

**World Governance Survey Discussion Paper 5
July 2003**

**POLITICAL SOCIETY AND GOVERNANCE IN 16 DEVELOPING
COUNTRIES**

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Introduction

Assessing Governance

UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan has stated that ‘good governance is perhaps the single most important factor in eradicating poverty and promoting development.’² If governance matters, so does the need for more reliable and valid data on key governance processes. Many analysts believe, however, that current indicators provide inadequate measures of key governance processes. Based on the perceptions of experts within each country, governance assessments were undertaken in 16 developing and transitional societies, representing 51 per cent of the world’s population. The aim of the World Governance Survey (WGS) was to generate new, systematic data on governance processes.

To facilitate cohesive data collection and analysis, the governance realm was disaggregated into six arenas:

- (i) Civil Society, or the way citizens become aware of and raise political issues;
- (ii) Political Society, or the way societal interests are aggregated in politics;
- (iii) Executive, or the rules for stewardship of the system as a whole;
- (iv) Bureaucracy, or the rules guiding how policies are implemented;
- (v) Economic Society, or how state-market relations are structured; and,
- (vi) Judiciary, or the rules for how disputes are settled.

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² Kofi Annan, *Partnerships for Global Community: Annual Report on the Work of the Organisation* (UN, 1998).

The project identified 30 indicators based on widely held ‘principles’ of good governance – participation, fairness, decency, accountability, transparency and efficiency – with five indicators in each arena.

In each country, a national coordinator selected a small panel of experts – c35-40 well-informed-persons (WIPs) to complete the assessment. The panel included, amongst others, government officials, parliamentarians, entrepreneurs, researchers, NGO representatives, lawyers and civil servants. Respondents were asked to rank each answer on a scale from 1 to 5; the higher the score, the better. In addition, respondents were invited to provide qualitative comments. The total governance scores have a very robust correlation (0.77) with the country scores in Kaufmann et al.’s aggregate governance indicators, indicating the validity of the results.³ Previous discussion papers looked at the issues of *Governance and Development*⁴ and *Assessing Governance: Methodological Challenges*⁵. This paper focuses on the political society arena.

Issues in Political Society

In a political process perspective like the one underlying our approach, political society is perhaps the most critical link in the governance chain. It is the arena where citizens are represented and their views, therefore, are aggregated and packaged into specific policy demands and proposals. In this respect, it is functionally different from civil society, where individual groups articulate their interests⁶. Political society is where much of the political agenda is set, or at least should be set. The result is that it is also the arena, which tends to be most intensively contested. Because power features so prominently in political society, it is no surprise that it is also one of the toughest to govern. Formal rules matter particularly much here. Managing them in a manner that enhances the legitimacy of the political process is in these circumstances not only especially important but also critical for the

³ Daniel Kaufmann, Aart Kraay and Pablo Zoido-Lobaton, ‘Governance Matters II: Updated Indicators for 2000/01’, *World Bank Policy Research Working Paper No. 2772*, 2002.

⁴ Goran Hyden and Julius Court, 2002, *Governance and Development, World Governance Survey Discussion Paper 1*, Tokyo: UNU.

⁵ Julius Court, Goran Hyden and Kenneth Mease, 2002, *Assessing Governance: Methodological Challenges, World Governance Survey Discussion Paper 2*, Tokyo: UNU.

⁶ See, e.g. Gabriel A. Almond and James S. Coleman, *The Politics of Developing Areas*. Princeton: Princeton University Press 1960; also, Juan Linz and Alfred Stepan, *Problems of Democratic Transition and Consolidation: Southern Europe, South America, and Post-Communist Europe*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.

stability of the political system at large. As students of democratic transition and consolidation studies, e.g. di Palma⁷, Huntington⁸, and Mainwaring, O'Donnell and Valenzuela⁹ have noted, democracy becomes “the only game in town” when political conflicts are habitually resolved according to established norms and costs are too high for violating these norms. But governing political society becomes a critical issue also in many other contexts, notably in societies divided by ethnicity, race, or religion. How political society is structured and how its rules are the subject of collective stewardship becomes of utmost importance in countries characterized by multiple cultures or nationalities¹⁰.

But, what more specifically is political society made up of? It is not a single institution, but rather a series of them, all of which are important for the policy-aggregating function. The first are political parties. Autocracies tend to have only one, democracies many. The number of political parties in any given polity is to a considerable extent determined by the electoral system in place. There is a great variation around the world, although the main distinctions are between plurality, majority or proportional systems of representation. These all come with specific rules that have implications for who get to occupy positions in political society. Presidential and parliamentary elections are the most significant although in some countries elections of representatives to sub-national or local authorities may also be significant. For instance, elections of governors in Russia tend to have also national significance as they have in the U.S. The remaining institution in political society is the legislature. Political parties compete in elections in order to get seats in the legislature. How the latter is constituted tends to be of less politically significant than how it works¹¹. The legitimacy of political society rests to a great extent on the credibility of individual legislators. How well they live up to the norms associated with representative government is definitely important.

⁷ Guiseppi DiPalma, *To Craft Democracies: An Essay on Democratic Transitions*. Berkeley: University of California Press 1991.

⁸ Samuel P. Huntington, *The Third Wave: Democratization in the Late Twentieth Century*. Norman, Okla: University of Oklahoma Press 1991.

⁹ Scott Mainwaring, G. O'Donnell, and J.S. Valenzuela, *Issues in Democratic Consolidation: The New South American Democracies in Comparative Perspective*. Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press 1992.

¹⁰ Arend Lijphart, *Democracy in Plural Societies: A Comparative Exploration*. New Haven: Yale University Press 1977.

¹¹ Matthew S. Shugart and J.M. Carey, *Presidents and Assemblies: Constitutional Design and Electoral Dynamics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1992.

This paper will begin by looking at what according to existing literature some of the main issues in political society are. It will proceed by providing the aggregate findings of the World Governance Survey for the political society arena, looking at how the three categories of countries – high, medium and low scoring – compare. The third section will analyze in greater detail the answers obtained in relation to each of the five indicators used in WGS. The conclusion will discuss the implications of the findings for both research and practice in the field of governance.

Governance Issues in Political Society

It is impossible here to discuss all the issues that fall under the political society rubric. We will focus on the more important ones that are also relevant for the analysis of the WGS data. The first relates to the issue of establishing a durable party system. The second concerns the extent, to which elections help produce legitimate legislatures. The third refers to how well the policy aggregating function is performed by the legislature. We shall briefly discuss each one of these.

The Party System

The role of political society, as we have indicated above, is to aggregate demands into policy. As such, it requires a manageable and functioning party system. A large number of parties are not necessarily better for how political society functions. Effectiveness is typically easier when the number is not too high. In practice, countries tend to vary according to how they strike a balance between durability and adaptability. Larry Diamond, borrowing a conceptualization from Andreas Schedler, notes that the problem in some places is an under-institutionalized party system, in others an over-institutionalized one¹².

The more common pattern, especially in transitional societies, is one of under-institutionalization. Political parties are weak and often fragmented entities, many dependent on a single charismatic individual for leadership and guidance. These parties are weak in the sense of not being able to penetrate society. In the absence of true membership,

¹² Larry Diamond, *Developing Democracy: Toward Consolidation*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press 1999, pp 96-98.

their electoral support is volatile. Brazil is often used as an example of weak party system. According to the scale of “effective” political parties, developed by Laakso and Taagepera, Brazil had a considerably higher number than other countries not only in Latin America but also elsewhere¹³. For instance, in 1992 it had 8.5 parties in the Lower House of the Congress, making it much more fragmented than other consolidated democracies, both presidential and parliamentary¹⁴. The party systems of African countries are, if anything, even more fragmented. Parties tend to proliferate along ethnic lines, because each group constitutes a natural political constituency for hopeful candidates. In addition, because there is a lack of experience with multi-party politics, each candidate tends to assume that his party is going to become a viable entity. The result is a high level of volatility. Political parties come and go and institutionalization is hampered¹⁵.

While under-institutionalized party systems are more common, there are examples of the opposite too. Wherever political parties become rigid and unable to accommodate themselves to changes in the economy or society, the party system may prove to be a hindrance to renewal and thus threaten the political stability of the country. Venezuela is a good case in point. Political parties were capable of monopolizing the political process for a very long time, robbing other institutions of their autonomy and alienating large groups of citizens¹⁶. This over-institutionalization was a major factor behind the main change that brought Hugo Chavez, a former military officer, into power in the late 1990s and allowed him to gain legitimacy at the expense of the established political parties.

Parties are vital to political society and how the party system is constituted and institutionalized matters. Parties are very important in mediating the relationship between citizen and government and tend to be indispensable to the task of forming government as well as constituting an effective opposition¹⁷. The rules that determine the way the party

¹³ Effectiveness refers to the party fragmentation in the legislature. Although it is a continuous scale, an ‘effective’ party is one that is significant enough to have a say in cabinet formation and in policy-making. See Marrku Laakso and Rein Taagepera, “‘Effective’ Number of Political Parties: A Measure with Application to Western Europe”, *Comparative Political Studies* 12, no 1 (April 1979): 3-27.

¹⁴ Linz and Stepan, *op.cit.*, pp 181-82.

¹⁵ Goran Hyden and Staffan Lindberg, “Elections and Democratization in Africa: A Focus on Polyarchic Stabilization”, forthcoming.

¹⁶ Michael Coppedge, *Strong Parties and Lame Ducks: Presidential Partyarchy and Factionalism in Venezuela*. Stanford: Stanford University Press 1994.

¹⁷ Scott Mainwaring and T.R. Scully, *Building Democratic Institutions: Party Systems in Latin America*. Stanford: Stanford University Press 1995.

system works are significant because they also bear on how the legislature operates and how it is perceived.

The Electoral System

One of the few things that political scientists have agreed upon is that electoral systems have a very significant influence on political behavior and choice. Sartori has argued that the electoral system is the most powerful instrument available in constitutional engineering¹⁸. Maurice Duverger has gone a step further and insisted that it is virtually a given that one-seat districts with a plurality rule will reduce the number of parties to two and that multi-seat districts with proportional representation are associated with more than two parties¹⁹.

Many political scientists have considered Duverger's proposition a 'law', but he himself has been more careful suggesting instead that it remains a hypothesis to be further tested. One reason for this caution is that plurality and proportional systems of representation are not monolithic. There are variations, especially on the proportional side. Some countries, like Germany, have adopted a mixture of both, i.e. approximately half the members of the Bundestag are elected in single-member districts, while the rest are elected through a proportional formula within one national constituency, which is tied to the outcome in the single-member districts.

Nonetheless, there is a difference in choosing electoral system between two important considerations: fairness and accountability. Proportional representation satisfies the first of these principles more effectively than the other, because it establishes a close association between percentage of votes and percentage of seats in the legislature. Plurality systems foster accountability in the sense that the single-seat formula encourages closer links between the electorate and their representative. Another distinction that is often made between the two systems is that proportional representation tends to be inclusive, e.g. it

¹⁸ Giovanni Sartori, "Political Development and Political Engineering" in J.D. Montgomery and A. O. Hirschman (eds.), *Public Policy*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1968.

¹⁹ Maurice Duverger, *Political Parties: Their Organization and Activity in the Modern State*. New York: Wiley 1954.

provides more scope for minority representation, while the plurality system tends to create a clear majority on which government can depend in order to carry out its policies.

Although each system tends to have its own advocates, it would be a mistake to assume that one model is always preferable to the other. Because it is impossible to maximize each principle that matters in choosing electoral system, it depends on historical circumstances and the particular type of issues that a country faces at a given time. For instance, there has been a debate in the African context whether the plurality system is preferable to the proportional one. Barkan has argued that in countries where political parties are weak, politics is driven more by patronage and policy, and people vote more on the basis of where they live, a plurality system is better suited than any alternative²⁰. Andrew Reynolds has countered in support of the proportional system arguing that inclusiveness is the most important principle in culturally plural societies. It is better placed to promote political consensus and thus stability²¹. A closer examination of the parliamentary elections in African countries since 1990 reveals that the association between electoral system and party system is not as close as in other countries²². In fact, many countries with proportional representation have fewer parties than those with plurality systems. One reason for this anomaly is likely to be the neo-patrimonialist nature of African politics, where person rather than party, patronage rather than policy, matters to the electorate.

Design of the electoral system sets the basic rules that apply to how political representatives are chosen and, therefore, how they perform their task of aggregating demands from society into policy. The legitimacy of these representatives, however, is not determined only by the system in which they operate but also by their own behavior. If electoral rules are violated and norms of fairness and freedom of choice are compromised by the way that candidates for the legislature behave, the whole exercise loses its legitimacy. A parliament that lacks credibility is one that will undermine belief in the principle of good governance. This is a response that is shared across cultures and nations. The international community has spent a lot of resources on monitoring elections in transitional societies on the premise that these are formative elections and thus very important for improving governance. What makes an

²⁰ Joel D. Barkan, "Elections in Agrarian Societies", *Journal of Democracy* vol. 6 (1995):106-16.

²¹ Andrew Reynolds, "The Case for Proportionality", *Journal of Democracy* vol. 6 (1995): 117-24.

²² Hyden and Lindberg, *op.cit.*

election free and fair has not always been easy to determine, and many election-observing exercises have left as many questions as answers for those in search of a clarification²³.

The literature that has been briefly reviewed above indicates that forming and managing the rules of the election of representatives to the legislature is important in two respects. The design of the electoral system itself has great impact on political outcomes. Without agreement on this fundamental issue, the regime at large is at risk, because electoral systems design is such a prominent part of any effort to change a political system. Whenever such designs are associated with a transition from autocracy to democracy, they are likely to be especially vulnerable, because so many other issues are unsettled at that time. It may be somewhat less threatening if a shift in the electoral system is made when no other significant change occurs. Shifts under such circumstances, however, are not very common, because when there is no real challenge to the way the political system operates, political actors are not likely to call for electoral reform. Italy, Japan, and New Zealand are among the few countries where electoral system reforms have been approved without the system at large being under threat of collapse.

The second aspect refers to how well rules are actually adhered to and administered at times of election. Because of the significance of political society as the prime arena for contestation of power, any violation of the ‘rules of the game’ is viewed as especially serious. Breach of such basic norms as ‘fairness’ and ‘freedom of choice’ becomes a potential threat to the regime at large. It certainly has a direct bearing on how the electorate views its representatives and their work.

The Legislature

In any form of representative democracy, the legislature is expected to play an important role, both in formulating policy and in holding governments accountable for their decisions and actions. What power these bodies have varies according to how freely elected they are and what relationship they have to the executive branch of government. The tendency since the fall of Communism has been for legislatures to become at least formally more powerful

²³ For a discussion of these issues, see Jorgen Elklit and Palle Svensson, “What Makes Elections Free and Fair?”, *Journal of Democracy*, vol. 8 (1997):32-46.

than they were under more autocratic and even totalitarian systems of rule. Ex-communist countries have overwhelmingly chosen parliamentary systems for purposes of governance, while democratizing countries elsewhere in the world have preferred a strong executive in the form of the presidential or semi-presidential system of government. So, in all, the trend since the 1990s has been at best ambiguous: legislatures have from a constitutional point-of-view become more autonomous when compared to the past but they have at the same time found themselves confined by the official and unofficial powers of the executive.

There has been a debate among students of comparative politics as to whether parliamentarism or presidentialism is more suitable for transitional societies. The case for one or the other has typically been done with reference to existing systems and how they have worked elsewhere. Shugart and Carey, for instance, believe that presidentialism is in principle the best system for democracy because it guarantees checks and balances of power. They argue that the problem with the export of this system from the U.S. is that it has been considerably modified. Thus, in Latin America, this modification has allowed for a considerable shift of power in favor of the president at the expense of the legislature²⁴. Mainwaring believes that the issue of how well presidentialism works can only be fully understood in the context of the party system. His point is that wherever presidentialism is operating with a fragmented party system, as in Brazil, there is a tendency for ineffective policy-making²⁵. Parliamentarism, however, has also had its defendants. Stepan and Skach argue that in a historical perspective there has been more stability in parliamentary systems than in those characterized by presidentialism²⁶.

Constitutions alone, however, do not determine the role that legislatures play in developing societies. Because these countries are undergoing political reform at a time when the international community is also pushing for economic reform in these places, the role of legislators has been hampered. Governments typically negotiate major policy reforms with representatives of the international finance institutions. For a variety of reasons, legislators are overlooked. Timeliness has been of the essence. Involving parliamentarians has been

²⁴ Shugart and Carey, *op.cit.*

²⁵ Scott Mainwaring, "Presidentialism, Multipartyism, and Democracy: The Difficult Combination", *Comparative Political Studies* vol. 26 (1993): 198-228.

²⁶ Alfred Stepan and C. Skach, "Constitutional Frameworks and Democratic Consolidation: A Synthesis and Evaluation of Recent Theory and Research", review article, *World Politics* vol. 46 (1993): 1-22.

seen as a complicating and delaying factor. O'Donnell has argued that the strong influence that external actors exercise over domestic policy has created a situation which he calls 'delegative democracy'²⁷. Moore has made a similar point in arguing that governments in developing countries undergoing simultaneous economic and political reforms have become more accountable to international agencies than to their domestic electorates²⁸.

In spite of the promise that political reforms have provided in the past two decades, legislatures have yet to prove themselves as important institutions in many developing societies. They have been held back by structural circumstances, but they have also suffered setbacks because the legislators themselves have not necessarily lived up to the expectations of their electorates. Many have been more interested in their own personal political career and they have often managed to bribe their way to re-election. For these reasons, it is clear that the role of legislatures remains controversial in many countries. Their legitimacy is in question, which means that this important component of the regime is threatening the legitimacy of the broader efforts to establish democracy.

It is with these background issues that we now turn to an analysis of our own data and what we can learn from the survey findings.

Political Society: The Aggregate WGS Findings

The five indicators used in the World Governance Survey reflect the issues that both the literature and governance analysts in the international community are concerned with. They have been constructed in such a way that they as little as possible carry an explicit bias in favor of a particular regime or system. Countries in transition, as indicated above, vary according to their degree of democracy, the system of government they have adopted, and the electoral system that is being used. The indicators used in the survey are:

²⁷ G. O'Donnell, "Delegative Democracy", *Journal of Democracy* vol. 7 (1996):

²⁸ Mick Moore, "Democracy and Development in Cross-National Perspective", *Democratization* vol. 2, 2 (1995): 1-19.

1. Representativeness of Legislature. This indicator assesses the extent to which the legislature is representative of society at large;
2. Political Competition. This indicator assesses the extent to which power can be contested without fear of retaliation;
3. Aggregation of Public Preferences. This indicator assesses how effectively and fairly public preferences are aggregated into public policy;
4. Role of Legislative Function. This indicator assesses the degree of influence that the legislature has on the making on public policy; and
5. Accountability of Elected Officials. This indicator assesses how far elected officials are viewed as accountable to their constituents.

These indicators capture five dimensions of political society that are crucial in any society. The first is how *representative* it is, the second, how *competitive* it is, the third how *effective* it is, the fourth how *influential* it is, and the fifth how *accountable* political society is. By disaggregating the main variable – political society – this way, we expect to get a better sense of what the more critical or controversial dimensions of political society are. Before proceeding to a discussion of each indicator, however, we will provide the aggregate score for each country, divided in terms of overall score into three categories: high, medium, and low.

Differences Between Countries

We will start our analysis by focusing on the overall pattern for each country and what the variations are between the countries included in our survey.

Table 1. Aggregate political society scores by country.

Country	Representativeness	Competitiveness	Effectiveness	Influence	Accountability	Average
High scoring countries						
Chile	2.73	3.93	2.83	3.40	2.40	3.06
India	2.83	4.14	2.92	3.39	2.56	3.17
Jordan	2.63	2.63	2.83	2.68	2.25	2.60
Mongolia	2.79	3.82	2.49	3.08	2.74	2.97
Tanzania	3.15	3.24	2.76	2.76	2.67	2.92
Thailand	2.73	3.68	3.12	3.13	3.12	3.16
Medium scoring countries						
Argentina	2.17	3.51	2.33	2.77	2.20	2.60
Bulgaria	2.90	3.46	2.27	2.56	2.24	2.49
China	2.73	2.30	2.67	2.94	2.58	2.64
Indonesia	2.83	3.80	2.69	3.46	2.34	3.02
Peru	2.27	3.46	2.84	3.27	2.00	2.77
Low scoring countries						
Kyrgyzstan	2.46	2.95	2.67	2.51	1.87	2.49
Pakistan	1.60	2.12	1.70	1.23	1.61	1.65
Philippines	2.14	2.94	2.43	2.74	2.26	2.50
Russia	2.61	2.66	2.53	2.29	1.71	2.36
Togo	1.67	2.21	1.79	1.71	1.83	1.84
Average	2.51	3.18	2.55	2.74	2.28	2.64

There is considerable difference in the average score for each indicator. The highest is for competitiveness, the lowest for accountability of legislators. Our survey tends to confirm that countries that have democratized in recent years have generally been able to institutionalize a competitive party and electoral system. Countries with a long democratic tradition like India score especially high, but this is true also for countries that have turned to competitive elections more recently such as Thailand and Indonesia. It is no surprise that China with its one-party system and Pakistan and Togo score lowest. In the case of the

latter two, the military has either aborted civilian rule, as in Pakistan, or made democratic governance impossible by harassing opposition parties, as in Togo.

The accountability of elected officials appears to be the most problematic aspect of political society. Even countries, that otherwise score quite high, have a lower than average score on this indicator. The newcomers tend to do better than the countries with a longer tradition of elected representatives. Thailand and Mongolia are cases in point. China is interesting in the sense that it does fairly well on this indicator in spite of being a one-party system. The main reason is that the Chinese Communist Party has quite strict rules for ensuring that those elected to the People's Assembly really work for their constituents. Accountability among legislators is possible even when there is no competitive party system. The Chinese case stands in contrast to both Argentina and Peru, which have had multi-party politics on and off for a long time.

The representativeness of the elected officials is also an important issue. One argument is that the electorate should have some one in the legislature who really represents their particular interests and preferences. Countries, which use a plurality system with single-member seats such as India and Tanzania, are among the top scorers on this indicator. Tanzania is an especially interesting case because it is a multi-ethnic society. There are over one hundred different groups, but the boundaries of electoral districts are drawn such that they give virtually all groups a chance to elect their own representative to parliament. Moreover, Tanzania is not deeply divided by social class, another factor that elsewhere reduces the extent to which the legislature is perceived as representative. For instance, it is worth comparing Tanzania with Argentina and Peru, where the score is much lower because politics is seen as controlled by the elite at the expense of the poor and/or indigenous peoples.

Aggregating public preferences is used here as a measure of how effective political society is in performing its main function. There is little evidence in our survey that civil and political societies are at loggerheads with each other. The aggregation of inputs from interest groups, social movements, non-governmental organizations and any other organized activities is seen as functioning quite well in most countries with the exception of those where parliament is stymied by the military. It may be no surprise that the older

democracies like Chile and India score high on this function, because they have a long tradition of institutions that facilitate it. Surprising to some will be how well Thailand does. Although it does not have a formal system of separation of power, its political society tends to function along the lines of ‘checks-and-balances’ by virtue of the manner in which dominant factions in political society shape up. It may be the best example in our survey of a functioning ‘development state’ where the various institutions – formal and informal - are already in place that are necessary for making the state function in an effective manner.

The fifth indicator refers to how influential the legislature is in terms of helping to shape public policy. Again, we find that the older democracies generally do better, although newcomers like Indonesia and Mongolia also do well. The scores for the latter countries may reflect the fact that parliament under autocratic rule had a very limited role to play. Respondents, therefore, are inclined to view the role of the legislature in the new political dispensation as vastly more important. We cannot rule out the ‘euphoria’ factor in our data and this is one place where it shows up. The contrast with the past is so noticeable that it registers in the answers we obtained. On the whole, the average score for this indicator is higher than we had expected given that the literature indicates parliaments have lost much of their ability to influence public policy in many developing countries because of the significant role that the international finance institutions and the donor community at large are playing.

If we compare the aggregate scores for each of the three groups of countries, there is no real surprise. As indicated in the next table, there is a marked difference between the high and low scoring groups, with the middle group falling closer to the high scoring one. Overall, the scores for political society are lower than for any of the other arenas confirming that institutionalizing rules for governance of this arena is not easy. Still, our survey may be seen as coming out with scores that are better than expected given what the academic literature on democratic transition and consolidation has had to say on the subject. One reason may be that writers on Latin American countries, who have a critical, sometimes even cynical, perspective on the issues, have dominated this literature.

Table 2. Mean scores on political society indicators by groups of countries.

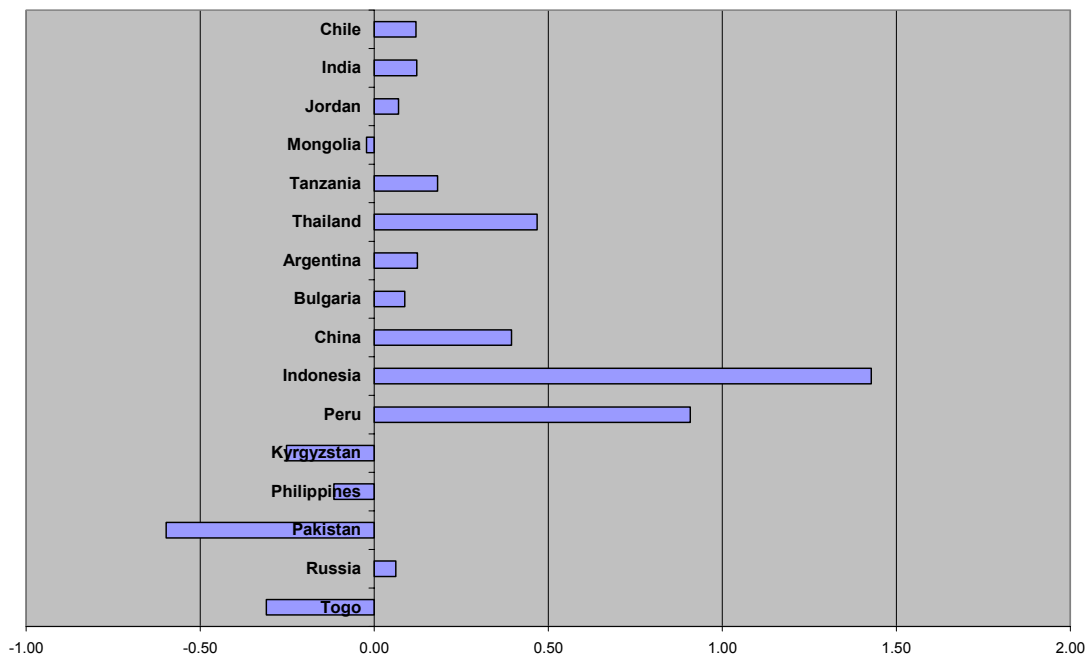
Category of countries	Mean score
High scoring	2.98
Medium scoring	2.70
Low scoring	2.17

But how do the scores for 2000 compare with the perceptions of what prevailed five years earlier?

Changes Over Time

The most important observation is that all countries in the low-scoring group have recorded a decline, while no country in the other two categories has done so. In fact, among the latter, each country has either recorded progress or at least retained a status quo. As Figure 1 illustrates, the decline has been especially marked in Kyrgyzstan, Pakistan and Togo, the improvement most noticeable in Indonesia and Peru.

Figure 1. Changes over time in political society 1996 to 2000.



Pakistan is of special interest here because it is a country that has practiced multi-party democracy on and off since independence in 1948. The record over those fifty or so years has been checkered, but Pakistanis have by and large expected their country to be capable of running a democracy and thereby sustain a viable political society. The sense of decline after the military take-over by General Musharaf, therefore, may have been particularly strong. Togo, by contrast, has never had a tradition of multi-party democracy, but the sense of deprivation there seems to stem first and foremost from the fact that the country has failed to make the transition to democracy that its neighbors, Benin and Ghana, have. The abrogation of political rights in Kyrgyzstan due to the appearance of an Islamic fundamentalism is the main reason why respondents sense a decline there.

With the possible exception of Thailand, the high-scoring group of countries has not experienced much change in the political society arena since 1996. This is by and large a confirmation that these countries are relatively stable and their institutions not really challenged. The improvement in Thailand has something to do with the resurrection of parliament after the military had intervened in the mid-1990s. The most notable improvements are in the medium-scoring category. Both Indonesia and Peru have climbed because the legislature has been able to regain its power and significance after a period of autocratic rule, in Indonesia for more than one generation, in Peru for a shorter time. We do also want to comment on China where the improvement is attributed primarily to a growing role for the People's Assembly in the making of policy.

Even with the improvements that have taken place, scores in the political society arena are low. There are several reasons for this. We shall cover most of these as we now turn to a discussion of each of the five indicators.

Analysis of Each Individual Indicator

As we have indicated above, we have chosen five different measures of how political society is governed. Each refers to an important aspect of the aggregating function sandwiched between civil society and the executive. Each also refers to a more specific or general principle contained in the UDHR, Article 21, which states that the authority of government should be based on the will of the people. In the discussion below, we shall

draw on the statistical data already referred to but also comments made by respondents or country coordinators.

Representativeness

Article 21 (1) of the UDHR states, that “every one has the right to take part in the government of his country, directly or through freely chosen representatives.” This sets the norm that the vast majority of governments around the world have committed themselves to. There are more countries than ever before that are at least aspiring to making this norm come true, but countries undergoing democratic transition, even consolidation, have found that doing so in a manner that is seen as fair by all citizens is very difficult. There are at least three ‘fairness’ issues that come out in our study.

The first regards the unequal representation of women. This is mentioned in several of the country reports accompanying the survey. Although some progress has been made in many countries since the 1995 Beijing Conference on Women, there is still a sense among many respondents that women are not adequately represented. In the Philippines, for instance, at the time of the WGS they made up 12 per cent of the elected House of Representatives. In Mongolia, respondents claimed that neither government nor political parties do anything to encourage female candidates to stand. Traditional customs are alleged to be one reason behind this reluctance.

The second issue concerns the poor. Politics continues to be seen by most as an elite activity. Citizens with little income or education do not have the means to compete for office. The gap between elected representatives and the electorate is commented upon in more than one country. In Indonesia, there is a widespread belief that politics belongs to the capital, Jakarta. In Latin American countries, which tend to be characterized by deep social stratification, there is reference to the relatively exclusive character of the political establishment. This may explain the strong reaction in favor of Lula da Silva’s candidacy for the presidency in Brazil in 2002. Coming out of the ranks of the poor, he could mobilize the low-income groups to support his party and with the right political rhetoric do so without alienating the already well-to-do.

The third issue concerns indigenous groups. The Unscheduled Castes and tribes of India as well as the Indian population in countries like Peru provide examples of the problems referred to in our survey. They constitute significant groups within the population but their voice is not represented in the legislature to an extent commensurate with their numbers. In their view, the formal political process does not really offer them incentives or opportunities to participate.

Two institutional issues are important in assessing this indicator. One is the electoral system. For instance, there are respondents in places like Indonesia who argue that the proportional system of representation is confusing. It leaves ordinary citizens without a sense of whom they are voting for. They don't see the connection between themselves and their elected representatives. The second issue concerns the extent to which the political parties – as private organizations – make an effort to introduce greater fairness in the way they represent the electorate. For instance, in South Africa, political parties have deliberately tried to make party lists in the elections more gender equal and representative of all the various groups that make up the population there. Other respondents in our survey argue that the absence of such measures in their own country leaves the legislature representative of some but not all groups in society.

Competitiveness

This indicator tries to capture the extent to which there is peaceful contestation for power in society. If divergent interests are to become part of official policy, the degree of competitiveness permitted becomes important. Competition is generally between political parties. Wherever parties are allowed to compete freely, the level of competitiveness should be high. There are countries where more modest forms of competition exist. Uganda, for example, has a no-party system, which allows for competition among individual candidates in single-member districts. China is an example of a country, which has only recently opened up in an incrementalist fashion by introducing competitive elections at local levels.

Most countries, including the clear majority in our study, belong to the group that has attempted a wholesale transition from autocracy to democracy. This approach has raised public expectations to a high level and it has not always been easy for countries to make

that transition. Those that have fared reasonably well are countries in Latin America and Eastern Europe. The transition has remained more troublesome in both Africa and Asia.

In our study, this is confirmed in the reports from various countries. In Togo, there has been political violence directed against the opposition. The government of president Eyadema, Africa's longest serving head of state, has done its utmost to undermine the political opposition, including harassment and other interventions that have made the notion of free and fair elections a farce. There have been instances of political violence also in Tanzania, though they have largely been confined to the islands of Zanzibar²⁹. In Asia, the report from Pakistan indicates that while the military intervention put a lid on competitive politics, respondents were quite frank in stating that the civilian political leaders and their parties were all corrupt and manipulated political society to satisfy their own interests³⁰.

While these examples indicate the problems of institutionalizing competitive elections that are also free and fair, there is a broad sense among the respondents in our study that competitiveness has improved since 1996. Although the notion of competitiveness may vary in the minds of respondents, it is still possible to interpret this improvement as an indication that as societies in transition are obliged to hold regular elections, both actors and administrators learn the rules and become better at respecting them. This is a point that has been made with reference to elections on the African continent³¹. Thailand may be a case where this learning has resulted in a more stable form of representative democracy with regular elections. The euphoria expressed by respondents in Indonesia is clearly over the fact that for the first time, people were allowed to participate in a free election in 1999. Our interviews were conducted while the 'honeymoon' effect of these elections was still present.

The competitiveness score is probably the most encouraging comment on political society in our survey. It does suggest that managing the rules properly matters. Even if elections

²⁹ It should be noted here that Zanzibar, though part of the United Republic of Tanzania, enjoys a high degree of autonomy. Our respondents were all from the mainland – originally called Tanganyika – and the scoring as well as comments by our Tanzanian respondents reflect this.

³⁰ The military leader, General Musharaf allowed competitive elections to the parliament to be held in October 2002. The strongest party represents a new coalition of interests in society.

³¹ Joel D. Barkan, "Protracted Transitions Among Africa's New Democracies", *Democratization* vol. 7, 3 (2000): 227-43.

are not all that matters in the context of democratization or ‘good governance’, it is a very significant part of it. Institutionalizing the norm that elections must be free and fair is not easy, especially in societies with a neo-patrimonialist political legacy, where patronage tends to dominate electoral politics. Thus, in our view, the competitiveness score recorded in our survey indicates, finally, also that improving governance is possible.

Effectiveness

There are typically more demands for public resources than can be afforded by government given limited public revenue. Priorities, therefore, must be set. What we are interested in here is the extent to which political society contributes to an aggregation of public preferences in an effective manner. By this we mean that the institutions in political society such as political parties, elections, and legislatures function in ways that allow them to process demands from civil society groups. The effectiveness indicator, therefore, is primarily an indicator of how capable political society is in adopting and processing political demands from civil society.

The party system is the key to how capable political society is in handling demands. If the latter is fragmented, it will be difficult to create coalitions or alliances that are capable of agreement on specific policy packages. Fragmentation here does not primarily refer to ideological cleavages. It is quite possible for policies to be developed even if the ideological distance between main parties is considerable. What we have in mind is the fragmentation that comes from too many parties. For instance, in Europe, both Denmark and Italy are among countries with a considerable number of ‘effective parties’, i.e. actors that may have a bearing on how a cabinet is formed and coalitions formed. In Latin America, Brazil, as suggested above, stands out as a country with a large number of political parties. The point is that while these parties are often closely tied to specific interest groups, and articulation therefore may be effective, finding a compromise with other parties on specific policies tends to become more difficult.

Our study confirms that the party system in many countries is weak. Judging from the comments we obtained, there are at least two reasons for this. One is the electoral system that encourages weak parties. For instance, in Argentina, respondents complain that the

listas sabanas - or different lists of candidates sponsored by the same political party – causes not only confusion in the electorate but also a weakening of the party as a coherent actor in the legislature. The electoral laws are also blamed for the persistence of weak political parties in countries like Jordan. Because democratic rule is new in so many of these transitional societies, political parties have not yet established themselves as autonomous actors. Mongolia is a case in point when it comes to lamenting the inability of parties to act coherently and consistently.

The other reason is that political parties remain controlled by powerful or charismatic individuals. Voters choose a particular party not because it is necessarily strong as an organization but because of the personal appeal of the candidate. While this is by no means unique to transitional societies, its consequences tend to be different from countries that have more consolidated party systems. Respondents in the Philippines, for instance, made it clear that voters support particular parties not because of a position on a given issue but because the personal attributes of the candidate, including whether he is from their particular district or not.

It is no surprise that the highest scores on this variable can be found among countries that have been exposed to democracy for a longer period of time. Chile, India, and Peru have a political society that has worked well for a long time, albeit with some interruption in Chile and also Peru. A few other countries deserve special mentioning here. Thailand, although a relative newcomer to democratic rule, is seen as having a legislature that is quite capable of absorbing and processing political demands from below. Its institutions are also relatively stable and functioning reasonably well. The same may be said for China in spite of not being democratic in the liberal sense. As a mass organization, the Communist Party has a system in place for processing demands from the cadres, if not directly from the citizens. The former may not always represent the latter, but respondents in our survey indicate that when it comes to effectiveness, political society in China functions quite well and is sufficiently effective to pick up specific demands while at the same time not opening the flood-gates to the rising expectations among the Chinese.

Influence

This indicator refers to how far the legislature is seen to bring public preferences to bear on public policy. More specifically it refers to its interaction with the executive branch of government. A legislature may be capable of responding to civil society demands but still not very influential when it comes to shaping public policy. Public preferences may get lost, because legislators are unwilling or unable to pursue them without first watering them down. The latter depends on at least three major factors. One is the system of government. Differences in degree of influence may be a reflection of whether the system is presidential or parliamentary. A second factor is the extent to which political parties are centralized or decentralized. The extent to which the legislature itself may be capable of influencing policy would differ depending on degree of party control of the process. The third factor is the extent to which the legislature has a committee system that is not only exercising oversight but is actually involved in working out specific policy compromises between government and opposition.

There is at least some indication that parliamentary systems may score higher on this indicator than presidential ones. Both India and Thailand, which function within the parliamentary tradition score high on influence. In both instances, the opposition is part of the policy-making process. It is treated as a “loyal” contender that can bring insights to the final version of a given bill. Other countries that score high here include Chile and Peru in Latin America and Indonesia in Asia. All three have presidential systems, although the separation of power is not as clear as it is in the U.S. constitution. Judging from the comments of our respondents in these countries, the high score on this indicator is at least in part a reflection of recent gains made by the legislature in its relations to the executive. In Chile, for instance, it reflects the ability of the legislature to free itself from a constitutional provision for the military to have reserved seats. In Peru, it was its enhanced influence in the wake of President Fujimori’s resignation. Much the same applies to Indonesia where parliament gained new influence with President Suharto’s resignation. In other words, it is not clear that these scores can be attributed to institutional factors as much as ‘cyclical’ variations in politics.

The influence score does not only reflect the variations in system of government. If political parties are strong and centralized, one would expect that legislators have less influence on policy than the executive. This is at least the proposition that comes out of the experience of more consolidated democratic systems. Our survey is more ambiguous. A country like Tanzania with a strong and dominant party forming the government and making up three quarters of the seats in parliament ranks lower on this indicator than on most of the political society indicators. At the same time, countries like Russia and Bulgaria, which do not have strong parties, also rank quite low on parliamentary influence on policy. The most convincing evidence that we have to suggest that decentralized parties give more influence to the legislators come from India and the Philippines, both of which have relatively decentralized political parties, yet score high on influence in our survey. Furthermore, we find that China's People's Assembly is deemed to have influence on policy to an extent that is rather unexpected. We lack enough data to explain this other than to suggest that this comment may be reflective of the relative influence that elected party organs also exercise in a system such as that of China.

In addition, behind the scoring on this indicator lies the question of how the legislature is organized. Some legislatures are new and have really not yet developed a functioning committee system. These bodies usually lack the resources that allow for much in-house work on specific policies. Archives are poorly organized if in existence at all. Elected representatives lack their own staff. Research capacity is most likely non-existent. This limits the role that the legislature can play in terms of shaping official policy. This complaint is especially explicit in Mongolia. As long as committees remain confined to what is essentially their 'watchdog' function, they are likely to find themselves more often in confrontational posturing vis-à-vis government than when engaged in a collaborative effort to develop an effective policy. Exercising oversight is an important part of what the legislature is meant to do, but if that is the sole thing it is capable of, the executive is likely to treat it more as a nuisance than an asset in policy-making. Moreover, it is likely to leave the legislature with less room to perform this oversight role. Again, we find that countries with legislatures that are well organized and have committee systems in place with at least a minimum level of independent staff and research capacity do relatively well on influence. Chile, India, Philippines and Thailand are cases in point. We also notice that countries without effective committees, e.g. Jordan, Tanzania and Russia, score much lower.

Accountability

This indicator is meant to capture how well political society fosters public accountability. It is not only how legislators are elected that matters. Also important for the legitimacy of political society is how they behave while in parliament. Most countries do not have a 'recall' system, which allows the electorate to call for an elected representative's resignation during his term of service. The common pattern is that voters have to wait until the next election is called. This is meant to take care of the problem with a legislator's unsatisfactory performance. The issue in many transitional societies, however, is that incumbents often have an advantage over their competitors and can 'buy' the support they need to get re-elected. Our survey indicates that there are two issues at stake here. The first is the extent to which an elected representative is seen as pursuing his own personal interests rather than those of his constituents. The second is the extent to which he is seriously interested in policy as opposed to simply dishing out patronage.

The accountability score is lower in our survey than on any of the other political society indicators. There is quite a general lack of trust in elected representatives that cuts across national borders and types of political system. Take, for example, Chile, India, and Peru, which on the previous indicator were high scorers. On accountability, they fall toward the lower end of the scale. In Chile, respondents made it very clear that elected representatives have a poor image. They are seen as ignoring the public and instead working for themselves or their party. This is a view that is also echoed in many other countries. We see it in comments from Indonesia and in the country coordinator's report for Argentina. Again, we find that the skepticism toward the representatives is exacerbated in proportional systems of representation. Because the political parties approve the lists, voters don't see how they can exercise control over their representatives. The latter are seen as acting with little regard for what the voters want. Respondents maintain that in these systems, the media play an especially important watchdog role, because the voters' own ability to do so is hampered by the electoral system. Because the link between voter and representative is not direct in systems of proportional systems, they tend to generate a level of skepticism in transitional societies where institutions are still in flux or just in the process of becoming consolidated.

A plurality system with its direct link between voter and elected representative, however, is no guarantee of accountability. Because so much is at stake in single-member districts, candidates are also more likely to spend considerable amounts of resources to win. Patronage tends to become especially important in these systems. Patronage may be issued any time, but becomes especially significant at times of electoral campaigning when it is crucial to get popular support. It is not uncommon for incumbents to rely on resources that are from a legal point really public. For instance, ruling parties tend to take advantage of their control of government resources and make them available to members who stand for re-election.

Although specific references to patronage are not very common in our study, they do come out in references to corruption. Some representatives bribe their way to power, an allegation that is made in relation to political society in places like Pakistan, Philippines, and Tanzania. Again, it seems like plurality systems of election tend to cause this problem more than proportional systems do. The patronage issue is often more serious than it appears. Patronage is a way of rewarding people for past support or in anticipation of future support. It is distributed on a personal basis regardless of what the policy issue may be. In other words, it tends to take away the attention from policy and instead institutionalize informal rules that often run against the interest of local constituents. This leads to a system of governance that is based on clientelism³² rather than public issues that are of concern to constituents and country alike. While clientelism may be a necessary feature of transitional societies and provide at least a tenuous link between elite and mass politics, it is clear that its effects on governance of political society are such that it doesn't help enhancing its legitimacy.

Implications for Research and Practice

There are at least three implications that we like to discuss by way of concluding this paper. The first concerns what our survey has to say about political society. The second relates to what it says about the specific governance challenges inherent in political society. The third

³² For an account of the role of clientelism in the context of national integration in Africa, see Rene Lemarchand, "Political Clientelism and Ethnicity in Tropical Africa: Competing Solidarities in Nation-Building", *American Political Science Review* vol. 66, no 1 (1972): 68-90.

builds on these other two concerns in order to discuss what our survey means for those practitioners working on improving governance around the world.

The World Governance Survey confirms that political society is the most difficult arena to govern. There are considerable differences both across time, countries, and indicators. These differences stem in part from systemic or institutional variations, but they can in most instances be attributed to a discrepancy between prescribed rules and actual behavior or practice. This discrepancy seems to be the result of lack of experience and personal predispositions that go contrary to the formal rules.

Many of the countries included in our sample are newcomers to a system in which political society is meant to play an important part in the political process. Institutions are only now being introduced or put into place. With regard to such key functions as adopting views from the public and transforming them into policy, our study confirms that individual actors and organizations are still learning. They make mistakes and there is reason in some places to consider whether the rules adopted so far really are the most suitable for the country's continued development.

The specific governance challenges that are highlighted by our study are reminiscent of what the literature on democratization also discusses. People do have expectations that their representatives really serve the interest of their constituents; that the legislature is responsive to public opinion, and that it can exercise influence on policy. We do not conclude that there is one path for all countries toward good governance. Institutional differences exist with regard to such key functions as how party and electoral systems are constituted and how representatives are chosen. These cannot be altered without attention to the historical legacy or socio-cultural context in which they have been developing. Even if they sometimes function only sub-optimally, their *raison-d'etre* should not be called into question. Countries in transition cannot necessarily be expected to function perfectly.

Many of the shortcomings of political society, however, are directly attributable to the behavior of individual members of the legislature. They do not necessarily live up to the expectations associated with the rules or, even worse, they outright violate these rules. We came across frequent references to elected representatives having abandoned their

constituents or having engaged in corrupt behavior. These breaches of expected norms have definitely contributed to lowering the legitimacy of political society at large.

We also found that the perception of governance can vary quite considerably over time with regard to key functions in political society. This is often indicative of a lack of institutionalization. People don't trust the institutions because their track record is too limited or too uneven. They can experience an upswing, however, that is largely the result of other arenas performing poorly. For instance, there are windows of opportunities for political society to grow in significance and attain new legitimacy, as the case was in Indonesia and Peru just before we conducted our survey.

Another important point to make here is that high scores on governance of political society do not come from democratic countries only. We differ from the international discourse on "good governance" which has a very distinct bias in favor of liberal democracy. Our study confirms that high governance scores are obtainable also in countries with other than a liberal political dispensation. China is the most obvious case in point. Its political society may not be as pluralist or open as in other countries, but it functions satisfactorily in terms of producing results.

The concluding observations that we wish to make concern the implications for governance practitioners. With specific regard to political society, what does our study tell that is important for those in the international community that advise on these issues? The first point is that in spite of all the money that has gone into strengthening legislatures and monitoring elections, remarkably little progress seems to have been made. This should not necessarily be a source of despair but an invitation to accept that any support of political society, whether the legislature or the electoral administration, is not merely a technical or 'capacity-building' issue. While greater capacity is needed in many countries, every gesture of support is highly political and will be perceived as such. There will be those in support of it, but also those opposing it. Governance work is not tantamount to some form of 'political engineering', an observation that may be especially true with reference to political society, because the arena is by definition so contested. Our study suggests that trust and social capital in the relationship between voters and their representatives – or civil and

political society – are as important ingredients in what needs to be done as are such more mundane inputs as training, staff capacity, or archives.