ECONOMIC COUNTERCYCLICAL FISCAL POLICY AND GROWTH IN DEMOCRACIES AFTER THE 2008 RECESSION

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Abstract

After years of economic downturn and recovery, the debate over stimulus packages and countercyclical policy continues globally. Proponents of such policies claim that the various stimulus packages and policy initiatives around the globe helped bring about quicker recovery, while opponents claim that in many cases these policies brought further economic woes. This study seeks to examine the effects of stimulus packages and major countercyclical policy initiatives on economic recovery over the last six years. This study uses quantitative methods, and controls for bank leverage, population growth, and GDP per capita. The regression shows that countries that implemented major countercyclical policy initiatives grew significantly more than countries that did not, theoretically validating the use of such policies.

The 2008 financial crisis plunged the United States and the world into an economic downturn the likes of which had not been seen since the Great Depression. It was characterized by massive demand shocks, bank bailouts, widespread unemployment, and a very slow recovery for many economies worldwide. The debate has centered around how to expedite the recovery.

Internationally, and within the American political divide, the debate primarily exists between proponents of market-based procyclical economic policy and proponents of Keynesian countercyclical policy. Procyclical theories hold that government action cannot end crises in effective ways. The
only thing to do in a downturn is to reduce regulations, taxes, and government
debt to ensure that, when the recovery begins, it is free to make progress
without the government hampering growth. Countercyclical theories assume
that a government’s best response to falling consumer spending is to step in
and increase spending, thereby stimulating the economy. Now that the US has
reached the recovery stage of this financial crisis, we can examine the evidence
since 2008 to empirically test the validity of procyclical and countercyclical
theories.

This study will consider the efficacy of stimulus packages, a principal
tool of recovery for countercyclical fiscal policy. In particular, whether countries
that instituted major countercyclical policy initiatives, like stimulus packages,
in response to the 2008 crisis fared better economically than those that did not. This study will first propose that the economics behind the countercyclical
fiscal policy initiatives in democratic countries is sound, and second, that
countries that instituted such initiatives will have higher GDP growth post-
2008 than those that did not. To examine this claim, I will run a statistical
regression on GDP growth using country-years in all democracies, as defined
by Freedom House, assessing data from 2009 to 2012. I distinguish between
those nations which have instituted or continued major countercyclical policy
initiatives that year for the independent variable, and I include bank leverage,
population growth, and GDP per capita as control variables.

This study will first proceed to review existing literature on economic
recoveries and the work of other scholars on the factors which may determine
their success. Second, I will detail the underlying theory behind the factors I
chose to examine and the causal narrative for each factor. Next, I will elucidate
my hypothesis and detail the research design and methodology. Finally, the
study will conclude with an analysis of the data and summary of findings.

**Literature Review**

Current gaps in the literature on economic recovery from financial
crises arise from the present lack of major studies on the effectiveness of
countercyclical fiscal policy. The lack of such work has been particularly glaring
since the 2008 financial crisis. Much of the current literature on stimulus
packages discusses how to make the policies more effective, but comparatively
little has been written empirically on the outcomes of these policies.

Countercyclical policy is considered to have a positive effect on
economic recovery among most literature on the subject, with a few notable
exceptions. A 2008 report (Spilimbergo et al.) on fiscal policy and worldwide
recessions argues that, among the economies with the greatest demand drop resulting from the crisis, a timely, substantial, and targeted stimulus package is the best way to achieve full economic recovery. Drawing upon evidence from prior financial meltdowns like the Great Depression on the 1930s, the East Asian financial crisis of 1997 in Japan and Korea, and the Nordic crisis of 1990-1994, the authors argue that an “early, strong, and carefully thought out fiscal stimulus” is the best way for a nation to succeed in “rescuing the financial sector and increasing demand” (Spilimbergo et al. 2008, 12). Facets of these policies include increased infrastructure maintenance spending, expansion of targeted transfer payments such as unemployment benefits, and temporary reductions in consumption tax. These proposals are also touched on in a 2009 paper about the United States’ “road to recovery” after the recession. The paper argues that substantial restructuring and stimulating of the financial sector should be a major part of recovery plans, especially in countries with low imports to GDP ratios. (Zhang and Zhang 2009, 7) Many of the major democracies affected by the crisis, including the United States, France, and Germany, fit this economic profile.

A 2012 paper (Armingeon) similarly argues that while the default reaction to such downturns in a crisis is a mild and only partially effective expansionary fiscal policy, certain countries and governments break this mold with strongly countercyclical policies, causing major economic rebounds in the short run. However, this only tends to occur when there are not “lengthy negotiations or significant compromises between governing parties with different views on economic and fiscal policy” in the course of policymaking (Armingeon 2012, 9). While examples of such situations come primarily from authoritarian systems, de facto one-party democratic systems can and have implemented extended stimulus and recovery programs. This argument assumes that countercyclical policy alone leads to recovery but the importance of a unified government in leading to better recovery deserves further examination.

Another major factor in economic recovery is the role, size, and effectiveness of regulation regimes within the financial sectors of economies. The regulations frameworks of many major economies, particularly those which permitted high levels of public debt as in Europe, were flawed leading up to the 2008 crisis. (Porokowski 2011) Some mechanisms have since been proposed to address these flaws. Porokowski finds that countries that adopted regulatory regimes which monitored risky or overleveraging behavior by banks, such as the Czech Republic, Poland, and Norway, weathered the crisis without major downturns. Moreover, countries that commit to reforming their
regulatory regimes without major public debt increases recover more quickly (Porokowski 2012, 194). The role of effective regulation and the scope of regulatory regimes on economic recovery also deserves further examination.

Credit accessibility and availability, an important driver of consumption spending and household debt, was greatly reduced during the 2008 crisis. Not only is credit one of the most important aspects of a growing economy, lackthereof is also a major hinderance to recovering economies. Biggs et al. (2010) sought to explain and debunk the theory of a recovery in which credit does not also re-expand to pre-crisis levels, also known as the “Phoenix Miracle.” While prior research compared GDP with the current stock of credit during a single moment of recovery, this study examined the growth and flow of credit instead. The authors found that GDP growth recovery is correlated and temporally associated with a recovery in credit levels (Biggs et al. 2010, 16-17). In other words, credit growth is an important factor to economic recovery.

While the growth of credit during recovery can be positive, in some cases, and certainly in the case of the 2008 financial crisis, it can be highly problematic. According to Jorda et al. (2011), not only are financial crisis recessions simply more costly, but more credit-intensive economic expansion can also lead to a slower recovery. Assessing data on dozens of countries from 1870 to 2008, the authors conclude that a major factor in economic recovery is the extent to which credit played a role in the expansion before the crash (Jorda et al. 2011, 38). This finding is also supported by an IMF report that assessed data from the 2008 crisis, concluding that countries with larger booms in bank credit before the crisis generally experience deeper busts and slower recoveries afterward (Aisen and Franken 2010, 25).

The factors reviewed in the literature of countercyclical policy are innately intertwined. Fiscal stimuli are more likely with unity governments and one-party systems, uncertainty is derived from non-unity governments and regulatory systems being changed, and credit recovery varies based on how dependent the pre-recession economy was on credit. While many factors can potentially affect economic recovery and the efficacy of stimulus packages, there have not been any major post-2008 crisis studies on what the key factors are in determining recovery rates, in part because the global economy has not yet entirely recovered from the recession. This study aims to fill that gap by considering what I believe to be the most important individual factors: stimulus packages, bank leverage, as well as possible confounding factors such as population growth and GDP per capita. This study will examine these
factors and attempt to determine how economies can expedite the process of economic recovery.

Theory

Fiscal policy has been a popular and effective tool used by governments to influence economies since John Maynard Keynes popularized the strategy of attempting to counteract and thereby alleviate economic contractions at the macroeconomic level. Especially during the 2008 crisis, countercyclical policies were most visible manifest in stimulus packages worldwide. In the United States, there has been a major debate over the effectiveness of the 2009 stimulus package enacted by President Obama. In order to understand the impact of these policies and advance the debate, it is first necessary to understand the theory behind them.

When an economy crashes due to major shock, such as the bursting of the US housing bubble in 2008, a number of effects often follow. First, banks that have loaned out large sums of money suddenly find that too few entities can afford to repay them. The banks therefore stop giving out loans, causing businesses to lack the credit needed to invest in their own production and growth. At the same time, individuals who have defaulted on their loans have greatly reduced purchasing power. Similarly, struggling and overleveraged banks are unable to grow their portfolios.

Accordingly, overall demand in the economy soon drops significantly. With fewer people buying goods and corporations investing in their production, firms are forced to cut both jobs and output, leading to unemployment and ultimately lowering consumer demand even further. This spiral can continue for years if left unchecked. An economic stimulus package aims to supplement falling consumer demand with increased government demand, jump-starting the economy by injecting a large amount of money through temporarily increased government spending. This continues until all the debt left over from the crash is paid off, banks become solvent once again, and consumer spending rises back to normal levels.

What this concept means is that governments that institute major stimulus packages should have faster recovery and GDP growth rates than those that do not. This effect should be evident for all years after the package is enacted, not just the year that it goes into effect. In addition, the effect of such a stimulus should theoretically be greater than the cost of the stimulus package. While Keynesian economic theories say that it works, the evidence
since 2008 must corroborate the story in order to ensure that the theory is sound in this particular case.

**Hypothesis and Research Design**

The main hypothesis of this paper is that democratic countries that implemented major stimulus packages or countercyclical policies will grow at faster rates on average than countries that did not, while controlling for aggregated bank leverage ratios from 2007, GDP per capita, and population growth.

The independent variable of the hypothesis is whether or not a country enacted a major stimulus package or countercyclical policy after the crisis began. For each country year, the data table specifies whether or not, in the current year or before, there was a major countercyclical fiscal policy initiative. The dependent variable is the growth rate of GDP in each country after the crisis. Major stimulus packages are defined as specific legislation passed to stimulate demand and growth that exceeds 1% of GDP. This figure will reduce interference from routine spending increases while still maintaining a large sample size of stimulus programs. Data on the stimulus packages will be drawn from news media or public releases and OECD statistics on GDP. The annual GDP growth rates will be analyzed, starting from 2009. A democracy is defined as any country rated “Free” by Freedom House in their 2012 Democracy Index. Each country year will have one data point, 1 or 0 respectively, for whether or not it enacted a major stimulus package that year or previously.

To increase the validity of conclusions, this study will control for a number of variables in the statistical regression. The first such variable is bank leverage ratios. The 2007 aggregated bank leverage ratios among the selected cases show the ratio between liquidated assets and loans for each country in that year. In other words, if a bank loans out 5 dollars for every dollar it has in current assets, the leverage ratio of that bank is 5. Once a credit bubble bursts, many of the loans a bank funds do not get repaid. If the leverage ratio is too high, it becomes difficult for a bank to cover the losses on the defaulted loans. The more leveraged banks are, the longer the recovery period needed to return to solid financial ground and begin lending again. Accordingly, the pre-crisis leverage ratios should theoretically be a significant factor in the GDP growth for each country year. The bank leverage ratios are taken from the research of Kalemli-Ozcan et al. (2012). Each country will have the same leverage value for all 4 observation periods, as it is only the pre-crisis leverage peak of 2007
that is expected to have an impact on recovery.

A second control variable is the population growth of each country year, with data from the World Bank online database as well as the CIA’s published statistics for 2012. People produce goods and services, and it seems intuitive to say that more people will produce more goods and services. As a country expands, either through childbirth or more importantly immigration, its GDP generally expands to accommodate the increased workforce as well. Because GDP is a measure of all goods and services produced each year, and since a larger population should almost automatically produce more goods and services, varying levels of population growth could have the effect of swaying the data and should be controlled for.

A last control variable is the wealth of a country, operationalized as GDP per capita. Richer countries tend to experience different effects from economic policies, and the concept of economies of scale implies that the larger an economy is, the more effective a package over 1% of GDP would be at instituting growth. Additionally, richer economies that have already achieved technological productivity gains and have higher levels of capital generally have lower growth than poorer countries, as basic increases in technological spread or capital levels have decreasing marginal as a percentage for GDP. Due to both confounding pathways, I will control for wealth in order to get a clearer picture of the effects of stimulus packages across all economies.

**Cases and observations**

The cases selected are all democracies, as defined by Freedom House, and for whom the relevant data is available from the 2008 financial crisis to the present. This is because democratic countries are the countries with the resources, developed economy, and effective political systems to weigh the option of whether or not to implement a stimulus package. Democracies are also much more likely to have the financial resources to do so, as well as to possess the developed financial sectors impacted by the 2008 financial crisis. Additionally, democracies are much more likely than non-democracies to have accurate, reliable statistics. The study will cover 87 country cases, covering a range of recovery rates, leveraging ratios, uncertainty in economic policy, and stimulus packages. Because bank leverage ratios and uncertainty data is not available for all country years, the number of observations is adjusted accordingly for those two variables. Only country-level data on each of the variables is considered.
Method of Analysis

Due to the large volume of data and cases, quantitative methods are used for analysis. To test the hypothesis, I first use a bivariate regression between major countercyclical policy initiative and GDP growth. I follow with a multivariate regression including the aforementioned control variables to ensure the findings are not skewed by confounding factors.

Data Analysis

For the first regression, analyzing only stimulus and its effect on GDP growth without factoring in control variables, the B value shows that on average, countries that implemented major stimulus packages or countercyclical policies grew about 2.14 percent more per year than those that did not. The correlation is highly significant, with a P value = .005. This corroborates the hypothesis that countercyclical fiscal policy initiatives bolstered recovery rates following the 2008 financial crisis.

The second regression, controlling for bank leverage, population growth, and GDP per capita, further strengthens the validity of the hypothesis. However, the regression also contradicts some of the arguments behind the control variables themselves. The additional variables actually increased the effect of a stimulus package. In this regression, countries that initiated stimulus packages actually grew 2.38% faster on average from 2009 to 2012 than those that did not. The significance of this correlation also improved, with a P value = .003, expressing a confidence level of over 99%.

Some findings merit further consideration. The coefficients on bank leverage ratios are negatively correlated with higher 2007 leverage ratios and GDP growth from 2009-2012. Each unit increase in the leverage ratio corresponded to a .083% drop in GDP growth, a seemingly small correlation. However, given an average leverage ratio of around 14, with some ratios in Germany and the UK going as high as 30, this can account for much of the difference between the first and second regressions’ demonstrated effect of countercyclical policy on GDP growth from 2009-2012. However, this correlation is insignificant, with a P value = .168, and therefore does not support the theory behind controlling for bank leverage ratios.

Population growth was more significant and adhered more closely to the hypothesis. Population growth even outperformed my expectations as a factor in GDP growth and economic recovery. Each additional percent of population growth corresponded to a 1.459% increase in GDP growth, with a P
value = .004, indicating strong confidence in this correlation. Failing to adjust for population growth accounts for much of the divergence between the first and second regressions and the effect of stimuli on GDP growth.

GDP per capita had a negative impact on growth, with each additional $1,000 per capita corresponding to a .046 drop in the growth rate. However, GDP per capita was narrowly insignificant, with a P value of .073, just above the .05 significance threshold.

The following model summarizes the impact of countercyclical policy in explaining the variation in GDP recovery rates after 2008.

The adjusted R-Square measure shows that the model can account for about 12.1% of the variation in GDP growth among democracies from 2009 to 2012. Considering the high number of factors that influence growth and the high volatility of growth after the crisis, this R-Squared value does support the validity of the model and thus the validity of the results.

Conclusions

There is a strong, significant, and positive correlation between stimulus package implementation and faster recovery after the 2008 financial crisis. Controlling for population growth, bank leverage rates, and GDP per capita, countercyclical stimulus packages increased growth by about 2.4% annually. Additionally, this model explains around 12% of the variation in post-2008 GDP growth rates. The model itself is clearly not all-encompassing. However, these policies remain highly effective tools to increase GDP growth during economic recoveries and should be considered by policymakers following financial crises. Overall, the hypothesis is supported by the data. Economies that implement stimulus packages grew faster, controlling for other factors, after the financial crisis than those that did not.

Due to the constraints of only accounting for 12% of the variation, the implications of this study are not wide in scope but may advance responses to future financial crises. In the aftermath of the 2008 crisis, there is evidence to conclude that instituting stimulus packages over 1% of GDP is a significant positive factor in recovery. This study can serve to counter critics who claim stimuli categorically cannot improve GDP growth. This is not to imply that all stimulus packages are good, or to imply that countercyclical policy is the “right” choice for any country undergoing a financial crisis. Rather, this study is simply exhibiting empirical evidence that post-2008, countries that implemented such packages grew faster on average.
Nevertheless, this study has considerable limitations. First and foremost, while 1% of GDP seemed to be an effective cutoff for the countercyclical policy size, it is possible that another threshold might be more effective in distinguishing between major stimulus packages and smaller policy initiatives. Another factor the study did not incorporate is the effect of economic interactions between countries. Countries with high levels of trade can impact growth among each other, and a country with especially high or especially low growth can distort the growth of its trading partners. There may also be ways to improve the operationalization of control variables. For instance, the released aggregate bank leverage data may not be completely comprehensive or accurate. There was also not enough data or faith in the theory to include the effects of policy uncertainty, and only having data for certain countries on leverage may have skewed the results.

Future research should focus on additional factors that may affect economic recovery and work to integrate research on each individual factor into an overall study across multiple financial crises. Additionally, certain factors identified in the literature review, such as regulatory regimes or uncertainty, have little to no data available to date. As this data becomes available, it could shed much more light on the effect those factors have on recovery and growth.
Bibliography


VISION TO PRODUCT: INCONSISTENCIES IN THEORIES USED IN FAILED PEACEBUILDING PROGRAMS

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Abstract

This paper identifies and provides an initial analysis of the problem of mismatched theories in peacebuilding programs. This problem occurs when a project is developed by a group that subscribes to one theory of peacebuilding, but is then executed by a group that subscribes to a different theory. A single case study is chosen in order to analyze both the occurrence of the problem and its effects. The Afghan Civilian Assistance Program (ACAP) follows the simple formula of finding Afghan civilians adversely affected by conflict and offering assistance in order to help them rebuild their lives. The program was envisioned and funded by the U.S. Congress and executed by the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), but the way in which it was implemented was highly affected by the differences in understanding of peacebuilding theory between Congress and USAID. Namely, ACAP was a program best suited for identity- and population-based approaches to peacebuilding, but the organizations that developed it supplemented it to governance-based peacebuilding and in doing so limited its potential.

Introduction

This paper will outline the new concept of mismatched theories and will test its explanatory potential on the case study of the Afghan Civilian Assistance Program (ACAP). While the concept of mismatched theories is new, it builds upon established literature that concentrates on the effects

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that theories have on how peacebuilding programs are implemented. The foundation for the concept of mismatched theories is that organizations and programs that work in the field rely on theories of peacebuilding in order to make sense of the problems they seek to address. Theories often start as explicitly stated scholarly theories. There are many scholarly theories of peacebuilding available, and three of these will be elaborated on later in this paper: Governance theory, which focuses on strengthening rule of law; Identity theory, which focuses on helping disadvantaged groups and ending adverse power structures; and Population theory, which concentrates on satiating potentially volatile youth bulges.

Organizations tend to subscribe to one or two scholarly theories of peacebuilding, but they often interpret them in such a way that transforms them into a unique organizational theory. These organizational theories often appear in mission statements, but more importantly they strongly affect the ways in which the organization interprets problems and implements programs. As a definition, the problem of mismatched theories occurs when a program is developed according to a specific scholarly theory, but is implemented by an organization that operates under a contradictory organizational theory.

This paper hypothesizes that mismatched theories can cause organizations to implement programs ineffectively through misinterpretation of the program’s purpose. Since the concept is new, the scope of the hypothesis is restricted to an initial investigation into the problem of mismatched theories. Analyses that make claims about the prevalence of the problem, or analyses that claim certain organizations are more prone to the problem than others, are beyond the scope of this paper. However, such analyses are important and the hope is that this paper, after highlighting the problem, will lead to further research on the issue.

Even though the importance of theories and their effects on programs are well documented, the literature on the problem of mismatched theories is small to non-existent, which can be blamed on the infrequency with which the problem occurs. However, rarity of a problem does not mean that analysis is unnecessary and there is evidence that this issue could become more common in the future. The issue is uncommon due to the fact that, generally, organizations develop their own programs. As such, the programs they develop are inspired by their own organizational theory. Thus there is no mismatch in theory between the development and the implementation of the program. However, there are organizations that implement programs developed by other groups. One such organization is USAID, which operates based on specific organizational theories but also often implements programs
developed by Congress (programs whose development are thus inspired by the scholarly theories held by their supporters in Congress). The issue has the potential to become more common due to the existence and growth of NGOs that fund the programs of other NGOs such as the Clinton Global Initiative and the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. The problem arises when the funding group, and thus the developing group, operates based on a different organizational theory than the implementing group.

An overview of the literature on the importance of theories in regards to the effectiveness of peacebuilding programs is needed before detailing the scholarly theories of peacebuilding that are relevant to ACAP. The methodology section explains the reasons for the selection of ACAP as a single case study and provides an overview of the relevant variables. For the analysis section, the history of ACAP will be examined in relation to how the theories informed all stages of development and execution of the program. The analysis continues with an explanation of why ACAP is considered to be a failed program while also providing alternative explanations for ACAP’s failure. Afterwards, the paper will continue with an in-depth discussion of how the mismatching of theories in the different stages of ACAP’s development and implementation negatively affected the program. The paper will conclude with a discussion of the potential breadth of the problem, as well as avenues for future research.

**Literature Review**

Unfortunately, the literature on mismatched theories is small to non-existent, but there are areas of literature that this concept does build upon. The importance of theory in determining the effectiveness of peacebuilding programs provides a good starting point. A substantial amount of literature developed in the past decade specifically investigates the effects of Western framing of non-Western security problems. These framings can then influence programs in negative ways and can cause unanticipated secondary effects. This literature review aims to situate the wider debate of which USAID is a part. In addition, by providing an overview of the ways in which theories impact the effectiveness of peacebuilding programs, this paper hopes to set the stage for a discussion of how mismatched theories can have an impact on program effectiveness. Next, I will provide an overview of the potential scholarly theories, and their associated organizational theories, relevant to ACAP. Theories that were used to develop the program, and those the program was implemented under, are both discussed in this section. In order to provide context on the specificity of organizational theories, the differing interpretations of one
scholarly theory of peacebuilding by two separate organizations (USAID and UNDP) are dissected in turn.

Importance of Theories in Determining the Effectiveness of Peacebuilding Programs

When it comes to critiques of Western theories and their impacts on the effectiveness of peacebuilding, a substantial number of scholars start their critique from a single point of departure: the concentration on the theory of the Weberian state. To understand why this can affect programs, it is important to first identify what the Weberian state implies for peacebuilding programs. One of the most commonly cited definitions of the Weberian state is that which “claims the monopoly of the legitimate use of physical force with a given territory” (Weber 1919, 26). Thus, as conflict constitutes a form of physical force, it is the duty of the Weberian state to suppress that force. As such, coming from the viewpoint of the Weberian state, the proliferation of armed groups falls under the jurisdiction of the state.

In the post 9/11 era, as William Miles explains, the purpose of U.S. aid to the Middle East and Africa has shifted “from counter-Communism to counter-Terrorism,” complete with an “unprecedented level of overlap between defense and development missions,” aimed primarily at increasing the capacity of the local state to maintain their monopoly of force (Miles 2012, 28). However, some scholars argue that Weberian states may not be as effective or as applicable to Africa as they were in their original European context and are in fact failing to perform their expected Weberian functions (Obadare and Wale 2010; Verhoeven 2009). At a basic level, this already poses some problems regarding the U.S.’s treatment of the state as the primary point of contact for stability promotion, but more importantly it provides the basis from which other authors have constructed their arguments.

This concentration on the Weberian state as the guarantor of stability permits some states to perform to the expectations of the U.S. in order to further their own interests. This paper will refer to these states as performative states. There are many examples that fall under this category. For example, Cédric Jourde examined the ways in which numerous small neoauthoritarian states “performed” according to U.S. conceptualization of the state. Small states are highly subject to international pressure, he explains, making them a good example of how the states react to such pressure.

Jourde found that small neoauthoritarian states managed not only to stave off international pressure for democratization, but actually managed to increase authoritarian action in some instances by manipulating the way in
which the West viewed the country. Jourde used the case studies of Guinea and Mauritania to show that small regimes could perform heavy-handed repression of potential opposition groups by labeling them as “alleged ‘Islamists,’ ‘warlords,’ and other transnational ‘subversive threats’” (Jourde 2007, 481). Not only did these countries not elicit disapproval from the international community, but actually received support for their actions and, in the eyes of the West, the “performances [defined] the regime as a ‘provider of regional stability’” (Jourde 2007, 489).

The characteristics of performative states are not necessarily limited to small neoauthoritarian actors. Andrew Walker, on behalf of the U.S. Institute of Peace, investigated a similar problem in the large and mostly democratic state of Nigeria. In a situation akin to that outlined by Jourde, the threat of Boko Haram, a domestic militant Islamist group in northeastern Nigeria, was used in order to gain power and silence opponents. Goodluck Jonathan, the President of Nigeria, has been shown to inflate the perceived reach of Boko Haram and “painted a picture of a puppet group that was being used by aggrieved northern politicians to bring down his southern government” (Walker 2012, 7). In addition, Jonathan has “played up the connections between the group and international terrorism,” despite the fact that Boko Haram is known to be a local group with few, if any, international ties (Walker 2012, 1).

Both Walker and LeVan state the Boko Haram emerged because of, and was then radicalized by, grievances engendered by the Nigerian State (Walker 2012; LeVan 2013). It is important to realize that in Nigeria, as in many other countries, the state is not necessarily the maintainer of peace and public goods that the Weberian state is supposed to be. Instead, these states consider “excess and abjection [as] integral to the constitution and production of state power and social (re)action” (Obadare and Adebanwi 2010, 23). Negative encounters between the state and the populace create an interesting side-effect that is often overlooked in conventional discourses of stability: a desire to create bottom-up sources of governance to provide services that traditionally fall under the purview of the state. In Boko Haram’s case, the goal was initially “to set up a state-like organization ... [to be] parallel to the federal government,” but the extrajudicial excess that inspired Boko Haram then proceeded to lead to its radicalization (Walker 2012, 9). The case of Boko Haram is not unique but it does provide a model example of bottom-up solutions of failed governance being radicalized due to coercive action from the state. Actions that can then be normalized in the view of the international community through performances that portray said action as integral to improving stability.
The focus on top-down approaches and the viewpoint of the Weberian state inflates the role of the state as the sole guarantor of stability, causing what Verhoeven calls the “Orthodox Failed States Narrative,” which he says “systemically equates failed states with chronic anarchy and the exportation of terrorism and instability” (Verhoeven 2009, 405). Verhoeven suggests that parallel systems of governance are inevitable and should be worked with, but says that the narrow viewpoint of the West dismisses them because they do not fit into the conventional top-down state approach. In the case of Somalia’s Union of Islamic Courts (UIC), an initially non-violent force for governance that aimed to fix the failure of the state was perceived as a threat by the state in Mogadishu. This was exacerbated when Ethiopia used the dominant narrative to portray the UIC as an example of an Islamic terrorist group and through attacking the formerly peacefully UIC, turned the group into the militant al Shabaab (Verhoeven 2009, 411). In a world of fracturing governance, where the state is increasingly losing its monopoly on the functions of governance, Verhoeven argues that it is dangerous and counter-productive to fight potential sources of alternative governance and focus solely on the state.

Background of Theories Relevant to ACAP

The literature shows that theory can have practical implications for policies and programs. This section reviews three scholarly theories of peacebuilding: governance, identity, and population. Governance theory is of particular importance because it is the scholarly theory on which the Office of Transition Initiatives (OTI), the group that originally implemented ACAP, based their organizational theory. Identity theory is also reviewed, as following the original proposal and funding of ACAP, the program’s proponents argued that it should be used to advance the position of women in Afghanistan, yet this vision never took full effect. Population theory is a scholarly theory supported heavily by USAID and the theory itself proposes solutions that ACAP is particularly suited to implement. However, two differing interpretations of population-based peacebuilding are analyzed in this paper: the organizational theory of USAID, which is based more on governance, and the organizational theory of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), which is based more on identity. An analysis of this distinction is key to elucidating the nuanced differences that can exist between similar organization theories.

According to the theorist Roland Paris, governance theory is a critique of older peacebuilding strategies. He states that the majority of peacebuilding organizations in his time, the late 1990s, partook too heavily in the scholarly theories of liberal internationalism, specifically the belief that creating market
democracies would automatically lead to peace. While he agrees with the theoretical aspects of liberal internationalism, he disagrees with the way its proponents have implemented it. Organizations of that time acted as if development was a linear evolution into market democracy, and thus all a developing country required was a push in the right direction (Paris 1997, 56-58).

Paris put the destabilizing effects of democratization first and center in his scholarly theory. He pushed for “strategic liberalization,” a more gradual phasing in of market democracy that would limit the destabilizing effects of democratization (Paris 1997, 58). In 2005, Hurwitz and Studdard echoed Paris and argued “the rule of law should not be regarded as a subset of security objectives or as a purely technical component of development programs, but should rather be seen as an integral element of peacebuilding strategies” (Hurwitz & Studdard 2005, 11).

Peacebuilding in Afghanistan has reflected the advice Paris offered with his “strategic liberalization.” In lieu of rushing the creation of a market democracy, elections were delayed “until passions [had] cooled,” and peacebuilding efforts were extended beyond 1997’s “norm of one to three years, to approximately seven to nine years,” or, in the case of Afghanistan, even longer (Paris 1997, 58). One last bit of advice from Paris, calling for the creation of “effective, central coordinating bodies for peacebuilding operations,” This came to fruition in the form of USAID’s Office of Transition Initiatives (OTI), the group that implemented the Afghan Transition Initiative (ATI), the direct precursor to ACAP. As a group whose organizational theory is based on the scholarly theory of governance, OTI’s mission statement includes the following: “OTI works on the ground to provide fast, flexible, short-term assistance targeted at key political transition and stabilization needs” (USAID 2009, 1).

Identity theory provides a more complete understanding of conflict and is connected to the school of Social Constructivism. Identity theory provides a full explanation of why conflict occurs, stating that a discourse develops in society allowing people to “securitize” groups, ideas, actions, etc. This is the process through which actors create biased lens where the “securitized” concept is always perceived to be a threat. Other less malevolent, yet still adverse, perceptions can arise and create social structures and power imbalances that cause or exacerbate conflict. Identity-based peacebuilding revolves around these socially constructed perceptions and structures, and attempts to mitigate or transform them.

Much of the literature on Identity theory centers on gender and how it
interplays with conflict. Amani El Jack, in conjunction with the Bridge Institute of Development Studies, explored the ways in which armed conflict creates gender-specific disadvantages, most often for women, and how peacebuilding efforts can address such problems. Jack states that gender inequality stems from “power imbalances in social structures” that are pervasive within societies. Armed conflict in particular can further entrench these structures and funnel problems through them causing increased inequality (Jack 2003, 3).

Ideally peacebuilding should be conscious of these structures and the effects they have, either offering specialized support or going as far as changing the social structures in question. However, many governments, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and international organizations fail to take gender into account, either by treating everyone the same or ignoring the problems women face, ultimately furthering gender stereotypes or failing to consider “women’s relative inequality in the context of gender relations” (Jack 2003, 3).

One particular peacebuilding strategy for identity, gender mainstreaming, focuses on putting gender front and center in peacebuilding operations. This strategy stems from critical theory, or the idea that the only way to bring about change is by changing the way people think. The hope is that by forcing gender issues into the open, civil society will become more aware and begin changing the core gender-constractive social structures. Sumie Nakaya puts forth a path for carrying out such visions, proposing that gender mainstreaming must happen at two levels: “postconflict institutional frameworks and the structural base of power” (Nakaya 2003, 472).

However, good intentions in tackling gender inequality can often go awry. Nakaya’s aforementioned article is a scathing review of organizations that believe simply bringing women to negotiating tables will solve everything. The bitter reality is that the inclusion of women at peacebuilding talks is too often simply a political move, showing quick and cheap commitment to women but then reverting to old ways afterwards (Nakaya 2003, 471). Another worry is that the organizations swooping in to help women abroad are still bound to Western stereotypes of gender. In 2002, the anthropologist Lila Abu-Lughod noted that the rhetoric of liberating Afghan women could cause problems of its own by securitizing the identity of Afghan women, thus hampering the pursuit of understanding in the region and making true change difficult (Abu-Lughod 2002, 783).

USAID, especially through its Youth and Conflict Toolkit, offers another scholarly theory for peacebuilding. This Population theory concerns
the destabilizing effect that a “disproportionately large youth cohort relative to the rest of the population” can have on a country (USAID 2005, 3). In some ways, this cannot be seen as an independent scholarly theory because it does not explain fully the causes of violence; it merely brings to light a destabilizing factor. The implications that USAID mentions, such as the strain on public services and institutions, can be seen as an addendum to governance-based programs such as those implemented by OTI. In the toolkit, USAID specifically mentions that a youth bulge is linked with conflict only when the country is also faced with “poor governance, a declining economy, or ... a high degree of ethnic or religious polarity” (USAID 2005, 3).

However, different organizations can have differing interpretations of even a single scholarly theory as it related to the framework for their organizational theory. This is particularly important to investigate as the present study seeks to examine the effects of USAID’s specific interpretations of scholarly theory and how those interpretations affect programs. Throughout the toolkit created by USAID, there is a theme of youth causing destabilization. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) looks at youth bulges from a slightly different standpoint. They chastise what they call the “securitization of youth,” saying that simply concentrating on the destabilizing aspects of a large youth population detracts from the potential good youth populations can create. Where USAID’s population-based organizational theory stems mostly from Governance theory, UNDP’s organizational theory stems mostly from Identity theory, going so far as to explore the concept of youth as a social construct and analyzing how it interacts with gender (Ebata et al. 2006).

Since USAID’s and UNDP’s organizational theories of youth draw from different base scholarly theories, the suggestions they put forth diverge. Both agree that youth training, political participation, and gender sensitivity are important, but where USAID’s organizational theory is aimed more at stabilizing the youth cohort, UNDP takes a more introspective approach. Where USAID asks for increased youth voting, UNDP warns that “youth wings of political parties are simply tools to amass political power” and suggests that organizations should strive not just for participation, but also for meaningful participation (Ebata et al. 2006, 75). Most tellingly, USAID states that “ideally, programs should be designed as ‘feeders’ into political, economic, and social institutions for adults,” whereas UNDP argues that “for maximum effectiveness, youth participation should go beyond consultation to real, meaningful involvement where young people are viewed not only as
beneficiaries or targets of assistance but as decision-makers” (USAID 2005, 14; Ebata et al. 2006, 76).

**Methodology**

**Hypothesis**

Mismatched theories can make organizations implement programs ineffectively by causing them to misinterpret the purpose of the program. Since the concept of mismatched theories is new, the scope of the hypothesis is restricted to an initial investigation into the problem of mismatched theories. Analyses that try to make claims about the prevalence of the problem, or analyses that claim that certain organizations are more prone to the problem than others, are beyond the scope of this paper. This paper concentrates on finding an instance that highlights the potential possibility of mismatched theories and then provides insight into the potential process by which mismatched theories negatively impact program success.

To isolate the potential effects of the problem of mismatched theories, this paper examines a single case study where the issue is present and then provides qualitative analysis in order to determine what effects the mismatching of theories had on the effectiveness of the program. This paper does not aim to prove that all mismatching of theories will cause problems, but rather aims to see whether the issue, which will likely become more common in the future, is one of concern. Following the initial analysis, the paper discusses the mechanisms by which mismatched theories are most likely to operate.

**Case Selection**

The requirements of case selection in this paper are twofold. First, the case must be considered a failure for the analysis to investigate the causes of program failure. Second, there should be potential for the problem to be caused by mismatched theories: i.e., the creator of the program should be different than the implementer of the program. If this paper aimed to state that mismatched theories are endemic, or attempted to claim that certain organizations on average suffer the problem more than others, or even tried to make other general claims, then multiple case studies would be necessary. However, since this paper only attempts to make an initial foray into the issue and aims to test whether or not mismatched theories could be a problem, a single case study will suffice.

The Afghan Civilian Assistance Program (ACAP) was chosen for this analysis due to the acceptance of the program as being a failure (criterion
1), as well as the disconnect between Congress’ initial idea for the program and the way in which it has been implemented by USAID (criterion 2). The previous literature has focused on negligence and incompetence as the causes of the program’s failure, but for the purposes of this paper, the factors leading up to said negligence and incompetence are more relevant. Public records and a series of reports will be used to analyze the history of ACAP and how organizational and scholarly theories affected each stage of the program’s development and subsequent implementation.

Discussion of Variables

In order to support the hypothesis, the case study must provide clear evidence that the program’s failure is caused by mismatching of theories. The independent variable for this analysis is the existence of mismatched theories in the program’s creation and implementation. This independent variable will be investigated through analysis of the program’s initial creation and implementation. If scholarly theories can be identified that inform the development of the program, and an organizational theory of the implementing group can also be identified, but the organizational theory does not match up with the scholarly theory that led to the program’s development, then the program will be said to have mismatched theories.

The dependent variable concerns the success or failure of the program. For this analysis, it is important to differentiate between proximate and root causes of failure. The idea is that the root cause of mismatched theories can lead to poor implementation of the program, which will manifest as a series of proximate causes, such as mismanagement, negligence, or misinterpretation of the program mission. As such, an analysis of the effects of the independent variable on the dependent variable will concentrate solely on how mismatched theories influence the proximate causes of the failure of the program.

Analysis of ACAP

Existing Explanations for the Failure of ACAP

The external scholarly literature has generally not engaged with ACAP, but within USAID, the failure has been well discussed. In the Final Project Evaluation Report for Afghan Civilian Assistance Program (ACAP), a report filed on behalf of USAID, Belquis Ahmadi determined that “ACAP is a very necessary and crucial ingredient to help bring stability to victims of military incidents,” but found that the program is “plagued by a number of issues that negatively impact its mission; ranging from lack of sufficiently trained staff, to
incidents of corrupt practices, to slow identification of beneficiaries, barriers to the timely delivery of assistance, and quality monitoring” (Ahmadi et al. 2010, 28). Overall, the proximate causes of ACAP’s failure were determined to be caused by negligence and incompetence.

Unfortunately, proximate causes are not enough and further investigation of root causes is necessary. Specifically, what caused the negligence and incompetence that led to the failure of ACAP? Scholars and investigative journalists alike have pointed to systemic problems with USAID that led to the failure of programs in Afghanistan, including corruption, prevalence of non-accountable and inefficient contracting services, and general incompetence (Brinkley 2013; Wolverson 2007). Another possibility for USAID’s failures is lack of accountability to the people they are helping, a problem that has been brought into the standard discourses of aid by William Easterly, who stated that “lack of feedback [from recipient to implementers] is one of the most crucial flaws in foreign aid” (Easterly 2006, 15).

However, the available explanations do not necessarily rule out the potential influence of mismatched theories. This claim is especially applicable to the most common explanations of USAID’s failures, most of which could be considered proximate causes (like negligence, incompetence, etc.) that are the result of broader root causes, which could include mismatching theories. With those ideas in mind, it is important to go over the history of ACAP in order to better understand its creation and implementation.

History of ACAP in Relation to Peacebuilding Theories

The goals of ACAP have changed slightly over the years, but the general idea has remained the same: find Afghan citizens hurt by conflict and help them. ACAP functioned as a “no-blame” program, whether the civilians were hurt by international or insurgent forces, ACAP provided assistance without focusing on why or how the incidents occurred (USAID 2011). According to their 2011 Fact Sheet, USAID lists its activities as the following:

- Distribute standard kit containing items for the home, children’s education, and tailoring supplies
- Distribute livelihood support kit from one of the following beneficiaries’ choices: grocery, rural livelihoods, haberdashery
- Liaise with and involve a variety of [Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan], national and international stakeholders to promote awareness and further assistance to affected communities
Given these activities it becomes difficult to properly place the program. Is it conflict resolution? Is it development assistance? Is it humanitarian aid? The only way to truly understand where it stands is to observe its history.

The idea was originally proposed by Senator Patrick Leahy in 2002 as a way of providing “humanitarian and reconstruction assistance ‘...for families and communities that have suffered losses as a result of the military operation against the Taliban and insurgents’” (Ahmadi et al. 2010, 9). Nicknamed the ‘Leahy Initiative,’ it was funded in the Consolidated Appropriations Resolution of 2003 so “that assistance should be made available to communities and families that were adversely affected by the military operations.” The bill maintained a focus on women and “humanitarian, reconstruction, and related assistance for Afghanistan” (Public Law 108-7 2003). At this point the initiative was a mixture of development and moral obligation. Nowhere in the funding of the initiative was a mention of helping improve governance in the area or increasing the stability of Afghanistan.

The group that ended up implementing the program was the Office of Transition Initiatives (OTI), a USAID office with a basis in governance and stabilization. According to their mission statement “OTI works on the ground to provide fast, flexible, short-term assistance targeted at key political transition and stabilization needs” (USAID 2009, 1). ATI, the precursor to ACAP, was funded by Congress as a humanitarian and development program with a concentration on women; it became a supplement to OTI’s governance-based programs. “The main goal for the first three phases (March 2002-March 2003) was to highlight the benefits of the Post-Taliban government (ATI) of the Transitional Islamic State of Afghanistan (TISA) through quick-impact, high-visibility projects,” building credibility by showing ability to help those in need in a timely manner (Ahmadi et al. 2010, 9). The next two phases did focus on women, then public awareness, political participation, and improving Afghan media capacity, but only as means to the end of stabilizing the region (Ahmadi et al. 2010, 9).

OTI, which solely handles countries deemed to be transitional, phased out of Afghanistan in 2005, was replaced roughly a year after the Transitional Islamic State of Afghanistan (TISA) by the current democratic government. The International Organization for Migration (IOM), the main implementing partner for ATI, sustained the program until 2007 (Ahmadi et al. 2010, 9). It should be noted that IOM’s main concern is migration, as per their mission statement:

As the leading international organization for migration, IOM acts with its partners in the international community to:
• Assist in meeting the growing operational challenges of migration management.
• Advance understanding of migration issues.
• Encourage social and economic development through migration.
• Uphold the human dignity and well-being of migrants.

ACAP was then born in 2007 with an initial budget of $27 million and 11 staff members with the goal to “strengthen the US Government’s efforts to provide assistance for Afghan families and communities that have suffered losses as a result of military operations against insurgents and the Taliban, thereby contributing to overall stabilization efforts in Afghanistan and pre-emptively addressing potential causes of renewed disorderly migration” (Ahmadi et al. 2010, 9). The last part of that statement is particularly important, as it highlights the effects the theory of the organization implementing the program can have. ACAP started as a humanitarian effort funded by Congress; it was then changed to a stabilization effort by OTI, and then shifted to the prevention of disorderly migration by IOM.

Analysis of the Detriment of Mismatched Theories

ACAP could become a highly effective identity and population-based peacebuilding program. However, it has been implemented as a supplement to governance-based programs and its concentration on women and youth has fallen to the side, robbing it of its true potential.

The groups implementing ACAP have organizational theories based on governance theories of peacebuilding. As stated prior, governance-based peacebuilding concentrates on pushing countries to market democracy while mitigating the destabilization that such change can cause (Paris 1997, 58). In its earliest iteration ACAP was used to “highlight the benefits of the Post-Taliban government” and “build its credibility by showing its ability to provide services to those in need in a timely manner” (Ahmadi et al. 2010, 9). The concentration on stabilization as the program continued and evolved only served to cement its firm standing as a supplement to governance, an additional show of credibility for the rule of law programs being implemented in parallel.

ACAP’s position as a supplement to governance has become even shakier in recent years as governance-based programs phase out of Afghanistan. The governance theories are best suited for countries in transition, and while Afghanistan’s current government has not become the
full-fledged stable market democracy that westerners would like it to be, it has reached a point in its development where governance-based theories start to lose their grip. The Office of Transition Initiatives (OTI), USAID’s governance-based arm, left Afghanistan in 2005, and most other governance programs left with it (Ahmadi et al. 2010, 9). However, ACAP remains as its legacy and the governance theories that forged ACAP in its early years remain, but ACAP must evolve beyond them.

Since the moment it was funded, ACAP and ATI had the potential to be much more than a supplement to governance. ACAP’s program structure gives it direct access to civil society, at-risk youth, women, and local community groups. ACAP was funded with a concentration on women in mind (Public law 108-7 2003). According to the International Organization for Migration (IOM) the focus of ACAP “has shifted from infrastructure to individually tailored ‘soft’ assistance, based on the specific needs of affected families and communities” (Kaya and Northing 2008). Individual assistance is perfect for identity-based peacebuilding, allowing individuals the chance to go beyond the opportunities originally offered to them and become role models that challenge existing social structures.

In terms of identity, the kits and assistance that ACAP distributes could be forged in such a way that they give Afghan women and youth the chance to improve their position in society. ACAP does offer vocational training, but as one reviewer of the program stated: “in our evaluation of the ACAP, we observed the troubling effects of its flawed design. The ACAP design does not consider women’s special needs and circumstances, resulting in the exclusion of many women from decisions regarding their assistance” (Ahmadi et al. 2010, 22). In terms of improving the social position of the next generation, an even more worrying discovery was made: “in some areas girls were not given school kits at all, while all the boys in the family received them” (Ahmadi et al. 2010, 26).

In terms of population theories ACAP has direct access to youth put at a disadvantage by war. Even at its best, USAID youth policy takes an overly straightforward and inflexible position that concentrates on mitigating the destabilizing effect of youth. ACAP could benefit greatly from the identity-based approach to youth that UNDP suggests (Ebara et al. 2006). In 2010 ACAP decided to “standardize the only assistance component that can be standardized: the kits” (Ahmadi et al. 2010, 27). This represents an approach to the problem typical of USAID programs; the kits act only as a band-aid for those hurt by conflict. The assistance concentrates on mitigating the harm of conflict, but instead the funding should be viewed as an opportunity to truly
change the lives of those given assistance. As UNDP argues, the beneficiaries should become key decision makers in the process and youth should be encouraged to become entrepreneurs (Ebata et al. 2006).

Lastly, ACAP could help its peacebuilding effects by working holistically on all levels. It has failed to do this with beneficiaries, and it has failed to do this with regional, national, and international groups. According to USAID’s scathing review of their own program “ACAP has neglected the importance of communication and coordination with stakeholders” (Ahmadi et al. 2010, 23). ACAP has gone through many program reviews prior to 2010, but they have been based on improvement of performance and limiting corruption (Ahmadi et al. 2010, 13). However, this analysis has suggested that ACAP’s failure stems from the mismatching of the theories that inspire the program. As such the program would need to be changed from its very core in order to make sure that the theories that influence its development and implementation are in harmony.

**Conclusion**

Mismatched theories can harm the effectiveness of peacebuilding programs and ACAP provides an example of this issue. Specifically the governance-based theories of the organizations implementing ACAP stifled its ability to be an effective identity-based program. With its direct access to community groups and at-risk women and youth, ACAP is in a perfect position to elevate the social position of women and youth and aid peace in the region.

The organizational fixation on governance that the Office of Transition Initiatives (OTI) imparted on ACAP is reflected by the repetition throughout ACAP’s development of the term “stabilization.” Despite stated goals of providing real assistance to those in need, ACAP has been treated as a supplement to the governance-based ideal of stabilization.

At the operational level ACAP shows discouraging failures at handling gender and youth. The standardization of kits available to those in need will only exacerbate the lack of tailored assistance and inability to truly change the lives of those reached by ACAP. Thus dooming the program to be a giver of band-aids: temporary relief to mitigate the pain of conflict and improve the credibility of the government.

This paper highlights the worrying concept that programs may be developed for one theory of peacebuilding but implemented through the lens of a different theory. Ideally the scholarly theory of the developers of the program and organizational theory of the implementers should work in
unison. This generally occurs, as organizations will develop programs that fit into their organizational theory and by default be in unison. However, USAID and its affiliates suffer from an odd problem. In the case of ACAP Congress developed a vision and allotted funding for the program using their theories, but the groups implementing the program on the behalf of Congress did not use the same theories as Congress. In many NGOs, for example, the people funding and creating programs take part in the same theory, but in the case of Congress and USAID the theories may not match up. The result of such mismatch in theory, as evidenced by the failure of ACAP, can be disastrous.

Further research is needed to see whether the problem of theoretical mismatch also negatively affects other USAID programs, as well as the programs of aid agencies run by other governments. In addition, it is possible that this problem could affect NGOs as well if donors or board members operate using different theories than the organization as a whole, or if one NGO develops and funds a program that is set to be implemented by another NGO. This paper has only highlighted the issue as a potential problem and set out an initial analysis for the mechanisms of the problem, but further research is required to see how widespread the issue truly is.  

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