

“Measures of Democracy, Governance and Rule of Law: An Overview of Cross-National Data Sets”

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This paper provides an overview of measures of democracy, governance and rule of law. The purpose of the paper is to serve as a basis for the selection of cases to be studied in depth as part of the “Moving Out of Poverty” project coordinated by Deepa Narayan. Therefore, the focus is on broad cross-national data sets, that is, those data sets that can offer a sense of the overall variation within the relevant universe of cases. More specifically, in terms of scope, only those data sets that encompass more than one region of the world and that extend into the 1990s are considered.

The choice of data set to use is ease when data is scarce: since any data is better than none, one uses whatever is available. But this overview shows that researchers have generated data sets of considerable scope that measure a wide array of concepts about politics and political institutions. Therefore, there are choices to be made. To guide this selection process, this paper places emphasis on the validity of the data and, in particular, on the criterion of content validity, that is, whether theoretically relevant indicators are excluded from, or theoretically irrelevant indicators are included in, the measure of a concept.

A first section discusses the key conceptual challenge confronted in efforts to measure democracy and related concepts. It suggests that, to avoid potential conceptual confusion, it is useful to distinguish between measures of the concepts of: i) democratic regime, ii) democratic governance, and iii) rule of law. The following section presents a set of tables that contain essential information about existing data sets that can serve as measures of these three distinct concepts. Both indices, that is, aggregate data, and indicators, that is, disaggregate data, are considered. Because this paper has been written without much knowledge about the theory that will be used in the “Moving Out of Poverty” project, all that is offered are brief comments that point to the availability of measures but that do not provide the sort of detailed assessment of any specific measure. By way of conclusion, a few comments concerning the potential use of these data sets for the purpose of case selection are offered and the most significant gaps in the existing data are identified.

¹ This paper draws on my work in preparing the statistical compendium of the *Report on Democratic Development in Latin America*, a new publication of the United Nations Development Programme, Regional Bureau for Latin America and the Caribbean (UNDP-RBLAC). It also draws upon research I have conducted on the measurement of democracy. See Gerardo L. Munck and Jay Verkuilen, “Conceptualizing and Measuring Democracy: Evaluating Alternative Indices,” *Comparative Political Studies* Vol. 35, N° 1 (February 2002): 5-34.

1. Some Conceptual Distinctions

Current efforts to measure concepts related to political processes face an important conceptual challenge. As the range of concepts used by researchers and policy makers interested in understanding the political process has grown, so too has the search for relevant measures. But because the concepts to be measured have not been systematically defined, measures of these concepts have frequently fallen prey to a key problem. Indicators that relate only vaguely to a concept are used as measures. And indices are created by combining indicators that are probably best seen as measures of different concepts. As a result, the validity of the measures is open to question.

Figure 1. The Concepts of Democratic Regime, Democratic Governance and Rule of Law

Concept	Democratic Regime	Democratic Governance	Rule of Law
Aspect of the political process	Access to government offices	Decision making within, and implementation by, the government	Government treatment of citizens
Some central elements	Elections and their competitiveness, inclusiveness, fairness, etc. Candidate selection process Electoral system	Executive-legislative relations Judiciary Federalism Bureaucracy	Corruption Human and civil rights Property rights Press freedom

To avoid this problem, this paper suggests that it is useful to distinguish between three closely related but distinct concepts: democratic regime, democratic governance and rule of law (see Figure 1). The concept of democratic regime is understood as referring to the access to government offices and thus is defined, in strictly Schumpeterian terms, as a mechanism for the selection of leaders. In turn, the concept of democratic governance is seen as referring to the process whereby government make and implement legally binding decisions. Finally, the concept of rule of law is taken to refer to the manner in which government treat citizens, including those that occupy a position within the state. As I show next, these conceptual distinctions help to organize the existing data sets and to better identify what concepts are measured by these data sets.

2. Existing Data Sets: The State of the Art

The measurement of the concept of democratic regime has been a concern within academia for some time and the generation of indices in particular has been the subject of a fair amount of analysis (see Table 1). These indices have tended to be minimalist, in the sense that they do not include important components, such as participation. Moreover, though they tend to correlate quite highly, there is evidence that there are significant differences among them. Nonetheless, most of these indices are firmly rooted in democratic theory and, with some important exceptions (esp. the Freedom House Political Rights index), offer disaggregate measures as well as an aggregate measure. Beyond these indices, in recent times much effort has gone into generating measures of important elements of the democratic regime (see Table 2). In comparative terms, the measurement of the democratic regime and its various elements is more advanced than the measurement of other aspects of the political process.

Table 1. Democratic Regime Indices

Name	Components	Scope	Comments	Source
Alvarez, Cheibub, Limongi and Przeworski, Political Regimes Index	Contestation Offices/Election executive Offices/Election legislature	141 countries, 1950-90	This data set has been updated through 1999.	www.ssc.upenn.edu/~cheibub/data/Default.htm pantheon.yale.edu/~jac236/Research.htm
Freedom House's Political Rights Index	Free and fair elections for the chief executive Free and fair elections for the legislature Fair electoral process Effective power of elected officials Right to form political parties Power of opposition parties Freedom from domination by power groups (e.g. the military, foreign powers, religious hierarchies, economic oligarchies) Autonomy and self-government for cultural, ethnic, religious, or other minority group	172 countries, 1972-present	Disaggregate data are not available.	Freedom House, www.freedomhouse.org
Gasiorowski Political Regime Change	Competitiveness Inclusiveness Civil and political liberties	97 (Third World) countries, independence-1992	Disaggregate data is not available. An updated and expanded version of this index, including post-communist cases, has become available.	Mark J. Gasiorowski, "An Overview of the Political Regime Change Dataset" <i>Comparative Political Studies</i> Vol. 29, N° 4 (1996): 469-83; and Gary Rei "Categorizing Political Regimes: New Data for Old Problems," <i>Democratization</i> Vol. 9, N° 4 (2003).
Polity IV/ Democracy & Autocracy Indices	Competitiveness of participation Regulation of participation Competitiveness of executive recruitment Openness of executive recruitment Constraints on executive	161 countries, 1800-2001	This index combines components relevant to the democratic regime and democratic governance.	www.bsos.umd.edu/cidcm/polity/
Vanhanen Democracy Index/Polyarchy Dataset	Competition Participation	187 countries, 1810-1998		www.svt.ntnu.no/iss/data/vanhanen

Table 2. Democratic Regime Indicators

Name of Data Set	Indicators	Scope	Comments	Source
Database of Electoral Systems	Type of electoral system	Entire world, 2003		International IDEA, www.idea.int/esd/data.cfm
Comparative Dataset on Political Institutions	38 institutional variables	60-85 countries, 1960-99	This database, used by Persson and Tabellini, should be available shortly. The data set draws on Freedom House, Polity, Seddon et al. and others. It includes various indicators of democratic governance.	www.sns.se
Cross-National Time-Series (CNTS) Data Archive	Type of regime (civil, military, etc) Type of executive Executive selection (elected or not) Parliamentary responsibility Legislative selection (elected or not) Competitiveness of nominating process for legislature Party legitimacy (party formation)	The world 1815-1999	This is a longstanding commercial dataset that has been used as an input in a large number of data sets.	Arthur Banks, www.databanks.sitehosting.net/index.htm
Data on Campaign Finance	Direct public financing Disclosure laws Access to free TV time Limits on spending on TV	114-143 countries, c. 2001		Michael Pinto-Duschinsky, "Financing Politics: A Global View," <i>Journal of Democracy</i> Vol. 13, Nº 4 (October 2002): 69-86.
Database on Electoral Institutions	Elections under dictatorship and democracy Electoral system	199 countries, 1946 (or independence)-	This database should be available shortly.	Matt Golder, homepages.nyu.edu/~7Emrg217/#research
Database on Political Institutions (DPI)	Legislative election, use of Executive election, use of Method of candidate selection Fraud and intimidation in voting process Threshold required for representation Mean district magnitude Type of electoral law (PR, plurality) Legislative index of political competitiveness Executive index of political competitiveness	177 countries, 1975-95	This dataset was created by researchers at the World Bank and includes 113 variables. Thus, only the main ones have been identified here. This data set relies in large part on the <i>Europa Year Book</i> and Arthur Banks' <i>Political Handbook of the World</i> .	Thorsten Beck, George Clarke, Alberto Groff, Philip Keefer, and Patrick Walsh, "New Tools in Comparative Political Economy: The Database of Political Institutions," <i>World Bank Economic Review</i> Vol 15, Nº 1 (September 2001): 165-176; and www.worldbank.org/research/bios/pkeefe.htm
Database of the EPIC Project	Electoral systems Legislative framework Electoral management Boundary delimitation Voter education Voter registration Voting operations Parties and candidates Vote counting	56 countries, 2003		Election Process Information Collection, www.epicproject.org/
Dataset of Suffrage	Right of suffrage	196 countries, 1950-2000		Pamela Paxton, Kenneth A. Bollen, Deborah M. Lee and Hyojoung Kim, "A Half-Century of Suffrage: New Data and a Comparative Analysis," <i>Studies in Comparative International Development</i> Vol. 38, Nº 1 (2003): 93-122.
Electoral Systems Data Set	Party control over candidate nomination and order of election Pooling of votes Number and specificity of citizen votes District magnitude	158 countries, 1978-2001		Jessica S. Wallack, Alejandro Gaviria, Ugo Panizza and Ernesto Stein, "Electoral systems data set," 2003, www.stanford.edu/~jseddon/
Global Database of Quotas for Women	Constitutional quota for national parliament Election law quota or regulation for national parliament Political party quota for electoral candidates Constitutional or legislative quota for sub-national government	Entire world, 2003		International IDEA, www.idea.int/quota/index.cfm
Global Survey of Voter Turnout	Voter turnout	171 countries, 1945-present		International IDEA, www.idea.int/vt/index.cfm
Index of Malapportionment	Malapportionment	78 countries, c. 1997		David J. Samuels and Richard Snyder, "The Value of a Vote: Malapportionment in Comparative Perspective," <i>British Journal of Political Science</i> Vol. 31, Nº 4 (October 2001): 651-71; and upon request from David Samuels < dsamuels@polisci.umn.edu >
Women in National Parliaments Statistical Archive	Number and percentage of seats held by women in national parliaments	181 countries, 1945-present		IPU (Inter-Parliamentary Union) <i>Women in Parliaments 1945-1995: A World Statistical Survey</i> (Geneva: Inter-Parliamentary Union, 1995); and IPU (Inter-Parliamentary Union), www.ipu.org/wmn-e/classif-arc.htm

The measurement of the concept of democratic governance reveals some bright spots and some problems (see Tables 3 and 4). At the disaggregate level, important progress has been made and the Database on Political Institutions (DPI) in particular is a valuable resource in this regard. However, we still lack a good index. Some indices, such as the Weberian State Scale, focus only on one element of democratic governance and its scope is quite limited. Others, such as the Political Constraint Index, though addressing the policy making process in fairly broad terms, do not touch upon the implementation aspect. Finally, those indices that do address the policy implementation aspect tend to combine such a large number of indicators, which tap into a range of very diverse phenomena, that they are hard to interpret.

Table 3. Democratic Governance Indices

Name	Components	Scope	Comments	Source
Governance Research Indicators Dataset (2002): Political stability index	Decline central authority Political protest Ethno-cultural, religious conflict External military intervention Military coup risk Political assassination Civil war Urban riot Armed conflict Violent demonstration Social unrest International tension Disappearances, torture Terrorism	199 countries, 1996-2002	This index, created by researchers Kaufman, Kraay and Mastruzzi, the World Bank, draws on a range of data sets.	www.worldbank.org/wbi/governance/govdata/2002/index.html
Governance Research Indicators Dataset (2002): Government effectiveness index	Skills of civil service Efficiency of national and local bureaucracies Coordination between central and local government Formulation and implementation of policies Tax collection Timely national budget Monitoring of activities within borders National infrastructure Response to domestic economic pressures Response to natural disasters Personnel turnover Quality of bureaucracy Red tape Policy continuity	199 countries, 1996-2002	This index, created by researchers Kaufman, Kraay and Mastruzzi, the World Bank, draws on a range of data sets.	www.worldbank.org/wbi/governance/govdata/2002/index.html
The Political Constraint Index (POLCON) Dataset	Number of independent branches of government Veto power over policy change Party composition of the executive and legislative branches Preference heterogeneity within each legislative branch	234 countries, variable dates-2001		Witold J. Henisz, www-management.wharton.upenn.edu/henisz/
State Failure Problem Set	Ethnic wars Revolutionary wars Genocides and politicides Adverse regime changes	96 countries, 1955-2001		State Failure Task Force, www.cidcm.umd.edu/inscr/stfail/sfdata.htm
Weberian State Scale	Agencies generating economic policy Meritocratic hiring Internal promotion and career stability Salary and prestige	35 developing countries, 1993-96		Peter Evans and James Rauch, "Weberian State Comparative Data Set," weber.ucsd.edu/~jrauch/webstate/

Table 4. Democratic Governance Indicators

Name of Data Set	Indicators	Scope	Comments	Source
Country Risk Service (CRS)	War Social unrest Orderly political transfers Politically motivated violence International disputes Government pro-business orientation Institutional effectiveness Bureaucracy	100 countries (emerging markets) 1997-present	This is a commercial dataset.	Economic Intelligence Unit (EIU), www.eiu.com/
Cross-National Time Series (CNTS) Data Archive	Legislative effectiveness vis-à-vis the executive Number of seats in legislature held by largest party Party fractionalization index	The world, 1915-1999	This is a commercial dataset.	Arthur Banks, www.databanks.sitehosting.net/index.htm
Database on Political Institutions (DPI)	System (presidential, assembly-elected presidential, parliamentary) Presidential control of congress Herfindhal index of government and opposition Party fractionalization Position on right-left scale; rural, regional, nationalist or religious basis Index of political cohesion Number of veto players Change in veto players Polarization Autonomous regions Elections at municipal level Elections at state/province level Power of subnational government	77 countries, 1975-95	This dataset was created by research and Patrick Walsh, "New Tools in Comparative Political Economy: The Database of Political Institutions" includes 113 variables. Thus, only the main ones have been identified here. This data set relies in large part on the <i>Europa Year Book</i> and Arthur Banks' <i>Political Handbook of the World</i> .	Thorsten Beck, George Clarke, Alberto Groff, Philip Keefer and Patrick Walsh, <i>World Bank Economic Review</i> Vol 15, N° 1 (September 2001): 165-176; and www.worldbank.org/research/bios/pkeefe.r
Executive Opinion Survey of the <i>Global Competitiveness Report</i>	Judicial independence	80 countries, 2002	These data are based on perceptions.	World Economic Forum, http://www.weforum.org and: K. Cornelius and Klaus Schwab (eds) <i>The Global Competitiveness Report 2002-2003</i> (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003).

Finally, significant advances and lingering problems can be identified with regard to the measurement of the concept of rule of law (see Tables 5 and 6). We have indicators on corruption (though they are based on perceptions by a small group of people), human rights, labor rights and other civil rights. Moreover, various indices have been proposed. But many of these indices either fail to offer disaggregate data (the problem with the Freedom House Civil Rights index), combine components of a diverse set of concepts, or focus overwhelmingly on business and property rights to the exclusion of other groups and rights.

Table 5. Rule of Law Indices

Name	Components	Scope	Comments	Source
The Fraser Institute, Economic Freedom of the World Index	Size of government Legal structure and security of property rights Access to sound money Freedom to exchange with foreigners Regulation of credit, labor, and business	123 countries, 1970-present (every 5 yrs.)	This data set relies in part on the World Economic Forum's <i>Global Competitiveness Report</i> and Political Risk Services (PRS)'s <i>International Country Risk Guide</i> .	The Fraser Institute, www.freetheworld.com/download.html
Freedom House's Civil Liberties Index	Free and independent media Free religious institutions Freedom of assembly, demonstration, and public discussion Freedom to form political parties Freedom to form organizations Independent judiciary Rule of law Protection from terror, torture, war and insurgencies Freedom from government indifference and corruption Open and free private discussion Freedom from state control of travel, residence, employment, indoctrination Rights of private business Personal freedoms (gender equality, etc) Equality of opportunity	172 countries, 1972-present	Disaggregated data are not available	Freedom House, www.freedomhouse.org
Freedom House's Religious Freedom in the World	Religious freedom	75 countries, 2000		Paul Marshall (ed.), <i>Religious Freedom in the World: A Global Survey of Freedom and Persecution</i> (Nashville, Tenn.: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2000);and Freedom House, www.freedomhouse.org/religion/publications/rfiw/index.htm
Freedom House's Press Freedom Survey	Influence on the content of the news media of laws and administrative decisions Political influence over the content of news systems, including intimidation of journalists Economic influences on news content exerted by government or private entrepreneurs	186 countries, 1993-present		Freedom House, www.freedomhouse.org/research/pressurvey.htm
The Heritage Foundation & Wall Street Journal's Index of Economic Freedom	Trade policy Taxation Government intervention in the economy Monetary policy Capital flows and foreign investment Banking and finance Wage and price controls Property rights Regulation Black market activity	161 countries, 1995-present	This index relies heavily on source published by the Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU), the U.S. State Department, as well as the IMF and World Bank.	Heritage Foundation & Wall Street Journal, www.heritage.org/research/features/index/
Governance Research Indicators Dataset (2002): Voice and accountability index	Government repression Orderly change in government Vested interests Accountability of public officials Human rights Freedom of association Civil liberties Political liberties Freedom of the press Travel restrictions Freedom of political participation Imprisonment Government censorship Military role in politics Responsiveness of the government Democratic accountability Institutional permanence	199 countries, 1996-2002	This index, created by researchers at the World Bank, draws on a range of primary data sets. It combines components relevant to the rule of law, democratic regime and democratic governance.	Kaufman, Kraay and Mastruzzi, www.worldbank.org/wbi/governance/govdata202/index.html
Governance Research Indicators Dataset (2002): Regulatory quality index	Export and import regulations Burden on business of regulations Unfair competitive prices Price control Discriminatory tariffs Excessive protections Government intervention in economy Regulation of foreign investment Regulation of banking Investment profile Tax effectiveness Legal framework for business	199 countries, 1996-2002	This index, created by researchers at the World Bank, draws on a range of primary data sets.	Kaufman, Kraay and Mastruzzi, www.worldbank.org/wbi/governance/govdata202/index.html
Governance Research Indicators Dataset (2002): Rule of law index	Legitimacy of state Adherence to rule of law Losses and costs of crime Kidnapping of foreigners Enforceability of government contracts Enforceability of private contracts Violent crime Organized crime Fairness of judicial process Speediness of judicial process Black market Property rights Independence of judiciary Law and order tradition	199 countries, 1996-2002	This index, created by researchers at the World Bank, draws on a range of primary data sets.	Kaufman, Kraay and Mastruzzi, www.worldbank.org/wbi/governance/govdata202/index.html
Governance Research Indicators Dataset (2002): Control of corruption index	Severity of corruption within the state Losses and costs of corruption Indirect diversion of funds	199 countries, 1996-2002	This index, created by researchers at the World Bank, draws on a range of primary data sets.	Kaufman, Kraay and Mastruzzi, www.worldbank.org/wbi/governance/govdata202/index.html

Table 6. Rule of Law Indicators

Name of Data Set	Indicators	Scope	Comments	Source
Country Risk Service (CRS)	Transparency/fairness (of the legal system) Corruption Crime	100 countries (emerging markets), 1997-present	This is a commercial dataset.	Economic Intelligence Unit (EIU), www.eiu.com/
Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI)	Corruption	81 countries, 2002	These data are based on perceptions.	Transparency International (TI), www.transparency.org/surveys/index.html
Dataset of Labor Rights Violations	Labor right to organize, bargain collectively and strike	200 countries, 1981-2000		Layna Mosley and Saika Uno, "Dataset of Labor Rights Violations, 1981-2000," Notre Dame, In.: University of Notre Dame, 2002.
Executive Opinion Survey of the Global Competitiveness Report	Corruption	80 countries, 2002	These data are based on perceptions.	World Economic Forum, http://www.weforum.org and: K. Cornelius and Klaus Schwab (eds) <i>The Global Competitiveness Report 2002-2003</i> (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003).
Journalists killed statistics	Violence against journalists	Entire world, 1992-present		Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ), www.cpj.org/killed/Ten_Year_Killed/Intro.html
Minorities at Risk	Ethno-cultural distinctiveness Group's spatial concentration Length of group's residence in country Group's presence in adjoining country Group's loss of autonomy Strength of group's cultural identity Cultural differentials Political differentials Economic differentials Demographic stress Political discrimination Economic disadvantage Cultural discrimination Identity cohesion Organizational cohesion Administrative autonomy Mobilization Orientation to conventional vs. militant strategies of action Autonomy grievances Political (non-autonomy) grievances Economic grievances Cultural grievances Intra-group factional conflict Intracommunal antagonists Severity of intra-group conflict Group protest activities Anti-Regime Rebellion Government repression of group International contagion and diffusion Transnational support for communal groups Advantaged minorities	267 communal groups, 1945-present		The Minorities at Risk (MAR) Project, www.cidcm.umd.edu/inscr/mar/
Political Terror Scale	Human rights: Right to life and personal integrity	153 countries, 1976-present		Political Terror Scale, www.unca.edu/politicalscience/facstaff/gibney.html
United Nations Surveys of Crime Trends and Operation of Criminal Justice Systems	Total recorded crime incidents Criminal justice system	82 countries, 1970-2000		UNCJIN, www.uncjin.org/Statistics/WCTS/wcts.html
World Prison Brief	Prison population Pre-trial detainees/remand prisoners Occupancy level	214 countries, c. 2002		International Centre for Prison Studies, //www.kcl.ac.uk/depsta/rel/icps/

3. Conclusion

Researchers have constructed a large number of data sets of considerable scope that measure a wide array of concepts about politics and political institutions. The data set that are used for the purpose of case selection in the context of the “Moving Out of Poverty” project depends, first of all, on the theoretical variables this project highlights. Once these variables have been specified, the next step to be carried out is a more in depth assessment than has been offered here of the potential data sets, a selection of the data set or sets, and the identification of cases that exemplify the overall range of variation found within the relevant universe of cases.

At this point, however, two general points that affect the way this next step is approached can be made. First, it is important to focus on the difference between indices and indicators. Indices have the virtue of synthesizing multiple indicators. Moreover, they are frequently the kind of measure that is needed. But indices have limitations. Many indices combine conceptual components that do not belong together and thus are hard to interpret. In addition, many indices compress what are essentially multidimensional phenomena into a single measure. Thus, it is important to remain open to the use of indicators. As shown, a large number of indicators are available and they might well tap into the concepts of interest better than existing indices.

Second, it is necessary to identify a significant gap in most data sets. With very few exceptions (the data on malapportionment, quotas for women, and power of subnational governments), most of the data sets reviewed in this paper take the nation state as their sole unit of analysis. This is an important problem in that a great deal of subnational variation exists, especially in large and federal systems. In this regard, the generation of data on concepts related to the political process lags well behind what has been accomplished by researchers focusing on social and economic issues. Indeed, efforts to generate data sets on politics have only recently begun in earnest and, as this paper shows, have sought as a first step to offer cross-national measures that take the nation state as the unit of analysis. The scarcity of measures on subnational units is thus a gap that is hard to overcome in the short term.