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Is Not So Bad Good Enough: Retesting Churchill’s Lesser-Evil Notion of Democracy in East Asia

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ABSTRACT

notion may seem very simple, but for a newly democratic citizenry to hold this view, ordinary people must first be capable of distinguishing democracy from other types of government. In addition, they must be dissatisfied with both their current democratic government and their previous authoritarian regimes but be less dissatisfied with democracy. Finally, the people must decide that because democracy is a lesser evil, they offers the first rigorous test of the Churchillian notion of democracy as a lesser evil. Our analysis of the East Asia Barometer surveys conducted in five new democracies in the region reveals that small minorities of these countries actually perceive the current

moreover, refuse to support democracy fully. They are also the least supportive of more democratization and the most supportive of less democratization. On the basis of these findings, we argue that the Churchillian lesser-evil notion of democracy has limited utility as an alternative paradigm for the study of democratization among ordinary citizens.
Is Not So Bad Good Enough?
Retesting Churchill’s Notion of Democracy in East Asia

Why do ordinary citizens prefer to live in a democracy? When do these citizens support a democratic political system that does not perform to their satisfaction? Why do these critical citizens remain supportive of a malfunctioning democracy? For the past decade, political scientists have proposed and tested a variety of theoretical models to address these and related questions regarding citizen orientations to democracy (Bratton, Mattes, and Gyimah-Boadi 2005; Camp 2001; Colton 2000; Dalton 2004; Evans and Whitefield 1995; Haerpfer 2001; Gibson 2004; Klingemann and Fuchs 1995; Linz and Stepan 1996; McDonough, Barnes, and Lopez Pina 1998; Norris 1999; Pharr and Putnam 2000; Rose, Mishler, and Haerpfer 1998; Shin 1999). The most eloquent and unassuming of these models

Churchill supporting democracy acknowledged that it may perform badly but not as badly as undemocratic forms of government. In his conceptualization, democracy need not attain political ideals including freedom, equality, and justice, as set forth in the works of political philosophers and theorists from John Locke through Thomas Jefferson to Robert Dahl (for a review of this literature, see Mueller 1999 and Powell Jr. 1982). It need not even establish the kinder and gentler form of government that many ordinary citizens of new democratic states and their political leaders have sought to establish since the current wave of global democratization began three decades ago (Lijphart 1999). Churchillian democracy is merely a lesser evil,
a conceptualization that directly challenges long-accepted idealistic and positive assertions in the theoretical literature about democracy, assertions that are widely endorsed by the mass citizenry of third-wave democracies (Camp 2001; Chu et al. 2006; Fuchs and Roller 2006; Gibson, Dutch, and Tedin 1992; Mattes and Bratton 2007; Miller, Hesli and Reisinger 1994; Shin 1999).

Moreover, the Churchillian notion that democracy constitutes a lesser evil directly challenges a growing body of literature on democratic consolidation. For the consolidation of nascent democratic rule to take root, the existing literature emphasizes the critical role of mass public support (Diamond 1999; Linz and Stepan 1996). This literature implicitly assumes that when citizens affirm democracy as the only game in town, they also view it positively as the best form of government. Rejecting this prevailing wisdom that democracy becomes the only game in town only when most people accept it positively as the best form of government, the Churchillian notion of democracy offers a counterpoint that could reshape the study of democratic consolidation.

To assess Churchill's epitaph about democracy, citizens must compare their own experiences of political life under democratic and undemocratic systems. The recent surge in democratic transitions in the various regions of the world, therefore, offers opportunities to assess empirically this notion of democracy. To date, tests of this proposition were made without determining whether citizens of new democracies had personally experienced the occurrence of democratic regime change. The tests also occurred exclusively within the context of post-Communist countries in Eastern and Central Europe (Rose, Mishler, and Haerpfer 1998; Shin and Wells 2001). Consequently, little is known about the validity of this lesser-evil notion for distinguishing popular
perceptions of democracy in other regions in democratic transition. Much less is known about whether it is perceptions of regime change or assessments of changed regime performance that more powerfully affects support for democracy.

To fill this gap in the literature, this study examines the 2001-2003 East Asia Barometer (EAB hereafter) survey data collected in five new democracies: Korea, Mongolia, the Philippines, Taiwan and Thailand. We use the data to ask and answer a series of empirical questions about democracy as a lesser evil. First, how much of the mass public in each of the East Asian countries perceive their newly formed democratic systems to be a lesser evil than the regime they knew prior to their recent transition to democracy? Do those who perceive the current political system as a lesser evil embrace democracy as the preferred form of government? Finally, how much independent influence does the conception of democracy as a lesser evil have on individual citizens’ support for democracy and democratization?

Our paper has seven sections. In the section that immediately follows, we review the previous scholarly endeavors to test the Churchillian notion of democracy. In the second section, we explicate the notion of a lesser evil as a concept and distinguish it from other types of regime perceptions. In the next section, we introduce a measurement of the Churchillian lesser-evil notion of democracy. In the following three sections, we present the results of univariate, bivariate, and multivariate analyses of the EAB surveys. The seventh and final section summarizes the key findings of our research and discusses their implications for the future study of democratic regime change.
Previous Research

Over the past decade, a great deal of survey research has investigated the sources and consequences of various perceptions and understandings of democracy. In Europe, Richard Rose has conducted New Democracies and Europe Barometers on a regular basis. Jose Montero has conducted several waves of national sample surveys in Spain, Portugal, Italy, and Greece. Marta Lagos has conducted annual Latino Barometer surveys in 15 Latin American countries and Spain. In Africa, Michael Bratton and Robert Mattes have launched the Afrobarometer surveys. In addition, James Gibson and many other individual scholars in Asia, Europe, and the United States have conducted numerous surveys on new democracies. As useful as these previous studies are in evaluating support for democracy in particular contexts, their utility in explicating and testing the Churchillian notion of a lesser evil is limited in two key ways.

First, most of these studies assume that democracy is the noblest form of government. They were designed to uncover popular conceptions of democracy as a series of political ideals, not as political realities (Gibson, Duch and Tedin 1992; Miller Hesli and Reisinger 1997; Shin 1999; Simon 1997). Instead of examining the reactions of citizens in new democracies to various real regimes, these studies mostly tapped the values that citizens attach to the democratic ideal. Using such idealistic conceptions, it is problematic to infer realistic assessments of democratic regimes in action. It is experiences (Mueller 1999; Rose and Mishler 1994; Rose, Shin, and Munro 1999).

Second, the bulk of the existing survey research was gathered using an absolute perspective that does not involve any comparisons with alternative forms of government
(Anderson and Guillory 1997; Cusack 1999; Fuchs, Guidorossi and Svensson 1995; Klingemann 1999). Characterizing experiences with the current democratic system as satisfying or unsatisfying, for example, provides no basis to infer whether a democracy performs better or worse than any of its undemocratic predecessors.

To date, only a very limited number of surveys have asked respondents to compare their perceptions of the democratic and undemocratic regimes they have experienced (Bratton, Mattes, and Gymia-Boden 2005; Chu et al. 2006; Rose, Mishler, and Haerpfer 1998). While it is possible for any analysis using these surveys to determine which political system, democratic or undemocratic, is seen as performing better, it is not possible to use these surveys to determine whether the current democratic system is preferable to its undemocratic predecessor in a positive sense or in a negative sense. These surveys merely indicate the extent to which the former is more or less preferable to the latter without revealing whether citizens view either form favorably.

To test the notion that people will support a dissatisfying democratic regime so long as they perceive its assessments of both the past and present regimes. Or they must uncover not only whether they feel satisfied or dissatisfied with the current democratic regime but also how they feel about it comparison with the past authoritarian regime. In their New Democracies Barometer surveys, Richard Rose and his associates (1998) got close to performing this test when they asked citizens of post-communist Europe to make separate assessments of the Communist and post-Communist systems. The researchers compared individual to estimate the proportion of the people who chose the post-Communist regime over the Communist regime. More than half the mass
public in Central and Eastern Europe were found to prefer the former to the latter (Rose and Mishler 1996: 36). This finding was interpreted as support for the Churchillian notion of democracy as a lesser evil.

In testing this notion, however, the researchers mistakenly inferred that being relatively preferable was the same as being a lesser evil, but to be a lesser evil, the government must be preferred while also being viewed in a negative light. A positive regime cannot be evil. Furthermore, the researchers assumed that citizens recognized a transition from an authoritarian past to a democratic present, but what if citizens did not recognize this transition? Then they should not be considered adherents of the Churchillian notion of democracy, yet in the Rose study, they were.

Clearly, Rose and his associates treated the notion of a lesser-evil democracy as a unidimensional rather than multidimensional phenomenon. At the same time, they stretched the notion of a lesser evil to the extent that any current regime is termed a lesser evil as long as it is perceived to be preferable to the old one. For them, therefore, a current regime becomes a lesser evil when it performs better or more positively than the old Communist regime, whether the current regime is viewed negatively or positively and whether it is viewed as a democracy or an authoritarian regime. Because this usage stretches the original meaning of the lesser-evil notion (cf. Collier and Levitsky 1997), it is difficult to accept *Democracy and its Alternatives* as the robust test of the notion that the authors claim it to be (Rose, Mishler, and Haerpfer 1998: 85).

**Conceptualization**

Our review of the existing literature suggests that the Churchillian notion of democracy as a lesser evil is a complex concept that necessitates much more than a
description of one political entity. It requires the evaluation and comparison of divergent political systems, democratic and undemocratic. In making a comparative evaluation of those systems, it emphasizes the frequent failures of those systems to satisfy the citizenry nceptually, therefore, the Churchillian notion constitutes a framework for a comparative evaluation of the failings of democratic and undemocratic political systems.

Empirically, this notion rejects the popular view that democracy is an ideal form of government. Instead, it holds that democracy, like undemocratic alternatives, is a bad or undesirable form of political system. It holds further that democracy is merely less undesirable as a political system than its undemocratic alternatives. Being a system of government that does not dissatisfy its people as much as a previous undemocratic system of government did, democracy is appraised as a lesser evil.

In the eyes of ordinary people, therefore, democracy becomes a lesser evil only when they perceive and assess the past and present regimes in three particular ways. First, they perceive the past regime as an authoritarian regime and the current regime as a democracy and thus recognize the occurrence of democratic regime change. Second, they assess both r performances. Third, they assess the current democratic regime less negatively or to be less undesirable than the past authoritarian regime.

Theoretically, moreover, the Churchillian notion offers a hypothesis linking negative rather than positive perceptions of a new democratic political system to support for democracy. This notion implies that people would remain supportive of the current democratic political system as long as they view the system as performing less negatively
than its predecessor. It also implies that those who perceive the system as a lesser evil are likely to be dissatisfied critical democrats. To determine whether the perceptions of a lesser evil really matter in shaping support for democracy, assessments of negative improvements should be distinguished from two other categories of assessments, positive and no improvements. Only when respondents who report negative improvements register more support for than opposition to democracy and a significantly higher level of democratic support than other respondents, can it be argued that the perception of a lesser evil matters in shaping democratic support.

In short, the notion of democracy as a lesser evil embodies two new noteworthy ideas, which contrast sharply with those underlying the prevailing paradigm that emphasizes positive conceptions of democracy among the mass public as a cultural foundation for the consolidation of nascent democracies. Conceptually, this notion offers a tool for empirical observation by focusing on democracy-in-action rather than democracy-in-principle. Specifically, it offers a realistic perspective that allows for accurately determining how individual citizens of newly democratizing countries perceive and understand their regimes even when they have no knowledge of democratic theory and little experience in democratic politics. Theoretically, this vantage point offers an alternative explanation of why critical citizens continue to support a new democratic system, even when it fails to perform to their satisfaction (Dalton 1999; Klingmann 1999).

Measurement

Do East Asians actually perceive their political systems as a lesser evil, consistent half a century ago? To address this
question more accurately than did Rose and his associates, we take into consideration

performance. To measure the recognition of democratic regime change, we chose a pair
of items from the EAB surveys, which asked respondents to rate, respectively, the past
and current regimes on a 10-point scale in which scores of 1 and 10 indicates,
respectively, complete dictatorship and complete democracy. We collapsed their
responses into the two categories of non-democracy and democracy, placing scores of 5
and below into the former and 6 and above into the latter. Comparing the dichotomous
ratings of the past and present regime, we determined the recognition of democratic
regime change. Perceiving the past regime as a non-democracy and the current regime as
a democracy is considered recognizing democratic regime change.

To determine whether the current regime performs less negatively or undesirably
than the previous one, we chose another pair of questions. One question asked
respondents to rate on a 4-point verbal scale the extent to which they were satisfied or
dissatisfied with the working of the current regime. We collapsed their responses to this
question into the two categories of positive (very satisfied and fairly satisfied) and
negative (not very satisfied and not at all satisfied) assessments. To determine

the wake of
democratic regime change, we fashioned another question that asked how strongly
respondents would agree or disagree with the statement that

We also collapsed their responses

label
the current democratic system as the best for their country, we conclude that they view
democracy as an improvement over all the other systems they have experienced.

Finally, we formulated a typology of six regime type-orientations on the basis of
the three criteria discussed above: (1) whether citizens recognize the occurrence of
democratic regime change, (2) whether they evaluate the current regime negatively, and
(3) whether they evaluate it as an improved system. The six types of regime orientations
are: (1) an unimproved authoritarian regime in which citizens neither perceive democratic
regime change nor experience any improvement in regime performance; (2) a negatively
improved authoritarian regime in which citizens neither recognize democratic regime
change nor feel satisfied but feel less unsatisfied than in the past; (3) a positively
improved authoritarian regime in which citizens recognize the current system as
authoritarian (no regime change occurred) but rate it positively and are more satisfied
than in the past; (4) an unimproved democratic regime in which citizens recognize the
occurrence of democratic regime change but they do not recognize the current regime as
performing any better, either positively or negatively, than its authoritarian predecessor;
(5) a negatively improved democratic regime in which citizens recognize the occurrence
of democratic regime change, are unsatisfied, but are less unsatisfied than in the past; and
(6) a positively improved democratic regime in which citizens acknowledge that a regime
change did occur, are satisfied, and prefer the current democratic system to the past
authoritarian system. Of these six types of regime orientations, the fifth type of
negatively improved democratic regime is of notable interest to our inquiry because it
-dimenionally notion of democracy as a lesser evil.
Univariate Analysis

National Differences in Regime Perceptions and Assessments

Our analysis of the EAB surveys begins by investigating whether citizens from different nations vary in their perceptions of regime characters and assessments of regime performances. In the five new East Asian democracies studied here, the previous authoritarian regimes were very different from each other. Korea and Thailand, for example, were military dictatorships, while the Philippines was a civilian dictatorship. Mongolia and Taiwan, on the other hand, were one-party dictatorships. The modes of the Philippines to the negotiated transition in Korea (Dalton and Shin 2006; Lee 1995; Reilly 2006).

Figure 1 compares citizen perceptions of democratic regime change across the five countries. This comparison reveals that majorities, though not always large majorities, of the East Asian mass publics are cognitively capable of recognizing that democratic regime change occurred in their own country. Of the five new East Asian democracies, Thailand has the highest percentage (72%) of citizens who believe that a regime change occurred in their polity. Taiwan has the lowest percentage (53%) recognizing a transition to democracy from authoritarian rule. The pooled sample indicates that about 6 out of 10 (59%) citizens in East Asia perceive that a regime change occurred in their respective countries. This means that as many as 2 out of 5 are not cognitively capable of distinguishing democracy from its alternative even after more than a decade of democratic rule.

(Figure 1 here)
Figure 2 shows how East Asians appraise the performance of the current regime in comparison with its authoritarian predecessors. The data reported in this figure confirm our suspicion that many East Asians may remain nostalgic for the authoritarian past and critical of their current democratic system. In this regard, Norris (1997) points out the political, economic, and cultural costs of democratic transition can make citizens evaluate their current system in a negative light or in such a way that they perceive no improvement from the past.

(Figure 2 here)

Of the five countries surveyed, critical citizens are more numerous in Korea (64%), the Philippines (47%), and Taiwan (44%). In these three countries, citizens critical of the current democratic regime (those who expressed dissatisfaction with its workings) outnumber those who believe that it performs positively better or more desirably than the authoritarian regime of the past. In Korea, a majority close to two-thirds strongly believe that their newly installed democratic system does not perform any better than the military dictatorship that freed many of them from poverty. In Mongolia and Thailand, perceivers of positive improvements in its performance outnumber those critical of the performance. Only in Thailand, the former leads the latter by a margin of 2 to 1 (62% vs. 31%). Despite these differences, the five countries are alike in that those who rate the current regime as performing negatively better or less undesirably than the previous regime constitute the smallest minorities. These minorities expressing less dissatisfaction with the current democratic regime range from 5 percent in Korea and Thailand to 14 percent in Taiwan. This finding suggests that the democratic
transformation of authoritarian rule engenders greater satisfaction than greater
dissatisfaction among ordinary citizens in East Asia.

To determine if these citizens tend to perceive democracy as a lesser evil, Table 1
reports the distribution of each national sample into the six types of regime orientations.

Lesser-evil notion of democracy are those
who perceive the current regime as a democracy that performs negatively but better than
percentages reported in Table 1 make it clear that lesser-evil perceptions are not the most
popular type of regime orientations among East Asians. Instead, they represent one of the
least popular types. In all five countries, minorities from 5 to 14 percent subscribe to this
type. Looking at the whole sample shows that less than one out of ten (9%) East Asians
are lesser-evil perceivers.

(Table 1 here)

Table 1 also shows that the most popular type of regime orientation varies
considerably across the five countries. In Korea, the perceptions of an unimproved
democratic regime are the most popular with a plurality of 37 percent. In Mongolia and
Thailand, perceptions of a positively improved democratic regime are the most popular.
In the remaining two countries, the Philippines and Taiwan, an unimproved authoritarian
regime constitutes the most popular type. These findings make it clear that East Asians
are more divided than united in perceiving and assessing their regimes of the past and the
present. Such divisions may be one of the reasons why these new democracies have been
struggling to become fully consolidated democracies (Chang, Chu, and Park 2007; Cheng
2003; Croissant 2004).
National Differences in Democratic Support

Our dependent variable of democratic support is measured with a 5-point index. The EAB surveys asked respondents to rate their personal desire to live in a democracy and the suitability of democratic rule for their country on a 10-point scale. Scores of 6 and above on these two scales confirm democratic desire and suitability. In addition, the surveys asked two questions regarding preferability and efficacy: (1) Is democracy always preferable to any other form of government? and (2) Is democracy capable of solving the major problems facing the country? Using the answers to these four questions, we constructed a 5-point index of democratic support. As a qualitative measure of democratic support, we selected as full or authentic democrats those who achieved the highest score of 4 on this scale.

To what extent do East Asians support democracy? Figure 3 shows considerable variation across five East Asian countries in terms of the mean levels of their democratic support. These levels vary from a low of 2.3 in Taiwan to a high of 3.5 in Thailand. For the remaining three countries—Korea, Mongolia, and the Philippines—they hover around 3.0. Despite such differences in the mean support levels, all these countries, however, register democratic support above the midpoint (2.0) of the 5-point scale. This indicates that East Asians, as a whole, are more supportive than unsupportive of democracy.

(Figure 3 here)

As important as it is to know how the mean levels of democratic support vary across new East Asian democracies, it is more important to know how full supporters of democracy vary across these countries because full supporters are the most likely to demand further democratization. According to Figure 4, the percentages of these
supporters range from a low of 22 percent in Taiwan to a high of 70 percent in Thailand. In other words, unqualified supporters of democracy are over three times more numerous in Thailand than in Taiwan. In the other three countries, as in Taiwan, these supporters form minorities from 36 to 40 percent. According to the figure for the pooled sample, a substantial minority of two out of five (42%) East Asians support democracy to the fullest extent. This means that a majority of three-fifths remains reluctant to embrace democracy fully or unconditionally even after a considerable period of democratic rule. Why the proportion of full democrats ranges so widely within the East Asian region remains a puzzle.

(Figure 4 here)

**Bivariate Analyses**

Now that we have looked at national differences in terms of our key independent and dependent variables, we proceed to examine the relationships *between* these variables. Does the experience of democratic regime change affect citizen support for democracy? Do those who have experienced such regime change support democracy more fully than those who have not? Are citizens who perceive democracy as a lesser evil more likely to be supportive of democracy? Figure 5 reports the relevant data to these questions.

(Figure 5 here)

The figure shows that in every East Asian democracy most citizens who believe a regime change did occur are more supportive of democracy than those who do not. It also shows considerable cross-national variation in the mean level of democratic support between the former and the latter. In three of the five countries—Korea, Mongolia, and the Philippines—there is relatively little difference between those who experienced
democratization and those who did not. In Taiwan and Thailand, the difference is substantial, over three times as much as what is observed in the other three countries. When all these five countries are considered together in the pooled sample, the message is clear that in East Asia as a whole, perceivers of democratic regime change are significantly more supportive of democracy than non-perceivers of the change (3.2 vs. 2.7).

We now shift the analysis by changing our dependent variable from the 5-point scale index of democratic support to the qualitative variable that taps full support for democracy. You will recall that fully supportive citizens are those who view democratic rule as suitable, preferable, desirable, and efficacious. Similar to our previous analysis using the 5-point index, we see in Figure 6 that across the board, citizens that perceived the occurrence of democratic regime change in their polities are significantly more likely to be fully supportive of democracy than those who did not. In every East Asian country, the former lead the latter by a substantial margin of at least 10 percentage points. In the case of Thailand, the margin of their difference extends to 26 percentage points (51% vs. 78%). Undoubtedly the experience of democratic transition from authoritarian rule motivates citizens to support democracy.

(Figure 6 about here)

In terms of regime performance evaluation, we see a pattern confirming the conventional wisdom that greater satisfaction breeds more support. In Figure 7, we see a pattern in the wake of their democratic regime transformation are significantly more supportive of democracy than those who rate it unimproved or negatively improved. This pattern
holds true for all the countries surveyed. For the pooled sample, the mean of democratic support is a full half-point (or nearly 20 percent) higher among those who see positive improvements than among those who see no improvement, and it is .6 points (or 22 percent) higher among the former than among those who see negative improvement (3.3 vs. 2.8 and 3.3 vs. 2.7).

(Figure 7 here)

More noteworthy is the finding that the perceptions of negatively improved regime performance do not always engender greater democratic support, contrary to what the Churchillian lesser-evil notion of democracy implies. Only in one country—Taiwan—do those who are less dissatisfied with the current democratic regime than with the past regime register a higher level of democratic support than those who remain equally dissatisfied with both (2.3 vs. 1.8). In the other four countries, the former are either less supportive or equally supportive of democracy than the latter. This finding suggests that decreasing dissatisfaction with the regime does not motivate citizens to express greater support for it. This raises a serious question about the validity of the lesser-evil notion as a theoretical model for explaining democratic support.

We now examine whether the same relationship exists between relative assessments of regime performance and full support for democracy as exists between relative assessments of regime performance and support. Once again the relationship between these two variables is similar to the one found with the 5-point democratic support index. Figure 8 shows that citizens who evaluate their regime as performing better in a positive sense are significantly more likely to support democracy fully than those who evaluate their regime as performing better in a negative sense or who perceive
no improvement in its performance. In every country, full supporters of democracy are most numerous among the former. Contrary to what is expected from the lesser-evil notion, they are least numerous among those who view democracy as a lesser evil in four of the five countries. Only in Taiwan are lesser-evil perceivers associated with a higher level of full support for democracy than those of unimproved democratic regime change. The figures for the pooled sample show that more than half (54%) the citizens in the category of positively improved democratic regime change fully supports democracy. The corresponding figure for those in the category of negatively improved democratic regime change is less than one-third (30%); moreover, the percentage of full supporters among lesser-evil perceivers is 5 percentage points lower than the percentage of full supporters in the category of an unimproved democracy (35%). Once again, this finding undermines the validity of the Churchillian notion linking citizen perceptions of democracy as a lesser evil to greater support for democracy.

(Figure 8 about here)

We now begin to test the lesser-evil notion as a hypothesis. In Table 2, we examine whether this particular type of regime orientation is associated with a higher level of democratic support than are others. This particular type called “negatively improved democratic regime change” is distinguished from the five other types in that citizens believe that a democratic transition did occur and that the current regime performs less undesirably or unfavorably than its authoritarian predecessor. For all five East Asian countries, it is evident that lesser-evil adherents are not the most supportive of democracy. In four of these five countries, they express even lower levels of democratic support than those who perceive no improvement in regime performance, not to mention
those perceiving a positively improved democracy. The percentages for the pooled sample, moreover, indicate that East Asians in the lesser-evil category are less supportive of democracy than those who report living under a positively improved authoritarian or unimproved democratic system (2.8 vs. 3.4; 2.8 vs. 3.0).

(Table 2 here)

Most notably, in every new East Asian democracy, respondents who report living in a positively improved democratic system are significantly more supportive of democracy than those who report living through any other kind of regime transition or non-transition. The figures for the pooled sample clearly substantiate this point. In the sample, those who experience the occurrence of democratic regime change and positive improvements in regime performance have a mean score of 3.4 on the 0-4 point democratic support index. This score is from .4 points to 1 full point (or 13 to 41 percent) higher than the mean scores of respondents who report living through any other transition or non-transition. Those mean scores range from 2.4 to 3.0. Of the six types of regime orientations, the most powerful contributor to democratic support appears to be that of a positively improved democracy, i.e., the new democracy performs more satisfactorily than unsatisfactorily and better than the regime of the authoritarian past.

Table 3 tests the relationship between the six types of regime change orientations and full support for democracy. Similar to the results shown in Table 2, lesser-evil perceivers are less likely to support democracy fully than citizens who believe they live in a positively improved democratic system. In every country, the percentage of full democratic supporters is much higher among the latter than the former (50% vs. 37% in Korea; 53% vs. 34% in Mongolia; 52% vs. 33% in the Philippines; 36% vs. 21% in
Taiwan; and 80% vs. 72% in Thailand). Moreover, in every country but Taiwan, one-half or more of those in the category of a positively improved democracy supports democracy fully. Corresponding figures for those in a negatively improved democracy are less than two-fifths in every country with the exception of Thailand. The figures for the pooled sample also show that the former lead the latter in supporting democracy fully by a margin of nearly 2 to 1 (34% vs. 61%).

(Table 3 here)

In every new East Asian democracy, moreover, lesser-evil perceivers are less fully supportive of democracy than those who perceive it as an unimproved democracy (fifth category). According to the percentage figures for the pooled sample, the former trails the latter by a substantial margin of 8 percentage points (34% vs. 42%). This indicates that even when citizens feel less dissatisfied with the performance of their democratic regime than with the past regime, they are not willing to support democracy to any greater extent than when they have seen no improvements.

Our analyses of the EAB surveys thus far focused on the relationships between perceptions of regime change and assessments of its impact on regime performance on the one hand and support for democracy on the other hand. These bivariate analyses reveal that only a small minority of lesser-evil perceivers supports democracy fully, and those who hold this view are less likely to support democracy than those who have other perceptions of the current democratic regime. These findings do not seem to confirm the Churchillian hypothesis put forward by Richard Rose and his colleagues. The findings are, however, derived from the bivariate analyses that did not control for demographic and other pertinent variables known to affect democratic support. In the next section, we
conduct the Multiple Classification Analyses (MCA) with these variables to estimate the independent effects of regime orientations on the quantitative and qualitative measures of democratic support.

**Multiple Classification Analyses**

To test rigorously the lesser-evil notion as a hypothesis, we need to employ a multivariate analysis to tease out the relationships between our six types of regime orientations and democratic support. Among a variety of statistical techniques, we chose the MCA known as the equivalent to a multiple regression analysis using dummy variables. Unlike ordinary least-square and other statistical techniques, the MCA does not require the normal distribution of units. Nor does it require that all predictors are measured on interval scales or that the relationships be linear. It is, therefore, capable of handling predictors measured on nominal and any other scales and interrelationships of any form among the predictor variables and between a predictor and dependent variable. It is also capable of handling a dichotomous dependent variable with frequencies that are not extremely unequal (Andrews, Morgan, and Sonquist 1973). This technique is, therefore, more pertinent in the analysis of public opinion data than others, although it is not as popular.

**Control Variables**

To assess the independent effect of regime orientations on democratic support among East Asians, we selected as control variables four demographic and nine other variables known to shape citizen support for democracy. These variables are chosen to represent seven major theories or explanations of democratic support. They include
socialization, modernization, governmental performance, political learning, social capital, cultural values, and cognitive competence (for a review of this literature, see Inglehart and Welzel 2005; Mattes and Bratton 2007; Mishler and Rose 2005; Newton 2005; Norris 1999).

The four demographic variables considered are gender, age, educational attainment, and household income. The first two of these variables serve as indicators of socialization and the last two of modernization. As indicators of governmental performance, we chose two pairs of questions, one tapping perceptions of corruption in the local and national governments and the other assessing the conditions of the national and household economies. We measured democratic political learning in terms of partisanship and participation in voting and campaigning, and social capital in terms of associational membership and interpersonal trust. The propensity for deference to authority, and the capacity to define democracy and understand the complexity of politics are chosen to measure, respectively, adherence to non-democratic values and cognitive competence. In addition to these seven clusters of twelve variables, we included the country of residence as a control variable. Unlike these variables, country represents a multitude of theoretical clusters, including socialization, modernization, and democratic political learning.

Levels of Democratic Support

How do perceptions of democratic regime change and relative assessments of regime performance affect levels of democratic support independent of all thirteen of the control variables? Model 1 in Table 4 reports the results of the MCA analysis performed on the 5-point index of democratic support. The beta coefficients for our two key
dependent variables—regime change in type and performance—make it clear that even after the effects of all control variables are statistically removed, these two variables have a statistically significant independent effect on the democratic support level. Of all the predictors included in Model 1, these two regime change variables register the second and third highest beta coefficients, after only the country variable, which represents a multitude of influences on democratic support. The magnitude of their beta coefficients (.16 and .15) is more than one-and-a-half times as high as the one for education (.07), the fourth most powerful predictor. Another notable feature of Model 1 is that perceptions of democratic regime change contribute more to democratic support than assessments of regime performance. Previous research completely overlooks this important dimension of the lesser-evil notion.

(Table 4 here)

In Model 2, we ran the same analysis of the democratic support level with the categorical variable combining perceptions of both regime-type change and performance change. The results mirror the findings reported in Model 1: the six types of regime change orientations as a predictor have a statistically significant and more powerful effect on democratic support than all other predictors with the exception of country.

Full Support for Democracy

In Model 3, we report the independent effects of regime change perceptions and performance change assessments on another dependent variable measuring full support for democracy. As expected from the findings reported in Models 1 and 2, these perceptions and assessments individually have a statistically significant and more powerful effect on both measures of democratic support than all other 10 influences
discussed in literature on this subject. When these perceptions and assessments are combined into the nominal index of regime orientations in Model 4, this index predicts the dependent variable over two times as well as any of its components—perceptions of regime change and assessments of regime performance change—do (.12 vs. .26; .10 vs. .26). This suggests that with either of such perceptions or assessments alone, we can offer only a partial account of democratic support.

The beta coefficients estimated by the MCA allow us to determine the relative predictive power or importance of regime orientations as a variable shaping democratic support. These coefficients, however, say little about the direction in and extent to which the levels of democratic support vary across the types of regime change orientations. To estimate such direction and magnitude, we need to compare the percentages fully supportive of democracy across the six types of regime orientations after the effects of all other control variables are statistically removed. Unlike all other multivariate analysis, the MCA is capable of generating the scores of the dependent variable for each category of a predictor measured on a nominal scale before and after the adjustments for its intercorrelations with other predictors. The adjusted percentage figures reported in Figure 9 show the differences in full support for democracy after the effects of all other predictors on such support have been statistically removed.

(Figure 9 here)

According to the adjusted percentages reported in Figure 9, how citizens understand and label the current and past regimes greatly affects their decision to support democracy fully. Figure 9 shows that the percentages fully supportive of democracy vary from a low of 31 to a high of 54. Among those who perceive the current regime as an
unimproved or negatively improved authoritarian regime, less than one-third supports it fully. Among those who view it as a positively improved democracy, more than one-half supports it to the same extent. This suggests that regime orientations alone can expand the family of full democrats in a given nation by one and three-quarter times.

A careful scrutiny of the adjusted percentages in Figure 9 also reveals that perceptions of democratic regime change always expand the family of full democrats as much as from 8 to 14 percentage points. In contrast, assessments of performance improvements do not always bring about a higher proportion of full democrats. Only when regime performance is rated as positively improved does full support for democracy increase. When it is rated as negatively improved, no such increase occurs. In fact, among respondents who recognize the occurrence of democratic regime change, negative improvements actually lead to a substantial decrease in full support for democracy. Figure 9 shows that those who perceive the current regime as a lesser evil are less fully supportive of democracy than who perceive the regime as an unimproved democracy (39% vs. 42%). Evidently, perceptions of a lesser-evil democracy, unlike those of a positively improved democracy, are not capable of motivating East Asians to embrace democracy fully.

Finally, Figure 9 clearly shows that East Asians become full democrats in the greatest proportion when they recognize the current regime as a democracy and feel greater satisfaction, not less dissatisfaction, with its performance. This finding directly challenges the Churchillian notion of democracy, which links lesser dissatisfaction with sustaining and expanding support for a new democratic regime. It also suggests that in
East Asia, a nation of full democrats can be built only when the existing democratic regime makes citizens more satisfied than less dissatisfied with it.

**Support for Democratization**

eir support for more democratization. These two kinds of support may seem to be the same, but actually, orientations to democracy and democratization are fundamentally different. The former refer to the affective type of political attitudes while the latter to the behavioral type. Only when these two types of orientations join together are citizens of new democracies most likely to convert themselves into democratic advocates or reformers.

As an additional test of the lesser-evil notion, we now examine how the different perceptions of democratic regime change affect citizen support for the democratization of their nascent democratic rule to a greater or lesser extent. To construct an index tapping such support, we subtracted the experienced level of democracy from the desired level of democracy. Using separate questions, the EAB surveys asked respondents to express these levels on a 10-point numeric scale running from 1 (complete dictatorship) to 10 (complete democracy). This operation resulted in an index with values ranging from -9 to +9. Negative scores of this index indicate that the current regime is *over-democratized* and needs to be democratized to a lesser extent. Positive scores, on the other hand, indicate that the regime is *under-democratized* and needs to be democratized to a greater extent.

In Table 5, we performed the MCA analysis on this index tapping support for the democratization of the existing regime, not just democracy in general. Once again, the
perceptions of regime change in both its type and performance as predictors of support stand out from all other predictors. Of the 13 predictors included in the analysis, the regime change variable registers the highest beta coefficient (.23) (see Model 1). The magnitude of its beta is, moreover, at least three times as high as that of any of the other eleven predictors exclusive of country, including economic and political performance, partisanship, social capital, and cognitive sophistication. This is another piece of unambiguous evidence confirming the earlier finding that the dynamics of subjective democratization depends largely on the perceptions of democratic regime change.

(Table 5 here)

How does support for democratization vary across the six types of those perceptions? To address this question, we first collapsed all negative and positive scores of the aforementioned 19-point index into two separate categories, each of which indicates support for more or less democratization. We performed the MCA analysis on each category to determine how specifically the different types of regime change orientations shape support for more or less democratization. For each type, Table 6 shows three adjusted percentages: (1) the percentage supportive of more democratization; (2) the percentage supportive of less democratization; and (3) the Percentage Differential Index (PDI) showing the extent to which the former prevails over the latter.

(Table 6 here)

According to these percentages presented in Table 6, those who perceive the current regime as a lesser-evil are the least supportive of more democratization. At the same time, they are the most supportive of less democratization. As a result, their net level of support for more democratization is the lowest. On the PDI index measuring such
net support level, lesser-evil perceivers trail other types of perceivers by 6 percentage points or more. This finding indicates that perceptions of the current regime as a lesser evil significantly weaken rather than strengthen demand for further democratization. Undoubtedly, this finding undermines the Churchillian hypothesis that such perceptions play a positive role in the democratization process.

We now compare Tables 4 and 5 to determine whether similar or different forces shape support for democracy and democratization, seen here as two different types of political orientations. According to the beta coefficients in the tables, our key variable, tapping perceptions of democratic regime change, stands out as the most powerful influence on both orientations. Over two times as much as any other variable included in the MCA analyses does, these perceptions motivate East Asians to support democracy in general, and the expansion of limited democratic rule to the greatest extent. In this respect, these two types of democratic orientations are very much alike in their genesis.

In the other sets of significant influences on the orientations, however, the tables show they are more different than similar. Support for democracy is, for example, significantly shaped by education, assessments of political performance, interpersonal trust, and cognitive competence. Support for more democratization, on the other hand, is significantly shaped by partisanship, electoral participation, and membership in voluntary associations. These two sets of predictors stand in stark contrast to each other.

By and large, support for democracy, as a form of affective political orientation, cognitive capacity. In contrast, support for democratization, as a form of behavioral orientation, has very little to do with any of such political attitudes or cognitive
capacity. It has a lot more to do with their political and social activities. These findings suggest that citizen learning about democracy takes two different forms — psychological and behavioral — and they have different consequences for the process of democratization.

**Summary and Conclusion**

What does democracy mean to ordinary people with little experience in democratic politics and no knowledge of democratic theory? When do they decide to embrace it as the most preferred system of governance and why? Do dissatisfied or critical remain supportive of democratic principles and ideals? Understanding the answers to these questions is the key to unraveling the process of democratization taking place among individual citizens of new democracies.

democracy is the worst form of government, except all those other forms that have been tried from time to time." In emphasizing that a new democratic regime does not have to be positively attractive to become the only political game in town, the Churchill notion constitutes a clear and meaningful alternative to the idealistic or positively-oriented paradigm that has guided the study of third-wave democracies for the past two decades. Nonetheless, his notion of democracy as a lesser evil has not been explicated fully.

Previous multidimensional characteristics. Previous research also focused exclusively on post-Communist Europe.

We began this paper with the argument that previous public opinion research did not rigorously test the Churchillian lesser-evil notion of democracy. Rose and his associates set out to test this notion with a series of surveys conducted in former
communist countries in East and Central Europe. Their tests, however, are incomplete conceptually as well as methodologically. Conceptually, they treated the Churchillian notion as a unidimensional phenomenon dealing exclusively with the assessments of regime performance among the mass publics and perceptions of the type of regime change they experienced. As a result, their test treated those who viewed the current regime as authoritarian regime the same as it treated those who viewed the current regime as a democracy. Methodologically, they neglected to distinguish between the positively and negatively perceived improvements in assessing regime performance change. In other words, they failed to take into account the difference between citizens feeling more satisfied with the current regime than with the last and citizens feeling less dissatisfied with the current regime than with the last. Although the notion of a lesser evil refers directly to the latter only, Rose and his

these two limitations, we proposed a multidimensional dynamic conception and a more nuanced measurement.

For a rigorous test, we analyzed the 2001-2003 East Asia Barometer surveys conducted in five third-wave democracies in the region. We first identified those citizens of each country who recognize that the authoritarian regime of the past has been transformed into a democracy. Then we determined whether these citizens were more satisfied or less dissatisfied with the performance of their new democratic regime than that of the past authoritarian regime. Of these two groups of citizens, we defined lesser-evil perceivers to be those less dissatisfied with their current regime. Finally, we compared this particular type of regime perception with five other types in terms of the
levels of general and full support for democracy. Our analyses of these surveys revealed three notable findings.

First, we found that a substantial minority of East Asians was not cognitively capable of recognizing their country’s transition to democracy. We also found that East Asians tend to view democracy in a positive rather than in a negative light. As a result, only very small minorities in all five new East Asian democracies actually perceive their current democratic system as a lesser evil or a negatively improved democracy. For the whole sample, these lesser-evil perceivers constitute less than one-tenth (7%) of the adult population. In none of the countries do they constitute a minority larger than one-seventh. This finding that a majority of East Asians do not view the current regime as a negatively improved democracy suggests that the lesser-evil notion of democracy as a concept cannot accurately represent the dynamics of democratization taking place in the minds of the mass citizenry.

Across all five East Asian democracies, the most ardent supporters of democracy regime as a positively improved or more satisfactorily performing democracy. In all five countries, moreover, lesser-evil perceivers are less fully supportive of democracy than those who see no improved regime performance, either negative or positive, in the wake of democratic transition. When the effects of other predictors are statistically removed, only a small minority of these lesser-evil perceivers fully supports democracy. In striking contrast, a majority of those who perceive a positively improved democratic system supports democracy fully. These findings suggest that perceiving democracy as a lesser-evil does not foster democratic support. East Asians are most likely to become
unqualified democrats only when they see the malfunctioning regime of the authoritarian past transformed into a well- and better functioning democracy.

We found further support for this finding when we measured citizen support for democratization. We discovered that respondents who perceive the current regime as a lesser-evil are the least supportive of their country becoming more democratic. At the same time, they are the most supportive of their country becoming less democratic. As a result, their net level of support for democratization is lower than that of any of the other five kinds of perceivers. This finding indicates that perceptions of the current regime as a lesser evil significantly weaken rather than strengthen demand for further democratization, a conclusion that is in direct opposition to the Churchillian notion of democracy.

Finally, how East Asians perceive the character of the current regime and the quality of its performance compared to the past regime influences their support for democracy much more powerfully than any demographic and other social and cultural factors known in the literature. The perception that the malfunctioning authoritarian system is transformed into a well- and better functioning democracy is more than two times more powerful than any other factor in motivating East Asians to embrace democracy fully.

These findings clearly indicate that ordinary citizens are most likely to embrace democracy fully when they are satisfied with the current democratic regime and prefer it to the authoritarian regime of the past. It is not enough for them to prefer their new situation to their old if they are still unsatisfied with their government. In light of these findings, we conclude the lesser-evil notion of democracy cannot be considered a robust
alternative paradigm for the study of democratization taking place among ordinary

   citizens in new East Asian democracies. Although widely used in the scholarly

   community and news media (Diamond 2001; Rose 1999), this notion is of limited utility

   not only as a concept to describe the phenomenon accurately and but also as a hypothesis
to explain it adequately. To unravel the dynamics of their support for democratic politics
more fully, future public opinion survey research needs to investigate the question of
what makes citizens react positively to democratic regime change.
Endnotes

1 Detailed information about the first wave of East Asia Barometer surveys is available at http://eacsurvey.law.ntu.edu.tw.

2 Each national sample survey interviewed more than 1,000 randomly selected potential voters (1,500 for South Korea, 1,096 for Mongolia N=1,096; 1,200 for the Philippines; 1,415 for Taiwan; and 1,546 Thailand). Our pooled sample in the MCA analysis had a total of 5,992 respondents.

3 This index of democratic support is derived from the summation of four separate indicators with
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and the


Powell, G. Bi


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Comparative Political Studies 38 (9): 1050-78.


in Post-


Figure 1. National Differences in Citizen Perceptions of Democratic Regime Change (in percentage)
Figure 2. National Differences in Relative Assessments of Regime Performance (in percentage)

- Korea: No Improvement 9.7%, Negative Improvement 26.2%, Positive Improvement 64.1%
- Mongolia: No Improvement 17.4%, Negative Improvement 33.6%, Positive Improvement 49%
- Philippine: No Improvement 22.4%, Negative Improvement 30.6%, Positive Improvement 47%
- Taiwan: No Improvement 24.9%, Negative Improvement 31%, Positive Improvement 44.1%
- Thailand: No Improvement 6.9%, Negative Improvement 30.9%, Positive Improvement 62.2%
- Pooled Sample: No Improvement 16.9%, Negative Improvement 40%, Positive Improvement 42.7%

Percentage
Figure 3. National Differences in Levels of Citizen Support for Democracy

Scores presented in each cell are means on the 5 point index of democratic support.
Figure 4. National Differences in Percentages Fully Supportive of Democracy (in percentage)
Figure 5. Levels of Democratic Support by the Experience of Democratic Regime Change
Figure 6. Percentages Fully Committed to Democracy by the Experience of Democratic Regime Change
Figure 7. Levels of Democratic Support by Relative Assessments of Regime Performance Change

![Bar chart showing levels of democratic support by relative assessments of regime performance change. The chart compares different countries such as Korea, Mongolia, Philippines, Taiwan, Thailand, and Pooled Sample. The bars represent mean scores for different categories of regime performance improvement: No Improvement, Negative Improvement, and Positive Improvement.](image-url)
Figure 8. Percentages Fully Committed to Democracy by Relative Assessments of Regime Performance Change
Figure 9. Adjusted Percentages fully supportive of Democracy by Types of Regime Change Orientations

Figures are percentages of full supporters of democracy after the adjustment of demographic and five other control variables by the MCA.
## Table 1 National Differences in Citizen Orientations toward Regime Change

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Table 2. Levels of Support for Democracy by Perceptions of Regime Change

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Entries are the percentages that scored the highest value of 4 on the five point index of democratic support.

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Table 3. Levels of Full Support for Democracy by Types of Regime Change Orientations (in percentage)

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Entries are the percentages that scored the highest value of 4 on the five point index of democratic support.
The highlighted are lesser-evil perceptions.
Table 4. Multiple Classification Analyses of Support for Democracy

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(R²)              (.20)     (.20)     (.16)     (.16)
Table 5. Multiple Classification Analyses of Support for Democratization

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Table 6. Percentages Supportive of More and Less Democratization by the Types of Regime Change Orientations after the Adjustment of Other Predictors

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<th>Type of Regime Change</th>
<th>Support for more Democratization</th>
<th>Support for less Democratization</th>
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<tr>
<td>Unimproved authoritarianism</td>
<td>62%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>+51%</td>
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<td>67</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>+60</td>
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<td>Positively Improved authoritarianism</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>+50</td>
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<tr>
<td>Unimproved democracy</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>+46</td>
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<tr>
<td>Negatively improved democracy</td>
<td><strong>57</strong></td>
<td><strong>17</strong></td>
<td><strong>+40</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Positively improved democracy</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>+49</td>
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The highlighted are lesser-evil perceptions.
<table>
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<th>Working Paper Series</th>
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36. Wang Zhengxu, and Tan Ern Ser. 2007. Are Younger People in Asia more Pro-democratic: Lifecycle Effects or Generational Changes?


38. Chong-min Park, and Jaechul Lee. 2007. Are Associations the Schools of Democracy across Asia?


Asian Barometer

A Comparative Survey of Democracy, Governance and Development

The Asian Barometer Survey (ABS) grows out of the Comparative Survey of Democratization and Value Change in East Asia Project (also known as East Asia Barometer), which was launched in mid-2000 and funded by the Ministry of Education of Taiwan under the MOE-NSC Program for Promoting Academic Excellence of University. The headquarters of ABS is based in Taipei, and is jointly sponsored by the Department of Political Science at NTU and the Institute of Political Science of Academia Sinica. The East Asian component of the project is coordinated by Prof. Yun-han Chu, who also serves as the overall coordinator of the Asian Barometer. In organizing its first-wave survey (2001-2003), the East Asia Barometer (EABS) brought together eight country teams and more than thirty leading scholars from across the region and the United States. Since its founding, the EABS Project has been increasingly recognized as the region's first systematic and most careful comparative survey of attitudes and orientations toward political regime, democracy, governance, and economic reform.

In July 2001, the EABS joined with three partner projects -- New Europe Barometer, Latinobarometro and Afrobarometer -- in a path-breathing effort to launch Global Barometer Survey (GBS), a global consortium of comparative surveys across emerging democracies and transitional societies.

The EABS is now becoming a true pan-Asian survey research initiative. New collaborative teams from Indonesia, Singapore, Cambodia, and Vietnam are joining the EABS as the project enters its second phase (2004-2008). Also, the State of Democracy in South Asia Project, based at the Centre for the Study of Developing Societies (in New Delhi) and directed by Yogendra Yadav, is collaborating with the EABS for the creation of a more inclusive regional survey network under the new identity of the Asian Barometer Survey. This path-breaking regional initiative builds upon a substantial base of completed scholarly work in a number of Asian countries. Most of the participating national teams were established more than a decade ago, have acquired abundant experience and methodological know-how in administering nationwide surveys on citizen's political attitudes and behaviors, and have published a substantial number of works both in their native languages and in English.

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