



# Democracy, development and the marine environment – A global time-series investigation



Marina Povitkina <sup>a,\*</sup>, Sverker C. Jagers <sup>a,b</sup>, Martin Sjöstedt <sup>a</sup>, Aksel Sundström <sup>a</sup>

<sup>a</sup> Department of Political Science, University of Gothenburg, Sweden

<sup>b</sup> Political Science Unit, Luleå University of Technology, Sweden

## ARTICLE INFO

### Article history:

Received 25 June 2014

Received in revised form

14 November 2014

Accepted 21 December 2014

Available online

### Keywords:

Sustainable development

Democracy

Economic development

Environmental politics

Marine environment

## ABSTRACT

Is democracy favorable or adverse for the management of marine resources? While some studies find democracy to increase the likelihood of achieving sustainable development, others propose that democracy rather has negative effects on the environment. This paper contributes explicitly to this debate, but also adds insights from research arguing that the effects of democracy are conditioned by surrounding institutions. Building on this literature, we argue that the way democracy works – whether it is an instrument for collective action beneficial to the environment or an instrument for patronage and clientelism – depends on levels of economic development. The overall objective of the article is to test this proposition empirically. Employing time-series cross-section analysis and using Marine Trophic Index as a proxy for the health of marine ecosystems, we investigate the impact of democracy on the marine environment in a global sample from 1972 to 2006. The analysis provides interesting insights regarding the conditional role of economic development. We report negative effects of democracy in low income settings, but find that this pattern is reversed when economic development has reached a certain threshold. Finally, we discuss how democracy affects the prospects for sustainable development and based on our conclusions offer suggestions for future research.

© 2014 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

## 1. Introduction

This paper is concerned with the debated issue of whether democracy is favorable or adverse for the environment. We explicitly contribute to this scholarly discussion, but also add insights from research arguing that the effects of democracy are conditioned by surrounding institutions. This debate has evolved from the research emphasizing the role of the state in environmental management in general (Eckersley, 2004) and ocean and coastal management in particular (Cicin-Sain, 1993; Bowen and Riley, 2003). The key responsibility for the states lies in the protection of their Exclusive Economic Zones – marine waters under national jurisdiction. This responsibility, *inter alla*, involves establishing institutions for the management of marine resources, conservation and restoration of habitats in national waters, dealing with marine and coastal land pollution, controlling the levels of local overfishing, making efforts

to fight illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing, establishing fleet size, and allowing selective types of fishing gear to avoid by-catch. In addition, countries are expected to engage into global management efforts and international cooperation directed towards conservation and sustainable use of resources on the high seas (Cicin-Sain, 1993).

Acknowledging the importance of the state as an actor in environmental protection, scholars further on have placed their focus on political factors within the state, namely the importance of democratic and non-democratic governance for the environmental performance. However, the findings of this strand of research are inconclusive. While some studies find democracy to increase the likelihood of sustainable development, others claim that democracy has negative effects, alternatively only appears to have positive effects on the management of some specific resources (Scruggs, 2009; Li and Reuveny, 2006; Midlarsky, 1998; Arvin and Lew, 2011).

This article, however, argues that the debate over democracy's virtuous or vicious effects may be partly misinformed. More specifically, we assert that there are substantial reasons to believe that the effect of democracy on the environment – and hence also on

\* Corresponding author. Box 711, 40530 Gothenburg, Sweden.

E-mail addresses: [marina.povitkina@gu.se](mailto:marina.povitkina@gu.se) (M. Povitkina), [sverker.jagers@pol.gu.se](mailto:sverker.jagers@pol.gu.se) (S.C. Jagers), [martin.sjostedt@pol.gu.se](mailto:martin.sjostedt@pol.gu.se) (M. Sjöstedt), [aksel.sundstrom@pol.gu.se](mailto:aksel.sundstrom@pol.gu.se) (A. Sundström).

the marine environment, which is in focus in this article – is fundamentally conditioned by level of economic development. This proposition originates from the literature on modernization and democratic consolidation, where it is typically argued that in societies lacking economic development, governance logic is quite different from that in more affluent countries (Leftwich, 1993; Collier, 2009; Kapstein and Converse, 2008; Spilker, 2012; Keefer, 2007; Zakaria, 2003; Lipset, 1959). Accordingly, if not preceded or accompanied by institutions that tend to be present in contexts of higher economic development (such as, for example, rule of law or predictable “rules of the game”), instrumental mechanisms of democracy cannot be expected to automatically strengthen collective action, civil society, political culture, accountability, or other factors held to be indispensable to foster sustainable development. Without such complementary institutions there are serious concerns that democracy in many cases may be no more than an empty shell, in fact potentially opening up yet other arenas for exploitation, patronage, and clientelism (Collier, 2007; Keefer, 2007; Walker, 1999). This argument also highlights the importance of sequencing. While democracy in the well-developed parts of the world was commonly preceded by rule of law and constitutional liberalism, many of today's developing states are forced to complete the construction of the modern state project while at the same time competing in general elections (Zakaria, 2003; Diamond, 2008; Persson and Sjöstedt, 2014). Moreover, in low-income settings, democracy is often imposed from outside, implying that there might be severe legitimacy problems and little correspondence between formal and informal institutions, which in turn might imply that democracy does not have as positive effects in low-income settings as in more affluent societies (see Bratton, 2007; Helmke and Levitsky, 2006; Ross, 2006; Pritchett and Woolcock, 2004; Spilker, 2012).

Taken together, there are substantial reasons to believe that the way democracy works – that is whether it is an instrument for collective action beneficial to the environment or an instrument for patronage, clientelism, and redistribution to the ruler's closest allies – depends on level of economic development. As will be discussed in later sections, we focus specifically on the marine environment in this article. The aim is thus to investigate whether level of democracy affects the marine environment and, if so, whether this impact differs depending on national levels of economic development.

In order to test the relationship between democracy and the marine environment empirically, we use the Marine Trophic Index as a proxy for the health of marine ecosystems and available data measuring democracy as the main independent variable. The empirical analysis is in many ways more ambitious than previous tests in the literature, with a sample of 142 countries and the health of their marine environment over the years 1972–2006. Hence, we have a larger sample size across both countries and years than normally used in this literature. Our findings provide interesting insights regarding conditional role of economic development, thus developing the claim recently made by Scruggs (2009), who argued that previous studies have not adequately taken this factor into account. We report negative effects of democracy in settings of low gross national income and positive effects when economic development has reached a certain threshold. Moreover, we contribute by adding knowledge of *when* democracy can be expected to generate positive environmental outcomes.

## 2. On democracy, economic development and marine resources

The effect of democracy on the environment is heavily debated. While some scholars argue that democracy increases the likelihood

of successful collective action and sustainable development, others hold that democratic systems tend to fall prey to the public's unwillingness to adopt environmentally sound policies. According to the latter perspective, democracy either needs to be exchanged for less democratic political systems with unbounded capacity to reorient society away from environmentally unsustainable paths (Ophuls, 1977; Heilbrunner, 1974; also see Paelike (1995)) or be guided by more deliberative and participatory ideals (Dryzek, 1992; Folke et al., 2003; Bluhdorn, 2013; Dryzek, 2014). Those instead holding that democracy is *beneficial* for the environment argue that democracy is an efficient coordination mechanism and that democratic values and procedures, such as freedom of speech and freedom of information, increase the likelihood of sustainable development (Achterberg, 1993; Lafferty and Meadowcroft, 1995; Barrett and Graddy, 2000; Jagers, 2007).

The arguments proposed in this debate are as contrasting as compelling. From a broad review of the literature, Li and Reuveny (2006) derive five causal mechanisms as to why democracy might *improve* environmental performance comparing to autocratic states: 1) *political rights and freedom* often lead to public awareness and environmental action (Payne, 1995), 2) systems with *electoral accountability* are more responsive to people's environmental concerns and the influence from environmentalists on policy (Kotov and Nikitina, 1995; Bernauer and Koubi, 2009), 3) due to the dominating principles of *rule of law, aversion to war and respect for life*, democracies tend to produce less environmental destruction than autocracies (Weiss and Jacobsen, 1999; Gleditsch and Sverdrup, 2003), 4) *the elite in an autocratic society* is less pro-environmental than the public mass, and 5) relatively *short time horizons* of autocratic leaders will tend to promote overexploitation (Congleton, 1992).

At the same time, autocracies are said to adopt less stringent environmental policies, since governmental leaders prefer to avoid payments of the costs of tight rules themselves (Congleton, 1992; Fredriksson et al., 2005). They also tend to prioritize economic development over environmental protection and are argued to allow supporters of the governments to overexploit ecosystems in order to pay off the support (Ward, 2008).

According to Li and Reuveny (2006) there are, however, also a number of democratic factors that may *worsen* environmental degradation: 1) (unlimited) freedom in a democracy will lead to unchecked behavior by overharvesting individuals (see Hardin (1968)), 2) autocracies can impose stricter regulations on population growth (Heilbrunner, 1974), 3) in democracies leaders will enact election-winning policies and thus tend to promote policies supporting the employment of voters rather than the environment (Midlarsky, 1998), and 4) democracies are often market economies where corporate interests have more influence than environmentalists (Dryzek, 1987). In the same regard, Bernauer and Koubi (2009) suggest that mature democracies are influenced by special interest groups, which have little or no incentive to compromise their interests for the environment, which thus might diminish the positive effect of democracy on the provision of public goods.

This debate has spurred numerous empirical investigations studying the relationship between the level of democracy and quality of the environment. While some studies indicate a positive correlation between democracy and environmental quality (Neumayer, 2002; Li and Reuveny, 2006; Ward, 2008; Wurster, 2013; Sjöstedt and Jagers, 2014), others find negative correlations or no relationship at all (Midlarsky, 1998; Grafton and Knowles, 2004). For example, in their review, Li and Reuveny's (2006) report that higher levels of democracy reduce CO<sub>2</sub> and NO<sub>x</sub> emissions and lead to less water pollution, less land degradation, and lower deforestation rates. Ward (2008), on the other hand, finds that while stable democracies perform better on sustainability

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/8061495>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/8061495>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)