

Cambridge University Press
978-1-107-01699-6 - Making Democratic Governance Work: How Regimes Shape Prosperity,
Welfare, and Peace
Pippa Norris
Excerpt
[More information](#)

PART I

INTRODUCTION

Cambridge University Press
978-1-107-01699-6 - Making Democratic Governance Work: How Regimes Shape Prosperity,
Welfare, and Peace
Pippa Norris
Excerpt
[More information](#)

Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-01699-6 - Making Democratic Governance Work: How Regimes Shape Prosperity, Welfare, and Peace

Pippa Norris

Excerpt

[More information](#)

I

Does Democratic Governance Determine Human Security?

This book focuses on three core questions. Is democratic governance good for economic prosperity? Has this type of regime accelerated progress toward achieving the Millennium Development Goals, social welfare, and human development? Does it generate a peace dividend and reduce conflict at home? Prosperity, welfare, and peace are core components of human security, reflecting critical risks and interrelated threats facing an increasingly complex and globalized world.¹ Despite the importance of understanding these questions, and despite the vast research literature generated on each of these topics, remarkably little consensus has emerged about any of these issues. Within the international community, democracy and good governance are widely advocated as intrinsically desirable and important goals. Nevertheless, several alternative schools of thought continue to dispute the consequences of democratic governance, each presenting contrasting visions about the most effective strategy for expanding human security. This book seeks to develop a more unified theory and to examine systematic empirical evidence throwing fresh light on this debate.

During recent decades, the *democracy-promotion* perspective has become increasingly popular, championed by commentators such as Thomas Carothers, Larry Diamond, Morton Halperin, Michael McFaul, Joseph Siegle, and Michael Weinstein, among others. This perspective emphasizes that deepening and consolidating the principles and procedures of liberal democracy will have intrinsic benefits, reinforcing human rights around the globe, as well as instrumental payoffs, by improving human security.² Through constraining predatory leaders, expanding voice and participation, and empowering citizens to rid themselves of incompetent rulers, democracy-promoters hope that this type of regime will make elected officials more accountable to ordinary people and thus more responsive to social needs and political grievances. In places undergoing transitions from autocracy – exemplified by developments in Egypt, Myanmar/Burma, and Tunisia – democracy-promoters argue that it is essential to strengthen human rights and fundamental freedoms for their own sake. In addition, however, commentators such as Halperin, Siegle, and

Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-01699-6 - Making Democratic Governance Work: How Regimes Shape Prosperity, Welfare, and Peace

Pippa Norris

Excerpt

[More information](#)

Weinstein argue that this process also delivers concrete benefits by reducing poverty, expanding educational opportunities and building the conditions for lasting peace in developing societies. Carothers identifies a standard template that the international community seeks to foster in transitions from autocracy and the consolidation of democracy. The early stages of this process include developing constitutional frameworks respecting human rights, strengthening competitive political parties, and holding competitive elections that meet international standards. The process moves on with a series of initiatives designed to strengthen the capacity of effective and inclusive legislatures, professionalizing independent judicial bodies and the courts, decentralizing decision making for local government, and also expanding participation in civil society organizations, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), and the independent media.³ Yet it is striking that the standard democracy template that Carothers recognizes as practiced by most democracy aid programs is not also directed toward state-building, with relatively little attention devoted toward activities such as strengthening public sector management in the civil service and central government ministries, establishing civilian control of militia, and training security forces. The power of the core executive is commonly regarded by democracy-promoters as part of the problem, not part of the solution to achieving developmental goals for meeting social needs.

Despite the popularity of democracy promotion, these initiatives have come under growing challenge from alternative viewpoints. Where basic human security is lacking, diverse commentators such as Simon Chesterman, James Fearon, Francis Fukuyama, Samuel Huntington, Stephen Krasner, David Laitin, and Roland Paris have all advocated *state-building* in postconflict societies.⁴ From the state-building perspective, the poorest developing societies – places such as Somalia, Chad, Timor-Leste, and Southern Sudan – can be understood as “weak” or “failed” states emerging from a long legacy of conflict and anarchy where the central authorities have limited capacity to maintain order and manage the delivery of many basic public goods and services.⁵ Governments struggle to guarantee conditions of public safety (such as in Côte d’Ivoire, Somalia, and the Democratic Republic of Congo), to protect against the worst effects of humanitarian and natural crisis (such as following the devastating earthquake in Haiti, floods in Benin, and famine in Niger), and to provide universal access to schooling and healthcare for their citizens (such as in Liberia). There is no single understanding of the concept of state-building, but it is commonly thought to include public sector reforms designed to strengthen the core functions of executive agencies, government ministries, the civil service, the courts, security services, local government agencies, and public sector management. The core functions of the state restored through this process including the capacity to maintain security and rule of law; to provide basic services, such as emergency relief, schools, and healthcare; to formulate and administer budget plans; and to collect taxation revenues.⁶ Cases such as Timor-Leste, Kosovo, Afghanistan, Liberia, and Southern Sudan exemplify the complex dilemmas raised by attempts by the international community to rebuild government

Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-01699-6 - Making Democratic Governance Work: How Regimes Shape Prosperity, Welfare, and Peace

Pippa Norris

Excerpt

[More information](#)*Does Democracy Determine Human Security?*

5

capacity.⁷ The state-building school of thought generally acknowledges the normative value of democracy as an abstract ideal, but recognizes the pragmatic benefits of strengthening governance institutions as the overarching priority. In the strongest version of this argument, state-builders contend that in “weak” or “fragile” states, democracy-promotion should be deferred, with the postponement of multiparty elections or attempts to strengthen civil society organizations. This idea has also been increasingly reinforced by several agencies in the international community, led by the World Bank, which emphasize the developmental benefits thought to accrue from strengthening the institutions of “good governance,” reflecting the principles of transparency, accountability, and rule of law.

Lastly, the claimed beneficial consequences of both democracy-promotion and state-building for development are questioned by the *structural* view, emphasizing the role of deep drivers of human security reflecting fixed and enduring conditions, irrespective of the type of regime in power.⁸ From this perspective, countries are poor because, like Liberia, they are land-locked and stranded at the periphery of international trade markets. Or, like Somalia, they lack investment in human capital, new technologies, and physical infrastructure (transportation, communications, factories, clinics, and schools). Or, like Bangladesh, they are located in an area vulnerable to tropical diseases and susceptible to natural disasters such as floods and droughts. Or, like the Democratic Republic of Congo, they are plagued by the scourge of violent conflict, deep-seated social inequality, and ethnic divisions. Or perhaps states confront “all of the above.” For all these reasons, no matter the most heroic attempts by the international community and national leaders to strengthen and transform democratic governance, it is thought Panglossian to dream that through the process of regime change, a Niger could thereby rise up the ladder of development to become a Nigeria or a Nicaragua, much less a Norway. Structuralists emphasize that the type of regime has minimal impact on human security, in part because political institutions are themselves the *product* of deep-seated socioeconomic and geographic conditions (the classic “Lipset thesis”) rather than functioning as an independent cause of development.⁹ From this viewpoint, it is naïve and foolish at best, and dangerous at worst, to hope that complex political processes of regime transition and democratization can generate immediate economic payoffs, reductions in poverty, or peace processes that improve the lives of ordinary people and thereby transform societies. In the words of a saying popularized by Jacob Zuma, “You can’t eat democracy.”¹⁰

Arguments about these rival claims are commonly heard in contemporary foreign policy circles in Washington, Paris, Berlin, and London when debating the most effective interventions for the world’s trouble spots. In some cases, one side or the other wins the argument; after the fall of the Berlin Wall, it seemed to many self-evident that democratic elections, multiparty competition, and initiatives strengthening human rights, civil society, and the independent media were the most urgent priorities facing the reconstruction of postcommunist societies in Central and Eastern Europe. In other cases, such

Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-01699-6 - Making Democratic Governance Work: How Regimes Shape Prosperity, Welfare, and Peace

Pippa Norris

Excerpt

[More information](#)

as newly independent postconflict Timor-Leste and Kosovo, it seemed equally self-evident to many observers that the basic structure of the new government had to be created, including security services and justice, central ministries, and public sector management.

But in many other countries around the world lacking the institutions for both liberal democracy and for effective state capacity – in Iraq and Afghanistan, Egypt and Libya, or Southern Sudan and Yemen – the choices about strategic priorities are far from self-evident. In a situation of limited resources – and there are always limited resources – if you were determining priorities, do you choose to invest aid into parliaments – or courts? Do you train police – or journalists? Do you hold elections – or rebuild government agencies? Do you “do it all”? Or do you instead choose to bypass governments by investing directly in humanitarian aid, blue-helmet security, clean water wells, anti-malaria nets, child immunization, girls’ schools, health clinics, antiretroviral drugs, rural food collectives, microfinance, demilitarization job training, and de-mining programs, where the international community works in partnership directly with local civil society organizations, on the grounds that these types of initiatives are more likely to generate an immediate, concrete payoff in people’s lives than attempts to strengthen democratic governance? These are not simply abstract scholarly questions; debate about these sorts of dilemmas commonly divides donor agencies, NGOs, think-tanks, national governments, and multi-lateral organizations in the international development community.

The claims and counterclaims are often framed in the context of particular cases currently in the headlines, exemplified by the world’s fascination with dramatic events unfolding during the Arab uprisings in Tahrir Square, the battle for Tripoli, or protests and bloody repression in Homs, Manama, and Damascus. Understanding these issues has much wider and deeper resonance beyond specific cases, however, including for the ongoing violence in Democratic Republic of Congo, the stirrings of liberalization in Myanmar/Burma, and the famine in Somalia, with debates about priorities dividing scholars among diverse disciplines within the social sciences as well as practitioners.

As reviewed in subsequent chapters, by now an extensive econometric literature in comparative politics, developmental economics, and international studies has tested the impact of democratization and governance for the attainment of multiple developmental goals, employing empirical indices of income growth, social welfare, and conflict. Some studies of the empirical evidence do indeed report detecting significant linkages, where regimes influence human security. Yet the direction of causality is usually complex to interpret due to potential interaction. Cross-national and time-series data often prove messy and untidy. Research on regime effects has been fragmented across different subfields and indices. Models often suffer from omitted variables or countries. Cherry-picked cases have limited generalizability due to selection bias. Theories about the underlying mechanisms supposedly linking regimes and development remain underdeveloped. For all these reasons, overall this rich body of research has failed to demonstrate robust and consistent confirmation

Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-01699-6 - Making Democratic Governance Work: How Regimes Shape Prosperity, Welfare, and Peace

Pippa Norris

Excerpt

[More information](#)*Does Democracy Determine Human Security?*

7

of many core claims, disappointing the hopes of proponents. The lack of consensus weakens the ability of social scientists to offer rigorous evidence-based policy advice useful for the practitioner community.

It is important to attempt to construct a unified and comprehensive theory from these claims and counterclaims, building on each of these incomplete perspectives but going beyond them to synthesize our understanding about the impact of regimes on diverse dimensions of human security. The current debate reflects an unfortunate intellectual schism and an artificial division of labor among various disciplines in the social sciences. It also arises from divergent normative values. These intellectual blinkers are reinforced by the varied mandates of development agencies within the international community, such as the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the World Bank, and the European Union. Each argument presents an incomplete and partial vision, often deriving plausibility from certain particular cases but limited in its broader generalizability. Like scattered pieces of a jigsaw puzzle, the alternative perspectives become more coherent and comprehensive, and the supporting evidence becomes clearer and more convincing, if synthesized into an integrated theoretical framework.

THE UNIFIED THEORY OF DEMOCRACY + GOVERNANCE

Accordingly, the unified theory at the heart of this book predicts that the institutions of both liberal democracy *and* state capacity need to be strengthened in parallel for the most effective progress deepening human security, within the broader enduring fixed constraints posed by structural environments. Democracy and governance are rightly regarded as separate and distinct phenomena, both conceptually and empirically. This book contends that regimes reflecting *both* dimensions are necessary (although not sufficient) for effective development. These dimensions function separately, rather than interacting; thus, as discussed fully in later chapters, today certain types of states, exemplified by China and Singapore, are particularly strong in their capacity for governance, but they continue to fail to protect basic human rights. Others, such as Ghana, El Salvador, and Mali, have registered significant gains in democracy during recent years, but these regimes continue to be plagued by weak governance capacity to deliver public goods and services. Certain contemporary regimes are strong on both dimensions – not simply established Western democracies in affluent societies such as Canada, Germany, and Sweden, but also many diverse third wave democracies and emerging economies, including Chile, Slovenia, and Taiwan. Still other regimes around the world – exemplified by Somalia, Zimbabwe, and Azerbaijan – display an exceptionally poor performance on both democratic rights and state capacity. The book develops a new conceptual typology based on sharpening these general ideas and then focuses on identifying the impact of regimes on a series of vital developmental goals, including economic growth; social welfare, such as education and health; and reductions in interval armed conflict.

Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-01699-6 - Making Democratic Governance Work: How Regimes Shape Prosperity, Welfare, and Peace

Pippa Norris

Excerpt

[More information](#)

The unified theory assumes that development is most effective where regimes combine the qualities of democratic responsiveness *and* state effectiveness. The argument is based on several premises.

The first is that the institutions of liberal democracy encourage elected officials to pay attention to human security, principally where procedures allow citizens to express their demands; to hold public officials accountable for their actions; and to rid themselves of incompetent, corrupt, or ineffective leaders. These mechanisms encourage leaders to be responsive to social needs and concerns. In practice, liberal democracies often prove imperfect in each of these procedures, particularly where party competition is limited, electoral systems are manipulated, or channels of participation are skewed toward money more than people. But, at best, liberal democracies should make leaders procedurally accountable to citizens for their action. Democratic regimes strengthen downward electoral accountability and develop institutions providing multiple horizontal and vertical checks and balances so that vote-seeking politicians have strong incentives to pay attention to public concerns and to deliver services and programs meeting social needs.

But the unified theory also assumes as the second premise that by themselves, democratic institutions are insufficient to achieve development goals. The institutions in liberal democracy can limit the abuse of power, but curbing Leviathan does not ensure that leaders will necessarily have the capability to implement effective public policies addressing social needs. Indeed, excessive checks and balances may even prove counterproductive for the developmental state, bogging down decision making over urgent challenges in a morass of partisan interests and mutual veto points. Elected politicians do not, themselves, build schools, run clinics, or dig latrines. Moreover, the initial move from autocracy, and the rhetorical promises commonly made by leaders during transitional elections, often encourages rising expectations among ordinary citizens. If these cannot be met by elected officials, due to limited state capacity, this can be a recipe for frustration. Among critical citizens, this process can generate disillusionment with incumbent officeholders, and, if discontent spreads upward to become more diffuse, with the way that the regime works or even, ultimately, with the promise of liberal democratic ideals.¹¹

For all these reasons, the third premise of the unified theory suggests that the quality of governance – particularly state capacity – will also play a vital role in achieving developmental goals, by bolstering state effectiveness and thus allowing responsive officials to deliver things that citizens want: better security, schools, healthcare, and living standards. If unconstrained by democratic procedures and principles, however, in the long term, strong states are unlikely to serve the general public interest. Like the ancient concepts of Yin and Yang, the seemingly contrary forces of democratic responsiveness and governance effectiveness are conceptualized here as interconnected and interdependent in the world, balancing each other's strengths and weaknesses.

Lastly, and equally importantly, the central argument acknowledges that the quality of both democracy and governance is not isolated phenomena; regimes

Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-01699-6 - Making Democratic Governance Work: How Regimes Shape Prosperity, Welfare, and Peace

Pippa Norris

Excerpt

[More information](#)*Does Democracy Determine Human Security?*

9

are assumed to reflect, as well as shape, the enduring structural conditions and the broader environment in each society. Thus the fourth premise is that deep drivers of development function to restrict or facilitate progress in strengthening regimes based on democratic governance. These fixed conditions are exemplified by each state's physical size and regional location, their degree of integration into global markets, their pool of natural resources and physical capital, the human capital and skills of its labor force, the existence of deep-rooted ethnic divisions and destructive civil wars, the impact of deep-rooted religious cultural values, and also colonial legacies. All these fixed structural conditions need to be incorporated as controls in comprehensive models analyzing the effects of regimes on human security.

By itself, it could be argued that these claims are hardly novel, bold, nor indeed startlingly original. Yet, for several reasons, this argument needs to be forcefully reiterated and the evidence carefully scrutinized.

The previous literature commonly fails to acknowledge and test the importance of both democracy and governance, with scholars from different disciplines preferring to emphasize one or the other of these twin phenomena. In particular, the vast bulk of the literature has focused on the impact of democracy irrespective of state capacity. Moreover, previous research has failed to present robust and consistent evidence using multiple indices of human security and a comprehensive battery of controls; too often there is potential selection bias in the narrow choice of dependent variable. Much research has focused on income and wealth, but rich nations can still be vulnerable to a broad range of risks and threats, whether from social inequality; lack of education, healthcare, and provision for children and the elderly; or violence and armed conflict. Thus the robustness of any regime effects need to be tested against multiple indices.

In addition, the notion of the "quality of governance" is a complex and slippery concept, open to several interpretations and meanings. Indeed, "good governance" is now such a catch-all term that it has become a Humpty Dumpty Rorschach ink blot test meaning whatever the commentator likes it to mean. This is useful for diplomatic language in realpolitik, but lacks the precision necessary to make the term valuable for social science. The way that the notion of governance is conceptualized and measured in this book as reflecting 'bureaucratic state capacity' will be clarified and carefully unpacked and measured in subsequent chapters. Regimes most successful in achieving a wide range of developmental goals, the unified theory predicts, reflect a delicate balance between the effective mechanisms of *democratic accountability* (restricting the autonomy of rulers) and the effective mechanisms of *bureaucratic state capacity* (expanding the ability of public officials to implement policies serving the general public interest). This claim is subjected to rigorous scientific tests against a diverse range of developmental indicators, within the limits of the available evidence and analytical techniques, to see whether it holds water.

Before critics jump into the fray and attack the simple theoretical propositions presented in the unified theory, however, several important qualifications need to be emphasized.

Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-01699-6 - Making Democratic Governance Work: How Regimes Shape Prosperity, Welfare, and Peace

Pippa Norris

Excerpt

[More information](#)

First, trade-offs among value choices are often encountered in the transition from regimes based on patronage autocracy toward those reflecting the principles of democratic governance; the initial stages of this process can expand electoral choice, human rights, and political freedoms while simultaneously weakening the capacity of the state to maintain order and stability. Only in subsequent stages do governance and democracy come together again in a more balanced trajectory. As Charles Tilly theorizes, tensions exist between state capacity and democracy, so that countries such as Libya and Egypt face regime transitions with difficult trade-offs.¹²

Secondly, this book does not prescribe a simple “one-size-fits-all” set of practical political reforms; instead, attention needs to be paid to diagnosing the particular weakness of regimes in each country on both these dimensions. Hence, in autocracies that have restricted political rights, the most urgent priorities should be focused on encouraging transitions from autocracy and promoting the principles and institutions of liberal democracy, typically through interventions seeking to implement legitimate and competitive multiparty elections meeting international standards of integrity, strengthening effective and inclusive legislatures with the capacity of government scrutiny, and bolstering independent and professional judiciaries to improve access to justice, within an overarching constitutional and legal framework respecting minority rights. In other democratic states, however, where the key challenge remains lack of governance capacity to deliver, international agencies should prioritize initiatives designed to address these issues, commonly through programs professionalizing training, budgeting, and management in the public sector; strengthening the capacity of local service delivery agencies; and reducing incompetence, malfeasance, and corruption in public life. The idea that one set of programs is effective in all social contexts should be abandoned in favor of a more accurate diagnosis of the key needs-based priorities, and thus more effective and targeted policy interventions tailored to local conditions.

Finally the empirical evidence available to test core propositions in each of the alternative accounts remains complex to analyze due to many technical challenges. Scholars in each subfield – comparative politics, economics, welfare development, and international relations – have developed specialized analytical techniques and concepts that may well differ from the approach used here. This book attempts to overcome these limitations by adopting a mixed method design, but nevertheless the interpretation of the results remains sensitive to the particular selection of indices, country coverage, and model specifications. We have to adopt an honest and dispassionate perspective, acknowledging in the conclusions that the evidence lends strong support for several of the core theoretical propositions, as expected, but not to all. The book therefore contributes to our knowledge about these issues, but further work needs to explore the remaining puzzles in understanding the underlying linkage mechanisms connecting regimes and development, using alternative approaches, case studies, and analytical techniques.