit to describe a feature of the political regime they refer to – autocracy – they neither soften nor alter its original meaning. At the same time, the importance of those institutional features tends to be overlooked when defined in this manner. The hybrid nature shades off into a somehow negligible feature. If the combination of democratic and autocratic institutions does not alter the authoritarian nature of a regime, the notion of hybrid regime loses part of its peculiarity. The institutional amalgam is still recognized as an important feature of these regimes, but it does not define their identity.

A similar, but less abrupt solution is to conceptualize hybrid regimes as a *sui generis* subtype of authoritarianism. Albeit its recent revival, the idea of introducing a further distinction between authoritarian party-based regimes is not new and has its origin in Sartori (1976). Drawing on the difference between competition as a structure and competitiveness as a specific state of the game (ibid.: 218), he identifies a 'hegemonic-party' type (ibid.: 230) which is different both from a democratic predominant-party system (ibid.: 192), because of the lack of competitiveness of the former, and from a single-party system, in that the latter has no political competition at all (ibid.: 221). Authors embracing this approach have either borrowed Sartori's own terminology (Magaloni, 2006; Reuter and Gandhi, 2009; Greene, 2010), or coined similar labels such as 'limited multi-party regime' (Hadenius, 2006). The main merit of this last approach to the study of hybrid regimes with respect to a more general equation between hybrid regimes and authoritarianism relies on its seek for a fair balance between parsimony and accuracy. On the one hand, for classificatory purposes a subtype of autocracy is more easily digestible than a third type of political regimes and definitely less confusing than a diminished type of authoritarianism. On the other hand, defining an hybrid regime as a subtype of autocracy is also more attentive to the importance of their institutions. In particular, this approach seems better equipped for acknowledging the 'transformative' potential

that these institutions have in re-shaping the organizational structure of a political regime, while not necessarily altering its authoritarian nature. An obvious difficulty that this last approach faces, however, comes from the task of integrating the classification of more conventional autocratic subtypes – such as monarchy, military, single-party, etc. – without losing its overall consistency.

Paragraph 4: chain reactions

The presence of so divergent positions shows the extent of the current gap between a crowded research agenda and the scarce attention paid so far to the fundamental task of building a common basic ground. So diffused a disagreement about the actual identity of hybrid regimes, in other words, attests how precarious are the foundations on which the whole debate, after ten years of research, is still relying.

The ultimate consequence of the little progress made about the identity question, we have seen, is the feeling of constant uncertainty given by the impossibility of a profitable accumulation of all the knowledge produced during these years. How this happens might be described as chain reaction: from the conceptual, to the theoretical, to the empirical level, and finally to our understating of the latter.

Too different conceptualizations of the notion of hybrid regime call a student's attention to focus on different factors, and ultimately lead to different explanations. But if we are not confident that these theories, because of conceptual divergences at their basis, are not talking about the same phenomenon, they could hardly be considered just alternative explanations of the same phenomenon. They could hardly represent pieces of a comprehensive and consistent block of knowledge. Our understating of hybrid regimes, finally, will remain fragmented and uncertain. Whether hybrid regimes represent a novelty or not, whether and how the combination of democratic and autocratic institutions ensures stability rather than fragility, no theory nor supporting empirical evidence will enforce our understanding of this phenomenon if we are not confident about how to define it. Similarly, it will have a negative effect on the validity of future research. Any further speculation about hybrid regimes will be doomed to be hazardous and new findings could hardly contribute to the advancement of the debate.

In more practical terms, a failure in the resolution of the identity question is the failure in the most important challenge of the debate: shedding light on the gray zone. Disagreement at the conceptual level, in fact, is likely to have its most harmful effects when research moves from theory to reality. From an empirical point of view, conceptual differences translate directly in vagueness with regard to which of the existing (and existed) political regimes – which countries during which years – should be considered hybrid. These represent the set of empirical referents to which the theory is expected to apply and upon which the ultimate assessment of its value should rely. Vagueness in the identification of the former casts doubts on the validity of the latter. The risk, at the end of the day, is that the theory fails to seize the reality it is supposed to explain. The consequence, if it is the case, is that we are left with no means to understand the latter.

How to stop the chain? Starting from the top, the conceptual level, would be just too difficult. It would be easy to remain trapped as all the others. Therefore my proposal is to start from the bottom, and shift the attention from how the notion of hybrid regime has been conceptualized to how hybrid regimes have been alternatively recognized in the real world. This will allow to assess whether the differences that have been previously pinpointed also translate in the selection of as many different sets of empirical referents. The best method to do it is to turn directly to the experts in the field, i.e. those researchers which have already studied these regimes, and “ask” them the following question: how did you operationalize the notion of hybrid regime?

The analysis, in particular will focus on twelve studies, all of which have been already analyzed in the previous paragraphs. The main criteria which have been followed in their selection are the relevance of these works, roughly measured by the number of times they have been cited, the validity of their measures (i.e. the extent to which they measure what they are supposed to

measure), and their representativeness with respect to the identity question. Accordingly, each approach to the conceptualization of hybrid regimes will be represented by the same number of authors. The studies under examination are the following²:

Hybrid Regimes as :	Publications:
<i>Third intermediate type of regime</i>	Freedom House (v.y.'s); Polity IV (v.y.'s); Epstein et al. (2006)
<i>Diminished type of autocracy</i>	Howard and Roessler (2006); Schedler (2006); Brownlee (2009)
<i>Outright authoritarian regimes</i>	Gandhi (2008); Boix and Svobik (2008); Wright (2008)
<i>Subtype of autocracy</i>	Hadenius and Teorell (2006); Magaloni (2008); Reuter and Gandhi (2011)

The sample consists of a panel of 159 countries, observed from 1974 to 2008, for a total of 5,100 observations (country-years)³. Note that the time coverage, thirty-five years, starts in correspondence to the beginning of the third wave of democratization. The choice of that date has been mainly driven by practical reasons of data availability. That choice, in other words, does not imply the idea that hybrid regimes are exclusively a third wave phenomenon. It has however the advantage to call the attention on a phase during which their number has grown, as well as the interest toward them.

For each publication, a dummy variable has been created. Each dummy takes the value 1 when an observation is classified as hybrid by that author, and 0 otherwise. A zero value, then, might correspond to any non-hybrid form of regime, either democratic, authoritarian, or something else. I'm aware of the loss of information that this strategy entails, but, given the very specific aim of the present analysis, in my opinion it will not jeopardize the results⁴.

² The absence in the list of the approach 'diminished type of democracy' is due mainly to the lack of works providing accessible data and/or clear operational rules. Accordingly, there's a total of four alternative conceptual approaches, each of them being represented by three publications (here is why an overall number of twelve). The analysis has used original data, when available, and replicated data. As a consequence a further selection criteria is the availability of either data or clear operational rules. By clear, in this case, I mean based on either an indirect or mixed measurement approach. By "indirect" I mean a measurement approach relying on already existing (and available) data coming from a different source (e.g. an alternative use of Polity data). A mixed approach, in turn, is indirect, and relies on more than one source of already existing (and available) data. Despite of the frequent use of some common sources of data – e.g. Przeworski et al., and Freedom House – the selected twelve measures are different enough to be meaningfully compared with each other. A summary of the operational rules followed for replicating each measure will be available upon request.

³ The requirements for a country to enter the sample are the following: having more than 500,000 inhabitants; being a current member of the UN (with the exception of Taiwan); being independent since at least ten years. In particular, all the cases of countries that have become independent after 1974 (and before 1998) – either because of decolonization, secession, or the break-up of a pre-existing state – will be taken into account since the year their independence has been internationally recognized (which does not necessarily coincide with the year they became member of the UN). Similarly, all the cases of unification or annexation will be taken into account since the year that event took place. As a consequence.

⁴ For completeness, however, for each author/publication I also generated two similar dummy variables distinguishing, respectively, non-hybrid democratic and non-hybrid autocratic regimes. While I'm confident that these variables do not overlap either with the former or with each other, I'm not so confident about the correctness of the operational rules I followed. Most of the studies my analysis is based on are focused on hybrid regimes, and not always the rules for the identification of the extant regime types are available and clear. Sometimes I resorted to 'reasonable' approximations. These variables have been used in order to produce a few analyses, mainly descriptive, of some interest. For the above reasons, however, I didn't include them in the paper. They will be available upon request.

The goals of the analysis are simple. First, identifying a broader *population* of hybrid regimes, roughly corresponding to the sum of all the political regimes that have been classified as such in at least one of the studies under examination. Second, surveying the level of agreement across different studies in the classification of the members of that population as cases of hybrid regime. By and large, this will be done by answering two interrelated questions. How many authors (out of 12) classify a given country-year hybrid? How many conceptual approaches (out of 4) considers the same country-year hybrid?

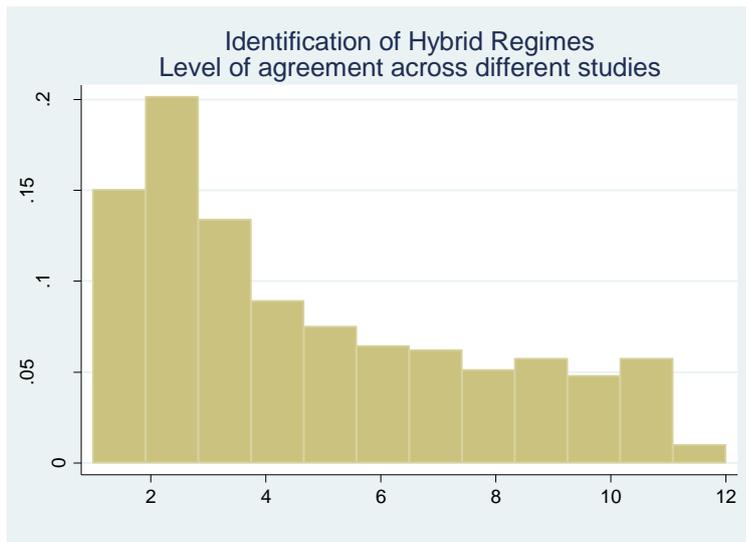
Without any claim of exhaustiveness, depending on the results of this simple analysis, it will be possible to draw some initial conclusion with regard to the identity of these regimes. If different approaches to the conceptualization of hybrid regimes actually led to the selection of different group of countries, the analysis would call into question the utility of the very notion of hybrid regime as a category. When analyzing the universe of hybrid regimes, thus, one should better emphasize the existence of a plurality of types. Each of them should be studied separately; each of them will require specific answers. If, on the contrary, despite of the different conceptual approaches, it was possible to identify a sizeable group of hybrid regimes upon which authors' judgments converge, the analysis would suggest that those differences are not so relevant to represent a concrete obstacle. Similar considerations, therefore, would solicit the initiative in making explicit steps toward the overtaking of the current conceptual barriers and a more intense dialogue.

The first piece of evidence that may be picked from these data seems to confirm the initial concerns. Table 2 and figure 2 display the frequencies of a variable measuring the level of agreement upon the classification of a given case, i.e. the raw sum of times (out of twelve) an observation has been classified as hybrid, with the exclusion of those cases that are always classified as non-hybrid. More often than not, the examined studies disagree on which cases should be considered instances of hybrid regime. For a vast majority of observations, about 65% of the total, the level of convergence of judgments does not even correspond to the half of the studies taken into account. In terms of probabilities, the higher the standard of agreement required, the lower the probability for a country-year to fulfill that standard.

Tab. 2

N of times an obs is classified hybrid	Freq.	Percent	Cum.
1	505	15.03	15.03
2	677	20.14	35.17
3	450	13.39	48.56
4	300	8.93	57.48
5	252	7.50	64.98
6	216	6.43	71.41
7	209	6.22	77.63
8	172	5.12	82.74
9	193	5.74	88.49
10	161	4.79	93.28
11	193	5.74	99.02
12	33	0.98	100.00
Total	3,361	100.00	

Fig. 2



Based on similar evidence, we can hardly ignore the support that the first hypothesis meets. The larger population of hybrid regimes looks just too heterogeneous to be considered a population at all. What the analysis seems to suggest, indeed, is the removal of the term ‘hybrid regime’ itself from the comparative politics lexicon, because of its patent lack of clear boundaries and its consequent inapplicability.

Should we conclude that any attempt to shed light on the gray zone is doomed to failure? Should we accept that the debate on these regimes will remain fragmented, because the ground left by the third wave is just too miscellaneous to represent a solid and consistent base? Not necessarily. The analysis, so far, has stood on the surface of the issue. It has looked at the overall level of agreement across the overall set of studies under comparison. It has not taken into account, in particular, the fact that each study was chosen as representative of a specific approach to the conceptualization of hybrid regimes. When shifting the emphasis from the quantity of agreement to its quality, on the contrary, it becomes evident that not only there’s room for a further investigation, but also reason to avoid hasty conclusions.

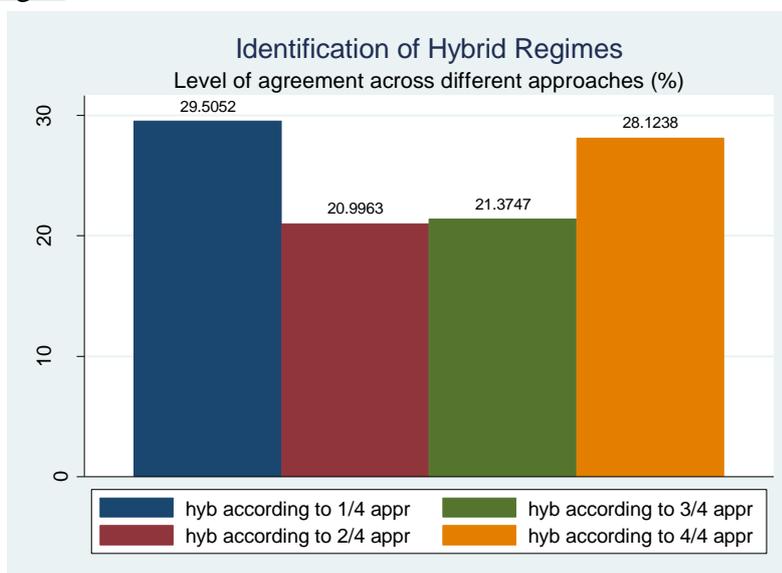
From the new perspective, the focus of the analysis is no longer on the convergence of judgments as such (i.e. on a scale from 1 to 12), but on the convergence of judgments across the different approaches to the conceptualization of hybrid regimes (i.e. on a scale from 1 to 4). In operational terms, the latter corresponds to the number of approaches that classify a regime hybrid. A given regime is classified hybrid by a specific conceptual approach if at least one author, no matter whom, belonging to that approach consider it hybrid⁵. Table 3 and figure 3 show the frequencies distribution of a variable measuring it.

⁵ This is to say that two regimes may be classified hybrid by the same conceptual approach even if each of them is classified hybrid only one time and by a different author, the only condition being that both authors belong to the same approach.

Tab. 3

How many approaches consider it hybrid?	Freq.	Percent	Cum.
1	1,029	30.62	30.62
2	681	20.26	50.88
3	713	21.21	72.09
4	938	27.91	100.00
Total	3,361	100.00	

Fig. 3



Their examination provides some interesting new piece of evidence. The frequencies of the level of agreement across approaches have quite a different distribution with respect to the frequencies described by the previous analysis. In particular, it is not possible to identify any decreasing trend in correspondence to the increase of the standard (from 1 approach, to 4 approaches out of 4). If we had a look at the last bar on the right in fig. 3, grouping all those hybrid regimes that fulfill at least a minimum standard of cross-sectional agreement⁶, furthermore, we should even acknowledge that the second hypothesis finds some empirical support. A group of political regimes that, despite of the existence of different conceptual approaches, can always be identified as hybrid does exist and has sizable dimensions.

Note that these are exactly the same data used in the first part of the analysis. The uncovering of this new evidence depends entirely on the change of priorities occurred in the meanwhile – from quantity, i.e. the absolute convergence of judgments, to quality, i.e. a convergence which is relative to the different approaches⁷. Similar considerations suggest that the results of the second analysis should not replace the results of the previous one. The latter does not confute the support that the former brought to the first hypothesis. If examining the same data from a different point of view

⁶ A regime enters this group if it is classified hybrid by at least one author per approach, i.e. at least four authors, each of them belonging to a different conceptual approach.

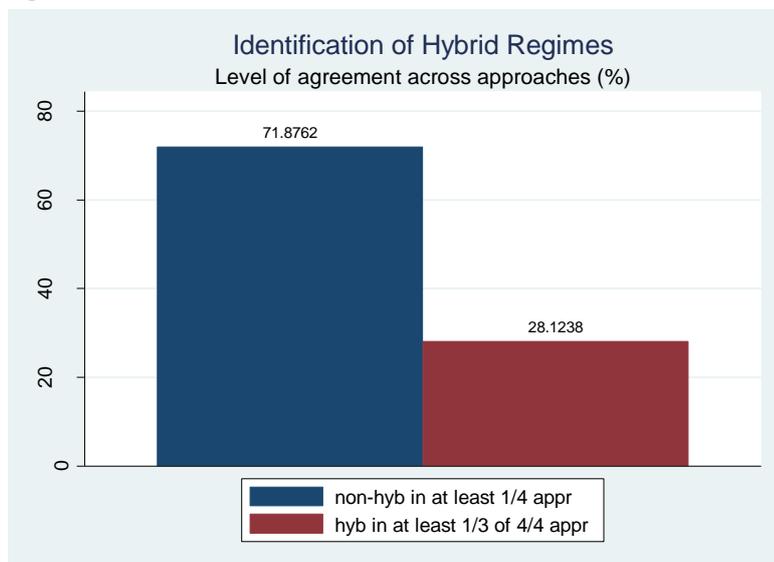
⁷ This also implies that the group we have now focused on lists several cases upon which the overall convergence of judgments is lower than many other excluded cases.

could hardly tell a different story, however, a shift in the focus of the analysis can certainly bring to light another part of the same story. New findings should therefore complement the previous, more pessimistic remarks.

Accordingly, we may conclude that the current poor state of advancement of the debate on the identity of hybrid regimes, notably the failure to settle the existing clashes on the topic, is hampering a fuller understanding of hybrid regimes. The analysis – the low level of convergence in the classification of a given political regime as hybrid – shows that different approaches at the level of conceptualization lead to the identification of different empirical referents. To put it bluntly, the analysis tells us that, at the current state of the art, the debate on hybrid regimes is a mess. Different studies that apparently deal with the same phenomenon, in practice do not. Each study seems to walk its own way, and seems perfectly confident about the specificity of the phenomenon under examination. Unfortunately, despite of the existing fragmentation, the analysis also shows a certain degree of overlapping across the different set of empirical referents. This risks to lead to quite schizophrenic conclusions, according to which, for instance, certain empirical cases provide evidence of the longevity of hybrid regimes and, at the same time, of their instability.

At the same time, the analysis has also uncovered the presence of a fertile ground to work with. In particular, it has identified a group of political regimes that each approach would consider hybrid⁸. As we can see in figure 4, summarizing the overall population of hybrid regimes resulting from the comparison of the studies under examination, this group is far smaller than the group of more controversial cases. Still, it represents about one-third of the larger population of hybrid regimes, the 19% of the overall sample, for a total of 938 country-years.

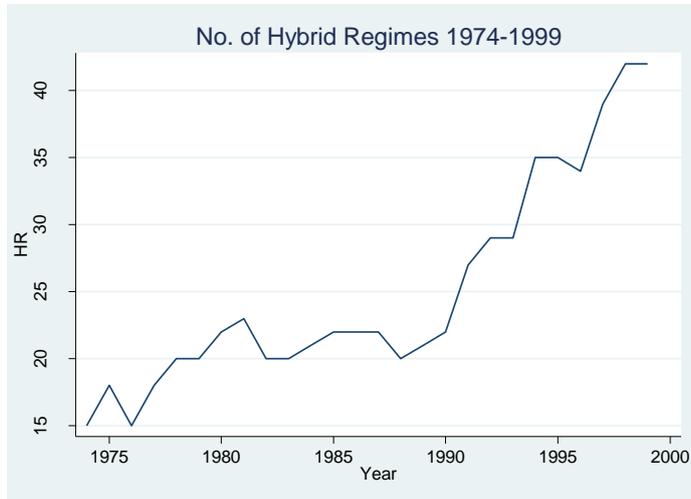
Fig. 4



The strategy followed in order to identify this group of countries is certainly unconventional, but not necessarily incorrect. Upon closer examination, indeed, this set of observations provides some ‘reassuring’ hints. First, as illustrated by figure 5, the trend followed by the number of hybrid regimes throughout the period of the third wave of democratization is consistent with the most generally agreed and consolidated beliefs. Hybrid regimes existed even before the third wave – in 1974 there were at least 15 of them according to the graph – and their numerical weight has experienced a constant increase until the end of the ‘90s, with a remarkable peak in the years

⁸ To be sure, the selection criteria used to identify that group of hybrid regimes treats the operational rules used by different authors belonging to the same conceptual approach as perfectly interchangeable. Because I assume all the different measurement being valid, and thus alternative measures of the same concept, however, this should not raise any doubt about the appropriateness of this strategy.

following the end of the Cold War. Second, the observations referring to the same country tend to cluster in continuous time sequences, so that it is possible to identify a number of “regime spells” – consecutive years in which the same hybrid regime has been in existence in a particular country (see Appendix 1). A more scattered outcome would have cast severe doubts on the appropriateness of the strategy followed.



Paragraph 5 : The survival of hybrid regimes: a replication analysis

The previous analysis led to the identification of a group of “undisputable” hybrid regimes. That group may represent the basis for the launching of a process of accumulation of the considerable amount of knowledge and expertise that has been produced during the last decade on the phenomenon of hybrid regimes. It can be thought of as the location where existing studies on the topic have the opportunity to finally meet and start that dialogue which is essential for taking stock of what has been said, theorized, tested, concluded so far. That group of hybrid regimes, in more practical terms, may represent the empirical referent for comparing the validity of alternative explanations and contrasting results.

Among the different ways according to which this exercise might be carried out, one option is the replication of an existing empirical analysis, holding everything the same as in the original version but the regime variable. The latter, on the contrary, should be replaced by a variable measuring/classifying political regimes throughout a different strategy. The new variable, in particular, will classify as hybrid only those political regimes that fulfill the minimum standard of being considered hybrid by at least one of the studies under examination for each conceptual approach. A regime will be considered hybrid, in other words, only if it is included in the list of Appendix 1.

Accordingly, the extant part of this paper will be devoted to the replication of one of the analyses previously surveyed, namely Jason Brownlee’s study on hybrid regimes stability⁹. The article was published in 2009 on the *American Journal of Political Science*, and soon gained the attention of the academic community. Brownlee’s paper follows the path already trodden by Geddes (1999) and carried on by several other scholars, among them the contribution of Hadenius and Teorell (2006) being one of the most remarkable. The article, however, has the merit of providing a more accurate analysis and presenting more fine-grained answers with respect to previous works. In particular, it disentangles – and analyzes separately – the two relationships between regime type and the

⁹ My warmest thanks to Jason Brownlee (University of Texas, Austin) who generously provided me with all the material necessary for the replication of his analysis.

likelihood of experiencing a regime breakdown and between regime type and the likelihood that the breakdown leads to a democratic transition.

Brownlee's analysis, in other words, tests essentially two hypotheses (Brownlee, 2009: 521):

- HP. 1 Hybrid regimes are more prone to regime breakdown than other non-democratic regimes.
- HP. 2 Hybrid regimes are more likely than other non-democratic regimes to experience a transition to democracy¹⁰.

In his work, however, he also distinguishes between two different types of hybrid regimes, namely hegemonic and competitive authoritarian. The two previous hypotheses are thus re-tested with a more specific focus on competitive authoritarianism. This distinction, indeed, proves to be essential for the sake of his argument. The results of the analysis, in fact, show that hybrid regimes as a whole exhibit no substantial differences with respect to other forms non-democratic regime neither in their propensity for regime breakdown nor in their likelihood of being succeeded by democracy. When distinguishing between hegemonic and competitive authoritarianism, however, the analysis demonstrates that in case of regime breakdown the latter group of hybrid regimes do have better prospects for democratization than other regimes.

Now the point is that such a distinction may represent also the Achilles heel of Brownlee's article. The classification of non-democratic regimes proposed by Diamond and hinging on the concepts coined by Schedler and Levitsky and Way – closed, hegemonic, and competitive authoritarianism – has been the target of several criticisms. From a theoretical point of view, classifying non-democratic regimes – political regimes broadly speaking – by ordering them along a continuum based on the degree of political openness/competitiveness implies an unwarranted teleological approach to politics. From a more practical point of view, the main weakness is that the classification of non-democratic regimes is not based on features that are observable and somehow resilient, such as the institutional structure, but on more volatile events. The distinction within the group of electoral authoritarian regimes between an hegemonic and a competitive subtype, in particular, hinges on the number of seats won by the largest party¹¹. Although reasonable, the 75% threshold is arbitrary and we really cannot say whether its crossing actually corresponds to a regime change. From a methodological point of view, finally, the introduction of a further distinction between the group of electoral authoritarianism seems not parsimonious.

All in all, the risk is that the validity of the interesting results of Brownlee's analysis depends to a considerable extent on a few arguable choices. Will these results stand a new test? The replication analysis will be carried out on both the hypotheses of the original paper. Given the previous considerations, however, it will focus only on hybrid regimes as such, without any further distinction (i.e. the analysis replicates only the third model of the tables at pages 527 and 529 of the original article).

Concerning the first hypothesis, the analysis works with a sample composed of 158 non-democratic regimes, classified by Brownlee according to an updated version of Geddes typology. The sample covers the period from 1975 to 2004, for a total of 2,132 regime-years. The dependent variable is regime breakdown, a dummy variable taking the value 1 each year in which the incumbent rulers are ousted from power, the means notwithstanding (Brownlee, 2009: 522). Given its binary nature, the tests requires the use of a logistic regression based on a maximum likelihood estimation approach, rather than the traditional OLS. Significantly positive coefficients, in other words, indicate the association of a given variable with an increased likelihood of a regime breakdown. In order to make the replication as faithful to the original as possible, the new independent variable

¹⁰ This is hypothesis number 3 in the original article.

¹¹ See the Index of Electoral Competitiveness from George Keefer Database of Political Institutions (World Bank, 2010).

recording the cases of hybrid regime will be placed side by side with the set of dummy variables corresponding to Geddes typology, the personalist type being the excluded reference category.

As for the hypothesis number two, following Brownlee, the analysis works with a restricted sample of only 107 regime-years, as many as the cases in which a regime break-down occurred. The model is exactly the same used in the previous analysis¹². The dependent variable, on the contrary, is another dummy variable indicating the occurrence of a democratic transition. An observation which is signaled as a case of regime breakdown is also recorded as an instance of transition to democracy if three out of four years after regime breakdown are coded as electoral democracy by Freedom House¹³. Table 3 illustrates the results of the new test of both the hypotheses under examination, along with the results of the original version.

The comparison between the original and the replicated results highlights some interesting new evidence. Starting from the hypothesis two, it is evident that the controversial distinction between competitive and hegemonic authoritarianism is no longer necessary. Contrary to previous results, in fact, the coefficient of the hybrid regime variable is both positive and significant. Among the cases of regime breakdown, in other words, being an hybrid regimes is associated with a greater likelihood of experiencing a transition to electoral democracy. This is true regardless of the level of openness/competitiveness in the political system of the collapsed regime. The new analysis, however, tells us something more. Shifting the attention to the results of the test of hypothesis one, we have to reconsider Brownlee's conclusion in a more extensive way. The new test, in fact, gives quite striking a response.

In the light of the new analysis, therefore, we may re-formulate previous conclusions as follows. It is true that hybrid regimes, once collapsed, are more prone to give way to a process of democratization. Similar results confirm previous arguments, by Brownlee himself and a few other scholar (Hadenius and Teorell, 2006; Howard and Roessler, 2006), according to which the presence of democratic institutions, although under authoritarian rule, makes these regimes better equipped to sustain a process of democratization. Not only, however, being an hybrid regime does not make a regime crisis more likely to occur. Hybrid regimes, indeed, are associated with a lower likelihood of experiencing a breakdown. Rather than a potential factor of instability, being hybrid proves to be a potential advantage to ensure the durability of the regime. Similar evidence seems therefore to support the arguments of authors such as Magaloni, Gandhi, Geddes, Lust-Okar and several others, according to which democratic institutions in a context of authoritarian governance may favor the stability and extend the life of a regime.

¹² The choice of working with a restricted sample of only cases of regime breakdown (i.e. scoring 1 in the dependent variable of the first test) but maintaining exactly the same model specification is quite controversial. The small number of available observations notwithstanding, that strategy would have been more justifiable if the model had been different.

¹³ A further shortcoming of this second part of the analysis derives from the use of different sources of data. Whereas both Geddes and Keefer's data refer to January 1 of each year, Freedom House data refer to December 31. The original analysis apparently misses this information, thus incurring in a few coding mistake of the d.v. This is evident, for instance, in the case of Burundi 1996-2003. The country was authoritarian until Jan 1 2003 but, following FH, has been an electoral democracy only since 2005. This is to say that on January 1 2005 Burundi was probably not democratic (in December 31 2004 certainly it was not). Therefore Burundi has been democratic only two (not three) out of the four years after the regime breakdown and should not be coded as a case of transition to democracy.

Table 3 Replication analysis of Brownlee's tests for hypotheses 1 and 2

	D.V. = Regime Breakdown		D.V. = Democratic Transition	
	HP. 1 Or. Version	HP. 1 Replication	HP. 2 Or. Version	HP. 2 Replication
Electoral authoritarian/ <i>Hybrid</i>	-0.261 (0.293)	-1.904*** (0.397)	1.129 (0.689)	3.197** (1.561)
Military regime	1.147** (0.376)	0.963** (0.375)	1.067 (0.982)	0.0805 (1.002)
Military-personalist	0.458 (0.372)	0.1 (0.371)	1.076 (0.994)	0.3528 (0.998)
Party hybrid	-0.069 (0.405)	-0.192 (0.411)	-1.797 (1.112)	-2.096* (1.222)
Single-party	-0.837** (0.378)	-0.806** (0.386)	-1.465 (1.081)	-1.158 (1.038)
Personal/military/single-party	-0.370 (0.654)	-0.824 (0.723)	0.133 (3.437)	-0.0233 (4.380)
Monarchy	-1.136* (0.651)	-1.280* (0.658)	-0.597 (1.953)	-0.384 (1.932)
Prior liberalization	1.196*** (0.272)	1.699*** (0.281)	0.178 (0.659)	0.5993 (0.718)
Per capita GDP (ln)	-0.345** (0.135)	-0.303** (0.129)	1.710*** (0.527)	1.709*** (0.548)
Lagged GDP/capita growth	-0.037*** (0.012)	-0.0313*** (0.0118)	-0.012 (0.038)	-0.0113 (0.0402)
Middle East	0.007 (0.416)	-0.0876 (0.416)	-5.535** (1.902)	-6.443*** (2.232)
Central and Eastern Europe	1.047*** (0.280)	0.729* (0.417)	1.630 (1.511)	1.346 (1.504)
Age of regime	0.049 (0.064)	0.2986 (0.0633)	-0.051 (0.192)	-0.0721 (0.198)
Age ²	-0.001 (0.002)	-0.000938 (0.00217)	0.002 (0.007)	0.00279 (0.00668)
Age ³	0.00001 (0.00002)	0.00001 (0.00002)	0.00002 (0.00007)	0.00002 (0.00006)
Post Cold War	0.521* (0.289)	0.723*** (0.226)	2.469** (0.800)	2.488*** (0.824)
Constant	-1.232 (1.208)	-1.351 (1.097)	-14.194*** (4.056)	-13.72*** (4.267)
Observations	2132	2132	107	107
Pseudo R-square	0.099	0.1479	0.456	0.4839
Log pseudo-likelihood	-382.261	-361.63771	-40.358	-38.2749

Standard errors in parentheses

*** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1

Paragraph 6: Conclusion

The purpose of this paper was to call the attention on the risk of fragmentation that the debate on hybrid regimes is now facing. This fragmentation is hampering our understanding of this phenomenon, despite of the remarkable work that has been done during the last years. Its causes have been detected in the absence of a solid common ground, namely an agreement on how to define hybrid regimes, which serves as a place where existing and future studies may meet and dialogue with each other.

The first part of the paper has highlighted the gap occurring between a crowded research agenda that in no more than a decade has led to the production of a considerable amount of literature and expertise and the poor attention reserved to the discussion of the actual identity of hybrid regimes. Although it is mainly conceptual, the consequences of neglecting that issue are evident especially in empirical research. The second part of the paper has tackled exactly this problem. The analysis has shown that the existing disagreement at the conceptual level does translate in as much disagreement in seizing the reality, i.e. in identifying hybrid regimes in the real world. This part of the paper is therefore an attempt to overcome similar difficulties and to lay the foundations for a process of accumulation of knowledge. The analysis led to the selection of a set of hybrid regimes characterized by an extensive convergence of judgments, which has been used for replicating one of most influential studies in the field.

The relevance and interpretation of the new results notwithstanding, this exercise suggests a few considerations. Contrary to similar replications appeared in the literature on democratization in the last years, the aim of my analysis was neither testing the performance of alternative measures (Elkins, 2000), nor showing the risks of the arbitrariness underlying many operational strategies (Bogaards, 2012). With a bit of hazard, the aim was more substantial. The non-conventional strategy I followed for selecting a group of hybrid regime may rise several doubts and of course cannot represent a full-blown new way for classifying hybrid regimes. In my opinion however it offers a great advantage. It allows the re-examination of existing theories and empirical evidence in the light and/or in the context of the debate they are part of. What the results of this kind of tests tell us is whether, rather than how, the answers would change in the presence of a more intense and constructive dialogue between different studies. The results, in particular, tell us that if scholars paid more attention to the building of a common understanding of the identity of hybrid regimes, many answers would be different, many apparently contrasting findings could be integrated rather than in contradiction. To conclude, the results of the analysis tell us that if we pay more attention the identity of hybrid regimes, we will be able to make a better use of the amount of knowledge produced so far and to dispel much of the formidably thick grayness which is still surrounding hybrid regimes.

Appendix

List of Hybrid Regimes 1974-2008

Haiti	1994 -2003	Guinea	1993 -2007
Dominican Republic*	1974 -1977	Burkina Faso	1978 -1979
Mexico*	1974 -1999	Burkina Faso**	1992 -2008
Guatemala	1974 -1981	Liberia	1985 -1988
Guatemala	1985 -1994	Liberia	1997 -2000
El Salvador	1974 -1978	Liberia	2005
El Salvador	1984 -1991	Sierra Leone	1977
Nicaragua*	1974 -1978	Ghana	1992 -1999
Nicaragua	1984 -1989	Togo**	1994 -2008
Panama	1984 -1987	Cameroon**	1992 -2008
Venezuela	2005	Nigeria	1992
Guyana	1975 -1991	Gabon**	1990 -2008
Peru	1991	Central African Rep	2005 -2006
Peru	1995 -2000	Chad**	1997 -2008
Brazil	1974 -1984	Congo Rep	2002 -2006
Paraguay	1974 -1975	Congo Dem Rep	2006
Paraguay	1978 -1985	Uganda	1980 -1984
Paraguay	1989 -1991	Kenya	1992 -2001
Portugal	1975	Tanzania**	1995 -2008
Poland	1980	Burundi	1998 -2004
Poland	1987 -1988	Rwanda**	2003 -2008
Serbia	1992	Djibouti	1999 -2005
Serbia	1999	Ethiopia**	1994 -2008
Bosnia and Herzegovina	1992 -1994	Angola**	1992 -2008
Bosnia and Herzegovina	2002 -2003	Mozambique**	1994 -2008
Cyprus	1974 -1975	Zambia	1996 -2006
Russia**	1992 -2008	Zimbabwe	1980 -1986
Belarus	1991 -1995	Zimbabwe	1989 -2007
Armenia	1994 -2005	South Africa*	1974 -1993
Georgia	1991 -2002	Namibia**	1990 -2008
Azerbaijan	1992 -1994	Lesotho*	1974 -1983
Azerbaijan	1997 -1999	Lesotho	1994 -2001
Guinea-Bissau	1994 -1999	Botswana	1974 -1996
Equatorial Guinea	2001	Madagascar	1977
Gambia	1981 -1989	Madagascar	1986 -1992
Gambia**	1997 -2008	Comoros	1995 -1998
Senegal	1978 -1999	Comoros	2002 -2003
Benin	1990	Morocco	1977 -1991
Mauritania	2001 -2001	Morocco	1993 -2005
Niger	1999	Algeria	1997 -2006
Cote d'Ivoire	1990 -1992	Tunisia**	1994 -2008
Cote d'Ivoire	1997 -1998	Iran	1980 -1981
Cote d'Ivoire	2000 -2006	Egypt	1976 -1991

Egypt**	2005 -2008	Bangladesh	1974
Jordan**	1989 -2008	Bangladesh	1979 -1981
Yemen**	1993 -2008	Bangladesh	1986 -1989
Tajikistan	1991	Sri Lanka	1978 -1993
Tajikistan**	1997 -2008	Thailand	1979 -1987
Kyrgyzstan	1991 -2005	Cambodia	1993 -1996
Kazakhstan	1991 -2001	Cambodia**	1998 -2008
Mongolia	1990 -1991	Malaysia**	1974 -2008
Taiwan	1985 -1995	Singapore***	1974 -2008
Korea South	1975	Philippines	1978 -1985
Korea South	1977 -1987	Indonesia*	1974 -1983
Pakistan	1975 -1976	Indonesia	1988 -1989
Pakistan	2002 -2006	Indonesia	1998
Chad**	1997 -2008	Fiji	2001 -2003

* left censored

** right censored

*** both

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