

# Democracy, Morality and Social Progress

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## Abstract

This paper hypothesizes that democracy is favorable for both national morals and for national social progress. It employs cross country regression analysis to investigate the relationship between national morality and the extent of democracy, and the relationship between national social progress and democracy. The empirical findings are consistent with the contention that higher levels of democracy are associated with higher levels of national morality, and, with increased levels of social progress.

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## 1 Introduction

Enhancing the level of national morality and national social progress are very worthy goals. If democracy is a positive driver of national morality and national social progress, then promotion of greater democracy becomes a viable policy for better achieving these aims. The purpose of this paper is to empirically investigate whether democracy is a positive determinant of national morality and social progress.

From a purely humanistic perspective, and through the eyes of the major world religions, there are a set of negative conditions in any nation that society needs to minimize or, if possible, totally eliminate, and another set of positive conditions that society needs to promote for greater social welfare. Some of these negative conditions are war, slavery, unemployment, poverty, economic instability, government corruption, arbitrary force, unequal justice, and all sorts of nationally and internationally organized criminal behavior, such as smuggling, kidnapping, murder, human trafficking, drug trafficking, buying of public officials, union infiltration, government infiltration, business extortion, individual extortion, and shakedowns. Some of the positive conditions include adequate food, medical care, housing, opportunities for advancement, a chance to get a decent

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education, freedom of speech, freedom of movement, the rule of law, and a modicum of physical and emotional security.

The paper is organized into five additional sections. The second section reviews some of the recent literature regarding morality, social progress, and democracy. The third section presents a simple formal model characterizing the relationships between morality and democracy, and between social progress and democracy. The following section identifies the specific variables that are used in the empirical analysis and their data sources. The next section presents the results, and, then, discusses the results, of regressions on the two key relationships of the model. Finally, the sixth and final section provides a short overall conclusion.

## 2 Brief Literature Review

Letki bemoans the small amount of extant research that has been devoted trying to explain the reasons for morality [1]. Developing an index of civic morality for individuals based on answers to a few pertinent survey questions from the 1999-2002 World Value Survey, and looking at a sample consisting of 47210 respondents, in 38 countries, and in 392 regions, she employs multilevel models to investigate potential determinants of civic morality for four different categories of variables; personal characteristics, other individual characteristics, regional characteristics, and country characteristics. In the first category she finds evidence that age, education, income, and the degree of religiosity are important favorable forces for civic morality. In the second group, she discovers that, while individual confidence in institutions is a positive force for civic morality, that, surprisingly, neither trust in others nor membership in associations appear to be relevant. The third group shows that trust and civicness are not statistically relevant at the regional level of analysis. Finally, her fourth group, the group containing country level characteristics, indicates that that the quality of government has a positive and significant effect on civic morality, but that the extent of democracy and the amount of economic growth are not statistically significant relevant factors for explaining civic morality, and that, while the rate of unemployment is statistically significant, it has a positive sign.

While there is a dearth of articles directly targeting research on the determinants of overall national morality and social progress, there do exist articles on topics in a number of related areas.

Avelino, Brown, and Hunter find, in their empirics, looking at nineteen Latin American countries between 1980 and 1999, that democracy has a positive effect on social spending, especially on educational spending [2].

Historically, it appears that democratic forms of government are more peaceful and less war prone, at least with regard to other democracies. Tonz and Weeks conduct survey scenario experiments using public opinion pools of 762 British and 1273 American citizens in 2010 to investigate the sources of the democratic peace, the peace between democracies [3]. They find that, in addition to the existence of public opinion pressure in democracies on elected offices holders from voters who want to avoid the human and financial costs of war (Kantian argument), it might also be the case that citizens of a democracy are less prone to make war with other democracies because they perceive other democracies as less threatening to their self-preservation, and, because, they find that war with other democracies is more morally reprehensible than war with non-democratic, autocratic countries.

Sommer, Bloom, and Arikan, using two data sets, an aggregate level data set of 129 countries from 1990 to 2002 and individual level data set on 57 countries for 2005, find evidence that democratic conditions directly reduce corruption, and support for their contention that, when corruption is considered to be immoral or inappropriate behavior by society, as is common in more democratic forms of government, then freedom of religion is important for reducing corruption, [4]

The separation of morals from politics can result in political corruption. Oladipo and Ademowo talk about the negative consequences of political corruption (diminished infrastructure, lower economic growth, and misuse of talent) for Africa [5]. They suggest that the separation of morals from politics in African countries is partially attributed to the legacy of colonial institutions, and advocate the infusion of moral values into politics as a way to increase social progress in African countries. They feel that the existence of moral values is essential for the creation of an environment favorable for social order and economic development.

### 3 The Theoretical Model

The model consists of two equations, a national morality equation, and a national social progress equation. The two equations are as follows.

$$\begin{array}{ll} \text{National Morality Equation:} & M=f(D, C) \quad \delta M/\delta D>0 \\ \text{National Social Progress Equation:} & P=g(D, C) \quad \delta P/\delta D>0 \end{array}$$

In the equations,  $M$  is national morality,  $D$  is democracy,  $P$  is national social progress, and  $C$  is a set of common control variables that are important for national morality and for national social progress. The first equation, the national morality equation, along with its associated partial derivative, simply theorizes that national morality depends on democracy, and, after taking into account the control variables, is positively related to democracy. Similarly, the second equation, the social progress equation, proposes that social progress is positively related to democracy.

There are a number of reasons that greater democracy is apt to be favorable for national morality and national social progress. First, greater democracy allows for greater inclusiveness and citizen participation in government, leading to greater government accountability and responsiveness to the needs of the average person. In other words, higher levels of democracy are likely lead to a more desirable allocation of scarce resources than a more totalitarian state. Second, greater democracy disperses power. It reduces the concentration of power and lessens the associated corruption and abuse that comes with power. Third, democracy is associated with a fairness that comes from a rule of law that applies equally to all. People are less likely to be arbitrarily arrested, tortured, and executed without some form of due process.

A key control variable that will be considered is the level of economic development. Naturally, higher levels of economic development are expected to be positively related to both morality, and to social progress, or morality in action. Higher levels of economic development provide a society with greater means to act morally, while low levels of economic development put tough resource constraints on moral behavior. It may be morally right to provide food for all citizens, but in countries beset with extreme levels of

underdevelopment, it may literally be impossible to do so, or, if possible, may come at an extreme cost of foregoing any possible hope of future economic improvement.

As the process of economic development generally entails both the shift of resources out of agriculture and into other sectors, and the movement of population from rural areas to urban areas, two structural variables are used to capture the extent of economic development. The first is the percentage of agricultural production to GDP and the second is the percentage of the population that is urban.

Besides the level of economic development, one other control variable, the quality of education, is considered. Higher quality education is predicted to be favorable for national morality and national social progress. It is assumed that improved educational quality makes citizens more socially conscious and more productive, thus giving them greater ability and desire to improve social conditions. The variable used to capture the quality of education is an index of the quality of math and science education.

#### **4 The Variables and their Sources**

Crabtree's index of morality, conscience, and the good life for 2013 is utilized to calculate national moral character [6]. For 2013, the Crabtree index, with higher index values indicating higher levels of country morality, ranges from a low value of 27.4 to a high value of 90.7.

National social progress is quantified using Social Progress Imperative's social progress index for 2014 [7]. The index has a potential range from zero to one hundred. It is put together by evaluating relevant factors in the three different areas of basic human needs, the foundations of well-being, and the extent of available opportunity.

The measure used to capture the extent of democracy is the 2010 democracy index from the Economist Intelligence Unit of The Economist magazine [8]. The index is constructed by considering five different categories. They are the electoral process and pluralism, the functioning of government, the extent of political participation, the political culture, and civil liberties. The Economist's democracy index ranges from one to ten with higher values indicating greater levels of democracy.

Two structural variables are employed to capture the degree of development. The first, a measure of the extent of underdevelopment, is the percentage of agriculture to GDP for 2010. The source is the World Bank [9]. The second structural variable, in this case a measure of development, is the percentage of the population that is urban in 2010. Again, the source for this variable is the World Bank

The educational variable employed is the World Economic Forum's quality of math and science education index for 2009-2010 [10]. The index is based on the average of answers to the survey question, "How would you assess the quality of math and science education in your country's schools?" The potential answers to the question can range from a low value of one (poor) to a high value of seven (excellent).

#### **5 Cross Country Empirical Results**

Table 1 shows the regression results from regressions of national morality on democracy and other explanatory variables.

Table 1: Cross Country Regressions of Morality on Democracy and Other Variables

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
CONSTANT	31.42 (16.16) *	46.24 (17.57) *	36.63 (8.88) *	29.52 (6.29) *
DEMOCRACY	5.020 (15.30) *	3.587 (10.01) *	3.360 (8.62) *	3.253 (8.157) *
PERAGRTOGDP		-.5105 (-8.76) *	-.5228 (-7.37) *	-.3684 (-4.23) *
EDUQUALITY			2.785 (3.86) *	2.588 (3.69) *
PERURBAN				.1164 (2.89) *
RSQ	.592	.728	.754	.771
N	163	139	118	118

The table is set up with the potential explanatory variables listed in the first column. Each of the four remaining columns, columns two through four, provide the results of a single regression equation. The equations are numbered in the first row. If and when a variable enters an equation, the top number in the body of the table in the appropriate row and column is the variable's estimated coefficient. Its individual t-statistic is underneath in parenthesis. If the variable is significant at the one percent level of significance or better in an equation, then it is marked by an asterisk. The r-squared values and the number of countries in the equations are shown in the last two rows of the table.

Table 1 contains four equations. The first is the equation of national morality using democracy (DEMOCRACY) as the sole explanatory variable. The remaining three equations cumulatively and sequentially add the three other explanatory variables, the percentage of agriculture to GDP (PERAGRTOGDP), the index for the quality of math and science education (EDUQUALITY), and the percentage of urban to population (PERURBAN).

The results of the equations lend strong support to the contention that democracy is a positive force for national morality. The estimated coefficient on democracy (DEMOCRACY) is positive and significant at the one percent level of significance or better in all of the equations. Whether democracy is used alone as the sole explanatory variable, as in equation one, or when democracy is used in combination with one or more of the other explanatory variables, as in equations two through four, democracy is positive and highly significant. Looking at the r-squared value for the first equation shows that democracy on its own explains close to sixty percent of the cross country variation in national morality for a sample consisting of one hundred sixty three countries.

The three other explanatory variables also behave quite well. Both structural variables, percentage of agriculture to GDP (PERAGRTOGDP) and the percentage urban population (PERURBAN), have theoretically appropriate signs for their estimated coefficients. The sign of the percentage of agriculture to GDP is negative in the three

equations that it appears (equations (2), (3), & (4)), suggesting that higher levels of underdevelopment, as captured by a higher percentage of agriculture to GDP, is associated with lower levels of country morality. The percentage of the population that is urban is positive in equation four, the sole equation that it enters, indicating that greater economic development, as compassed by this structural variable, leads to higher levels of national morality. Both structural variables are significant at the one percent level of significance or better in each and every one of the equations in which they are used as independent variables.

Lastly, the education variable, the index of the quality of math and science education, is positive, as theoretically expected. In equations three and four, the two equations in which it is included, the variable is significant at the one percent level or better.

Table 2 shows the results for the same set of four regressions as in Table 1 after replacing the index of national social progress for the index of national morality as the dependent variable.

Table 2: Cross Country Regressions of Social Progress on Democracy and Other Variables

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
CONSTANT	33.20 (15.26) *	51.15 (20.17) *	43.87 (12.85) *	34.91 (9.19) *
DEMOCRACY	5.269 (14.98) *	3.441 (10.19) *	3.110 (9.21) *	2.949 (9.36) *
PERAGRTOGDP		-.5980 (-9.92) *	-.6023 (-9.68) *	-.4210 (-5.87) *
EDUQUALITY			2.407 (3.91) *	2.377 (4.17) *
PERURBAN				.1390 (4.26) *
RSQ	.635	.792	.821	.848
N	131	120	108	108

The results are similar to those in table 1. All of the variables are significant at the one percent level of significance in any equation in which they enter. Every one of the variables have their theoretically expected sign. Democracy on its own explains over sixty three percent of the cross country variation in social progress.

## 6 Conclusion

The empirical findings of this paper provide support for the proposition that greater democracy is associated with higher levels of national morality and social progress. From the results, it appears that greater democracy is favorable for national morality and

national social progress regardless of the level of economic development. Democracy allows people to decide the character of society and society's future direction. When these decisions are made by the people, then it is more likely the outcomes will be people friendly, or as people friendly as they can be under prevailing circumstances.

Democracy is often criticized for lack of leadership. Indeed, the non-democratic social experiments of fascism, Nazism, may partially have been a response to the perceived failure of leadership of democracies in the inter world war years. However, the non-effective leadership criticism of democracy is often just a ruse or a smokescreen to enable a subgroup of the population to establish its own leader, and through the new leader, to foster its desires on the population. Greater leadership allows a leader to impose its values, it's will, on society. It presupposes, even under the most favorable assumption, that the leader is benevolent and is truly interested in the public welfare, that the leader, or sub group he represents, knows better than the people themselves as to what is for their own good.

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