

## How East Asians Understand Democracy: From a Comparative Perspective

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### Summary

Democracy is a political model with global appeal, but little is known about how contemporary publics understand it. Are East Asians capable of defining democracy in their own words? Are they also capable of prioritizing its properties? Do they tend to understand it procedurally or substantively? This paper addresses these questions by analyzing responses to the open-ended and closed-ended questions that the second round of the East Asia Barometer surveys asked in nine countries in 2006 and 2007. Results of this analysis confirm that most people in East Asia are cognitively capable of defining democracy. Contrary to what is known in the literature, however, the majority of East Asians do not equate democracy exclusively with political freedom. This finding leads to the conclusion that the prevalence of substantive or communitarian conceptions of democracy is one important characteristic of the cultural democratization unfolding in East Asia.

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The rapid diffusion of democracy throughout the globe, especially since the fall of the Berlin Wall, has made it possible for individual scholars and research institutes to conduct numerous public opinion surveys in a large number of democratizing countries (Heath, Fisher, and Smith 2005; Norris 2009; Shin 2007). Gallup International Voice of the People Project, the Pew Global Attitudes Project, the UNDP program on Democracy and Citizenship, the World Values Survey, and many other national and international surveys have monitored citizens' orientations toward democracy. Results from all of these surveys show that democracy has achieved overwhelming mass approval throughout the world and has become "virtually the only political model with global appeal" (Inglehart 2003, 52).

In the last two waves of the World Values Surveys, for example, "a clear majority of the population in virtually every society endorses a democratic political system" (Inglehart and Welzel 2005, 264). The 2005 Voice of the People surveys conducted in 65 countries by Gallup International (2005) between May and July 2005 also reports: "8 out of 10 global citizens believe that in spite of its limitations, democracy is the best form of government, almost 10 percent more than in 2004." Even in the Islamic Middle East, Confucian East Asia, and the former Soviet Union, large

majorities are favorably oriented to democracy (Dalton and Ong 2005; Gibson 1996; Park and Shin 2005; Pew Research Center 2003). Without a question, democracy as a system of government is attracting an ever-increasing number of ordinary citizens from a variety of regions and cultures.

What is still in question, however, is how ordinary citizens understand democracy. For example, in what specific terms do ordinary citizens understand democracy? Which elements of democracy do ordinary citizens consider to be the most and least essential for its development in their own countries? Do these elements vary from nation to nation and/or region to region? This paper seeks to answer these and other related questions in the context of East Asia.

Our research proceeds in four stages. The following section reviews previous public opinion surveys on popular conceptions of democracy and highlights the surveys' key findings. The second section discusses national differences in the levels and patterns of citizens' conceptions of democracy among the mass publics of nine East Asian countries. The third section examines demographic differences in their democratic conceptions in terms of gender, age, education, family income, and urbanization. In the final section, we highlight the notable characteristics of cultural democratization in East Asia.

### **Previous Public Opinion Research**

For the past two decades, an increasing number of public opinion surveys have been conducted to explore conceptions of democracy among ordinary citizens (Baviskar and Malone 2004; Camp 2001; Canache 2006; Fuchs 1999; Miller, Hesli, and Reisinger 1997; Montero 1992; Moreno 2001; Ottemoeller 1998; Schedler and Sarsfield 2007). Three regional barometers, the Afrobarometer, the Asian Barometer, and the Latinobarometer, have asked open-ended questions and encouraged respondents to talk about the meaning of democracy in their own terms. Some other national and multinational surveys have asked closed-ended questions and have had respondents choose one or more defining characteristics from a list that corresponded most closely to their own conception of democracy (McIntosh et al. 1994; Shin 1999). Still other surveys have asked both open-ended and closed-ended questions, and compared responses to the two types of questions (Bratton and Mattes 2001; Fuchs and Roller 2006; Simon 1998). Yet very few of these surveys have asked the same questions over a substantial period of time to track the evolving dynamics of democratic conceptions, particularly among citizens of emerging democracies. Moreover, only one survey has posed the same questions to both mass and elite samples to determine whether any discrepancies exist between the conceptions of democracy held by ordinary citizens and their political leaders (Miller, Hesli, and Reisinger 1997).

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

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

### **Approaches**

National and cross-national public opinion surveys to date have asked two types of questions, open-ended and closed-ended, to ascertain popular conceptions of democracy (Mattes 2006). The open-ended approach is intended to address two specific questions: Do ordinary citizens have the capacity to recognize the concept of democracy? If they do, how do they define or understand it? The close-ended question, in contrast, is intended to determine what types of democratic conceptions are most and least popular among ordinary citizens and how these types vary across the different families of democracies, i.e., the emerging ones and the old/consolidated democracies. Both closed-ended and open-ended questions are occasionally asked together to “get a more complex picture about the democracy-interpretation of citizens” (Simon 1998, 80).

The best example of the closed-ended approach is the USIS-commissioned surveys conducted in Hungary, Poland, Romania, and Bulgaria between early 1991 and early 1993 (McIntosh et al. 1994). In these surveys, respondents were asked to weigh six values—three political and three economic—and choose the one they considered most important to their country’s democratic development. Their responses to this closed-ended question were compared with what was known in three old democracies in Europe, viz. Britain, France, and West Germany. While the publics of the consolidated democracies in Western Europe emphasized the political values of political freedom, party competition, and a fair system of justice, those of the new Eastern European democracies gave more weight to the economic values of prosperity, equality, and security. This pattern of conceptual differences was confirmed in the 1993 Korea Barometer survey in which two-thirds of the masses chose economic rights over political rights (Shin 1999, 60).

In the past five years or so, more multinational public opinion surveys have begun using the open-ended approach. The 1998 Hewlett survey directed by Roderic Ai Camp asked a pair of open-ended questions to compare popular conceptions of democracy in three Latin American countries. Since then, three regional

barometers—the Afrobarometer, the East Asia Barometer, and the Latinobarometer—have asked an open-ended question to address the same matter. These multinational surveys were all alike in requesting respondents to define democracy in their own words, yet they were not all based on the same notion of democracy. The Hewlett survey, for example, treated democracy as a one-dimensional concept and thus allowed respondents to identify only one property. The three regional surveys, on the other hand, treated democracy as a complex concept and permitted respondents to name up to three of its properties.

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

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

### **Levels of Awareness**

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

subsequently identify its multiple properties.

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

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

### **Types of Conceptions**

Among the citizens cognitively capable of discussing the meaning of democracy in their own words, overwhelming majorities understood it positively rather than negatively. In twelve Southern African countries, a total of only one percent gave a negative definition for democracy. What is more notable is that "no politically aware person came up with a negative definition" in half of these countries (Bratton, Mattes, and Gyimah-Boadi 2005, 69). In addition, in all seven East Asian societies, small minorities of five percent or less offered negative views of democracy. In every African and Asian country, only a very small minority refused to view democracy as essential to a good life for themselves and their country. When negative conceptions were compared across the masses and elites of Russia and Ukraine, the masses were found to be far more critical of democracy than the elites (Miller, Hesli, and Reisinger 1997, 170).

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

What particular sorts of regime properties do ordinary citizens associate with democracy most and least frequently? To address this question, previous studies have developed several pairs of categories and classified a multitude of divergent responses according to these pairs. The mostly commonly used pairs include: (1) procedural versus substantive; (2) political versus economic; and (3) liberal versus non-liberal. When comparative surveys of thirteen Eastern and Central European countries asked an open-ended question in 1998-2001, “liberty and basic rights” was the first answer given by an average of 49 percent of their citizens (Fuchs and Roller 2006, 78). When asked the closed-ended question with a list of twelve possible meanings, at least 50 percent of each national sample chose five characteristics as having “a lot to do with democracy.” These five points—political liberties, a multiparty system, citizens’ participation rights, equal justice before the law, and equal rights for women—represent the core values and practices of liberal democracy (Diamond 1999). Other surveys have also revealed the prevalence of liberal political values and practices in popular conceptions of democracy.

### **How East Asians Understand Democracy**

Democracy is a concept referring to a variety of things, and it is also a concept difficult for ordinary people to grasp or define (Dalton, Shin, and Jou 2007; Schedler and Sarsfield 2007; see also Collier and Levitsky 1997; Dahl 1989; Diamond 1999). Are East Asians capable of understanding what democracy means? If they are, are they capable of defining it in their own words? What properties do they name most and least often as its constituents? Are they also capable of weighing the various properties of democracy and identifying one of them as the most essential? Do they consider political procedures more essential than substantive outcomes? All these questions need to be addressed in order to determine the levels and patterns of East Asians’ cognitive competence in democratic politics.

To begin with, we selected a pair of questions from the latest round of the Asian Barometer Surveys (ABS) conducted in ten different countries in 2006 and 2007. The first open-ended question asked respondents to define democracy in their own

terms.<sup>1</sup> The second closed-ended question asked them to consider four well-known properties of democracy and thereafter choose the one which they considered the most essential. The well-known properties are (1) opportunities to change the government through elections; (2) freedom to criticize those in power; (3) reducing the gap between the rich and poor; and (4) guaranteeing basic necessities. The first two issues were intended to tap procedural conceptions of democracy, while the last two were meant to tap substantive conceptions.

How well do East Asians understand democracy? We estimate their overall capacity to understand democracy by determining whether they answered none, one, or both of the questions tapping, respectively, the properties of democracy and the relative importance of those properties. Table 1 shows that about two-thirds (67%) of the East Asians surveyed were able to answer both questions, while a little over one-quarter (27%) answered only one. Those who were completely incapable of understanding democracy, as evidenced by their failing to answer either of the two questions, constitute a very small minority of six percent.

**Table 1. Levels of the Cognitive Capacity to Understand Democracy**

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

Source: the Asian Barometer surveys II.

<sup>1</sup> China and Japan did not ask all the questions tapping either the meaning of democracy or family income. For this reason, we decided not to include them in our analysis.

In three of the nine countries listed in Table 1—Thailand, Indonesia, and Vietnam—nearly one-tenth of the respondents, or slightly more that, are *fully incapable* of understanding democracy. In all of the other six countries, fewer than one in twenty had no understanding of the meaning of democracy. Those *fully capable* of defining democracy also vary considerably across the countries, from a low of 53 percent in Thailand to 92 percent in South Korea. In five countries—South Korea, Mongolia, Taiwan, Singapore, and Vietnam—the fully capable account for more than three-quarters of the respective population. These countries are not all highly modernized, nor are they all democratic countries. In East Asia, it appears that exposure to modernization and democratic politics are not the keys to unlocking popular understanding of democracy.

**Table 2. National Differences in the Number and Breadth of Named Democratic Properties**

Country	Number			Breadth		
	One	Two	Three	Narrow	Broad	(DK/DA)
S. Korea	17%	27%	<b>51%</b>	17%	78%	6%
Mongolia	29	<b>33</b>	26	29	59	13
Philippines	<b>57</b>	9	3	57	12	32
Taiwan	<b>39</b>	24	13	39	37	21
Thailand	<b>45</b>	13	6	45	19	36
Indonesia	<b>33</b>	20	17	33	37	31
Singapore	<b>78</b>	11	1	78	21	10
Vietnam	<b>56</b>	17	10	56	27	17
Malaysia	<b>42</b>	17	10	41	37	32
(pooled)	39	17	14	39	31	29

Source: the Asian Barometer surveys II.

How many East Asians are cognitively able to define democracy in their own words? Table 1 shows that about seven-tenths (71%) were able to do so. Judging by this criterion, East Asians are slightly less capable of defining democracy than Southern Africans, 78 percent of whom were able to offer a definition (Bratton, Mattes, and Gyimah-Boadi 2005, 66). In all nine countries surveyed, clear majorities were able to define democracy (see Table 1). The size of these majorities, however,



varies considerably. In South Korea, nearly everyone (96%) can define democracy in his or her own words. In Thailand, on the other hand, less than two-thirds (64%) can do so. What causes this difference among East Asian citizenries? The finding that Mongolians are more likely to be able to define democracy than the Taiwanese indicates that socioeconomic modernization is not a basis of broader understanding. The finding that the Vietnamese are more likely to offer a definition than Filipinos and Indonesians indicates that personal experience with democratic politics isn't either. So the cause remains a mystery.

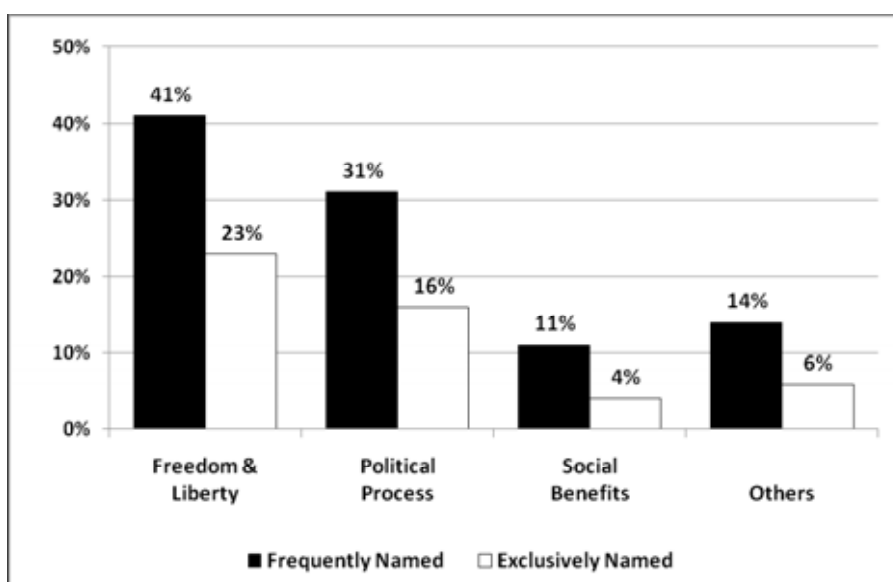
Do East Asians think of democracy as a single entity or multiple entities? We addressed this question in terms of the entities the ABS respondents named in reply to the open-ended question, which allowed them to name up to three things. Table 2 shows that East Asians tend to think of democracy as a single entity rather than multiple entities. While a plurality of 39 percent identified only one component, small minorities of 17 and 14 percent named two and three components respectively. In six of the nine East Asian countries where the ABS asked the open-ended question, respondents named just one component more often than two or three. Only in three other countries—Korea, Mongolia, and Indonesia—did respondents name two or three components more often than just one.

Naming just one component represents a narrow view of democracy, while identifying two or three components represents a broad view. Narrow conceptions of democracy are slightly more popular than broad conceptions among East Asians as a whole (39% vs. 31%). Yet they led Southern Africans in giving multiple meanings to democracy by a margin of 32 to 19 percent. Nearly three times as many East Asians (14% vs. 5%) as Southern Africans were able to equate democracy with three entities. The understanding of democracy among East Asians appears to be deeper than their peers' in Southern Africa.

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

What percentages of East Asians associate democracy with freedom, a political process, and socioeconomic benefits? Figure 1 shows the percentages of East Asians who named each of these three properties and others as a property of democracy in response to the open-ended question. When all nine East Asian countries are considered together, freedom is more frequently mentioned than the political process (41% vs. 31%), social benefits (11%), and other things (14%). Yet nearly three out of five (59%) did not include freedom in their conceptions of democracy. Obviously, non-liberal conceptions of democracy are more common than liberal ones in East Asian countries.

**Figure 1. The Properties of Democracies East Asians Named Frequently and Exclusively**



Source: the Asian Barometer surveys II.

Moreover, Table 3 shows that freedom is not the most frequently mentioned property of democracy in every country. In six of the nine countries, it is, but in only three of these countries—South Korean, Mongolia and Singapore—do majorities ranging from 60 to 75 percent name it as a property of democracy. In three other countries—the Philippines, Indonesia, and Malaysia—pluralities mentioned it most frequently. In the other three countries—Taiwan, Thailand, and Vietnam—substantial majorities of two-thirds or more did not include freedom in their definitions of democracy. The finding that the majority or near majority of respondents equate democracy with liberty or freedom only in three of nine (33%) East Asian countries clearly indicates

that liberal conceptions of democracy are not as prevalent as what is known in other regions.

**Table 3. National Differences in the Most Frequently and Exclusively Named Properties of Democracy**

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

Source: the Asian Barometer surveys II.

What proportion of East Asians understand democracy exclusively in terms of freedom and liberty? Figure 1 shows that exclusively liberal conceptions of democracy constitute less than one-quarter (23%) of the East Asian mass publics. The right-hand panel of Table 3 shows that their percentages vary considerably—from 15 percent in South Korea and Thailand to 59 percent in Singapore. In all but one country, Singapore, minorities equate democracy exclusively with freedom and liberty. In seven of the nine countries, small minorities of less than one-third offered exclusively liberal conceptions of democracy. In three countries, Taiwan, Thailand, and Vietnam, moreover, the proportion of respondents who conceive of democracy in exclusively liberal terms is smaller than the proportion of respondents who conceive of it solely in terms of a political process. These findings can be considered

additional pieces of evidence that non-liberal conceptions of democracy are more common than liberal conceptions among the mass publics of East Asian countries.

The last column in Table 3 also shows the proportions defining democracy in multi-dimensional terms, i.e., substantively different kinds of properties instead of two or three of the same kind. Of the nine countries, South Korea and Mongolia are the only two countries where the majority or a plurality of respondents have a multidimensional conception of democracy. Two non-democracies, Singapore and Vietnam, registered the lowest levels of multidimensional conceptions. These findings suggest that whether citizens hold unidimensional or multidimensional conceptions of democracy depends on their current regime type. When all nine countries are considered together, East Asians are three times more likely to define democracy unidimensionally than multidimensionally. The preponderance of unidimensional conceptions over multidimensional ones is another characteristic of East Asian democratic conceptions.

Which properties of democracy do East Asians consider to be the most essential? Table 4 shows the percentages of ABS respondents who rated each of the four properties they were asked to choose in response to the close-ended question as the most essential. The property most often picked was popular elections, with nearly one-third (30%) of the respondents calling it the most essential. The property of popular elections was followed by economic security (26%), economic equality (18%), and freedom (16%). In the minds of East Asians, popular elections and political freedom stand out, respectively, as the most and least important elements that a political system must have to be a democracy. This finding—that freedom is less essential than either economic security or equality—contrasts sharply with the generalization drawn from the analysis of the multiregional data, viz. that freedom or liberty counts most among the mass publics, even across the regions in democratic transition.

Table 4 shows the national differences in the percentages choosing each of the four democratic properties as the most essential. In none of the ten countries reported in Table 5 did any of the four properties receive a majority vote endorsing it as the most essential property. This is a strong indication that East Asians are more divided than united when it comes to prioritizing the areas in which their countries need to work to build democracy. Economic security was the most popular of the four properties, receiving the endorsement of pluralities in four countries, Indonesia, the Philippines, Singapore, and Taiwan. In the four other countries—Japan, Thailand, Vietnam, and Malaysia—pluralities ranging from 35 to 41 percent named popular elections as the most essential property. Only in South Korea and Mongolia did smaller pluralities rate either economic equality or freedom as the most essential property of democracy. In five of these nine East Asian countries, it is economic security or equality, not political freedom, that people consider the most essential to the building of democracy in their country.

**Table 4. National Differences in the Properties of Democracy that East Asians Consider “the Most Essential”**

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

Source: the Asian Barometer surveys II.

In the right-hand panel of Table 4, we can classify the four properties into two categories, i.e., procedural (governmental elections and the freedom to criticize government officials) and substantive (economic equality and security), and report the percentages falling into these two broad categories for each country. It shows that in eight of the ten East Asian countries, people understand democracy more in procedural terms than substantive ones. Only in Taiwan and Vietnam are substantive conceptions more popular than procedural ones. In Taiwan, moreover, substantive conceptions outnumber procedural conceptions by a large margin of nearly 2 to 1. In Thailand, on the other hand, the reverse is true. When the ten countries are considered together, nearly one in ten (9%) respondents was unable to choose the most essential property of democracy, while the rest were divided almost evenly into the categories of political and economic conceptions of democracy (46% vs. 45%).

We shall now consider responses to the closed- and open-ended questions together and identify five distinct types of democratic conceptions: (1) the ignorant (or uninformed); (2) the narrowly procedural; (3) the narrowly substantive; (4) the broadly procedural; and (5) the broadly substantive. The first type, the ignorant, refers to those unable to answer the open-ended and close-ended questions. The second and third types define democracy narrowly in terms of a single property, but while the second type chooses a property related to the political process as being the most

**Table 5. National Differences in Patterns of Understanding Democracy**

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

Source: the Asian Barometer surveys II.

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

Of these five types, Table 5 shows that the ignorant or uninformed were the dominant group, with nearly one-third (33%) of East Asians falling in this category. They are followed by the narrowly procedural (20%); the narrowly substantive (17%); the

broadly procedural (17%); and the broadly substantive (14%). Although none of these five types represents a majority, each of them forms a substantial minority. This finding clearly indicates that East Asians are much more divided than united in their conceptions of democracy.

Table 5 also shows how nine East Asian countries differ from one another in terms of what percentage of their respondents fall into these five types of democratic conceptions. In none of these countries, once again, does a majority fall into one of the five conception types, and the most popular type varies considerably across the countries. The ignorant or uninformed were the most common in four countries, the Philippines (34%), Thailand (47%), Indonesia (33%), and Malaysia (35%). In two countries, South Korea and Mongolia, the broadly procedural conception was a clear favorite, while in two more countries, Singapore and Vietnam, it was barely more popular than the narrowly substantive conception. Only in Taiwan was the narrowly substantive conception the most popular one, and it was barely more popular there than either ignorance or the broadly substantive. From these findings, it appears that ignorance is most common in the least-modernized countries, while the narrowly procedural conception is most common in the non-democratic countries of East Asia, where citizens have never experienced free, competitive elections.

## Demographics

We shall now compare the five types of democratic conceptions across demographic categories. Table 6 shows that females are more likely to be ignorant than males and are less likely to report a procedural conception. Similarly, increasing age is positively associated with ignorance about democracy and is negatively associated with procedural conceptions. As a result, those people who are sixty or older are far more likely to be ignorant than those younger than twenty-nine, and members of the older group are far less likely to conceive of democracy in procedural terms than are their younger counterparts. Those who are sixty and older are also less likely to hold a broadly substantive conception of democracy than those in the seventeen to twenty-nine age group. More education and a larger income are positively associated with broad conceptions, both procedural and substantive, and are negatively associated with ignorance and **narrowly substantive** conceptions. Urban living is positively associated with **broad** conceptions and negatively associated with **narrow conceptions**; whether one lives in the city or country seems to make little difference in one's likelihood to be ignorant.

**Table 6. Demographic Differences in Patterns of Democratic Conceptions (in Percent)**

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

Source: the Asian Barometer surveys II.

When all five demographic characteristics are considered together, it is evident that ignorance is the most common type of democratic conception among the



underprivileged, a group that includes females, the elderly, the poor, and the uneducated. In sharp contrast, the broadly procedural and substantive conceptions are the most popular types among the privileged, a group that includes the young, the college-educated, and the wealthy. It appears that greater exposure to authoritarian culture has led females and the elderly to remain more ignorant about democracy or to understand it **less in procedural terms**. Modernization, which involves greater access to economic resources and education, on the other hand, has led the young and high-income people with a college education to become less ignorant about it or to understand it **more in procedural terms**.

## Conclusions

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

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

However, analysis of the Asian Barometer surveys does not confirm the second generalization, which suggests that the majority, or near majority, of East Asians equate democracy with political freedom or liberty. Nor does the analysis confirm the third generalization, which suggests that only a small minority equate democracy with socioeconomic benefits. Among the cognitively capable of the East Asian publics, a large plurality considers those benefits to be far more essential than political freedom.

Earlier public opinion surveys conducted in East Asia have documented that East Asians are no different from their peers in other regions in endorsing democracy as the most desirable regime (Chang, Chu, and Park 2007; Shin and Wells 2004). The findings presented in this paper, however, make it clear that East Asians do differ in the particular type of democracy they want to build. As Daniel A. Bell (2006) and other scholars of Confucianism point out, it appears that East Asians prefer communitarian democracy to the liberal democracy that the mass publics of the West prefer. Such a prevalence of communitarian or substantive democracy can be considered the most notable characteristic of cultural democratization unfolding in East Asia.

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

Theoretically, the findings discussed above provide support for two alternative theories of subjective democratization. The first of these theories, named socialization theory, holds that adherence to pre-democratic values, such as communist and Confucian values, makes it difficult for citizens to reorient themselves, especially toward the values of liberalism and pluralism that figure significantly in the new democratic political order (Eckstein et al. 1998; Hahn 1991). The second theory of modernization emphasizes the role of socioeconomic development in generating democratic political orientations (Inglehart and Welzel 2005).

Finally, the analyses presented above clearly indicate that an accurate and comprehensive account can be made of the popular understanding of democracy only when we analyze responses to both open-ended and closed-ended questions. Methodologically, therefore, it is highly desirable and necessary for future public opinion surveys to ask both types of questions, as the Asian Barometer project does.

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