Conference Report: Policy Dialogue Day May 10th 2017

“From Knowledge to Action: Current Insights on Democracy, Governance and Armed Conflict”

A collaboration between: V-Dem, QoG, GLD & UCDP

1. Overview

The 2017 Policy Dialogue Day was organized jointly by the V-Dem (Varieties of Democracy) Institute, the QoG (Quality of Government) Institute, GLD-Gothenburg (Program for Governance and Local Development) and UCDP (Uppsala Conflict Data Program). The conference seeks to bridge the gap between analysis and practice. 2017’s Dialogue Day covered topics related to the most recent academic findings in the areas of democracy, conflicts, corruption, and local governance. It is an annual event that continues to serve as an important platform for practitioners and policy-makers as well as academics.

This year’s conference covered a broad range of themes, among others: what are most important global changes in democracy, conflict and governance today, and what are their implications for promoting human development? Is democracy really in decline today? What do the latest findings say about current trends in armed conflicts? How has the nature and scope of conflict changed, and can we expect that democratic institutions can help prevent it? Is corruption a source of “bad democracy” or the other way around, an outcome? Can you have “good government” without democracy? And how important is the state to human development outcomes? Has the state and democracy lost its meaning for citizens today? How do we best promote democracy, human rights, quality of government, and peace in today's changing environment?

The day was opened by introductory speech by Pam Fredman (Vice-Chancellor) University of Gothenburg, Mrs. Annika Söder (State Secretary for Foreign Affairs, Sweden) and keynote speaker Richard Youngs (Carnegie Endowment for Democracy). This was followed Professor Staffan I. Lindberg (V-Dem, University of Gothenburg) launching the very first V-Dem Annual Report 2017, and Mr. David Bulman (World Bank) presenting the World Development Report 2017. After the introductory session, the sessions continued in four parallel thematic tracks on democracy, governance, local development, and armed conflict. The first sessions focused on the latest academic findings within the thematic areas, this was followed by afternoon sessions led by practitioners/policy makers. The rationale for the afternoon sessions is to “turn the tables” to enable discussion on major issues within the policy community and how they can feed into research agendas.
2. Summaries from Thematic Sessions

This report provides short summaries from each of the thematic sessions. Summaries are provided by the rapporteurs: Felix Hartmann, PhD Candidate, University of Gothenburg; Lindsay Benstead, Associate Professor, Portland State; Ruth Carlitz, Research Fellow, Program on Governance and Local Development, University of Gothenburg; Isis Yano, Intern, Quality of Government Institute, University of Gothenburg; Marco Cox, Intern, Quality of Government Institute, University of Gothenburg; Marie Dumont, Intern, Quality of Government Institute, University of Gothenburg; Juraj Medzihorsky, Post-Doc, V-Dem Institute, University of Gothenburg; Francesco Piccinelli, Intern, V-Dem Institute, University of Gothenburg; Laura Maxwell; Sirianne Dahlum, Post-Doc, V-Dem Institute, University of Gothenburg; Anna Luhrmann, Post-Doc, V-Dem Institute, University of Gothenburg; Richard Morgan, Post-Doc, V-Dem Institute, University of Gothenburg.

The report is compiled by Francesco Piccinelli, Intern at the V-Dem Institute, University of Gothenburg.

2.1 Democracy

The Democracy session was divided into two panels: “Unevenness in Democracy” and “Accountability and Development”. The panels were moderated by John Gerring (University of Texas at Austin, USA).

During the first panel, three papers were presented. In the first presentation, Kelly McMann (Case Western University) illustrated how unevenness can be reduced using V-Dem data. Unevenness is reduced when either democracy or autocracy is consolidated. Staffan Lindberg (V-Dem, University of Gothenburg) presented the first findings of the FASDEM (Failing and Successful Sequences of Democratization) project, looking into typical sequences of successful and failed democratization. He highlighted that free and fair elections usually appear early in the sequence in successful cases, while in failed democratizations they appear much later. Carl Henrik Knutsen (University of Oslo) presented the paper “Who Revolts? Empirically Revisiting the Social Origins of Democracy”. In the paper, he and his co-authors look into successes/failures of democratization movements. The paper shows the importance of an urban middle class and industrial workers in the democratization process. Specifically, such processes are associated with success of democratization in short and medium term.

In the following panel, Valeriya Mechkova (V-Dem, University of Gothenburg) presented her work on clientelism as a substitute for public policy. The paper found evidence that clientelism sometimes can lead to improved human development. The paper shows that in case of extreme poverty and/or single party dominance, infant mortality (human development) is reduced when there is a higher degree of clientelism. Valeriya Mechkova was though careful to stress that clientelism still is not good in the sense that this is something we should encourage or strive for. Anna Lührmann (V-Dem, University of Gothenburg) presented the paper “Constraining Governments: New indices of vertical, horizontal and diagonal accountability”. The main finding is that accountability is on the rise, and that diagonal and vertical accountability having increasing the most over the past 25 years. Horizontal accountability has increased the least. These different types of accountability are positively related to development outcomes and newly developed measures of accountability are available in the new V-Dem dataset.
The third paper, “Suicide by Competition” by Michael Bernhard (University of Florida) and Amanda B. Edgell (University of Florida) asks: “Do authoritarian elections promote stability or democratic transitions?”. The paper concludes that elections can have a democratizing effect even under an authoritarian regime. According to the paper, iterated, competitive and multiparty elections are risky for autocrats, especially during the first elections. As competitiveness increases, dictators who adopt multiparty elections play a dangerous game. In single/hegemonic party systems, it is easier to maintain power.

The turning the tables-panel was moderated by Per Nordlund (SIDA). Secretary General Maria Leissner (Community of Democracies) gave a though-provoking input statement reflecting on how authoritarian leaders turn democracies into illiberal states. From her experience, it starts with control of the judiciary, then public service media and finally public administration. In the next stage, they pull out of international organizations and hamper the election laws. She called for democracies to fight back to stop this worrying trend. The second speaker, Timur Onica (European Endowment for Democracy), reported similar challenges from the Endowment’s work in Eastern Europe.

2.2 Governance

The morning panels on “Corruption and Quality of Government” and “Quality of Government and Effective Democracy”, gave the audience insights on how elections, taxation, gender and cadastral records impact the quality of government. Both panels were moderated by Andreas Bågenholm (QoG, University of Gothenburg). Sarah Lister (UNDP) articulated how research on these subjects can be applied to policy making, and how institutions interact with other actors. A question from the audience sparked a debate about how policy makers can respond to research that aims to isolate variables when practitioners are dealing with a wide range of actors and institutions.

Georgios Xezonakis (University of Gothenburg) demonstrated that when an economy is performing well, voters are less likely to punish corrupt leaders. Sarah Lister responded with an additional push to further investigate the matter with particular attention to how media deals with such politicians. According to Sarah Lister, both policy makers and researchers could benefit from these fruitful discussions.

In the afternoon, Greg Power (Global Partners Governance) urged the audience to think big and act small. The Global Partners Governance focuses on strengthening the capacity of ministers, local governments and members of parliaments, before tackling larger institutional changes. Ann Sofi Agnevik (Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions) pushed for a greater municipal level focus in research. In her presentation, she mentioned that a small change at the municipal government level could lead to greater accountability. Andreas Bågenholm (QoG, University of Gothenburg) asked what kind of research policy makers would like to see more of. Furtherly articulating, he asked if research is moving towards case studies, or large sample size global analyses. Patrick Keullers (UNDP) responded that policy makers would benefit from research that contributes to an explanation for why countries with similar degrees of development show large disparities with regards to corruption levels.
2.3 Local Development

The subjects in the morning panels were “Challenges of Representation”, moderated by Lise Rakner (University of Bergen) and “The politics of service provisions”, moderated by Ellen Lust (GLD, University of Gothenburg).

Adam Harris (GLD, University of Gothenburg) presented the paper “Local Ethnicity and Local Elections: Lessons from South Africa's 2016 Elections”. His research explores the limits of ethnic identity voting in South Africa. In particular, what non-identity aspects do influence swing-voters. The research finds that partisanship, party performance, and patronage influence whether or not an individual will vote with his/her ethnic group. Asiyati Chiweza (University of Malawi), Ragnhild Muriaas (University of Bergen) and Lindsay Benstead (Portland State University) presented “Gender and Representation in Malawi”. The paper explores the support of citizens to include more women into politics. Women representation in local government and parliament is very low in Malawi. Therefore, they ask: “Can electoral gender quotas be a possible solution?”. Ellen Lust (GLD, University of Gothenburg) presented “The Dynamics of Local and National Elections: Partisanship, Ethnicity, and Club Goods in Malawi”. Levels of elections do matter, therefore, voters make different evaluations depending on the power of elected officials and access to resources. These characteristics vary dependent on the level of the elections. The GLD Local Government Performance Index for Malawi finds that gender does not matter for the evaluation of candidates. Partisanship, not ethnicity, is important for local elections. Ethnicity is important only at national level elections. At local level dynamics are different. These different dynamics have implications for representation, and also in terms of demands to officials.

In “Ethnic Determinants of Local Service Provision in Africa: Evidence from Malawi,” Adam Harris, Kristen Kao, and Ellen Lust (GLD, University of Gothenburg) examined whether co-ethnicity or ethnicity is a factor explaining access to quality education. Among their findings, the fact that individual co-ethnicity does not consistently predict access to quality education. Areas with more co-ethnics with the village head and a more diverse community have the best education outcomes. Kristen Kao (GLD, University of Gothenburg) presented “The Effect of Electoral Laws on Ethnic Favoritism in Service Provision: Evidence from Jordan”. Kristen Kao examined when and why connections between MPs and citizens in Jordan are tribally-based. Kristen Kao highlighted that while SNTV (Single non-transferable vote) districts are more competitive than Single Member Districts (SMDs), they also lead to greater co-ethnic favoritism. Moreover, Kristen Kao pointed out how electoral systems can change the salience of political divides (e.g., sub-nationally allegiances) with implications for identity politics. In “Same, Same but Different: Understanding How Patterns of Accountability Differ Across Different Public Goods”, Ruth Carlitz (GLD, University of Gothenburg) asks why politicians choose to influence the provision of some local goods and not others, and what constrains or facilitates their ability to do so. Cross-nationally, economic growth and population density are positively associated with progress toward the Millennium Development Goals. Foreign aid is positively related to some other indicators (e.g., education, gender, child mortality, maternal mortality, and HIV), but negatively related to others (e.g., water and sanitation).
In the turning tables panel, moderated by Happy Mickson Kayiuni (IPOR), Varja Lipovsek (Twaweza) presented: “Where is the voice of the citizens in governance & development?”. Policies, according to Varja Lipovsek, are crafted in capital cities, but what actually happens to local people is not related to the debate in institutional seats. The issue is that the structures are almost parallel to one another. Nicolas Garrigue (UNDP) presented “Insights into UNDP’s approach to local governance and state building from below”. Nicolas Garrigue informed the audience about the UNDP Guide on Local Governance in Fragile and Conflict-Affected Settings and the UNDP Integrated Framework to support Local Governance. The institutional, and hierarchically, centered model of local governance is now mostly obsolete. However, in post-conflict and transition countries, this vision still dominates.

2.4 Conflict

The morning panels were moderated by Petter Wallesteen. The titles of the panels were: “Monitoring and Preventing Conflicts” and “Promoting Peaceful Societies: The role of institutions and interventions”.

The first presentation by Petter Wallesteen (UCDP, Uppsala University) was about the criteria that guide the data collection at the Uppsala Conflict Database. After defining the criteria, Petter Wallensteen noticed that in the last few years the number conflicts increased, even though, between 2015 and 2016, there was a decline of state based armed conflicts from 52 to 49. Scholars need to foster preventive action and search data for predictions, adding that they academics must assess the issues of gender, climate change and corruption. Policy makers, on their side, need to assure data quality, political support for quality peace, preventive action and policy implementation support. The second presentation was on violent outbursts forecasts in sub-Saharan Africa. Håvard Hegre (UCDP, Uppsala University) uses statistical models to predict the likability of violence outbreak in the region. The questions he asks are about violence in north Nigeria, Kenya upcoming elections and civil war in Zimbabwe. Predictions are computed upon existent research according to normal machine learning practices. The UCDP will launch a monthly report from fall 2017 trying to forecast violence outbreaks in sub-Saharan Africa. Predictions, concluded Håvard Hegre, can be useful to react and prevent violence in an appropriate way.

In the first part of the second panel, Hanne Fjelde (Uppsala University) discussed whether democracies are less likely to experience armed conflict. It was noted that most existing studies investigating this relationship rely on the Polity index to measure democracy, thereby lumping together different components of democracy, making it hard to assess the impact of particular institutions. Hanne Fjelde presented some of her findings on how the V-Dem indicators can be used to assess the relationship between aspects of democracy and armed conflict. First, she presented evidence that there is an inverse U-shaped relationship between electoral democracy and conflict. Second, there is evidence that liberal components of democracy may reduce conflict. In the second part of the session, Lisa Hultmann (Uppsala University) discussed whether peace-keeping operations (PKOs) actually promote peace. Although peace-keeping missions are often criticized for its failure to secure peace, there is evidence, from several studies, suggesting that PKOs foster peace.

In the turning tables panel Ted Piccone (Brookings Institute) talked about democracy and security. He advocated for an evidence-based approach, taking advantage of publicly available datasets on democracy and terrorism. In line with the current civil conflict and terrorism literature, his report found
that strong democratic institutions, more importantly, inclusive political processes reduced the risk of civil war. The mechanism he suggests drives this relationship is built around grievance-reduction and increased costs of rebellion. He concluded advocating for more focus on civil society measures and taking into account local context. Sven-Erik Söder (FBA) stressed the need for institutional modernization. His presentation focused on questions concerning why the international community was slow or unable to develop, modernize, and adapt to new circumstances. One of the more important comments he made was that we need to think about how NGOs are different from International Organizations and how these differences effect how these institutions think about peace, security, and development. His main argument was that NGOs and International Organizations need to focus on finding motivated leaders from outside their organizations. He recommended that academics take on more research on the importance of leadership and the qualities of effective leaders.

3. Summary Notes

The Policy Day 2017 welcomed a broad range of policy makers, practitioners, as well as representatives of international governmental and non-governmental organizations. It was attended by participants from 50+ organizations such as EBA, NIMD, NORAD, EED, SIDA, International IDEA, REPOA, SIPRI, World Bank, Global Partners Governance, WFD, ICLD, Ministry for Foreign Affairs Sweden, UNDP and many others. Over 170 participants from around the world participated in this event. Preliminary date for the next Policy Dialogue Day 2018 is May, 30th 2018.

4. Organizers

*The V-Dem – Varieties of Democracy – Institute* is a new approach to conceptualizing and measuring democracy. For more information: [v-dem.net](http://v-dem.net)

*The QoG - Quality of Government - Institute* conduct and promote research on the causes, consequences and nature of Good Governance and the Quality of Government. For more information: [qog.pol.gu.se](http://qog.pol.gu.se)

*GLD - Program for Governance and Local Development* - aims to explain variation in governance and local development in an effort to promote human welfare globally. For more information: [gld.gu.se](http://gld.gu.se)

*UCDP - Uppsala Conflict Data Program* - is one of the most accurate and well-used data-sources on organized violence. For more information: [ucdp.uu.se](http://ucdp.uu.se)