

Revised

The Churchill Hypothesis Revisited: Support for Democracy and Detachment from Authoritarianism in East Asia

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Introduction

Democracy cannot be judged in isolation from other regimes. The Churchill hypothesis is both comparative and competitive. Everyone knows that Winston Churchill said something to the effect that democracy is the worst form of government except for all the others, but few people check the exact citation. If people who have personally experienced the shortcomings of both democratic and undemocratic regimes opt in favor of the former, then the “Churchill hypothesis” stands. If, however, those people prefer the undemocratic alternatives to the imperfections of democracy, then the Churchill hypothesis is false: Democracy falls short of even the “lesser evil” threshold (Rose, et al. 1998).

Therefore, the support for democracy should be the opposite side of detachment from authoritarianism. Asian citizens’ attitudes towards the two seemingly opposite political setups impose a great challenge to the existing democratic theories, literature of dictatorship and policymakers: Why are firm supporters of democracy still not let go of authoritarianism? Why does life under democracy fail to take people away from authoritarianism? Why are some types of authoritarian rule less resistant than others? The authors intend to reveal a series of puzzling facts unearthed by the 3rd wave of Asian Barometer Survey in this paper. Particularly, this is the first attempt to provide micro-level evidence to echo the finding that one-party rule as the most resistant form of authoritarian regime in the latest literature of the political survival of dictatorships. In conclusion, we propose a possible direction for further investigation for the questions mentioned previously. First, let us briefly review the background of political development in Asia.

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Introduction: Democracy is not the Only Option in East Asia

Nearly forty years after democracy's third wave began with the Carnation Revolution in Portugal, liberal democracy has still to achieve Fukuyama's (1992) expected historical triumph. This reality is very apparent in East Asia, where despite two hundred years of Western encroachment and influence, and decades of economic growth and modernization, most people do not live under democratic governments. As Huntington (1968) has pointed out, East Asia is a site of competition between civilizations. The reasons for this include the region's long history of human civilization, the diverse cultural heritage of the region, and the presence of competing political systems.

Democracy arrived in East Asia from the outside. Before the arrival of Western modernization in the 18th century, East Asia had its own political and social logic. East Asian civilization is marked by the diversity of its cultural heritage and forms of social organization, including Confucian culture, Buddhist culture, and Islamic culture. The presence of these cultural traditions forms the backdrop to conflicts between traditional and modern values during the process of modernization. According to some observers, major cultural traditions in the region, including Confucianism and Islam, may be incompatible with democracy (see for example Huntington, 1984, 1991).

The various regime types in East Asia also provide competing models. The recent economic rise of China has led many to view the "China Model" as a viable alternative to Western democracy.¹ After China's success was showcased to the world at the Beijing

¹ The China model is generally defined as including one-party rule and a compromise between state-owned

Olympics, a great deal of discussion emerged on whether China has embarked on a path to modernization that is distinct from the West. Prior to this, the rise of East Asia's "four little dragons" and the public pronouncements of Singapore leader Lee Kuan Yew resulted in widespread discussion surrounding "Asian values." Thirty years later, the rise of China has led to a reemergence of this debate. Does this mean that there is a genuine alternative to Western-style democracy? Recent democratic reversals, including the Thai military coup in 2006, and the continuing failure of countries such as Malaysia and the Philippines to strengthen democracy provide a stark illustration of the continuing challenges for democratic consolidation in the region. Even Indonesian democracy, widely held up as an exception to the democratic recession elsewhere in the world, has been "stagnating" in recent years under attack from anti-reformist elements (Mietzner, 2012).

The emergence and stability of democracy in the region is affected by many different forces – including elite interactions, economic development, and the external environment. However, popular attitudes are also a critical factor for the emergence and stability of democracy (Chu et al., 2008: 2). If East Asians find alternative forms of government more attractive, or are not culturally predisposed to support democracy, the long-term prospects for democracy in the region would appear to be bleak. Indeed, for many authors, democratic legitimacy is an essential element of democratic consolidation (Linz and Stepan, 1996; Diamond, 1999). Without a "democratic consensus" – widespread normative support for democracy - among major actors, superficial adherence to the rules of democracy may be abandoned in favor of non-democratic alternatives in the face of crisis, leaving democratic regimes weak and vulnerable to breakdown.

However, "support for democracy" may only capture support for certain politically desirable outcomes, even when they have nothing to do with democracy. Regimes across the region proclaim they are "democratic," despite expert evaluations to the contrary. Democracy has become a "universal good," even when it is not practiced in reality. Therefore, the ABS also includes a battery on "detachment from authoritarianism," asking respondents whether they accept four authoritarian alternatives to democracy. The advantage of this battery is that it avoids the use of the word "democracy," and therefore hopefully mitigates the problem of respondents giving socially desirable answers, enabling us to capture whether citizens of East Asia reject some of the major competitors to democracy in the region.

Our main findings are as follows: (1) For high income countries, diffuse support for democracy and detachment from authoritarianism both score highly, but specific support for

enterprises and the free market (Naughton, 2010). The China Model is centered on the Beijing Consensus,

democracy is much lower. In addition, (past or present) regime type does not have a large effect on detachment from authoritarianism, although support for democracy does increase the more democratic a country is; (2) For low income countries and societies, the effect of regime type on support for democracy and detachment from authoritarianism is much stronger. In particular, citizens of countries that have experienced a particular type of authoritarian rule show lower levels of detachment from that type of rule.

Operational Concepts: Support for Democracy and Detachment from Authoritarianism

Since democratic legitimation is crucial to democratic consolidation, one of the important tasks of the ABS project is to measure popular support for democracy. Public opinion surveys have commonly measured support for democratic values by gauging support for the idea of democracy, support for democracy as the “best form of government,” and preference for democracy over authoritarian alternatives (Norris, 1999: 16-17). Following Easton’s (1965, 1975) distinction between diffuse support (support for the regime or constitutional order and the political community) and specific support (how members of a political community evaluate the political authorities), the World Values Survey measures both support for democracy as an ideal form of government and support for the democratic regime itself (Klingemann, 35-36). Similarly, Dalton (1999) and Bratton and Mattes (2001), distinguish between instrumental support for democracy (support for a democratic regime based on the delivery of certain desirable goods) and intrinsic support for democracy and (support for democracy as an end in itself). These two dimensions of support for democracy reflect a longstanding debate in the literature about the origins of political trust. On the one hand, cultural theories emphasize that trust in the political system is exogenous. According to this tradition, trust is thought to originate in deeply rooted cultural norms that individuals are socialized into at a young age. By contrast, institutional theorists argue that trust is politically endogenous; it is produced by the satisfactory performance of institutions (Mishler and Rose, 2001: 31). This debate matters for the consolidation of democracy, because deep rooted intrinsic or exogenous support is necessary for democracy to retain popular support even when democratic institutions are not performing well.

In the ABS survey, we identify two levels of support for democracy. For diffuse support for democracy, we ask general questions about democracy as the best form of government, priority of democracy (when compared to authoritarianism), and the efficacy of democracy

(can democracy solve the problems in our society).² For specific support for democracy, we ask respondents to choose between specific democratic values and other desirable political outcomes. East Asian societies have a strong developmentalist tendency. In particular, with the success of the “four little dragons” and the economic rise of China, economic development and competitiveness have become a policy priority. As a result, East Asian citizens may be willing to tolerate greater government control or surrender some political freedoms in pursuit of these goals. To assess this phenomenon, we ask respondents to choose between two conflicting goals or values: democracy or economic development and reducing economic inequality or protecting political freedom.³

In addition, we also observe a long-term phenomenon in East Asia. With the exception of Japan, all the countries in the region have recent experience of authoritarian rule.⁴ Taiwan and South Korea transitioned from authoritarianism during the third wave of democratization, prior to this they had been ruled by one party and military authoritarian regimes. Mongolia was a client state of the Soviet Union and only underwent its democratic revolution in 1990. Indonesia and the Philippines were subject to strongman rule, and even after democratization remain trapped in a low quality and unstable democracy. Thailand has only recently restored democracy after a military coup. In addition, Malaysia, Singapore, and Hong Kong have been classified as electoral authoritarian regimes due to a failure to meet international standards for free and fair elections. In Cambodia, politics in the country is dominated by prime minister Hun Sen who has been in power since a disputed election in 1998. Finally, Vietnam and China are authoritarian one-party regimes. We expect that genuine supporters of democracy will also reject these authoritarian alternatives. In the ABS third wave, we measure detachment from four types of authoritarian rule: strongman rule, military rule, rule by experts, and one-party rule.⁵ Three of these types of authoritarian rule have been practiced in East Asia (strongman rule, rule by experts, and one-party rule), and while no country has been a pure technocracy, experts have wielded extensive policy influence under other types of regime, notably in the developmental states of Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan, and more recently in countries such

² On diffuse support for democracy, the ABS third wave asked “Democracy may have its problems, but it is still the best form of government,” “Democracy is always preferable to any other kind of government.” and “Democracy is capable of solving the problems of our society.”

³ On specific support for democracy: ABS third wave asked: “If you had to choose between democracy and economic development, which would you say is more important?” and “If you had to choose between reducing economic inequality and protecting political freedom, which would you say is more important?”

⁴ Japan is the only country in East Asia with a continuous history of democratic rule following the Second World War. However, Japan of course had a long history of militarism before its defeat in the War.

⁵ On detachment from authoritarianism, the ABS third wave asks respondents if they agree with the following statements: “We should get rid of parliament and elections and have a strong leader decide things.” “Only one political party should be allowed to stand for election and hold office.” “The army (military) should come in to govern the country.” “We should get rid of elections and parliaments and have experts make decisions on behalf of the people.” Responses are given on a four-point scale, which we code into positive and negative answers.

as Malaysia.

A preliminary analysis of support for democracy and detachment from authoritarianism is shown in Table 1.1 and 1.2. Bold figures and the shaded section indicate figures greater than the regional average. The top half of Table 1.1 shows diffuse support for democracy, while the bottom half of the table shows support for democracy when compared to other values. Looking at Table 1, it is clear that diffuse support for democracy is quite high across East Asia, for example 81.9% of respondents across the region agreed that “democracy is the best form of government,” with the lowest figure of 70.7% in support in Hong Kong. Second, 68.7% of respondents agreed that democracy can solve our country’s problems, with the lowest score of 55.4% found in the Philippines. It is worth noting that when asked if democracy is always preferable, we offer the choice “sometimes authoritarianism may be preferable to democracy.” By forcing respondents to choose, we can measure divisions in society more precisely. Overall, 57.7% of respondents thought that democracy is always preferable, the lowest score on our support for democracy indicators. In addition, support for democracy on this item did not reach 50% in Taiwan, Mongolia, Singapore, or Hong Kong, and was only a little over 50% in the Philippines and China, showing that under certain circumstances, respondents may support an authoritarian government that can deliver economic growth, social stability, or political efficacy.

When we compare democracy and political freedom with other values, support for democracy is even lower. For example, when asked to choose between democracy and economic development, only 21.2% chose democracy. The lowest scores were found in Indonesia (9.8%), Hong Kong (13.1%), Taiwan (15.3%), and Singapore (17.1%), indicating that people in these societies tend to prioritize economic growth. When we compare political freedom and economic equality, only 23.6% of people believe that protection of political freedom is more important than reducing economic inequality, with the lowest support found in Indonesia, and higher than average support found in Japan, Mongolia, the Philippines, Cambodia, and China.

Table 1.2 shows rejection of four types of authoritarian government among East Asians. Overall, the lowest level of disapproval is for strongman rule, although this still reached 71.7% across the region. This is followed by one-party rule (72.1%), rule by experts (77.1%) and military rule (77.5%). When we compare detachment from authoritarianism by country, we find the highest levels in Japan, South Korea, Taiwan, Singapore, and Hong Kong. Moreover, these five societies have high levels of detachment from each type of authoritarian rule. At the same time, they have the highest levels of modernization and economic development in the region. Interestingly, when citizens in these countries are asked to choose between democracy and other desirable policy outcomes, their support for democracy often appears to be quite weak.

However, when the same respondents are presented with authoritarian alternatives to democracy, they reject them overwhelmingly.

[Table 1 here]

Performance and Support for Democracy in East Asia

In modernization theory, there has been a long-standing debate between institutionalists and culturalists. The former argues that our way of life is determined by the system we live under. Therefore, changes in the system lead to institutional learning, which has a transformative impact on culture. However, culturalists argue that institutions which are not culturally embedded are not effective in the long run. Simply transplanting foreign institutions into an alien culture normally leads to institutional failure. This approach argues that the influence of culture persists over a long period.

In East Asia, support for democracy and detachment from authoritarianism is linked to both the current political system and the level of modernization, lending support to institutional theory. Figure 1 combines diffuse support for democracy, specific support for democracy, and detachment from authoritarianism in East Asia. We also made some adjustments to the ordering of the cases. The line between Hong Kong and Malaysia indicates the \$20,000 per capita annual GDP cut-off. All the economies to the left of the line have an annual per-capita income of \$20,000 or greater, while the countries to the right of the line have a per-capita income of less than \$10,000, with the exception Malaysia (per-capita income \$10,937). Within each GDP bracket, we order the cases according to their level of political freedom. Therefore, Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan are ranked to the left of Singapore and Hong Kong, while China and Vietnam appear on the far right-hand side.

Figure 1 shows two major patterns which indicate the relationship between the level of modernization and type of political system on the one hand and support for democracy and detachment from authoritarianism on the other. The countries on the left with average GDP per capita of over \$20,000 modernized earlier and have enjoyed stronger economic performance. They consistently reject authoritarian alternatives, and also display relatively high levels of diffuse support for democracy. However, with the exception of Japan, specific support for democracy in these countries is around 20% or lower. In addition, we found that both specific and diffuse support for democracy fell when the level of political freedom was lower. In other words, in societies with lower levels of political freedom, the gap between detachment from authoritarianism and diffuse support for democracy was larger. However, in

countries with annual income below \$20,000, none of which are full democracies, we found that aside from Indonesia, Singapore, and China, diffuse support for democracy was higher than detachment from authoritarianism. There is a sharp drop-off in detachment from authoritarianism when compared to the high income societies. All the high-income societies have levels of authoritarian detachment of 85% or more, while in the low-income societies, authoritarian detachment is 75% or less. However, when we look at specific support for democracy, the effect of GDP disappears.

Overall, looking at the ABS third wave of data, we can draw a number of conclusions about support for democracy in East Asia. First, we identify two different patterns of support for democracy in East Asia. In societies with higher levels of modernization, support for democracy and detachment from authoritarianism are relatively stable. We find high levels of detachment from authoritarianism, slightly lower levels of diffuse support for democracy, and very low levels of specific support for democracy. In contrast, in the late modernizers, patterns of democratic support and detachment from authoritarianism are less stable. The gap between diffuse support for democracy and detachment from authoritarianism may be positive or negative, indicating that in these countries, regime choice is not settled. In addition, we identify a clear gap between the two income groups. Countries with higher levels of modernization are more resistant to authoritarian alternatives, indicating that people in these societies less willing to accept non-democratic alternatives.

[Figure 1 here]

Detachment from Authoritarianism in East Asia

Why are many Asians still attracted to authoritarian alternatives? Aside from income levels, regime type may affect detachment from authoritarianism. The literature on authoritarian survival indicates that the one-party regime is the most resilient form of authoritarianism in terms of longer political survival (Gandhi and Przeworski 2007, Geddes 1999, Huntington 1968, Magaloni 2008, and Svoboda 2009), less domestic rebellion (Cox 2008, Keefer 2008, Kricheli and Livne 2009), and better economic development (Gehlbach and Keefer 2012). Is the resilience of one-party authoritarianism reflected in lower levels of authoritarian detachment than for other regimes, suggesting that mass support may explain the longevity of such regimes? Even after countries have democratized, the authoritarian legacy may cast a shadow, affecting the levels of detachment from authoritarianism among citizens. Overall, we find that once countries have reached a certain level of modernization, their authoritarian history does not have an effect on rejection of different types of authoritarian rule.

However, for countries with low levels of modernization, current or past experiences of different types of authoritarian rule tends to reduce detachment from that type of rule among citizens.

First, we examine detachment from authoritarianism by regime type.⁶ As expected, citizens in liberal democracies show the highest level of detachment from authoritarianism. However, surprisingly, detachment from authoritarianism in the non-democracies was somewhat higher than in electoral democracies. The main reason for this anomaly was the presence of two high-income economies (Hong Kong and Singapore) in the group of non-democracies. As discussed previously, once a certain level of modernization is reached; citizens tend to overwhelmingly reject non-authoritarian alternatives.

[Figure 2 here]

When we break down detachment from authoritarianism by regime type (Figure 3), we find that in the non-democracies and liberal democracies, respondents are most likely to reject military rule, followed by single-party rule, expert rule, and finally strongman rule. However, the electoral democracies do not follow the same pattern. In the electoral democracies, respondents are most likely to reject expert rule, followed by one-party rule, military rule, and finally strongman rule.

[Figure 3 here]

Figure 4 shows rejection of military rule by country. The results show that citizens in the three liberal democracies almost universally reject military rule, even in South Korea, which has a recent history of successful economic modernization under a military regime. Citizens also tend to reject military rule in other non-democracies that have no history of military rule, including China, Singapore, Mongolia, the Philippines, and Malaysia. In contrast, Indonesia and Cambodia have much lower detachment from military rule, reflecting their history of extensive military involvement in politics. The only anomaly is Thailand, where detachment from military rule is roughly the same level as other electoral democracies without a history of military involvement in politics, suggesting that Thai citizens are increasingly rejecting the military's traditional role in Thai politics.

⁶ We categorize the twelve countries into three types: non-democracies (Hong Kong, China, Singapore, and Malaysia), electoral democracies (Cambodia, Mongolia, Indonesia, the Philippines, and Thailand), and liberal democracies (Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan).

[Figure 4 here]

Figure 5 shows rejection of expert rule by country. Generally speaking, East Asian citizens reject expert rule despite the well-documented role of technocrats in state-led economic development. Of course, accepting an important policy role for experts is not the same as saying that we should “get rid of elections and parliaments and have experts make decisions on behalf of the people.” With the exception of Japan’s highly insulated bureaucracy, technocrats in East Asia dominated policy only within certain domains such as economic planning, and ultimately derived their authority from the country’s rulers.

[Figure 5 here]

The rejection of a strong leader item, shown in Figure 6, highlights some interesting cross-national variations. Citizens in the higher income countries are consistent in their rejection of a strong leader as an alternative to democracy, despite the role that such leaders (especially Park Chung Hee in South Korea, Chiang Ching-kuo in Taiwan, and Lee Kuan Yew in Singapore) played in the successful economic modernization. However, citizens in the less developed countries are more ambivalent. Only 44% of Mongolians reject, 63% of Malaysians, 65% of Filipinos, and 69% of Chinese reject a strong leader. In Malaysia and Philippines, the legacy of the autocratic rule of Ferdinand Marcos and Mahathir Mohamad casts a long shadow over politics and for many still represents a viable institutional alternative.

[Figure 6 here]

Detachment from one party-rule, shown in Figure 7, produces a similar pattern. Citizens in the high-income countries are consistent in their rejection of one-party rule, although the score for Singapore is around ten points lower due to the long-term dominance of the People’s Action Party. For the societies with lower levels of modernization, the picture is more mixed. Rejection of one-party rule is greater than 80% in Thailand and Indonesia, which have no history of strong political parties. However, detachment from one-party rule is somewhat lower in Malaysia, Mongolia, the Philippines, and Cambodia. Unfortunately, this question was not asked in mainland China due to political sensitivities, so we have no way to gauge the views of citizens on this item in the only genuine one-party state in this sample.

[Figure 67 here]

Conclusion

This paper examined support for democracy in East Asia, and found that both the level of

modernization (economic development) and regime type effect support for democracy and detachment from authoritarianism. Overall, we identified two separate patterns. For the richer countries, all of which have a per capita GDP in excess of \$20,000, detachment from authoritarianism and diffuse support for democracy are consistently high, while specific support for democracy is much lower. While the level of democracy does not make much of a difference to detachment from authoritarianism in these societies (citizens of Hong Kong and Singapore reject authoritarian alternatives in nearly the same numbers as the citizens of liberal democracies), both diffuse and specific support for democracy increase with the level of democracy. However, for the low-income countries, regime type has a much greater effect on support for democracy and detachment from authoritarianism.

The second part of the paper focused on the relationship between regime type and detachment from authoritarianism. Our findings show that past or present experience with a particular type of authoritarianism does not have a significant effect on detachment from that type of authoritarianism. However, in the low-income countries, we find that the experience with a particular type of authoritarian rule may produce lower levels of detachment from that type of rule, even after the regime has collapsed. To survive, authoritarian regimes need to build coalitions of support within society. These coalitions often persist long after the regime has been overthrown, presenting a viable alternative to democratic institutions for many citizens. Furthermore, citizens in these countries may also look to successful development models from abroad such as the alternative blueprint provided China's rapid economic growth.

Our findings lend support to modernization theory. When economic development reaches a certain level, respondents tend to reject authoritarian alternatives to democracy, regardless of their country's history. Rejection of authoritarian alternatives provides the popular support necessary for the consolidation of democracy, even when respondents are dissatisfied with the performance of the democratic regime in practice. However, for many citizens in the less developed countries, their own experiences of authoritarian rule or successful models of authoritarian development may provide a realistic alternative.

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Appendix

Table 1.1 Diffuse and specific support for democracy in comparison

	JP	KR	TW	MN	ID	PH	TH	MY	SG	HK	CB	VN	CN	ALL
DIFFUSE SUPPORT FOR DEMOCRACY														
Best form of government	90.0	83.2	85.9	85.4	78.5	75.0	88.4	87.5	79.1	70.7	93.0	73.4	74.9	81.9
Democracy is always preferable	61.6	65.5	49.9	48.4	58.6	54.2	68.4	74.7	47.4	46.9	58.0	64.8	52.1	57.7
Democracy is capable	68.5	70.2	59.5	74.6	68.0	55.4	75.5	84.1	62.8	47.4	91.4	70.3	65.6	68.7
Average	73.4	73.0	65.1	69.5	68.4	61.5	77.4	82.1	63.1	55.0	80.8	69.5	64.2	69.5
SPECIFIC SUPPORT FOR DEMOCRACY														
Democracy vs. economic development	37.7	23.2	15.3	28.2	9.8	23.1	19.4	19.4	17.1	13.1	26.8	19.5	23.4	21.2
Political freedom vs. economic equality	25.4	18.7	16.4	26.0	6.2	39.0	21.3	21.0	18.5	16.4	46.5	21.9	29.0	23.6
Average	31.5	20.9	15.8	27.1	8.0	31.0	20.4	20.2	17.8	14.8	36.6	20.7	26.2	22.4

Table 1.2 Detachment from authoritarianism in comparison

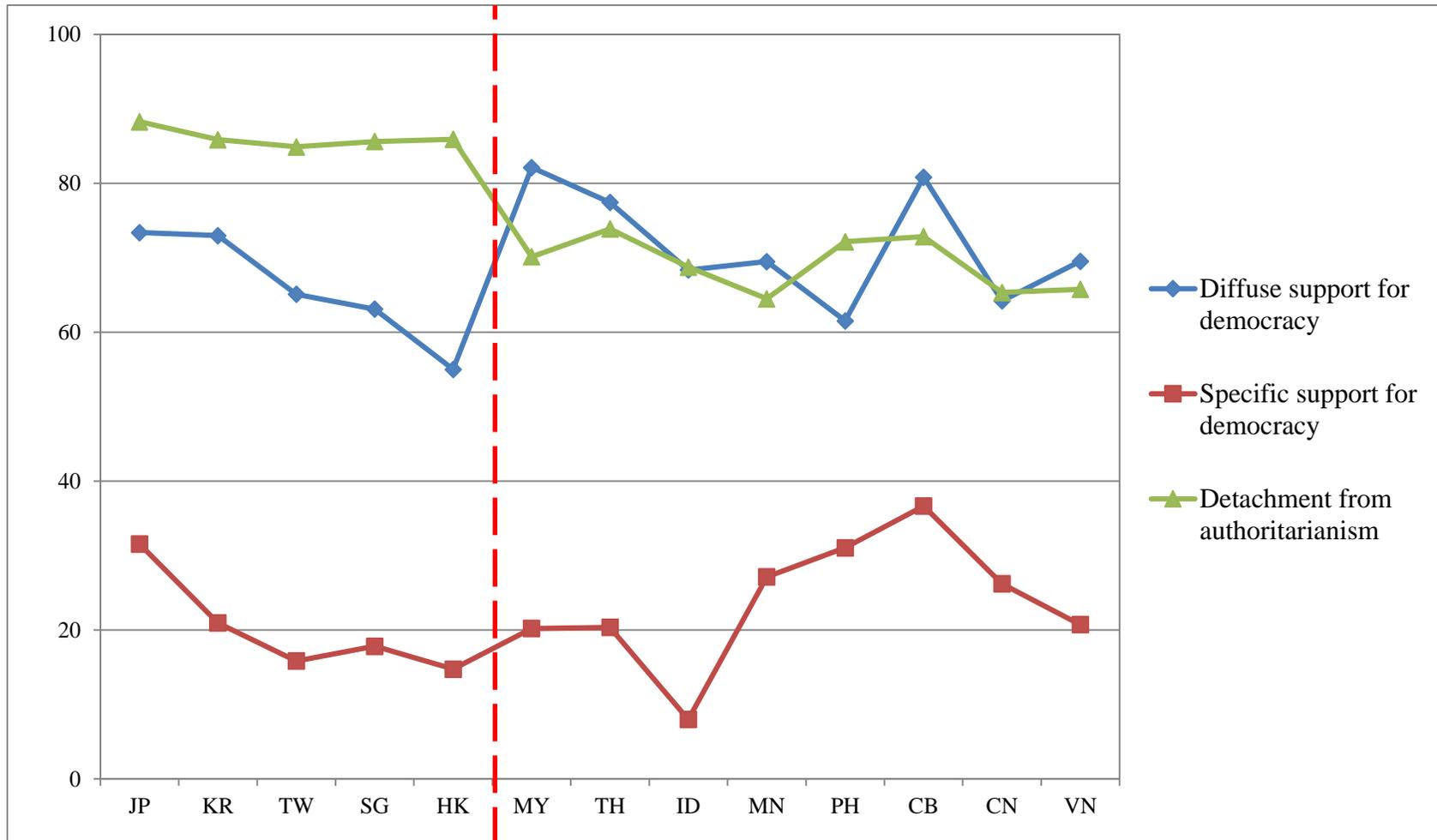
Disapprove	JP	KR	TW	MN	ID	PH	TH	MY	SG	HK	CB	VN	CN	ALL
Strong leader	81.4	80.0	79.4	42.7	74.3	64.4	69.6	61.7	86.8	82.7	80.1	68.6	60.1	71.7
One party	90.4	87.9	86.2	73.7	77.6	67.5	75.8	70.9	79.4	85.6	68.0	2.6	None*	72.1
Military rule	95.2	91.4	92.2	86.1	51.6	75.1	74.7	79.0	86.5	91.2	58.3	59.6	66.9	77.5
Experts	86.1	84.1	81.8	55.5	71.5	81.6	75.4	68.9	89.8	84.1	84.9	69.0	69.0	77.1
Average	88.3	85.9	84.9	64.5	68.7	72.1	73.9	70.1	85.6	85.9	72.8	65.8**	65.3	74.6

* This item was not asked in mainland China

** Vietnam is a one-party state. The legal status of the Vietnam Communist Party resulted in very low numbers rejecting one-party rule.

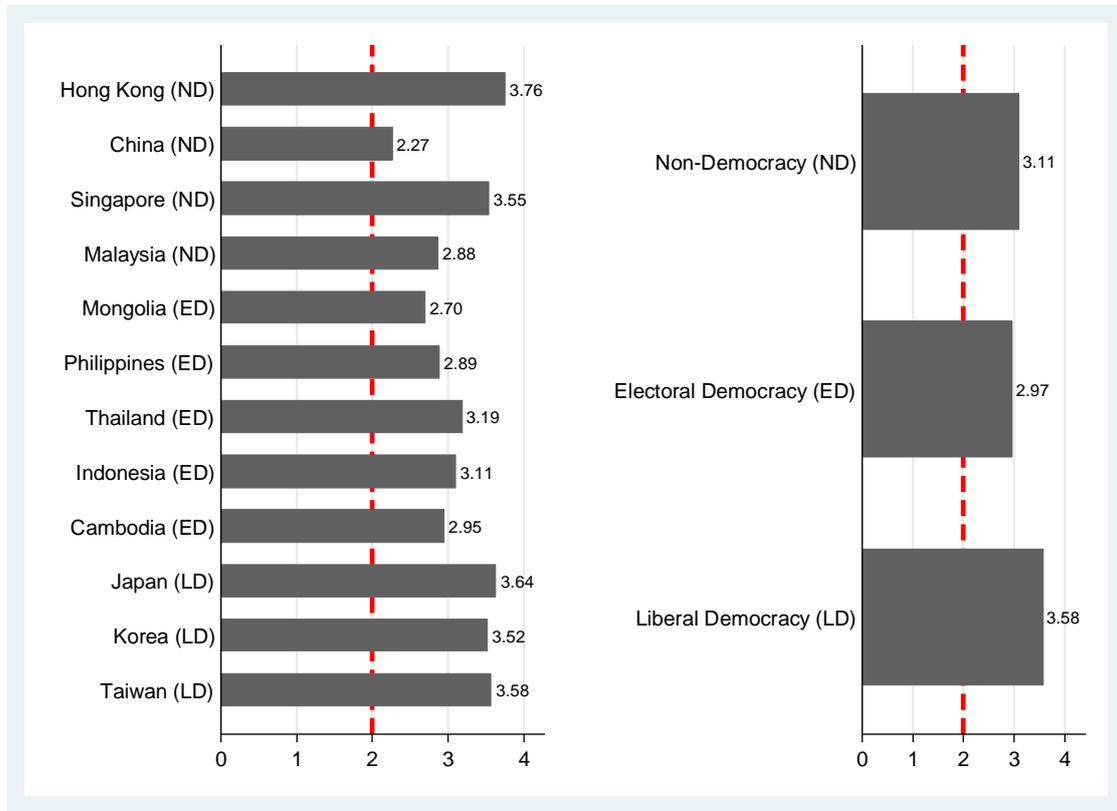
As a result, we did not include this item in the average.

Figure 1 Pattern of Support for Democracy and Detachment from Authoritarianism



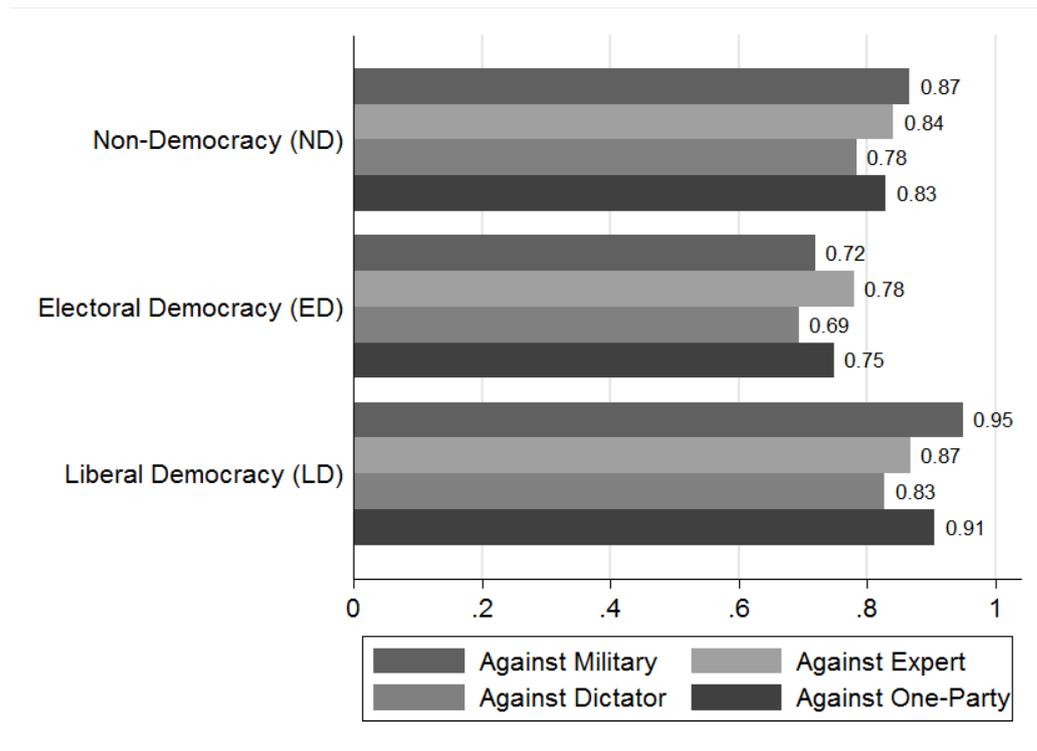
Source: ABS third wave

Figure 2 Detachment from Authoritarianism by Regime Type



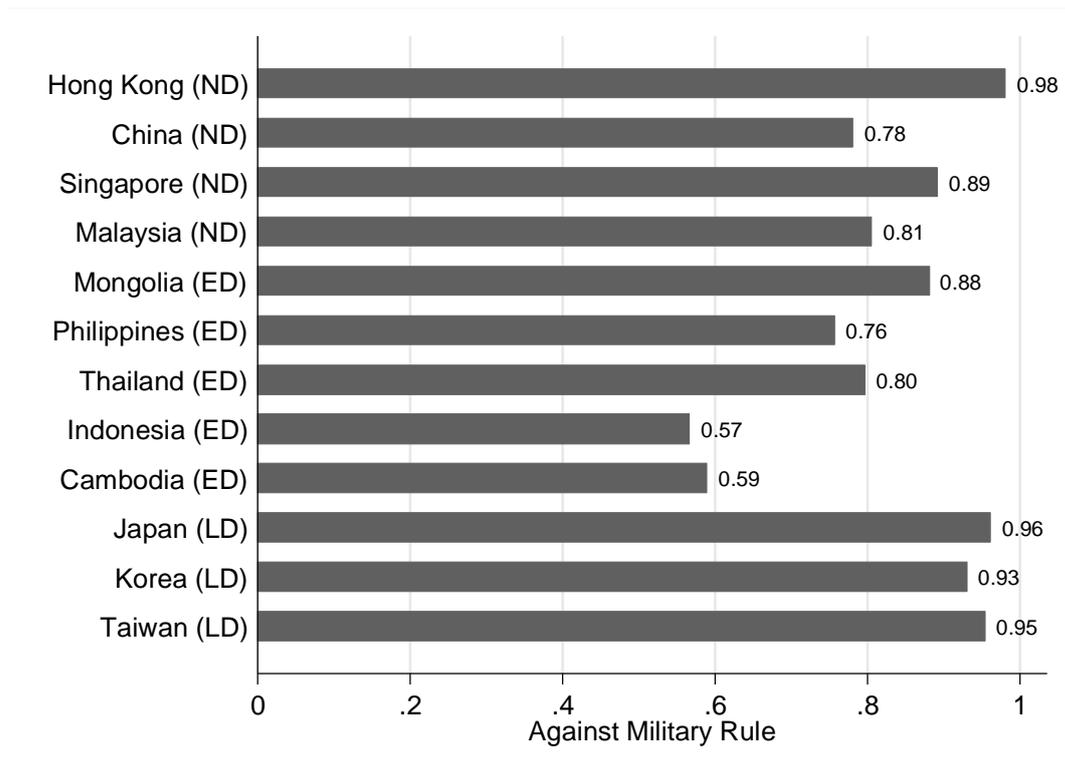
Source: ABS third wave

Figure 3 Detachment from Different Types of Authoritarian Rule by Regime Type



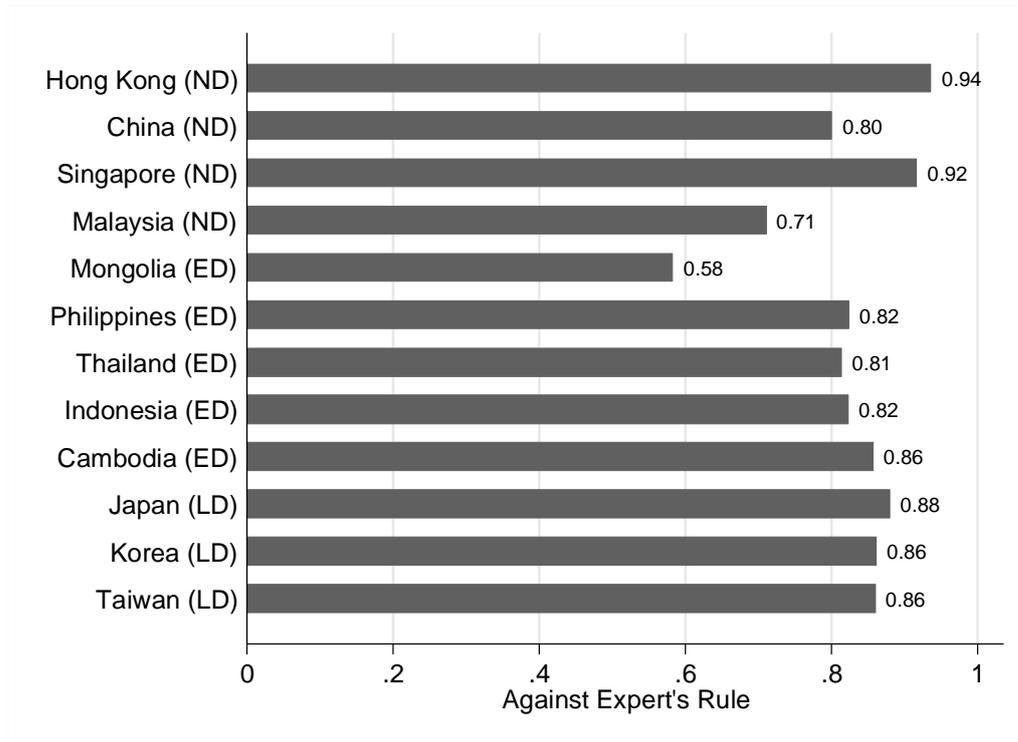
Source: ABS third wave

Figure 4 Detachment from Military Rule by Country



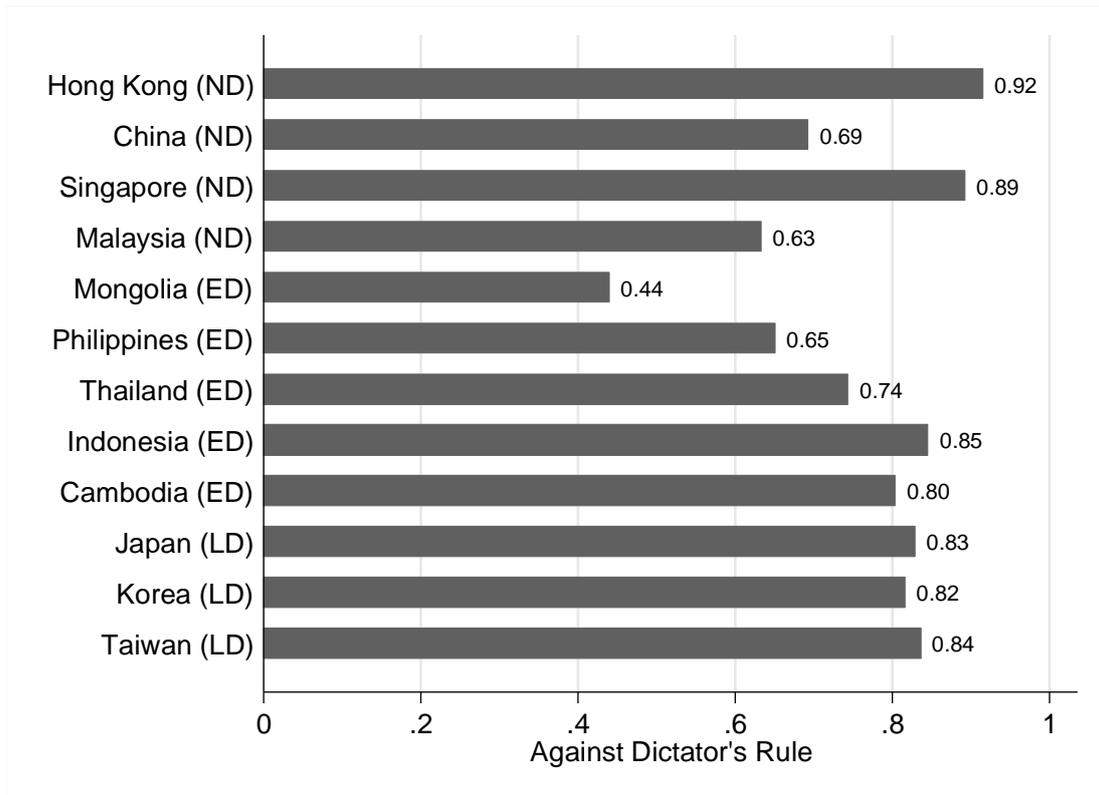
Source: ABS third wave

Figure 5 Detachment from Expert Rule by Country



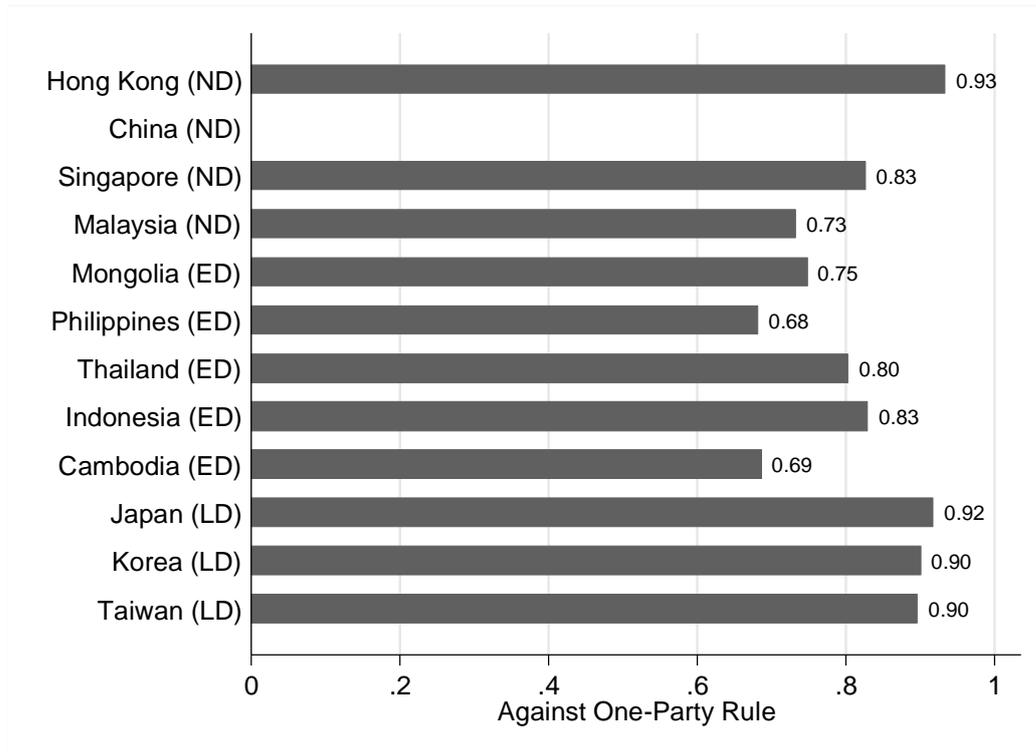
Source: ABS third wave

Figure 6 Rejection of Strong Leader by Country



Source: ABS third wave

Figure 7 Detachment from One-Party Rule by Country



Source: ABS third wave