

State legitimacy: An updated dataset for 52 countries

BRUCE GILLEY

Mark O. Hatfield School of Government, Portland State University, USA

Abstract. A previous article in this journal presented a conceptualisation of the political legitimacy of the state and its operationalisation for 72 countries c. 2000. This article provides an updated dataset of state legitimacy for 52 countries c. 2008 using the same conceptualisation. It presents a brief discussion of the comparative results of the two datasets.

Keywords: legitimacy; consent; political support; political trust; satisfaction; rule of law

Introduction

In a previous article in this journal (Gilley 2006), the political legitimacy of the state was conceptualised for the purposes of empirical research. The conceptualisation was based on the three dimensions of political legitimacy outlined most fully by Beetham (1991) – namely the legality of the state, the moral justification of the state and the consent enjoyed by the state. Using historical evidence as well as convergent data analysis, it was argued that in aggregating these three dimensions, justification should count roughly twice as heavily as each of legality and consent.

The operationalisation of the concept was then executed using data from the late 1990s and early 2000s (c. 2000) for 72 countries, containing within them 83 per cent of the world's population. The data included substitutive or 'effect' indicators as well as constitutive or 'cause' indicators (Bollen & Lennox 1991). The results were briefly presented and discussed and became the basis of a subsequent book-length treatment of the empirical study of political legitimacy (Gilley 2009). Other scholars have also drawn upon the results as the basis for analysis of social and political issues (Grimes 2008; Rothstein 2010; Hechter 2009).

The results have also given rise to renewed interest in legitimacy measurement. Power and Cyr (2009) validated, replicated and expanded the measurement for 18 Latin American countries c. 2005, and then used the results to inquire into the explanation for variations across those cases. Seligson and Booth (2009) dissented from the conceptually driven measurement in favour

of a correlation-driven one, arguing that legitimacy is only legitimacy if it can be shown to correlate with certain observed behaviours. They also argued that 'political legitimacy' should address a wider object than only the state, and included 'political community' and 'economic performance' in their measure. Their legitimacy calculations for eight Latin American countries c. 2004 (Seligson & Booth 2009: 247) were only modestly correlated ($r = 0.55$) to the same eight countries in the 'Gilley replication' measurement of Power and Cyr, showing the implications of the different measurement strategies.

Updated data

For the purposes of ongoing inquiry, I have replicated my original measure using updated data. The conceptualisation of legitimacy remains unchanged – namely, *a state is more legitimate the more that its citizens treat it as holding and exercising power rightfully, meaning in a manner that is consistent with rules and laws (legality), that is morally justified (justification), and to which they have actively consented (consent), where justification is roughly twice as important as legality and consent.*

The data used to measure 'Views of Legality' consists of two questions from the World Values Survey 2004–2008 on confidence in the justice system and perceived respect for human rights (the mean of the two indicators is used). The data used to measure 'Views of Moral Justification' consist of two types (the mean of the two types is used): two attitudinal indicators from the World Values Survey 2004–2008 on confidence in the civil service and an overall assessment of how democratically the country is being governed; and a separate behavioural indicator from the Center for Systemic Peace (2009) that is the sum of 'Security Legitimacy' (a measure of the repression of political opposition in the country) and 'Political Legitimacy' (a measure of the exclusion of key political actors or groups in the country). As before, the data used to measure 'Acts of Consent' consists of two indicators (the mean of the two is used): taxes on income, profits and property as a percentage of central government revenues less social contributions from the 2007–2009 period; and voting turnout for the most recent legislative election in the 2006–2010 period as a proportion of the voting age population. All data is rescaled using a 0–10 scale and then aggregated as before. As mentioned, justification is weighed 50 per cent, and legality and consent 25 per cent each.

The rationale for all of these indicators and measurement strategies remains the same except for one. The 'Security Legitimacy/Political Legitimacy' indicator replaces the previously used 'Incidence of Political Violence in Civic Protests' indicator. This indicator alone accounts for 25 per cent of a

country's legitimacy score (since it is half of Views of Justification, which in turn is half of the overall score). As before, it is preferable to have a behavioural indicator to balance the attitudinal indicators when measuring an essentially latent concept like political legitimacy. Whereas the political violence indicator captured citizen behaviour and was included as a hypothesised 'effect' of legitimacy, the security legitimacy/political legitimacy indicator captures state behaviour and is thus included as a hypothesised 'cause' of legitimacy. While it is preferable to avoid inserting causal hypotheses into the measurement of a latent concept, the repression and exclusion used here are sufficiently generic and universal examples of 'bad behaviour' by states to merit inclusion. Political legitimacy (exclusion) includes five different indicators of ideological, ethnic and party/group exclusion. Security legitimacy (repression) repeats the Political Terror Scale (Gibney et al. 2011) using nine-year smoothing techniques to avoid reliability problems.

Overall, then, as before, this legitimacy measurement is composed half of attitudinal indicators and half of behavioural indicators, distinguishing it from purely attitudinal measures.

This data is available for 52 countries. There are nine missing values of the total possible of 364 (seven indicators for 52 countries), or 2.5 per cent. Missing values are excluded in the case of legality and justification indicators and imputed (Vietnam turnout uses the average) or substituted (China turnout uses survey-based village election turnout as reported in Su et al. 2011) in the case of consent indicators. The regional breakdown, as before, presents a reasonable global sample: 15 are Western European and Anglophone countries; nine are East and South Asian; nine are post-communist Central and Eastern European; eight are Latin American; seven are African; and four are Middle Eastern. Together, these 52 countries accounted for 4.9 billion people, or 70 per cent of the global population in 2009 – less than the 83 per cent covered by the previous dataset. The 'typical' country is a middle-income electoral democracy such as Mexico or Turkey.

Updated results

The overall tables of the aggregate legitimate scores are shown in Table 1.

Discussion

Several substantive contributions emerge from this updated dataset which merit brief comment. As a general pattern, the two results share many similar

Table 1. Legitimacy scores, mid to late 2000s, 0 to 10, all countries

Country	Score	Country	Score	Country	Score
Norway	7.97	Thailand	5.89	Slovenia	4.33
Finland	7.40	South Korea	5.87	Burkina Faso	4.32
Sweden	7.33	Germany	5.84	Zambia	4.17
Canada	7.26	United States	5.83	Turkey	3.96
Australia	7.18	Netherlands	5.74	Mexico	3.50
Vietnam	7.07	South Africa	5.45	Peru	3.44
New Zealand	6.78	China	5.36	Bulgaria	3.21
Uruguay	6.66	Cyprus	5.26	Russia	3.18
Spain	6.64	India	5.21	Ukraine	2.99
Switzerland	6.50	Jordan	5.17	Serbia	2.69
United Kingdom	6.21	Chile	5.05	Romania	2.44
Italy	6.15	Malaysia	5.05	Georgia	2.42
Japan	6.13	France	5.03	Colombia	2.35
Rwanda	6.11	Trinidad & Tobago	4.70	Iran	2.04
Indonesia	6.03	Brazil	4.68	Ethiopia	1.82
Ghana	6.00	Morocco	4.58	Moldova	0.98
Taiwan	6.00	Argentina	4.47		
Mali	5.91	Poland	4.37		

features. Scandinavian countries along with Canada continue to top the list as the most legitimate states, while Central and Eastern European post-communist states continue to make up a large part of the world's least legitimate states. The entry of Vietnam in a top position may reflect the relatively immature state of survey techniques in that country as well as genuinely positive citizen evaluations. The high rankings of Rwanda, Ghana and Mali are a reminder of the democratic achievements in many parts of Africa.

Although the dataset samples are not the same, there is a substantial overlap between the first and second. There are 41 countries that are found in both sets and the typical countries in both as measured by developmental level and democracy score are similar: an average per capita gross domestic product in purchasing power terms of about US\$12,100 in the former dataset versus about US\$18,700 in the updated one, and average Freedom House combined liberties scores of 2.5 and 2.6, respectively. By recalculating legitimacy scores for only these 41 countries, we can examine changes in rank over the two periods. Countries whose rankings changed dramatically between the two dates are likely to have experienced significant changes in their state legitimacy during the 2000s.

The five countries that experienced the greatest increases in their rankings between the c. 2000 measurement and the c. 2008 measurement are: New Zealand (+13), Indonesia (+12), India (+9), Switzerland (+8) and Russia (+7). As discussed in a previous work (Gilley 2009: 55), New Zealand was one of the world's biggest under-legitimizers (legitimacy relative to performance) c. 2000, where good performance was coupled with unusually low legitimacy. The state in New Zealand thus seems to have redressed its legitimacy gap during the 2000s. Russia, meanwhile, was one of the world's biggest under-performers (performance relative to income) c. 2000 (Gilley 2009: 24). It was hypothesised that the rule of Vladimir Putin would improve legitimacy through improved performance, which appears to be the case. Indonesia and India, meanwhile, had successful political and economic liberalisation programmes, respectively, throughout the 2000s that have resulted in more positive citizen evaluations of the state.

The five countries that experienced the greatest decreases in their rankings between the c. 2000 measurement and the c. 2008 measurement are: Netherlands (-16), Moldova (-12), Iran (-12), China (-11) and the United States (-10). Again, two Western countries are included here – a reminder that Western countries are no more or less prone to 'legitimacy crisis' than others. In the Netherlands and the United States, rising social tensions relating to post-9/11 domestic and foreign policies in both countries help to explain the precipitous declines. It also remains notable that another long-established liberal democracy where the response to Islam has inflamed political tensions – France – remains far down on both rankings (24th in both cases).

The near-total collapse of legitimacy in Moldova (whose ranking fell from 29th to 41st) clearly reflects rising opposition to the entrenched Party of Communists of the Republic of Moldova (PCRM). This legitimacy crisis culminated in mass protests that led to the PCRM's collapse after a flawed election in 2009 and the coming to power of the democratic opposition.

A similar dynamic was seen in Iran, where increased opposition to the Islamic leadership culminated in the 'Green Revolution' following the fraudulent presidential election in 2009. In the case of Iran, the opposition failed to dislodge the regime. Whereas legitimacy in Moldova can be expected to improve, that in Iran will likely continue to weaken.

China's steep decline in the rankings may reflect the emergence of a more critical citizenry throughout the 2000s as the wave of 1990s nationalism wore off. It may also reflect improved survey instruments and behavioural data collection – a trend towards the professionalisation of social indicators that is also likely to take shape in Vietnam.

Appendix. Data

Dimension	Indicator	Source	Mean	Missing values
Legality	Perceived respect for human rights (sum of 'Some' or 'A lot', excluding DK/NA)	World Values Survey 2004–2008	60%	5
	Confidence in the justice system (sum of 'Some' or 'A lot', excluding DK/NA)	World Values Survey 2004–2008	53%	0
Justification	Confidence in civil service (sum of 'Some' or 'A lot', excluding DK/NA)	World Values Survey 2004–2008	45%	0
	Rating of how democratically the country is being governed (average score on 1–10 scale, excluding DK/NA)	World Values Survey 2004–2008	6.40	2
	Sum of security legitimacy (repression) and political legitimacy (exclusion) scores (30 to 0)	Center for Systemic Peace	8.1	0
Consent	Taxes on income, profits and property as a percentage of central government revenues less social contributions	IMF, mostly 2007–2010	34%	0
	Turnout for last national legislative election as a percentage of the voting age population	Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA)	63%	2

References

- Beetham, D. (1991). *The legitimation of power*. London: Macmillan.
- Bollen, K.A. & Lennox, R. (1991). Conventional wisdom on measurement: A structural equation perspective. *Psychological Bulletin* 110: 305–314.
- Center for Systemic Peace (2009). State Fragility Index. Available online at: www.systemicpeace.org/inscr/SFIv2009a.xls
- Gibney, M., Cornett, L. & Wood, R. (2011). Political Terror Scale. Available online at: www.politicalterrorsscale.org
- Gilley, B. (2006). The meaning and measure of state legitimacy: Results for 72 countries. *European Journal of Political Research* 45: 499–525.
- Gilley, B. (2009). *The right to rule: How states win and lose legitimacy*. New York: Columbia University Press.

- Grimes, M. (2008). Consent, political trust and compliance: Rejoinder to Kaina's remarks on 'Organizing consent'. *European Journal of Political Research* 47: 522–535.
- Hechter, M. (2009). Legitimacy in the modern world. *American Behavioral Scientist* 53: 279–288.
- Power, T.J. & Cyr, J.M. (2009). Mapping political legitimacy in Latin America. *International Social Science Journal* 60: 253–272.
- Rothstein, B. (2010). Happiness and the welfare state. *Social Research* 77: 441–468.
- Seligson, M. & Booth, J. (2009). *The legitimacy puzzle: Political support and democracy in Latin America*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Su, F. et al. (2011). Clans, electoral procedures and voter turnout: Evidence from villagers' committee elections in transitional China. *Political Studies* 59: 432–457.

Address for correspondence: Bruce Gilley, Mark O. Hatfield School of Government, Portland State University, Portland, OR 97207, USA. E-mail: gilleyb@pdx.edu