



Organization and Management

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Institutional Homes:



With support from:



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What follows is a brief overview of the organization and management of the Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem) project – the team, the web site, outreach to the international community, funding, progress to date, and sustainability. Finally, we lay out some benchmarks by which the impact of the V-Dem project on the development community (encompassing both policymakers and academics) can be monitored in the coming years.

Project Team

A complex undertaking such as this requires coordinating the work of many individuals, each of which brings a unique skill or knowledge base to the project. A full list with details on the project team can be found at the website www.v-dem.net.

Principal Investigators (PIs) – Coppedge, Gerring, Lindberg, and Teorell – constitutes the V-Dem PI Board, charged with overall management responsibilities. This is the highest decision-making body and generally functions by consensus but may also make decisions by a qualified (3/4) majority rule. The PIs began work on this project in 2008.

Project Coordinators (PCs) are the PIs' principal assistants in the executive management of most aspects of the project. Located at the University of Gothenburg (two) and the Kellogg Institute (one), the current PCs are Elizabeth Andrews (BA, University of Notre Dame, 2012), Josefine Pernes (MA, International Administration and Global Governance, University of Gothenburg 2011), and Natalia Stepanova (MA, International Administration and Global Governance, University of Gothenburg 2011). The PCs manage the daily operations of data collection soon involving some three thousand country experts; handle most coordination and collaboration with regional managers and country coordinators around the world; coordinate and process quality control and lateral coding; assist with data processing, web-sites maintenance, communication, and outreach; organize workshops and conferences; and one of the PCs is also responsible for development of the coding management system and financial management (Pernes).

Project Managers, along with the PIs, oversee the development of survey questions and the collection of data in specific substantive areas, as follows: Direct Democracy (David Altman, Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile), Civil Society (Michael Bernhard, University of Florida), Sovereignty (Michael Bernhard), Legislatures (M. Steven Fish, UC Berkeley; Matthew Kroenig, Georgetown University), Parties and Party Systems (Allen Hicken, U. of Michigan), Subnational Government (Kelly McMann, Case Western), Formal and Descriptive Representation (Pamela Paxton, University of Texas, Austin), Elections (Lindberg; Megan Reif, University of Colorado, Denver), Media (Coppedge), Civil Liberty (Svend-Erik Skaaning, University of Aarhus), Judiciary (Jeffrey Staton, Emory University), Executives (Teorell), Political Equality (Gerring). Adam Glynn (Harvard University) serves as an advisor to the project on methodological issues. Daniel Pemstein (North Dakota State University) serves as our measurement expert, assisted by the Research Fellows (described below). This division of labor enabled us to define concepts, identify existing data sources, and write survey questions that reflect the wide-ranging work and accumulated wisdom on these topics. It also allows for a decentralized system of informal consultation among experts (academics and practitioners) in these areas. Project managers are also responsible for assuring cross-country equivalence for their indicators, so that a given

question is not interpreted differently in varying country contexts. Most of the Project Managers have been with the project since 2009.

Research Fellows, located at the University of Gothenburg, assist with various aspects of constructing the final measurement model, data validation, and aggregation. The current post-doctoral fellows are Yi-Ting Wang (PhD, Department of Political Science, Duke University, 2013) and Eitan Tzelgov (PhD, Department of Political Science, Penn State University, 2013).

Regional Managers (RMs) are responsible for recruiting and managing expert coders, overseeing coding, and checking for problems of validity at the regional level. Occasionally, someone is engaged to manage only a single country, in which case we refer to him/her as a *Country Manager* (CM). The first Regional Managers were recruited in Fall 2011.

Country Experts (CEs) code type (C) indicators (see *Dataset* document). They are generally holders of a PhD and usually residents or citizens of the country they are coding. They also have specialized knowledge in at least one of the sections of the V-Dem survey. The Country Experts have been recruited on a rolling basis since the start of the pilot study in Spring 2011.

A *Country Coordinator* (CC) is selected by the Regional Manager for each country to gather the type (B) data for that country and to check A* ratings (as explained in the *Dataset* document) and assist the Regional Manager with the identification of Country Experts.

Research Assistants assist at all levels except expert coding. They are generally pursuing graduate studies, and work under the supervision of members of the project team. A set of core research assistants are employed by the V-Dem Institute at University of Gothenburg, including Vlad Ciobanu (MA, International Administration and Global Governance, University of Gothenburg 2014), Valeriya Mechkova (MA, International Administration and Global Governance, University of Gothenburg 2014), and Talib Jabbar (MA, Political Science, Lund University 2012). The core RAs are responsible for collection, harmonization, and quality control of factual data from extant sources. A series of graduate students at Notre Dame have also provided research assistance in the past, including Sandra Botero, Chad Kiewiet de Jonge, Cecilia Lero, Krystin Krause, and Rodrigo Castro Cornejo. More than 30 Notre Dame undergraduate students have also helped in various ways.

An *International Advisory Board* provides guidance on the project (the board is not responsible for the content or conduct of V-Dem). The Board includes a mix of academics, jurists, and practitioners from around the world. While communication is normally conducted through email and Skype, we hope to bring the board together periodically in the coming years to facilitate in-depth discussion.

V-Dem Institute, Database, Web Site

The V-Dem program has two institutional homes: the V-Dem Institute in the Department of Political Science at University of Gothenburg (Sweden) and the Kellogg Institute at the University of Notre Dame (USA).

The V-Dem Institute is established in order to host the administrative database and management system of coders, regional managers, and country coordinators, coordinate

research, to coordinate research and all data collection, the working papers series, organize research workshops and annual conferences, country and thematic reports, guest scholarship and internship programs, and outreach & dissemination of the project. The coder management system and database construction was developed by Josefine Pernes at the V-Dem Institute in collaboration with Premium System AB as a consultant. The Kellogg Institute hosts the website, the research database of country-ratings, is responsible for data processing and dissemination, and also helps coordinate data collection and research.

The V-Dem website can be viewed at www.V-Dem.net. The survey interface and underlying relational database has been designed following our guidance, by the Center for Research Computing (CRC) at the University of Notre Dame. The site includes web-based interfaces that will allow users to download data and to visualize these data in line graphs, maps, histograms, and motion charts (animated scatterplots).

Almost all data is entered on-line. (Exceptions are made for those Country Experts who might not have internet access and for those doing lateral coding.) All data except confidential information about the coders will be made public when coding for all countries is complete, though data for selected countries is released prior to the completion of the project at the request of funders. Before the release of the comprehensive dataset, we anticipate an embargo period of up to 12 months to allow for quality control, data cleaning and processing, as well as to give the core researchers of the project team prioritized access.

The V-Dem website is also progressively expanding to provide additional services besides download of the data and online analysis tools. V-Dem indicators, coding schemes, aggregation formulas, as well as podcasts of selected V-Dem talks, a V-Dem Working Paper series with emerging results, and the series of thematic and country reports/briefs on democracy are elements that will be featured in years to come.

International Collaboration and Outreach

The current project is international in character and composition to a much greater extent than any other democracy index. With dual headquarters on two different continents, the project team – consisting of Principal Investigators, Project Coordinators and Research Assistants, Project Managers, Research Fellows, Regional Managers, and Country Coordinators – includes nationals of virtually every country in the world. The International Advisory Board includes nationals of Brazil, Burkina Faso, Canada, Ghana, Hong Kong, India, Indonesia, Mexico, Mongolia, the Netherlands, Pakistan, Russia, South Korea, Turkey, the United States, and Yemen. Altogether, members of the project team and the advisory board connect the V-Dem project to several dozen universities located in every region of the world. Most important, V-Dem currently enlists over 2,000 Country Experts (and eventually about 3,000) from nearly every country in the world to serve as coders for our questionnaires.

We anticipate that the direct involvement of academics and professionals in V-Dem will result in numerous projects, many of which are collaborative in nature. Indeed, many of these collaborative projects have already begun. In future decades, we anticipate that the V-Dem database and web site will become a focal point for policymakers, practitioners, students, and scholars across the social sciences who are interested in democracy.

To facilitate this, we plan to create a visiting scholars program for selected individuals who have served as country experts, regional managers, or advisors in the project so that they may visit the V-Dem Institute at the University of Gothenburg for a period of a month or so. During this time, they would be expected to complete research on a theme related to the project.

The V-Dem Institute plans to hold annual conferences at University of Gothenburg, as well as smaller workshops, as means to further stimulate innovative collaborations and as additional venues for generating new ideas and publicizing the results of research conducted with V-Dem data.

We have also begun to introduce the project at social science conferences throughout the world. This includes the International Political Science Association meetings, at workshops organized with our Regional Managers in Asia, Africa, Eastern Europe, and Latin America, and at meetings of regional political science associations (Africa, East Asia, Southeast Asia, Europe, Latin America, the United States). Project team members and members of the advisory board who live or work in each region will assist in that region's conferences.

Publications in high-profile academic journals and press outlets of a more popular nature will ensure that all relevant communities of interest are informed of the availability of V-Dem and how it can be used to help them do their work better.

We are also establishing a working paper series, to be posted on the Varieties of Democracy web site. All data will be a public good but we will also ask users of the data to contribute initial drafts of their work to the V-Dem Working Paper series. We anticipate that, once publicly available, V-Dem data will generate an increasing number of working papers, journal articles, chapters, and books by scholars around the world, contributing to a growing stream of interrelated research.

Traffic to the web site, as channeled by Google and other search engines and links on related sites, offers a further channel for outreach – making V-Dem accessible to anyone who searches on key terms (e.g., “democracy”). Funding permitting, we plan to commission the creation of a V-Dem App for smart devices that would enable users to check scores for selected countries, variables, and years, and even to generate color-coded graphs and maps on demand. The V-Dem App will also provide access to working papers, discussion for a, and podcasts of selected V-Dem talks.

Progress to Date

The progress of V-Dem may be summarized in three phases.

First, there is the conception and management of the project itself, including the pilot study. This phase was completed in October 2011.

With the support of Sweden's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Riksbankens Jubileumsfond (Sweden), the Vice-Chancellor's Office, the College of social Sciences, and the Department of Political Science at University of Gothenburg, and the Kellogg Institute and other bodies at the University of Notre Dame, we conducted a pilot study in twelve countries from May to December 2011. These included two countries from each of six regions: Mexico and Suriname in the Americas, Japan and Burma in Asia, Russia and Albania in the post-Communist region,

South Africa and Ghana in Africa, Egypt and Yemen (North and South) in the Middle East, and Sweden and Switzerland in Europe. These pairs were chosen to represent countries in each region that, in our judgment, would be fairly easy, and fairly hard, to code. (For example, in the Americas we judged that Mexico would be fairly easy and Suriname fairly difficult.)

Almost 100 experts submitted 461,000 country-date-question-expert observation ratings to the database. Preliminary analyses indicate that the methodology we developed was sound and worked as intended to collect data of highest quality. For example, we ask all experts not only to choose a response to each question but also to estimate their confidence in all their responses. The average summary certainty level in the pilot data is 84 percent, which means that based on the agreement among experts and their confidence in their ratings, we can be, on average, 84 percent confident that the summary scores are correct. Cronbach's alpha averages .709 (conventionally considered in the "acceptable" range) for the 131 pilot-study type (C) questions for which we have enough data to calculate it. In addition, very preliminary analyses have shown that aggregated scores discriminate well not only across countries and over time, but also across components. For example, a country can do well with respect to civil society but less well on administration of elections or legislative strength. Such distinctions are among the most important contributions of our approach. But we also used the pilot study data to pinpoint the weakest questions and modify or drop them, and used this information to revise the questionnaire extensively in order to improve reliability before the current phase of data collection. In addition, the pilot study demonstrated the need for having more coders/country-question, a better system for standardize instructions and management, as well as the need for an expanded post-survey questionnaire allowing for systematic assessment of potential biases in coding.

The second phase of V-Dem, comprising data collection for the entire world from 1900 to 2012, began in March 2012 to be concluded in 2014 at current funding levels with coverage of 167 of the 197 countries/territories existing today. At the time of writing (February 2014, we have completed data collection in 132 countries with the involvement of some two thousand coders, and have over 12 million data records in the database.

This phase also involves cleaning the data, conducting extensive quality controls and measures for correcting errors, preparing data for public access (through the V-Dem web site). Concurrently, the Principal Investigators, the methodologists and research fellows are working on issues of aggregation – how to aggregate coder ratings into point estimates for countries; and how to build components from indicators and broader indices from components. Several grants are also making it possible for the team to begin a large-scale research program addressing the issue of democratization both in terms of endogenous processes of sequencing and diffusion, and the role of various exogenous factors in explaining transitions to and development of various types of democracies.

Beginning in 2015 (if all goes well), V-Dem will enter a third phase where three somewhat separate activities will run simultaneously.

- A) *Updates*. Annual or biannual updates of the data, building on our established network of Regional Managers, Country Coordinators, and Country Experts;
- B) *Outreach & Dissemination*. This involves the V-Dem institute reaching out to potential end-users (including the community of democracy practitioners) with general

information but also research outputs and data resources, training, workshops, and conferences possibly involving producing country- and thematic reports as well as some form of annual report for the policy community, as well as the possibility of establishing Regional V-Dem Centers in collaboration with our Regional Managers; and

- C) *Historical V-Dem*. The goal is to extend coding for as many political units and as many indicators and years as possible of the period from 1800 to 1899 in order to supplement the current coverage.

Funding

The principal funding for the pilot phase of the program came from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs-Sweden, supplemented by a small grant from the Riksbankens Jubileumsfond.

The Second Phase is funded at about 85 percent of total projected cost. The Research Council of Norway (through a collaborative arrangement with Håvard Hegre, Oslo University) financed data collection for 17 countries; the Canadian International Development Agency funded another 12 countries; the Ministry of Foreign Affairs-Denmark/Danida provided resources to conduct data collection for 14 countries; the European Commission/EuroAid supplied a contract that contributed to both data collection in 42 countries and a series of country- and thematic reports as well as database and website programming; an additional 47 countries' data collection was provided for with funding from Ministry of Foreign Affairs-Sweden; research grants from the Swedish and Danish national research councils allowed us to collect data in 29 more countries; and a contribution from the Quality of Government Institute gave the opportunity to collect the data for 3 more countries. We have thus secured funding for the data collection in 167 of the current 197 countries in the world with a total funding of about USD 2.5mn.

The hosting universities, the Kellogg Institute of Notre Dame and the University of Gothenburg, have provided substantial seed funds for the pilot phase and both institutions have committed additional co-funding for the data collection: University of Notre Dame at USD half a million and University of Gothenburg at about USD 800,000.

Outreach, capacity building and networking with Regional Managers and Country Coordinators across the world has also been supported by the Riksbankens Jubileumsfond during 2012 and 2013.

The V-Dem Research Program on Democratization is primarily funded by a grant from the Riksbankens Jubileumsfond at USD 5.8mn and the University of Gothenburg at USD 2mn, as well as the grant to Staffan I. Lindberg as a Wallenberg Academy Fellow (USD 1.15mn).

Sustainability

V-Dem must be continually revised and updated in order to remain useful for scholars, practitioners, and citizens. The set of indicators comprising V-Dem may be expanded, and some indicators may require revision. In the latter case, revisions will need to be implemented systematically (for all countries and years in the database) so that equivalence across countries

and through time is maintained.

Most important, V-Dem will need to be updated on an annual or semiannual basis. We may use these updates as opportunities to re-code prior years (e.g., the 5 years prior to the update), offering a further check on inter-coder (or intra-coder) reliability. In any case, we would employ the same coders whenever possible, further enhancing the efficiency of each update (since coders would be already familiar with the database and the on-line coding system).

At present, we are discussing continued funding of (bi-)annual updates with our existing funders and other interested parties for the period 2015-2019.