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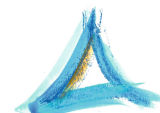
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## SPECIAL ISSUE ARTICLE

# Advancing governance indicator systems: Lessons learned from the 2022 symposium

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## Abstract

The Berggruen Governance Index (BGI) is a new and innovative entry into the crowded domain of quantitative governance research. In its effort to contribute to the field, the BGI builds off of and acts in dialogue with several other governance indicator projects from across the globe. As part of a collaborative outlook, the BGI convened the first of three symposia at the UCLA Luskin School in October 2022, titled 'Advancing Governance Indicator Systems: The 2022 Conference'. The event invited representatives from other indicator projects to share their thoughts on the BGI, present their own projects and discuss avenues for further research and development of 'planetary' indicators. This article discusses the highlights and key contributions from the conference.

The field of governance indicators is a vast, growing and changing landscape with different collectors, providers, disseminators, stakeholders and interests. As noted in the opening article in this special issue, the Berggruen Governance Index (BGI)<sup>1</sup> is not the first indicator system designed to measure significant phenomena cross-nationally and over time, nor even the first to have governance performance at its core (Anheier et al., 2018; Gisselquist, 2013; Malito & Bhuta, 2018). Indeed, the range of data projects could be considered an 'indicator industry' (Kelly & Simmons, 2019; Rotberg & Bhushan, 2015). In terms of the actors that produce such measurement systems, there are national and international statistical agencies next to a growing number of public and private organisations engaged in the collection of a wide array of data. In its effort to contribute to the burgeoning indicator research field, the BGI builds off of many other adjacent projects.

Because the BGI seeks to bring new insights and build upon the relevant findings of existing projects, learning, improvement and innovation are crucial. Furthermore, as the 'industry' grows in breadth and depth, it makes sense to take the opportunity to share and learn from other experiences. Thus, a key objective of the BGI project is to engage the wider community of academics and experts working on comparative indicators and data systems, especially in the broader field of governance. For this purpose, the BGI project is convening three international

symposia to explore how we can advance indicator research and encourage cross-learning and collaboration.

The first of these symposia took place on October 10–11, 2022 to gather feedback on the BGI as well as to assess the state of global indicator and data systems in this field more generally.<sup>2</sup> We asked experts from a selection of projects and organisations to review aspects of the BGI and share information about their project's structure, methodological approaches, data collection procedures, coverage and quality as well as analytics, reporting standards and outreach. The results of the symposium not only feed into BGI-related work but also help identify a set of cross-cutting key issues that we might address in subsequent meetings. The agenda, which includes the main participants and their affiliations, can be found in the Appendix S1 to this article.

Though we mention the projects represented at the symposium and provide links to their websites or related publications, we will not describe them in depth here. Instead, we highlight primarily the challenges the experts identified over the 2 days of presentations and the ways those challenges have been met so far and could be met in the future. The challenges include clarifying and clearly projecting the purpose of the indicator or data project, choosing and using data sources, analysing the results and communicating them to achieve

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the desired impact. But before delving into these more ubiquitous challenges, we report on comments and suggestions relating specifically to the BGI, its analytical framework, potential biases therein, ways to ensure validity and the need to hone and communicate the project's novel contribution.

## 1 | FEEDBACK ON THE 2022 BERGGRUEN GOVERNANCE INDEX

For the first three sessions of the symposium, we asked invited experts to assess the BGI, starting with its analytical framework and moving on to its results. As described in greater detail in Anheier and colleagues' article 'Introducing the Berggruen Governance Index: I. Conceptual and Methodological Framework' in this special issue, the BGI builds on an improved conceptualisation of governance that sees public goods provision as resulting from the interplay of democratic accountability and state capacity. In this concept, state capacity is 'the crucial link mediating between democratic accountability and public goods provision' (Anheier et al., 2022, p. 13). As the report argues, 'Whereas state capacity is about the state administration's ability to generate revenue, to organize collective action, and to achieve stated goals, democratic accountability refers to the process by which governments are selected, monitored, held accountable, and replaced' (Anheier et al., 2022, p. 13).

Depicted as the Governance Triangle, the framework and index are intended to help assess the different pathways by which democratic accountability and state capacity influence public goods provision. Specifically, the framework includes: public goods provision, which is broken down into social, economic and environmental public goods; state capacity and the key subdimensions of fiscal, coordination and delivery capacity; and democratic accountability and the subelements of institutional, electoral and societal accountability.

We have grouped the rich feedback received and the ensuing debates under three somewhat overlapping headings: theory and causality, potential biases and validity concerns, and purpose and audiences.

### 1.1 | Theory and causality

While the Governance Triangle can serve, as Miguel Centeno of Princeton University called it, as an 'excellent heuristic' that draws on several social science traditions, commentators offered feedback and refinements for the specific dimensions and their measurement and for analysing and communicating results. Is the Triangle meant to be more than a heuristic, and does it not suggest some notion of causality, even implicitly,

among the three dimensions? If so, are we theoretically equipped for causal arguments and hypothesis testing?

These questions about the notion of causality in the Triangle, the underlying assumptions and the kinds of hypotheses of how the three dimensions relate to each other turned out to be a major discussion point. The strength of their associations, time-ordering, non-spuriousness and feedback loops were at the centre of the debate. Several experts noted that the Governance Triangle leaves open questions not only about which direction causality occurs but also about whether causality is even claimed or can be proven.

Helène Landemore (Yale University) recommended that it be made clearer whether democratic accountability and state capacity are considered processes, with public goods provision as an outcome. But some, including Nathan Lane (Oxford University), asked whether we even need causal analysis: could we not be happy with 'stylised facts'? Or, as Daniel Pemstein (North Dakota State University) argued, deeper descriptions of those facts and of the interactions among the Governance Triangle dimensions might matter as much as theory testing would. Towards that end, Centeno suggested deepening the analysis well beyond the numbers in order to, for example, tease out the reasoning behind the policy trade-offs governments make (e.g. between inclusion, growth and order).

The concept of democratic accountability as used in the BGI received much attention, too. Landemore cautioned that the democratic accountability dimension should not be equated with the quality of democracy; democratic accountability is instrumental but not essential to democracy. Other aspects of 'democracy' (Landemore, 2020), including representation of interests and variations of accountability, could also be considered. Ben Read (University of California, Santa Cruz) wondered more broadly whether faith in democratic accountability's impact on public goods provision might be overstated. In autocracies, for example, other feedback mechanisms and social contracts might be more relevant. But, as he further pointed out, the BGI already highlights that democratic accountability works differently in different economies and polities. Read argued that the relationship between political systems and public goods provision bears further and separate analysis.

Darin Christensen (UCLA) suggested that the BGI focus on identifying the policy choices that move the indicators so as to provide guidance for how the needle can be moved. Environmental governance could provide one such set of policy choices to examine. As Susanna Hecht (UCLA) argued, at least in South America, environmental governance is extremely sensitive to politics at multiple levels and scales, so the degree of deforestation could prove to be an excellent governance indicator. More generally, Steven Rathgeb Smith (American Political Science Association) recommended

that the BGI focus on working out more nuanced stories to explain the results, especially the interactions between the three dimensions, and that, to do so, the BGI team should engage others to collaborate.

## 1.2 | Potential biases and validity concerns

Other commentators pointed to potential biases in the framework. For example, Christensen detected an assumption – found in many indicator projects – that states are decisive actors and that, through governance, states manage problems and shape their own fates. But how much of the improvement shown by the BGI results in Sub-Saharan Africa, reported in Anheier, Fröhlich and List's article, 'Sub-Saharan Africa: Towards Better Governance and Sustainability?', in this special issue, reflects choices actually made by states? By Christensen's estimates, it is hard to link state capacity to improvements in public goods provision in a strict causal sense. To examine the possible disconnect, Laura Mann (London School of Economics) made the case for consideration of additional factors such as policy autonomy,<sup>3</sup> imaginative space<sup>4</sup> and institutional complementarity,<sup>5</sup> all of which could affect the state's ability to impact public goods provision, especially in developing economies. She also argued that state capacity may not be needed or applied in the same way in every country all the time and suggested disaggregation or categorisation according to, for example, level of industrialisation and position in the global power hierarchy, to capture the differences.

Another potential bias was mentioned by Ben Read, who, based on his reading of the BGI results for China,<sup>6</sup> suggested that BGI measurements, particularly with regard to state capacity, might have an overly 'Weberian' emphasis. The Chinese state may be Orwellian, in his view, but it is not as mediocre as the BGI scores might indicate. Read argued that explanations for the discrepancy can be found among subindices. For example, China's fiscal capacity is low largely because tax revenues are negligible, but if China has no need to levy income tax because it can mobilise resources via other mechanisms, does this truly represent weak state capacity? Also, coordination capacity is strong in China, even though the bureaucracy is missing many of the Weberian characteristics measured by the BGI. It is advisable to examine how this apparent Weberian emphasis might impact results for other countries and, in any case, to acknowledge the possibility of bias.

The time span covered by the BGI at present (2000–2019) might also limit a fuller understanding of developments and changes taking place that require longer periods to detect. Several commentators, in particular Michael Woolcock (World Bank) and Andreas Wimmer (Columbia University), pointed out that the temporally

truncated data (among other factors) leads to 'flat lines' and stability in the rankings. Furthermore, as Mark Peterson (UCLA) argued with regard to the US findings,<sup>7</sup> the relatively short time frame restricts our view: while it is true that democratic accountability has been declining in the United States since at least 2000, the decline is actually a more dramatic reversal of achievements hard-won by the civil rights movement in the 1960s. These scholars suggest that a longer time series would allow for capturing earlier changes or events and tracing meaningful trends. However, as they and the BGI team were keen to emphasise, there are trade-offs related to the availability of data over time for a sufficient number and range of countries.

Another key question is whether the BGI measures reflect reality sufficiently. In examining more closely the BGI scores and ranking for Russia,<sup>8</sup> Daniel Treisman (UCLA) was struck by several discrepancies. For example, while Russia is far from the ideal democracy, it did have an elected president, several political parties and universal suffrage in 2000, whereas Kuwait was ranked above Russia on the democratic accountability dimension, although it had a hereditary emir as head of state, political parties were outlawed and only men could vote. Furthermore, while Russia's life expectancy, and therefore its public goods provision score, increased over time, the development was less (if at all) because of improved healthcare or better state capacity and more because binge drinking declined. During the session, Pemstein suggested the concrete step of conducting validation tests via blind case studies. Other ways to check whether results reflect reality are discussed further below.

## 1.3 | Purpose and audiences

Experts offered many suggestions in terms of purpose and audience, the majority of which apply to indicator or data projects more generally and are thus discussed further below. But for the BGI as a relatively new entry in the indicator industry, Nathan Lane emphasised that the BGI team should not fear imperfection in how results are communicated: even for the most established data projects, not only is the available data lacking in many respects, but the concepts underlying the framework are fundamentally imperfect. Communicating results and reaching audiences is a challenge and a learning process for all indicator projects.

## 2 | EXPERIENCES OF OTHER INDICATOR AND DATA PROJECTS

In the next four sessions of the symposium, researchers involved in other indicator and data projects of different kinds shared what their projects are about, especially

purposes, target groups, methods and – very briefly – results, and reflected on the challenges they have faced as well as both possible and proven solutions. Since these projects tend to be well known and their findings well publicised, we summarise project descriptions in [Table 1](#) and focus here on the challenges they have encountered that have broader relevance for advancing governance (and other) indicator systems.

## 2.1 | Identifying and staying on mission

New indicators or data projects come into the ‘industry’ in pursuit of a vision, mission or purpose. Kayser (2018) distinguishes indicator projects according to their purpose: communication, that is identifying undesirable conditions in society and motivating policy action, or analysis, that is testing theory, identifying causes or designing policy. Ideally, the indicator (set) will fit the purpose. As Kayser notes (2018, p. 258), ‘[a]ny indicator can fail when evaluated outside its purpose’.

The challenge is not only to ensure that the indicator system, its components and measurements are appropriate to its purpose, but also to ensure that the mission is clearly understood by various audiences and that it does not veer too far from that original purpose (unless so intended). At the symposium, questions often surrounded the purpose and desired impact of the projects, whether they seek to produce awareness, action or something else. Do all indicators and indices need to be ‘actionable’ (Erkkilä, 2016; Trapnell, 2011) to have value? Must all data projects be amenable to activities designed to empower the grassroots? What are the trade-offs in terms of data collection methods, measurement, analysis and choice of communication channels when a data project tries to pursue actionability or empowerment?

## 2.2 | Choosing data sources

Unfortunately, the quality of official and private statistics varies and is often more accurate and comprehensive in developed market economies than in emerging markets or developing countries. The large variance in reporting capacity of states around the world produces data ‘black holes’ in much of the developing world (Jerven, 2013).<sup>9</sup> This matters, especially for calculating what the World Bank’s Michael Woolcock called ‘high-stakes policy indicators’, such as Gross National Income (GNI) per capita, which determine, for example from which World Bank facility loans can be taken, whether investors will be inclined to invest, and a host of other financially and economically significant policy decisions. Such high-stakes indicators typically place countries on one side of a politically determined line or another (e.g. a poverty line), therefore making them

eligible or not for some service or treatment or signalling their worthiness to donors or investors.

At the same time, there has never been more data collected for more purposes and on more topics than today. While this profusion is in many ways a boon to researchers and policy analysts, it also creates, as HOLLER (2018, p. 104) calls it, a ‘paradox of choice’ that requires weighing the use of competing measures that might produce contrasting or even misleading results.

One of the choices which is typically presented to index builders is that between subjective, ‘perceptions-based’ indicators and ‘objective’ indicators.<sup>10</sup> As HOLLER (2018: 105) writes in a chapter devoted to the topic, each ‘entails costs and benefits, and neither is appropriate for all situations’. Typically, the flexibility provided by perceptions-based indicators – whether based on population or expert surveys – allows for the incorporation of a broader range of information, giving them higher content validity. By contrast, the rigidity of objective measures that restrict what information is considered, such as life expectancy or years of schooling, makes such measures highly reliable, especially when used for theory testing, but weaker in terms of content validity.

In other words, neither is inherently better or worse for measuring governance and related topics. As Joseph Asunka (Afrobarometer) cautioned during the symposium session devoted to survey-based projects, posing the subjective vs. objective dichotomy should not give the impression that subjective data is of lower quality. Indeed, Martin Gilens (UCLA) concurred that public opinion surveys like those conducted as part of the World Values Survey and by Pew Research are a valuable resource that can contribute to assessing governance, among other themes. They can, for example, shed light on lived experiences, such as the actual accessibility of public goods, as the Afrobarometer’s Lived Poverty Index does (Mattes & Patel, 2022). Such surveys can also get to the ‘average’ person’s views on trust, democratic accountability and support for democratic norms and practices. In addition, they allow analysts to offer more nuanced stories than objective data alone would permit.

That being said, such perceptions-based data also needs to be considered critically. For one, as Kurtz and Schrank (2021) found with regard to expert surveys, subjective data brings the individual’s or expert’s bias into the calculation, including group-think tendencies. Furthermore, especially when relying on surveys that are conducted at regular intervals using the same or similar questionnaires, the questions posed may not reflect current concerns. For example, as Martin Gilens recalled, the Eurobarometer left out some democracy-related questions because, at the time the project was initiated in 1974, democracy was considered to be ‘here to stay’. And hunger-related questions that have become pertinent post-Covid were not included in the



TABLE 1 Advancing Governance Indicator Systems: Data Projects Represented.<sup>a</sup>

Project	Year started	Regularity	Purpose/motto	Main data source(s)	Coverage	Audience
Afrobarometer <a href="http://afrobarometer.org">afrobarometer.org</a>	1999	Every 2–3 years	Make citizen voice a key pillar of African policy and decision making; Motto: 'Let the people have a say'	Public opinion survey	34 (round 8)	Policymakers, general public
Freedom House's Freedom in the World <a href="http://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world">freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world</a>	1972	Annual	Assess real-world rights and freedoms enjoyed by individuals, rather than governments or government performance per se	Expert (paid) survey	195 countries +15 territories (2023 edition)	Policymakers, journalists, academics, activists, and general audience
Latinobarómetro <a href="http://latinobarometro.org">latinobarometro.org</a>	1995	Annual (mostly)	Observe the development of democracies, economies and societies, using indicators of attitude, opinion and behaviour	Public opinion survey (mostly face-to-face)	18 (2020/21 survey)	Researchers, social and political leaders
Pew Research Center <a href="http://pewresearch.org">pewresearch.org</a>	2004	Annual (Global Attitudes Survey), with periodic special surveys	Generate a foundation of facts that enriches the public dialogue and supports sound decision-making	Public opinion polling, demographic research, computational social science research	Varies	Media, engaged public, policymakers
Quality of Government (QoG) <a href="http://www.gu.se/en/quality-government">www.gu.se/en/quality-government</a>	2004	Annual updates of secondary sources (except environment dataset)	Address the theoretical and empirical problem of how political institutions of high quality can be created and maintained; to study the effects of QoG on specific policy areas	Repository of 100+ secondary sources + own expert survey	190+ (year)/1946–present [2020 (third wave) expert survey covers 117 countries]	Researchers and students (primarily)
Recoupling Dashboard <a href="http://www.global-solutions-initiative.org/programs/recoupling-dashboard-homepage/">www.global-solutions-initiative.org/programs/recoupling-dashboard-homepage/</a>	2020	Possibly annual	Measure the well-being of societies beyond GDP	Secondary sources (Gallup, OECD, EB, EPI)	169	Academics and policymakers
Social Progress Index <a href="http://www.socialprogress.org/">www.socialprogress.org/</a>	2013	Annual	Catalyse improvement and drive action by presenting social outcome data in a useful and reliable way. Motto: 'From index to action'	Secondary sources	169 countries (2022)/2011–present	Policymakers, general public

TABLE 1 (Continued)

Project	Year started	Regularity	Purpose/motto	Main data source(s)	Coverage	Audience
UNDP's Human Development Index <a href="http://hdr.undp.org/data-center/human-development-index#/indicies/HDI">hdr.undp.org/data-center/human-development-index#/indicies/HDI</a>	1990	Annual	Emphasise that people and their capabilities should be the ultimate criteria for assessing the development of a country, not economic growth alone	Secondary sources	~190 countries and territories (2021)	General public
Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem) <a href="http://v-dem.net">v-dem.net</a>	2011	Annual	Acknowledge and capture different conceptions of democracy	Expert surveys (3700+)	202 (2023)/1789–present	Academics, but increasingly policymakers, practitioners
World Justice Project's Rule of Law Index <a href="http://worldjusticeproject.org/rule-of-law-index/">worldjusticeproject.org/rule-of-law-index/</a>	2008	Annual rankings (General Population Poll-GPP every 2–3 years)	Offer a comprehensive picture of the extent to which countries adhere to universal rule of law principles	Household surveys (GPP) + expert (unpaid) survey (Qualified Respondents' Questionnaire)	140 (2022)	Citizens, governments, policymakers, donors, businesses, media
World Values Survey (WVS) <a href="http://www.worldvaluessurvey.org">www.worldvaluessurvey.org</a>	1981	Ca. every 5 years	Analyse people's values, beliefs and norms in a comparative cross-national and over-time perspective; also to assess which impact value stability or change over time has on the social, political and economic development of countries and societies	Public opinion survey	120 (wave 7)	Academia, policymakers, general

<sup>a</sup>Representatives of the World Bank and International Monetary Fund presented diverse data projects from their institutions.

Source: website or most recent project report.

Latinobarómetro when it launched in the mid-1990s because hunger did not seem to be an issue then. Thus, to place perceptions-based results in context and attempt to trace change, a look at the societal level is also required.

The use of objective indicators presents its own challenges. This is especially so for projects like Quality of Government, Social Progress Index and BGI that rely on secondary data sources produced by the World Bank and various United Nations agencies. Here, the data project is dependent on the original source provider, which may or may not collect and provide data regularly or on the same schedule and for which definitions and other parameters might be unclear. Further, the project might run into licence problems that restrict access to data sources. In such cases, researchers must explore workarounds, new sources and estimation methods for filling gaps. Finally, reliance on objective data might entail limits on coverage with respect to both time and territory.

Most of the indicators and data projects are designed to trace historical trends. Steve Zipperstein (UCLA) asked symposium participants to consider whether researchers can develop leading and/or real-time governance-related indicators as inputs to policymaking. Aside from the difficulty of proving causal paths that would underpin predictions, such an endeavour would face several other challenges. In terms of data, as Jaromír Harmáček (Social Progress Initiative) suggested, satellite, online and other sources of 'big data' could be helpful. However, several experts pointed out potential limits to these sources: whereas Laura Mann highlighted that the use of big data rewards people who are digital and not everyone, Pedro Conceição (UNDP) cautioned that all big data is inherently biased and that our understanding of how AI makes choices remains too limited. In terms of users, Centeno posited that real-time indicators might make many situations worse because of bounded rationality that limits decision-makers' ability to absorb large quantities of information; we simply would not have the cognitive capacity to deal with so much information. How to make use of 'big' and real-time data, whether official or privately owned, is both an opportunity and a challenge for established as well as newer indicator projects.

## 2.3 | Interpreting results and checking biases

As noted earlier in this article, a challenge for the BGI and for any indicator project is ensuring that the results reflect reality and, at best, help understand governance performance more fully. Many of the projects represented at the symposium have experimented with and employed a variety of approaches to validating results. For the Rule of Law Index, as Tanya Primiani (World

Justice Project) explained, a team checks the results of population and expert surveys against qualitative reports on each country and other well-established indices such as Freedom in the World, among other validity and reliability tests. The Freedom in the World scores are the result of analysts' assessments, which are scrutinised at a series of review meetings by other analysts, a panel of experts and Freedom House staff. The end product represents their consensus.

Such consultative processes might also be appropriate for handling potential biases, which, as became clear during the symposium, can be discerned in the analytical frameworks or methods of most, if not all, of the data projects represented. One tendency highlighted by Andreas Wimmer is towards Western centrism. He used the hypothetical example of a survey informed by neo-Confucian thinking, which was pleased to find preferences for clear hierarchy, devotion to consensus and a lack of contentious politics when analysing the results, quite contrary to a survey designed in a typically Western liberal and secular framework, which sees a civil society with many divergent values and voices questioning established hierarchies as a sign of progress.

Aside from acknowledging such potential biases, several projects have devoted significant energies to correct for (or at least limit) their influence on the results. In the case of the Afrobarometer, for example, every effort has been made to 'Africanize' the entire process from data collection to dissemination. According to E. Gyimah-Boadi (Ghana Center for Democratic Development), not only does this approach build capacity within a country and the region, but also the fact that the data has been collected by Africans makes it harder for governments to disown the results due to alleged colonial biases. For its part, the World Values Survey has developed an elaborate system of centralised quality control that also checks at the national level for potential bias.

## 2.4 | Going beyond methodological nationalism

Another bias is inherent in endeavours like those represented at the symposium to compare elements of governance cross-nationally: methodological nationalism. As Nils Gilman (Berggruen Institute) put forward, there is indeed a place for methodological nationalism when the problem is national or statist in character, for example, economic growth or perhaps inequality. But for many, if not most, contemporary challenges, it is, in his view, inappropriate and fully inadequate. For example, national hysteria over high crime rates is misplaced because the problem tends to be localised; here, local, disaggregated data is needed. Furthermore, as Steven Rathgeb Smith noted, nation-based data projects rarely



capture local democracy and activism, thus revealing little about solutions being sought and tried at the sub-national level. At the other end, many pressing policy issues are ‘problems without passports’ (Annan, 2009), for which national-level tools are lacking and only planetary institutions can find and implement solutions.

Notably, several of the projects represented at the symposium have initiated subnational projects, particularly in the European area. Already in 2010, the Quality of Government project began collecting and reporting survey-based data at the subnational level within the European Union,<sup>11</sup> and the Social Progress Index team has produced a European Social Progress Index<sup>12</sup> reporting subnational data for 2016 and 2020. In addition, the World Justice Project (WJP), which produces the Rule of Law Index, has already developed measures at the level of Mexican states<sup>13</sup> and is starting to build indicators for the subnational level within the European Union.<sup>14</sup>

Among the most critical problems is the dearth of data on, and analytic approaches to, global flows. Some areas (e.g. trade, supply chains and tourism) are well covered, but others (e.g. cultural flows, diffusion of political ideas and social movements) barely. The most important methodological issue is defining appropriate units of analysis. As noted above, whether in the system of national income accounting, economic complexity, or the analysis of migration, most data projects rely on the artificial construct of country units, which can give an intrinsically erroneous view of the world. In other words, discrepancies between methodological categories and realities deserve further attention. Miguel Centeno's transnationality indicators, which are still under development, seek to measure and map transnational flows to understand risk.

While transnational indicators potentially offer a portrait of the extent to which various social, economic or cultural phenomena have become globalised, they do not necessarily inform us about their governance. This is where the notion of planetary governance comes in, and according to Gilman, there are still too few attempts to measure planetary aspects of governance performance. By this, he means indicators for how well we manage to address planetary problems like climate change, greenhouse gas emissions or pandemics (Blake & Gilman, 2021). Developing such indicators will take time and effort, of course. It would nonetheless be a major step towards advancing our understanding of governance performance at the planetary level if further steps in this direction can be taken.

## 2.5 | Communicating results and reaching audiences

Attracting and then increasing engagement with a data project's results is a challenge faced by the majority of the

projects represented at the symposium, even for multilateral organisations. Indeed, one could argue that at least as much time could (and probably should) be spent from a project's outset working on communications issues as on methodological and data issues (Feigenblatt, 2018). Simply uploading information or a publication to the web and assuming that users will come has been shown to lead to ‘data graveyards’ (Custer & Sethi, 2017).

Though the projects represented at the symposium are well known, the researchers speaking about them and other experts nevertheless mentioned several communications-related challenges as well as approaches to solving them. If the intended audience is policymakers, for example, Michael Woolcock cautioned us to recognise that there is no single ‘policy-maker’; rather, the analyses and their write-ups should focus on specific problems that can be more easily taken up by specific groups or sectors. Having researchers or policymakers do their own national or subnational exercise might be a way to yield actionable responses. Use cases provide a way to attract and maintain the interest of policymakers, especially when the indicator or index is not updated annually.

If the intended audience is broader, both the challenges and solutions are different. While none of the projects deliberately incorporates empowerment or ‘liberation’ efforts in their approaches, some make great effort to translate the research results for the general public and create local ownership. For instance, as Christian Haerpfer (University of Vienna) reported, many national World Values Survey teams hold town hall meetings to discuss local results, and, more generally, respondents receive reports if they have expressed interest. As Richard Wike (Pew Research) noted, his team thinks quite a bit about their audiences (mainly media, engaged public and policymakers) and invests significant resources in what they call ‘digicomms’ so that their research becomes part of the conversation and a catalyst for debate. Transparency then is the key to avoiding and responding to criticism.

All of these projects are aware that there is work to do to build audiences outside of Europe and the United States. For example, as Amy Slipowitz (Freedom House) reported, her organisation is exploring translation of its documentation and publications and working with local groups. Rachel Sigman (University of Denver) explained that, among other efforts, V-Dem is developing regional centres outside of Europe and the United States and considering offering incentives such as grants to encourage scholars from everywhere to engage with the data. WJP is also engaging in or planning translations, outreach, local hubs and biannual forums as well as scholarly conferences, but all are expensive and need to be included in budgets. In short, to move these efforts beyond Europe and the United States, more resources must be invested.

Another challenge is that once the results are out, there is the possibility that they will be misinterpreted or even misused, especially when an individual score or label is given. If they are not to the audience's liking, the results might also be questioned, and there might be pressure to modify them. Several experts described what their project undertakes to avoid 'engagement' that goes haywire. For example, as recounted by Gyimah-Boadi, the Afrobarometer team has taken great pains to Africanise the process (as noted above), to ensure funding independence and diversity by pooling resources (avoiding even the appearance that funding sources exert influence on the results), and to offer strategic briefings (particularly to politicians who might not appreciate the truth of the results). According to Tanya Primiani, the WJP's Rule of Law Index team tries to mitigate misuse by being as transparent as possible regarding methods and choices made in the scoring process and by offering more detailed narratives and other information to underpin the published results.

Particularly tricky, but essential, is finding ways to communicate statistical information in a user-friendly form. This includes not only aspects of data collection, transformation and aggregation and the type of scaling and statistical analysis used but also the presentation of uncertainty intervals of estimates (Høyland et al., 2012). As inserting confidence intervals can make charts more difficult to read when presenting multiple lines, Daniel Pemstein suggested adding descriptions that explain probabilistic statements in the caption of tables or figures.

### 3 | CONCLUDING COMMENTS

As noted at the outset of this article, a key objective of the BGI project over the next few years is to enlist the academic and expert community working on comparative indicator and data systems in exploring how we can advance indicator research and encourage cross-learning and collaboration. This 2022 symposium allowed us to identify numerous challenges, possible solutions and indeed opportunities as we all proceed in developing our respective projects.

As for the BGI, the main outcome was that we do not need to revise the index architecture or conceptual framework in fundamental ways. However, more work is clearly needed on the implied causality of the Governance Triangle and whether causal thinking is the right way to approach the complex relationships involved. If we move away from causality and techniques such as mediation analysis, what are the alternatives? How can we account for the complexity of interaction and the many confounding factors that come into play? What is more, we must take seriously the charge of a Western bias. Do we assume that

accountability is an end rather than a means? Do we assume policy autonomy? How we can correct for that is an open question and ultimately a matter of operationalisation of indicators.

This leads to the issue of validity. As some experts have pointed out, there are some complex issues in terms of validity in the classical sense of 'does the measure measure what we intend it to measure?'. Accountability versus democracy was one of several such issues that were raised. We should question each subindicator regarding biases and involve regional or country experts in validating our results. The above-mentioned example of fiscal capacity in China is just one illustration.

There is a strong lesson we draw from the experience of many of the global surveys and data projects represented at the symposium: these projects have a long life because they improve over time around their core business; an audience is created over time as well. We should not expect a 'big bang' when presenting an index or indicator system for the first or second time. It is a step-by-step process, and indicator systems evolve over time. User groups are an important component in this process, which also helps build a constituency around the indicator (system).

The BGI can be expanded, especially when it comes to public goods provision, by adding more types of goods. However, we should keep parsimony in mind. The focus of the BGI is not to explain in toto all factors involved in why some countries develop in some way and others do not, but rather to address one segment of that wider range of issues: governance performance. Therefore, we should not expand the explanatory scope at this point but focus on the core issue of improving the BGI's operational and measurement quality.

Finally, control is important. GDP and other standard measures were mentioned by the experts, who also suggested more qualitative approaches, including regime classifications. The classic typologies of regimes, welfare states and varieties of capitalism come to mind. In this respect, more deep dives are needed in terms of country studies and by setting a focus on conceptually important issues but also exploring empirical anomalies revealed by the results, tracing the impact of events such as economic crisis, political instability, social unrest or war.

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### CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

There are no conflicts of interest.


## DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The data that support the findings of this study are openly available at <https://governance.luskin.ucla.edu/datasets/>.

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## ENDNOTES

- <sup>1</sup> The Berggruen Governance Index is a collaborative project between the UCLA Luskin School of Public Affairs and the Berggruen Institute examining, as of 2022, the performance of 134 countries in key areas over a 20-year period to advance understanding of why some countries are governed more effectively and enjoy a higher quality of life than others. See the article 'Introducing the Berggruen Governance Index: I. Conceptual and Methodological Framework' by Anheier, Lang, and Knudsen in this special issue. The full dataset is available for download in various formats at <https://governance.luskin.ucla.edu/datasets/>. A data exploration tool offers readers a variety of ways to examine the data; available at <https://governance.luskin.ucla.edu/index/>.
- <sup>2</sup> The full symposium, which was hosted by the UCLA Luskin School and funded by the Berggruen Institute, is available for viewing at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WQAQmS6KkOag> (October 10) and <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4Pxb8hyL-94> (October 11).
- <sup>3</sup> The idea of 'choiceless democracies' posed by Mkandawire (1998) reflects the result of the structural adjustment policies undertaken/imposed in the 1990s that limited what states could do and left little, if any, room for states to implement popular will.
- <sup>4</sup> To what extent do countries have 'imaginative space'? Do the intelligentsia or political elite have their own ideas or draw on external ones? Do they address domestic needs or rather international ones? A fully outward orientation leads to a disconnect between local will and policymakers. Mann suggests collecting data on the background of policymakers (e.g., where attended university or previous employment in international agency) to find out where they get their ideas.
- <sup>5</sup> This complementarity makes a difference in rooting policies. But when policies are siloed, as seems to be happening with implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals, complementarity suffers. The coordination capacity subdimension does not capture this.
- <sup>6</sup> Yang's article, 'Lessons and Challenges of China's State-Led and Party-Dominated Governance Model', in this special issue, builds on these results taking Read's and others' comments into account.
- <sup>7</sup> See Knudsen's article, 'A Falling Star? The Causes of Declining State Capacity and Democratic Accountability in the United States', in this special issue.
- <sup>8</sup> Russia is covered in Fröhlich's article, 'Debunking the Autocratic Fallacy? Improving Public Goods Provision in Russia', in this special issue.
- <sup>9</sup> Despite efforts such as Paris21 initiatives (<https://paris21.org>) or the UN Statistics Division ([https://unstats.un.org/home/nso\\_sites/](https://unstats.un.org/home/nso_sites/)) among others to improve capacity based on the UN's

Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics (<https://unstats.un.org/unsd/dnss/gp/fundprinciples.aspx>).

- <sup>10</sup> Among the data projects represented at the symposium that would be considered perceptions-based, the World Values Survey, Latinobarómetro, Afrobarometer, and Pew Research rely on population surveys, Freedom House's Freedom in the World relies on expert surveys, and the World Justice Project's Rule of Law Index combines population and expert surveys as the primary data sources. The UN's Human Development Index is the only participating project based primarily on objective data sources. Others, including V-Dem, the Quality of Government, and Social Progress Index use a mix of perceptions-based and objective data.
- <sup>11</sup> <https://www.gu.se/en/quality-government/qog-data/data-downloads/european-quality-of-government-index>
- <sup>12</sup> [https://ec.europa.eu/regional\\_policy/information-sources/maps/social-progress/2020\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/information-sources/maps/social-progress/2020_en)
- <sup>13</sup> <https://worldjusticeproject.org/our-work/research-and-data/special-reports/rule-law-mexico>
- <sup>14</sup> <https://worldjusticeproject.org/our-work/research-and-data/european-union-subnational-justice-governance-and-rule-law-indicators>

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## SUPPORTING INFORMATION

Additional supporting information can be found online in the Supporting Information section at the end of this article.

## Appendix

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