

The Effect of British Colonialism on Democratization in Zimbabwe and India

Christian Vanhoek

Department of Political Science, University of Mary Washington

PSCI 350B (01)

Dr. Melissa Martinez

May 2nd, 2024

In this case study I will focus on the effects that colonization has had on the development of countries. I will examine the institutions left behind by colonial powers, particularly those of European powers, and whether these institutions had an impact on the development of a country's democracy once independence has been achieved. The first section of the case study will examine literature and research focused on the effects of colonization. This will primarily focus on the difference between exclusive and inclusive systems of colonial governance and the correlating effect this has on democratization. The second section will provide an in-depth comparison between two former British colonies, India, and Rhodesia (subsequently Zimbabwe). The comparison will examine how the colonial system of governance impacted decolonization and impacted both nations' path to democratization.

The first area of research addresses whether British colonial rule translated into a more survivable democratic system in former colonies. The first article compares British and Spanish colonial rule (Lange, Vom Hau, 2006). The findings conclude that Spain tended to colonize more developed precolonial regions, which had more wealth and more robust institutions. Whereas the British tended to colonize more sparsely populated and less developed regions (Lange, Matthew et al, 2006). The British tendency to institute more liberal institutions focusing on property rights, and free markets tended to equate to a greater development of democracy post-independence. The Spanish colonies stratified the societies by strengthening local hierarchies and focusing on a policy of wealth extraction. This left former colonies incredibly fractured and institutionally weak, with no capacity to establish free markets.

The study conducted by Bernhard et al. paints a similar picture, that independent countries once under colonial British rule did indeed have a greater chance of democratic survival (2004). Although this is presented with a caveat, the length of time under colonial

institutions played a role in survival. This theory was tested against other Western colonial powers, such as the Dutch, French, Belgian, and Spanish. The results stated, "...that the legacy that the British left on the state and civil society in their former colonies has had beneficial effects for democratic regimes compared to other colonial legacies." (Bernhard, Michael, 2004, 241). Looking beyond the economic systems previously covered, it seems the British colonial institutions, and tendency for indirect rule, left now independent colonies more prepared to run a democratic system of government. This contrasts with other colonial powers, such as the Spanish, who practiced a type of direct rule, allowing for very little civic participation among the populace. The study also finds that even though British colonial legacies leave colonies better positioned for a functioning democracy, this is a much lower chance than those democracies that never experienced colonial rule.

Research by Acemoglu et al. looks at colonial institutions not based on who the colonizer was, but instead where they colonized. This area focuses on whether the colony had a large indigenous population or not. It is argued that areas that possessed a large indigenous population, had their economies structured to be "extractive." (Acemoglu, Daron, and Robinson, James A., 2017). Essentially, large indigenous populations incentivized colonizers to use the populace as a labor force, focusing on extracting resources, such as mining or agriculture. Whereas, in areas like North America, which had comparatively smaller indigenous populations than in Latin America or Africa, the incentive for the colonizers was to attract European settlers. To do this the colony offered property and political rights to some extent, and better-paying work. These differences in economic strategies and population are thought to play a more significant role in development economically than who the colonizing power was.

The final article under review is “Analysis of Colonialism and its impact in Africa.” This article discusses a brief history of colonialism on the African continent and then delves into specific reasons why colonial rule stunted the development of African nations. The most relevant area of the article explains that any economic development that exists is not sufficient, as it is primarily geared towards export (Ocheni, Stephen, and Nwanko, C. Basil, 2012). Further exasperating barriers to development, western education provided to the native population was primarily focused on training Africans to work in the extraction of raw materials, and not the development or operation of technology. These factors contribute to the poor state of development currently seen today.

It seemed there was almost a consensus in the literature that British colonies performed better in sustaining higher survivability and economic development than those under other European rule. This seems to be the result of both British governance and institutions and the geography of the selected areas of colonization. The British institutions facilitated a form of indirect rule, allowing those being colonized to participate in government (to varying degrees, in different colonies). This inclusion led to increased governmental stability and democratic survival. The opposite was true among those colonies that practiced direct rule, which produced very stratified and unequal societies, which fared far worse in democratic development.

The other factor impacting development was the economic situation of the colonies. A major hurdle newly independent colonies had to contend with was the exploitative nature of the economy. Many colonies, facilitated by education and industry, were set up to extract raw materials for manufacturing back in Europe. This led these colonies to essentially be stuck in a cycle of having major export-focused industries and very little domestic production capability. This led to a dependency on imports, stunting economic growth. Those that had liberal free

markets, such as many British colonies, are much more economically developed and prosperous today than those that did not. Free markets allowed a domestic economy and industry to develop, allowing for the reliance on imports to be much smaller than those with extractive economic systems.

The literature has provided a satisfactory answer in my examination of the impact of colonial institutions on the development of democracy and economic stability. From my findings, I can determine that yes, colonial institutions played a large role in the development of countries. The colonies which operated under a form of indirect governance, saw better development than those which did not. The indirect governance led to more inclusive political institutions and free liberal markets. These factors allowed countries to develop a more competitive economy in the modern world, and a stronger democratic system of government. These benefits extended to economics as well. Due to the inclusivity of free markets, education and industries were allowed to develop in a way to benefit the country, instead of being focused on exporting goods for manufacturing elsewhere. The legacy left by colonialism is still present today and continues to either help or hinder the countries impacted by it.

One area that the literature falls short is in its examination of the effect the process of decolonization has on democratization. Primarily, when discussing the impact of colonialism, the papers focused almost exclusively on the effects of colonization, during the period of colonial rule. None of the literature discussed how a country became independent and if whether, for instance, decolonization was violent or peaceful and if this influenced democratic development. Nor does the literature discuss any former colonies that have developed advanced economies or long-standing democracies, and how this was accomplished. The grouping of inclusive and exclusive colonial institutions into narrow outcomes of democracy is very limited. It assumes

that a certain type of colonial government will result in a certain level of democratic development. How a country exactly achieves democratic development, while considering the legacy of colonialism still warrants further examination.

The consensus reached by an examination of colonialism's legacy on democratic development is that British colonies tend to have much better chances of having a surviving democracy than the colonies of other European powers. However, despite having better chances to survive, democracies still have plenty of opportunity to fail. One area that presents a chance for a democracy to fail is during the process of decolonization, when an independent government is still in its infancy. British colonies, despite their systems of government typically incorporating indirect rule, have still failed. The second section of this paper compares two former British colonies and examines how the process of decolonization impacted the democratic survival of the two nations.

At various points throughout history the British controlled colonies on nearly every habitable continent. Following the Second World War, a wave of decolonization swept over the British Empire. Among these decolonization efforts were India and Rhodesia, which would eventually be known as Zimbabwe. Despite both being British colonial possessions, India would almost immediately declare itself a republic, and have free and fair democratic elections. On the other hand, Zimbabwe would suffer a bloody decolonization process resulting in an authoritarian regime that persists to this day. This case study will focus on how the colonial systems put in place during the colonial era led to the disparity in democracy that we see between the two nations today.

Research by Bernhard et al. (2004) and Lange et al. (2006) suggests that colonies with institutions of indirect rule see greater success in the development and survival of a democracy.

This was due to these institutions being more inclusive and allowing broader participation in the governing process. A close examination of the democratization process of India and Zimbabwe supports this assertion. India which gained independence in 1950, developed a democracy that sought to include all Indians under universal suffrage with fair and free elections. Zimbabwe (then known as Rhodesia) waged a rebel war of independence to uphold an unfair and exclusive parliamentary system. After gaining legal independence from the British Empire, this undemocratic system of government would persist until the present day.

Research both in theory and in practice supports that having an inclusionary system of government stemming from colonization leads to better democratic development and survival. This can be seen in the cases of two former British colonial possessions that had very different outcomes in democratic development. The Indian experience indicates the positive correlation between inclusionary civic involvement and the survival of a democracy. The work that was done in India to include all Indians in the democratic process, strengthened the governmental bureaucracy and its civic tradition. Rhodesia and Zimbabwe provide a look into the correlation between exclusionary government policy and a tendency to fall into an authoritarian political state.

Ornit Shani (2016) details India's transformation from a colonial subject to a thriving democracy. Under the British, India had only a limited amount of native Indian participation in government. The process of decolonization saw the bureaucracy of the colonial state working with members of Indian national movements, to devise a system for an electoral roll that included full adult participation. This shift from previous divisions along class, religion, and wealth in electoral laws allowed the inclusion of much of the adult population. This inclusion

worked to strengthen the democratic process and bureaucracy leading to one that could handle election challenges and survive from the early 1950s to today.

The first democratic elections held in India occurred between 1951 and 1952, but preparatory work for a change to democracy occurred in 1947 with the agreement that a new constitution would include universal adult suffrage (Shani, 2016, p. 84-85). The bureaucracy at the national level asked and empowered provincial and local officials to produce ideas and studies on how best to include all citizens in an election roll. This allowed governmental bureaucracies of different levels (low, middle, and high office) to participate in the democratization process. It was agreed upon that "... as defined in Article 5 of the draft constitution, of or above twenty-one years of age who is not disqualified by reason of unsoundness of mind or of nonresidence is entitled to registration on the electoral roll." (Shani, 2016, 92). This extension and inclusion of voting rights to everyone accompanied by a decentralized approach to carrying out registration, led to an effectual and strong democracy emerging both at the local level and at the national level.

Rhodesia took the opposite route on its journey towards democratization. According to a book by Rotberg (2001, p. 48), Rhodesia was at the beginning of decolonization a part of the Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland, along with Zambia and Malawi, but possessed a much larger white population than the other two countries. This population enjoyed a life of wealth and luxury in a very segregated and unequal society. The white minority population refused the granting of African majority rule, as had been done in Zambia and Malawi, and chose to resist the demands of the British government. Britain's decolonization efforts sought to put the country back in the hands of the native population, Rhodesia's government disagreed and instead of

participating and facilitating free elections, they chose to declare independence, not just from being a colony, but total independence from Britain.

Tinashe Nyamunda's (2016) journal entry will be used to examine the impact that Rhodesia's Unilateral Declaration of Independence (UDI) had on decolonization. This article discusses how the Rhodesian government illegally declared independence from Britain and the impact of the subsequent war on post-colonial development. A main point raised in the article is that Rhodesia's self-governing status, which they held since 1923, gave white Rhodesians the impression they were not colonial subjects but the rightful rulers of the country. This mentality drove them to defy the decolonization efforts of Britain and refuse to establish African majority rule. This bitter defense of the colonial system's status quo by white Rhodesians prompted the government of now legally independent Zimbabwe to pursue a policy of reprisal and anti-colonialism rather than development.

The illegal independence of Rhodesia took the form of a brutal civil war, one which pitted the white, colonial population against native, black African nationalist movements. Rotberg explains that these African nationalist movements, ZANU and ZAPU, were divided along ideological lines but united against the unrecognized Rhodesian government (2001, p. 52). However, after the war and the ousting of the former colonial government, both groups saw themselves as the rightful rulers and sought to exclude the other from power. The ideological fractures between the two main rebel forces, ZANU and ZAPU, fostered conflict and distrust between the two parties. ZANU and Robert Mugabe would win the 1980 elections formally granting Zimbabwe independence and immediately used military forces loyal to themselves to intimidate voters to keep themselves in power (Makonye, Rukema, 2019, p. 299-300).

Subsequent political repression followed which is detailed by Felix Makonye, and Joseph Rukema (2019). Political repression took the form of militarized violence against opposition parties by forces loyal to the prime minister and later president of Zimbabwe, Robert Mugabe. Nyamunda writes that many politicians' rhetoric in Zimbabwe references the Rhodesian UDI and the bloody struggle, and their opposition and defeat of the colonial government legitimizes their claim to rule (2016, 1006). This is further confirmed by an analysis of political rhetoric which sees Zimbabwe's independence as the result of violence, and that only violence can keep the country independent (Makonye and Rukema, 2019, p. 305). This culminated in a coup that ousted Mugabe, but Zimbabwe remains authoritarian.

Both the decolonization and democratization efforts of India and Zimbabwe were born out of the desire for their colonial overlords to return their respective countries to the native population, one country embraced the challenge, while the other resisted it. India chose to enact an inclusive system of universal suffrage which has lasted since the early 1950s. Rhodesia, and later Zimbabwe chose to resist democratization and centralize authority, using violence and intimidation to exclude political opponents. India highlights that an inclusionary system of governance lends itself to the development and sustainment of democracy, while Rhodesia exemplifies how an exclusionary system fosters a cycle of authoritarianism.

The findings of both the research regarding the impact of colonialism on development and a close examination of two countries differing decolonization process, supports the assertion that an inclusive form of government leads to better chances of democratic survival. Authors such as Bernhard et al. (2004), and Lange et al. (2006), argue that having robust and inclusive colonial institutions are foundational to developing a healthy democracy. The examination of Rhodesia's decolonization proves that having an exclusive form of government can lead to

resistance to inclusive representation and democracy. Therefore, I can conclude that British colonies that strove to develop and maintain an inclusive form of government benefitted from more robust, experienced institutions. These experienced and strong institutions greatly increase the chances that a nations democracy will be able to further develop and handle challenges to their survival.

References

- Acemoglu, D., and Robinson, J., (2017), The Economic Impact of Colonialism, *The Long Economic and Political Shadow of History*, Volume I. A Global View Pg. 81, https://cepr.org/system/files/publication-files/60189-the_long_economic_and_political_shadow_of_history_1_a_global_view.pdf
- Bernhard, M., Reenock, C., Nordstrom, T., (2004), The Legacy of Western Overseas Colonialism on Democratic Survival, *International Studies Quarterly*, Volume 48, Issue 1, Pages 225–250, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.0020-8833.2004.00298.x>
- Lange, M., Mahoney, J., Vom Hau, M., (2006), Colonialism and Development: A Comparative Analysis of Spanish and British Colonies. *American Journal of Sociology*, Volume 111, no.5, <https://www.journals.uchicago.edu/doi/full/10.1086/499510>
- Makonye, F., Rukema, J. R. (2019). Elections in Zimbabwe: the Mugabe Years. *The Journal of Social, Political, and Economic Studies*, 44(3/4), 298-317. <https://umw.idm.oclc.org/login?url=https://www.proquest.com/scholarly-journals/elections-zimbabwe-mugabe-years/docview/2309922699/se-2?accountid=12299>
- Nyamunda, T. (2016). ‘More a Cause than a Country’: Historiography, UDI and the Crisis of Decolonisation in Rhodesia. *Journal of Southern Africa Studies* 42(5), 1005-1019. <https://web-p-ebshost->

com.umw.idm.oclc.org/ehost/pdfviewer/pdfviewer?vid=0&sid=b1fd2205-e98f-4dc9-b3bd-6a5cae98556f%40redis

Ocheni, S., Nwankwo, B., (2012). Analysis of Colonialism and Its Impact in Africa. *Cross-Cultural Communication*, 8(3), 46-54, <http://www.cscanada.net/index.php/ccc/article/view/j.ccc.1923670020120803.1189> DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.3968/j.ccc.1923670020120803.1189>.

Rotberg, R. (2001). *Ending Autocracy, Enabling Democracy : The Tribulations of Southern Africa, 1960-2000*. Brookings Institution Press.

Shani, O. (2016). Making India's Democracy: Rewriting the Bureaucratic Colonial Imagination in the Preparation of the First Elections. *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 36(1), 83-101. <https://www.muse.jhu.edu/article/615053>.