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## The Democracy Barometers

# AUTHORITARIAN NOSTALGIA IN ASIA

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From Bangkok to Manila, Taipei, Seoul, and Ulaanbaatar, East Asia's "third-wave" democracies are in distress. The most dramatic sign of trouble has been the September 2006 military coup in Thailand, where the opposition had earlier boycotted a parliamentary election. (Thailand was also the scene of the region's last full-scale democratic breakdown, a 1991 coup.) In Taiwan and the Philippines, the losers of the most recent presidential elections have challenged the results. In South Korea, the incumbent president has found himself crippled by flagging popular support and deserted by his own party's National Assembly deputies. Mongolia is mired in party stalemate. Even the region's oldest democracy, Japan, has been beset by endless corruption scandals and consistent failures to come to grips with the challenges of deflation, stagnation, and the need for structural economic reform. Under these stressful circumstances, can democracy still endure and flourish in East Asia?

Although many forces can affect a democracy's survival chances, no democratic regime can stand long without legitimacy in the eyes of its own people. Scholars have long known that beliefs and perceptions regarding legitimacy have much to do with whether a regime—particularly one founded upon popular consent—will endure or break down.<sup>1</sup> What elites think matters, but for democracy to become stable and effective, the bulk of the citizenry must develop a deep and resilient commitment to it. A necessary condition for the consolidation of democracy is met when an overwhelming proportion of citizens believe

that “the democratic regime is the most right and appropriate for their society, better than any other realistic alternative they can imagine.”<sup>2</sup>

Data from the first and second Asian Barometer Surveys (ABS)<sup>3</sup> can help us systematically to assess the extent of normative commitment to democracy that citizens feel in Japan, South Korea, Taiwan, Mongolia, the Philippines, and Thailand. The assessment involves seeking answers to the following interrelated questions: Has the growth of democratic legitimacy in East Asia stagnated or even eroded? How detached are East Asians from authoritarian alternatives? What do East Asians think of how democracy works in their countries? Is there a link between how citizens rate democracy’s performance and how committed to democracy they feel? Is popular support for democracy deeply rooted in a liberal-democratic political culture? Let us begin by briefly explaining the strategies that we have chosen for measuring democratic legitimacy.

### Measuring Democratic Legitimacy

Public opinion plays a crucial role in determining legitimacy. International donors, think tanks, and experts can publish all the ratings they like, but a democracy will be consolidated only when most of those who live within its borders believe that democracy actually is better for their society and that democracy of an acceptable quality is being supplied. In a nutshell, the citizens are the final judges of the legitimacy as well as the characteristics of their democracy. Surveys such as the Asian Barometer open a window on whether citizens think that their political institutions are delivering acceptable degrees of democracy and good governance. In particular, such surveys make possible an empirical assessment of the extent of normative commitment to democracy among the public at large and thus tell us much about how far a given political system has really traveled toward democratic consolidation.<sup>4</sup>

Those who seek to gauge popular support for democracy have long asked respondents to choose among three statements: “Democracy is always preferable to any other kind of government,” “Under some circumstances, an authoritarian government can be preferable to a democratic one,” and “For people like me, it does not matter whether we have a democratic or a nondemocratic regime.” But the single-item measurements thus reached always lack conceptual breadth and depth, and are less reliable than measurements drawn from multiple indicators.<sup>5</sup>

Like any other complex concept, normative commitment to democracy consists of many attitudinal dimensions. Richard Rose, Doh Chull Shin, and their colleagues have respectively highlighted four other important aspects of democratic legitimacy.<sup>6</sup> First is the *desire for democracy*, the level of democracy that citizens want for their political regime.<sup>7</sup> Second is the *suitability of democracy*, the degree to which citizens feel

that democracy is appropriate for their country.<sup>8</sup> Third is the *efficacy of democracy*, which involves the effectiveness of the democratic regime in addressing the country's major problems.<sup>9</sup> Fourth is the *priority* that citizens place on democracy as compared to other societal goals.<sup>10</sup> The ABS contains specific items designed to measure these four additional dimensions, thus generating a five-item battery that can be used to gauge popular support for democracy.

As important as such support is, robust legitimacy entails more. It also requires that citizens profess "authoritarian detachment"—in other words, that they reject nondemocratic alternatives. Referring to Winston Churchill's famous 1947 quip that democracy "is the worst form of government except all those other forms that have been tried from time to time," Rose and his colleagues argue that democracy often survives not because most people believe in its intrinsic legitimacy, but rather because there are simply no preferable alternatives.<sup>11</sup> This suggests that aversion to authoritarianism weighs as heavily as attachment to democracy in sustaining a democratic regime. Hence our surveys asked respondents a set of three questions, exploring whether or not they would favor the return to any of the three conceivable authoritarian alternatives: strongman rule, single-party rule, and military rule.

One of the ABS's important methodological innovations is its use of items meant to probe further into the substance and depth of popular commitment to democracy. These items intentionally omit the word "democracy" itself since use of the "d-word" could invite answers that might seem socially desirable, but which may not be deeply felt. In our time, after all, even the least democratic rulers and regimes habitually speak of "democracy"—it is a word whose very prestige has led to its excessive and at times less-than-honest use. Fortunately for us, however, there is no need to invoke the "d-word" in order to probe respondents' value orientations toward such fundamental organizing principles of liberal democracy as liberty, the rule of law, the separation of powers, and the duty of government to answer to the governed.

The batteries for measuring popular attachment to democracy, detachment from authoritarianism, and liberal-democratic value orientation have been consistently applied in two rounds of surveys between 2001 and 2006, yielding for the first time a database that is longitudinal across time rather than a "snapshot" of opinion at a given moment.

## Teetering Support for Democracy

When we began our analysis we did not expect to find a strong and resilient popular base for democratic legitimacy in East Asia's new democracies, let alone any enhancement of it over time. We knew that many East Asian democracies display socioeconomic features that in principle should be friendly to the growth of democratic legitimacy

(sizeable middle classes, well-educated people, and many ties to the global economy). Yet at the same time we feared that the region's overall geopolitical configuration, political history, and predominant cultural legacies would act as strong drags on the development of robust democratic political cultures.

Let us discuss these three factors in more detail. First, over the last three decades East Asia has in a significant way defied the global democratic trend known as the third wave. Most of the region's people remain under one form or other of authoritarian or at best semidemocratic rule. In 2006, only six of the region's eighteen sovereign states received a Freedom House (FH) rating of "Free." Five of the six Free countries, moreover, had become democratic only during the recent era of the third wave. (The five were Mongolia, the Philippines, South Korea, Taiwan, and Thailand—the last of which has now received an FH ranking of "Not Free" in the wake of its 2006 military coup.) Furthermore, with the shift of the region's center of economic gravity from Japan to China, East Asia has become one of the few places in the world where regime characteristics pose no barrier to trade and investment and perhaps the only region where newly democratized countries have become economically integrated with and dependent on nondemocratic countries.

Second, few of the region's former authoritarian regimes have been thoroughly discredited. Indeed, all too many people are wont to credit them with having fostered social stability, stunning economic growth, and an apparently greater resistance to "money politics" or other corrupt dealings. Because many an East Asian authoritarian order permitted limited pluralism—allowing some forms of electoral contestation as well as the existence of an opposition—citizens in the region's new democracies have not known the dramatic increases in rights and freedoms that their counterparts in many other third-wave democracies have witnessed. Moreover, many of East Asia's new democracies have found their performance hampered by grave governance challenges flowing from political strife, bureaucratic paralysis, recurring scandals, sluggish economic growth, and foggy economic outlooks. At the same time, the authoritarian or semiauthoritarian regimes of Singapore, Malaysia, China, and Vietnam have seemingly shown themselves able to handle economic globalization as well as other complex problems. The achievements (real or putative) of the region's less-than-democratic regimes both past and present have saddled its young democracies with unreasonably high public expectations.

Finally, there is the argument—proffered by such influential Western scholars as Lucian Pye and Samuel P. Huntington—that dominant East Asian cultural traditions pose an obstacle to the acquisition of democratic values.<sup>12</sup> Echoing this view for their own purposes, certain figures in the region have embraced the idea of "Asian values" that privilege group over individual interests, authority over liberty, and

TABLE 1—SUPPORT FOR DEMOCRACY (IN PERCENTAGES)

COUNTRY	SURVEY YEAR	PREFERABILITY: DEMOCRACY IS ALWAYS PREFERABLE TO ANY OTHER KIND OF GOVERNMENT <sup>1</sup>	DESIRABILITY: TO WHAT EXTENT WOULD YOU WANT OUR COUNTRY TO BE DEMOCRATIC NOW? <sup>2</sup>	SUITABILITY: DEMOCRACY IS SUITABLE FOR OUR COUNTRY <sup>2</sup>	EFFICACY: DEMOCRACY IS CAPABLE OF SOLVING THE PROBLEMS OF OUR SOCIETY <sup>3</sup>	PRIORITY: DEMOCRACY IS EQUALLY OR MORE IMPORTANT THAN ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT	MEAN SCORE (0–5)	N
Taiwan	2001	40.4	72.2	59.0	46.8	23.5	2.42	1415
	2006	47.5	83.1	67.1	54.3	24.2	2.76	1587
South Korea	2003	49.4	95.4	84.2	71.7	30.1	3.31	1500
	2006	42.7	94.1	79.2	55.2	32.3	3.04	1212
Philippines	2002	63.6	88.1	80.2	60.7	21.8	3.14	1203
	2005	50.6	70.8	56.6	55.9	26.4	2.60	1200
Thailand	2001	82.6	93.0	88.1	89.6	51.3	4.04	1544
	2006	72.7	84.6	82.4	66.2	47.9	3.54	1546
Mongolia	2002	57.1	91.6	86.3	78.4	48.6	3.62	1144
	2006	38.9	94.7	84.7	76.7	32.2	3.27	1211
Average <sup>4</sup>	2001–2003	58.9	88.1	79.5	69.8	35.2	3.31	6806
	2005–2006	51.4	85.3	74.1	61.5	32.9	3.05	6756
Japan	2003	67.2	87.1	76.3	61.4	44.0	3.36	1419

1. Trichotomous variable recoded into dichotomous variables

2. Six or above on a 10-point scale

3. Dichotomous variables

4. Values in the Average row refer to those of emerging democracies and exclude Japan. Source: Asian Barometer Survey, 2001–2006.

duties over rights. Such values, it is said, draw a sharp line between East Asia and the West and make the former less prone to embrace liberal democracy.

The ABS confirms that East Asian citizens feel ambivalent about democracy, and that the region's new democracies have seen their popular legitimacy stay flat or even drop slightly. On the one hand, a great majority of ordinary citizens find the ideal of democracy appealing. Between 2001 and 2003, fully 88 percent of those surveyed across all five new democracies (Mongolia, the Philippines, South Korea, Taiwan, and Thailand) deemed democracy to be "desirable for our country now," while 80 percent considered democracy "suitable for our country," and 70 percent believed that "democracy is capable of solving the problems of our society" (see Table 1). On the other hand, fewer than three out of five respondents (59 percent) considered democracy "preferable to all other kinds of government," while barely more than a third (35 percent) said that it was "equally or more important than development." Even in Japan, the region's oldest democracy, only two-thirds of respondents said that "democracy is always preferable."

More disturbingly, when we surveyed people in the five new democracies again in 2005–2006, every indicator of average support for democracy showed a decline. The preference for democracy and the perceived efficacy of democracy each dropped by about 8 percentage points. Some countries declined sharply on other measures, too. Between the two surveys, a quarter of Thais and a sixth of South Koreans lost confidence in democracy's efficacy, and the belief among Mongolians that "democracy is always preferable" fell 16 points, to only 39 percent. Outside East Asia, such a low level of support was found only in some struggling Latin American democracies.<sup>13</sup> In 2005, only 56 percent of Filipinos still said they believed that "democracy is suitable" (a 23-point drop in four years). Only in Taiwan did support for democracy strengthen during this period (albeit from a rather low base).

To measure the overall level of attachment to democracy, we constructed a 6-point (0-to-5) index of the number of prodemocratic responses to the five questions discussed above (see the second column from the right of Table 1). On this index, South Korean and Japanese citizens show lukewarm support for democracy, with mean scores only about at the region's average. Thailand in 2001 registered the highest level of overall support (4.0), reflecting the euphoria and optimism most Thais felt at the beginning of a new administration under since-deposed premier Thaksin Sinawatra, whose party had just captured an unprecedented single-party majority in parliament. Taiwan registered the lowest mean score (2.4). This came in 2001, just a year after the first-ever alternation in power (produced by the 2000 elections) and at a time when the island was suffering the worst economic recession it had known since the 1972–73 oil crisis.

Most East Asian democracies are still wrestling with a fragile and fluid foundation of popular support. Crises of governance have taken a toll on popular commitment to democracy, pushing down the region's average score from 3.3 around 2002 to 3.0 around 2006. Now, East Asians on average accept only three out of five possible reasons to embrace democracy. And, as elsewhere, East Asians' attachment to democracy appears context-dependent. The more abstract the context, the stronger is the normative commitment; the more concrete the context, the weaker the commitment. Nearly everyone embraces democracy as an abstract idea, but significantly fewer endorse it as their preferred form of government under all circumstances, and fewer still say that if forced to choose between the two, they would prefer democracy even to economic development.

### **Authoritarianism's Lingering Support**

The absence of full-blown positive sentiment toward democracy in these East Asian countries would be less worrisome to the degree that authoritarian alternatives also lack support. Here as well, however, the evidence is less than reassuring. In the three less-developed countries among our group (Mongolia, the Philippines, and Thailand), pockets of support for authoritarianism are growing rather than diminishing.

If we look at popular rejection of each individual authoritarian alternative—strongman rule, single-party rule, and military rule—antipathy for authoritarianism appears quite high. In the first-wave surveys, more than two-thirds in every country except Mongolia opposed replacing democracy with strongman rule. Rejection of single-party rule was less emphatic but still exceeded two-thirds in all countries except Thailand (where it stood at 61 percent). Military rule was rejected even more vigorously, at levels exceeding 80 percent in every country except the Philippines (63 percent). Yet the aggregate picture raises some cause for concern. Only in Korea, Japan, and Taiwan did a majority reject all three alternatives. In Mongolia, the Philippines, and Thailand, only 39 to 46 percent of respondents rejected all three authoritarian options.

More alarmingly, the gap between the two sets of countries widened significantly in the second survey. Rejection of all three authoritarian options rose from 56 to 69 percent in Taiwan and from 71 to 77 percent in South Korea, but it dropped from 44 to 28 percent in Mongolia and declined slightly to 39 percent in the Philippines. In both of the latter countries, the yearning for a "strong leader" to decide everything grew substantially. Worrisome signs also popped up in Thailand on the eve of the 2006 military coup. While the aggregate measure of authoritarian detachment improved (from 46 to 55 percent), the percentage of Thais who disapproved of military rule dropped 9 points, and the percentage of those who objected to strongman rule dropped 8 points.



**TABLE 2—DETACHMENT FROM AUTHORITARIANISM (IN PERCENTAGES)**

COUNTRY	SURVEY YEAR	DISAGREE WITH THE FOLLOWING:			
		STRONG LEADER <sup>1</sup>	NO OPPOSITION PARTY <sup>2</sup>	MILITARY RULE <sup>3</sup>	REJECT ALL THREE
Taiwan	2001	68.3	70.3	81.6	55.7
	2006	76.1	82.9	88.2	69.1
South Korea	2003	84.4	86.7	89.8	71.3
	2006	82.7	87.8	90.5	76.8
Philippines	2002	69.4	69.6	62.7	39.6
	2005	58.5	64.6	73.0	38.5
Thailand	2001	76.6	61.3	81.2	46.1
	2006	68.8	73.1	71.3	54.7
Mongolia	2002	59.2	72.4	85.8	44.4
	2006	34.5	70.9	82.8	28.4
Average <sup>4</sup>	2001–2003	72.4	72.1	80.7	52.2
	2005–2006	65.0	76.1	81.1	54.5
Japan	2003	79.1	66.7	94.4	57.4

1. "We should get rid of parliament and elections and have a strong leader decide things."

2. "No opposition party should be allowed to compete for power."

3. "The military should come in to govern the country."

4. Values in the Average row refer to those of emerging democracies and exclude Japan.

Source: Asian Barometer Survey, 2001–2006.

Comparing Tables 1 and 2 reveals another important contrast between the two sets of countries. On measures of support for democracy, Thailand and Mongolia appear stronger than Taiwan and South Korea, but the former two (and the Philippines) lag well behind on authoritarian detachment. This suggests that Thailand, Mongolia, and the Philippines each have a large number of equivocal and confused citizens whose inconsistent political orientations burden their democracies with a fragile foundation of legitimacy. In Taiwan and South Korea, authoritarianism has gradually lost its appeal, but democracy has not yet lived up to their citizens' high expectation.

Evidence from Eastern Europe, Africa, and Latin America suggests that popular support for democracy is directly affected by citizen's assessment of how well democracy works.<sup>14</sup> Some early studies of East European transitions identified perceptions of change in economic circumstances as the most important factor influencing support for democracy.<sup>15</sup> Later studies qualified this view by finding that citizens' perceptions that "good governance" (rule of law, corruption control, and the like) was in place had a still larger impact on democratic support.<sup>16</sup> In analyzing data from Africa, Robert Mattes and Michael Bratton also found that people judged democracy through direct experience with their own governments' political and (to a lesser extent) economic performance.<sup>17</sup>

Our surveys used three succinct indicators to gauge how citizens assessed the working of democracy. The first was overall satisfaction

“with the way democracy works in our country.” The second measures perceptions of the extent of corruption in the national government, and the third taps people’s assessments of general economic conditions over the last few years (often seen as a telling indirect measure of regime effectiveness). From these responses we can glean possible reasons for the waning of popular support for democracy and the revival of authoritarian nostalgia in several of our cases.

In each of the five new democracies, negative assessments of democratic performance increased markedly on at least one of the three items. Dissatisfaction with the way democracy works declined slightly in Taiwan (to 39 percent) but increased in each of the other four countries, still to a very low level (15 percent) in Thailand, but to 44 percent in South Korea and to 59 percent in the Philippines.<sup>18</sup> This explains why in 2005 the Philippines registered the lowest mean score (2.6) on the five-item battery measuring support for democracy and the second-lowest overall level of authoritarian detachment in the region, while these two indices of democratic legitimacy have improved somewhat between 2002 and 2006 in Taiwan. This macro-level observation is backed up by individual-level statistical analysis, which shows a significant correlation between the level of dissatisfaction and the mean score of the support-for-democracy battery.<sup>19</sup>

Moreover, in all East Asian democracies (including Japan), citizens were appalled by stories of rampant corruption at the level of the national government. Across the region, no other factor seems to have done as much to hurt public confidence in democratic institutions.<sup>20</sup> During the first wave of surveys, more than 45 percent of respondents in Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan—and more than 60 percent in Mongolia and the Philippines—perceived that “almost everyone” or “most officials” were “involved in corruption and bribe-taking in the national government.” Such cynical assessments have persisted in South Korea and the Philippines and have intensified in Taiwan (to 58 percent) and Mongolia (to 69 percent). Resentment of corruption has evidently helped to feed the dramatic rise in Mongolians’ yearning for strongman rule.

Most of East Asia’s democratic regimes cannot rely on economic performance because the region’s growth momentum has not fully recovered to (and may never again reach) the levels seen before the 1997 financial crash. Still, significant differences exist among countries because citizens assess their respective national economic conditions differently. In countries where rapid economic growth was the rule for decades, recent performance might “feel” much worse than statistics indicate. Therefore, we are not surprised to find that slightly more than four-fifths of Japanese in 2003, three-quarters of South Koreans in 2006, and slightly more than three-fifths of Taiwanese (in both surveys) felt that the national economic condition had gotten worse in the last few years. The combination of this disparaging assessment of the economy

with the perception of rampant corruption helps explain why so many citizens in Taiwan and South Korea (and to some extent in Japan as well) still doubt that democracy is effective, or that it is always preferable. Where people have experienced (within memory) a variant of soft authoritarianism that delivered social stability, economic development, and at least the appearance of resistance to money politics, democracy now seems to be having a hard time winning hearts.

### **The Uneven Spread of Liberal-Democratic Values**

To what extent is popular support for democracy in East Asia deeply rooted in a liberal-democratic political culture? This is a crucial question for gauging the region's democratic future, as it tests how robust is the observed popular commitment to democracy. If citizens' embrace of democracy is not anchored in liberal values affirming freedom and the rule of law, the foundation of regime legitimacy will remain shallow and fragile. This also provides a vantage point for examining the debate over "Asian exceptionalism."<sup>21</sup> If a liberal-democratic culture can take root in East Asian soil, especially in societies with a strong Confucian legacy, the core assumption of the "Asian values" thesis is turned on its head.

Due to limited space, we present here only the results of three items selected from a more elaborate battery. The three items were worded to repudiate the notions of political liberty, separation of powers, and the rule of law—which are presumed by some established scholars to contradict traditional Asian concepts of good governance.<sup>22</sup>

In Table 3, we report the percentage of respondents who disagreed with each of the three statements and thus revealed their propensity for liberal-democratic values. We also calculate a 4-point index (0 to 3) based on the number of liberal responses and report the findings in the righthand column of the table.

As we see in Table 3, across East Asia the acquisition of liberal-democratic values has been slow and uneven. The average number of liberal views hovered around the midpoint of 1.5. But here again, the richer countries in our group offer a sharp contrast to their less-developed neighbors. In Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan, a great majority of citizens embrace political liberty, separation of powers, and rule of law. Their mean scores were way above the region's average. In Taiwan, 60 percent of respondents in 2002 and 71 percent in 2006 disagreed that "the government should decide whether certain ideas should be allowed to be discussed in society." In South Korea, the rejection rate was about 60 percent in both surveys, and in Japan it was 55 percent. In South Korea, more than 69 percent of respondents have consistently rejected the notion that "when judges decide important cases, they should accept the view of the executive branch." Less overwhelming but still strong ma-

**TABLE 3—POPULAR BELIEF IN LIBERAL-DEMOCRATIC VALUES  
(IN PERCENTAGES)**

COUNTRY	SURVEY YEAR	DISAGREE WITH THE FOLLOWING:			MEAN (0–3)
		REGULATED DISCUSSION <sup>1</sup>	POLITICAL JUDICIARY <sup>2</sup>	DISREGARD THE LAW <sup>3</sup>	
Taiwan	2001	60.2	53.7	58.3	1.72
	2006	71.1	57.0	67.9	1.96
South Korea	2003	60.1	69.0	76.7	2.06
	2006	58.5	71.5	74.3	2.04
Philippines	2002	39.7	38.7	70.2	1.49
	2005	40.8	32.3	59.3	1.32
Thailand	2001	46.9	40.1	49.2	1.36
	2006	43.9	27.7	33.6	1.05
Mongolia	2002	22.3	71.0	59.6	1.53
	2006	13.5	42.9	43.4	1.00
Average <sup>4</sup>	2001–2003	47.2	54.2	62.6	1.64
	2005–2006	46.9	46.0	55.3	1.48
Japan	2003	55.6	62.2	72.0	1.90

1. “The government should decide whether certain ideas should be allowed to be discussed in society.”

2. “When judges decide important cases, they should accept the view of the executive branch.”

3. “When the country is facing a difficult situation, it is okay for the government to disregard the law in order to deal with the situation.”

4. Values in the Average row refer to those of emerging democracies and exclude Japan.

Source: Asian Barometer Survey, 2001–2006.

majorities have done so in Taiwan and Japan as well. Almost three-quarters in Japan and Korea disagreed that “it is okay for the government to disregard the law in order to deal with [a difficult] situation.” In Taiwan, the proportion rose from 58 percent in 2002 to 68 percent in 2006. Thus, a liberal-democratic culture seems to be emerging in these three socio-economically advanced democracies.

By contrast, Filipinos, Mongolians, and Thais gave much more illiberal responses, and the gap between them and Taiwan, South Korea, and Japan is widening. In all three of the former countries, only a minority defended freedom of expression. In Mongolia, support for this freedom (expressed via disagreement with the first item in Table 3) declined to a minuscule 13 percent in 2006. The proportions supporting judicial independence shrank from 40 to 27 percent in Thailand, from 38 to 32 percent among Filipinos, and from 71 to 43 percent among Mongolians. There is a similar pattern of diminishing support for the rule of law, dropping for example from 49 to 33 percent in Thailand. Clearly, liberal-democratic values have not yet taken hold in Mongolia, the Philippines, and Thailand—on the contrary, the political culture in each country seems to have taken an authoritarian turn. Moreover, this deterioration reinforces the three concurrent trends observed earlier: dwindling popular support for democracy, declining popular resistance to authoritarian alternatives, and growing dissatisfaction with the work-

ing of democracy. From the viewpoint of regime legitimacy, these young democracies appear vulnerable to any well-orchestrated hostile intervention by a strategically positioned antidemocratic elite.

Table 3 also helps us decipher the meaning behind some of the baffling statistics we observed earlier. In Thailand, support for democracy as a concept far outstripped the regional average, but this support was not backed by belief in liberal-democratic values and hence has proven quite shallow—as the relative quiescence of the country since the 2006 coup suggests. In fact, Thailand's mean score on liberal-democratic values dropped to 1.05 on the 0-to-3 scale, just above Mongolia and way below the region's average.

Lastly, the figures in Table 3 provide little support for the “Asian-values” thesis. A liberal-democratic culture is emerging in Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan—the very countries which, among all East Asian democracies, are the most thoroughly imbued with Confucian principles and ideals. Their Confucian legacy might not have been conducive to the acquisition of liberal-democratic values, but it appears to have done nothing to hinder the process either.<sup>23</sup>

How does democracy's standing in East Asia appear in global perspective? The short answer is: about average. Democracy is in trouble in East Asia, but at the same time it is in no worse shape there than it is in other developing regions of the planet. East Asia is not alone in showing symptoms of democratic recession, ambivalence toward democracy's legitimacy, and faltering confidence in democracy's effectiveness as a system of governance. Compared to levels of popular support for democracy, strength of authoritarian detachment, and satisfaction with the performance of democracy observed in other regions, our six East Asian democracies appear on a par with similarly situated societies elsewhere in the world.<sup>24</sup>

The lesson we draw is not that East Asian cultures preclude liberal democracy from taking root, but that this form of government must win citizens' support through better performance. People's disenchantment with the gap between democratic promises and democratic realities is growing in all of East Asia's emerging democracies. Many citizens feel that progress toward democratic goals such as the rule of law, accountability, and responsiveness has been too sluggish and too scanty. There is also a broad feeling that the performance of democratic regimes has not lived up to expectations, especially as regards social equity, economic growth, and law and order. As a result, public confidence in democracy's superiority has waned. This does not mean that democratic consolidation in East Asia is a lost cause, but that it will require steps to make democratic regimes more effective, honest, and responsive.

Nonetheless, meeting citizens' expectations for strong economic growth combined with social equity is more difficult in an era when globalization can aggravate economic inequality and instability while

hampering the capacity of states to manage and cushion the resulting stresses. Globalization also accelerates the hollowing-out of national politics. It shifts the locus of governing power away from a nation's capital to international organizations (such as the World Bank), multinational firms, foreign institutional investors, and private transnational actors. It pains most citizens to realize that, in a globalized world, their elected governments all too often can do little to shield them and their families from the challenges thrown up by a dynamic world economy.

These are challenges that third-wave democracies face everywhere, but East Asian democracies confront them in a delicate, if not more difficult, regional context. Many East Asian democracies are still struggling against a haze of nostalgia for authoritarianism, as citizens compare life under democracy with either the growth-oriented authoritarianism of the recent past or with their prosperous nondemocratic neighbors of the present. Either way, these region-specific benchmarks tend to set the performance bar for democratic regimes at an unreasonable height.

The economic and geopolitical rise of China over the last decade has also made the regional environment more hospitable for nondemocracies. The dramatic decline of Japan's economic vitality and regional influence during this period has further eclipsed the sway of the United States (and the community of industrialized democracies as a whole) over the political future of the region. The Japanese themselves, meanwhile, feel lukewarm enough about their own system that they are likely to sound an uncertain trumpet when it comes to calling the rest of the region to the liberal-democratic standard. China is showing her socialist neighbors a viable path for growing out of a planned economy, and is proving (so far, at least) that sequenced transition from communism to a form of authoritarian developmentalism is possible. If China fails to embark on a path of democratization, government by consent may still hold its own in the region, but the prospect of new democratic breakthroughs will recede.

## NOTES

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1. Juan J. Linz and Alfred C. Stepan, *The Breakdown of Democratic Regimes* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1978).

2. See Larry Diamond, *Developing Democracy: Toward Consolidation* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999), 65.

3. The Asian Barometer Survey (ABS) represents the region's first collabora-

tive initiative to develop a regional network of democracy studies based on surveying ordinary citizens. Between June 2001 and February 2003, the ABS surveyed eight East Asian countries and territories: Japan, South Korea, Mongolia, Taiwan, the Philippines, Thailand, Hong Kong, and China. The ABS launched its second-round survey in October 2005, enlarging its geographical scope to cover five more countries in the region. By March 2007 the fieldwork in South Korea, Mongolia, Taiwan, the Philippines, Thailand, and Indonesia had been completed, and the surveys in China, Hong Kong, Japan, Indonesia, Vietnam, Cambodia, Malaysia, and Singapore were still underway. The ABS survey in Thailand was conducted in April and May of 2006, just four months before the military coup. All ABS data were collected through face-to-face interviews of randomly selected eligible voters in each participating country. For further details, visit [www.asianbarometer.org](http://www.asianbarometer.org).

4. Yun-han Chu, Larry Diamond, and Doh Chull Shin, "Halting Progress in Korea and Taiwan," *Journal of Democracy* 12 (January 2001): 122–36; Doh Chull Shin, "Democratization: Perspectives from Global Citizenries," in Russell Dalton and Hans-Dieter Klingemann, eds., *The Oxford Handbook of Political Behavior* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 259–82.

5. Robert Adcock and David Collier, "Measurement Validity: A Shared Standard for Qualitative and Quantitative Research," *American Political Science Review* 95 (September 2001): 538.

6. William Mishler and Richard Rose, "What Are the Political Consequences of Trust? A Test of Cultural and Institutional Theories in Russia," *Comparative Political Studies* 38 (November 2005): 1050–78; Doh Chull Shin and Jason Wells, "Is Democracy the Only Game in Town?" *Journal of Democracy* 16 (April 2005): 88–101.

7. The ABS asks: "Here is a scale: 1 means complete dictatorship and 10 means complete democracy. To what extent would you want our country to be democratic now?"

8. The exact wording of the item reads: "Here is a similar scale of 1 to 10 measuring the extent to which people think democracy is suitable for our country. If '1' means that democracy is completely unsuitable for [name of country] today and '10' means that it is completely suitable, where would you place our country today?"

9. Respondents were asked: "Which of the following statements comes closer to your own view? 'Democracy cannot solve our society's problems,' or 'Democracy is capable of solving the problems of our society.'"

10. The ABS asks the respondents: "If you had to choose between democracy and economic development, which would you say is more important?"

11. Richard Rose, William Mishler, and Christian Haerpfer, *Democracy and Its Alternatives: Understanding Post-Communist Societies* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998), 31.

12. Lucian W. Pye, *Asian Power and Politics* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap, 1985); Samuel P. Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1996).

13. Latinobarómetro, *Latinobarómetro Report 2005* (Santiago de Chile: Corporación, 2005).

14. See, for example, Michael Bratton and Eric C.C. Chang, "State Building and Democratization in Sub-Saharan Africa: Forwards, Backward, or Together?" *Comparative Political Studies* 39 (November 2006): 1059–83; Geoffrey Evans and

Stephen Whitefield, "The Politics and Economics of Democratic Commitment: Support for Democracy in Transition Societies," *British Journal of Political Science* 25 (October 1995): 485–514.

15. Adam Przeworski, *Democracy and the Market: Political and Economic Reform in Eastern Europe and Latin America* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 184; Herbert Kitschelt, "The Formation of Party Systems in East Central Europe," *Politics and Society* 20 (March 1992): 7–50.

16. Stephen Whitefield and Geoffrey Evans, "Political Culture versus Rational Choice: Explaining Responses to Transition in the Czech Republic and Slovakia," *British Journal of Political Science* 29 (January 1999): 129–54; Pamela Waldron-Morre, "Eastern Europe at the Crossroads of Democratic Transition: Evaluating Support for Democratic Institutions, Satisfaction with Democratic Government, and Consolidation of Democratic Regimes," *Comparative Political Studies* 32 (February 1999): 32–62.

17. Robert Mattes and Michael Bratton, "Learning about Democracy in Africa: Awareness, Performance, and Experience," *American Journal of Political Science* 51 (January 2007): 192–217.

18. Space does not permit presentation of the table with our results on these performance dimensions. That may be found at [www.journalofdemocracy.org](http://www.journalofdemocracy.org).

19. When all the cases for the five new democracies were pooled together, the correlation coefficients came to -0.22 for the first-wave ABS and -0.19 for the second-wave ABS.

20. Eric Chang and Yun-han Chu, "Corruption and Trust: Exceptionalism in Asian Democracies?" *Journal of Politics* 68 (May 2006): 259–71.

21. Francis Fukuyama, "The Illusion of Asian Exceptionalism," in Larry Diamond and Marc F. Plattner, eds., *Democracy in East Asia* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998).

22. Most notable are Pye, *Asian Power and Politics*, as well as Daniel A. Bell et al., eds., *Towards Illiberal Democracy in Pacific Asia* (New York: St. Martin's, 1995).

23. Chong-Min Park and Doh Chull Shin, "Do Asian Values Deter Popular Support for Democracy in South Korea?" *Asian Survey* 46 (May–June 2006): 341–61.

24. For instance, on whether "democracy is always preferable," the mean support across East Asia's five new democratic regimes was 59 percent in 2001–2003 and 51 percent in 2005–2006. This is very close to the 53 percent average in Latin America in 2005 and in Eastern Europe recently. Richard Rose, *Insiders and Outsiders: New Europe Barometer 2004* (Centre for the Study of Public Policy, Glasgow, 2005), 68.