



The British Effect: Is colonial legacy a contributing factor to post-colonial democratization?

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The British Effect: Is colonial legacy a contributing factor to post-colonial democratization?

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Abstract

The drivers of democratic success are well-studied and comprise a complex topic with a plethora of economic, environmental, and historical factors given to explain the relative degree of democratic performance across countries. Amongst the factors that account for democratic success is the role of colonialism and whether colonial history and identity has contributed (or not) to the onset of liberal democracy in former colonies of former European imperial powers. Specifically, writers such as Lange (2004) and Ferguson (2004) have argued that former British colonies have enjoyed higher levels of democratic success than former colonies of other European colonial powers such as France or Spain.

Following a statistical analysis that measures the extent of democratic success across eighty-five former colonies, according to two prevalent indices that analyze levels of freedom and democratic success (Freedom House and The Economist Intelligence Unit), I found that the correlation between democratic success and colonial history was not significant across the data set and instead has been limited to a few specific exceptions. The study finds that a specific form of settler colonialism and related institutional building in particular countries (Australia, Canada, New Zealand, United States) was instrumental in contributing to isolated cases of democratic consolidation. However, after controlling for those exceptional cases, I conclude that there is not a meaningful democratic outperformance of former British colonies vis-à-vis the former colonies of France, Spain, and the other European colonial powers.

Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to my ever patient and supportive wife, Thais, and my two wonderful young daughters, Isabella, and Lia.

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Chapter I.

Introduction

Growing up in the United Kingdom in the late 1980s and 1990s meant that the British colonial legacy and role of ‘The Empire’ were not fully faded and never far from mind. During my own childhood, I recall distinctively the memories of playing amongst the ‘colonial’ artifacts in my grandmother’s house, who had been born in the 1930s in a small town outside what is known today as Islamabad in Pakistan to a colonel in the British colonial army. Memories of the tiger skin rug (a macabre and ghastly relic), ceremonial daggers, and the grainy home videos that included a dramatic duel between a king cobra and a mongoose served as an overt and tangible reminder of The Raj and wider British colonial legacy.

As an important statement, my intent here is of course not to ignore or paper over the obvious injustices and exploitation attributed to the colonial era and the problematic legacies associated with colonialism. I am not looking to justify the tragedies of the colonial era or to suggest overarching benign or benevolent impacts linked to colonialism. Nonetheless I do reflect as to whether there exists a notable difference in the colonial legacy across the former British Empire and those other far-flung lands colonized by the other European powers of the era.

In this thesis, the research question ‘Is colonial legacy a contributing factor to post-colonial democratization?’ seeks to determine whether colonial legacy, defined as the lasting impact of the structures and colonial history of former European colonies, has been a significant contributor in underpinning the process of democratization in former

colonized nations. This discussion relates principally to the type of colonialism, the role and extent of institution building, and the post-independence engagement between the colonizer and the colonized.

Fundamentally, the concept of democracy is based on how societies determine or elect those who govern or hold power, supported by rule of law in the sense of how this political power is exercised. In a democracy, citizens and the elected class are held accountable to the rule of law and rely on this to ensure orderly democratic transitions and the rules by which the winners and losers abide. As opposed to other forms of government, under democracy the rule of law applies to all citizens. Conversely in dictatorships, oligarchies, and autocratic regimes, the ruling elite often conduct their affairs beyond the rule of law and norms expected of the wider populace.

In this sense, I define democratization according to the measures outlined by two well-regarded institutions that attempt to quantify democratization and levels of democracy (the methods of which are explained subsequently in this thesis). By drawing upon those indices that measure democratic success, namely Transparency International Freedom Index and the Economist Intelligence Unit's Democracy Index, the study will seek to identify the correlation between the consolidation and strength of democracy in post-colonial nations and the historic colonial power therein. For avoidance of doubt, I draw upon the definition of democratic success as outlined by the Economic Intelligence Unit and Freedom House, which is broadly categorized around electoral process and pluralism, civil liberties, the functioning of government, political participation, and political culture.

Specifically, the focus of this research will be on the legacy from the wave of European colonialism that began in the 15th and 16th centuries during the ‘Age of Discovery,’ with the Spanish and Portuguese driving European exploration to establish overseas empires. This era was subsequently followed by the advent of colonialism under other European nations, notably France and Britain, who were eager to replicate the extractive wealth of the Iberian powers. These empires gradually fragmented with the creation of series of independent nation states beginning in the late 18th century, notably in the Americas and culminating with the onset of independence movements in the decades following the end of World War II.

This study by nature will focus on a wide comprehensive data set that includes all former colonies, ranging from the United States that achieved independence in 1776 through to Zimbabwe, which achieved independence from the United Kingdom as recently as 1980. Of course, this difference of two hundred years is significant but there is a breadth of difference in the subsequent advent of independence across the major colonial powers as decolonization has been a gradual process during the last two centuries across former colonies. For instance, the former Spanish colonies of Equatorial Guinea achieved independence in 1968, while Argentina achieved independence in 1816, nearly one hundred and fifty years prior.

Based on existing political theory and initial reviews of the datasets, I hypothesize that nations which were colonized by Great Britain were more likely to achieve lasting democratic success than those colonized by other European powers, namely Belgium, France, Germany, Portugal, and Spain. To be clear, the hypothesis does not surmise that all British colonies have experienced democratic success, and significant failures

outweigh the successes. For instance, and as illustrated in the data set, we consider much of Sub-Saharan Africa (i.e., Nigeria, Kenya), and the Middle East (i.e., Iraq, Egypt, South Yemen) as countries with lower scores of democratic success. However, despite these notable examples, I argue that British colonies have generally displayed democratic success to a magnitude not seen in countries that were colonized by other European powers.

Literature Review: Democratization and Colonialism

In 2022, Freedom House released their latest *Freedom in the World* study, which illustrated a sixteenth consecutive year of decreased freedom worldwide. Per the study, the challenges of China, Russia, and other dictatorships to the world order has led to notable democratic backsliding, as these actors have “succeeded in shifting global incentives, jeopardizing the consensus that democracy is the only viable path to prosperity and security, while encouraging reversal has spanned a variety of countries in every region, from long-standing democracies like the United States to consolidated authoritarian regimes like China and Russia” (Freedom House, 2022).

Indeed, in the period from 1988 through 2005, according to Freedom House (2018), the proportion of nations classified as ‘Not Free’ in *Freedom in the World* fell by fourteen points (from 37 to 23 percent), while the share of ‘Free’ countries grew by eight points to 46 percent. Since 2005, there has been a reversal of these gains, and in the most recent report, about 38% of the global populace live in ‘Not Free’ countries, which is the highest rate since 1997. Defining freedom and democracy is a notorious tricky matter, and in the Freedom House definition, the following criteria are considered: pervasiveness

of elections, term limits for executive, rights of ethnic minorities and migrants, safety of expats and diaspora, and freedom of expression.

The explanation for the varying degrees of democratic success across different nation states has been a central question in the field of political science, particularly after the proliferation of new independent states following the end of World War II. Within democratic theory, several political scientists, including Lipset, Berman, and Linz, have analyzed whether democratic success is tied to certain structural factors such as history, culture, geography, and economics. Indeed, in *Modernization Theory*, Diamond et al (1996) have argued that economic performance affects democratic transition in several ways, including the socio-economic development of a large middle class that pushes for political change, as well as the wider notion that socio-economic development brings about political change.

Democracy and Colonialism

Through this research, my intent is to undertake a comprehensive statistical study to determine to what extent colonial legacy and models of colonialism provided the foundations for democratic success or failure in post-colonial states. Although many of these post-colonial states have remained authoritarian regimes, others such as India have been home to pluralistic governments with varying degrees of success—some for long periods of time and others more briefly—despite apparently lacking some of the expected structural conditions such as high levels of economic development, European settlement (i.e., Canada, USA, Australia), and strong civil societies that are often described to underpin democratic transition.

Before proceeding further, it is important to clarify and explain the definition of colonialism considered in this study. In this investigation the form of colonialism under investigation is overseas colonialism deployed by Western powers and expanded to signify a Western colony overseas that is located outside Europe but ruled by a European power who exercise both political sovereignty and military control over the territory. As a point of housekeeping this study excludes colonies internal to Europe, namely those European territories that fell under the subjugation of Hapsburg, German, Russian, or Soviet empires as well as British dominion over Ireland. For further clarity this study also does not include non-Western colonial powers such as the Ottoman Empire or Imperial Japan, on the basis that the political, societal, and economic landscape across the European powers is inherently more similar than non-European powers, and the experiences of empire building occurred in a similar time period and with broader similarities in terms of the regions colonized.

Based on existing political theory and initial reviews of the datasets, I hypothesize that nations that were colonized by Great Britain are more likely to achieve democratic success than those colonized by other European powers, namely Belgium, France, Germany, Portugal, and Spain. In addition to well documented standout cases of democratization amongst former British colonies such as New Zealand, US, Canada, and Australia, my initial theory is that former British colonies in general have enjoyed more democratic success (which is not limited to the aforementioned examples) due to three overarching factors: form of colonialism, post-colonial institutions, ‘rule of law’.

Principally, the British form of colonialism in several pivotal cases, such as North America and Oceania, was typically settler-based colonialism, which it will be argued is

more conducive for democratization. Typically, scholars such as Longley (2021) have defined colonialism into four principal types: settler colonialism, exploitation colonialism, surrogate colonialism, and internal colonialism. Settler colonialism, as in case of North America and Oceania, involves mass immigration with a policy of replacing or supplementing the existing indigenous populations. In that sense, Wolfe (2006) goes further and emphasizes the linkage between settler colonialism and genocidal outcomes in native societies entrenched in policies of racial superiority, or rather “practiced by Europeans, both genocide and settler colonialism have typically employed the organizing grammar of race.” In the example of settler colonialism, the intention of the colonizer is longer-term with intentions to stay and cultivate the land and, to some extent, engage in forms of institution building, as was the case in the US and Canada. This contrasts to exploitation colonialism as practiced in much of Africa and Asia, which involves fewer colonists and concentrates on the extraction and exploitation of natural resources or labor for the benefit of the empire and metropole.

Related to this form of settler-based colonialism were the more overt efforts of the British in creating and investing in educational institutions in the colonies, even if often initially for the overarching benefit of the colonists than indigenous populations and further reinforcing colonial and racial hierarchies. Indeed, Glaeser et al (2004) point out the role of education systems in colonies to impact both the economic and political realities. Often these institutions would outlive independence and provide local populations with the foundations of an educational system to support future democratic consolidation.

Naturally various schools of thought have provided several palpable reasons, which are expanded further below, contrary to my hypothesis and in favor of the argument that colonialism is not correlated meaningfully with democratic success. Specifically, this is identified across three interrelated facets as noted by Bernhard, M., Reenock, C., & Nordstrom, C. (2004).

Primarily colonialism and its *modus operandi* are oft associated with limited attempts at intentionally fostering local economic development in the colonies unless it served the direct objectives of the colonial power to extract and exploit local resources (given resources were diverted to the Metropole). That is to say that there is a strong correlation between colonialism and lower levels of economic development because structural economic development in colonies did not fulfil the immediate needs of resource extraction and generating wealth for the colonizer.

In a wider sense and as mentioned previously, economic development is considered to be a significant variable in fostering democratic success (Przeworski and Limongi, 1997) and suggests that countries with a colonial history should face greater challenges in transitioning to and embedding democracy. This is due to the fact that colonial structures often fostered development that left the former colonies highly reliant on agriculture exports or low value-add extractive resource economies. In turn this model resulted in many economies in former colonies being very vulnerable to economic shocks and commodity volatility in global markets with the consequential ‘boom and bust’ cycles stunting long-term economic growth. Therefore, given the “well-demonstrated effect that negative growth has on the survival of democratic regimes, it also works to disrupt democratic survival” (Bernhard, M., Reenock, C., & Nordstrom, C., 2004).

Secondly, colonialism in many corners of the world has been synonymous with higher degrees of religious and ethnic cleavages, often due to the fact that colonial powers drew borders or boundaries for bureaucratic or military objectives, consequently creating artificial nations, often with limited historical coherence or commonality. The impact of this approach in example of Africa is described in that “some large ethnic groups were split between colonial states, while others with little in common, save in some instances a history of warfare and enmity, were drawn together into the new state boundaries.” (Diamond, 1998). As ethnic strife and cleavages are an impediment to democratization and it would, therefore, be challenging for post-colonial nation states to retain democratic models in the mid or long-term.

Finally, it is argued that colonial legacy impacted the relationship between civil society and the state and in a fundamental manner. This is further outlined by Bernhard, M., Reenock, C., & Nordstrom, C., (2004) who discuss the effect of colonialism on political actors by surmising that “authoritarian rule by colonial powers left both elites and the population-at-large unprepared for democracy”. Moreover, the legacy of the colonial structure served to foster nationalistic or paternalistic leadership who emulated the often dictatorial and predatory behaviors of the former colonial administration and was not conducive for democratization.

To reinforce and although I purposefully outline contradictory arguments above, my hypothesis is that the identity of the colonial power, namely Britain in this case, was linked to the subsequent democratization of former colonies for the a number of reasons, including the nature of colonialism, the build out of post-colonial institutions, and the focus on ‘rule of law’.

The British Commonwealth of Nations

Specifically, in the case of Great Britain is the perceived role of the Commonwealth of Nations in underpinning democratization amongst former colonies. The Commonwealth is a unique political grouping of around fifty nations, established in 1926, which includes members from many former colonies of the British empire. Members of the Commonwealth are expected to adhere to common values such as human rights, equality, and world peace amongst the wider objectives outlined in the 1971 Singapore declaration. In addition to promoting free trade, one of the core tenets of the declaration is the promotion of individual liberties and democracy. In more overt terms, scholars such as Patel (2021) have argued that the Commonwealth was created specifically to prolong the influence of British colonialism and the empire, albeit in a more 'palatable' sense.

In recent years, the Commonwealth has exercised suspensions and terminations due to members abrogating their commitment to democratic government and upholding human rights, including suspensions for Pakistan and Nigeria in 1999 and 1995 respectively. While other colonial empires have institutions designed to promote aspects of shared culture or heritage (such as the International Organization of Francophonie or the Community of Portuguese Language Countries), The Commonwealth is unique in its impact, organization, and effectiveness in fostering liberal democracy and economic development amongst the membership. Of course, criticism is levelled at the

Commonwealth that it serves as a neocolonial institution with the objective to continue to enforce colonial power structures (Hirsch, 2018), but for the purposes of this thesis, I consider the Commonwealth as a vehicle to promote understanding and economic/political development amongst the members.

Part of the stated objectives from the Commonwealth is the focus on work to support electoral democracy and wider election processes and governmental institutions through the member nations. Specifically, the Commonwealth Secretariat plays an important role in supporting member countries to bolster these institutions and support citizen participation in the electoral process. For instance, during elections and when invited, the “Commonwealth Secretary-General will often deploy an independent observer group to give an impartial assessment and offer recommendations on possible improvements”. This focus demonstrates the hands-on approach to supporting the entrenchment of democracy in the Commonwealth membership and can be seen as complementary or incremental to other organs such as the United Nations electoral assistance.

As evidenced by the developments in the charter and mission, Commonwealth membership has moved past discussions of democracy as the best model of government and to implementation of practical actions to foster it. As summarized by Nzerem (2000), Former Director of the Legal and Constitutional Affairs Division of the Commonwealth, a seminal moment was the agreement on several initiatives following the Harare convention in 1991. This included technical assistance to build appropriate institutions, assistance in selecting models of democracy and the related legal and constitutional support, support in building models of electoral process and the requisite monitoring of

elections via independent bodies, and training of the judiciary in legal matters and strengthening rule of law, as well support for wider public service reforms.

According to Nzerem (2000), the Harare declaration and actions taken by governments on their own and in conjunction with the Commonwealth have been a “powerful factor in propelling the process of democratic change in several countries, and it is a measure of what has been achieved to observe that when the Harare Declaration was adopted in 1991, there were nine Commonwealth countries under military or one party dictatorship. Today, there are none.” However, whilst the general trend of democratization is palpable amongst the members of the Commonwealth, the extent to which this has outpaced the wave of overall global democratization over the last several decades is more debatable and will be examined subsequently in this thesis. Of course, the Commonwealth is unique in reach and size amongst the organizations or affiliations created by other former colonial powers, but one must also recognize that these organizations headed by European former colonial powers are also not the only ‘game in town’ when it comes to fostering democracy, with a multitude of international development agencies and Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) existing today in former colonies with such stated aims.

Of course, the Commonwealth has its deficiencies and detractors who question the relative success of the organization in delivering upon its mission statement. Indeed, there exists a school of thought that critiques the practical implementation and efficiency of the policies deployed as well as the legal recourse of the Commonwealth to hold members to account for transgressions. Additionally, one can question whether the organization has not succeeded in tackling the hierarchies of power that underpin the

project of democratization. As noted by Craggs (2010), research has illustrated “that Commonwealth rhetoric about family and partnership can be seen, within the context of Britain’s recent international aid policy, to reproduce hierarchical power relations and imperial ideologies”. In addition to this, Power (2003) has noted that conditional aid, often tied to promotion of solid political development, in more recent Commonwealth member states has actually been a regressive factor in underpinning democracy.

The Importance of the Rule of Law

Lastly, many scholars note that Great Britain used bureaucratic systems in its colonies that sought to preserve order through more of a decentralized system of ‘rule of law’ than a highly centralized structure in the metropole. With time these bureaucratic institutions became more localized and local indigenous subjects were more exposed to Western forms of law-based rule (Lipset et al, 1993). Further to this Great Britain typically deployed a nominal system of elections and representation that provided the indigenous political class with an understanding of, and visibility to, democratic processes (Abernethy, 2000). Of course, this approach signals to a dubious view of agency amongst the indigenous population and their portrayal as passive recipients of lessons from the colonizer; and calls into question whether these systems of democracy were truly benevolent and not just symbolic gestures deployed by the colonial regimes.

Indeed, an important study here is that of Weiner (1987) who surmised that Britain promoted “tutelary democracy”. Primarily British colonial structures included some restricted form of election and democratic representation amongst local elites that

could be argued introduced notional concepts of elections and representation even in a narrower sense. Through this system Britain sought, in theory, to preserve order in the colonies by relying, at least in theory, on the concept of 'rule of law' rather than through "arbitrary authority" (Lee & Paine, 2016) and "because these administrative institutions gradually become indigenous, colonial subjects gained experience with law-based governance" (Lee & Paine, 2016). In contrast, France, for example towards the end of the colonial period did introduce elections to some of the African colonies before independence but with less authority and more centralized involvement from Paris as in the example of Algeria as described by Winnacker (1938).

In their influential book "Problems of Democratic Transition and Consolidation", Linz and Stepan identified five arenas as critical for consolidating democracy, including the importance of rule of law. They delineated the five 'arenas' as follows: political society, civil society, rule of law, economic development, and bureaucracy (Linz and Stepan, 1998).

In essence, rule of law and adherence thereto ensures that the democratic system is set up to protect the winners, and even more importantly, the losers. By codifying the rule book and by instilling the necessary institutional frameworks such as the judiciary, rule of law ensures that those in opposition enjoy the necessary freedom and protection to contest elections without the fear of repercussion.

Rule of law also ensures that the losers of elections feel that they have resources to address any rightful grievances from the electoral process; and that upon the loss of power that there exists the structure in place whereby the losing power will have the right to contest free elections in due course after the term of the winner. This is encapsulated in

the concept of the two turnover test as defined by Samuel Huntington (1991), which notes that democratic consolidation occurs once there have been two consecutive transfers of power following open and fair elections. It is apparent that the two test only passes in states where the political winners and losers are afforded protection to contest open elections and operate in a system where the loser will concede or relinquish power.

In addition to guaranteeing the rights of the opposition, rule of law is also fundamental in precipitating the onset of civil society, one of Linz and Stepan's other mentioned arenas. Rule of law is critical for providing citizens with rights to assembly, the freedom of speech, as well as the right to protest or voice opposition and criticism of the ruling elite. For civil society and the media to thrive and become an effective check and balance to the prevailing ideas of the elites, it is important that the citizenry feel sufficiently emboldened and secure to voice their opposition or criticism of policies and the status quo. Rule of law can also provide a counterweight to tribalism or tendencies for people to vote for similar ethnic or cultural candidates by providing the electorate with a true free and fair choice to support or vote for candidates outside their 'tribe'.

Moreover, and returning to the specificities of this thesis, I note both the historical context of British settler colonialism and institution building but also refer to the ongoing efforts of the Commonwealth to continue promoting the rule of law by "providing support to member countries through knowledge and expertise sharing programs, leading on work in law and development, implementing the Cyber Declaration and promoting democracy" (Commonwealth, 2022). As noted previously, Linz and Stepan (1998) identify rule of law as being one of the five arenas critical for strengthening democracy given the importance of codified legal frameworks and supporting institutions in

providing clearly documented rules of engagement for democracy and concepts such as electoral processes and electoral terms.

More tangibly, the type of support offered by the Commonwealth has included technical support in policy and tool development and sending experts on policy and legal professionals to the member states to support drafting laws. In addition, the Commonwealth has offered training and capacity building in legal reform, provided training and capacity building in legislative drafting and law reform, and organized exchange programs between member states to share best practices.

Other Factors at Play

Of course, scholars such as Lee and Paine (2016) posit that colonial power is not correlated with democratic success as summarized. Lee and Paine draw upon a body of work that suggests that the influence of Protestant missionaries (and therefore non state actors) inside former colonies was important to foster democracy. Woodberry (2012) asserts that the building of civil society, educational systems, and electoral practices was not the work of the British state but rather can be attributed to the work and presence of Protestant missionaries. Lankina and Getachew (2012, 466-7) also emphasized this view that British colonialism is not directly related to democratic transition but rather suggest that “to isolate the impact of missionary activity from that of colonial authority rests on the role of Christian missions in the promotion of education”. Furthermore, one can argue that colonialism is not correlated with democratic success, and that other factors such as geography are more relevant in determining democratic success. Acemoglu et al (2001)

also discuss this further in their research and suggests that “British colonies are found to perform substantially better in other studies in large part because Britain colonized places where [substantial colonial] settlements were possible, and this made British colonies inherit better institutions”.

Furthermore, to the above is the effect of agency and individuals or elites in fostering (or not) democratic reform. Samuel Huntington, in his article “How Countries Democratize” (1991), proposes a three-way typology of fostering democratic change, denoted as ‘transformations, ‘replacements’, and lastly ‘transplacements’.

“Transformations” are the process through which elites in the ruling class or government are the most significant medium in pushing for regime change and driving transitions in a top-down sense. The oft-cited examples in this case were Hungary, Brazil, Spain, and the Soviet Union; and in the case of former British colonies the examples called out by Huntington were India, Nigeria, and Pakistan. Under this transformation, reformers first begin to emerge in the coalition of the ruling regime before starting to acquire power within the said coalition. After a period of time, typically authoritarian regimes do not democratize or liberalize organically and, in many examples, there is open or covert suppression of the reformers before eventually over time the regime is democratized through consultations or formal negotiations with the reforming parties or opposition.

The second model outlined by Huntington is ‘replacements,’ whereby the members of the regime pushing for reform are in a position of relative weakness, and democratization derives from gradually transferring power and strength from the ruling regime (typically authoritarian) until there is a dramatic collapse of the ruling government. These democratic transitions are often initiated by a catalyst in the form of a

student or youth movement that opposes the regime and begins to permeate other areas of civil society. Civil society subsequently becomes increasingly disaffected when the ruling class continues to refuse negotiation or liberalization, eventually losing the fundamental support of the military. Upon this loss of tangible support, there typically ensues a period of negotiation or democratic transition between the more reform-minded members of the regime and the opposition. Perhaps the most well-noted example of this change is that of the fall of the Apartheid regime in South Africa and spread of democracy to the wider populace.

Lastly, there is the concept of ‘transplacements’ through which democratization is precipitated by the combined act of both opposition and government. In this model a gradual shift in the balance occurs within government in the favor of reform-minded individuals, who eventually form a majority, or enough of a minority, to encourage the government at large to negotiate change. From the view of the opposition, the more moderate factions also have amassed enough power and influence to triumph over the elements of the opposition that are less disposed to democratic ideals, and consequently the opposition overall is more disposed to negotiate a change.

To clarify, the purpose of the study is not to suggest that all former British colonies have enjoyed higher rates of democratic success, as there are clear exceptions in parts of Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa. However, I do surmise that as a general rule or trend former British colonies have performed better in terms of post-colonial levels of democratization than those nations colonized by other European imperial powers. Of course, the next logical step is to validate and challenge this hypothesis through, in this instance, quantitative research methods.

Chapter II.

Research Methods and Limitations

As part of this thesis, I will perform a correlation analysis across a data set of eighty-five former colonies that examines the relationship between the measure of democratic success (as noted in the Economist Intelligence Unit and the Freedom House studies) and the linkage to the predominant former colonial power in that country.

As referenced previously, we are living in an increasingly bipolar world where the prevailing theory that democracy is the key to freedom and prosperity is under attack from authoritarian regimes. As we see the threat to democracy increase (as evidenced real-time in the Ukraine crisis), this study intends to revisit the critical success factors of democratization and identify what lessons we should derive from the relative (and general) democratic success (as defined below) of British former colonies vis-à-vis other colonies.

As noted, the research will rely heavily on statistical analysis of two democracy indices: The Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU) Democracy Index 2021, and Freedom House, Freedom in the World 2022. I chose to use two indices primarily since defining and measuring democracy and freedom is by nature subjective and performing analysis on two sets of data serves to reduce the bias from one study and provide a broader measure of democracy. As an example, in the Freedom House index, each nation is assigned between 0 and 4 points for 25 indicators, to generate an overall possible score of 100. The scoring is then used to generate two separate numerical ratings across civil liberties and political rights, with a 7-rating denoting the least free conditions and 1 the freest. Per the stated methodology shared on the Freedom House website (2022), civil

liberties questions are grouped into four subcategories: Freedom of Expression and Belief (4 questions), Associational and Organizational Rights (3), Rule of Law (4), and Personal Autonomy and Individual Rights (4); political rights questions are grouped into three subcategories: Electoral Process (3 questions), Political Pluralism and Participation (4), and Functioning of Government (3). Within this categorization there are a set of underlying set of objective questions including “Did independent, established, and reputable national and/or international election monitoring organizations judge the most recent election for head of government to have met democratic standards?” (Freedom, House, 2022)

The EIU Democracy Index (2018) is based on five areas: electoral process and pluralism; civil liberties; the functioning of government; political participation; and political culture. Based on the scoring across these areas, countries are subsequently categorized as one of four regime types: full democracy; flawed democracy; hybrid regime; and authoritarian regime. The index drives a weighted average based on responses to 60 questions across the five areas identified above, which have closed permitted answers. The responses are mostly experts’ assessment, whereas some other responses are driven by surveys of public opinion for the selected country (where available). In the case of countries for which survey results are missing, survey results for similar countries and expert assessments are used to fill in gaps.

Within the statistical analysis, the study will employ correlation analysis to identify whether there is a linkage between the ‘colonizer’ (Great Britain, France, Spain, Portugal, Netherlands, Belgium) and the contemporary score of the ‘colonized’ across the Freedom House Index and the EIU Democracy Index. In practical terms, to weigh the

responses, we have converted the Freedom House response (out of 100) into the same scoring basis as the EIU on an ‘out of 10’ basis, as shown in Table 1.

To prepare a valid and rational data set of countries necessitated several rules or practical decisions. Firstly, where former colonies had shifted through the numerous power struggles and regional rivalries, we have assigned the colonial power based on the most significant time duration in ‘control’ of the colony. For instance, Burundi was part of German East Africa from 1916-1918 (2 years) but part of the Belgian African territories from 1918 to independence in 1962 (44 years) and is thus assumed to be a Belgian colony. Similarly, in a few examples, a proxy of colonial power was delegated rule in practical terms, such as Australia’s dominion over Papua New Guinea for 60 years following World War 1. In this instance colonial power is attributed to the erstwhile colonial power (Great Britain in this example).

Related to this, we have deliberately excluded those countries from the data set which had a shorter ‘direct’ colonial experience (defined loosely as less than 30 years). For instance, we have excluded Ethiopia as it fell under the domination of Mussolini’s Italy from 1936 after annexation to Italian East Africa, but this ended six years later in the Anglo-Ethiopian agreement when independence was restored. In addition, several countries in the Middle East like Iraq, Lebanon, Syria, and Jordan were subject to a relatively short period of de facto British or French colonial oversight during the interwar period following the disintegration of the Ottoman Empire, and these countries are also excluded on the same basis.

In geographical terms, the borders of several current nation states have changed significantly and occasionally combine a few former colonies, some of which were under

the dominion of different European powers. In this instance, we have assigned the colonial power based on the one that held largest part of the modern national state territory, therefore assigning Cameroon to France in the study and Canada to the United Kingdom.

From a practical standpoint, the studies from Economist Intelligence Unit also have some exclusions based on country size and practical obstacles in gathering the required data. For instance, the study does not generally include countries or microstates with populations less than one million such as Belize, Mauritius, and Sao Tome & Principe and does not include a data set for Somalia due to security challenges in collecting data.

Naturally the application of these rules has precipitated a slightly more restrictive data set, but one that is comprehensive enough to draw conclusions. Its 85 countries are comprised of a reasonable regional spread as follows: Asia and Australasia (16), Latin America (23), Middle East (6), North America (2), and Sub-Saharan Africa (38). These 85 countries are largely and unsurprisingly chiefly split among the 'main' colonial powers of Great Britain (30), France (25), and Spain (20) with the remaining 10 split between Portugal (6), Netherlands (2), and Belgium (2).

Chapter III.

How Significant is Colonialism in Fostering Democracy?

As illustrated in the initial summary of the results below (refer to Table 1), the overall average democracy score for the sample is 5.0, with a median of 4.9. Of the three colonial powers most frequently featured in the study, Spain recorded the highest average democracy score at 5.7 across the twenty countries in the study, with Great Britain a close second at 5.6 across the thirty sample countries; in contrast, France recorded a much lower average score at 3.7 across the twenty-five former French colonies included in the study.

We witness more of a spread amongst the less expansive or pervasive colonial powers of Belgium (1.7), Netherlands (6.8), and Portugal (5.5) but naturally, given that the three powers had a combined total of ten countries in the sample, these results are more susceptible to outliers, such as Suriname in the case of the Netherlands (which registered a score above 7) and the Democratic Republic of Congo for Belgium, which was the seventh lowest scoring nation in the study at 1.7.

Table 1. Summary of the Results Using Full Sample Population of 85 Countries

Colonial Power	Sample <i>n</i>	Average Democracy Score	Median Democracy Score
Belgium	2	1.7	1.7
France	25	3.7	3.5
Great Britain	30	5.6	5.8
Netherlands	2	6.8	6.8
Portugal	6	5.5	5.5
Spain	20	5.7	6.1
Total	85	5.0	4.9

As illustrated in the table below (Table 2), New Zealand, Canada, Uruguay, Australia, and Chile received the highest average democracy score and comprised the top five in the sample. Of those five, three are former British settler colonies that underwent a different type of colonial experience compared to the majority of the other countries in the data set, including those also formerly colonized by Great Britain. The other two highest-scoring countries are Uruguay (9.3) and Chile (8.7), which scored much more favorably than other former Spanish possessions in Latin America, where the average score was 6.0.

Table 2. Top Five Countries by Average Democracy Score

Colonial Power	Average Democracy Score	Colonial Power
New Zealand	9.6	Great Britain
Canada	9.3	Great Britain
Uruguay	9.3	Spain
Australia	9.2	Great Britain
Chile	8.7	Spain

On the other end of the spectrum, the below table (Table 3) illustrates the five lowest-scoring former colonies, of which three are in Africa and two are in Asia, Laos and Myanmar. Of the bottom five, three are former French colonies (Central African Republic, Chad, Laos), and Myanmar and Equatorial Guinea are former colonies of Great Britain and Spain, respectively.

Table 3. Lowest Five Countries by Average Democracy Score

Colonial Power	Average Democracy Score	Colonial Power
Myanmar	1.0	Great Britain
Central African Republic	1.1	France
Equatorial Guinea	1.2	Spain
Laos	1.5	France
Chad	1.6	France

As noted in the literature, the colonial experience of a certain group of former British colonies was distinct in the sense that it was highly driven by high levels of initial settler colonialism and the replacement of indigenous populations, rather than a narrower form of extractive colonialism to secure and remove natural resources. The specific examples where this form of colonialism arguably took place are Canada, the United States, New Zealand, Australia, and, to a slightly lesser extent, South Africa. As noted in Table 2, three of these countries record amongst the five highest average democratic scores, and the other two are scored at 9th (United States) and 13th (South Africa), respectively. Additionally, the average democratic score of these five case studies is 8.7, versus the overall average score across the data set of 5.0. In recognition of these specific cases, Table 4 below illustrates the average scores for the data set if we use 80 countries and exclude these outliers from the study. As illustrated, the average democratic score for the remaining 25 former British colonies declines to 4.9 versus 5.6 in the full study and places former British colonial performance in democratic consolidation at a lower level than Spain, but still markedly higher than the levels of success evidenced in French colonies.

Table 4. Summary of the Results (Adjusted for Settler Colony Outliers)

Colonial Power	Sample <i>n</i>	Average Democracy Score	Median Democracy Score
Belgium	2	1.7	1.7
France	25	3.7	3.5
Great Britain	25	4.9	5.8

Colonial Power	Sample n	Average Democracy Score	Median Democracy Score
Netherlands	2	6.8	6.8
Portugal	6	5.5	5.5
Spain	20	5.7	6.1
Total	80	4.7	4.9

Additionally, by assigning a set of numerical values to the colonizer (i.e., all colonies of Great Britain labelled as “1” and all those from France as “2”, Spain as “3”...), I was able to run a standard correlation analysis on the data set to determine the strength of the relationship between the average democracy score for the country in the sample and the identity of colonizer. The formula used in excel to compute the correlation coefficient was as follows:

$$\text{Correl}(X, Y) = \frac{\sum (x - \bar{x})(y - \bar{y})}{\sqrt{\sum (x - \bar{x})^2 \sum (y - \bar{y})^2}}$$

where

\bar{x} and \bar{y}

are the sample means AVERAGE(array1) and AVERAGE(array2).

The unadjusted data set (including the aforementioned exceptions for Great Britain), the correlation coefficient was calculated at 0.33; for the adjusted data set, it was

0.40. On the basis that 1 implies a very strong correlation and 0 suggests negligible correlation, the correlation across the unadjusted data set is classified as ‘weak,’ with little relationship between the democratic success score of the former colonial power and the former colonial state. Including the outliers of Canada, the United States, New Zealand, Australia, and South Africa, the correlation is classified as ‘moderate,’ but does not suggest a strong relationship.

Recognizing that the colonial experience has a different character by region, for instance North America’s predominate modus operandi of settler colonialism versus the highly extractive colonialism pervasive in most of Africa, the below table illustrates the data isolated for forty-four countries located in either Sub-Saharan Africa or the Middle East. To add, Africa and, to a lesser extent, the Middle East is also the region where historically a multitude of the former colonial powers had sought to expand and conquer, but typically with a more narrowed focus on resource extraction and geopolitical positioning versus settler colonialism. In stark contrast, of the sixteen countries in the study from Asia and Australasia, thirteen were former British colonies, representing the hegemony of the British Empire in Asia and Australasia. With regards to Latin America, we see a similar trend, where eighteen of the twenty-three countries included in the study were former Spanish colonies, illustrating the domination of the Spanish Empire across much of the Western Hemisphere.

Table 5. Summary of the Results in Sub-Saharan Africa and the Middle East

Colonial Power	Sample <i>n</i>	Average Democracy Score
Belgium	2	1.7
France	21	3.9
Great Britain	16	4.7
Portugal	4	4.8
Spain	1	1.2
Total	44	4.1

As illustrated above, at 4.7 British former colonies in Africa actually register better scores than the average of 4.1 and perform slightly better than French colonies at 3.9 (the other major constituent in the data set), but slightly below Portuguese former colonies at 4.8. In the case of Africa, the five notable frontrunners with higher performance (above 7.0) are Cabo Verde, Mauritius, South Africa, Botswana and Ghana, of which the last three are former British colonies, reflecting different economic and political development trajectories since independence. Of course, the relatively strong performance of Cabo Verde has a disproportionate effect on the scoring for former Portuguese colonies, and without Cabo Verde, the average for Portuguese colonies is 3.5. Naturally, the scores for Belgium and Spain are skewed with former colonies in Africa totaling two and one respectively.

Chapter IV.

Searching for Answers

As illustrated in Chapter III, there appears to be a very limited positive correlation between the identity of the colonial power and the subsequent measure of democratic success in former colonized nations, which directly contradicts my initial hypothesis. Indeed, it seems that the overall impact of colonialism and the identity of the colonial power as a driving factor in underpinning democratization is relatively weak or, at best, secondary to other factors. In order to understand this statistical departure from my hypothesis, I will expand further on three distinct reasons to explain this lack of causality. Primarily, this study is time bound and whilst the preceding phase of colonialism extended over almost five centuries, this study itself offers a snapshot of democratic success at a specific period in time as captured by the Economist Intelligence Unit and Freedom House studies (2020 to 2022). Indeed, the studies point to a notable retreat of democratization in former British colonies that have eroded the correlation over time. Secondly, a few specific British colonies have experienced high levels of democratic consolidation, and this begets further discussion. Lastly and as noted previously, the Commonwealth was purported to be a key determinant in democratization, and we look to isolate the impact of this in the data set and offer comment and observation on the efficacy of the organization.

The Passage of Time Erodes Earlier Gains

Interestingly, in their comprehensive study of British colonial impact on democratization, Lee and Paine (2016) note that the analyses heretofore are inconclusive regarding British colonialism and that timebound analysis is problematic. This is to say that former colonies of Great Britain were more democratic in nature in the period after independence, but that this democratic convergence was eroded or unwound in the era following the cessation of the Cold War. During the various struggles and intensification of independence movements following the Second World War, Great Britain was more disciplined vis-à-vis other colonial powers in insisting upon ostensibly fair elections being a precondition for granting independence which served to boost democracy in the early years following independence. However, societal change was nascent, and democracy was very fragile in many of these instances; without a long-standing tradition of competitive elections, democratic consolidation was not successful in many cases. This was exacerbated in the Cold War world order, whereby the United States was oft prepared to overlook flaws in democracy in exchange for geopolitical gain and regime loyalty. Conversely, Communism was also promoted heavily by the Soviet Union as a viable alternative to Western ideals of freedom.

Moreover, transformations in the international system corresponded with “diminishing legacies” (Lee and Paine, 2016), as in many instances, newly independent countries were challenging their colonial history and the maintenance of ties with the former European power in favor of the allure of new alliances. Thus, colonies in the data set of Lee and Paine (2016) were able to secure independence during the Cold War

jostling but did not respect or adhere to Western objectives to foster democratization. Subsequently, within a few decades, the onset of a third wave of democratization began during the Cold War and intensified with the fall of the Soviet Union and the diminished influence from the competing communist system, allowing opportune international conditions for the promotion of Western democracy. As noted by Lee and Paine (2016), “destabilizing colonially rooted dictatorships made democratization, or at least movement toward greater levels of electoral competition, possible in all ex-colonies—even those lacking prior democratic experience”. Therefore, in this third wave, major gains and transitions towards a democratic system occurred within many former colonies, in part regardless of democratic or colonial legacy. Related to this, Huntington defined a democratic wave as “a group of transitions from nondemocratic to democratic regimes that occur within a specified period of time and that significantly outnumber transitions in the opposite directions during that period of time” (Huntington 1991). Accordingly, Huntington refers to three specific waves of democratization. The first wave (1828–1926) related to when the right to vote was granted typically to white males in the United States, France, Britain, Canada, and a handful of other countries. This was followed by the second wave (1945-62), which took place after the Allied victory in World War II and culminated in 36 democracies worldwide, many of which were erstwhile colonies of Great Britain. Subsequently, Huntington noted that the third wave (1974-1995) followed the transitions to democracy in the Iberian Peninsula and spread initially to Latin America and subsequently to Asia Pacific. Following the collapse of the Soviet Union, this wave then reached Eastern Europe and sub-Saharan Africa and served to erode the relative gains in democratic consolidation in British colonies, as former colonies of the

other European powers accelerated their own transitions and trajectories towards democracy.

Settler Colonialism: The Exception to the Rule

As illustrated in the data set, those former British colonies (Australia, Canada, New Zealand, United States) that underwent a different settler colonial experience scored higher on the democratic indices, at an average blended score of 9.1 versus a score of 5.8 overall for former British colonies and 4.9 for the entire data set. As noted previously, a significant body of literature (see Longley, 2021) describes the unique experience of those settler colonies vis-à-vis other forms of colonization. Indeed, even within settler colonies are varied experiences in terms of the chronology of settlement and the histories of expulsion and elimination of the pre-existing indigenous populations.

One of the earliest European studies on the advent of democracy in settler colonies was made by Alexis de Tocqueville, who discussed the uniqueness of the American democratic experience in his book, 'Democracy in America,' that followed his much-publicized tour of America in the 1830s. In discussing American exceptionalism, Tocqueville notes that the events surrounding the American Revolution and the birth of the nation state provided foundations for egalitarianism, and that this was subsequently documented in the Constitution and democratic institutions. That is to say that America was born out of an exceptional ideology, where the ideology of the 'founding fathers' happened to be inspired by what we consider today some of the overarching facets of democracy, including "original freedom and independence of individuals, the sovereignty of the people, representative institutions based in real communities, and the progressive

attempt to raise the humblest citizens to the highest level” (Gauchet & Hamburger, 2016). Given that America did not have the same entrenched elites in society at the time, compared to the aristocracy in most of Europe or various tribal leaders in many other parts of the world, American society did not initially require a dramatic burst of violence within society to precipitate equality for its citizens to implement equality nor did America subsequently have to leverage authoritarianism to maintain this sense of equality. Indeed, as noted by Gauchet & Hamburger (2016) “American society, on the other hand, established based on egalitarianism, was not forced in the same way to mobilize an open conflict between its citizens to establish equality as a fact. No more did it have to rely on political authoritarianism to maintain this equality”.

That said, one must reference the important body of literature that takes exception to these notions of egalitarianism in post-colonial American society and the narrow and self-serving definition of equality implied. As noted by scholars such as Kalb (2018), this application of egalitarianism excluded large sectors of society, including enslaved African Americans and women (and to emphasize I am narrowly defining equality anachronistically here as timebound and reductive to mean equal rights for white male citizens).

In the same sense that the United States is an example of exceptionalism, we can extend this broader argument further to Australia, Canada, and New Zealand, where the democratic scores were actually higher than those evidenced in the United States. As put forward by Lange (2004), this can be partly explained by the type of institutional rule deployed by the British, direct or indirect. According to Lange, direct and indirect types of rule are best understood by who occupies what positions within the colonized nations.

Per Doyle (1986) amongst others, direct rule takes place in cases where locals run only the lowest rungs of the local colonial administration, and officials from the colonial power occupy the higher-level positions where the power is concentrated.

Conversely, indirect rule is defined by the delegation of governance to locals who run the affairs for extensive areas of the colony under the auspices of the colonial powers. To summarize, “direct rule differs from indirect rule in that it involves the construction of a complete system of colonial domination that lacks any relatively autonomous indigenous component, yet which might be staffed overwhelmingly by indigenous actors” (Lange, 2004).

In his study of 33 former British colonies, Lange surmises that indirect rule is negatively correlated with postcolonial political progress and democratization (using variables of state stability, rule of law, and democratization). His analysis provides evidence that “British colonialism left positive political legacies in some colonies but not others and that this legacy depended on the extent to which colonial rule was either direct or indirect” (Lange, 2004). Therefore, one of the potential reasons for the comparative democratic success of Australia, Canada, New Zealand, and the United States could be attributed to the fact that they were subject to a form of more direct colonial rule where the European colonial power and their local proxies had a greater incentive to build long-standing institutions and set the foundations for rule of law, when compared to the myopic and exploitative forms of colonialism undertaken elsewhere. In simple terms, the local colonial proxies were settled in Australia, Canada, New Zealand, and United States and saw the colonial settlement as a long-term project worthy of laying down roots and foundations.

Going further, Mamdani (1996) posits that pretty much the entirety of sub-Saharan Africa was governed via indirect rule and that this hindered the consolidation of democracy following independence regardless of the identity of the former colonial power. However, there is of course an element of subjectivity and a spectrum on what might define indirect rule, and one could note that French colonialism had a more direct nature in Africa than British colonialism, given that local rulers or chiefs had started to relegate their local indigenous traditions and replace this with the more Euro-centric beliefs of the colonizer (Fisher, 1991). Furthermore, Firmin-Sellers (2000) conducted an insightful analysis of two proximate regions in Ghana and Côte d'Ivoire and determined that the tribal leaders in the former French colony, Côte d'Ivoire, had more significant control over land rights and fewer checks and balances on their powers than their counterparts over the border in Ghana despite, in theory, the similarities that prevailed between the regions in their political institutions in the pre-colonial period. Thus, "although French colonies appear to have been ruled more directly, French colonialism had similar effects on state governance by creating a dispersed and despotic form of rule" (Lange, 2004).

In a slightly different vein, Spanish colonial methods in countries that were subject to intense exploitation (i.e., Bolivia, Ecuador, the Dominican Republic, Mexico, and Peru) have typically undergone less significant levels of development following independence than those states determined to be less resource-rich by Spanish colonists, and were impacted by less 'extreme' forms of colonialism (Chile, Costa Rica, and Argentina). However, in regions where there was significant colonial activity, Spanish rulers normally depended on very powerful local actors of European origin who acted as

proxies of their colonial masters. As noted by Mahoney (2003) these local elites often blocked economic and political reform in preference of the status quo and their own benefit, which effectively left the outlying regions relatively better off as they did not have a rule that was decentralized through Spanish elites.

As illustrated in the Spanish and French examples, the examination of colonial rule is not straightforward and had different impacts amongst and also within the colonial powers. However, alongside the former British colonies, these examples do suggest that, in principle, forms of colonial governance that are dispersed and devolved to local actors served to hamper governance in states when they led to the creation of very powerful local ruling elites that weaken the power and maturity of the state infrastructure. In a wider sense, Alan Lawson (1990), in his analysis of the specificities of settler colonialism, suggests the concept of the “Second World”, which represents a category that is equally different to the colonizer and their European bases and to those nations that were colonized in the “Third World”.

Moreover, the work of Acemoglu et al. (2001) further underpins the narrative of settler colonialism promoting democracy in the sense that in nations such as Australia, Canada, New Zealand, and the United States, an inherent transfer of institutions happened ‘organically’ via settlement. The study by Acemoglu et al (2001) is particularly noteworthy as they focus on the lens of comparative economic development to test whether the unique institutional history of these settler colonies provided an advantage for subsequent economic development. In their study they note the extreme difference in the case of settler colonies, in that British colonists settled *en masse* and created early colonial institutions that were able to facilitate investment and ensure enforcement of the

rule of law (pivotal for economic development and democratization as discussed later in this thesis).

The opposite of these instances were those states set up by colonial powers with the narrow and express objective of extracting and transferring natural resources efficiently to the metropole (for example, Congo or the Gold Coast) and any institutions created were focused on delivering upon these goals and not building foundations that would precipitate economic development and less myopic forms of investment. As a further predeterminant, Acemoglu et al (2001) noted the practical argument that Europeans were also more likely to settle in locations where conditions were more amenable and mortality rates amongst colonists were low; conversely in locations that were less ‘hospitable’ to longer-term settlement, European colonists would set up extractive systems. Acemoglu et al (2001) also note that these foundations had longer-term effects on economic development (and democratization by proxy) to the extent that “these early institutions persisted to the present. Determinants of whether Europeans could go and settle in the colonies, therefore, have an important effect on institutions today.” They assess these differences “as a source of exogenous variation to estimate the impact of institutions on economic performance”.

An Increasingly Toothless Commonwealth

As noted previously in this paper, one of the principal tenets underpinning my hypothesis around the British historical advantage in fostering democratization is the existence of the Commonwealth of Nations and its exceptional role in promoting human rights and democratic practices amongst its membership of former British colonies, as

opposed to the organizations established after colonialism by the other former European powers. The Commonwealth itself is a grouping of fifty-four countries (refer Fig. 1) that are predominately former colonies within the British Empire (although in more recent history other nations without substantial historical connections to the UK have joined, including Mozambique in 1995 and Rwanda in 2009). Alongside the UK, members with significant populations include Australia, Canada, India, Malaysia, Nigeria, Pakistan, and South Africa, leading to a total population amongst member states of more than 2 billion (circa one third of global population), and “members’ combined gross domestic product (GDP) tops \$10 trillion, or about 14 percent of global GDP” (Council of Foreign Relations, 2020).

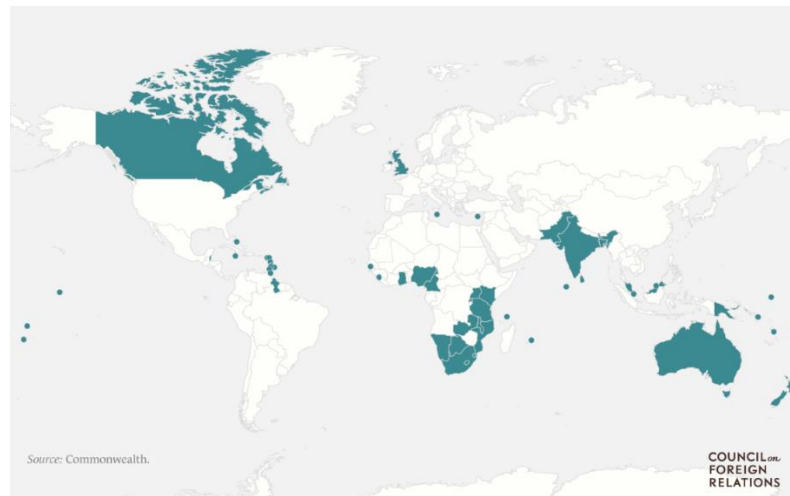


Figure 1: Map Illustrating Commonwealth Members

Within the data set, we have identified twenty-six current members of the Commonwealth, which comprises roughly half from the total of fifty-four active members, with many of the member countries not included being smaller Caribbean

islands which were intentionally excluded from the analysis based on size. Of these twenty-six countries, twenty-four are classified as British colonies, with the two other countries being Cameroon and Mozambique. Cameroon was colonized mostly in modern geographical terms by France, with a smaller portion on the eastern border with Nigeria colonized by Great Britain. Given this shared history, Cameroon was formally admitted to the Commonwealth in 1960, post-independence.

On the other hand, Mozambique obtained membership to the Commonwealth in 1995 as the first state without direct constitutional ties to Great Britain or other Commonwealth members. This decision was taken in recognition of Mozambique's solidarity with the Commonwealth on its policies towards apartheid-era South Africa. Interestingly, following the admission of Mozambique and amid concerns that this could set a precedent for diluting the historical ties between Commonwealth members, the Edinburgh Declaration was adopted in 1997, which enshrined the exceptional nature of Mozambique's admission and stated that future members would need a direct constitutional link to Great Britain or another member. This therefore supports the notion that the Commonwealth is an independent variable to measure democratic success for former British colonies, as membership rights have not been extended further to the former colonies of other European powers, aside from the exception of Mozambique.

As illustrated in the table below, the average democracy score for Commonwealth members is calculated at 5.9, or 5.5 if we exclude the exceptional settler colonies of Australia, Canada, and New Zealand. The scoring is, of course, directionally aligned to the overall scoring of former British colonies at 5.6 and 4.9, respectively, given that only six former British colonies in the data set are not members of the Commonwealth today

(Egypt, Myanmar, Qatar, Sudan, United States, Zimbabwe). Indeed, after controlling for a couple of notable exceptions with the military junta in Myanmar (score of 1.0) and Zimbabwe (2.9), which withdrew from the Commonwealth, the results, as expanded further below, do not suggest a very strong correlation between membership of the Commonwealth and positive democracy scores. As mentioned, excluding settler colonies, the average score amongst Commonwealth nations is 5.5, which compares to 4.7 across the overall data set and, notably, a score of 5.7 derived from Spanish colonies alone.

Table 6. Analysis of Commonwealth Member States

Data Set	Average Democracy Score	Notes
All Commonwealth Members in Study	5.9	26 members including Cameroon and Mozambique
Commonwealth Members Excluding Settler Colonies	5.5	Excludes Australia, Canada, New Zealand
Average Score of British Colonies	4.9	Excludes Australia, Canada, New Zealand

As illustrated above and in the statistical analysis, it appears that the Commonwealth system has not had a significant impact in fostering democratic consolidation, and this points to several criticisms around the efficacy and focus of the association.

Certainly, Commonwealth member countries have had disagreements over violations of the group's stated objectives, and this has pointed to challenges in the

efficacy and assertiveness of the group's consensus-based approach to violations. However, in a few examples during the Commonwealth's history, members have been sanctioned or suspended. For instance, the group was a vocal critic of the apartheid policies of the South African government, leading to the South African government's decision to leave the grouping in the 1960s, which was followed, albeit a few decades later, with a raft of economic sanctions agreed to and applied by the Commonwealth. Following the collapse of apartheid in South Africa, the country was readmitted to the Commonwealth in the wake of the 1994 elections of South Africa.

In addition to the example of South Africa, Nigeria was suspended from the group in 1995 for four years over perceived abuses carried out by the military regime, and Pakistan and Fiji were also suspended in the late 1990s and 2000s following military coups and the suppression of democracy. In another high-profile and acrimonious case, Zimbabwe was suspended until further notice in 2002, and President Robert Mugabe withdrew Zimbabwe's membership the following year (and at the time of writing, Zimbabwe is still outside the Commonwealth). More recently, the Commonwealth also approved the (re)joining of the Maldives in 2020, following the implementation of a wave of democratic reforms; this took place four years after the Maldives withdrew unilaterally, as the Commonwealth had mooted a suspension due to pervasive human rights violations in the country.

Regardless of the concrete actions and decisions taken by the Commonwealth at times, critics argue that the Commonwealth generally has not taken consistent tangible actions to support the respect for human rights and democratic freedoms amongst its membership, and this has impacted its ability to assert change and to be seen as a true

bastion of liberal democratic values. Rather the Commonwealth has appeared symbolic at best, and toothless or ineffectual at worse. Perhaps most palpably, the Commonwealth's executive power lies in consensus-driven action, as mentioned previously, and this has led to the creation of an institutional structure that is oft perceived as toothless, in which action is not supported in legal frameworks, but rather relies on moral authority and 'peer pressure'. This structure means that the Commonwealth has an inconsistent approach to handling transgressions of members, which at best could be seen as linked to the weak institutional framework and at worst due to self-serving objectives or nepotism. For instance, the Commonwealth has been relatively silent regarding serious and pervasive atrocities perpetrated by Sri Lankan government during that country's civil war or the introduction of anti-LGBTQ+ legislation by a few members, including Malawi and Ghana.

According to the Council of Foreign Relations (2020), concerns have also been raised about the effectiveness surrounding the inner workings of the Commonwealth Secretariat and allegations of a lack of clarity surrounding its mission, as well as suspicions of nepotism, as outlined by the case in which "Scotland [Former Secretary General] has faced accusations of favoritism for awarding contracts to personal friends, leading [then] UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson to take the unusual step of opposing her reappointment to a second term as secretary-general".

Moreover, following the Brexit referendum in the UK and subsequent exit from the European Union (EU), debate has intensified as to whether the Commonwealth is a natural successor for the UK to project its influence on the global stage and replace the economic benefits from EU membership. However as summarized by *The Economist*

(2018), the Commonwealth's geopolitical importance in the modern era is an "amiable delusion," especially given that the Commonwealth has achieved very little on trade since its inception. Worse still, as the standing and relevance of the UK on the global scene has arguably diminished in recent decades, the brand and significance of the Commonwealth has inevitably suffered contagion as well. To put this in comparison, the current overall budget of the Commonwealth "amounts to about \$40 million," whilst the EU, in comparison, "spends more than \$100 billion yearly on economic development and other assistance" (CFR, 2020).

The Importance of the Rule of Law

As mentioned previously, in their influential book "Problems of Democratic Transition and Consolidation", Linz and Stepan identified five arenas as critical for consolidating democracy: political society, civil society, rule of law, economic development, and bureaucracy (Linz and Stepan, 1998). Historians and academics such as Niall Ferguson have often posited that the rule of law and legal framework in institutions left behind as gifts by British colonialists have been pivotal in fostering democracy. Indeed, this legacy of institution-building has been key to the hypothesis in this thesis that legal, educational, and societal institutions introduced by the British had been unique bedrocks for democratic success in former colonies when compared to that of other colonial powers. In general terms, the 2012 United Nations General Assembly pointed to the intertwining of rule of law and democracy as part of their core values as follows: "Human rights, the rule of law and democracy are interlinked and mutually

reinforcing and that they belong to the universal and indivisible core values and principles of the United Nations” (Un.org, 2018).

Fundamentally, the concept of democracy is based on how societies determine or elect those who govern or hold power, supported by rule of law in the sense of how this political power is exercised. In a democracy, citizens and the elected class are held accountable to the rule of law and rely on this to ensure orderly democratic transitions and the rules by which the winners and losers abide. Different from other forms of government, under democracy the rule of law applies to all citizens, rather than in dictatorships, oligarchies, and autocratic regimes, under which the ruling elite often conduct their affairs beyond the rules and norms expected of the wider populace.

To illustrate the linkage between democracy, civil society, and free speech, one need look no further than the Reporters without Borders World Press Freedom Index. It is no coincidence that Freedom of Press is highest in established (perhaps model) democracies such as Norway, Sweden, and Netherlands, whilst the worst performers on press freedom were the non-democratic regimes of Turkmenistan, Eritrea, and North Korea.

In an intertwined system of liberal democracy and capitalism, one must also consider the importance of the rule of law in underpinning economic growth that is considered essential as a foundation for a thriving democracy. This is because the rule of law is seen as critical for enshrining property rights and providing protection for investors and businesses to enable a favorable climate for investment and subsequent economic growth. Indeed, one need only consult the literature of modernization theorists such as Inglehart and Welzel and Przeworki and Limongi for a compelling linkage between the

consolidation of democracy and modernization, including the hallmarks of economic growth and urbanization. Assuming that a strong economy is either an ‘endogenous’ or ‘exogenous’ factor in democratization, one must note that the rule of law plays a fundamental role in fostering economic growth. Rule of law is often a necessary basis for attracting foreign investment and for fostering domestic owned enterprise, as well as for supporting the creation of an orderly taxation system.

Without the rule of law and the protection of the rights of the citizenry, notions of political society and civil society are almost unfathomable and could surely not function in the manner required by a democracy to meet Huntington’s Two Turnover Test. The rule of law provides an essential foundation of the economic system by enshrining property and investor and business rights, and thus facilitating modernization and democracy.

As part of this significance of rule of law, Great Britain is often described as different from the other European imperial powers, given that it was the only imperial power that remained a liberal democracy during the entire twentieth century (the most obvious departure here is Hitler’s Germany, but refer also to Franco in Spain, Salazar in Portugal, or the Vichy Regime in France). Due to this perception, Great Britain was viewed by scholars such as Ferguson as having a more authentic platform for democratization, and a commitment to instill the rule of law and more enlightened liberal principles to civil society and institutions. Related to this are the views of historians such as Niall Ferguson (2004) who has written at length around the importance of the legacy of rule of law in British colonies and the institutional frameworks left behind.

However, in recent years a revisionist view has argued this notion to be flawed, and that behind the veneer of rule of law are important nuances. For instance, Elkins (2022) has argued that the legacy of the British rule of law was impacted by the use of emergency powers that violated the spirit and letter of the rule of law and the perception of British exceptionalism. For instance, during the final years of the British empire, Elkins argues that local proxy leaders were facing major problems in governing restless colonies due to social strife, and these leaders readily turned to colonial-era emergency codes and legal provisions to suppress political dissent. These local leaders were often trained by and worked alongside MI-5 (the British military intelligence arm) operatives to support violations of local rights and transfer skills in intelligence gathering, interrogation, and internal security. For instance, as noted by Khilnani (2022), “Ghanaian leaders, shortly after their country became independent, in 1957, cribbed from British preventive-detention laws the right to detain citizens for five years without trial”. Similarly in the 1960s in Malaysia, “officials, building on British models, enacted laws permitting suspects to be detained indefinitely” and in the 1970s, Indian leaders deployed “colonial era emergency powers embedded into their constitution to censor the press, jail political opposition, clear urban slums and even sterilize their residents”.

That is to say that facets of the institutions and rule of law introduced by British colonial administrations were actually perverted during the last stages of the Empire and therefore many new or nascent independent countries were starting out with darker and exceptional interpretations of the rule of law (or of course that the ‘imperfections’ of this definition of the rule of law functioned as designed to entrench colonial power whilst needed by the British colonial administration). This flawed definition of the rule of law

would often become enshrined in the new institutions and modus operandi of the colonized, especially leveraging its flexibility in quelling political opposition and dissent.

Chapter V.

Conclusion

Democratization is an expansive and complex process, and there is no prevailing school of thought on the most important factor attributable to driving democratic success. The relative success regarding the advent of democracy in countries is undoubtedly a combination of several different factors, amongst which I find colonial legacy to be of limited importance. That said, in the same way that providing direct linkage between cause and effect can be problematic, this also means that a multitude of other variables could have supported or derailed the process of democratization in British former colonies (and those of other European powers).

Following a comprehensive review of the democratization scores from both Freedom House and the Economist Intelligence Unit, I have determined that colonial legacy is not a major contributing factor to democratic success, particularly from the viewpoint of former British colonies. The data shows that British former colonies score an average of 5.6 for democratic success, which compares to 5.0 for the entire data set and shows British colonies lagging both Portugal and Spain (but above former French colonies, where the overall score was 3.7)

Instead, the dataset suggests that the perception that British colonies have fared better than former colonies or other European powers is largely driven by a few very notable and visible outliers that were subject to a very distinct form of white settler colonialism. The overall average democratic success score of Australia, Canada, New Zealand, and the United States combined is 9.1, and excluding these outliers reduces the overall score for former British colonies to 4.9. This is, in part, attributable to a form of

settler colonialism in those nations that created robust and enduring institutions that were built with a long-term view to facilitate the long-term prosperity of settler communities, entice investment, and solidify the rule of law. In comparison, most colonies (especially those in Africa and Asia) underwent an extractive form of colonialism that was primarily built to facilitate resource extraction for the benefit of the colonizer. There was limited, if any, consideration towards building institutions or infrastructure locally that could have left some positive, if likely unintended, legacy or foundation for subsequent democratization. This notion is illustrated in the research by the limited divergence in democratic success scores across the European imperial powers.

Indeed, I surmise that British colonies may have democratized more quickly than others following independence in the 1950s and 1960s, but that this relative advantage eroded quickly during the Cold War and the third wave of democratization. This was ostensibly because, outside the aforementioned settler colonies, the British colonial institutional frameworks were, in reality, less solid and adept at fostering long-lasting democratic success vis-à-vis other colonial powers like France and Spain.

Furthermore, this paper notes that the Commonwealth of Nations is certainly a unique organ in its stated mission to promote the entrenchment of liberal values and democratization amongst its members. However, the underlying effectiveness of the Commonwealth in holding members to account for violations of human rights or the rule of law is limited at best, and this study does not suggest a material correlation in the activities or membership of the Commonwealth and the success of democracy in former British colonies.

Appendix 1.

Complete Date Set of 85 Countries

Country	Colonial Power	Freedom House Score	EIU Score	Blended Score
Algeria	France	3.2	3.8	3.5
Angola	Portugal	3.0	3.4	3.2
Argentina	Spain	8.4	6.8	7.6
Australia	Great Britain	9.5	8.9	9.2
Bangladesh	Great Britain	3.9	6.0	4.9
Benin	France	5.9	4.2	5.0
Bolivia	Spain	6.6	4.7	5.6
Botswana	Great Britain	7.2	7.7	7.5
Brazil	Portugal	7.3	6.9	7.1
Burkina Faso	France	5.3	3.8	4.6
Burundi	Belgium	1.4	2.1	1.8
Cabo Verde	Portugal	9.2	7.7	8.4
Cambodia	France	2.4	2.9	2.7
Cameroon	France	1.5	2.6	2.0
Canada	Great Britain	9.8	8.9	9.3
C. African Republic	France	0.7	1.4	1.1

Country	Colonial Power	Freedom House Score	EIU Score	Blended Score
Chad	France	1.5	1.7	1.6
Chile	Spain	9.4	7.9	8.7
Colombia	Spain	6.4	6.5	6.4
Comoros	France	4.2	3.2	3.7
Costa Rica	Spain	9.1	8.1	8.6
Côte d'Ivoire	France	4.9	4.2	4.6
Cuba	Spain	1.2	2.6	1.9
DR Congo	Belgium	1.9	1.4	1.7
Djibouti	France	2.4	2.7	2.6
Dominican Republic	Spain	6.8	6.5	6.6
Ecuador	Spain	7.1	5.7	6.4
Egypt	Great Britain	1.8	2.9	2.4
El Salvador	Spain	5.9	5.7	5.8
Equatorial Guinea	Spain	0.5	1.9	1.2
Eswatini	Great Britain	1.7	3.1	2.4
Gabon	France	2.1	3.4	2.8
Ghana	Great Britain	8.0	6.5	7.3
Guatemala	Spain	5.1	4.6	4.9
Guinea	France	3.4	2.3	2.8
Guinea-Bissau	Portugal	4.3	2.8	3.5
Guyana	Great Britain	7.3	6.3	6.8

Country	Colonial Power	Freedom House Score	EIU Score	Blended Score
Haiti	France	3.3	3.5	3.4
Honduras	Spain	4.7	5.1	4.9
India	Great Britain	6.6	6.9	6.8
Indonesia	Netherlands	5.9	6.7	6.3
Jamaica	Great Britain	8.0	7.1	7.6
Kenya	Great Britain	4.8	5.1	4.9
Laos	France	1.3	1.8	1.5
Lesotho	Great Britain	6.3	6.3	6.3
Madagascar	France	6.1	5.7	5.9
Malawi	Great Britain	6.6	5.7	6.2
Malaysia	Great Britain	5.0	7.2	6.1
Mali	France	3.2	3.5	3.3
Mauritania	France	3.5	4.0	3.8
Mauritius	France	8.6	8.1	8.3
Mexico	Spain	6.0	5.6	5.8
Morocco	France	3.7	5.0	4.4
Mozambique	Portugal	4.3	3.5	3.9
Myanmar	Great Britain	0.9	1.0	1.0
New Zealand	Great Britain	9.9	9.4	9.6
Nicaragua	Spain	2.3	2.7	2.5
Niger	France	5.1	3.2	4.2

Country	Colonial Power	Freedom House Score	EIU Score	Blended Score
Nigeria	Great Britain	4.3	4.1	4.2
Pakistan	Great Britain	3.7	4.3	4.0
Panama	Spain	8.3	6.9	7.6
Papua New Guinea	Great Britain	6.2	6.1	6.2
Paraguay	Spain	6.5	5.9	6.2
Peru	Spain	7.2	6.1	6.6
Philippines	Spain	5.5	6.6	6.1
Qatar	Great Britain	2.5	3.7	3.1
Republic of Congo	France	1.7	2.8	2.2
Senegal	France	6.8	5.5	6.2
Sierra Leone	Great Britain	6.5	5.0	5.7
Singapore	Great Britain	4.7	6.2	5.5
South Africa	Great Britain	7.9	7.1	7.5
Sri Lanka	Great Britain	5.5	6.1	5.8
Sudan	Great Britain	1.0	2.5	1.7
Suriname	Netherlands	7.9	6.8	7.4
The Gambia	Great Britain	4.7	4.4	4.6
Timor-Leste	Portugal	7.2	7.1	7.1
Togo	France	4.2	2.8	3.5
Tunisia	France	6.4	6.0	6.2
Uganda	Great Britain	3.4	4.5	3.9

Country	Colonial Power	Freedom House Score	EIU Score	Blended Score
United States	Great Britain	8.3	7.9	8.1
Uruguay	Spain	9.7	8.9	9.3
Venezuela	Spain	1.4	2.1	1.8
Vietnam	France	1.9	2.9	2.4
Zambia	Great Britain	5.1	5.7	5.4

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