To understand the condition of democracy in the world today, one must begin by situating it in the context of its global fortunes over the past two centuries. The most illuminating account of democracy’s historical trajectory was put forward by Samuel P. Huntington in his 1991 book *The Third Wave: Democratization in the Late Twentieth Century*. Huntington finds that democracy’s advances have occurred primarily in three waves—periods in which the number of democratic countries in the world has risen substantially, with transitions to democracy considerably outpacing breakdowns of democracy.

Huntington chooses as the starting date of modern democracy the year 1828, when it is estimated that suffrage in the United States was extended to fifty percent of all adult males. Beginning in 1828, the first wave slowly but steadily gathered force and did not come to an end until 1926. This “long wave” really comprises two different subgroups of countries. The first is the dozen or so European and European-settler countries that had, by the nineteenth century, succeeded in establishing a fair degree of freedom and rule of law, and then later moved into usability.

Intrigued by this finding against the odds of conventional wisdom, we revisit the classic topic of regime types and regime changes. Based on well-grounded conceptual discussion, we use a trichotomous classification of regime types, including the intermediate anocratic category between democracy and autocracy, and the subsequent six-fold typology of regime changes. We have...