

Facing *staseis* in democratic Athens

Claudia TIERSCH

Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin (Germany)

Abstract

This essay examines why Athenian democracy was more politically stable than other Greek cities that were frequently affected by civil unrest. A comparative study of fifth-century BC Athens and Sicilian democracies shows that stability did not depend on democracy alone. Athens itself faced two oligarchic coups at the end of the fifth century BC, both aiming to overthrow the democratic system. These coups were closely connected to the earlier process of democratization, demonstrating that civil conflicts can reveal much about a state's political structure and its transformation.

Democratization in Athens deepened the integration of citizens and strengthened civic cohesion, reducing

the fragmentation typical of earlier periods. At the same time, it created opportunities for powerful individuals to dominate politics by aligning themselves with popular interests. Pericles' long-lasting political dominance weakened traditional elite power structures, leading to growing resistance among dissatisfied upper-class groups. However, these groups failed to build a broad popular base, limiting their effectiveness.

Keywords: Athenian democracy; *staseis*; civil war; oligarchic coups; civic cohesion; political stability

(c) Claudia Tiersch; claudia.tiersch@geschichte.hu-berlin.de

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The phenomenon of *stasis*, understood as a violent conflict between different groups of citizens within a community, was a pervasive phenomenon in Greek city-states from at least the Archaic period to Hellenism (Gehrke 1985; 2016; 2024; Gray 2015; Börm 2016; 2019; Eich 2006, 508–603; Wees 2008). However, it is difficult to determine their precise structure, their trajectory and their causes. The main problem in analyzing *staseis* is that they do not adhere to discernible patterns and that the categories used to identify social actors or relevant causes are by no means unambiguous and frequently require careful interpretation. The fuzzy terminology of the ancient sources makes for an additional problem (Börm 2019, 13–22; 2016, 16).¹

In recent decades, this problem has attracted considerable attention within the research community. As a result, it became evident that several former assumptions regarding the causes or course of *staseis* were no longer tenable (Gehrke 1985, 355–359). Among these assumptions identified as contributing to *staseis* were social factors, which were defined as the power base of social alliances. Additionally, research posited that *staseis* could result in a ‘progressive’ change from oligarchic to democratic constitutions or ended by reconciliation processes (Gray 2016; Dössel 2003).²

In his study on Greek *staseis*, Armin Eich demonstrated that social unrest or external influences could be a factor contributing to the phenomenon of *staseis* (Eich 2006, 558–576). Nevertheless, the evidence suggests that such factional struggles not always had a clear social profile. Likewise, the constitutional changes caused by civil wars may either be relatively minor and transient, or alternatively, they may result in a shift from democracy to oligarchy. Finally, current debates have shown that *staseis* were shaped by various factors that depended heavily on elite competition or local conditions. They were, in effect, part of the political signature of the respective Greek poleis (Börm 2019, 273–306; Gray 2015, 380–388).

The mental and social background of these factors has been convincingly examined in an illuminating study by Uwe Walter. In his article, *An der Stasis teilhaben. Assoziation und Dissoziation als Handlungsmuster im griechischen Bürgerstaat*, he pointed out that political dissociation and, consequently, political instability in ancient Greek cities had a structural foundation in the mentalities and group formation processes of the wider citizenry (Walter 2023). They were a consequence of the ‘disposable loyalties’ of Greek citizens, which clearly differed from the more stable social integration mechanisms of

¹ For a certain distinction between stasis and civil war, whereas the term stasis rather designates the factional, not necessarily violent strife with a sometimes ‘static’ effect for the political life of a polis: App. Civ. 1.7.55, 58; Börm 2016, 18f.

² For social conflicts in Hellenistic times see the case studies in Pfeiffer & Weber 2021. On the specific perspective of Aeneas Tacticus, who sees the greatest danger for *staseis* in the selfish motives and behavior of citizens cf. Winterling 1991; Pretzler 2018.

Roman citizens. The latter were based on the stronger acceptance of social hierarchies and patronage relationships (Walter 2023, 311).

In contrast to the majority of other Greek city-states, democratic Athens appeared to defy the seemingly immutable ‘iron law of *stasis*’ in the Greek world, because it managed to maintain a relatively stable political system. Conversely, this internal stability was more characteristic of the 4th century BC, whereas two oligarchic coups occurred at the end of the 5th century BC, i.e. in democratic times. This analysis therefore considers the phenomenon of *stasis* and stability in democratic Athens through a series of key questions. The study will examine the long-term evolution of Athenian democracy with a particular focus on the interrelation between democracy and *stasis*. Why, despite the considerable integrative power of Athenian democracy, did the two *stasis* events occur in 411 and 404 BC, rather than at an earlier stage of the democratic transition process? To what extent did the *stasis* events of Athenian democracy reflect the features of the new political order? Was *stasis* in Athens, as it occurred in the coups of 411 and 404 BC, particularly difficult to carry out, against the resistance of organized citizenry? And what caused the obvious change in stability during the 4th century? Why was Athens in the 4th century BC characterized by a high degree of domestic political stability despite the occurrence of clear military and financial crises? Can the rules and procedures, or further factors that did contribute to this increased stability, be determined?

These questions will be methodologically substantiated by reference to current methodologies in political and social research (in particular conflict research). The key consideration here is that civil wars are a common phenomenon that has occurred with great frequency throughout world history. This comparative approach is not limited to classical studies. Civil wars have also become a central topic of political science research, especially in the last 20 years, often with a historical-comparative approach. Consequently, this study will also investigate whether these modern case studies can contribute to the analysis of political transformations in democratic Athens and vice versa.

The initial section will discuss the methodologies employed in the analysis of civil wars within the context of contemporary political science discourse, and their potential applicability to the study of ancient *staseis*. The second section concerns the process of political erosion throughout the democratization of Athens in the 5th century BC. Thirdly, the coups of 411/10 BCE and 404/03 BCE are to be analyzed as *stasis*-shaped conflicts according to their specific traits. Finally, the question of the causes of the evidently greater political stability of Athenian democracy in the 4th century BC is addressed.

1 Civil wars in the social and political sciences and their potential for analyzing Greek *staseis*

Current studies define civil wars as organized conflicts between groups within a country or region. These conflicts are typically driven by a desire to gain political control, achieve independence, modify policy or constitution, or secure privileged access to material resources (Cederman & Vogt 2017). The extensive analytical potential of copious empirical studies on historical and contemporary civil wars, investigating the causes, objectives, courses as well as the prevention of civil wars, lies in its comparative approach. It is therefore evident that the pursuit of historical, regional and cultural particulars pertaining to instances of civil wars constitutes a significant element within the field of study (Hironaka 2005). Nevertheless, despite the enhanced availability of sources, comparable analytical challenges to those encountered in the study of civil wars in Antiquity persist in the modern era. Classifying contemporary civil wars is as complicated as classifying the *staseis* of ancient Greece, largely because the phenomenon still lacks uniformity in modern times. Thus, despite the fact that some of the assumptions proved to be inadequate, and despite the ongoing debate that seeks to refine causality and attribution, we need to acknowledge that the benefit of these studies has come primarily from their ability to establish more pragmatic, intermediate relationships (Gleditsch et al. 2016).

A comparison of autocratic and democratic systems with regard to civil wars reveals that the frequency of civil wars in autocratic systems is not necessarily higher than in democratic systems. This is partially attributed to the more pronounced coercive mechanisms observed in autocratic societies. Nevertheless, the involvement of the relevant elites and the provision of material forms of participation for broader sections of the population were of the utmost importance for the prevention of political upheavals (Cederman & Gleditsch 2009).

In the context of democratic systems, the researchers identified a distinct set of factors that contributed to the prevention of civil wars. They emphasize that democracies are more dependent on the appropriate balance between formal rules and procedures. Consequently, the implementation of regulated procedures in which groups can articulate their interests has been identified as a crucial factor in the prevention of civil wars. This is evidenced by the fact that, even in instances of political defeat, these groups are better equipped to accept the social, political and economic outcomes, thereby reducing the likelihood of violent conflict. Further conducive factors for enhancing political stability include the integration of minority rights, concessions to formerly excluded groups, the establishment of adequate political participation mechanisms for various strata of the population, the conferral of basic legitimacy upon political leadership, the political in-

volvement of relevant actors, and an overall commitment to good governance (Rummel 2002; Anderson et al. 2007; Walter 2015). Basic socio-economic standards also had a dampening effect on social unrest.

A central issue was the question of whether there was an immediate link between economic factors and the propensity to engage in civil war: greed and grievance (Fearon & Laitin 2003). Interestingly, economic factors proved to be less relevant than previously assumed, although they are often interlocked with mental factors. These findings from modern cases correspond with analyses of Aristotle's politics, which posit that *staseis* are often frequently the result of dissatisfied citizens who had hoped for greater honor and profit. However, they may also be the consequence of a desire to avoid the status of victim, following experiences of humiliation and lack of recognition. Aristotle was willing to accept these motives as justified, at least in some cases (Aristot. Pol. 5.2 1302 a23, 5.2. 1302a28 b22, 5.3 1302 b22).³

In general, extreme forms of social discontent or political collapse were less common causes of civil wars than a sheer set of opportunities, i.e. possibilities for actors willing to rebel to organize resistance and a change of power through suitable channels (Tilly 1978; Gurr 1972). A common precipitating factor in the onset of civil wars is the occurrence of a critical situation, particularly when accompanied by a political transition process, even in a democratic context. This is especially the case when the balance of power between the various actors and institutions involved remains unequal (Przeworski 1991; Hegre 2001; Gleditsch & Ward 2006; Cederman 2010). Further factors that contributed to instability included corruption, institutional weaknesses, and poor forms of statehood that lacked legitimacy. Additionally, segmentary forms of loyalty played an important role (Fearon 2011). Often, in order to assert and legitimize its claims to power, the opposing side also used quasi-state forms of organization. How could the case of ancient democratic Athens be interpreted with the help of this methodological framework?

2 The emergence of democracy in the 5th century BC – unity and conflict

In his history of the Peloponnesian War, Thucydides lauds the Athenian democracy of his era, positing that, under the stewardship of Pericles, the citizenry was so inclusive that Athens was able to successfully orient itself towards the war, achieving notable victories for its position of power in Greece (Thuc. 2.36.3, 41.4, 65.5).⁴ His comments are overall

³ See Rogan 2018; Pellegrin 2019.

⁴ See Ober 2010. On Thucydides' picture of the Peloponnesian war as a stasis shaped conflict between Greeks, see Price 2001.

correct. The integrative power of this novel form of democratic empowerment was immense and far-reaching, resonating with the majority of Athenian citizens. Pericles, in particular, was adept at leveraging this phenomenon to advance his own ambitions.

On the other hand, the advent of democracy as a transitional process was marked by a series of intense conflicts, such as Cleisthenes' phyle reform and the disputes surrounding the disempowerment of the Areopagus under Ephialtes.⁵ Not only was the author of these initiatives murdered, but the opponents of his reforms also tried unsuccessfully to revise them.⁶ Some scholars have even proposed that the destruction of buildings, which was previously dated to the Persian Wars, may have been caused by internal conflicts surrounding the reform of Ephialtes (Vickers 1990, 105–115). In her book on Athens as a divided city, Nicole Loraux presents a convincing argument that the collective identity of democratic Athens was shaped by the selective silencing of historically traumatic events, including several instances of conflict (Loraux 2002, 71–75).

In fact, the period following the Areopagus reform appears to be characterized by domestic harmony and a functioning democracy within Athens. Earlier research indicated that a close collaboration existed between aristocracy and democracy during these years (Stein-Hölkeskamp 1989, 205–230; Eder 1998, 105–140, 121–123). In reality, however, democracy had significantly shifted the circumstances for members of the upper echelons of society.⁷ In the 5th century, Athens remained a city divided into numerous competing power groups. However, the political majority of Athenian citizens in the popular assembly, unified by common political objectives, demonstrated resilience. Pericles was the uncontested leader of the political domain. His intimate relationship with the citizenry rendered potential competitors politically impotent, either through neutralization or ostracism, or by demonstrating their willingness to accept his rule.⁸ The

⁵ Hdt 5.62, 5.66–70, 5.72; Thuc. 6.59.4; Aristot. AP 20–22, 28 on Cleisthenes; Aristot. AP 25.2; Plut. Cim. 15.2; Per. 9.4 on Ephialtes; Soph. Eumen. 681–690 and 861–866; cf. Meier 1988, 162–178; Loraux 2002, 71–75.

⁶ After his return from Sparta, Cimon campaigned for the revision of the Ephialtes reform. Another attempt was made in 457 BC: Plut. Cim. 15.3–5, 17.3; Per. 9.5. Cimon has been ostracised. On the events of 457 cf. Thuc 1.107.4–6; Ostwald 1989, 178.

⁷ E.G. Thucydides Melesiou Plut. Per. 11.2–3 or the sons of Cimon, Thessalus and Lacedaemonius: Plut. Per. 29.2.

⁸ The basis for his prestige was formed both by the material benefits of the measures he intended for the citizens of Athens, such as the payment of juries, the founding of cleruchies and the Parthenon building programme, as well as the gain in dignity that the politicization of the citizenry propagated by him meant for them, cf. Aristot. AP 27.3; Plut. Per. 9.1–5; Plut. Cim. 10.1–3; Thuc. 2.36.3, 38.1–2; Plut. Per. 11.5 (Chersones, Naxos, Andros, Thrace, Thurioi); Paus. 1.27.5; Thuc. 1.114.3; Plut. Per. 23.4; Diod. 11.88.3 (1000 settlers on Naxos); Diod. 12.22.2; Theopomp. FGtHist 115 F 387 (Euboea); Andoc. 3.9; Stadter 1989, 138–142; Brunt 1966, 71–92. Plut. Per. 12.1–13.14 on the building programme for the Parthenon. Diets in particular have rightly been interpreted as a symbolic recognition of Athenian citizenship: Humphreys 1978, 147; Nippel 1990, 148.

only option for dissatisfied rivals was to withdraw from the political sphere or launch indirect attacks on Pericles. In surviving comedy fragments, he was accused of tyranny and as the son of *stasis*; his political allies were attacked in lawsuits.⁹ The emergence of the pejorative notion of democracy as mob rule, as espoused by those in opposition to the new order, indicated mounting apprehensions regarding the far-reaching changes.¹⁰

Following the death of Pericles, the schism between the conservative members of the aristocratic groups and the Athenian citizenry intensified, largely due to the more confrontational political approach adopted by Pericles' political successors, such as Cleon. They not only addressed the *Demos* more exclusively in public speech, but also employed the courts as a means of politically rivaling and attacking their opponents.¹¹ Nevertheless, despite the ongoing public discourse surrounding the question of who should prevail in the city and numerous expressions of discontent that have been communicated in various sources, there were no viable avenues for successfully overthrowing the democracy. The grievances articulated by Ps.-Xenophon, a vocal critic of democracy, serve to substantiate this assertion. He bitterly complains about the new political order as absolute dysnomia, yet is compelled to acknowledge the unlikelihood of a successful assault on it, given the commendable functionality of democracy. The first public clash arose from the highly controversial expedition to Sicily in 415 BC. Those who opposed the proposal were outvoted. They articulated their protest by mutilating the urban statues of the god Hermes, which caused a profound shock to the Athenian population. Although the Athenians saw it as an attempt to overthrow the democracy and brutally condemned the conspirators (Thuc. 6.27.2–3, 53.2; Plut. Alcib. 18.8.; Andoc. 15; Andoc. 11.27, 36, 43; Rhodes 1972, 186–188), the incident ultimately manifested itself as a symbolic act of resistance against political marginalization (Thuc. 6.27.1; Plut. Alcib. 18.5–8; Aristoph. Lysistr. 1094; on the events cf. Dover 1970, 271–276, 288; Furley 1996, 28–30; Osborne 1985, 47–73).

⁹ This aspect is mentioned by Telecleides (fr. inc. 42 K = CAF I, S. 220). Cf. Cheirones fr. 240 and 241 K, CAF I, S. 86; Plut. fr. 1 Vit. Z. 22. Symptomatic of his perception by conservative opponents were also interpretations as Peisistratos (fr. adesp. 60 K), Zeus (Cratin. Cheiron. fr. 240 K; Nemes. fr. 111 K; Thratt. fr. 71 K; Hermipp. Moir. fr. 41 K) or as Olympian (Telekleid. fr. 17 K; Aristoph. Ach. 530), Schwarze 1971, 40–87; Mc Glew 2006.

¹⁰ Nippel 1980, 35 n. 19 and 20 points out that in the 5th century the concept of democracy is used in the sources either descriptively (e.g. in Herodotus) or in a strongly polemical form. (Thuc. 6.89 by a critic, 2.37, 6.39 by a defender); Raaflaub 1985, 269, 276; Sealey 1973, 253–295.

¹¹ Thuc. 2.65.11 on the successors of Pericles. After the death of Pericles, numerous trials were held against *strategoi*, cf. Hansen 1975; Roberts 1982, 126.

3 The coups of 411/404 BC

The oligarchic coup of 411 BC was the result of a confluence of factors, including the military defeat in Sicily and the subsequent constitutional crisis of 413 BC, the growing apostasy of the citizenry and the spatial separation of different strata of the citizenry due to the presence of the fleet in the Aegean. These circumstances provided an opportunity for dissatisfied members of the Athenian upper class to seize power (Thuc. 7.71–87, 8.47.1–97.1–3). Although many of the coup plotters were elected officials of the democracy, the intention was to completely renounce the democratic order (Thuc. 8.48.1). The context for Critias' second oligarchic coup in 404 BC was the final defeat of Athens in the Peloponnesian War, the collapse of the Delian-Attic League and the presence of a Spartan garrison in Athens (Xen. Hell. 2.2.17–23; Plut. Lys. 15.1; Lys. 13.13–16).

The mechanisms of both stasis-shaped coups can be summarized as follows. In both cases, the conspirators employed informal power mechanisms to achieve their ambitions. These included social networks in the form of *hetairaeae*, leveraging their educational superiority, rhetorical manipulation techniques, false promises, the division of the citizenry and direct terror (Thuc. 8.53.1–3, 54.4, 65.2, 66.1–5, 68.1–4. Aristot. AP 35.1; Xen. Hell. 2.3.12, 38; Lys. 13.36–42). In both instances, the oligarchic seizure of power was made possible only through the direct elimination of democratic procedures and institutions (Thuc. 8.67.3, 69.1–4; Lys. 12.71–75, 13.34; Aristot. AP 34.3). In 404 BC, Critias initiated the destruction of the port and shipyards in Piraeus with the objective of restoring an agrarian state by eliminating pivotal components of Athens' socio-economic base. This strategy ultimately succeeded in reinstating the anticipated aristocratic dominance (Lys. 12.99, 13.46; Isocr. 7.66; Xen. Hell. 2.4.19, Aristot. AP 35.1; Plut. Lys. 154; Plat. Ep. 7 324c; Lehmann 1972, 216).

However, both coups failed within a year. The reasons for this can be attributed to a combination of factors, including the erosion of support within the respective putschist groups and the lack of acceptance by the Athenian population. This contributed to other forms of unsuccessful initiatives, which subsequently prompted Sparta to alter its stance in 410 and 404 BC.¹² The critical juncture in both instances, however, was the inability or unwillingness of the oligarchic putschists to develop a functional or even institutionally legitimized alternative to democratic institutions, rules, and procedures within their power structure.¹³ They resorted to brutal and arbitrary means of maintaining their

¹² In 411 BC the 400 sent an embassy to Sparta, but it was rejected: Thuc. 8.70.2–71.3. The Spartan king Pausanias withdrew his support from the conspirators 403 BC: Xen. Hell. 2.4.28–31; Lys. 18.10, 12.58–60; Justin. 5.10.7.

¹³ As the debates on the Hoplite politeia of 5000 members or the never realised promises about the establishment of constitutions prove. The future order was to be characterized by a system of rotating quarter-

position, even going as far as to victimize some of their own supporters.¹⁴ All of this demonstrates the effectiveness and prominence that the Athenian democratic order had achieved by that point in time.

However, the deeply divided citizenry proved to be a problem after the restoration of democracy in 403 BC.¹⁵ Despite the loss of political influence, the former oligarchs retained significant social influence and power in Athens, as well as the support of Sparta (Nippel 1997, 117–118). The accusations made by the opponents, reflected, for instance, in some of Lysias' speeches, were directed at the inadequate consideration of their own claims to authority and status within the democratic order and at the jurisdiction of the Athenian jury courts for individual civil rights and property rights, which was perceived as unjust (Lys. 16, 25; see the commentary by Weißenberger 1987, 24–148). State protection regulations such as the Demophantos-psephisma or the psephisma of Kannonos strengthened the collective rights of the democratic demos.¹⁶ The harsh reckoning with the conspirators of 411 BC and their public defamation by the Athenian democrats in the following year, however, significantly contributed to a further erosion of the citizenry.¹⁷

A key distinction between these civil war-like events and those of the 6th century BC that led to the establishment of tyranny (cf. Hdt. 1.59; Aristot. AP 13.4, 14.1) is that they did not involve divisions among the broader citizenry. The supporters of the later coups were predominantly members of the upper echelons of society who were discontented with the prevailing political and economic circumstances. Despite their limited connections to broader segments of the population, their social prestige and influence were significant and would continue to be so in the coming years.

4 Athens in the 4th century BC and the pacification of stasis conflicts

In the aftermath of the events of 403 BC, the Athenian community was compelled to pursue a more nuanced equilibrium between democratic institutions and political actors. This implied, above all, the political and social integration of the upper classes who were

boulai, which was to ensure a certain degree of participation by the hoplites (albeit without office pay): Thuc. 8.67.2, 8.96.1–97.1; Xen. Hell. 2.3.2; Lys. 12.76; Aristot. AP 35.1; Diod. 14.3.7, 4.1.

¹⁴ Cf. the Theramenes-affair in Xen. Hell. 2.3.50–56.

¹⁵ A symbol was the temporary existence of an oligarchic republic in Eleusis, cf. Lehmann 1972, 221–224.

¹⁶ Andoc. 1.95–96; Lyc. 1.124–127; Dem. 20.159; Xen. Hell. 1.7.20f.; Shear 2007; McGlew 2012; Teegarden 2012; Bleckmann 1998, 423, 433.

¹⁷ Former oligarchs were pursued with harsh court proceedings, e.g. Phrynichus, Polystratus and many more; Lyc. 1.112–115; Plut. Vit. Dec. Or = Mor. 833a–834b; Schol. Aristoph. Lys. 313; IG I3 102; [Lys.] 20.14; Andoc. 1.75; Hefner 2001, 312–322.

dissatisfied with some expressions of actual democracy. It also entailed the institutional constraint of their opportunities for revolt. With reference to the categories of modern civil war research outlined above, a discernible interplay of several factors emerges. The stability in Athens was rather the exemption in a generally unstable political climate in Greece, as Peter Rhodes has pointed out:

To take a few examples: Corinth experienced early in the fourth century the killing of pro-Spartans and then the political union with Argos, it is included among the states suffering an upheaval which Diodorus places under 375/74 but which probably belongs after Leuctra, and in the 360's an attempted Athenian take-over was followed by Timophanes' attempt to become tyrant; in Argos there was the *skytalismos* of 370/69; in Sicyon in the 360's Euphron came to power as a democratic and anti-Spartan leader, made himself tyrant, was ousted but returned, and was assassinated when on a diplomatic mission to Thebes. Outside the Peloponnese we find civil war in Paros c. 373, in Corcyra and Cephallenia about the same time, and in Corcyra again in 361/60.¹⁸ (Rhodes 2010, 69–70)

Therefore, the stability in Athens needs to be explained. First, the Athenians addressed the issue of legal uncertainty, notably by improving the balance between collective interests and safeguarding individual rights. These institutional regulations have been the subject of extensive research. They primarily concern the amnesty requirements and their legal reinforcement, which permitted some former oligarchs to resume their political careers following a judicial review.¹⁹ In addition to these changes, the legislation was codified, and comparisons between the current and former legislative frameworks and the abolition of contradictory regulations were made (Andoc. 1.82–87; Carawan 2002, 1–23). Moreover, this led to procedural changes, as henceforth the *ekklesia* could only pass *psephismata*, whereas the passing of *nomoi* was to be reserved for the dicasteries (Andoc. 1.87). This resulted in a more rigorous separation between *nomoi* and *psephismata*, with the introduction of a regular examination process to ensure that the enacted laws were free from internal contradictions and aligned with the established *nomoi* (Dem. 20.89–99, 24.20–23; Hansen 1978, 315–330; 1979, 27–53; Rhodes 1985, 55–60). These in-

¹⁸ 390's: Xen. Hell. 4.1.1–13, 4.4.14–5,9; Diod. 14.86, 91.2–92.2; And. 3.24–27, 32. 375/74: Diod. 15.40. 360's: Xen. Hell. 7.4.4–6; Plut. Tim. 4–5, misdated Diod. 16.65. Argos: Diod. 15.57.3–58. Sicyon: Xen. Hell. 7.1.44–46, 7.2.11–15, 7.3.1–4, 1; Diod. 15.70.3. Paros: Supplementum Epigraphicum Graecum 31.67. Corcyra: Xen. Hell. 6.2.5–39; Diod. 15.45–47, Thuc. 3.70–85.

¹⁹ Aristot. AP 39.1–6; Xen. Hell. 2.4.43; Lys. 12.92–94, 13.5, 10–12, 26.2; Lehmann 1972, 221–223; Loening 1987, 59–67, 101–117. Driscoll 2016 points out that oath-bound contracts led to further examples of *stasis* reconciliations in Greece during the 4th century BC.

novations not only meant changes for the institutional structure of Athens, they also led to notable enhancements in its political stability. This was because they facilitated a more accurate delineation of the relationship between institutions and actors, thereby regulating the political spheres of action in a more precise manner. In particular, the possibility of constantly reviewing the legal validity of enacted laws transformed the landscape of the political power struggle. Unlike in the past, it was now much more challenging for individual charismatic politicians to realize their political ideas based solely on the *ekklesia*. Political discourse was slowed down, different opinions were given greater weight in the *ekklesia* or, in the case of a revision, before the dicasteries. At the same time, numerous sources expressed the conviction that the Athenian legal system guaranteed security for citizens of different classes, thereby ensuring that an accusation in court did not result in automatic condemnation.

Furthermore, a normative socialization process emerged, which was more standardized and binding for all participants. Community-related values were named more precisely. Democratic rules were transparently communicated and constantly negotiated, thus also providing opportunities for recognition through varying rituals, for example the *ephebeia* (Walter 2023, 321, 324; Gehrke 2016; Gehrke 2024). These developments afforded flexibility and enabled greater social diversity than was the case in the 5th century BC. However, this was contingent upon the politician in question having made significant contributions to the Athenian community. The basic consensus on common norms and obligations was also evoked in court hearings, e.g. in indictments against Athenian politicians. Men such as Iphicrates, Timotheos or Callistratus of Aphidnai were able to assert their prestige through established status characteristics in public without being confronted with accusations of tyranny, as had been the case in the 5th century. From the middle of the 4th century BC, special achievements were also honored in Athens through honorary inscriptions (Lambert 2021). At the same time, even in times of crisis, radical measures such as the withdrawal of tax privileges from meritorious fellow citizens or foreign allies of Athens were rejected (Dem. 20; Canevaro 2016).

Conversely, this augmented compromise on conventional social and political norms imposed rigorous constraints on anti-democratic or unpatriotic conduct, while facilitating more effective oversight of magistrates by the jury courts (Hansen 2004, 124–129). The dicastic oratory from these times gives a balanced picture. If magistrates could successfully demonstrate that their actions were aligned with the collective interests of the Athenian people, they were more likely to be exonerated. This was particularly evident in the case of Aristophon of Azenia, who was sued on over forty occasions but was consistently acquitted towards the end of the 5th century BC. (Oost 1977). Nevertheless, in the event of a politician's failure to satisfy these collective interests, even prominent figures

such as Callistratus of Aphidnae, Hypereides or Demosthenes were subjected to financial punishment or death.²⁰ Border-crossing behavior thus had less chance of resonating with group formations, because it was negotiated in public. The democratic public sphere of Athens thus became the decisive point of reference.

Additionally, it would be remiss not to acknowledge the significant improvement in the quality of life for a greater portion of the population. These changes included legal security, a high degree of political participation opportunities and considerable political responsiveness, as well as an increase in living standards. Some of the most significant innovations in Athens were initiated and passed after periods of acute crisis, providing political solutions to a number of significant challenges.²¹ Furthermore, the *ekklesiastikon* and the *theorikon* constituted additional sources of revenue, alongside with the payment for several minor magistracies and for military service. Additionally, a minimal financial support system was put in place for orphans, widows and veterans. Athens was responsible for ensuring the provision of grain to its citizens, thereby enhancing the likelihood of attaining a basic minimum for daily living during the fourth century. This was achieved, in part, through the implementation of political initiatives (Eich 2006, 487–50).

In sum, the combined effect of the altered institutional, material, social and normative procedures resulted in a reduction in opportunities for instigating factional strife against Athens or its democracy. They were further supplemented by proceedings based on the *nomos eisangelitikos*, which provided regulated accusation opportunities for the dissolution of the demos (Hansen 2004, 124–129) or the enactment of laws for state protection, as well as anti-*tyrannis* laws, such as the Eucrates Law of 336 BC (Engels 1988). The sources prove that some trials were conducted on the basis of this legal framework (Hansen 1975). Overall, the higher degree of administrative institutionalization with the creation of efficient rules and procedures, which were accepted as legal justice, had a stabilizing effect. These developments resulted in the formation of a democratic order with a differentiated political field, which provided less opportunity for the seizure of power by individual groups. The satirical character portrait of an oligarch in Theophrastus from the end of the 4th century BC, which mocks the oligarch as a marginal fig-

²⁰ Callistratus: Lyc. Leocr. 93; Hochschulz 2007. Hypereides and Demosthenes: Plut. Dem. 28.2; Phoc. 29.1; Arr. Succ. Al. Fr. 1.13; Nep. Phoc. 3.3; Plut. Vit. Dec. Orat. 846e, 849a; Suda s.v. Antipater. Demades had lost his citizenship because of his pro-Macedonian position during the initial phase of the Lamian War, but this measure was corrected after the defeat of Athens. Demades was sent as an envoy to Antipater together with Phocion and Xenocrates, the head of the Academy; Diod. 18.18,1–6; Plut. Dem. 28.1; Phok. 26–29; Nep. Phok. 1; Mor. 847c–d. The conditions of Antipater: Diod. 18.18,3–6; Plut. Dem. 28–30; Phok. 29, 33; Plut. Marl. 846c–847d; Pausan. 1.43,1, 7.10.1; Worthington 2013, 334; Gehrke 1976, 92.

²¹ As, for example, the grain tax law of Agyrrhius passed in 377 BC or the general improvement of financial administration, Ober 2009; Moreno 2003; Stroud 2016, Leppin 1992.

ure without any adherents, reflects the prevailing opinion within Athens regarding oligarchs.²²

However, it would be erroneous to ascribe undue significance to these structural conditions and their consequences. Moreover, the examination of contingent factors, such as specific Athenian crises and their internal political management, is yet to be conducted in greater detail. This is necessary in order to provide a more coherent picture.²³ A further escalation took place in the 320s, when Athens was subjected to increasing pressure from Macedonia, was faced with a significantly reduced margin of manoeuvre for its foreign policy and was forced to surmount considerable economic challenges.²⁴ In fact, Athens proved to be surprisingly stable in this decade. It operated effectively within the new political context, addressing challenges such as the grain crisis of 326/5 BC. The Athenian citizenry demonstrated resilience and unity in the face of adversity.²⁵

During this period, a series of internal debates emerged concerning Athens' relationship with Alexander. The debates were linked to the Harpalus affair, Alexander's decree of exile, and Athens' defeat in the Lamian War. The latter event marked the end of Athens' political independence, along with that of other Greek city-states. It also initiated a period of considerable unrest within the Greek world.²⁶ In this final conflict, it is possible to identify a number of distinct groups with their own individual goals and aspirations within the citizenry, though the size of these groups varies.²⁷ Thus, it was preponderantly external pressure that led to civil conflicts, but these conflicts were mainly

²² Theophr. Char. 26; Leppin 2002, 44; Heitmann-Gordon 2017.

²³ These are, for example, the situations after Athens' defeat in the Corinthian War in 391 BC, the defeat in the Social War in 355 BC, and the defeat in the battle of Chaironeia in 338 BC.

²⁴ Arrian. Anab. 1.7–9; Diod. 17.8–17; Plut. Dem. 23; Dein. 1.18; Hypereid. 6.4; Hegesias FgrHist 142 F 12; Lehmann 2004, 189; Worthington 2013, 275–287; Aischin. 3.166; Dein. 1.34; Hypereid. 1.20; Plut. Mor. 818e–f; Lehmann 2004, 194; Worthington 2013, 287–291.

²⁵ Descat 2004. For the Athenian patriotism cf. the Demosthenes' speech *On the crown*; Dem. 18.170–179; Westwood 2020, 296–298. As a result Aischines did not even receive the necessary quorum for prosecutors of one-fifth of the votes and had to leave Athens: Plin. Epist. 2.2.10; Ps.-Plut. Vit. Dec. Orat. 840 d–e; Cic. De orat. 2.213; Lehmann 2004, 203.

²⁶ Dein. 1.89; Hypereid. 1.24. On the chronology of the Harpalus affair cf. Engels 1993, 308; Hypereid. 1.12; Lehmann 2004, 212–214. Dein. 1.107. Ten prosecutors appeared before 1501 jurors.

²⁷ Plut. Dem. 28.2; Phok. 29.1; Arr. Succ. Al. Fr. 1.13; Nep. Phoc. 3.3; Plut. Vit. Dec. Orat. 846e, 849a; Suda s.v. *Antipatros*. Demades had been stripped of his citizenship by the Athenians in the early stages of the Lamian War because of his pro-Macedonian stance, but this measure was corrected after Athens' defeat. Demades was sent as an envoy to Antipater together with Phocion and Xenocrates, the head of the Academy; Diod. 18.18.1–6; Plut. Dem. 28.1; Phok. 26–29; Nep. Phok. 1; Mor. 847c–d. The conditions that Antipater set: Diod. 18.18.3–6; Plut. Dem. 28–30; Phok. 29, 33; Plut. Marl. 846c–847d; Pausan. 1.43.1, 7.10.1; Worthington 2013, 334; Gehrke 1976, 92. Diod. 18.18.5; Plut. Phok. 28.4. How many citizens were affected by this exclusion is disputed, Worthington 2013, 335. There are three different versions of the events that led to Hypereides' death: Plut. Dem. 28.4; Phok. 29.1; Plut. Mor. 849b–c. On the death of Demosthenes: Plut. Dem. 29.1–4; Mor. 846.

directed to reestablish the democracy as soon as possible and punish every politician who was suspected of cooperating with Macedonian dominance. Nevertheless, even after Athens' defeat in the Lamian War and the renewed presence of a Macedonian garrison in Athens, pro-Macedonian politicians were only able to assert themselves temporarily and were confronted with enormous resistance, an indicator of Athens' dominant democratic structure (Worthington 2021; Dreyer 1999). The question of Athens' internal political stability therefore remains a further rewarding topic of research.

Conclusion

The central issue addressed in the analysis is the causes behind the greater political stability of Athenian democracy in comparison to other cities that experienced frequent civil unrest. Answers to this question required a more granular analysis. A comparative analysis of Sicilian democracies and Athens in the 5th century BC revealed that the durability of these systems was not solely contingent on the presence of democracy. After all, Athens was threatened by two oligarchic coups at the end of the 5th century BC, the aim of which clearly was to abolish the democratic order. Concurrently, it became evident that the format of both coup attempts and their antecedents were inextricably linked to the democratization of Athens. Consequently, an analysis of civil wars enables inferences to be drawn regarding the political configuration of a state and its transformations. On the one hand, democratization led to a more extensive and profound integration of the citizenry, thereby reinforcing the capacity of the civic associations to withstand the fragmentation that characterized earlier periods. As a result, however, the citizens' association became a political power base for ambitious individual politicians who were able to align their interests with those of the citizens, while also exerting undue influence over them. This gave Pericles a twenty-year phase of political dominance, to the detriment of other members of the upper classes. It contributed to the erosion of traditional structures of rule and dominance. It was from the ranks of these dissatisfied members of the upper classes that the gradual resistance to the new political order formed, which, however, only gradually gained in terms of its program and organizational strength. The problem of the lack of a mass base remained unresolved. As a result, the ability of this group to connect with other citizens was limited. The two oligarchic coups could only be initiated in the circumstances of Athenian foreign policy disasters. The conspirators implemented their goals with considerable brutality in some cases in order to achieve a reversal of the political situation. The fall of both coups after less than a year each demonstrated the low political performance of these counter-regimes and their lack of acceptance among the citizens. However, at the same time, considerable deficiencies in the internal structure

of Athenian democracy became evident, which were primarily attributable to a dearth of legal protection for individuals and an inadequate framework for regulating the relationship between politicians and the democratic institutions.

The greater political stability in the 4th century BC was based on a combination of factors, including an improvement in institutional rules, an increased commitment to common norms, an improved scope for the representation of politicians and the guarantee of the basic material needs of the Athenian population. In the 4th century BC, the history of Athens was also characterized by periods of significant challenge and change, yet these did not result in the same level of civil war or civil war-like divisions.

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