THE UNEVEN GROWTH OF DEMOCRATIC LEGITIMACY IN EAST ASIA

Yu-tzung Chang, Yun-han Chu, and Min-hua Huang

The consolidation of a democracy requires ‘broad and deep legitimation, such that all significant political actors, at both the elite and mass levels, believe that the democratic regime is the most right and appropriate for their society, better than any other realistic alternative they can imagine’ (Diamond, 1999, p. 65). An assessment of the extent of normative commitment to democracy among the public at large can tell us much about how far the political system has really traveled toward democratic consolidation (Chu, Diamond, & Shin, 2001).

A robust popular base of legitimation entails both widespread and strongly felt attachment to a democratic regime and dwindling support for non-democratic alternatives. These two dimensions of popular commitment to democratic legitimacy are conceptually different and empirically distinguishable (Rose, Mishler, & Haerpfer, 1998; Shin & Wells, 2005). To this end, we seek to answer three empirical questions: To what extent do citizens in Japan, South Korea, Taiwan, Mongolia, the Philippines, Thailand and Hong Kong support democracy as a system of government as measured by overtly favorable orientations toward democracy? How many people in these countries still consider authoritarian arrangements as desirable alternatives? Do attachment to democracy and detachment from authoritarianism reinforce each other, yielding a coherent attitudinal foundation for sustainable democracy?

To answer these questions, this paper uses the first-wave East Asia Barometer (EAB) survey data, which consist of responses collected through face-to-face interviews of randomly selected eligible voters in these countries and territories. Before presenting the empirical findings, a succinct overview of the regional political trends in the context of the ‘third wave’ of democratization is called for.

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1 The first-wave East Asia Barometer surveys were conducted between July 2001 and February 2003. All these interviews were conducted under standardized research protocols and survey instruments and based on stratified random sampling of the eligible voters. Data from the first-wave survey are now publicly available upon request. Please visit the project website: http://www.asianbarometer.org/ for more information.
EAST ASIAN DEMOCRACIES IN GLOBAL PERSPECTIVE

East Asia poses a number of intellectual puzzles for students of democratization. First, East Asia has defied the global movement toward democracy. Since the current wave of democratization began in 1974, more than 80 countries have made significant progress toward democracy by holding free and competitive elections and expanding political freedoms. In contrast, the bulk of the region is still governed by various forms of authoritarian and semi-democratic regimes. In 2005, measured in terms of political rights and civil liberty developed by Freedom House, among the 18 sovereign states and autonomous territories in the region, only six are ranked ‘free’ (Freedom House, 2005). Among the six, only five (namely the Philippines, South Korea, Taiwan, Thailand, and Mongolia) became democratized within the time span typically referred to as the third wave. On the other hand, most of the region’s non-democratic regimes seem to be well-positioned for an extended life lease.

Second, with the shift of the center of regional economic gravity from Japan to China, East Asia is becoming one of the few regions in the world where characteristics of the political system are no barriers to trade and investment (or even migration), and perhaps the only region in the world where newly democratized countries become economically integrated with and dependent on non-democratic countries. The region’s emerging multilateral institutions are also increasingly orbiting around China. For its socialist neighbors, China has exemplified a viable path for growing out of planned economy and has proved (thus far) that separating political and economic change is possible for the transition from communism. In a nutshell, the adaptability as well as resiliency of China’s communist regime has made the region’s overall environment much more hospitable for non-democratic regimes.

Third, authoritarianism remains a fierce competitor to democracy in East Asia. In the ideological arena, East Asia and the Islamic World remain the two notable exceptions to the general observation that ‘the democratic ideal has become the “spirit of the times” (zeitgeist)’ (Linz & Stepan, 1996, pp. 74–76). The sustained interest in the ‘Asian Values’ debate among elites suggests that liberal democracy has not yet established itself as ‘the only game in town.’ In terms of regime performance, many East Asian new democracies are struggling with overwhelming challenges for governing—inconclusive or disputed electoral outcomes, endless partisan gridlock, recurring scandals, slower economic growth and foggy economic outlook. At the same time, the region’s resilient authoritarian or semi-authoritarian regimes, such as Singapore, Malaysia, and China, are seemingly capable of coping with complex economies, diverse interests, and globalization.

Last but not least, few of the region’s former authoritarian regimes were thoroughly discredited. In people’s recent memory, the old regimes had delivered social stability and miraculous economic growth and were seemingly less susceptible to money politics. Also during the authoritarian years, most of East Asia’s emerging democracies had experienced limited pluralism, allowing some forms of electoral contestation as well as the existence of an opposition. As a result, citizens in many East Asian new democracies did not experience as dramatic an increase in the area of political rights and freedom during the transition as did citizens in many other third-wave democracies.

The above arguments lend some support to the so-called ‘Asian exceptionalism’ (Fukuyama, 1998). The region’s unique history of political development carries important implications for the growth of democratic legitimacy in emerging democracies. These
democracies are burdened with authoritarian nostalgia. Citizens tend to compare the current regime with two readily available benchmarks: either with variants of growth-oriented, less strictly authoritarian regimes that they had experienced in their lifetime or with their more prosperous non-democratic neighbors. Either way these region-specific benchmarks tend to generate unreasonably high expectations about the performance of democratic regimes. Thus, while East Asian democracies on the whole are endowed with many favorable socio-economic conditions (such as a sizable middle class, well-educated population and highly internationalized economy), which are conducive to the growth of democratic legitimacy, the region’s culture, political history, and the overall geo-political configuration might put a drag on the development of a robust democratic culture.

**POPULAR SUPPORT FOR DEMOCRACY**

In the EAB survey, we employed a set of five questions to estimate the level of support for democracy. These questions address the desirability, suitability, efficacy, preferability, and priority of democracy.

We measure the desirability dimension by asking our respondents to indicate on a 10-point scale how democratic they wanted their country to be, with 1 being ‘complete dictatorship’ and 10 being ‘complete democracy.’ The first row of percentages in Table 1 shows that in all countries except Taiwan an overwhelming majority (87 percent or more) expressed a desire for democracy by choosing a score of 6 or above. In Taiwan 72 percent of the electorate explicitly expressed their desire for democracy, not a very impressive ratio in comparison with South Koreans’ near unanimity (95 percent). On this score, Taiwan is trailing behind not only all East Asian democracies but also Hong Kong, where the democratization process was truncated after the 1997 handover.2

Next, respondents were asked to rate the suitability of democracy for their country on a 10-point scale, 10 being ‘perfectly suitable’ and 1 being ‘completely unsuitable.’ The second row in Table 1 indicates that in most East Asian societies a great majority (75 percent or more) considered democracy suitable for their country by selecting a score of 6 or above. The ostensible gap between the desirability and suitability measures suggests that there are quite a few East Asians who, in principle, desire to live in a democracy but do not believe that it is highly suitable for their country. Taiwan also fares rather unimpressively on this measure, with only 59 percent of the respondents looking down favorably on the suitability issue, trailing behind Hong Kong’s 67 percent.

The EAB survey also asked respondents whether or not they believed that ‘democracy is capable of solving the problems facing the country.’ It turns out East Asians hold divergent views on the ‘efficacy’ of democracy. Thais overwhelmingly (90 percent) believed that democracy is capable of addressing their problems, while only 39 percent of Hong Kong respondents answered the question in the affirmative. On the whole, in most countries a majority still pinned their hope on democracy’s efficacy in solving their problems.

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2 We should alert our readers that the ratio of ‘don’t know’ and ‘decline to answer’ varies considerably across the seven cases. A higher ratio of DK/DA will bring down the percentage of positive response shown in our tables. However, this technical reason only partially explains why ‘Taiwan and Hong Kong trail behind other Asian countries on virtually every indicator of attachment to democracy.’
On the other hand, across all seven cases, the number of people who registered their doubt about democracy’s problem-solving potential are substantially higher than people questioning democracy’s desirability or suitability. This suggests many East Asians attach themselves to democracy as an ideal but not necessarily as a viable political system.

The EAB survey also included a widely used item for measuring popular support for democracy as a preferred political system. The respondents were asked to evaluate the statement: ‘Democracy is always preferable to any other kind of government,’ in comparison with ‘Under some circumstances, an authoritarian government can be preferable to

\[\begin{align*}
\text{Democratic is...} & \quad \text{Desirable for our country now}^a \quad \begin{array}{cccccccc}
\text{Hong Kong} & \text{Taiwan} & \text{Korea} & \text{Japan} & \text{Thailand} & \text{Philippines} & \text{Mongolia} \\
\% & \% & \% & \% & \% & \% & \%
\end{array} \\
88 & 72 & 95 & 87 & 93 & 88 & 92 \\
67 & 59 & 84 & 76 & 88 & 80 & 86 \\
39 & 47 & 72 & 61 & 90 & 61 & 78 \\
40 & 40 & 49 & 67 & 83 & 64 & 57 \\
9 & 11 & 19 & 32 & 17 & 19 & 27 \\
8 & 15 & 1 & 7 & 1 & 2 & 2 \\
4 & 3 & 10 & 18 & 13 & 6 & 16 \\
2.4 & 23 & 32 & 32 & 3.7 & 3.1 & 3.4
\end{align*}\]

\[\begin{align*}
\text{Suitable for our country now}^a & \quad \begin{array}{cccccccc}
\% & \% & \% & \% & \% & \% & \%
\end{array} \\
88 & 72 & 95 & 87 & 93 & 88 & 92 \\
67 & 59 & 84 & 76 & 88 & 80 & 86 \\
39 & 47 & 72 & 61 & 90 & 61 & 78 \\
40 & 40 & 49 & 67 & 83 & 64 & 57 \\
9 & 11 & 19 & 32 & 17 & 19 & 27 \\
8 & 15 & 1 & 7 & 1 & 2 & 2 \\
4 & 3 & 10 & 18 & 13 & 6 & 16 \\
2.4 & 23 & 32 & 32 & 3.7 & 3.1 & 3.4
\end{align*}\]

\[\begin{align*}
\text{Effective in solving the problems of society}^b & \quad \begin{array}{cccccccc}
\% & \% & \% & \% & \% & \% & \%
\end{array} \\
39 & 47 & 72 & 61 & 90 & 61 & 78 \\
40 & 40 & 49 & 67 & 83 & 64 & 57 \\
9 & 11 & 19 & 32 & 17 & 19 & 27 \\
8 & 15 & 1 & 7 & 1 & 2 & 2 \\
4 & 3 & 10 & 18 & 13 & 6 & 16 \\
2.4 & 23 & 32 & 32 & 3.7 & 3.1 & 3.4
\end{align*}\]

\[\begin{align*}
\text{Preferred to all other kinds of government}^c & \quad \begin{array}{cccccccc}
\% & \% & \% & \% & \% & \% & \%
\end{array} \\
40 & 40 & 49 & 67 & 83 & 64 & 57 \\
9 & 11 & 19 & 32 & 17 & 19 & 27 \\
8 & 15 & 1 & 7 & 1 & 2 & 2 \\
4 & 3 & 10 & 18 & 13 & 6 & 16 \\
2.4 & 23 & 32 & 32 & 3.7 & 3.1 & 3.4
\end{align*}\]

\[\begin{align*}
\text{More important than economic development}^d & \quad \begin{array}{cccccccc}
\% & \% & \% & \% & \% & \% & \%
\end{array} \\
9 & 11 & 19 & 32 & 17 & 19 & 27 \\
8 & 15 & 1 & 7 & 1 & 2 & 2 \\
4 & 3 & 10 & 18 & 13 & 6 & 16 \\
2.4 & 23 & 32 & 32 & 3.7 & 3.1 & 3.4
\end{align*}\]

\[\begin{align*}
\text{None of the above} & \quad \begin{array}{cccccccc}
\% & \% & \% & \% & \% & \% & \%
\end{array} \\
8 & 15 & 1 & 7 & 1 & 2 & 2 \\
4 & 3 & 10 & 18 & 13 & 6 & 16 \\
2.4 & 23 & 32 & 32 & 3.7 & 3.1 & 3.4
\end{align*}\]

\[\begin{align*}
\text{All of the above} & \quad \begin{array}{cccccccc}
\% & \% & \% & \% & \% & \% & \%
\end{array} \\
4 & 3 & 10 & 18 & 13 & 6 & 16 \\
2.4 & 23 & 32 & 32 & 3.7 & 3.1 & 3.4
\end{align*}\]

\[\begin{align*}
\text{Mean number of items supported} & \text{N} \\
811 & 1416 & 1500 & 1418 & 1546 & 1200 & 1144
\end{align*}\]

\[\text{Notes:} \text{This item has been adopted in Latinobarometro, Afrobarometer and the World Values Survey.}\]
a democratic one’ or ‘For people like me, it does not matter whether we have a democratic or a non-democratic regime.’ It turns out that popular belief in the preferability of democracy is surprisingly low as compared with other third wave democracies. In Spain, Portugal, and Greece, more than three-quarters of the mass public say democracy is always preferable in survey after survey (Dalton, 1999, p. 65). In East Asia, only Thailand (83 percent) has reached that threshold. It is surprising to find that in Japan, widely regarded as the region’s only established democracy, only 67 percent of the respondents preferred democracy to other forms of government, actually lower than the average (above 70 percent) of the twelve sub-Saharan countries surveyed by Afrobarometer around 2000 (Bratton, Mattes, & Gyimah-Boadi, 2005, p. 73). In Taiwan and South Korea, more than half of the disenchanted citizens either supported a possible authoritarian option or showed indifference to democratic or non-democratic form of government, pushing the support level down to 40 and 49 percent respectively. Outside East Asia, this depressingly low level of support was found only in some struggling Latin American democracies such as Mexico and Ecuador (Latinobarometro, 2005). This low level of popular support in the two East Asian tigers in spite (or because) of their higher level of socioeconomic development suggests that in societies where people experienced a variant of less strict authoritarianism seemingly efficacious in delivering social stability and economic development, democracy has a difficult time winning over the people’s heart.

To measure the priority of democracy as a societal goal, the EAB survey asked, ‘If you had to choose between democracy and economic development, which would you say is more important?’ Across East Asia, democracy lost favor to economic development by a wide margin. Less than one-third of the Japanese respondents favored democracy over economic development, and less than one-fifth of the respondents felt that way in Hong Kong, Taiwan, South Korea, and the Philippines. On this score, East Asians and Latin Americans look very much alike, despite the fact that most East Asian countries have enjoyed an extended period of rapid economic expansion. According to the 2001 Latinobarometro survey, 51 percent of Latin Americans believed that economic development was more important than democracy, 25 percent thought democracy was more important, and 18 percent stated that both are equally important.4

Finally, to measure the overall level of attachment to democracy, we constructed a 6-point index ranging from 0 to 5 by counting the number of pro-democratic responses on the five items discussed above. On this index, Thailand registered the highest level of overall support (with an average of 3.7) while Taiwan and Hong Kong registered the lowest (with 2.3 and 2.4 respectively). Across East Asia, very few people subscribed to unqualified support for democracy. Even in Japan, there are merely 18 percent of the respondents reaching the maximum score of 5 (‘all of the above’). This suggests that East Asia’s still relatively young democracies have yet to prove themselves in the eyes of many citizens.

Our findings also make clear that in East Asia as elsewhere normative commitment to democracy consists of many attitudinal dimensions and the strength of citizens’ attachment

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4 Please refer to http://www.latinobarometro.org/uploads/media/2001_01.pdf. It is worth noting that since then more and more Latin Americans (51 percent in 2003) agree with the statement that ‘I would not mind a non-democratic government in power if it could solve the economic problems.’
to democracy is dependent on the context. The more abstract the context, the stronger is the normative commitment; the more concrete the context, the weaker the commitment. Democracy as an abstract idea is embraced by almost everyone, but not so many people endorsed it as the preferred form of government under all circumstances, and very few prefer it to economic development.

DETACHMENT FROM AUTHORITARIANISM

While we do not find a full-blown democratic culture in most of the East Asian countries we surveyed, this does not mean that democracy is in imminent danger. Richard Rose and his colleagues have put forward an argument about the competitive justification of democratic regimes. Referring to Winston Churchill’s famous line, ‘Democracy is the worst form of government except all those forms that have been tried from time to time,’ they argued many democracies survive not because a majority of people believe in its intrinsic legitimacy but because there are simply no viable alternatives (Rose et al., 1998, p. 31). This suggests that authoritarian detachment is as important as attachment to democracy in sustaining a democratic regime.

To tap into East Asian citizens’ antipathy for authoritarian alternatives in a more systematic way, the EAB survey asked respondents a set of four questions, exploring whether or not they would favor the return to any of the four authoritarian alternatives: strongman rule, military rule, single-party rule, and technocrat rule.

As we can see in the first row of Table 2, a two-thirds (or larger) majority in every country except Mongolia rejected the notion of replacing democracy with strongman rule by disagreeing with the statement, ‘We should get rid of parliament and elections and have a strong leader decide things.’ East Asian citizens rejected military rule even more vigorously. In every country except the Philippines an overwhelming majority (more than 80 percent) turned down the option to install military rule by disagreeing with the statement, ‘The military should come in to govern the country.’ Objection to single-party rule was less impressive. Still at least a two-thirds majority in five countries disagreed with the statement, ‘No opposition party should be allowed to compete for power.’ Finally, a two-thirds majority (or larger) in every country rejected the option of technocratic rule, disagreeing with the statement, ‘We should get rid of parliament and elections and have the experts decide everything.’

However, there are still identifiable pockets of authoritarian inclination among the populace in most countries. In Mongolia, the yearning for a return to strongman rule remains quite strong with only 59 percent of the respondents opposing that option. In the Philippines, sympathy for military intervention remains formidable with less than two-thirds (63 percent) of the people rejecting this alternative. Also, there are considerable potential supporters for single-party rule in Hong Kong and Thailand.

When all four measures are taken into account, the picture is not very assuring. As the fifth row of Table 2 indicates, only in three countries, Korea, Japan, and Taiwan, more than half of the people rejected all four alternatives. In Mongolia and the Philippines, the figure is alarmingly low, with less than 40 percent of the respondents rejecting all four authoritarian options. This brings the seven-country average (47.8 percent) surprisingly close to a comparable figure (48 percent) reported by the New European Barometer
covering nine Central and Eastern European new democracies (Rose et al., 1998, p. 116). This is not very reassuring given the fact that most post-Communist countries have suffered much more severe and more protracted economic turmoil during the transition than East Asian new democracies have.

To estimate the overall level of detachment from authoritarianism, we combined the responses into a 5-point index scale, with 4 meaning complete detachment and 0 meaning full attachment. The last row of Table 2 reports the mean score in each country. On this summary score, the cross-country variation is not as great as that of support for democracy. Also, the two summary measures do not move in tandem at the aggregate level. Some countries such as the Philippines and Mongolia which register relatively high on support for democracy are now ranked at the very bottom on detachment from authoritarianism. A correlation analysis at the individual level also confirms our suspicion that growth in citizens’ positive orientations toward democracy does not necessarily bring about a corresponding decline in their attachment to authoritarianism. For the merged seven-country data set, the bivariate correlation coefficient amounts to only .103.\(^5\)

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<tr>
<td>Reject ‘strong leader’</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reject ‘military rule’</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>86</td>
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<tr>
<td>Reject ‘no opposition party’</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reject ‘experts decide everything’</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reject all authoritarian options</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reject none of above</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mean detachment (0 to 4)</td>
<td>2.9</td>
<td>2.9</td>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>2.8</td>
<td>2.8</td>
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<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>811</td>
<td>1416</td>
<td>1500</td>
<td>1418</td>
<td>1546</td>
<td>1200</td>
<td>1144</td>
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\(^5\) Across the seven samples, the two indexes were weakly correlated in the case of South Korea, Hong Kong, Japan, and Mongolia (with correlation coefficients ranging from .19 to .25). In the case of the Philippines and Thailand, the correlation coefficients are statistically not different from zero.
As Doh Chull Shin and Chong-Min Park (2003) explicated the issue in the Korean context, for citizens with little experience and limited sophistication in democratic politics, either democracy or dictatorship may fail to provide satisfying solutions to their problems. Confronting such uncertainty, many citizens more often than not embrace both democratic and authoritarian political propensities concurrently.

LOCATING THE PRINCIPLED BELIEVERS IN DEMOCRACY

A principled believer in democracy is expected to not only embrace overtly favorable orientations toward democracy but also register a strong objection to authoritarian alternatives. The greater the number of principled believers living under a new democracy is, the more robust will its foundation of legitimation be. We can identify these ‘democrats’ by locating people who responded to the two sets of measurement in a highly coherent manner. In Table 3, we define a ‘very strong supporter of democracy’ as someone who rejected all four authoritarian alternatives and embraced at least four out of the five items measuring support for democracy, a ‘strong supporter of democracy’ as someone rejecting all authoritarian alternatives and embracing three out of the five items, a ‘moderate supporter’ as someone rejecting all authoritarian alternatives and embracing two out of the five items. The criterion for the latter category is arguably the minimum attitudinal threshold for being a ‘democrat’. At the other end of the spectrum, we identify a ‘strong opponent to democracy’ as someone who agreed with two or more of the authoritarian alternatives and embraced no more than one of the five items and a ‘weak opponent to

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<tr>
<td>Very strong supporters</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>36</td>
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<tr>
<td>Strong supporters</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>12</td>
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<tr>
<td>Moderate supporters</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>7</td>
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<tr>
<td>Skeptical supporters</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td>Weak opponents</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strong opponents</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
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<tr>
<td>Incoherent, mixed</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>16</td>
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<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>101</td>
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<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>101</td>
<td>101</td>
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<tr>
<td>Very strong + strong + moderate supporters</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>55</td>
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Table 3 Patterns of commitment to democracy
democracy’ as someone agreeing with one of the authoritarian alternatives and embracing only two or less than two of the five items. Lastly, we define a ‘skeptical supporter of democracy’ as someone who rejected all authoritarian alternatives but embraced only one of the five items and the so-called ‘incoherent’ as someone who does not belong to any of the above (i.e. harboring democratic and authoritarian orientations concurrently).

As the row with the sum of ‘very strong,’ ‘strong,’ and ‘moderate’ supporters in Table 3 shows, only Japan and South Korea enjoy a robust foundation of legitimation where principled believers in democracy constitute the majority, specifically 55 percent and 61 percent. In Taiwan and Thailand, they constitute just barely above 40 percent of the electorate, yielding a rather weak cultural foundation for democracy. The comparable figures for Mongolia and the Philippines (36 and 33 percent) look even more worrisome. Also, we found Japan, the only established democracy, houses the largest percentage of ‘very strong supporters’ (35.9 percent) and Hong Kong has the biggest share of ‘strong opponents’ (10.2 percent).

The size of ‘weak opponents to democracy’ is alarmingly large across East Asia. In Mongolia, the Philippines, and Thailand, they constitute more than a quarter of the electorate (27, 26, and 20 percent). Moreover, in these three countries, a very large number of people were disoriented and confused over democracy (32, 35, and 27 percent respectively in the ‘incoherent’ category). These peoples’ jumbled political orientations shall endanger their democracy with a rather fluid and fragile foundation of legitimation. It is no coincidence that in all three countries, a crisis of democracy is unfolding at the time of this writing with their democratically elected governments embroiled in crippling political turmoil. It is also no coincidence that the democratic parties in Hong Kong have found dwindling popular support for their agenda of sweeping democratic reform.

Our analysis suggests that except for South Korea and Japan most East Asian democracies do not enjoy a deep legitimation. In Taiwan, the Philippines, Mongolia, and Thailand, the number of citizens who harbor either professed reservation about democracy or lingering attachment to authoritarianism remain significantly large, suggesting that the four countries still have a long way to go on the way to democratic consolidation. Also, authoritarian nostalgia is still lurking as most East Asian democracies were preceded by seemingly efficacious growth-oriented, less strictly authoritarian regimes. The extraordinarily large number of the general public who embraced a possible authoritarian option attests to our observation that authoritarianism remains a fierce competitor to democracy in the region. In a nutshell, East Asia’s still relatively young democracies have yet to prove themselves in the eyes of many citizens.

REFERENCES


BIOPGRAPHICAL NOTES

Yu-tzung Chang is an Assistant Professor of Political Science, National Taiwan University. Yun-han Chu is a Distinguished Research Fellow of the Institute of Political Science, Academia Sinica. Min-hua Huang is Assistant Professor of Political Science, National Taiwan University

Address correspondence to Yun-han Chu, Institute of Political Science, Academia Sinica, Nankang, Taipeh, Taiwan 115, E-mail: yunhan@gate.sinica.edu.tw