

How East Asians Understand Democracy: From a Comparative Perspective

Abstract

Democracy is a political model with global appeal, but little is known about how popular understanding of its meaning differs from one world region to another. How do the conceptions East Asians have of democracy compare to the conceptions held in other regions? This paper addresses this question by summarizing the analysis of multiregional public opinion data that yielded three broad generalizations concerning popular understanding of democracy. This paper then rigorously tests the three generalizations using the latest round of the East Asia Barometer surveys conducted in 2006 and 2007. These Barometer surveys confirm the generalization that most people are cognitively capable of defining democracy. However, the surveys do not confirm either the generalization that a majority of contemporary mass publics equate democracy with liberty or the generalization that only a small minority equates democracy with socioeconomic benefits. In the minds of East Asians, socioeconomic benefits are more essential to democracy than either political freedom or popular elections. This finding leads to the conclusion that the prevalence of substantive or communitarian conceptions of democracy is one important characteristic of the cultural democratization unfolding in East Asia. It also leads to the methodological conclusion that an accurate analysis of popular democratic conceptions can be made only when responses to open-ended and closed-ended questions are analyzed together.

How East Asians Understand Democracy: From a Comparative Perspective

The rapid diffusion of democracy throughout the globe especially since the fall of the Berlin Wall, has made it possible for individual scholars and research institutes to conduct numerous public opinion surveys in a large number of democratizing countries (Heath, Fisher, and Smith 2005; Norris 2004; Shin 2007). Gallup-International Voice of the People Project, the Pew Global Attitudes Project, UNDP program on Democracy and Citizenship, the World Values Survey, and many other national and international surveys have monitored citizen orientations toward democracy. Results from all of these surveys show that democracy has achieved overwhelming mass approval throughout the world and has become “virtually the only political model with global appeal” (Inglehart 2003, 52; see also Diamond 2008).

In the last two waves of the World Values Surveys, for example, “a clear majority of the population in virtually every society endorses a democratic political system” (Inglehart and Welzel 2005, 264). The 2005 Voice of the People surveys conducted in 65 countries by Gallup-International (2005) between May and July 2005 also reports: “8 out of 10 global citizens believe that in spite of its limitations, democracy is the best form of government, almost 10 percent more than in 2004.” Even in the Islamic Middle East, Confucian East Asia, and the former Soviet Union, large majorities are favorably oriented to democracy (Dalton and Ong 2005; Gibson et al. 1992; Park and Shin 2005; Pew Research Center 2003; Tessler 2002). Without a question, democracy, as a system of government, attracts an ever-increasing number of ordinary citizens from a variety of regions and cultures.

What is still in question is how ordinary citizens understand democracy. For example, in what specific term or terms do ordinary citizens understand democracy? Which elements of democracy do ordinary citizens consider to be the most and least essential for its development their countries? Do these elements vary from nation to nation and/or region to region?

This paper seeks to answer these questions and others concerning how ordinary people understand democracy from cross-regional and intraregional perspectives. Do contemporary publics have a basic understanding of the meaning of democracy? If they do, do they understand it more in procedural or substantive terms? Do the mass publics of East Asia understand democracy similarly to the way people from other regions do? What are the most and least prevalent conceptions of democracy among East Asians? Do such conceptions vary significantly across the region of East Asia and its population groups? To address these questions, this paper analyzes a wide range of public opinion surveys that have been conducted in East Asia and other regions.

Our research proceeds in four stages. The following section reviews previous public opinion surveys on popular conceptions of democracy and highlights the surveys' key findings. The next section summarizes our earlier analysis of multiregional public opinion data, including data from forty-seven nationally representative public opinion surveys, and discusses three broad generalizations about the conceptions of democracy among contemporary publics. The third section tests these generalizations by analyzing the latest round of the East Asia Barometer (EAB hereafter) surveys conducted in 2006 and 2007. It also analyzes national and demographic differences in popular conceptions of democracy in East Asia. In the final section, we identify interregional differences in

the conceptions of democracy and highlight the notable characteristics of cultural democratization in East Asia.

Previous Public Opinion Research

For the past two decades, an increasing number of public opinion surveys have been conducted to explore conceptions of democracy among ordinary citizens (Baviskar and Malone 2004; Camp 2001; Canache 2006; Fuchs 1999; Miller, Hesler, and Reisinger 1997; Moreno 2001; Montero 1992; Ottemoeller 1998; Schedler and Sarsfield 2004).

Three regional barometers, the Afrobarometer, the East Asian Barometer, and the Latinobarometer, have asked open-ended questions and encouraged respondents to talk about the meaning of democracy in their own terms. Some other national and multinational surveys have asked closed-ended questions and had respondents choose from a list one or more defining characteristics that corresponded most closely to their conceptions of democracy (McIntosh and Mac Iver 1993; Shin 1999). Still other surveys have asked both open-ended and closed-ended questions and compared responses to the two types of questions (Simon 1998; Fuchs and Roller 2006). Yet very few of these surveys have asked the same questions over a substantial period of time to track the evolving dynamics of democratic conceptions, particularly among citizens of emerging democracies. Moreover, only one survey has posed the same questions to both mass and elite samples to determine whether any discrepancies exist between the conceptions of democracy held by ordinary citizens and their political leaders (Miller, Hesli, and Reisinger 1997).

These national and multinational surveys were administered in two waves. The first wave of surveys included mostly single-country surveys, and all of them were

conducted in Europe before the demise of communism in this region. These first-wave surveys include the early 1970 Dutch survey, the 1978 and 1986 Allensbach Institute surveys, the 1989 and 1990 Hungarian panel surveys, and the 1989 Spanish survey. The second wave of surveys were conducted after the fall of the Berlin Wall in November 1989, and they were mostly multinational surveys focusing on several countries within a region. This wave brought the surveys administered by the Afrobarometer, the East Asia Barometer, the Latinobarometer, and the Post-communist Citizen Project. Although these single-region surveys asked similar or nearly identical open-ended questions, no effort has been made to compare the patterns, sources, and consequences of popular conceptions of democracy across the represented regions.

Approaches

National and cross-national public opinion surveys to date have asked two types of questions, open-ended and closed-ended, to ascertain popular conceptions of democracy (Mattes 2006). The open-ended approach is intended to address two specific questions. Do ordinary citizens have the capacity to recognize the concept of democracy? If they do, how do they define or understand it? The close-ended question, in contrast, is intended to determine what types of democratic conceptions are most and least popular among ordinary citizens, and how these types vary across the different families of democracies, emerging and old-consolidated. Both closed-ended and open-ended questions are occasionally asked together to “get a more complex picture about the democracy-interpretation of citizens” (Simon 1998).

The best example of the closed-ended approach is the USIS-commissioned surveys conducted in Hungary, Poland, Romania, and Bulgaria between early 1991 and

early 1993 (McIntosh and Mac Iver 1993). In these surveys, respondents were asked to weigh six values—three political and three economic—and choose the one they considered most important to their country’s democratic development. Their responses to this closed-ended question were compared to what was known in three old democracies in Europe, including Britain, France, and West Germany. While the publics of the consolidated democracies in Western Europe emphasized the political values of political freedom, party competition, and a fair justice system, those of the new Eastern European democracies gave more weight to the economic values of prosperity, equality, and security. This pattern of conceptual differences was confirmed in the 1993 Korea Barometer survey in which two-thirds of the masses chose economic rights over political rights (Shin 1999, 60).

In the past five years or so, more multinational public opinion surveys have begun using the open-ended approach. The 1998 Hewlett survey directed by Roderic Ai Camp asked a pair of open-ended questions to compare popular conceptions of democracy in three Latin American countries. Since then, three regional barometers—the Afrobarometer, the Asian Barometer, and the Latinobarometer—asked an open-ended question to address the same matter. These multinational surveys were all alike in requesting respondents to define democracy in their own words. Yet they were not all based on the same notion of democracy. The Hewlett survey, for example, treated democracy as a single-dimensional concept and thus allowed respondents to identify only one property. The three regional surveys, on the other hand, treated democracy as a complex concept and allowed respondents to name up to three of its properties.

In contrast, the 1992 and 1995 surveys conducted in Russia and the Ukraine allowed their samples of average citizens and elites to identify all of the political and other values and practices they associated with democracy (Miller, Hesli, and Reisinger 1997). The number of their responses was counted to determine their levels of cognitive development concerning democracy. This analysis was based on the premise that “citizens who have more to say about the meaning of democracy has [sic] more fully developed cognitions of democracy than those who say little or [have] nothing to say about it” (Miller, Hesli, and Reisinger 1997, 164). In addition, the particular types of values and practices the two samples associated most frequently with democracy were compared to determine whether the leaders and masses of these post-communist countries were sharing a common political democratic culture.

The Post-communist Citizen Project directed by Samuel Barnes and Janos Simon (1998) asked both closed and open-ended questions. Their surveys conducted in 11 Central and Eastern European countries first asked closed-ended questions to determine whether decades of communist rule were effective in “homogenizing” mass political attitudes. Specifically, it asked respondents to rate on a 4-point scale the relevance of 11 political and other values to democracy. In addition, the project asked an open-ended question: “What does democracy mean for you?” Responses to the closed-ended questions were analyzed to identify the most and least important categories of democratic components and to compare the patterns of their distribution across 13 former communist countries. Responses to the open-ended question were analyzed to assess the ability of the mass publics to define democracy, and identify the most and least popular images of democracy among the masses of each society.

Levels of Awareness

Are ordinary citizens capable of conceptualizing or defining democracy in their own words? If they are, how do they understand it? Do they impute positive or negative meanings to it? Do they understand it primarily in procedural or substantive terms? Do their understandings have a narrow or broad basis? The public opinion surveys to date have sought to address at least some of these questions. All of these questions, however, can be addressed only with responses to the open-ended questions that allowed respondents to view democracy as a multi-dimensional phenomenon and identify multiple properties.

The national and multinational surveys discussed above, when considered together, clearly show that the ability of the masses to define democracy or their democratic awareness varies considerably across countries and different periods of time. In the Russian and Ukraine surveys discussed above, for example, more than nine-tenths of their elite samples and more than two-thirds of their mass samples were able to give at least one answer to the open-ended question, confirming the salience of democracy (Miller, Hesli, and Reisinger 1997, 166). In other post-communist countries, the level of cognitive capacity was found to vary more greatly, from a low of 66 percent in Romania to a high of 87 percent in Czechoslovakia (Simon 1998). According to the two panel surveys conducted in Hungary during the 1989-1993 period, the percentage of ordinary citizens who were cognitively capable of recognizing democracy and defining it in their own words increased by 12 percentage points from 72 to 84 percent over a four-year period (Simon 1998, 105).

According to the first-round surveys of the Afrobarometer and the East Asia Barometer, the cognitive capacity of Africans and East Asians varies a great deal more than what was observed in East and Central Europe. In Africa, those who are able to recognize democracy range from a low of 58 percent in Lesotho to a high of 98 percent in Nigeria (Bratton, Mattes, and Gyimah-Boadi 2005, 66). In East Asia, nearly every Korean (99%) was able to define democracy, while less than two-thirds of the Japanese (64%) and the Chinese (65%) were able to do so. Despite such large differences across countries within each of these two regions, majorities of citizens in every African and East Asian country are familiar with the concept and capable of defining it. This finding contrasts sharply with the finding from Mexico's 2003 National Survey on Political Culture that "over 60 percent of respondents were unable or unwilling to produce an answer" (Schedler and Sarfield 2004, 2).

Types of Conceptions

Among the citizens cognitively capable of discussing the meaning of democracy in their own words, overwhelming majorities understood it positively rather than negatively. In twelve Southern African countries, a total of only one percent gave a negative definition for democracy. More notable is that "no politically aware person came up with a negative definition" in half of these countries (Bratton, Mattes, and Gyimah-Boadi 2005, 69). In addition, in all seven East Asian societies, small minorities of five percent or less offered negative views of democracy. In every African and Asian country, only a very small minority refused to view democracy as essential for the good life for themselves and their country. When negative conceptions were compared across the masses and elites of

Russia and the Ukraine, the masses were found far more critical of democracy than the elites (Miller, Hesli, and Reisinger 1997, 170).

Do ordinary citizens, with relatively little knowledge and experience with democratic politics, view democracy as a phenomenon with single or multiple properties? When allowed to name up to three properties, most survey respondents volunteered only one. In Africa, for example, 59 percent associated it with a single property while 14 and 5 percent associated it with two and three properties, respectively. In East Asia, 21 and 12 percent offered two and three definitions, respectively. In emerging democracies, single-dimensional conceptions are known to be far more prevalent than multidimensional conceptions among the mass citizenry. Among elites in post-communist societies, however, multidimensional conceptions were found to be almost equally or even more popular than uni-dimensional ones (Miller, Hesli, and Reisinger 1997, 166).

What particular sorts of regime properties do ordinary citizens associate with democracy most and least frequently? To address this question, previous studies have developed several pairs of categories and classified a multitude of divergent responses according to these pairs. The mostly commonly used pairs include: (1) procedural versus substantive; (2) political versus economic; and (3) liberal versus non-liberal. When comparative surveys of thirteen Eastern and Central European countries asked an open-ended question in 1998-2001, “liberty and basic rights” was the first answer given by an average of 49 percent of their citizens (Fuchs and Roller 2006, 78). When asked the closed-ended question with a list of twelve possible meanings, at least 50 percent of each national sample chose five characteristics as having “a lot to do with democracy.” These five— political liberties, multiparty system, participation rights of citizens, equal justice

before the law, and equal rights for women—represent the core values and practices of liberal democracy (Diamond 1999). Other previous surveys have also revealed the prevalence of liberal political values and practices in popular conceptions of democracy.

How Contemporary Publics Understand Democracy¹

Are contemporary publics capable of understanding democracy? If they are, how do they conceptualize its meaning? To address these questions, we have compiled data from all of the available major cross-national surveys that have used a common open-ended question concerning the meaning of democracy. These include (1) the Post-communist Citizen surveys conducted in eleven Central and Eastern European countries during the period of three years beginning in 1990 (Barnes and Simon 1998); (2) the first round of Afrobarometer surveys (www.afrobarometer.org) conducted in ten countries; (3) the first round of the East Asia Barometer surveys (www.asianbarometer.org) conducted in seven countries and one dependent territory; and (4) the 2002 Latinobarometro surveys (www.latinobarometro.org) conducted in seventeen Central and South American countries. Merging the data from these and other national and international surveys yielded results from 47 democracies, including four established democracies (the United States, Austria, Japan, and Spain). Responses from these established democracies served as a reference for the new democracies and developing political systems.

Because each project independently coded the responses, we used the available codings to construct comparability among the different coding systems. The resulting cross-national data are admittedly imprecise (although they are probably more comparable within projects than between projects). However, these data provide valuable insights into public thinking, and the results do present a surprisingly consistent view of

how ordinary people conceptualize the meaning of democracy. We will therefore focus on broad cross-national patterns rather than specific percentages from any single nation.

Table 1 displays five categories for the responses to the open-ended survey question. The first column includes responses that define democracy in terms of *civil liberties and citizen rights*. The second column includes a variety of responses coded under the heading *political process*. This includes definitions of democracy as rule by the people, elections, majority rule, or open and accountable government. The third column presents responses that are broadly classified as *social benefits*, which includes social and economic development, references to equality or justice, or peace and stability. The fourth column, a “residual category,” presents miscellaneous responses that do not fall under the other headings, mostly because of coding variation. The fifth column presents the percentages who do not offer any substantive definition. To those individuals, democracy is a concept largely devoid of meaning.

[Table 1 here]

One of the most striking findings is that most people in most nations do offer some definition of democracy. In the four established democracies in this set—the United States, Austria, Japan, and Spain—about a quarter of the public did not provide a definition (26%). Interestingly, about the same percentage of respondents (27%) in the less established democracies also failed to provide a meaning. The citizens in ten Afrobarometer nations are more likely to offer a definition of democracy than are citizens of Spain or Japan. A large majority in several Asian and Latin American nations also offer definitions. Only in Brazil in 2001 did a majority of the public fail to register a response; several other Latin American nations also score relatively low in democratic

awareness, which seems to be a persisting aspect of the Latin American political experience (Latinobarometer 2002).

The simple awareness of the term “democracy” and the willingness to express a definition is a basic measure of the meaningfulness of this concept to contemporary publics. More important, of course, is the content of the offered definitions. Here, also, the results are different from what many of the skeptics have assumed. Definitions of democracy in terms of social benefits are low in most nations, averaging about a sixth of all responses (see Figure 1). Furthermore, in several countries, answers coded under this heading are more often about social equality, justice, and equality of opportunities than about blatant economic benefits such as finding a job, providing social welfare, or economic opportunities. For instance, relatively large percentages of the publics in Korea, Mongolia, South Africa, and Chile are coded as defining democracy in terms of social benefits, but in each case more than three-quarters of these responses involve social justice and equality, and only a small percentage are listed under the subheading of social and economic development. These results thus undercut claims that when average citizens say they want democracy what they really want is higher living standards and other benefits.

[Figure 1 here]

Equally striking is the broad identification of democracy in terms of rights and civil liberties. Figure 1 reveals that in 36 of the 47 (76%) countries surveyed, liberty or freedom was the most-often mentioned property of democracy. A careful scrutiny of the data reported in Table 1 reveals that a majority or near majority mentioned those values in 23 of those countries (49%). In both established and new democracies, this type of

liberal conception is the modal response; it is what most people think of when they think of democracy. This is significant for several reasons. First, this implies that people think about democracy more in terms of its intended outcomes—freedom, liberty and rights—than its means. Definitions of democracy in terms of elections, majority rule, and other democratic procedures are less than one-fifth as frequent as definitions citing political freedom and social benefits (see Figure 1). In other words, people understand that electoral and constitutional democracy is not enough; to most people the real meaning of democracy is in what it produces.

Second, the wide breadth of freedom/liberty responses across an array of nations is impressive although their breadth varies considerably across the four regions of Africa, Asia, Europe, and Latin America (see Figure 2). We might expect such rights consciousness within the United States (and it does clearly appear in the American responses); however, even in poor nations, such as Zambia and Malawi, where there are modest literacy levels, low living standards, and limited access to media and other information sources, the average citizen primarily gives examples of rights and liberties when asked what democracy means to them. It is, perhaps, a testament to the strength of democracy that citizens in even the most unlikely national circumstances express such an understanding of the concept.

[Figure 2 here]

These results suggest that an understanding of democracy has diffused widely around the globe. No longer should democracy be viewed as a Western concept, understood only by affluent and well-educated citizens in established advanced industrial democracies. Instead, democratic values should be considered broadly held principles

understood by most citizens in developing nations. The results also suggest that the liberal conceptions of democracy are the most prevalent around the globe and that contemporary publics value liberty more than any other democratic attribute.

Nonetheless, the responses analyzed above are not enough evidence for us to determine whether ordinary people in new democracies, like their peers in established democracies, actually view freedom or liberty as the most essential or important property of democracy. As Ronald Inglehart (1987) points out, the preferences of values and their priority cannot be considered the same thing. To estimate the priority of liberty as a property of democracy, therefore, we need to analyze responses to the closed-ended question that ask ordinary people to prioritize various properties, including freedom. The second round of the EAB surveys asked such a question together with a closed-ended question.

How East Asians Understand Democracy

The findings presented above make it clear that democracy is a concept referring to a variety of things; it is also a concept difficult for ordinary people to grasp or define (Andreas and Rodolf 2007; Dalton, Shin, and Jou 2007; see also Collier and Levitsky 1997; Dahl 1989, 1997; Diamond 1997). Are East Asians capable of understanding what democracy means? If they are, are they capable of defining it in their own words? What properties do they name most and least often as its constituents? Are they also capable of weighing the various properties of democracy and identifying one as the most essential? Do they consider political procedures more essential than substantive outcomes? All these questions need to be addressed in order to determine the levels and patterns of East Asians' cognitive competence in democratic politics.

To begin, we selected a pair of questions from the latest round of the East Asia Barometer surveys conducted in ten different countries in 2006 and 2007. The first open-ended question asked respondents to define democracy in their own terms.² The second closed-ended question asked them to consider four well-known properties of democracy and choose the one which they considered the most essential. The well-known properties are (1) opportunities to change the government through elections, (2) freedom to criticize those in power, (3) reducing the gap between the rich and the poor, and (4) guaranteeing basic necessities. The first two were intended to tap procedural conceptions of democracy, while the last two to tap substantive conceptions.

How well do East Asians understand democracy? We estimate their overall capacity to understand democracy by determining whether they answered none, one, or both of the questions tapping, respectively, the properties of democracy and the relative importance of those properties. Table 2 shows that about two-thirds (67%) of the East Asians surveyed were able to answer both questions, while a little over one-quarter (27%) answered only one. Those who were completely incapable of understanding democracy, as evidenced by their failing to answer either of the two questions, constitute a very small minority of 6 percent.

[Table 2 here]

Of the nine countries listed in Table 2, three, Thailand, Indonesia, and Vietnam, have nearly one-tenth of their populations or slightly more that are *fully incapable* of understanding democracy. In all of the other six countries, fewer than one out of twenty has no understanding of the meaning of democracy. Those *fully capable* of defining democracy also varies considerably across the countries, from a low of 53 percent in

Thailand to 92 percent in South Korea. The fully capable account for more than three-quarters of the population in five of the nine countries, including South Korea, Mongolia, Taiwan, Singapore, and Vietnam. These countries are not all highly modernized; nor are they all democratic countries. In East Asia, it appears that exposure to modernization and democratic politics are not the keys to unlocking popular understanding of democracy.

How many East Asians are cognitively able to define democracy in their own words? Table 3 shows that about seven-tenths (71%) were able to do so. By this criterion, East Asians are slightly less capable of defining democracy than Southern Africans, 78 percent of whom could offer a definition (Bratton, Mattes, and Gyimah-Boadi 2005 66). In all nine countries surveyed, clear majorities were able to define democracy (see Table 2). The size of these majorities, however, varies considerably. In South Korea, nearly everyone (96%) can define democracy in his or her own words. In Thailand, on the other hand, less than two-thirds (64%) can do so. What causes this difference among East Asian citizenries? The finding that Mongolians are more likely to be able to define democracy than the Taiwanese indicates that socioeconomic modernization is not a cause of broader understanding, while the finding that the Vietnamese are more likely to offer a definition than Filipinos and Indonesians indicates that neither is personal experience with democratic politics. So the cause remains a mystery.

[Table 3 here]

Do East Asians think of democracy as a single entity or multiple entities? We address this question in the terms of the entities the EAB respondents named in response to the open-ended question which allowed them to name up to three things. Table 3 shows that East Asians tend to think of democracy as a single entity than multiple entities. While a

plurality of 39 percent identified only one component, small minorities of 18 and 15 percent did name, respectively, two and three components. In five of the nine East Asian countries where the EAB asked the open-ended question, respondents named just one component more often than two or three. Only in three other countries—Korea, Mongolia, and Indonesia, respondents named two or three components more often than just one.

Naming just one component represents a narrow view of democracy while identifying two or three components represents a broad view. Among East Asians as a whole, narrow conceptions of democracy are slightly more popular than broad conceptions (39% vs. 31%). Yet they led Southern Africans in giving multiple meanings to democracy by a margin of 32 to 19 percent. Nearly three times as many East Asians (15% vs. 5%) as Southern Africans were able to equate democracy with three entities. The understanding of democracy among East Asians appears to be deeper than their peers in Southern Africa.

East Asian countries are considerably different from one another in their breadth of democratic understanding. In two of the countries, South Korea and Mongolia, respondents were much more likely to name multiple properties than to name only one. In South Korea, more than three-quarters (78%) mentioned three properties. In Singapore, which ranks much higher in the UNDP human development than South Korea, however, an exactly identical proportion mentioned only one property. In four other countries, the Philippines, Thailand, Vietnam, and Malaysia, respondents were much more likely to name only one property than multiple properties. In the remaining two countries, Taiwan and Indonesia, they were about as likely to name multiple properties as they were to

name one. What motivates East Asians to define democracy either narrowly or broadly is another mystery.

[Table 3 here]

What percentages of East Asians associate democracy with freedom, a political process, and socioeconomic benefits? Figure 3 shows the percentages of East Asians who named each of these three properties and others as a property of democracy in response to the open-ended question. When all nine East Asian countries are considered together, freedom (41%) is more frequently mentioned than political process (31%), social benefits (11%), and other things (14%). Yet, nearly three out of five (59%) did not include freedom in their conceptions of democracy. Obviously, non-liberal conceptions of democracy are more common than liberal ones in East Asian countries.

[Figure 3 here]

Moreover, Table 4 shows that freedom is not the most-often mentioned property of democracy in every country. In six of the nine countries, it is, but in only three of these countries, South Korean, Mongolia and Singapore, do majorities from 60 to 75 percent name it as a property of democracy. In three other countries, the Philippines, Indonesia, and Malaysia, pluralities mentioned it most frequently. In the other three countries, Taiwan, Thailand, and Vietnam, substantial majorities of two-thirds or more did not include freedom in their definitions of democracy. The finding that a majority or a nearly majority equate democracy with liberty or freedom only in three of nine (33%) East Asian countries clearly indicate that liberal conceptions of democracy are not as prevalent as what is known in other regions.

[Table 4 here]

What proportion of East Asians understands democracy exclusively in terms of freedom and liberty? Figure 3 shows that exclusively liberal conceptions of democracy constitute less than one-quarter (23%) of the East Asian mass publics. The right panel of Table 4 shows that their percentages vary considerably from 15 percent in South Korea and Thailand to 59 percent in Singapore. In all but one country, Singapore, minorities equate democracy exclusively with freedom and liberty. In seven of the nine countries, small minorities of less than one-third offered exclusively liberal conceptions of democracy. In three countries, Taiwan, Thailand, and Vietnam, moreover, the proportion of respondents who conceive of democracy in exclusively liberal terms is smaller than the proportion of respondents who conceive of democracy exclusively in terms of political process. These findings can be considered additional pieces of evidence non-liberal conceptions of democracy are more common than liberal conceptions among the mass publics of East Asian countries.

[Figure 3 here]

The last column of Table 4 also shows the proportions defining democracy in multi-dimensional terms, i.e., substantively different kinds of properties instead of two or three of the same kind of properties. Of the nine countries, South Korea and Mongolia are the only two countries where a majority or plurality holds a multidimensional conception of democracy. Two non-democracies, Singapore and Vietnam, registered the lowest levels of multidimensional conceptions. These findings suggest that whether citizens hold uni-dimensional or multidimensional conceptions of democracy depends on their current regime type. When all nine countries are considered together, East Asians are three times

more likely to define democracy uni-dimensionally than multi-dimensionally. The preponderance of uni-dimensional conceptions over multidimensional ones is another characteristic of East Asian democratic conceptions.

Which properties of democracy do East Asians consider to be the most essential?

Table 5 reports the percentages of EAB respondents who rated as the most essential each of the four properties they were asked to choose in response to the close-ended question. The property most often chosen was popular elections, with nearly one-third (30%) of respondents calling it the most essential. The property of popular elections was followed by economic security (26%), economic equality (18%), and freedom (15%). In the minds of East Asians, popular elections and political freedom stand out, respectively, as the most and least important elements that a political system must have to be a democracy. This finding that freedom is less essential than either economic security or equality contrasts sharply with the generalization drawn from the analysis of the multiregional data, that freedom or liberty counts most among the mass publics, even across the regions in democratic transition.

[Table 5 here]

Table 5 shows the national differences in the percentages choosing each of the four democratic properties as the most essential. In none of the ten countries reported in Table 5 did any of the four properties receive a majority vote endorsing it as the most essential property. This is a strong indication that East Asians are more divided than united when it comes to prioritizing the areas where their countries need to work to build democracy. Of the four properties, economic security was most popular, receiving the endorsement of pluralities in four countries, Indonesia, the Philippines, Singapore, and Taiwan. In four

other countries, Japan, Thailand, Vietnam, and Malaysia, pluralities, ranging from 35 to 41 percent, named popular elections as the most essential property. Only in South Korea and Mongolia did smaller pluralities rate either economic equality or freedom as the most essential property of democracy. In five of these nine East Asian countries, it is economic security or equality, not political freedom, that people consider the most essential to the building of democracy in their country.

In the right panel of Table 5, we classify the four properties into two categories, procedural (governmental elections and the freedom to criticize government officials) and substantive (economic equality and security), and report the percentages falling into these two broad categories for each country. It shows that in eight of the ten East Asian countries, people understand democracy more in procedural terms than substantive ones. Only in Taiwan and Vietnam are substantive conceptions more popular than procedural ones. In Taiwan, moreover, substantive conceptions outnumber procedural conceptions by a large margin of nearly 2 to 1. In Thailand, on the other hand, the reverse is true. When the ten countries are considered, nearly one out of ten (9%) respondents was not capable of choosing the most essential property of democracy, while the rest were divided almost evenly into the categories of political and economic conceptions of democracy (46% vs. 45%).

We now consider together responses to the closed- and open-ended questions and identify five distinct types of democratic conceptions: (1) the ignorant (or uninformed); (2) the narrowly procedural; (3) the narrowly substantive; (4) the broadly procedural; and (5) the broadly substantive. The first type, the ignorant, refers to those who are not able to answer the open-ended and close-ended questions. The second and third types define

democracy narrowly in terms of a single property, but while the second type chooses a property related to political process as the most essential, the third type chooses a property related to economic outcome as the most essential. The fourth and fifth types define democracy broadly in terms of multiple dimensions but diverge in the selection of its most essential property. The fourth selects a property related to political process, while the latter chooses a property related to an economic outcome.

Of these five types, Table 6 shows that the ignorant or uninformed were the dominant group, with nearly one-third (32%) of East Asians falling in this category. They are followed by the narrowly procedural (19%), the narrowly substantive (18%), the broadly procedural (16%), and the broadly substantive (15%). Although none of these five types represents a majority, each of them forms a substantial minority. This finding clearly indicates that East Asians are much more divided than united in their conceptions of democracy.

[Table 6 here]

Table 6 also shows how nine East Asian countries differ from one another in terms of what percentage of their respondents fall into these five types of democratic conceptions. In none of these countries, once again, does a majority fall into one of the five conception types, and the most popular type varies considerably across the countries. The ignorant or uninformed were the most common in four countries, the Philippines (34%), Thailand (47%), Indonesia (33%), and Malaysia (35%). In two countries, South Korea and Mongolia, the broadly procedural conception was a clear favorite, while in two more countries, Singapore and Vietnam, it was barely more popular than the narrowly substantive conception. Only in Taiwan was the narrowly substantive conception the

most popular, and there it was barely more popular than either ignorance or the broadly substantive. From these findings, it appears that ignorance is most common in the least-modernized countries, while the narrowly procedural conception is most common in the non-democratic countries of East Asia where citizens have never experienced free and competitive elections.

We now compare the five types of democratic conceptions across demographic categories. Table 7 shows that females are more likely to be ignorant than males and less likely to report a procedural conception. Similarly, growing age is associated positively with ignorance about democracy and is negatively associated with procedural conceptions. As a result, those sixty or older are far more likely to be ignorant than those younger than twenty-nine, and members of the older group are far less likely to conceive of democracy in procedural terms than are their younger counterparts. Those sixty and older are also less likely to hold a broadly substantive conception of democracy than those in the seventeen to twenty-nine age group. More education and a larger income are associated positively with broad conceptions, both procedural and substantive, and are associated negatively with ignorance and broadly procedural conceptions. Urban living is positively associated with substantive conceptions and negatively associated with procedural conceptions; whether one lives in the city or country seems to make little difference in one's likelihood to be ignorant .

[Table 7 here]

When all five demographic characteristics are considered together, it is evident that ignorance is the most common type of democratic conception among the underprivileged, a group that includes females, the elderly, the poor, and the uneducated.

In sharp contrast, the broadly procedural and substantive conceptions are the most popular types among the privileged, a group that includes the young, the college-educated, and the wealthy. It appears that greater exposure to authoritarian culture has led East Asians to remain more ignorant about democracy or to understand it more in procedural terms. Modernization, on the other hand, has led them to become less ignorant about it or to understand it more in substantive terms. (Note: Have the poor or female or less wealthy had less exposure to modernization? This seems an odd conclusion to me.)

Conclusions

Our analysis of multiregional public opinion data yields three generalizations concerning popular conceptions of democracy. First, most citizens of new democracies are cognitively capable of defining democracy in their own words. Second, and most important, most of those cognitively capable citizens think of democracy in terms of the freedoms, liberties, and rights that it conveys, rather than the procedural and institutions it uses to achieve those ends. Third, citizens do not tend to associate democracy with social benefits, even in the poorest of nations.

Our analyses of the closed-ended and open-ended questions the EAB surveys asked in 2006 and 2007 confirm the first of the three generalizations that a substantial majority of contemporary publics are cognitively capable of offering a reasonable definition of democracy. More than two-thirds of East Asians can offer such a definition in their own words and, given a list, will choose one property as the most essential.

However, analysis of the EAB surveys does not confirm the second generalization that suggests that a majority or near majority of East Asians equate democracy with political freedom or liberty. Nor does the analysis confirm the third generalization that

suggests that only a small minority equate democracy with socioeconomic benefits.

Among the cognitively capable of the East Asian publics, a large plurality considers those benefits to be far more essential than political freedom.

Earlier public opinion surveys conducted in East Asia have documented that East Asians are not different from their peers in other regions in endorsing democracy as the most preferred regime (Chang, Chu, and Park 2007; Shin and Wells 2004). The findings presented in this paper, however, make it clear that East Asians do differ in the particular type of democracy they want to build. As Daniel A. Bell (2006) and other scholars of Confucianism point out, it appears that East Asians prefer communitarian democracy to the liberal democracy that the mass publics of the West prefer. Such prevalence of communitarian or substantive democracy can be considered the most notable characteristic of cultural democratization unfolding in East Asia.

Another notable characteristic is that East Asians as a whole understand democracy more narrowly than broadly and more procedurally than substantively. The levels of their capacity to define it in such terms and the patterns of their democratic conceptions, however, vary considerably across the countries in which they live. Why they adhere to a particular pattern remains unexplained (Chang and Chu 2007). Our analysis of the latest EAB surveys suggests that regime experience and exposure to socioeconomic modernization do not matter much in shaping the various patterns of democratic understanding among East Asians.

Finally, the analyses presented above indicate clearly that an accurate and comprehensive account can be made of popular understanding of democracy only when we analyze responses to both open-ended and closed-ended questions. Methodologically,

therefore, it is highly desirable and necessary for future public opinion surveys to ask both types of questions, as the EAB does.

Endnotes

¹ This section of the paper originates from an article the author co-authored with Russell Dalton and Willy Jou (Dalton, Shin, and Jou 2007, 145-147).

² Japan cannot be included in this analysis because the open-ended question was not asked in the second round of its EAB survey. China and Hong Kong are not included in the analysis because their surveys are ongoing.

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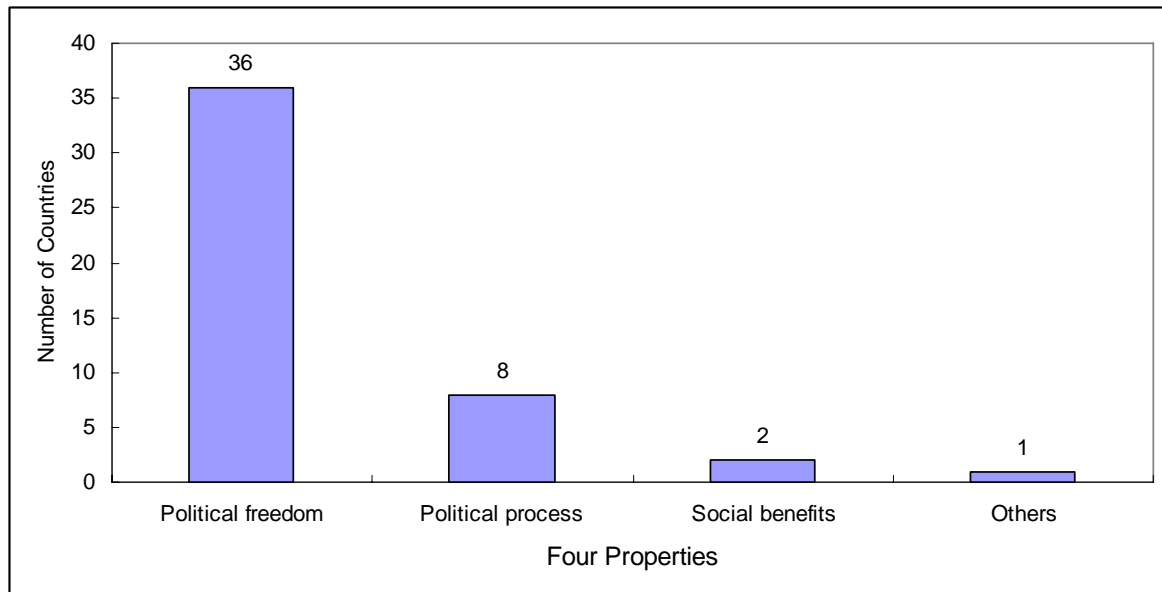
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Table 1. The Meaning of Democracy for Contemporary Publics (in percent)

Nation	Freedom, Rights, Liberty	Political Process	Social Benefits	Other Response	Don't Know	Total Responses
Afghanistan	50.3	21.9	19.1	10.3	32.6	117.5
Argentina	51.6	23.4	23.7	19.6	11.2	129.5
Austria	37.4	34.8	3.5	10.4	13.0	99.1
Bolivia	46.2	27.1	18.3	8.9	22.4	123.0
Botswana	28.5	43.6	28.7	1.6	28.8	131.2
Brazil	25.4	7.6	12.6	4.0	56.4	106.0
Chile	43.1	15.3	33.0	22.1	15.6	129.1
China	23.2	53.3	7.0	16.8	34.6	134.9
Colombia	6.7	38.0	10.1	9.8	44.5	109.1
Costa Rica	58.9	12.9	27.4	6.9	20.7	126.8
Czech Rep	60.9	11.3	11.3	3.5	13.0	100.0
Ecuador	45.7	19.8	18.6	12.9	30.1	127.0
El Salvador	27.7	5.0	21.6	7.9	49.8	112.1
Ghana	29.1	35.5	10.9	1.9	25.0	102.4
Guatemala	33.4	7.4	24.1	8.5	39.6	113.0
Honduras	43.5	18.2	22.9	10.6	23.9	119.1
Hong Kong	36.5	20.3	13.9	17.0	21.3	109.0
Hungary	24.5	13.7	25.9	7.9	28.0	100.0
Indonesia	9.0	5.0	33.0		63.0	110.0
Japan	30.6	15.3	25.0	20.9	35.5	127.3
Korea	59.5	16.4	54.9	26.0	1.5	158.3
Lesotho	17.0	24.4	9.7	7.0	42.2	100.3
Lithuania	55.1	3.4	4.1	1.4	33.0	97.0
Malawi	78.7	21.8	11.7	9.8	8.2	130.2
Mali	23.9	15.7	23.0	35.8	28.6	127.0
Mexico	42.1	33.2	25.5	11.8	14.0	126.6
Mongolia	68.2	26.6	42.6	23.4	31.4	192.2
Namibia	67.2	13.1	17.6	1.4	34.2	133.5
Nicaragua	49.9	24.3	26.7	11.0	16.4	128.3
Nigeria	13.8	56.3	8.7	18.3	6.2	103.3
Panama	38.9	15.2	17.8	22.2	29.5	123.6
Paraguay	47.4	5.1	20.9	13.9	20.7	108.1
Peru	46.5	22.2	23.2	4.0	25.0	120.9
Philippines	48.3	8.7	13.3	12.4	26.7	109.4
Poland	57.5	8.9	13.0	1.6	19.0	100.0
Romania	44.9	4.0	15.2	1.5	34.0	99.6
South Africa	68.8	33.6	36.7	2.9	10.0	152.0
Spain	41.3	14.0	10.5	4.2	30.0	100.0
Taiwan	39.9	36.6	11.3	26.1	17.0	130.9
Tanzania	46.0	28.4	23.1	18.0	15.2	130.7
Thailand	49.3	24.9	22.1	28.4	20.2	144.9
Uganda	22.0	28.8	20.9	4.7	29.3	105.7
Uruguay	48.9	30.1	27.2	10.4	11.1	127.7
USA	68.0	5.0	6.0	9.0	12.0	100.0
Venezuela	73.7	9.1	18.3	17.3	14.8	133.3
Zambia	61.9	20.6	4.8	2.8	21.4	111.5
Zimbabwe	30.0	43.8	19.4	4.1	19.1	116.4

Sources: Afrobarometer (I), East Asia Barometer (I), Latinobarometer 2001. Post-communist Citizens Survey (plus Austria and Spain); USA: Camp survey; Afghanistan and Indonesia: The Asia Foundation surveys.

Figure 1 The Most Often Mentioned Democratic Attributes in Responses to the Open-Ended Question



Sources: Afrobarometer (I), East Asia Barometer (I), Latinobarometer 2001. Post-communist Citizens Survey (plus Austria and Spain); USA: Camp survey; Afghanistan and Indonesia: The Asia Foundation surveys.

Figure 2. Regional Differences in the Liberal Conceptions of Democracy

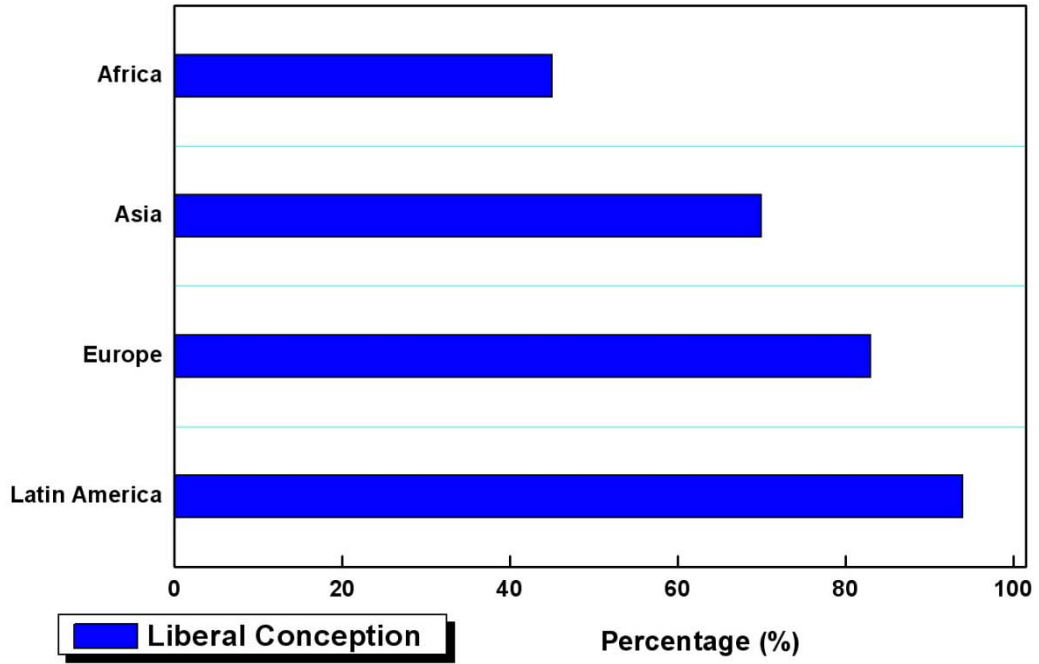


Table 2 Levels of the Cognitive Capacity to Understand Democracy

Country	Responses to Two Questions		Number of Questions Answered		
	Open-ended	Closed-ended	None	One	Both
S. Korea	96%	96%	1%	7%	92%
Mongolia	87	96	2	13	85
Philippines	69	95	3	31	66
Taiwan	78	95	3	21	76
Thailand	64	76	12	35	53
Indonesia	69	89	9	23	68
Singapore	90	94	3	10	87
Vietnam	83	88	7	15	78
Malaysia	68	94	4	31	65
(pooled)	71	91	6	27	67

Table 3 National Differences in the Number and Breadth of Named Democratic Properties

Country	Number			Breadth		(DK/DA)
	One	Two	Three	Narrow	Broad	
S. Korea	17%	27%	51%	17%	78%	6%
Mongolia	29	33	26	29	59	13
Philippines	57	9	3	57	12	32
Taiwan	39	24	13	39	37	21
Thailand	45	13	6	45	19	36
Indonesia	33	20	17	33	37	31
Singapore	78	11	10	78	21	10
Vietnam	56	17	10	56	27	17
Malaysia	42	17	10	41	37	32
(pooled)	39	17	14	39	31	29

Source: the East Asia Barometer surveys II.

Figure 3. The Properties of Democracy East Asians Named Frequently and Exclusively

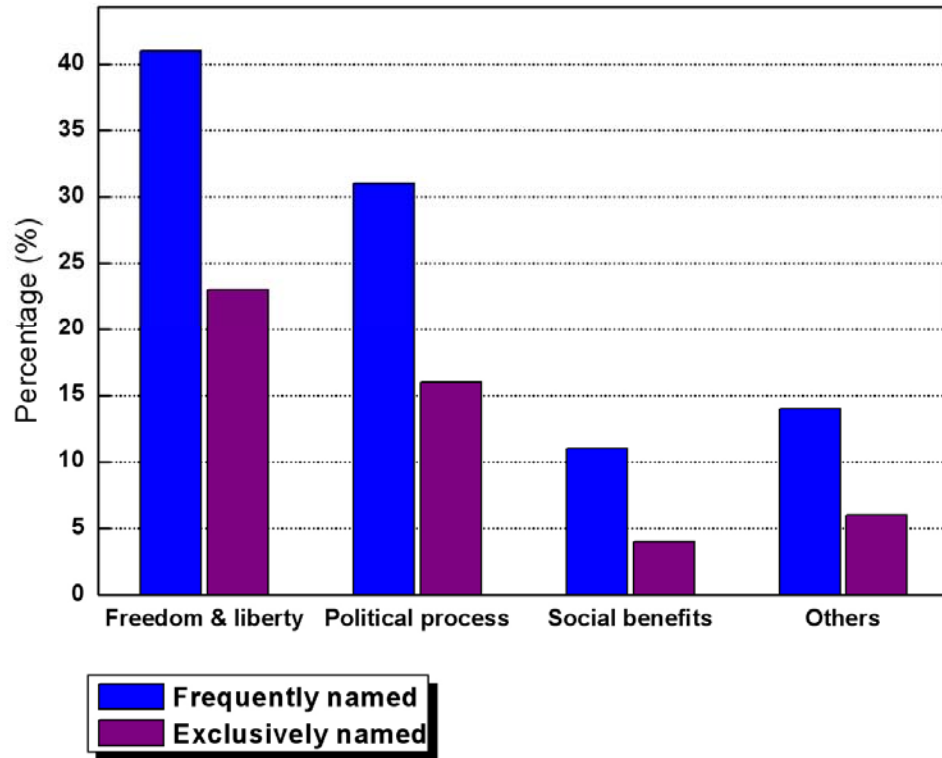


Table 4. National Differences in the Most Frequently and Exclusively Named Properties of Democracy

Country	Frequently Named Properties				Unidimensional				Multi-dimensional
	Liberty & Freedom	Political Process	Social Benefits	Others	Liberty & Freedom	Political Process	Social Benefits	Others	
S. Korea	75%	59%	18	17%	15%	7%	2%	3%	68%
Mongolia	60	28	27	25	24	7	5	7	45
Philippines	41	10	7	20	35	6	4	16	8
Taiwan	33	45	10	17	17	27	3	8	25
Thailand	24	42	3	8	15	31	1	5	12
Indonesia	40	34	13	13	23	15	4	4	24
Singapore	66	18	7	5	59	14	5	4	7
Vietnam	34	46	17	13	22	34	10	1	7
Malaysia	42	18	11	15	31	10	47	16	16
(pooled)	41	31	11	14	23	16	4	6	23

Source: the East Asia Barometer surveys II.

Table 5 National Differences in the Properties of Democracy East Asian Consider “Most Essential”

Country	Properties Selected as “Most Essential”				Types of Conceptions		
	Political Freedom (A)	Elections (B)	Economic Equality (C)	Economic Security (D)	Procedural (A + B)	Substantive (C + D)	(DK/DA)
Japan	12%	35%	17%	27%	47%	44%	9%
South Korea	15	35	36	10	50	46	4
Mongolia	30	19	21	26	49	46	4
Philippines	19	31	7	38	50	45	5
Taiwan	4	27	19	45	31	64	5
Thailand	14	38	14	12	52	26	24
Indonesia	21	27	11	29	48	40	11
Singapore	20	28	18	28	48	46	6
Vietnam	6	37	25	20	43	62	12
Malaysia	21	41	15	17	62	32	6
(Pooled)	16	30	18	26	46	45	9

Source: the East Asia Barometer surveys II.

Table 6 National Differences in Patterns of Understanding Democracy

Country	Patterns of Understanding				
	Narrow Procedural	Narrow Substantive	Broad Procedural	Broad Substantive	Ignorant
S. Korea	7%	10%	42%	34%	8%
Mongolia	14	15	31	26	15
Philippines	31	24	7	5	34
Taiwan	12	26	15	23	24
Thailand	26	12	11	5	47
Indonesia	19	12	21	15	33
Singapore	38	37	6	5	13
Vietnam	28	25	11	14	22
Malaysia	27	13	18	7	35
(pooled)	20	17	17	14	33

Source: the East Asia Barometer surveys II.

Table 7. Demographic Differences in Patterns of Subjective Democratization (in percent)

Demographic Characteristics	Uninformed	Narrow Procedural	Broad Procedural	Narrow Substantive	Broad Substantive
Gender					
Male	28	22	19	18	15
Female	37	17	14	17	15
Age					
17-29	26	23	19	16	16
30-39	28	20	19	18	16
40-49	29	21	16	19	16
50-59	34	18	16	19	13
60 & older	48	14	11	17	10
Education					
Illiterates	47	17	9	19	9
Primary Ed.	25	27	14	23	12
Secondary Ed.	28	17	20	16	20
Tertiary Ed.	25	18	25	13	19
Income					
Lowest	41	18	9	22	10
Low	32	19	15	19	14
Middle	26	19	20	18	18
High	26	18	23	14	18
Highest	22	24	23	14	17
Urbanization					
Rural	34	23	13	20	10
Urban	31	16	19	16	18