

# Do Truth Commissions Contribute to Democratic Governance? How?

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## Motivation

The relationship between truth commissions and democratic governance remains unclear, in part because extant research has not clearly conceptualized and disaggregated the concept of democratic governance. Scholars argue that truth commissions advance democracy to the extent that they contribute to social trust in political institutions and encourage reforms to provide accountability and the rule of law. Such reforms include bringing the military under civilian control, dismissing the leadership of tainted security forces, or strengthening the independence of the judiciary from political interference. This project asks whether truth commissions advance democratic participation and non-electoral accountability rather than electoral institutions.

## Literature

- Some studies find no systematic associations between truth commissions and either the extent of democracy or democratization processes (Wiebelhaus-Brahm 2010). Others find positive associations with democratization (Kenney and Spears 2005). Existing studies have not been able to determine whether truth commissions have an independent effect on democratization, or are a symptom of the democratization process.
- Different studies work with different definitions of truth commissions.
- Few analyses of differences in implementation of truth commissions. One study finds that higher levels of truth commission “public-ness” is associated with subsequent democratization (Taylor and Dukalskis 2012).
- We still know little about what accounts for implementation of truth commission recommendations. Extant research finds limited impacts (Wiebelhaus-Brahm 2010; Bakiner 2014).
- Quantitative studies have used measures of democracy, such as the Polity and Freedom House indices, that do not conceptually match the dimensions of democratic governance argued to be influenced by truth commissions.

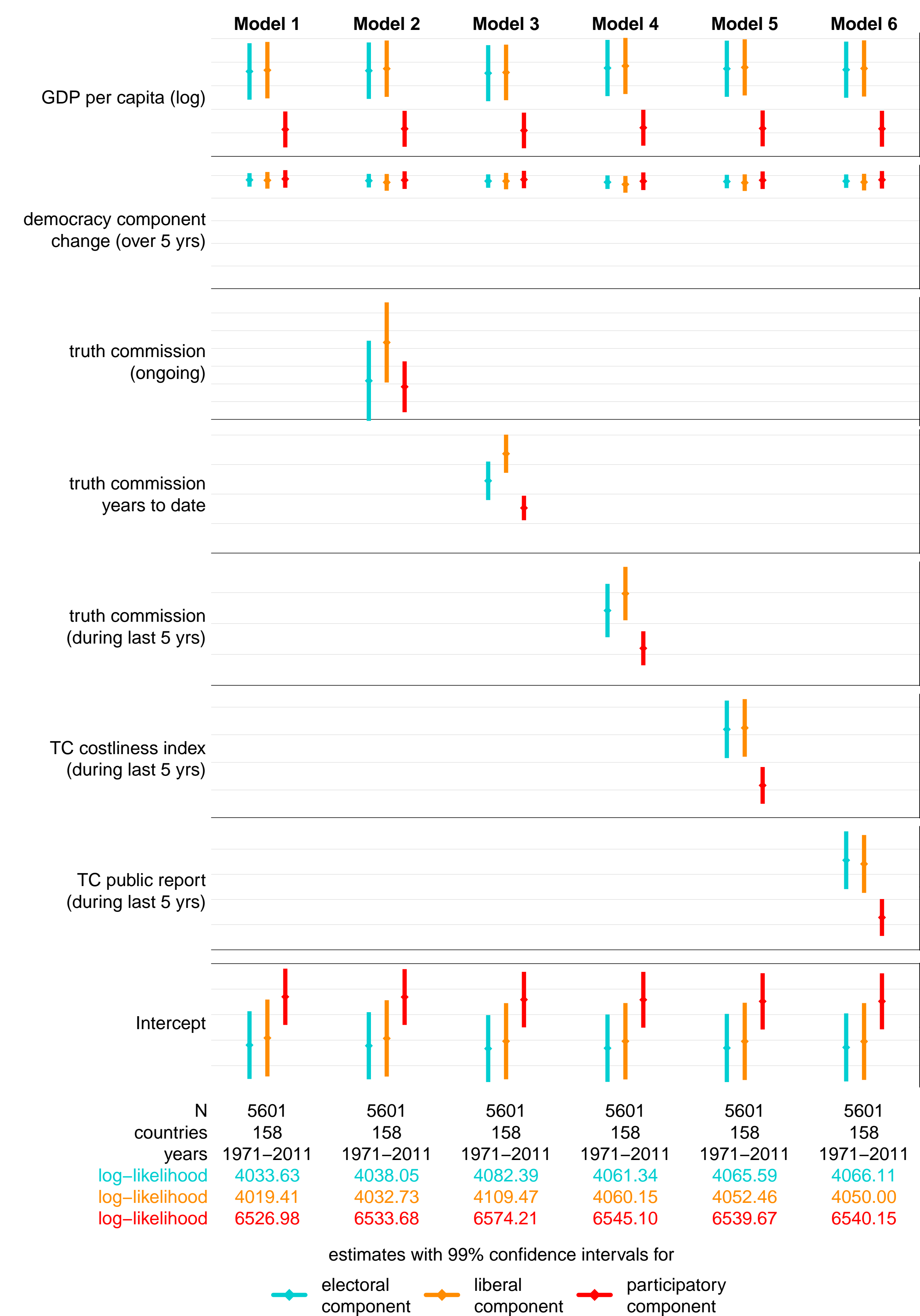
## Hypotheses

- H1 Truth commissions are associated with increased democratic participation and constraints on executive power rather than electoral contestation.
- H2 Truth commissions are associated with strengthened judicial institutions.

## Data & Methods

- Truth commissions are temporary, officially sanctioned bodies with mandates to investigate specific periods of past state abuses. Implementation quality is measured with an index proxying the costliness to perpetrators and with an indicator of whether a final report was publically available.
- The democracy component and judicial strength measures come from the Varieties of Democracy dataset.
- The analyses of democracy components control for the change of the component over the previous five years.
- The analyses of judicial institutions control for change in electoral accountability (institutions) and the level of multiparty competition (to account for the “insurance” theory of judicial strength).
- All analyses include lagged GDP per capita to account for economic wealth.
- Correlated random effects models are employed to account for the dependence of observations within country panels.

## Democracy components



	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5	Model 6
N	5601	5601	5601	5601	5601	5601
countries	158	158	158	158	158	158
years	1971–2011	1971–2011	1971–2011	1971–2011	1971–2011	1971–2011
log-likelihood	4033.63	4038.05	4082.39	4061.34	4065.59	4066.11
log-likelihood	4019.41	4032.73	4109.47	4060.15	4052.46	4050.00
log-likelihood	6526.98	6533.68	6574.21	6545.10	6539.67	6540.15

estimates with 99% confidence intervals for  
 electoral component (blue), liberal component (orange), participatory component (red)

## Findings

- As expected, ongoing truth commissions have no effect on the electoral component of democracy, but have positive effects on the liberal and participatory components. Counter to expectations, all other measures of truth commission activity are associated with increases of all three dimensions of democracy.
- Regardless of how truth commission operation is measured, truth commissions are associated with improvements in judicial strength.
- Further research needs to explain how truth commissions contribute to electoral institutions.

## Acknowledgments

I thank Geoff Dancy and colleagues for sharing their new truth commissions dataset.

## Judicial institutions



	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5	Model 6
N	5601	5601	5601	5601	5601	5601
countries	158	158	158	158	158	158
years	1971–2011	1971–2011	1971–2011	1971–2011	1971–2011	1971–2011
log-likelihood	-7006.98	-6995.28	-6974.22	-6992.01	-7001.14	-7002.35
log-likelihood	-6814.18	-6803.30	-6778.93	-6800.73	-6810.15	-6811.66
log-likelihood	-8184.25	-8163.86	-8145.37	-8152.07	-8162.52	-8164.84

estimates with 99% confidence intervals for  
 high court independence (blue), lower courts independence (orange), judicial reform (red)

## Selected References

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