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Democracy and Human Development: Conceptualizing the Pathways of Influence

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Abstract

This article addresses the gap in understanding the causal mechanisms linking democracy to human development. While existing research focuses on correlations or broad linkages, this study conceptualizes specific mechanisms at macro and micro levels, proposing an integrative framework that synthesizes diverse theoretical perspectives. The framework emphasizes the interconnected roles of electoral accountability, civil society, a culture of equality, and good governance in driving human development, offering a nuanced understanding of the democracy-development nexus. The study makes three key contributions: (1) identifying specific causal pathways; (2) providing a foundation for empirical research, particularly through qualitative case studies or process tracing; and (3) highlighting the importance of holistic democratic governance. It concludes that government expenditure on human development sectors, influenced by electoral accountability and good governance, is a plausible mechanism. However, the study acknowledges limitations, such as confounding factors like economic conditions and cultural differences, and calls for future research to empirically test these mechanisms. Methodologically, mixed-methods approaches, combining quantitative analysis with qualitative case studies, are recommended to validate the framework across diverse contexts. By doing so, this study aims to provide actionable insights for policymakers and researchers seeking to enhance human development through democratic governance.

Keywords: Democracy, human development, causal mechanisms

Abstrak

Artikel ini berupaya mengatasi celah dalam pemahaman tentang mekanisme kausal yang menghubungkan demokrasi dengan pembangunan manusia. Sementara penelitian yang ada fokus pada korelasi atau hubungan luas, studi ini mengkonseptualisasikan mekanisme spesifik pada tingkat makro dan mikro, dengan mengusulkan kerangka kerja integratif yang mensintesis berbagai perspektif teoretis. Kerangka kerja ini menekankan peran keterkaitan antara akuntabilitas elektoral, masyarakat sipil, budaya kesetaraan, dan tata kelola yang baik dalam mendorong pembangunan manusia, memberikan pemahaman yang lebih bernuansa tentang hubungan demokrasi-pembangunan. Studi ini memberikan tiga kontribusi utama: (1) mengidentifikasi jalur kausal spesifik; (2) menyediakan landasan untuk penelitian empiris, terutama melalui studi kasus kualitatif atau penelusuran proses (process tracing); dan (3) menyoroti pentingnya pendekatan holistik dalam tata kelola demokratis. Artikel ini menyimpulkan bahwa pengeluaran pemerintah di sektor pembangunan manusia, yang dipengaruhi oleh akuntabilitas elektoral dan tata kelola yang baik, merupakan mekanisme yang memungkinkan. Namun, studi ini juga mengakui keterbatasan, seperti faktor pengganggu (confounding factors)

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seperti kondisi ekonomi dan perbedaan budaya, serta menyerukan penelitian lebih lanjut untuk menguji mekanisme ini secara empiris. Secara metodologis, pendekatan metode campuran (mixed-methods), yang menggabungkan analisis kuantitatif dengan studi kasus kualitatif, direkomendasikan untuk memvalidasi kerangka kerja ini di berbagai konteks. Dengan demikian, studi ini bertujuan untuk memberikan wawasan yang dapat ditindaklanjuti bagi pembuat kebijakan dan peneliti dalam upaya meningkatkan pembangunan manusia melalui tata kelola demokratis.

Kata Kunci: *Demokrasi, pembangunan manusia, mekanisme kausal*

INTRODUCTION

Despite extensive research on the relationship between democracy and human development, a significant gap persists in the literature regarding the specific causal mechanisms that underpin this relationship (Gerring et al., 2012; McGuire, 2004; Ross, 2006). While numerous studies have established broad correlations or general causal linkages between democracy and human development, they often fail to delve into the micro-level forces and contextual factors that drive these outcomes (Dahinden, 2013; Ghali et al., 2003; Heller, 2007; Tommasoli, 2013). This oversight limits our understanding of how democratic processes translate into tangible improvements in human development, particularly in diverse political and socio-economic contexts.

Existing research has largely adopted a macro-level perspective, focusing on aggregate outcomes such as economic growth, education, and health indicators, without systematically unpacking the mechanisms that connect democratic governance to these outcomes (Gerring et al., 2012; Ross, 2006). For instance, while some studies highlight the role of electoral accountability or civil society in promoting human development, they often treat these factors as isolated variables rather than interconnected components of a broader causal framework (Heller, 2007; Tommasoli, 2013). This fragmented approach has resulted in a lack of clarity about the specific pathways through which democracy influences human development, particularly at the micro level where individual and institutional interactions shape policy outcomes.

This article seeks to address these limitations by proposing a comprehensive and integrative conceptual framework that synthesizes various theoretical perspectives to elucidate the causal mechanisms linking democracy to human development. Unlike previous studies that rely on descriptive or correlational analyses, this research adopts a mechanistic approach, focusing on the dynamic interplay between key factors such as electoral accountability, civil society, a culture of equality, and good governance. By doing so, it provides a more precise and systematic understanding of how democratic processes operate at both macro and micro levels to drive human development.

The novelty of this research lies in its ability to bridge theoretical and empirical gaps by integrating insights from political science, development studies, and social theory. This integrative framework not only clarifies the causal pathways but also highlights the contextual nuances that influence their effectiveness. For example, while electoral accountability may drive human development in some contexts, its impact may be mediated by the strength of civil society or the quality of governance in others. By accounting for these complexities, the framework offers a more nuanced understanding of the democracy-development nexus.

The significance of this study is threefold. First, it contributes to the academic discourse by moving beyond broad correlations to identify specific mechanisms through which democracy influences human development. Second, it provides a robust foundation for future empirical research, particularly through qualitative case studies or process tracing, to test the hypothesized mechanisms in diverse settings. Third, it underscores the importance of holistic approaches to democratic governance, emphasizing the interplay between institutional design, societal norms, and policy implementation in driving human development outcomes.

This article is structured as follows. The first section, *Democracy and Human Development: A Critical Review of Existing Literature*, critically examines the existing literature, highlighting its strengths and limitations while identifying the specific gaps this study aims to address. The second section, *Understanding Causal Mechanisms: Theoretical Foundations*, elaborates on the concept of causal mechanisms and justifies the mechanistic approach adopted in this study. The third section, *Conceptualizing the Pathways of Influence between Democracy and Human Development*, presents the integrative conceptual framework and discusses the hypothesized mechanisms in detail. Finally, the *Conclusion* summarizes the key findings, highlights the most plausible causal mechanisms, addresses potential limitations, and calls for future research to empirically test these mechanisms.

In summary, this article aims to fill a critical gap in the literature by conceptualizing the causal mechanisms linking democracy to human development in a more systematic and context-sensitive manner. By proposing an integrative framework that synthesizes diverse theoretical perspectives, it not only advances our understanding of the democracy-development nexus but also provides a valuable tool for researchers and policymakers seeking to enhance human development through democratic governance.

Democracy and Human Development: A Critical Review of Existing Literature

Before delving into the causal mechanisms linking democracy and human development, it is essential to critically examine the existing literature. This review not only summarizes the diverse and often conflicting perspectives on the democracy-development nexus but also evaluates their methodological and theoretical underpinnings. By doing so, it identifies key gaps and establishes a stronger foundation for the conceptual framework proposed in this study.

The relationship between democracy and human development has been a subject of extensive debate, with scholars offering three primary perspectives: positive, negative, and agnostic. Each perspective reflects different methodological approaches, theoretical assumptions, and empirical findings, which are critically examined below.

The first perspective posits a positive relationship between democracy and human development, arguing that democratic governance fosters economic growth, social welfare, and improved public services (Campos, 1994; Baum & Lake, 2003; Doucouliagos & Ulubapođlu, 2008). Proponents of this view suggest that democracy creates favorable conditions for welfare production by promoting accountability, transparency, and citizen participation (Rueschemeyer, 2008). For instance, studies have shown that democracies tend to allocate more resources to education and healthcare, leading to better health outcomes and higher literacy rates (Baum & Lake, 2003; Besley & Kudamatsu, 2006; Vollmer & Ziegler, 2009).

However, this perspective has limitations. While some studies report positive correlations, others find that the relationship is context-dependent and often unstable (De Haan & Siermann, 1996; Gerring et al., 2005). For example, the positive effects of democracy on human development are more pronounced in high-income countries, whereas the relationship is weaker or even negative in low-income settings (Filmer & Pritchett, 1999; McGuire, 2004). This suggests that the mechanisms linking democracy to human development may vary across different political and socio-economic contexts.

The second perspective argues that democracy can hinder development, particularly in low-income or politically unstable countries (Sirowy & Inkeles, 1991; Gasiorowski, 2000). Scholars in this camp contend that democratic processes, such as elections and political competition, can lead to short-term policymaking, corruption, and inefficiencies that undermine long-term development goals (Bardhan, 1996; Przeworski & Limongi, 1993). For example, in some developing countries, democratic transitions have been associated with economic instability and reduced public spending on social services (Rachdia & Saidib, 2015).

While this perspective highlights important challenges, it often overlooks the role of institutional quality and governance in mediating the effects of democracy. For instance, studies have shown that well-functioning democratic institutions, such as independent judiciaries and effective bureaucracies, can mitigate the negative effects of political competition and enhance development outcomes (Heller, 2007; Gerring et al., 2012). Thus, the negative relationship perspective may overgeneralize the challenges of democratization without adequately accounting for contextual factors.

The third perspective, often termed the agnostic view, suggests that the relationship between democracy and development is complex, contingent, and defies simple categorization (Przeworski et al., 2000; Bishop, 2016). Scholars in this camp argue that both democracy and non-democracy can lead to development, depending on factors such

as historical legacies, institutional design, and external influences (Rudebeck, 2016). For example, some authoritarian regimes have achieved rapid economic growth and improvements in human development, while others have failed to do so (Przeworski & Limongi, 1993).

While the agnostic perspective provides a more nuanced understanding of the democracy-development nexus, it often lacks a clear theoretical framework for explaining why certain regimes succeed or fail in promoting development. This limits its ability to offer actionable insights for policymakers and researchers.

Recent studies have sought to address these limitations by adopting more sophisticated methodologies and incorporating new theoretical insights. For example, research by Gerring et al. (2020) and Liotti et al. (2018) has used cross-national data and process-tracing techniques to identify specific mechanisms through which democracy influences human development. These studies highlight the importance of factors such as electoral accountability, civil society, and good governance in shaping development outcomes, particularly in newer democracies (Gerring et al., 2016; Liotti & D'Isanto, 2018).

Additionally, there is growing recognition of the bidirectional relationship between democracy and human development. Some scholars argue that improvements in education, health, and income levels can create demand for democratic reforms, which in turn reinforce human development (Inglehart & Welzel, 2005; Welzel & Inglehart, 2001). This perspective aligns with modernization theory, which posits that economic development and education are preconditions for democracy (Acemoglu & Robinson, 2005a; Lipset, 1959).

Despite these advancements, several gaps remain in the literature. First, many studies rely on cross-sectional data or aggregate indicators, which fail to capture the micro-level dynamics and contextual factors that shape the democracy-development relationship. Second, there is a lack of consensus on the specific mechanisms through which democracy influences human development, with most studies focusing on broad correlations rather than causal pathways. Third, while recent research has begun to address these issues, there is still a need for more systematic and comparative studies that examine the interplay between democratic institutions, societal norms, and policy outcomes.

The theoretical foundations section of this study builds on these insights by adopting a mechanistic approach to understanding the causal pathways linking democracy to human development. Drawing on theories of intervening variables, empirical sequences, and generative mechanisms (Beach & Pedersen, 2013; Gerring, 2008), this study conceptualizes democracy as a system of interlocking parts that transmit causal forces to human development outcomes. For example, electoral accountability can be understood as an intervening variable that mediates the relationship between democratic governance and public spending on education and healthcare (Gerring et al., 2012; Tommasoli, 2013).

By explicitly linking these theoretical perspectives to the context of democracy and human development, this study provides a more coherent and applicable framework for analyzing the causal mechanisms at play. For instance, the mechanistic approach allows for a detailed examination of how democratic processes, such as political competition and civil society engagement, interact with institutional and societal factors to drive improvements in human development.

METHOD

Understanding Causal Mechanisms: Theoretical Foundations

The concept of causal mechanisms varies among scholars. One perspective views them as intervening variables or sets of variables that mediate the relationship between an independent variable (X) and a dependent variable (Y) (Mahoney, 2001). According to this approach, intervening variables are the means through which X exerts its influence on Y (Beach & Pedersen, 2013). To establish a causal relationship between X and Y, rather than merely a correlation, it is essential to provide a detailed explanation of the connecting variables. For example, Knight and Winship discuss a “causal relationship involving one or more intervening variables between a treatment and an outcome” (Waldner, 2016, p. 29). This approach, prevalent in quantitative research, specifies the causation linkage through variables between X and Y. Path Analysis and Structural Equations Models are examples of this approach (Holland, 1988).

Another group of scholars defines causal mechanisms as “a series of empirical events that are temporally and spatially located between the occurrence of X and the outcome of Y” (Beach & Pedersen, 2013, p. 33). In this view, the causal process between X and Y is conceptualized as a sequence of events. Practically, this approach presents causal mechanisms as an empirical narrative detailing how X leads to Y. Additionally, some scholars understand causal mechanisms as interaction structures within generative social processes (Kaidesoja, 2021). These structures involve interactions among social actors, and the causal mechanism is seen in terms of “the causal powers, capacities, and tendencies of entities and structures” (Kaidesoja, 2021, p. 23).

A third perspective, the mechanistic understanding of causal mechanisms, contrasts with the intervening variable view. This approach aims to examine and dissect the “black box” of causation, or as Gerring (2008) describes it, “thinking inside the box.” Beach and Pedersen (2013) define this approach as “a theory of a system of interlocking parts that transmits causal forces from X to Y” (p. 29). Waldner (2016) further elaborates by explaining that causal mechanisms are “a complex system of interacting parts whose interactions can be characterized by direct, invariant, change-relating generalizations” (p. 29). According to Beach & Pedersen (2013), perhaps the definition of causal mechanisms proposed by Hernes (1998) best represents this position: “a mechanism is a set of interacting parts—an assembly

of elements producing an effect not inherent in any one of them. A mechanism is not so much about ‘nuts and bolts’ as about ‘cogs and wheels’—the wheelwork or agency by which an effect is produced” (p. 29). In summary, this view posits those causal mechanisms consist of a series of interlocking parts, neither intervening variables nor events.

In its conceptualization, the parts of a causal mechanism are operationalized as entities performing specific activities. Practically, each part comprises entities and their associated activities. Using the analogy of a machine, these entities, which engage in activities, can be likened to toothed wheels, while their activities, acting as causal forces, resemble the movement of the wheels (Beach & Pedersen, 2013). In written form, entities and activities are typically presented as nouns and verbs, respectively. This approach emphasizes the dynamic interplay between entities and their actions, which collectively drive the causal mechanism. The figure below illustrates this operationalization of causal mechanisms:

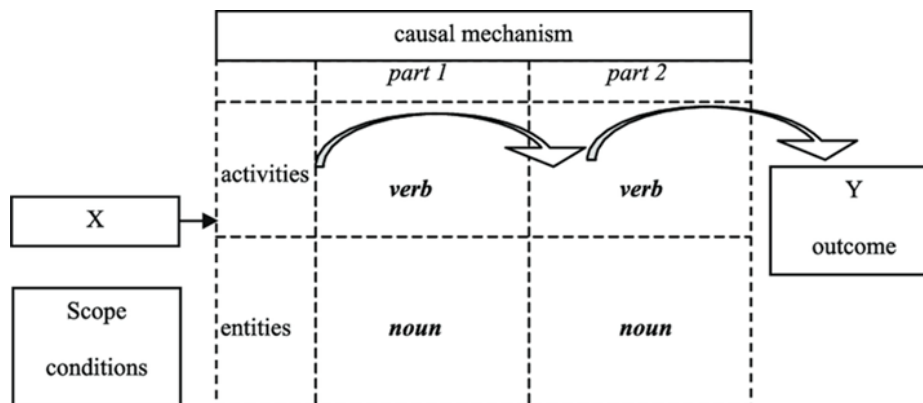


Figure 1. A simple template for a two-part causal mechanism
Source: Beach & Pederson, 2016.

In this context, this article adopts the mechanistic understanding of causal mechanisms as operationalized by Beach and Pedersen (2016) in a more eclectic manner. Within this framework, democracy is identified as the cause, and human development is the outcome. The causal mechanisms are conceptualized as entities, or actors, performing specific activities that generate the causal forces linking the cause to the outcome. While we will not strictly operationalize these mechanisms as nouns and verbs, we will indicate the presence of actors engaged in various activities or actions. This approach allows for a detailed examination of how democratic processes and structures drive improvements in human development by focusing on the dynamic interactions between entities and their activities.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Conceptualizing the Pathways of Influence between Democracy and Human Development

The primary aim of this article is to conceptualize the causal mechanisms linking democracy to human development. To achieve this, we present a conceptual framework based on an extensive literature review. This framework integrates formal theories to refine our analytical lenses (Ravitch & Riggan, 2012, p. 32) and serves as a critical tool for examining the phenomenon of interest. As Miles et al. (2014) describe, its function is to help researchers “fill the intellectual bins identified through the literature review” (p. 21).

Our review of existing studies has identified four primary causal mechanisms through which democracy influences human development: electoral accountability, civil society engagement, civic culture of equality, and effective political institutions (Gerring et al., 2012, 2020; Dahinden, 2013; Heller, 2007; Tommasoli, 2013). These mechanisms were selected based on their theoretical prominence, empirical support in comparative political studies, and their demonstrated explanatory power across diverse contexts. Moreover, these mechanisms operate not in isolation but as complementary and mutually reinforcing pathways that together constitute a comprehensive explanation of how democratic systems advance human development outcomes.

Before examining each mechanism individually, it is crucial to understand their interconnections within the broader democratic ecosystem. Electoral accountability provides the foundational democratic incentive structure that motivates political responsiveness. Civil society organizations both emerge from and strengthen democratic processes, acting as intermediaries between citizens and the state. A civic culture of equality empowers marginalized groups to participate in democratic processes, while effective political institutions translate democratic mandates into actionable policies that deliver human development outcomes.

These mechanisms interact in several important ways: electoral accountability creates the political space for civil society to flourish; civil society organizations advocate for inclusive policies that foster a culture of equality; this culture of equality, in turn, improves political participation that enhances electoral accountability; and good governance institutions channel these democratic inputs into effective human development policies. Empirical evidence from diverse contexts demonstrates that countries with the strongest human development outcomes typically exhibit strength across multiple mechanisms rather than excellence in just one (UNDP, 2016; Acemoglu & Robinson, 2012).

1. Electoral Accountability

Electoral accountability represents a foundational mechanism through which democratic governance influences human development outcomes (Gerring et al., 2012, 2020). This

relationship is theoretically grounded in agency theory, which provides an analytical framework for understanding the dynamics between citizens (principals) and elected officials (agents) in democratic systems. Agency theory elucidates the interplay of incentives, information asymmetries, and monitoring mechanisms that underpin democratic governance (Bendickson et al., 2016; Eisenhardt, 1989; Miller, 2005). By framing the relationship between voters and leaders as a principal-agent problem, this theory highlights how electoral accountability ensures that leaders remain responsive to the needs and aspirations of their constituents.

The principal-agent framework is instrumental in unpacking the multifaceted relationships inherent in democratic systems. It applies to three primary dimensions: (1) the relationship between citizens and governments in policy formation (Lane, 2013), (2) the interaction between voters and elected representatives (Borowiak, 2011; Holcombe & Gwartney, 1989), and (3) the dynamic between politicians and bureaucratic administrators (Gailmard, 2009; Weingast & Moran, 1983). This multi-layered application underscores the complexity of accountability mechanisms and their role in fostering development outcomes. By delineating these relationships, the framework highlights how accountability operates at distinct levels, each contributing to the broader governance ecosystem.

At its core, electoral accountability hinges on the competitive dynamics of democratic systems. As Gerring et al. (2012, p. 2) posit, “competition among elites for voters’ favor should produce a situation in which elites are accountable to the citizenry.” This competition generates strong incentives for political leaders to prioritize and deliver improvements in citizens’ well-being. The cyclical nature of elections establishes regular intervals for performance evaluation, creating a feedback loop that incentivizes sustained attention to human development priorities (Ferejohn, 1986; Balaguer-Coll, 2015). This mechanism ensures that elected officials remain responsive to the needs and aspirations of their constituents, thereby aligning governance with developmental goals.

Empirical studies provide compelling evidence of the operationalization of electoral accountability across diverse contexts. Cross-national analyses reveal that democratically elected leaders allocate significantly more resources to public goods provision compared to their authoritarian counterparts (Muñoz-Portillo, 2021; Lake & Baum, 2001; Bueno de Mesquita et al., 2003). These findings underscore the role of democratic institutions in fostering equitable development. At the subnational level, research from India demonstrates that competitive local elections drive increased investment in education and healthcare infrastructure, particularly in historically marginalized regions (Besley & Burgess, 2002). Such evidence highlights the transformative potential of electoral accountability in addressing systemic inequalities and promoting inclusive development.

Drawing upon the preceding discussion, the hypothesized causal mechanism of electoral accountability can be articulated as follows: Democratic systems foster electoral competition

among political leaders, creating incentives for accountability to the public. This accountability, in turn, drives the formulation and implementation of policies and programs that prioritize human development. These policies lead to improved public service delivery and resource allocation, ultimately enhancing human development outcomes. This mechanism operates in synergy with civic culture, civil society, and good governance, creating a comprehensive framework for understanding how democracy drives human development. We can delineate the causal mechanism at a more granular (or micro-level) as follows:

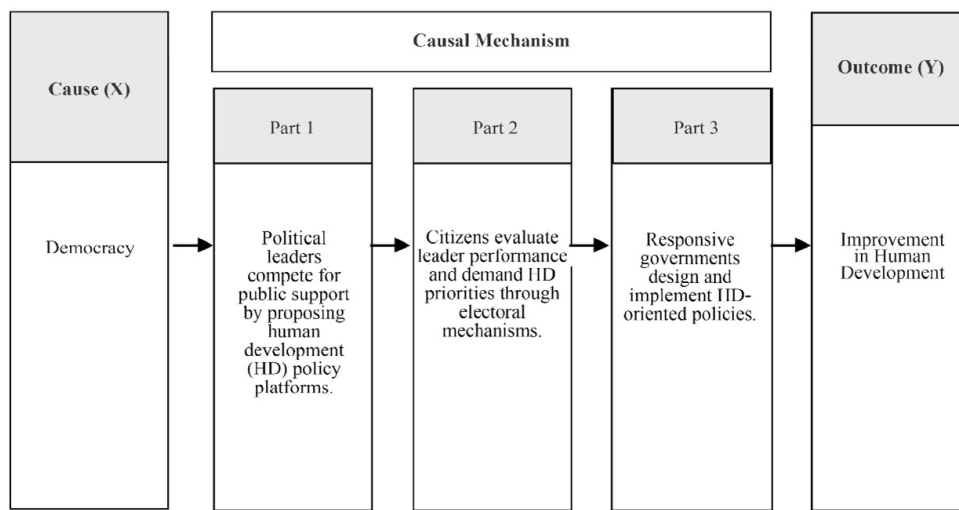


Figure 2. Electoral Accountability Mechanism

The figure illustrates the hypothesized causal mechanisms linking democracy to human development. It starts with democracy as the cause (X) and human development as the outcome (Y). The first mechanism involves electoral competition among political leaders, which leads to the second mechanism, leaders’ accountability to the public. This accountability, in turn, influences the third mechanism, political leaders’ policies or programs in human development sectors. These interconnected mechanisms collectively demonstrate how democratic processes and structures can drive improvements in human development.

Electoral accountability does not operate in isolation; rather, it is deeply intertwined with other institutional and societal mechanisms. A robust civic culture is essential for generating citizen demands for performance on key human development indicators. Similarly, civil society organizations play a pivotal role in enhancing electoral accountability by monitoring government performance and disseminating critical information to voters (Diamond, 2005). These actors serve as intermediaries, bridging the gap between citizens and the state and ensuring that electoral promises translate into tangible outcomes. Furthermore, the effectiveness of electoral accountability is contingent upon good governance practices, which ensure the implementation and sustainability of human development policies.

2. Civil Society

Civil society represents a pivotal mechanism through which democratic governance fosters human development outcomes (Gerring et al., 2012). Democratic institutions create an enabling environment for robust civil society networks by safeguarding political and civil rights (Diamond, 2005). These networks, in turn, influence human development through multiple, interconnected channels that complement and reinforce electoral processes. Grounded in social capital theory and collective action literature, this mechanism highlights the critical role of civil society organizations (CSOs) in bridging democratic governance and development outcomes.

The theoretical underpinnings of this mechanism are rooted in social capital theory and the collective action literature. Democracy provides fertile ground for the proliferation of civil associations by protecting associational rights and establishing institutional channels for civic participation (Cohen, 1999; Newton, 2001). Civil society organizations contribute to the formation of social capital, which Fukuyama (2010) identifies as a cornerstone of effective democratic governance and, by extension, human development. Social capital, characterized by norms of reciprocity, trust, and collective action, facilitates cooperation among citizens and between citizens and the state, thereby enhancing the capacity of societies to address development challenges.

Civil society influences human development through three interconnected pathways. First, CSOs exercise political influence by advocating for human development policies and holding governments accountable for their implementation (Diamond, 2005; Sondhi, 2000). Through lobbying, advocacy, and public campaigns, CSOs amplify the voices of marginalized groups and ensure that human development priorities remain on the political agenda. Second, CSOs directly provide essential services in sectors such as education, healthcare, and social welfare, particularly for underserved populations (Fafchamps, 2006; Gauri & Khaleghian, 2002). These organizations often fill gaps in public service delivery, leveraging their proximity to local communities to address specific needs. Third, CSOs promote participatory practices that enhance civic engagement in development processes (UNDP, 2005, p. 54). By fostering inclusive decision-making and empowering citizens, CSOs strengthen the social fabric and ensure that development initiatives are responsive to local contexts.

Empirical evidence from diverse contexts substantiates the role of civil society in advancing human development. Studies demonstrate that regions with stronger civil society networks exhibit better educational outcomes, even when controlling for income levels (Fafchamps, 2006). Similarly, health interventions achieve greater success in democratic contexts with vibrant civil society engagement, as CSOs play a critical role in mobilizing communities and ensuring the effective implementation of health programs (Gauri & Lieberman, 2006). These findings highlight the transformative potential of civil society in addressing development challenges and promoting equitable outcomes.

Drawing upon the preceding discussion, the hypothesized causal mechanism of civil society can be articulated as follows: Democratic institutions create an enabling environment for civil society by protecting political and civil rights. In turn, civil society organizations contribute to human development through (1) political advocacy and accountability, (2) direct service delivery, and (3) the promotion of participatory practices. These pathways are reinforced by the interplay between civil society, electoral accountability, good governance, and civic culture, creating a synergistic effect that amplifies the impact of democratic governance on human development outcomes. We can delineate the causal mechanism at a more granular (or micro-level) as follows:

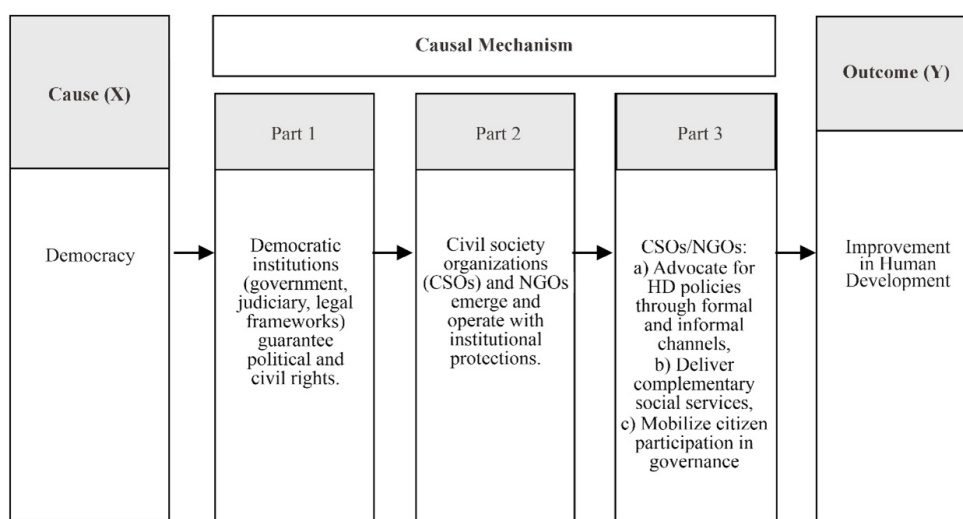


Figure 3. Civil Society Mechanism

The figure illustrates the hypothesized causal mechanisms linking democracy to human development. It begins with democracy as the cause (X) and human development as the outcome (Y). The first mechanism involves the exercise of greater political and civil rights, which leads to the second mechanism, the development of a robust network of voluntary associations (NGOs/CSOs). These associations then engage in political influence and lobbying for human development programs, representing the third mechanism. Collectively, these interconnected mechanisms demonstrate how a vibrant civil society, fostered by democratic institutions, can drive improvements in human development.

The civil society mechanism operates in dynamic interplay with other pathways in the broader framework linking democracy to human development. CSOs strengthen electoral accountability by monitoring government performance, disseminating information to voters, and mobilizing citizens around human development issues. They also contribute to good governance by partnering with government agencies in service delivery and policy implementation, thereby enhancing the effectiveness of public institutions. Furthermore, civil

society both reinforces and is strengthened by civic culture, as associational life fosters norms of reciprocity, trust, and collective action. These interactions underscore the mutually reinforcing relationship between civil society and other democratic mechanisms.

3. Civic Culture: Equality, Public Discourse, and Participation

Democratic systems cultivate a civic culture characterized by values of equality, deliberation, and participation, which play a pivotal role in advancing human development through both normative and instrumental pathways. As Gerring et al. (2012, p. 3) assert, “democracy may serve to inaugurate a culture of equality that empowers oppressed groups,” thereby creating conditions for more inclusive and equitable development outcomes. This mechanism is underpinned by cultural modernization theory (Inglehart & Welzel, 2005; Putnam, 1993) and organizational culture literature (Brown, 1998), which highlight how democratic values transform formal institutions into substantive participatory systems, enabling citizens to effectively claim public resources and influence policy (Welzel et al., 2003).

Cultural modernization theory posits that democratic values and practices foster a shift in societal norms, emphasizing equality, empowerment, and active citizenship (Inglehart & Welzel, 2005). These values, when institutionalized, enhance the responsiveness of public institutions to the needs of marginalized groups, thereby promoting inclusive development. Similarly, organizational culture literature underscores the importance of embedding democratic principles—such as transparency, participation, and equity—into institutional practices to improve governance and service delivery (Brown, 1998). Together, these theoretical perspectives provide a robust framework for understanding how civic culture mediates the relationship between democracy and human development.

The civic culture mechanism operates through three interconnected processes. First, democratic institutions and practices empower historically marginalized populations by establishing formal equality and participation rights. This empowerment enables individuals and groups to engage meaningfully in public discourse and decision-making processes. Second, this empowerment fosters increased awareness of entitlements and capabilities, equipping citizens with the tools to make effective claims on public resources (Alvarez et al., 1998; Rubin, 1997). Third, these claims translate into more inclusive policies and improved public services in key human development sectors, such as education, healthcare, and social welfare. Collectively, these processes create a virtuous cycle of empowerment, awareness, and policy responsiveness that drives human development.

Empirical research provides robust support for the role of civic culture in promoting human development. Studies demonstrate that regions with stronger democratic values exhibit better educational outcomes for marginalized groups, underscoring the transformative potential of inclusive civic norms (Uslaner, 2003). Similarly, healthcare systems become more responsive

to underserved populations as democratic values become institutionalized, leading to improved health outcomes and greater equity in service delivery (Johnston & Harrison, 2006). These findings underscore the critical role of civic culture in translating democratic principles into tangible development outcomes.

Drawing upon the preceding discussion, the hypothesized causal mechanism of civic culture can be articulated as follows: Democratic systems foster a culture of equality, deliberation, and participation, which empowers marginalized groups and enhances their awareness of entitlements and capabilities. This empowerment leads to increased advocacy and demand for inclusive policies, which, in turn, result in improved public services and human development outcomes. This mechanism operates in synergy with electoral accountability, civil society, and good governance, creating a comprehensive framework for understanding how democracy drives human development. We can delineate the causal mechanism at a more granular (or micro-level) as follows:

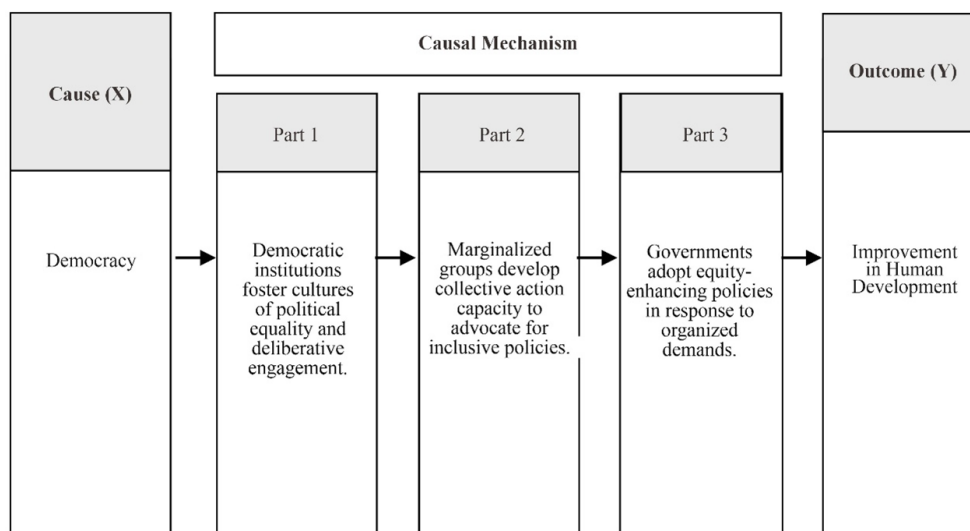


Figure 4. Civic Culture Mechanism

The figure illustrates the hypothesized causal mechanisms linking democracy to human development. It begins with democracy as the cause (X) and human development as the outcome (Y). The first mechanism involves the empowerment of marginalized or oppressed groups, which leads to the second mechanism, awareness of and demand for due rights. This increased awareness and advocacy result in the third mechanism, inclusive policies and improvements in public services for human development programs. Collectively, these interconnected mechanisms demonstrate how democratic principles and practices foster a culture of equality, thereby driving advancements in human development.

Civic culture exhibits significant synergies with other mechanisms linking democracy to human development. It enhances electoral accountability by fostering societal expectations

of government responsiveness to human development needs. It strengthens civil society by encouraging associational participation and collective action, thereby amplifying the voices of marginalized groups. Additionally, civic culture reinforces good governance by institutionalizing values of transparency, participation, and equity in organizational practices. These interactions highlight the mutually reinforcing relationship between civic culture and other democratic mechanisms, creating a cohesive framework for advancing human development.

4. Good Governance

The fourth mechanism in the framework linking democracy to human development centers on institutional quality and governance practices. Democratization fosters greater institutionalization within the political sphere, leading to more developed, differentiated, and effective systems of governance (Gerring et al., 2012, p. 3). These institutional improvements enhance state capacity to design, implement, and sustain policies that advance human development outcomes. Grounded in institutional development literature (Huntington, 1968; Levitsky, 1998; Polsby, 1968) and governance studies (Pierre & Peters, 2000; Rhodes, 1998), this mechanism highlights the critical role of democratic institutions in fostering bureaucratic professionalization, procedural regularization, and functional differentiation—qualities that collectively enhance policy effectiveness and implementation capacity.

The theoretical underpinnings of this mechanism are rooted in institutional development and governance studies. Democratic institutions promote bureaucratic professionalization, ensuring that public officials are selected based on merit and expertise rather than patronage (Huntington, 1968). Procedural regularization, another hallmark of democratic governance, establishes clear rules and processes for policy formulation and implementation, reducing arbitrariness and enhancing predictability (Levitsky, 1998). Functional differentiation, meanwhile, ensures that governance structures are tailored to address specific policy challenges, thereby improving responsiveness and efficiency (Polsby, 1968). Together, these qualities create a governance ecosystem that is better equipped to address complex human development challenges.

Good governance practices influence human development through several interconnected pathways. First, they improve policy formulation by promoting evidence-based approaches and stakeholder consultation, ensuring that policies are both effective and inclusive (Pierre & Peters, 2000). Second, they enhance implementation effectiveness through the establishment of professional bureaucracies and clear accountability structures, which minimize inefficiencies and ensure that policies are executed as intended (Rhodes, 1998). Third, they reduce corruption and rent-seeking behaviors, ensuring that resources are allocated efficiently and equitably to human development priorities (Kaufmann et al., 2005;

Keping, 2018). These pathways collectively contribute to the creation of a governance environment that is conducive to sustainable and inclusive development.

Empirical research provides robust support for the role of good governance in advancing human development. Cross-national studies demonstrate that indicators of good governance—such as government effectiveness, regulatory quality, and control of corruption—correlate positively with human development outcomes, even when controlling for the presence of democratic institutions (Pradhan & Sanyal, 2011). At the subnational level, fiscal decentralization—a key component of good governance—has been shown to improve the efficiency and equity of education and health service provision (Adam et al., 2015). Similarly, governance reforms in education systems have been linked to improvements in both the quality and accessibility of educational services (Khana, 2016). These findings highlight the transformative potential of good governance in addressing development challenges and promoting equitable outcomes.

Drawing upon the preceding discussion, the hypothesized causal mechanism of good governance can be articulated as follows: Democratization fosters greater institutionalization within the political sphere, leading to the development of professional bureaucracies and effective governance structures. These institutional improvements enhance the state’s capacity to formulate and implement policies that address human development priorities. The resulting improvements in public service delivery and resource allocation contribute to better human development outcomes. This mechanism operates in synergy with electoral accountability, civil society, and civic culture, creating a comprehensive framework for understanding how democracy drives human development. We can delineate the causal mechanism at a more granular (or micro-level) as follows:

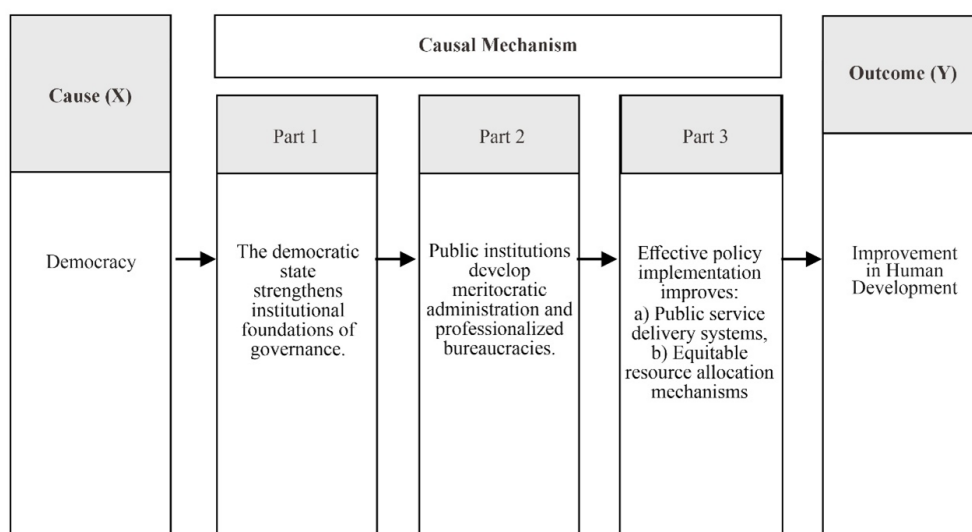


Figure 5. Good Governance Mechanism

The figure illustrates the hypothesized causal mechanisms linking democracy to human development. Starting with democracy as the cause (X) and human development as the outcome (Y), the first mechanism involves the greater institutionalization of the political sphere. This leads to the second mechanism, the development of an effective bureaucracy. Finally, this process results in the third mechanism, the implementation of better public services and efficient expenditure on human development programs. Collectively, these interconnected mechanisms demonstrate how democratic governance structures can enhance human development outcomes through improved institutionalization, effective bureaucracies, and targeted public policies.

The good governance mechanism operates in dynamic interplay with other pathways in the broader framework linking democracy to human development. Electoral accountability creates political incentives for governance reforms that improve policy effectiveness and responsiveness to citizen needs. Civil society organizations contribute to good governance by monitoring policy implementation, advocating for transparency, and partnering with government agencies in service delivery. Civic culture reinforces good governance by institutionalizing values of transparency, participation, and equity, thereby fostering a governance environment that prioritizes the public good. These interactions underscore the mutually reinforcing relationship between good governance and other democratic mechanisms.

5. Government Expenditure and Human Development

Among the intervening variables, government spending on human development sectors emerges as a crucial mechanism linking democracy to human development. Both electoral accountability and good governance are closely connected to human development outcomes through the allocation and effectiveness of government expenditure. However, the relationship between democracy, government expenditure, and human development is not uniform across all contexts. This section elaborates on the empirical evidence supporting this mechanism, while also addressing variations, counterarguments, and potential confounding factors.

Several scholars argue that democracy exerts a robust effect on development through government expenditure (Kurzman & Burkhart, 2002). Empirical studies across diverse contexts highlight the positive impact of government financial performance, particularly expenditure on education, health, and infrastructure, on human development outcomes. For instance, research conducted across various regions of Indonesia demonstrates that fiscal decentralization, local revenue generation, and efficient financial management are positively associated with improvements in the Human Development Index (HDI) (Anggraeni, Rina & Kiswanto, 2018; Mutiha, 2018; Sjahrir et al., 2013; Pradana & Sumarsono, 2018; Riphath et al., 2016; Siregar & Pratiwi, 2017; Suranta et al., 2019; Yusuf & Afendi, 2020).

A study by Sari et al. (2017) examining the effect of fiscal independence and local revenue on the HDI in 33 districts/cities of North Sumatra reports a positive relationship, showing that fiscal independence indirectly impacts human development. Even in provinces with the lowest HDI rankings, such as West Papua and Papua, this positive causal relationship persists. Similarly, Indramawan (2018) finds that the Fiscal Decentralization Ratio significantly influences the HDI, suggesting that local governments' financial performance plays a critical role in driving human development.

Further evidence from other regions supports the positive impact of government expenditure on human development. For example, Fattah and Muji (2012) use multiple regression models to demonstrate that government spending on education, health, and infrastructure in South Sulawesi positively and significantly impacts the HDI. Similarly, Fadilah et al. (2018) provide robust evidence that government expenditure on education, health, and economic sectors significantly influences all components of the HDI.

While the evidence supports the positive impact of government expenditure on human development, it is essential to recognize that this relationship is not uniform across all political and economic contexts. The effectiveness of fiscal policies in democratic settings can vary significantly depending on factors such as the quality of democratic institutions, the level of economic development, and the presence of external shocks.

For example, in well-established democracies with strong institutions, such as those in Western Europe, government expenditure on human development sectors tends to be more effective due to higher levels of transparency, accountability, and public participation (Gerring et al., 2012; Heller, 2007). In contrast, in newer or fragile democracies, such as those in sub-Saharan Africa, the effectiveness of government spending may be undermined by weak institutions, corruption, and political instability (Przeworski & Limongi, 1993; Rudebeck, 2016).

Moreover, the relationship between democracy and government expenditure is not always straightforward. In some cases, democratic governments may fail to allocate resources effectively due to short-term electoral cycles, populist policies, or clientelism (Bardhan, 1996; Gasiorowski, 2000). For instance, in some Latin American countries, democratic governments have prioritized populist spending to secure electoral support, often at the expense of long-term development goals (Rachdia & Saidib, 2015).

While the positive relationship between government expenditure and human development is well-documented, it is important to consider counterarguments and potential confounding factors. For example, some scholars argue that non-democratic regimes may outperform democracies in terms of development outcomes, particularly in contexts where authoritarian governments prioritize economic growth and infrastructure development over political freedoms (Bardhan, 1996; Przeworski & Limongi, 1993). In such cases, the effectiveness of government expenditure may be driven by centralized decision-making and rapid implementation, rather than democratic accountability.

Additionally, the relationship between government expenditure and human development may be influenced by external factors such as economic conditions, historical legacies, and international aid. For instance, in resource-rich countries, government expenditure may be heavily dependent on commodity prices, leading to fluctuations in public spending and development outcomes (Ross, 2006). Similarly, in countries receiving significant international aid, the effectiveness of government expenditure may be shaped by donor priorities and conditionalities (Filmer & Pritchett, 1999).

In summary, government expenditure on human development sectors emerges as a crucial mechanism linking democracy to human development. While empirical evidence consistently supports the positive impact of financial performance and government spending on various aspects of human development, the relationship is not uniform across all contexts. Variations in political and economic conditions, as well as potential confounding factors, must be considered to fully understand the dynamics of this relationship. By addressing these complexities, policymakers and researchers can develop more nuanced and effective strategies for promoting human development through democratic governance.

CONCLUSION

Based on the discussion and reviews of the hypothesized causal mechanisms linking democracy to human development, it appears that the mechanism of government expenditure on human development sectors is particularly plausible. The evidence shows that both electoral accountability and good governance are closely connected to human development through the allocation and effectiveness of government spending. This suggests that the financial performance and targeted expenditure of democratic governments play a crucial role in driving improvements in education, healthcare, and overall human development.

Based on the discussion and review of the hypothesized causal mechanisms linking democracy to human development, the mechanism of government expenditure on human development sectors emerges as particularly plausible. The evidence demonstrates that both electoral accountability and good governance are closely connected to human development through the allocation and effectiveness of government spending. This suggests that the financial performance and targeted expenditure of democratic governments play a crucial role in driving improvements in education, healthcare, and overall human development.

However, the hypothesized causal mechanisms are not without limitations and potential flaws. For instance, the correlation between democratic practices and human development outcomes may be influenced by various confounding factors, such as economic conditions, cultural differences, and external political pressures. Additionally, the effectiveness of these mechanisms may vary depending on the specific contexts and stages of democratic development in different regions or countries. For example, in fragile democracies or

resource-dependent economies, the link between democracy and human development may be weaker due to institutional weaknesses or external shocks (Przeworski & Limongi, 1993; Ross, 2006).

Policy Implications

The findings of this study have significant implications for governance strategies and policy interventions. Policymakers in democratic settings should prioritize the efficient allocation of resources to human development sectors, such as education, healthcare, and infrastructure, to maximize the impact of public spending. Fiscal decentralization, as demonstrated in cases like Indonesia, can enhance the effectiveness of government expenditure by empowering local governments to address region-specific development needs (Fattah & Muji, 2012; Indramawan, 2018). Furthermore, strengthening institutions that promote transparency, accountability, and public participation in budgeting processes can help ensure that government spending aligns with the needs and priorities of citizens.

Future Research Directions

Given these considerations, it is imperative for future research to empirically test each causal mechanism to determine which operates as theorized. Researchers should aim to identify the conditions under which these mechanisms are most effective and explore the nuances that may affect their functioning. Specifically, future studies could:

First, adopt Mixed-Methods Approaches: Combining quantitative analysis with qualitative case studies can provide deeper insights into the causal mechanisms at play. For example, process-tracing methods could be used to examine how electoral accountability influences government expenditure in specific contexts (Beach & Pedersen, 2013).

Second, conduct Comparative Studies: Comparing the effectiveness of fiscal policies across different types of democracies (e.g., established vs. fragile democracies) and authoritarian regimes can shed light on the variations in the democracy-development nexus (Gerring et al., 2012; Rudebeck, 2016).

Lastly, explore Contextual Factors: Future research should investigate how economic conditions, cultural norms, and external pressures influence the relationship between democracy, government expenditure, and human development (Filmer & Pritchett, 1999; Ross, 2006).

Limitations and Challenges

While this study provides a comprehensive conceptual framework, it is important to acknowledge its limitations. First, the mechanisms proposed are based on existing literature and theoretical insights, and their empirical validity remains to be tested. Second, the

relationship between democracy and human development may be bidirectional, with improvements in human development fostering greater democratic accountability (Inglehart & Welzel, 2005). Third, the effectiveness of government expenditure may be influenced by external factors such as international aid, commodity prices, and global economic trends, which were not fully explored in this study.

Final Reflections

By addressing these limitations and pursuing the proposed research directions, scholars and policymakers can better understand the complex relationship between democracy and human development. This, in turn, can inform more effective governance strategies and policy interventions aimed at enhancing human development outcomes. Ultimately, the findings of this study underscore the importance of democratic governance in shaping human development and highlight the need for continued research and policy innovation in this area.

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