

# APSA-COMPARATIVE POLITICS

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## Newsletter

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### Letter from the Editors

#### Measuring Governance

*by Mark Hallerberg and Mark Kayser*

The development of governance indicators is a booming field. As a consequence of the institutional turn in comparative politics, now long ago, the need to compare the organization of government and its consequences across larger samples arose. Early efforts, such as the World Bank's Worldwide Governance Indicators (WGI), were followed by many other notable contributions. Your editors recently both took part in what is perhaps the most recent effort to develop yet better indicators as part of the annual Governance Report recently launched by the Hertie School of Governance ([www.governancereport.org](http://www.governancereport.org)). In so doing, we landed in the middle of ongoing debates about the problems of conceptual comparability and measurement as well as about the meaning of governance itself.

The field is now large and diverse enough that it may benefit from a broad discussion about the conceptual and methodological trade-offs inherent in various approaches. Our goal is not a

comprehensive survey—earlier efforts, such as the APSA project to assess the state of government indicators (<https://sites.google.com/site/democracyaudit/>), do a better job of that—but simply to sample some of the diversity among the newer and more longstanding governance indicators and to glean the lessons learned from the authors' efforts. We believe much can be learned from the experience of others.

We begin with a contribution from Bo Rothstein and Jan Teorell who, at the Quality of Government (QoG) Institute in Gothenburg, Sweden, have set up one of the most comprehensive and systematic data collection and indicator development efforts. They argue for operationalizing quality of government narrowly, most specifically in the form of bureaucratic impartiality. This measure offers notable benefits over the inclusion of broader components that also capture the efficiency, competence or policy outputs of government. For one thing, including these latter concepts in the measure itself, precludes one from using the measure to study them.

Matt Andrews also notes the pitfalls of broad measures but takes a different

#### The Quality of Government: What It Is? How to Measure It?

*by Bo Rothstein and Jan Teorell*

Quality of Government and its close cousins Good Governance and State Capacity are concepts that have made a strong impact in research as well as

in some of the highest policy circles since the mid-1990s. The reason is the increased influence from institutional theory and that we now have an abundance of empirical results showing strong correlations between institutional quality and general human well-being.

A central question is how to define and measure what Quality of Government

*Continued on page 3.*

tack. Observing that broad measures of governance are often correlated with contextual variables such as a country's wealth, he calls for different benchmarks in different income groups. He proposes to measure "quality of governance" as deviations from group means—income groups, for example—so that the context level does not drive the indicator level. He illustrates this approach with a proposed child survival indicator that evaluates each country with respect to its income-group peers.

Zachary Elkins is steeped in institutions. He shares several lessons learned from his large-scale Comparative Constitutions Project with collaborators Tom Ginsburg and James Melton. In collecting and coding an impressively large sample of written constitutions from around the world, he not only unearthed some surprising facts—who knew that political parties are addressed in 83% of constitutions in force despite being mentioned in only 3 percent of 19th century constitutions, for example?—but learned some things about conceptual and measurement equivalence in the process. He is ultimately sanguine about the possibility of reliably coding constitutions across variation in country, period and coder noting that different coders differ little despite such variation in the origins of the constitutions.

The quality of government under dictatorships and democracies occupies the attention of Nicholas Charron and Victor Lapuente. In summarizing a finding from some of their co-authored work, they expose and explain a fascinating relationship: transition from autocracy to democracy actually lowers the quality of government in poor countries.

An influential incumbent in the field of governance indicators is the Afrobarometer surveys that have been conducted in ten sub-Saharan in five waves since 1999. In describing this effort, Michael Bratton highlights the advantages of large-scale surveys in measur-

ing multiple dimensions of governance and reports a few changes between the 2005 and 2012 waves, most notably an increase in the faith of respondents in the ability of governments to solve what they identify as the most important problem facing their country. They do not believe, however, that this increase in effectiveness comes from an increase in responsiveness: In fact, fewer respondents in 2012 (16%) believe that "elected representatives usually try to listen" than did in 2005 (24%).

Of course, more technical areas of governance may demand specialized measures. Fiscal governance is one such area. Mark Hallerberg surveys the key ideas and fiscal governance indicators undergirding research in this area, including new measures from international organizations like the European Commission, IMF, and OECD. He reprises his and his co-authors' contention that two forms of fiscal governance outstrip the other alternatives in parliamentary democracies: Single-party governments best constrain spending through "delegation" to a strong finance minister; multi-party governments do best by negotiating "fiscal contracts" between the governing parties as party of their coalition agreement.

Finally, in concluding this issue, we continue with our regular features. We announce a change in editorship in the

Concepts and Methods Working Paper series and the arrival of two new datasets. Holger Döring and Philip Manow profile an impressively comprehensive dataset of coalition governments in parliamentary systems and we, your editors, announce the arrival of the governance indicators to accompany the inaugural Governance Report of the Hertie School of Governance.



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## Measuring Governance

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(henceforth QoG) is. Our strategy has been to opt for a procedural, universal, normative, and limited definition of QoG (Rothstein and Teorell 2012, 2008). Our reasons for this have been

***By focusing on impartiality in the exercise of political power, we do not only rule out things like money (bribes as corruption) but also what is known as clientelism, nepotism, patronage systems, and various other forms of discrimination.***

the following: We have argued that QoG should be limited to the exercise of political power leaving the access to power as a separate thing.

In other words, we have limited QoG to the “output” side of the political system. The reason is that if we would have included the “input” side, we would not have been able to study whether the introduction of electoral-representative democracy in a country would improve QoG. We also find that democratization is not a safe cure against, for example, corruption and that we have authoritarian countries with high levels of, for example, state capacity such as Singapore and now also China. The definition of “good governance” used by the World

Bank which includes the “input” side makes it impossible to reach this quite important result.

Our choice of normative baseline is quite mainstream, namely the type of rights-based liberal theory provided by John Rawls and Brian Barry. In this line of thinking, the central idea is that just political procedures are those that by and large can be seen as impartial by groups with very different conceptions of “the good.” As argued by political philosophers in this approach, the opposite to justice is not inequality but favoritism.

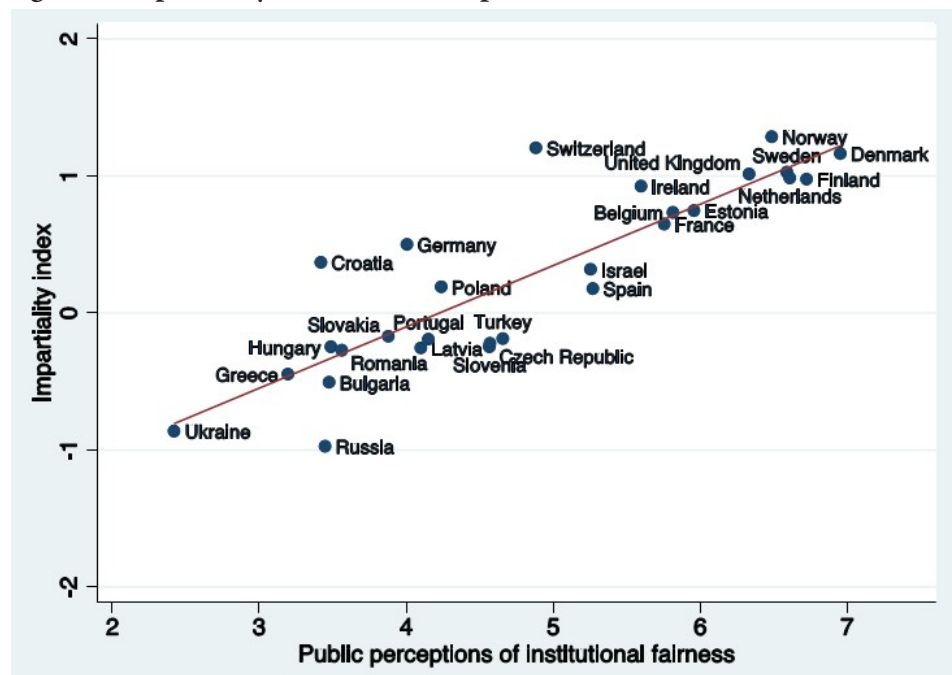
Our definition of this reads: “When implementing laws and policies, government officials shall not take anything about the citizen or case into consideration that is not beforehand stipulated in the policy or the law.” As is obvious, this definition would not rule out laws or policies that can be considered unfair, but that is “bad politics,” not a

lack of state capacity or QoG. The same problem will occur with every procedural definition of democracy since there is no guarantee that the majority that results from ever so “free and fair” elections will make unfair or bad laws and policies.

By focusing on impartiality in the exercise of political power, we do not only rule out things like money (bribes as corruption) but also what is known as clientelism, nepotism, patronage systems, and various other forms of discrimination.

Another advantage with basing the definition in normative theory is that we avoid a pitfall that very often appears when scholars try to use more empirically-based definitions. A case in point is the recent book by Daron Acemoglu and James Robinson in which they argue that what makes nations fail is “bad institutions.” In this we agree, but we think that their definition of “good in-

**Figure 1: Impartiality and Public Perceptions of Institutional Fairness**





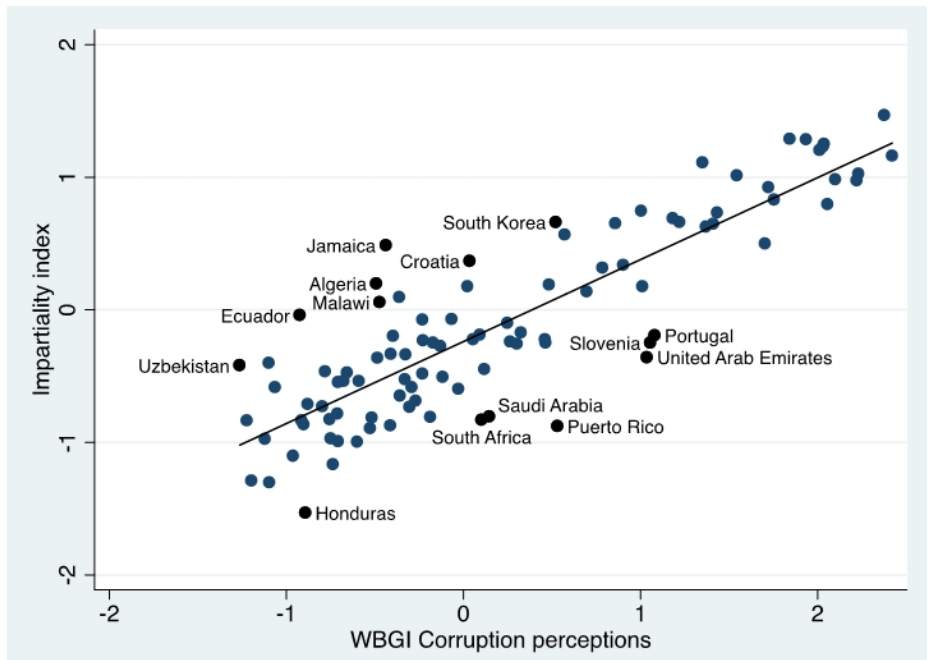
stitutions” is problematic.

Such institutions, they argue, should be “inclusive.” With this, they mean institutions that “allow and encourage participation by the great mass of people in economic activities that make best use of their talents and skill and enable them to make the choices they wish.” Such institutions should also “secure private property, an unbiased system of law, and a provision of services that provides a level playing field in which people can exchange and contract.” Moreover, such institutions “also must permit the entry of new business and allow people to choose their careers.” The list does not stop, the institutions should also “distribute power broadly in society” and ensure that “political power rests with a broad coalition or plurality of groups” (Acemoglu and Robinson 2012, 73, 80). One can say many things about this definition, but not that it is overwhelmingly precise.

However, the main problem with this empirically-based definition is that it is very close, if not identical, to what the theory intends to explain. How surprised should we be that such “inclusive” institutions will create the good and prosperous society and that a society with the opposite type of “extractive” institutions will be bad and poor? This definition is close to stating that

***The advantage with a normatively-based procedural definition as the one we have suggested is that we will be able to see if certain procedures for the political system that we find intrinsically just and fair will produce valued outcomes.***

**Figure 2: Impartiality and World Bank Institute Corruption Index**



the good society will produce the good society.

The advantage with a normativelybased procedural definition as the one we have suggested is that we will be able to see if certain procedures for the political system that we find intrinsically just and fair will produce valued outcomes. In this, we are in line with most definitions of representative democracy that are also based on the idea of fair procedures and the hope that such procedures will result in normatively valued outcomes such as high levels of human well-being.

A common argument is that the QoG agenda, launched by many international development organizations, represents a specific western liberal ideal that is not applicable to countries outside that part of the world.

There are at least two arguments against this type of relativistic conceptual strategy. The first is normative and based on the similar discussion in the areas of human rights and democracy. As we see it, the anti-relativistic camp has won the discussion that for such central political concepts we should avoid definitions that are culturally relativistic. Otherwise, we would lack a moral right to criticize countries that violate human rights and portray their au-

thoritarian regimes as “just our type of democracy.”

The second reason against a relativistic definition of QoG is empirical. Although the empirical research in this area is not entirely unambiguous, our assessment is that most of it points to the quite surprising result that people in very different cultures seem to have a very similar notion of what should

***... people in very different cultures seem to have a very similar notion of what should count as, for example, corruption.***

count as, for example, corruption (Widmalm 2008; Miller and Grødeland 2001; Nichols et al. 2004).

Lastly, our idea of a limited definition implies that we have decided to leave economic efficiency and administrative competence outside the definition. This may to some sound strange: how can you speak of a country with a high level of QoG that has a very inefficient civil service. But again, we want to explain efficiency and competence and including this in the definition would make

that impossible. Here we can present an empirical result that supports our hypothesis. Countries that have an impartial (read: merit-based) recruitment to the civil service also have according to our measure (see below) a higher level of QoG.

Can this definition of QoG be operationalized and measured? The short answer is yes. Together with our colleagues at the Quality of Government Institute we have carried out a web-based survey of about 1,000 experts in 126 countries.<sup>1</sup> The results have been quite encouraging.

The impartiality index we have created from this survey correlates at .86 with a composite measure of public perceptions of the extent to which doctors and nurses, as well as the tax authorities, “give special advantages to certain people or deal with everyone equally,” in a sample of 28 countries from the European Social Survey (Svallfors 2012). Given their different origins (experts and “ordinary people”), the fit between these two sources of data is pretty impressive (see Figure 1 on page 4).

1) As with all the data produced and assembled by the QoG Institute, this data is freely available, see [www.qog.pol.gu.se](http://www.qog.pol.gu.se).

Moreover, our expert-based measure of QoG as impartiality looks much as can be predicted from other measures such as the World Governance Indicators produced by the World Bank Research Institute or the Corruption Perception Index from Transparency International (correlations at .87 and .86, respectively).

Although this fit across data sources is again reassuring, Figure 2 (page 5) makes clear that there are still subtle differences between the information contained in these commonly employed “good governance” indices and our new measure of impartiality.

The countries highlighted in the upper part of the figure, most notably Jamaica, Ecuador, and Algeria, have higher levels of impartiality than one would expect given their perceived level of corruption. By contrast, the countries highlighted in the lower part, most notably the United Arab Emirates, Honduras, and the territory of Puerto Rico, have significantly lower levels of impartiality than their corruption scores would predict.

Although corruption and a lack of impartiality tend to go hand in hand, these

examples also make clear that these two concepts are not equivalent.



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## Rethinking Governance Indicators

*by Matt Andrews*

### The Problem

Governance indicators have come under fire in recent years, especially the Worldwide Governance Indicators (WGIs). Critics present these indicators as a-theoretical and biased and question if the indicators really help academics trying to do research on governance or practitioners trying to improve governance through reforms.

A common concern is that the indicators reflect a particular ideological perspective on the kinds of “best practice”

processes needed to make a “good” government. These include merit-based civil service systems, top-down budget systems, business-friendly regulatory frameworks, and open trade regimes. Another concern is that the indicators are inappropriately used in academic research because they really reflect a nation’s level of development (not its governance). There are also worries that countries attempting to improve indicator scores are adopting poorly fitted best practice reforms that make them look better (at least on the indicators) but do not lead to improved functionality.

### An Alternative Approach

Critics of the critics may accept these concerns but counter that no better, alternative indicators exist. I suggest oth-

erwise, arguing that more appropriate “governance” indicators can be created. I believe these indicators should be developed on the basis of a core theoretical understanding of governance as “the exercise of authority by governments on behalf of citizens.” Given such, governance indicators should focus on specific fields of engagement in which governments are given authority to do

***... the indicators are inappropriately used in academic research because they really reflect a nation’s level of development (not its governance).***

things on behalf of citizens. These could include the economic management field, infrastructure field, and child health field. Indicators should emphasize outcomes in these fields, which are what citizens authorize governments to influence and hence constitute the true

*Outcomes should be adjusted to control for key contextual differences between countries so that (for instance) poorer countries are compared with other poor countries and richer countries with other richer countries.*

indicators of governance. Outcomes should be adjusted to control for key contextual differences between countries so that (for instance) poorer countries are compared with other poor countries and richer countries with other richer countries. Finally, the cost

of producing outcomes should also be captured, because governance costs in one field have implications for governance possibilities elsewhere.

Constructs developed with these principles in mind can help indicate where countries seem to have governance successes and problems, allowing second stage analyses of these successes and problems. The second stage analysis allows investigation of the nature of governance successes and problems and whether specific processes or institutional mechanisms seem to foster such successes or problems. This allows a more evidence-based, context-specific approach to thinking about governance and to design reforms to improve governance.

I propose an example of this indicator, looking at the survival rates of children under five years of age as the crucial indicator of governance in the field of child health.

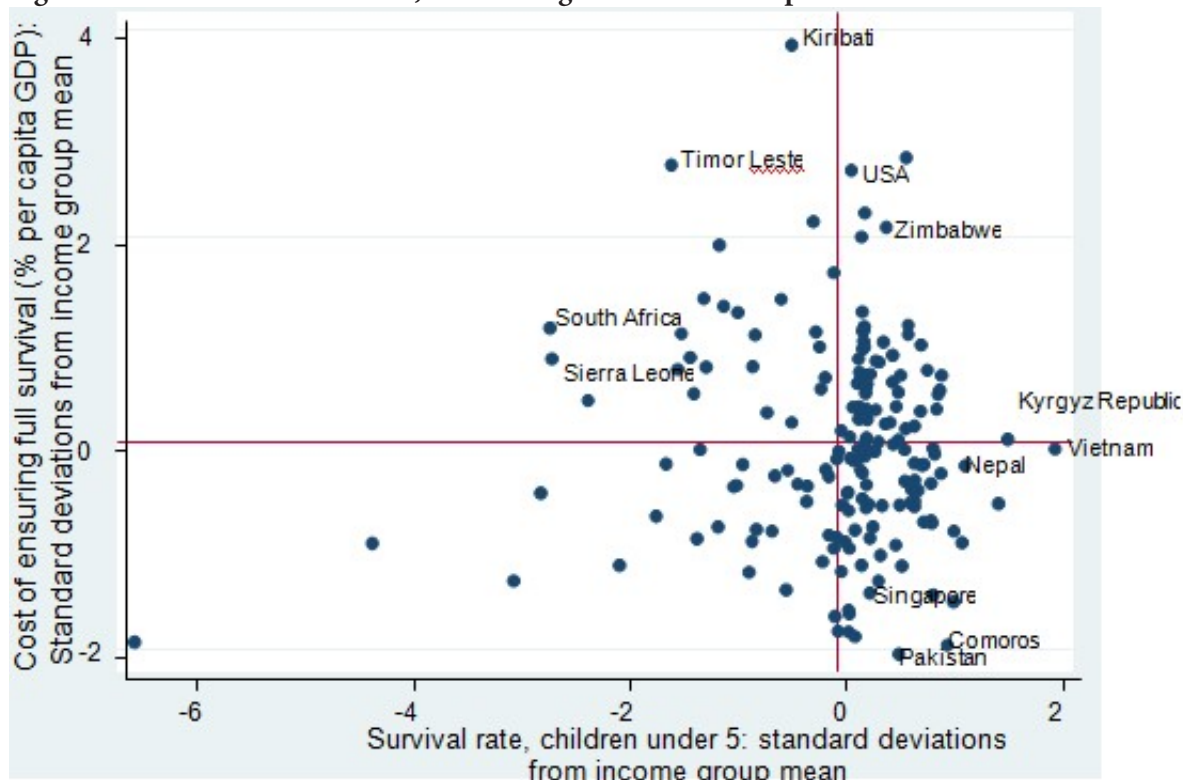
- The *theoretical rationale* behind such indicator is simple: Citizens grant governments the authority to ensure optimal provision of child health care, in whichever way appropriate, reflected in the cost ef-

ficient production of the highest possible survival rate of all children under five. Governance systems are 'good' when they ensure relatively high survival rates at relatively low average cost.

- The *mechanics* behind this indicator are also simple. I calculate the z-score for countries' under-five survival rates and the costs of providing health care (public and private), when compared with averages of countries in the same income groups (using the United Nations Classification as a guide). This involves looking at the number of standard deviations a country sits above or below the average scores of comparable countries. To use a sports metaphor in explaining the approach, the idea is to see if countries box at, above, or below their income 'weight'.

Figure 1 shows how a variety of countries score on such an indicator, reflected in a two-dimensional graph. The bottom right-hand quadrant could be called a "good governance" domain because it shows countries where survival rates are relatively higher than those in comparable countries and health care

**Figure 1: Child Health Outcomes, Controlling for Income Group**





costs are relatively lower than those in comparable countries. Singapore and Pakistan are in this domain. The top left quadrant shows an unequivocal “poor governance” domain (where survival rates are lower than average and costs are higher). South Africa is in this domain. The top right quadrant shows countries where survival rates are higher than averages in comparable income countries but costs of producing such are higher than averages. The United States is in this domain, where field-level governance produces results but at costs that are probably undermining the exercise of authority in other fields.

It should be apparent that there is no immediate bias in this approach toward higher income countries or toward one or other governance process or institutional mechanism. All the indicator does is shows where countries are doing well (in the child health field) compared with comparators and where they are not doing well. This indicates how well governments are exercising their authority in the field and should help foster a discussion of where improvements are needed and what these might be.

For instance, governance systems in the United States could be adjusted to bring the cost of providing health

care down. Lessons on where costs are lower could come from other high income countries like Singapore. These lessons might suggest that jurisdiction size matters (given that most wealthy countries in the bottom right quadrant are small) and that having a dominant public sector role in health care financing can bring costs down (given that wealthy countries with lower costs seem to have higher public sector contributions). These and other second-stage observations provide important avenues for further research into why outcomes vary between countries, and will help to focus reform decisions on relevant solutions to the peculiar governance challenges of specific countries.

### Conclusion

I accept that there are problems with the indicator, which is intended as an example of what an alternative governance indicator might look like (not a final proposal). Even with its problems I am intrigued at what the indicator suggests and could imagine similar indicators being used in different fields (like education, specific industries, safety and security, etc.). Such indicators could be useful in guiding academics attempting to explain why governance differs between countries, for instance, and could help countries benchmark

themselves and identify contextually appropriate options for governance reform.

This, I believe, is what a good indicator should do: point to comparatively better and worse performers and allow more informed investigation about why these are better and worse performers.

I think we can be clearer about what governance is and provide more useful indicators. There is undoubtedly more work to be done in thinking about the approach I suggest here—and other alternatives—and I hope that this note will provoke some thinking to move the work forward.



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## Comparability and the Analysis of National Constitutions<sup>1</sup>

*by Zachary Elkins*

A nagging challenge in analyzing political institutions across contexts is that of conceptual and measurement equivalence. For the last ten years, I have been actively engaged (with my collaborators Tom Ginsburg and James Melton) in the systematic interpretation of a large set of historical constitutions. I offer here some observations, drawn

from this experience, on the challenge of comparability. My hope is only that these observations provide some concrete benchmarks for understanding basic problems in institutional analysis.

### Conceptual Equivalence

Anybody who works on constitutions inevitably grapples with what I’ll call the Walter Murphy interjection. Upon hearing the word “constitution,” the late Professor Murphy would often interrupt the conversation with this pointed question: “you mean the text, right?” Murphy, of course, meant to call attention to the other elements of higher law such as ordinary legislation, institutionalized norms, and interpretations. This broader sense of a constitution—sometimes identified as the “constitutional

order,” or the “small-c constitution”—comprises those elements that perform what are traditionally understood as “constitutional” functions without the traditional form. By contrast, the “constitution” in its folk conception refers simply to the formal written charter,

***This distinction between constitution-as-function and constitution-as-form is fundamental to much theory and analysis in cross-national work on institutions.***

<sup>1</sup> My collaborators on the Comparative Constitutions Project, Tom Ginsburg and James Melton, contributed significantly to these ideas and insights over the years.

a form that is now nearly universal among modern states.

This distinction between constitution-as-function and constitution-as-form is fundamental to much theory and analysis in cross-national work on institutions. Consider a simple descriptive endeavor in which one needs to understand the law of the land in a country, whether written or otherwise. Maybe it's a three-country study of executive power. Does the analyst consult our systematized study of the content of its written constitution? Maybe, but it is more likely that the analyst will want to ascend Sartori's (1970) ladder of abstraction and reach for a more general concept, the constitutional order. At that level, she is likely to find the appropriate legal rules, perhaps after

*...while ascending the ladder of abstraction allows scholars to compare contexts with radically different constitutional forms, it becomes prohibitive to do so for large samples.*

some soaking and poking through case law and political ethnography, together with a look at our data.

Not every research question requires one to operate at that level of generality. Studying written constitutions can be remarkably revealing, especially for students of history. Our project, for instance, is motivated in large part by a set of historical questions about the origins of ideas: who, what, where, and when did a particular institution develop and how did it drift, transmogrify, break down, or congeal? These are questions suited to the study of discrete documents. While, the larger constitutional order is expansive, unwieldy, and approachable only in small doses, the written constitution is concrete and scalable. Indeed, the deliberate, pub-

lic, and discrete character of the big-C constitution yields a remarkably objective historical record of activity across a wide set of cases.

So, one set of generalizations about conceptual scale emerges as follows. Moving up the ladder of abstraction to the constitutional order is useful if one is focused on the functional constitution, particularly its effects. This more general sense of higher law may allow scholars to assess institutional arrangements even in those places without a written constitution. However, as a pragmatic matter, one must uncover much more data—from written laws, to judicial opinions, to habits and norms. Note, then, this corollary to Sartori's work: while ascending the ladder of abstraction allows scholars to compare contexts with radically different constitutional forms, it becomes prohibitive to do so for large samples. Written constitutions—concrete that they are—meanwhile are highly suited for historical studies of large sets of cases. Nonetheless, these generalizations—you shall see if you keep reading—depend a little bit on which part of the constitutional order is under consideration.

### **Heterogeneity across Constitutions**

In larger part, the problem of the comparability of constitutions has to do with the degree of variation in their content. We often think of constitutions as highly standardized pieces of statecraft—documents that take on a very similar form across countries.

But the simple fact remains that constitutional drafters are free to write anything and everything into their written charter. Our evidence suggests that many do have a mind of their own. Some constitutions stop at 500 words and some go on for 150,000. Some deal with reindeer herding (Finland) and some with sports (Brazil). Of course, there are some subjects (e.g., rights) that are so essential (or, at least, so constitutional) that nearly every constitution has them.

But what about other topics? How

many constitutions talk about the environment, intellectual property rights, or agricultural policy? How many go into the budgeting process or international trade? How have these patterns changed over time? No one really knows.

In this sense, we have come to realize that one very basic, but extremely important, insight from our data on constitutions has to do with the relative coverage of various substantive domains. Understanding these patterns, as you can imagine, is absolutely crucial to understanding the utility and comparability of constitutional data for any given question.

So when are constitutions silent and when are they vocal? Let's think first about three basic functions of constitutions: limiting government, defining the nation and its goals, and defining patterns of authority. Most modern written constitutions address these topics.

Consider rights, the primary means of limiting government. Of the 188 constitutions in force in 2006 (where our data currently stops), only three do not contain any rights provisions in their constitutions. Of those constitutions with rights, we estimate that, on average, 16% of the document is dedicated to the specification and elaboration of these rights. Of course, constitutions vary with respect to which rights they enshrine. Certain rights—the classic negative liberties such as freedom of religion and speech—are so ubiquitous as to be nearly universal. Most rights, however, are much less prevalent. Among current constitutions, for example, 52% and 61% provide the right to health and education, respectively.

Similarly, basic patterns of authority are well-specified in constitutions. As of 2006, every single constitution identifies the structure of some version of the executive and legislative branches and only one constitution circa 2006 (Libya) omitted provisions regarding the structure of the judiciary (post-Qaddafi, that set is now empty). Other insti-



tutional elements are similarly present. 90% (169) of constitutions in force in 2006 detailed the procedures by which states of emergency can be called, 89% (168) enumerated a power of executive pardon, 89% (168) specified the process of legislation, 81% (154) detailed the procedure through which the budget is passed, and 89% (165) clearly stated who was responsible for interpreting the constitution. The goals of the state are generally defined in the preamble of constitutions, and preambles were included in 81% (152) of the constitutions in force in 2006.

Still, some omissions from most texts are readily apparent. Judicial age limits, term limits for legislators, legislative quotas, and campaign finance are regulated by fewer than 20% of constitutions. One might also expect that written constitutions would frequently describe such crucial issues as the electoral system for the legislature, which generates important incentives for temporal majorities to manipulate the rules. Instead, most constitutions either specifically leave to ordinary law the design of electoral systems (historically, only 33% of constitutional texts do so for the lower, or unicameral, house since 1789) and the drawing of districts (12% since 1789), or do not mention election law issues of either kind at all (45% and 69%, respectively, since 1789). Only 21% of constitutions in our study mention central banks, whose constitutionally-protected independence is increasingly considered essential to macroeconomic stability. Media and human rights commissions also remain peripheral. If a researcher is concerned with the structure and workings of these very important institutions, an exclusive focus on the written constitution will be inappropriate.

Some of the elements have gained or lost prevalence over time. The United States constitution mentions bankruptcy, as did nearly 20% of constitutions through the 19th century, but only about 6% of constitutions mention it today. Political parties, on the other hand, were addressed in only 3% of

19th century constitutions, but are now core elements of constitutional design (82% of constitutions in force address them).

The point is that comparability will vary by provision. For some provisions, the written constitution measures institutions across countries fairly completely; for other provisions, the written constitution covers only a patchwork group of states. In these latter cases, of course, all is not lost: one may profitably ask whether it matters whether a provision is constitutionalized in some places, but not others.

### **Interpretability across Context**

Another real challenge to the comparability of written constitutions across context concerns their interpretation. Certainly, understanding any text presupposes a shared understanding of language, whose terms and syntax might be highly context-dependent. Can analysts reliably interpret constitutions written across different periods, regions, and cultures? The methodology of the Comparative Constitutions Project provides at least one response to this question. In the protocol for the project, we provide for two independent interpretations of a given constitution as well as a reconciliation procedure that reviews any discrepancies between the two codings. The degree of inter-coder agreement on the set of survey questions on any given constitution may be taken as an indicator of the degree of error associated with the interpretation of that constitution.

Strikingly, when we analyze the variance in intercoder agreement, we find that it does not vary with respect to the region, period, or the language in which the constitution was drafted (Melton, Elkins, Ginsburg, and Leetaru 2012). What does matter, however, are aspects of the constitution's writing. In particular, longer constitutions with more topics present the most significant risk to interpretation. But apparently, modern coders residing in North America appear to have the same difficulty reading and interpreting a constitution regard-

less of the context of its drafting. These findings matter for those interested in the quality of our data, but they also have substantive implications. Constitutions are meant to last for generations and, often, are supposed to operate in multi-ethnic states. In this sense, it is absolutely critical that they are understood across temporal and cultural contexts.

### **Conclusion**

The issue of comparability looms over institutional research, though probably no more so than in any other comparative endeavor. And like most problems, that of comparability is only threatening and fearsome when you have avoided its gaze. Upon inspection, issues of comparability turn into research questions. What areas of the state and society do written constitutions cover? Does it matter if a rule is enumerated in a written constitution as opposed to in another part of higher law? Can citizens and elites read and interpret constitutions that are two centuries old? And so on.

These are interesting and compelling questions, which for my collaborators and me, have helped to turn a once small inquiry into the diffusion of constitutional ideas into a full-fledged research program.



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# Democracy and Good Government

by Nicholas Charron and Victor Lapuente

Do democracies “perform better” than autocracies in terms of quality of government? Many may doubt so, simply by looking at China’s impressive lead over India in the provision of key public goods, ranging from adult literacy rate and gross higher-education enrolment to child mortality and life expectancy at birth. It is definitively tempting to argue that Chinese officials seem to be more committed to deliver those essential public goods than their Indian counterparts (Sen 2011, 5).

In a series of papers (Charron and Lapuente 2010; 2012a, 2012b) we have explored to which extent there is a systematic empirical relationship between the type of political system— mostly focusing, yet not exclusively, on the continuum between fully-fledged democracies and pure autocracies—and the quality of government—understood as a government that performs

its activities in an impartial way and without corruption. We proceed here to summarize the main findings.

The empirical puzzle we address can be visualized in Figure 1, that plots in the horizontal axis a common proxy for the level of democracy (from Teorell et al. 2008) and in the vertical axis a common proxy for the level of quality of government from the World Bank’s Worldwide Governance Indicators, (Kaufman et al 2011). The countries with governments that deliver their policies in a more impartial and less corrupt way—e.g. the Nordic countries, Canada, or Germany—are highly democratic countries. Nevertheless, one can see also how some relatively autocratic regimes—the well-known case of Singapore, or Qatar—outperform many democracies all over the world—like India, Peru or Romania—, including some Western ones, like Italy or Greece.

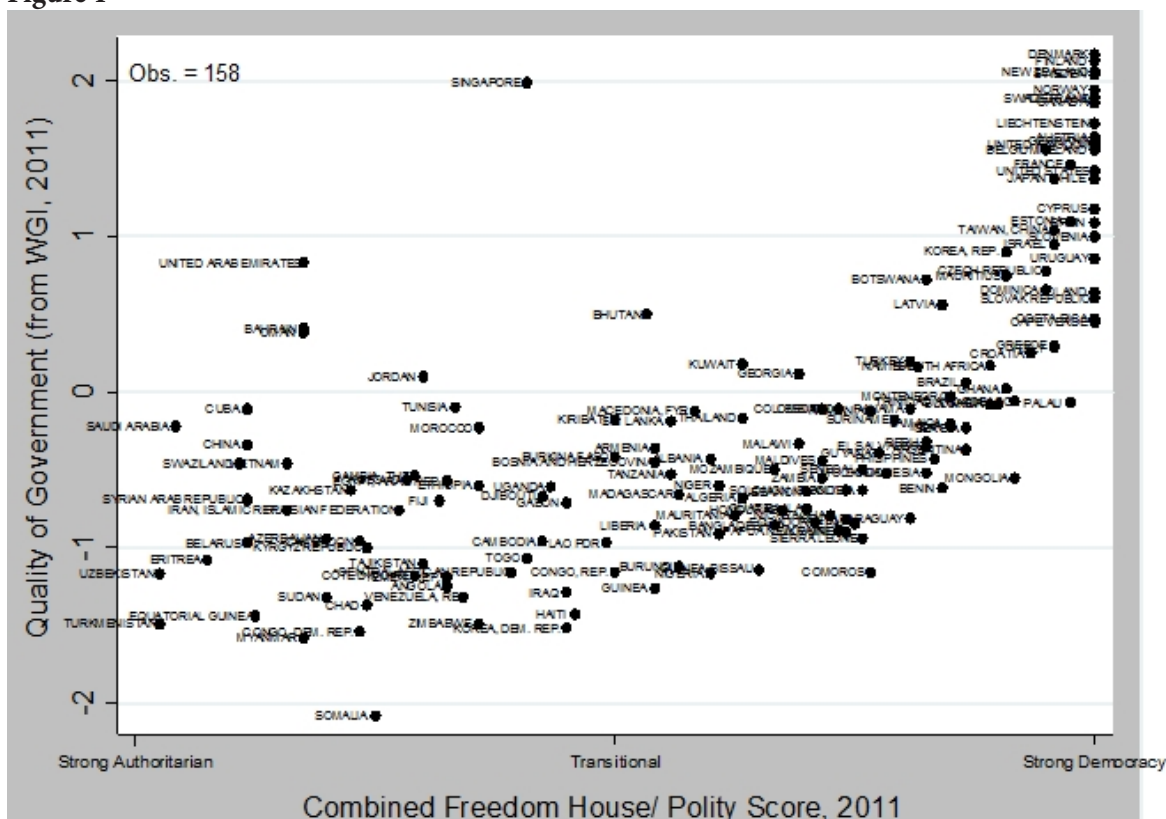
All in all, the relationship between these two variables resembles more a J-shaped curve than a linear relationship. It is also plausible to expect that this relationship could be driven or mediated by a third variable—such as economic development—that could affect both

transitions: from an autocratic regime to a democracy and from low to high quality of government.

Since the 1990s, numerous comparative studies have analyzed the impact of regime type on standard proxies for quality of governments—such as the protection of property rights, the quality of bureaucracy, the ability to control corruption and the prevalence of the rule of law—from what we could call a political economy perspective (Clague, Keefer, Knack and Olson 1996, Montinola and Jackman 2002, Sung 2004, Keefer 2007, Bäck and Hadenius 2008). That is, they tackle the issue from a mainly institutionalist or “supply-side” view: governments will provide impartial policies and public goods—instead of targeted, private or rent-seeking goods—as a function of the incentives faced by those who supply the policies—i.e. the rulers.

On the other hand, we consider that in order to understand the quality of government, we also need to take into account “demand-side” factors—i.e. which type of goods voters (in democracies) and core supporters (in autocracies) demand from their governments.

Figure 1

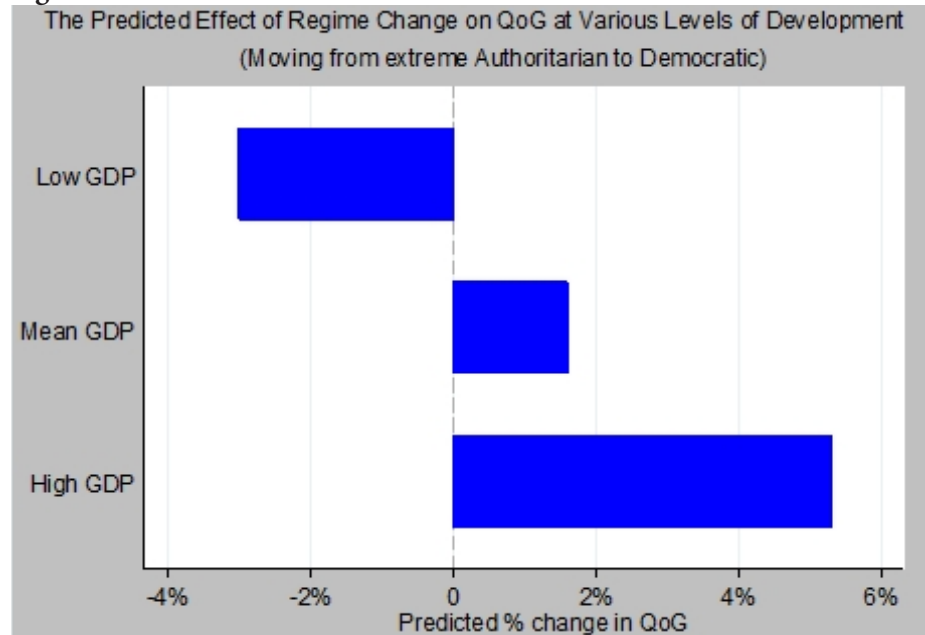


Similar to Welzel and Inglehart (2008), we try to bring “ordinary people” back into the study of good government by combining both “supply” and “demand” sides of the equation. The basic idea is that the degree to which institutions in a country are impartial and un-corrupt also reflects the priorities of citizens in a country. Building quality of government is often a long-term investment, and sometimes a critical mass of citizens might prefer consumption goods like patronage jobs to core supporters while other times prefer an impartial merit-recruited public workforce.

Our hypothesis is that citizens in low-income democracies will tend to prefer short-term benefits, ranging from “jobs of the boys” and other clientelistic practices to distributive targeted policies. Similar to Inglehart and Welzel’s (2005), these would be societies dominated by “survival” values. On the contrary, when societies develop, a larger number of individuals would shift from “survival” to “self-expression” values. As a result, more voters will be in a position to resist the short-term patronage in favor of the more long-term cost of creating a sophisticated bureaucracy able to execute policies in a more impartial and less corrupt way. Thus, it is in these democracies—i.e. those that are over a given threshold of wealth—where one should expect high levels of quality of government. In other words, we hypothesize that the impact of democracy on quality of government is contingent upon levels of economic development: in poor countries, autocracies will outperform democracies in quality of government because leaders have more incentives to follow the demands of citizens for immediate patronage in exchange for votes; while in rich countries, democracies will outperform autocracies in quality of government.

Figure 2 shows the main results. The indicator of quality of government used to build the graph is, a combination of the variables Bureaucratic Quality and Level of Perceived Corruption from the Political Risk Services’ (PRS) Inter-

**Figure 2**



national Country Risk Group (ICRG) data, covering 140 states from 1984 to 2003. The continuous variable of level of democracy is a combination of a 0-10 scaled Freedom House score and a 0-10 scaled Polity score. The three bars indicate what the effect of a strong change of political regime (from a highly authoritarian to a highly democratic system) is over the level of quality of government for, respectively, a low-income country (bottom 5%), a median-income country (50th percentile) and a wealthy country (top 5%).

This figure is an illustration of the time series models with control variables and a lagged dependent variable that we have done elsewhere (Charron and Lapuente 2010, 2012a, 2012b). Yet it highlights the main result from our research: that democracy seems to have a negative effects in terms of good government for relatively poor countries and positive effects for relatively rich ones. Our interpretation of these results is that democratic rulers tend to be more accountable to their citizens than their autocratic counterparts and that means underproviding public goods like an impartial bureaucracy and judiciary when citizens may prefer private/patronage goods and distributive targeted policies (i.e. in low-income countries). Conversely, democratic leaders have a stronger incentive than their au-

thoritarian counterparts to provide long-term impartial, uncorrupt public goods when their citizens, by virtue of their relatively high-income, may be in a position to demand long-sighted policies.



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# Governance: Disaggregating Concept and Measurement

by Michael Bratton

What are the most important governance challenges in new democracies? This brief article offers an answer based on a framework that disaggregates the concept of governance and illustrative results from recent social survey research in Africa.

Simply defined, governance is the act or process of imparting direction and coordination to governmental organizations in an environment. As a vague and complex concept, governance has multiple aspects: not only political, but also administrative and economic. Each of these dimensions can be further broken down for purposes of operational research, making, in all, a total of nine measurable dimensions.

The *administrative* dimensions of governance concern:

- *Legality*: whether the government observes a rule of law;
- *Transparency*: whether government procedures are open for all to see; and,
- *Honesty*: whether government officials are free of corruption.

The *economic* dimensions of governance cover:

- *Effectiveness*: whether government is able to attain its stated policy goals;
- *Efficiency*: whether public goods are delivered on a cost-effective basis; and,
- *Equity*: whether citizens enjoy equality of access to available public goods.

Finally, the *political* dimensions of governance consist of:

- *Responsiveness*: whether elected officials act according to popular priorities;

- *Accountability*: whether unresponsive public officials can be disciplined; and,
- *Legitimacy*: whether citizens willingly obey government commands.

Governments can be compared according to performance of these various governance functions. A government that does well or badly on one dimension will not necessarily perform the same way on all. For example, even if public services are delivered efficiently (that is, cost-effectively) public agencies may not be transparent (using procedures that all citizens can see and understand) or responsive (to citizen priorities).

Large-scale social surveys offer opportunities to measure each dimension of governance in fine-grained fashion. Although public opinion is not the only approach to measuring governance, it is an essential one in democratic regimes, where citizens supposedly enjoy oversight of government performance.

Table 1 (page 14) reports public attitudes about nine dimensions of governance, each measured by Afrobarometer surveys conducted in ten sub-Saharan African countries in 2005 and 2012. Each country sample represents a random cross-section of the national adult population and is weighted equally. The questionnaire items are posed in a polar-choice format in which survey respondents are asked to indicate which of two statements comes closest to their own opinion.

The administrative dimension of legality is operationalized as the president's perceived observance of the rule of law (Row 1). In 2005, a majority of citizens said that they saw the political chief executive as operating in accordance with the country's constitution (by a margin of 57% to 20%). Moreover, the proportion that regarded governance as legally constituted increased between 2005 and 2012, a period in which term limits on presidential tenure were applied to executive succession in many African countries.

A similar pattern applies to effectiveness, an economic dimension of governance that refers to the capability of a government to attain stated policy goals (Row 4). The Afrobarometer first asks respondents to identify "the most important problems facing this country." It then asks: "How likely do you think it is that the government will solve this problem within the next five years?" Across 10 countries in 2012, many more people thought government could solve their priority problem (67%) than skeptically thought such an outcome unlikely (27%). Growing popular confidence in this aspect of governance may partly reflect improving economic conditions in several African countries over the past decade.

As an example of the political dimension of governance, we examine legitimacy (Row 9). Do Africans think that their government's have a right to rule? The relevant indicator concerns voluntary compliance to official commands. Over time, an overwhelming proportion (89%) considers that the government can legitimately require obedience; only tiny minorities think that if they did not vote for a government, they need not obey it. Indeed, in some places, compliance was so widespread as to approach unquestioning deference to whoever claims—rightfully or not—to occupy the offices of the state.

In case ordinary Africans appear as generous or gullible judges, it should be noted that they can also be profoundly critical of the quality of governance. Respondents reported extremely negative evaluations of transparency (an administrative dimension of governance), efficiency (an economic dimension) and responsiveness (a political dimension). On transparency, just 18% in 2005 thought that "government procedures are easy to understand", rising imperceptibly to 20% in 2012 (Row 2). And on efficiency, fewer than one third (31%) considered that "public services are easily accessible" in 2005, slipping to 27% in 2012 (Row 5). In the largest governance setback over time, however, the proportion reporting political re-

**Table 1: Dimensions of Governance**  
**Public Opinion Indicators, 10 African Countries, 2005 and 2012**

Row	Dimension of Governance	Indicator	Afrobarometer Round 3 2005 (N=14481)	Afrobarometer Round 5 2012 (N=20413)
<b>ADMINISTRATIVE</b>				
1	<b>Legality</b>			
		The president usually observes the constitution	57	67
		The president often ignores the constitution	20	21
2	<b>Transparency</b>			
		Government procedures are easy to understand	18	20
		Government procedures are too complicated	66	69
3	<b>Honesty</b>			
		No or few government officials are corrupt	47	54
		Most or all government officials are corrupt	30	36
<b>ECONOMIC</b>				
4	<b>Effectiveness</b>			
		Government can solve most important problems	52	67
		Government cannot solve important problems	38	27
5	<b>Efficiency</b>			
		Public services are easily accessible	31	27
		Public services are difficult to obtain	46	55
6	<b>Equity</b>			
		Government usually treats people equally	46	50
		Government often treats people unequally	44	47
<b>POLITICAL</b>				
7	<b>Responsiveness</b>			
		Elected representatives usually try to listen	24	16
		Elected representatives often fail to listen	67	81
8	<b>Accountability</b>			
		The conduct of elections is mostly free and fair	67	68
		For the most part, elections are not free and fair	23	27
9	<b>Legitimacy</b>			
		The government can rightfully demand compliance	89	89
		If you did not vote for a government, you need not obey	9	10

sponsiveness (“elected representatives usually try to listen”) sank substantially from a low 24% in 2005 to an even lower 16% in 2012. This result points to a key weakness in newly democratized regimes in Africa, namely that the electorate feels increasingly isolated from the leaders they have sent to the national assembly. They complain that legislative representatives only visit their home districts at election time and that they spend more time pursuing self-interest rather than the public good.

Along with a lack of transparency in government procedures and difficulty in gaining low-cost access to basic public services, African citizens tell us that a shortfall in political responsiveness is the greatest and most urgent challenge to achieving good-quality governance in their countries.



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Cell entries are percentages of adults surveyed. Calculated by collapsing 5-point scales (from “disagree strongly” to “agree strongly”) into binary indicators. Totals may not add to 100 because “neither” and “don’t know” are not reported.

10 African countries are: Benin, Botswana, Cape Verde, Ghana, Kenya, Malawi, South Africa, Tanzania, Uganda, Zimbabwe

# Measuring Fiscal Governance

by Mark Hallerberg

During the recent financial crisis, discussions of “fiscal governance” have moved from academic papers to international institutions, such as the European Commission and the International Monetary Fund, and have even appeared in the mainstream press. Beliefs that “good fiscal governance” will lead to more fiscal discipline and, consequently, more stable and successful euro inspired an international treaty, the “Fiscal Compact,” that 25 European Union member states signed. This treaty requires signatories to adopt some form of a budget balance rule and either to have, or to create, a domestic “watchdog,” or “fiscal council,” to monitor what the member states are doing.

This all begs the question—what exactly is “fiscal governance,” and how should a comparative political economist measure it? Indeed, conceptual differences explain some differences in measurement across datasets, and this short piece traces the theoretical arguments and the variables meant to measure them. It first goes through older literature, then it compares the main datasets available today. Since this is a newsletter-style piece, some of my comments are impressionistic. The focus is on available datasets.

In terms of the conceptual framework, what all authors in this genre have in common is a belief that how one makes the budget affects fiscal outcomes. One

*In terms of the conceptual framework, what all authors in this genre have in common is a belief that how one makes the budget affects fiscal outcomes.*

core argument is that deficits may develop because the existing institutions encouraged a large common pool resource (CPR) problem. The idea is that a given politician worries only about her constituency. In fiscal terms, she cares about the benefits she generates in terms of spending and the costs in terms of taxation for her constituency. If such politicians are allowed simply to sum up their “ideal” budgets, spending will be higher than if they had considered the full tax burden (Weingast, Shepsle, and Johnson 1981). Velasco (2000) notes that, in a multi-period game with politicians who discount the future, deficits will be larger as well (see also Hallerberg, Strauch, and von Hagen 2009; Krogstrup and Wyplosz 2010).

This type of argument differs from one that focuses on partisan differences. Most empirical models these authors use do include a measure for partisanship, but the expectation is that more decentralized decision-making rules are more important than whether the left or the right is in power when explaining outcomes like deficits and debt burdens. While the extent to which a given variable really relates to a common CPR model differs, most authors cite it.

That fiscal rules and institutions may have some sort of effect has been debated for decades of course, and one institutional reform meant to centralize the budget process was to have a given body set limits on spending before deciding how to divide the spending. This logic underlay the 1974 Congressional Budget and Impoundment Control Act, which meant that the US Congress should pass first a budget resolution before considering more detailed appropriations (Ferejohn and Krehbiel 1987; see their superb critique of the reform as well). Several other countries have since introduced such “top-down” elements.

The initial articles looking at budget centralization were case studies, but cross-country studies began appear-

ing in the 1990s. Von Hagen (1992) considered the EC-12 at the time, and he argued that European Community members with more hierarchical fiscal institutions had better fiscal performance. While von Hagen (1992) discussed the role of finance ministers in centralizing the process among other attributes of the budget process, others focused specifically on finance ministers, with Hahn et. al (1996) providing

*...the expectation is that more de-centralized decisionmaking rules are more important than whether the left or right is in power when explaining outcomes.*

data on nine industrialized countries and arguing that “stronger” finance ministers lead to better fiscal outcomes. Alesina et. al (1999) provide a database for Latin American countries, while Filc and Scartascini (2007) use Alesina et. al as a basis for an update and a reconsideration. Hallerberg and Scartascini (2013) update the dataset in their discussion of why some Latin American countries reformed their fiscal institutions.

There is also a literature on American state governments that compares differences in constitutionally-mandated rules and finds that tighter rules improve fiscal discipline (Poterba 1996; Strauch 1998). Poterba and Rueben (2001) examine state bond yields and state fiscal rules. The National Association of State Budget Officials (NASBO) provides summaries of constitutional rules. Hou and Smith (2006), however, counter that the constitutional rules are too vague, and are sometimes difficult to understand, and they propose a focus on the statutory rules. They provide data for the time period 1950-2004 in Hou and Smith (2010).

Several approaches characterize the



2000s. The first focuses on fiscal rules that somehow limit what the government can do. These may be constitutional rules, such as the “debt brake” now in place, although they can be statutory instead of constitutional. They may limit the size of the overall debt burden; in Poland, the constitution specifies steps the government must take when the debt burden is above 50% of GDP, and they become progressively more binding in steps as the debt burden approaches 60% of GDP.

International institutions are a main provider of such datasets. The European Commission collects data for European Union countries which is available at [http://ec.europa.eu/economy\\_finance/db\\_indicators/fiscal\\_governance/fiscal\\_rules/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/economy_finance/db_indicators/fiscal_governance/fiscal_rules/index_en.htm).

It focuses on the strength of fiscal rules and creates a “fiscal rule strength index” and a “fiscal rule index.” The former focuses on the statutory basis of the rule, how easily one can revise its objectives, who is in charge of monitoring and enforcing the rule, what enforcement mechanisms are in place, and the media visibility of the rule. The latter takes the initial index and considers what portion of the budget is covered. Data is available for the time period 1990–2011. One finding is that the use of such rules has increased almost continuously since 1990. The empirical work cited on this web page suggests that more rules is at least correlated with higher fiscal discipline.

The International Monetary Fund has the most recent dataset that covers the most countries over the longest period of time—it provides data for 81 countries from 1985–September 2012 and is available here: <http://www.imf.org/external/pubs/cat/longres.aspx?sk=40101.0>.

Measurement is similar to the Commission database, with a focus on rules, their legal basis, escape clauses, and who monitors them. Its comprehensiveness is a strength, and the co-authors continue to update and refine the database. A potential concern is the end date of

fiscal rules. Argentina, for example, is listed as suspending its balance budget rule it put in place in 2000 in 2008, and one could question whether the country dropped the rule earlier. I suspect that other countries have weakened or ignored their rules as well. But this is an important effort.

Finally, the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development has run two surveys, with the latest one for 2007/08 covering 97 countries and including 99 questions. While this dataset covers the fewest years, it is the most detailed. I have been nervous about such a long questionnaire in terms of data reliability (will a respondent really sit through such a long document? If so, who answered it?), but the second survey was still shorter than the first, which ran over 80 pages. It is nevertheless a good snapshot of not only constitutional rules but budget practices as well on the eve of the financial crisis. The data are available here: <http://www.oecd.org/governance/budgeting/internationalbudgetpracticesandproceduresdatabase.htm>

The second approach focuses on budget transparency. Politicians want to appear competent to voters, and they would like to be able to raise spending strategically without voters realizing the consequences for the debt burden.

Alt and Lassen (2006) find that more fiscal transparency leads to lower debts and deficits both in OECD countries and, in Alt, Lassen, and Skilling (2002), in the American states as well.

Wehner and de Renzio (2013) investigate why fiscal transparency varies across countries. They find that free and fair elections in particular increase transparency, as does partisan competition in democratically elected legislatures. They, in turn, rely on data that the International Budget Partnership has collected under its Open Budget Initiative beginning in 2005, with the latest version of their Open Budget Index available for 2012 (see <http://internationalbudget.org/what-we-do/major-ibp-initiatives/open-budget-initiative/>).

tiative/).

Wehner and de Renzio’s analysis includes a dataset of 85 countries from the OBI. As Wehner and de Renzio note, this dataset appears more regularly, and is more detailed, than similar data that the IMF has collected under its “Code of Good Practices on Fiscal Transparency” begun in 1998. The IMF is, however, reconsidering its “Code” to focus especially on public sector risks to the financial sector (see IMF 2012). Alt and Lowery (2010) similarly consider transparency in U.S. states.

In an important paper, Alt, Lassen, and Wehner (2012) argue that other fiscal

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rules do not work when transparency is low. They also discuss in some detail in their Appendix 3 different ways of measuring transparency and the strengths and weaknesses of the variables.

The final approach focuses on the decision-making process itself. Readers should note that I am one of the proponents of this approach. As we write in Hallerberg, Strauch, and von Hagen (2009), we think one should go beyond the simple formal rules to consider the decision-making process.

Our concern is that there are problems with looking only at formal limits on government fiscal policy. Germany, for example, had a fiscal rule in its constitution through 2010 that borrowing should not exceed gross investment. But there was another rule in the con-

stitution that stated that the government should consider the economic balance. So German governments in practice cited the second rule when breaking the first (which governments did almost half the time through 2010).

*... there are two “ideal” forms of fiscal governance in parliamentary democracies. In one-party governments or in governments that approximate them, “delegation” to a strong finance minister in the budget process suffices to decrease the common pool resource (CPR) problem.*

Many countries also “suspended” their rules during the recent economic crisis. This is not meant to say that such rules are meaningless, of course—they may be useful as an expression of what governments want to accomplish, and indeed, the datasets listed above provide terrific information on what rules states have put in place. To some extent, it is

both an empirical and a modeling question whether the straight fiscal rules themselves suffice to improve budget balances.

Nevertheless, Hallerberg, Strauch, and von Hagen (2009), building on von Hagen’s (1992) original paper, argue that there are two “ideal” forms of fiscal governance in parliamentary democracies. In one-party governments or in governments that approximate them, “delegation” to a strong finance minister in the budget process suffices to decrease the CPR problem. Under multi-party governments, “fiscal contracts” where the parties themselves negotiate the targets is the effective route to greater fiscal discipline. Because these targets are usually multi-annual and numeric, some may consider them to be simple “fiscal rules.” We contend, however, that the process of setting them, and the political commitment to them usually in a coalition agreement, makes them preferable to a simple constitutional rule.

These authors present a dataset that examines procedural rules and regulations consistent with either ideal type through the various stages of the budget process for the EU-15 from 1985 to 2004. Yläoutinen (2005) extends the dataset to East European countries that acceded to the EU while Hallerberg and Yläoutinen (2010) provide information for these countries for 1998-2007. Throughout, there is a focus on why politicians may find it in their interest

to adopt such rules in the first place. Work that has used these datasets include Fabrizio and Mody (2006) and Martin and Vanberg (2012). I am in the process of updating this dataset to the crisis period (through 2012), and expanding it to include OECD countries and not just European Union Member States.

Which dataset one should use depends upon one’s conception of “fiscal governance,” the time period, and the countries. All of them share the contention that institutional choices matter when explaining fiscal outcomes.



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## Datasets

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### ParlGov - A New Data Infrastructure in Comparative Politics

by Holger Döring and Philip Manow

Most political scientist would probably agree that there is much room for improvement in the provision of integrated political data on election outcomes, cabinet composition and party positions. Data availability is not the problem as there are well established data collections such as Mackie and Rose (1991), Woldendorp et al. (1998), Nohlen and Stöver (2010), and the yearly political data section of the European Journal of Political Research (EJPR). Yet, often data is available in printed form only, focuses only on parties or elections or cabinets and the various, existing data sources are hard to com-

***The dataset covers 35 democracies with observations on all parties, all (national and European) elections as well as cabinets over the entire post-war period.***

bine. As of yet the discipline has failed to provide a classical collective good: integrated, up-to-date, readily available and easily readable data on parties (and their political positions), on elections and cabinets.

In the following we introduce a new

data infrastructure that addresses these shortcomings - ParlGov (Parliament and Government composition database; [www.parlgov.org](http://www.parlgov.org)). It has been publicly available for almost three years and we released its fourth version in October 2012 (Döring and Manow 2012). The data infrastructure makes use of recent internet technologies and has four components:

- a database to file information non-redundantly,
- a web interface to present observations in a more accessible manner and
- computer scripts to calculate institutional parameters, as well as
- a feedback system that allows users to contribute their (country or party) expertise in an open and transparent way.

In what follows, we will briefly describe the content, the setup and the features of ParlGov (for more detail and an application to the EU, see Döring (2013)), a data set that should be of particular interest to comparativists.

#### Data

The dataset covers 35 democracies with observations on all parties, all (national and European) elections as well as all cabinets over the entire post-war period. All information can be easily combined by making use of unique identifiers for parties, elections and cabinets. Party IDs in ParlGov are connected to a large number of external data sets (see below).

The latest stable release of ParlGov includes observations for 1400 parties and classifies them into party families. It records a party's name in the original

language, its English name and the abbreviation. In addition, name changes over a party's history are coded, as well as most mergers and splits. This allows tracking the evolution of entire party systems. In addition, parties in ParlGov are linked to well known datasets with information on party positions such as the expert surveys by Castles and Mair (1984), Huber and Inglehart (1995), Ray (1999), Benoit and Laver (2006), and the Chapel Hill Expert Survey Series (Hooghe et al. 2010; Steenbergen and Marks 2007), or the Comparative Manifesto Data (Budge et al. 2001; Klingemann et al. 2006), the EU Profiler (Trechsel and Mair 2009), and the European Election Study (EES) (2009). One can therefore add position data from various external sources to all observations in ParlGov. The combination of position data with information on parliament and cabinet composition allows one to derive easily positional information for parliaments and cabinets (their partisan-political 'centre of gravity') through software routines, as well as a number of derivate indicators like the median parliamentary or cabinet party.

ParlGov currently also includes 680 elections with about 5,800 electoral results at the party level for all the parties with seats in national parliaments or

### ***Dataset Review Submissions***

If you have submissions for the dataset review section of the APSA-CP Newsletter, please email [kayser@hertie-school.org](mailto:kayser@hertie-school.org).



the European Parliament. The coding scheme distinguishes parties that form electoral alliances and run on a joint list from the parliamentary groups these parties join in the legislature. Furthermore, ParlGov reports data on 930 cabinets with 2300 cabinet parties. Again, unique identifiers make this data on cabinets fully compatible with the information on parties and legislatures and various external data sources.

## Presentation

All data is presented via a web-interface providing a modern alternative to data handbooks. This design combines the advantages of data handbooks with the requirement to have machine-readable data formats. For instance, each party is presented on one page that combines information from various data tables. The page displays all information about the party that is included in the ParlGov data infrastructure, as well as a list of all the names of parties in external datasets that are linked to the observation.

The list of elections in which a party participated is linked to pages that show all parties that took part in that particular election with their respective electoral results. The page contains information about the governments that formed after this election and provides links to separate pages listing the cabinet parties and further information about the cabinet. This information is based on the same database tables that are used to generate the combined data sets. The online presentation makes our coding more transparent and open for scrutiny by country or party experts. The page does also allow users to offer feedback, i.e. to comment, correct and add information.

Data in ParlGov is based on a relational database that stores observations non-redundantly according to a defined table schema. For an election result we record information in at least two tables, one table containing election-

specific information, such as date and turnout, a second contains information on the parties that took part in the election with their number of votes and seats. For each election, the first type of information is observed at the election level, the second at the party level.

We can add more information to these parties, such as information about parties' left/right positions or previous electoral performance through the use of unique identifiers. On the webpage we provide sample scripts (in Stata or R) that help users to link ParlGov data with external observations.

We also provide calculations for some analytical measures that are of interest to political scientists and that are based on the primary and external information provided by ParlGov, such as calculations for disproportionality, the advantage ratio, and the effective number of parties.

*By having these three formats we can offer versions that are replicable (stable version), up-to-date (development version), and include additional information (experimental version).*

The data in ParlGov is also available as downloadable files. The database and all data tables are publicly available with documentation for each table and variable. The released versions include a snapshot of the entire web page. However, for most users three main tables are sufficient as they provide ParlGov's main content.

We provide tables on parties, elections and cabinets that combine information from the various database tables. The

party table includes party information and IDs from other data sets with party positions. The election table records results of national and EP elections and the cabinet table includes all parties in parliament at each instance of cabinet formation. These tables serve as a starting point for most applications of ParlGov and there is rarely the need to draw on any of the primary database tables or the database file.

## Versions

Given the continuous evolution of our data collection, the correction of old and the addition of new information such as recent elections or cabinet formations, the database undergoes constant change. The regular improvement of the data comes into conflict with standards of replication. To address this problem, we provide three versions of the ParlGov data infrastructure.

First, there is a stable version released once a year, which is fully documented and which can serve as a reference for usages of the data in publications. This version gives fixed, replicable, archived information and should provide the basis for empirical work. Stable versions are archived in the project and at the EUDO Dataverse at the EUI in Florence.

Second, there is a development version, which includes all recent changes, user feedback and error reports. The development version provides the basis for the next stable release.

Finally, there is a third version available online that is accessible via login with a guest account only and has some information in addition to the development version. This experimental version includes information (countries and variables) that we have not yet collected for all cases and that we may add to future versions.

By having these three formats we can offer versions that are replicable (stable

version), up-to-date (development version), and include additional information (experimental version).

### Future Plans

We have worked on ParlGov for more than five years and it has been publicly available for almost three years now. Over this period many scholars have helped us improve the data infrastructure by pointing out errors, and by giving advice and encouragement.

However, we have also learned that the way we structure the data in ParlGov

*We learned that some of the core concepts of comparative politics are ill-specified. What constitutes a new party? What a successor-party? For recording our data we usually relied on the categories of the primary information we use and document.*

does not fit well with established workflows on single datasets that are fully prepared for statistical packages (codebook, labels, format etc.).

Our users are required to create many variables of interest by using merge functions of statistical packages, since ParlGov focuses on primary observations, whereas users need to calculate secondary (derived) observations mainly on their own. With ParlGov it is possible to create time series data (country-year format) on the ideological composition of parliaments and cabinets but these observations are not included in the data set and need to be programmed. This has sometimes stood in the way of an easy use of ParlGov.

For future versions, we plan to add more examples and to provide more R- or Stata-routines to help users working with the information we provide.

In addition, we learned that some of the core concepts of comparative politics are ill-specified. What constitutes a new party, what a successor-party? How do we code a party family? For recording our data we usually relied on the categories of the primary information we use and document. However, these proved not always to be consistent, and during coding we frequently ran into corner cases. It is our goal to offer better documented and more systematic coding rules in future versions.

As of today, ParlGov is the only fully web-based data infrastructure that systematically combines information on parties, elections and cabinets for advanced democracies over the entire

post-war period. ParlGov has benefited greatly from modern internet technologies. We hope that similar projects will emerge and connect in the future.



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## *A New Approach to Governance Indicators*

The Hertie School of Governance, in tandem with the inaugural launch of its Governance Report, has developed and released a new set of governance indicators. Conceptualizing governance as extending both above and below the nation-state to include sub-national, international and civil-society organizations, the new indicators include a broader set of measures than are conventionally employed to study governance and its consequences (Anheier, Stanig, Kayser 2013; Stanig and Kayser 2013).

The Governance Report, as an annual publication, will continue to develop new indicators for the themes of each issue and to update ongoing time-series at regular intervals.

**The indicators can be found at [www.governancereport.org](http://www.governancereport.org).**

## News and Notes

Volume 22, Issue 1, Winter 2012



### New Editor for the Concepts and Methods Working Paper Series

*by the Committee on Concepts and Methods*

The Committee on Concepts and Methods (C&M) announces that Andreas Schedler of CIDE Mexico City is stepping down as editor of our two C&M working paper series and that Cas Mudde of the University of Georgia will be taking over as the new editor.

Founded by Giovanni Sartori and friends, C&M was the first research committee recognized by the International Political Science Association (IPSA) in 1970. It promotes conceptual and methodological discussion in political science and provides a forum of debate for adherents of all methodological schools, who otherwise tend to conduct their deliberations at separate tables.

C&M publishes two series of working papers that readers may consult and download for free at the C&M website ([www.concepts-methods.org](http://www.concepts-methods.org)):

- *Political Concepts* contains work of excellence on political concepts and political language. It seeks to include innovative contributions to concept analysis, language usage, concept operationalization, and measurement.
- *Political Methodology* contains work of excellence on methods and methodology in the study of politics. It invites innovative work on fundamental questions of research design, the construction and evaluation

of empirical evidence, theory building and theory testing.

Founded by Andreas Schedler in 2005, C&M has published close to 100 working papers that have collectively been viewed and downloaded many thousands of times. Putting out the two working paper series is now perhaps the most visible and important activity of C&M.

The working paper series is open to

***The working paper series is open to excellent and original research from all sub-disciplines and methodological approaches.***

excellent and original work from all sub-disciplines and methodological approaches. In particular, we are looking to increase the work in American Politics, Comparative Politics outside of Europe and Latin America, International Relations and Political Theory as well as research using interpretive and quantitative methods. All suitable submissions will be reviewed by two peers, who will be experts on the methodological aspect of the paper (after

all, the innovation should be methodological rather than substantial). Importantly, they are asked to review the submission constructively, looking to improve rather than reject the paper, understanding that it is work-in-progress rather than the final product.

The working paper series also aims to be(come) the place for high-quality original, conceptual and methodological work that is unlikely to be published (in that detail) in top journals. We are thinking in particular of extensive conceptual and methodological discussions in PhD dissertations, (reliability and validity) assessments of important datasets, and robustness tests of existing research using conceptual or methodological innovations. Unlike articles in most academic journals, WP papers can address what and how questions; e.g. what is the best conceptualization of party ideology? How can religiosity best be operationalized cross-regionally? What dataset provides the most reliable and valid results in studies of political mobilization? Further, working papers that do address *why* questions do not necessarily have to provide empirically substantiated alternative explanations for the theories they critically assess. Most importantly, the critiques should predominantly be conceptual or methodological.

### ***Concepts and Methods Working Paper Submissions***

For more information on the C&M Working Papers series, and to download the published papers for free, please visit the website: <http://www.concepts-methods.org/WorkingPapers>. If you want to submit a manuscript to the C&M Working Paper series, send it to [wp@concepts-methods.org](mailto:wp@concepts-methods.org).

If you are not sure whether your paper will fit the series, please feel free to contact the editor, Cas Mudde ([mudde@uga.edu](mailto:mudde@uga.edu)), to discuss your paper.



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The Organized Section in Comparative Politics is the largest organized section in the American Political Science Association (APSA). The Section organizes panels for the APSA's annual meetings; awards annual prizes for best paper, best article, best book, and best data set; and oversees and helps finance the publication of this newsletter, APSA-CP.

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