UNDERSTANDING DEMOCRACY: DATA FROM UNLIKELY PLACES

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The "third wave" of democratization gave rise to Francis Fukuyama's well-known statement that democracy appeared to represent the endpoint of human history.[1] Apparently reaffirming this claim, a new wave of international public-opinion surveys finds striking support for democracy around the globe. World Values Survey data indicate that "in country after country throughout the world, a clear majority of the population endorses democracy,"[2] while opinion surveys in Eastern Europe, Africa, and East Asia also describe broad support for democracy, even in some of the most unlikely places.[3] Indeed, the breadth of democratic support is often amazing, with majorities of the public in nations as diverse as Azerbaijan, Iran, and Vietnam stating that democracy is the best form of government, even if it has its faults.

This public-opinion evidence has generated questions about the substance of popular support for democracy in many developing nations. Some skeptics claim that most residents in such countries are preoccupied with economic needs and have little understanding of democracy. To peasants in Afghanistan or Zimbabwe, democracy may have positive connotations, but their understanding of the concept might be vague or without content. Alternatively, some skeptics suggest that support for democracy signals a desire for Western income levels and living standards, and not for a democratic political system. Still others suggest that rhetorical support for democracy has lost meaning, as democracy is now embraced even by nondemocrats because of the positive image and legitimacy that it enjoys.

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So how do ordinary people understand democracy? Do contemporary publics display a reasonable understanding of the meaning of democracy, and what are the contents of their definitions? We draw upon nearly fifty national public-opinion surveys that have recently explored this question in Africa, Asia, Eastern Europe, and Latin America. For a subset of nations, we track how perceptions change after a transition from authoritarianism to democracy. Finally, we discuss the implications of these patterns for the democratization process as well as for programs meant to facilitate democratization.

Defining Democracy

It is rumored that a Chinese student at the 1989 Tiananmen Square democracy rally held a poster that read, "I don't know what democracy means, but I know we need more of it." In fact, democracy is a concept with a variety of potential meanings, and it is not simple to grasp or define.

Thus one might begin by asking whether the average citizen—especially in poor and less democratic nations—can offer a reasonable definition of democracy. Even in advanced industrial democracies, research often highlights the limited political knowledge and sophistication of mass publics. Does a peasant in a developing nation—who often has little schooling and limited access to mass media—have a basis for understanding or evaluating democracy? Some prior surveys suggest that public understanding of democracy is common, but this remains an uncertain pattern across other democratizing nations.[4] The first question is therefore, what percentage of the public offers any definition of democracy?

For those who offer a definition of democracy, the question turns to which factors they emphasize. The most widely employed scholarly definitions of democracy focus on the *institutions and procedures of democratic governance*. For example, Robert Dahl's seminal writings largely equate democracy with the institutions and processes of representative government.[5] If citizens can participate equally in free and fair elections, and if elections direct the actions of government, then the standards of democracy are met. Indeed, Freedom House rankings and other democracy indicators often treat free and fair elections as a defining element of democracy.

Similarly, the democracy-building activities of governments and international NGOs often focus on democracy's institutional and procedural aspects. Democracy-promotion groups advise governments on constitutional reforms; fund public-education programs to explain the nature of electoral politics and other democratic procedures; monitor elections; and provide aid to create political organizations. Thus we might expect people to think of democracy in institutional and proce-

dural terms, and to cite "free and fair elections," "multiparty competition," and "majority rule" as democracy's defining elements. Indeed, surveys that present respondents with a list of items to define democracy often find that voting, elections, and such procedural choices are common responses.[6]

People might also define democracy in terms of its outcomes. Democracy emphasizes *freedom and liberty* as its essential goals, with democratic institutions as the means to achieve them. This has been part of the political rhetoric of democracy from the preamble of the U.S. Declaration of Independence to Franklin D. Roosevelt's articulation of the four democratic freedoms in his 1941 State of the Union address. Similarly, Larry Diamond lists political liberties, participation rights of citizens, equal justice before the law, and equal rights for women as four of the core democratic values.[7] Even if individuals might not understand the institutional procedures of democracy, their desire for freedom and liberty may generate support for democracy as a means to these goals. In principle, other forms of government might seek to achieve these same goals; but in practice, it is contradictory for autocratic regimes to protect the freedom and liberties of the citizenry.

Earlier surveys in several developing nations have found that references to freedom, liberties, and rights were the most common answers in defining the meaning of democracy. For instance, Janos Simon found that liberty and basic rights were the first answer given by a majority of the public in four of the five East European nations he studied.[8] References to liberty, freedom, and equality also accounted for the plurality of responses in surveys in Africa and Latin America.[9]

While scholarly definitions of democracy focus on the political, there may also be a third, *social dimension* to public images of democracy—especially in low-income nations. A social-democratic conception of democracy can include such social rights as social services, providing for those in need, and ensuring the general welfare of others. Some proponents of this view argue that the democratic principles of political equality and participation are meaningless unless individuals have sufficient resources to meet their basic social needs. Indeed, even Roosevelt's four freedoms included the freedom from want.

Furthermore, one hears frequent claims that support for democracy in developing nations merely signals a desire for a higher standard of living.[10] To the extent that democracy is identified with affluent, advanced industrial societies, the endorsement of democracy may mean a desire to achieve this same economic—but not necessarily the same political—standard. This orientation would lead people to cite economic improvement, social welfare, and economic security as key elements of democracy. For example, a 1990 survey asked East Europeans to choose between three political and three economic values that they considered most important to their country's democratic development; most people

equated democracy with the economic values of prosperity, equality, and security.[11]

These three broad alternatives—institutions and procedures, freedom and liberties, and social benefits—constitute the primary substantive choices in defining democracy. Certainly people will offer other responses if asked to define democracy spontaneously. Yet the extent to which democracy is defined in terms of these three broad choices provides a framework to assess the high levels of public support for democracy in recent public-opinion surveys and the implications of these democratic aspirations. Each alternative has different implications for the interpretation of public opinion toward democracy and the principles that guide the democratization process.

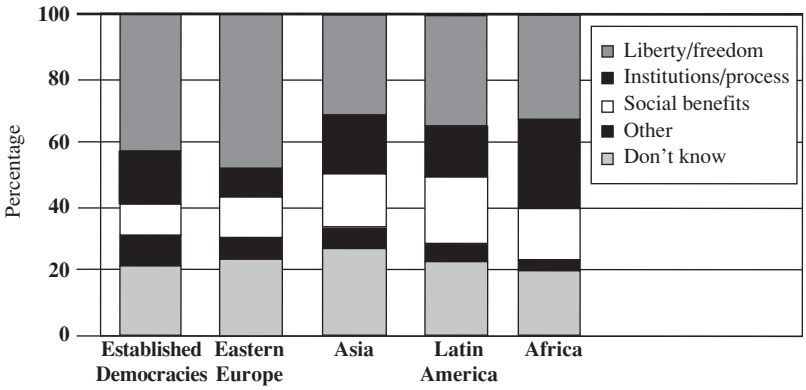
Measuring Public Understanding of Democracy

How do contemporary publics understand the meaning of democracy? To address this quesion, we assembled the major crossnational surveys that have asked a common open-ended question on the meaning of democracy.[12] The value of the open-ended format is that it allows (and requires) respondents to define democracy in their own words. This is a more rigorous test of democratic understanding than providing a list of items which respondents rate as important. Our methodology requires that respondents actively articulate their understanding of democracy.

The Postcommunist Citizen Project adopted a question on democracy's meaning in its surveys of five newly democratized East European nations in the early 1990s. The Afrobarometer, the East Asia Barometer, and the Latinobarómetro adopted a version of this question in their regional surveys in the early 2000s. The Asia Foundation asked about the meaning of democracy in Afghanistan and Indonesia, while the New Soviet Citizens Project surveyed Russian and Ukrainian public opinion. We expand the breadth of the empirical evidence by merging these separate projects, which yields results from 49 nations. This includes surveys in four established democracies (Austria, Japan, Spain, and the United States) to provide a reference point for the developing nations.[13]

Figure 1 displays the findings grouped into five global regions, with responses coded into five categories that are averaged across the nations in the region.[14] The top of each bar displays the percentages who define democracy in terms of *freedoms, civil liberties, and citizen rights*.[15] This includes freedom of speech, political liberty, protection of individual rights, or freedom to participate. The second level presents responses that involve *democratic institutions* or the *democratic political process,* which includes such responses as rule by the people, elections, majority rule, or open and accountable government. The third category displays responses broadly classified as *social benefits,* which include social and

Figure 1—The Meaning of Democracy
(Percentage of total responses)



Source: Figure combines results from national surveys in 49 countries.

economic development, equality or justice, or peace and stability. The fourth category describes miscellaneous responses that cannot be coded under another heading. Often this category reflects the different coding schemes used in the separate projects, so it becomes a residual category for responses that do not fit the other categories.[16] The bottom part of each bar displays the percentages who do not offer any substantive definition. To those individuals, democracy is a concept largely devoid of meaning.

It is significant that most people in most nations do offer some definition of democracy. In the four established democracies in this set, about a quarter of the public did not provide any definition of democracy (23 percent), illustrating that even in these nations some citizens have limited political knowledge. The percentage of those who provide a definition of democracy in established democracies is not significantly different from the average percentage in the world's other regions. Afrobarometer respondents are actually more likely to offer a definition of democracy than are Spaniards or Japanese, and a large majority in several Asian and Latin American nations also offer definitions. Indeed, even in mainland China—which has very low income levels, a large peasantry, and limited democratic experience—two-thirds of the public can express what democracy means to them. Only in Brazil in 2001 and in Indonesia in 1999 did a majority of the public not offer a response. Several other Latin American nations also score relatively low in democratic awareness, which also appears in other Latinobarómetro surveys.

Awareness of the term "democracy" and a willingness to express a definition are initial indications of the depth of contemporary democratic understanding. More important, of course, is the content of these definitions. Here also the results differ from what many of the skeptics have assumed.

Strikingly, democracy is broadly identified in terms of freedom and civil liberties.[17] In most nations, these democratic outcomes are what most people think of when they define democracy. Definitions referencing elections, majority rule, and other such democratic procedures and institutions are only about half as frequent as those citing freedom and liberty. People seem to understand that electoral and constitutional democracy is not sufficient. To most people, the real meaning of democracy is in what it produces.

The breadth of freedom-and-liberty responses across a wide array of nations is impressive. We might expect such rights consciousness in the United States, and it clearly appears in the U.S. responses. Yet even in poor nations such as Afghanistan and Zambia—which have modest literacy levels, low living standards, and limited access to media and other information sources—the average person primarily cites examples of freedoms and liberties when asked what democracy means to them. It is, perhaps, a testament to the positive attraction of democracy that citizens in even the most unlikely national circumstances understand democracy by its political benefits.

Relatively few people define democracy in terms of social benefits (only about a tenth of respondents do so). This heading includes references to social equality, justice, and equality of opportunities, rather than blatant economic benefits such as employment, social welfare, or economic opportunities. For instance, a relatively large percentage of the public in South Korea, Mongolia, South Africa, and Chile define democracy in terms of social benefits, but in each case more than three-quarters of these responses involve social justice and equality, and only a small percentage deal with social and economic benefits. These results undercut claims that supporters of democracy really mean they want higher living standards and similar benefits.

A basic understanding of democracy has apparently diffused widely around the globe. Even if one agrees that the depth of understanding has limits, the responses themselves indicate the ideas that contemporary publics associate with democracy.[18] Instead of assuming that democracy is a Western concept, understood only by affluent and well-educated citizens in established, advanced industrial democracies, these patterns suggest that democracy embodies human values and that most people understand these principles.

The Roots of Democratic Understanding

It is surprising that a large proportion of the public in developing nations defines democracy in liberal-democratic terms. Even if these are only "questionnaire democrats"—an interpretation that we reject—it is still remarkable that citizens with limited democratic experience know the "correct" answers.

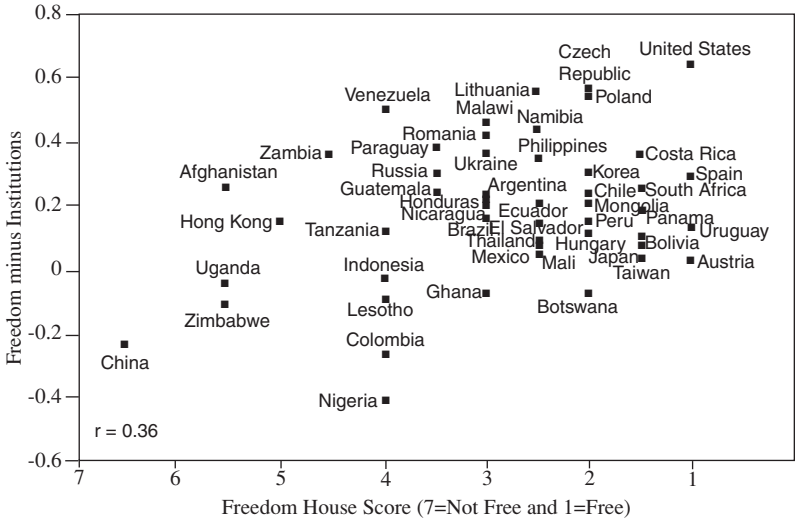
How can we explain this broad public understanding of democracy? One possibility is a *model of diffusion,* which suggests that democratic norms and aspirations spread across the globe because of their natural appeal as well as from the advocacy of international groups.[19] According to this logic, people are drawn to democracy once they understand its potential benefits. The shopkeeper in Cincinnati, Ohio, knows what it means to have freedom and liberty to live one's own life, and a peasant in China who learns about democracy can also understand this ideal even if it is unrealized in his nation. Moreover, confronting a life without freedom and liberty, the Chinese peasant might be even more aware of the consequences of an autocratic regime, and the potential advantages of democracy in providing basic human rights. If this logic is correct, then public understanding of democracy should be weakly related to national conditions, such as the democratic experience or affluence of the population.

Alternatively, a *logic of learning* suggests that ideas about democracy are learned from democratic experience. For instance, political elites in eastern Germany in the early 1990s expressed as much support for democracy as elites from western Germany, but deeper democratic values such as political tolerance apparently developed from actual democratic experience.[20] Similarly, others have argued that people in emerging democracies generally express democratic aspirations when asked whether they support democracy as a regime form, but that their understanding of democracy's meaning requires some degree of democratic experience.[21] If this logic is correct, then public understanding of democracy should be related to national conditions, such as democratic development.

To examine these rival ideas, we compared the economic and political characteristics of nations to their respective publics' understandings of democracy. Affluent societies with better-educated publics might be more likely to define the concept of democracy, while their level of wealth may also affect the content of democratic definitions. A popular lore presumes that people in less-developed nations are more likely to equate democracy with social benefits and a higher living standard. Similarly, we might expect that a freedoms-and-liberties consciousness is more common in affluent societies. It also seems reasonable to assume that more democratic nations would have citizens who are better able to define democracy, and who would perhaps hold images of democracy that focus on freedoms and liberties and the political process, rather than social benefits.

We examined these ideas with surveys from the 49 nations included in our comparison set. Although one might expect national affluence to correlate with the percentage of the public that gives "don't know" responses, this relationship is not statistically significant.[22] Respondents in poor nations are almost as likely to express some definition of democ-

Figure 2—Democratic Development and Definitions of Democracy

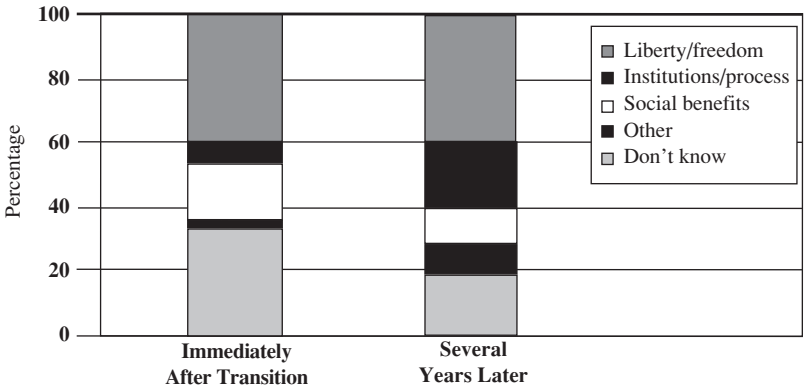


racy as affluent publics, and even the content of these definitions varies only slightly according to the level of national affluence. Wealthier publics are slightly less likely to define democracy in terms of its social benefits; but these differences are not statistically significant. Similarly, the level of democratic development—as measured by the Freedom House—is essentially unrelated to the percentage of respondents who give "don't know" responses.

There is, however, some evidence that the content of democratic understanding changes with democratic experience (see Figure 2). Higher levels of democracy are significantly related to a greater emphasis on freedom and liberty (r=0.34), while democratic development is negatively associated with a focus on institutional and procedural definitions of democracy (r=-0.36). People in the least democratic nations—such as China, Uganda, and Zimbabwe—associate democracy with such political processes as majority rule and free and fair elections. With increasing democratic development, however, the emphasis shifts to freedom and liberties. For instance, U.S. respondents were asked only for a single definition of democracy and 68 percent of respondents cited freedom and liberties (the upper right point in figure 2), while Chinese, who were asked for three definitions, mentioned freedom and liberties only 23 percent of the time (the lower left point).

Early studies of political culture and political development often discounted the ability or the willingness of the public in developing nations to understand or embrace democracy.[23] Our results provide a more positive picture of democratic awareness and the breadth of citizen understanding. Many individuals in these nations may not fully comprehend

Figure 3—Changes in Meaning of Democracy Following a Democratic Transition



Sources: For Poland, the Czech Republic, Lithuania, and Romania, the Postcommunist Citizens Survey; for Afghanistan, the Asia Foundation Survey, 2004 and 2006; for Indonesia, the Asia Foundation, National Voter Education Survey, 1999, and Democracy in Indonesia—A Survey of the Electorate, 2003.

the exact details of their democratic definitions, but that they cite broad principles of liberal democracy is a notable positive finding. Moreover, the identification of democracy with greater freedom and liberty has broadly diffused across the globe, articulated by publics even in unlikely political and economic circumstances.

Examples of Democratic Learning

According to the logic of democratic learning, people should learn democracy's meaning by experiencing a new democratic order, while new incentives and civic-education efforts may also influence their understanding. Put simply, citizens' democratic understanding should be the sum of their individual experiences.

To test this logic, we assembled time-series trends on public understanding of democracy from seven nations that had recently undergone a democratizing regime change: Afghanistan, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Indonesia, Lithuania, Poland, and Romania.[24] Because we can compare responses from the period immediately following democratization with those from a few years thereafter, these nations provide fertile ground for examining whether and how citizens' understanding of democracy shifts in response to a change of regime.

Figure 3 combines results from all seven nations for the first survey after the democratic transition, and a second survey several years later.[25] Citizens' understanding of democracy generally does increase with democratic experience. Except in Poland, where the decline was small, all other countries witnessed significant decreases in the "don't know" responses. The increased awareness of democracy was most salient in

Afghanistan, where the share of "don't know" responses dropped 32 percentage points in two years, suggesting that democratic understanding can be learned in a short period of time. Moreover, several of the first surveys were conducted a few years after the democratic transition, which implies that democratic learning might be even greater if we could do true pre- and post-transition comparisons.

In terms of the substance-of-democracy definitions, institutional and political-process definitions increase for this set of nations. This striking phenomenon occurs across all seven countries, and runs contrary to our earlier finding that greater democratic experience leads citizens to emphasize freedom and liberty, rather than the processes of democracy. At the same time, the propensity to define democracy in terms of freedoms and liberties also increases slightly between the two waves of surveys, and this may be understated because of changes in the coding of responses.[26] In the two nations with the same coding methodology in both waves—Afghanistan and Indonesia—definitions based on freedom, liberty, and rights increased by 14 percent between the two waves.

Rates of change appear to differ between countries at different stages of economic development. For instance, the Czech Republic and Hungary saw relatively minor changes over time, while countries ranking lowest on both indices—Afghanistan and Indonesia—witnessed some of the largest changes. It may be that people in more affluent countries are more educated and have more opportunities to receive information about, or even to interact with, democratic societies—which in turn fosters familiarity with the concept (if not the practice) of democracy even before democratic transitions take place. These conditions do not apply to most citizens in less-developed countries that are experiencing democratization.

A comparison of our cross-sectional and time-series results provides an intriguing contrast. The cross-sectional results suggest that perceptions of freedom and liberty grow with democratization, while the cross-temporal results are ambiguous on this point. Democratization may strengthen public emphasis on liberties and rights, but it also may be that democracy finds a more fertile ground for development where people are more conscious of the liberties and rights that are embedded in a democratic-political order.

Lessons for Democratization

The recent global public-opinion surveys on attitudes toward democracy should reshape our basic images of democracy's popular base. Evidence from the World Values Survey and regional Barometer surveys demonstrates broad public support for democracy as a form of government, even in many undemocratic settings. Our research indicates that support for democracy is more than a hollow expression on behalf of an

unknown concept, because most citizens of most developing nations are capable of imputing meaning to democracy in their own words.

Equally important, people most often think of democracy in terms of the freedoms, liberties, and rights that it conveys, rather than in terms of institutional structures and governmental processes. This implies that the popular appeal of democracy lies not in its procedures for elections and governance, but rather in the freedom and liberty that democracy provides. Even in less-developed nations, relatively few people equate democracy with such social benefits as a higher living standard, secure employment, or personal security.

These different definitions of democracy also shape citizen attitudes toward democracy. According to Michael Bratton and his associates, Africans' ability to define democracy has a significant and independent effect on their demand or support for democracy. As Bratton and his team explain, "understanding of democracy is a top-ranked element explaining why some Africans demand democracy and others do not."[27]

Generally, our findings suggest that the broad popular support for democracy displayed in contemporary public-opinion surveys is legitimate, as endorsements of democracy are typically paired with reasonable definitions of democracy's meaning. We should be cautious about reading too much into public definitions of democracy, because democracy requires more than an understanding of the term. Yet the extent of liberal understandings of democracy indicates a level of political awareness that previous research on the political culture of developing nations did not recognize. Indeed, these patterns suggest that democratic aspirations reflect deeper human values for control over one's life and individual freedom that are readily understood by people across the world.[28]

The popular emphasis on freedom and liberty also holds implications for democracy-promotion efforts. Governments and international agencies often focus their democracy-building activities on the institutional elements of democracy. These are important parts of the democratic process. Yet people are naturally drawn to the freedoms, liberties, and rights that democracy can provide, which suggests that public-education efforts might more consciously link democratic procedures to their potential to produce the freedoms that people desire. Put simply, the respondents in these surveys are telling us that democracy is more than a form of government, and these political benefits are most salient to them.

Our findings also suggest that our previous thinking about citizens in developing nations has not done them justice. Most often, analysts have described these publics as passive subjects, often tolerating or endorsing various forms of autocratic government.[29] To paraphrase Adlai Stevenson, research suggested that people get the type of political system they deserve—so less democratic nations must have less democratic publics. Now that we can finally systematically study public opinion in the developing world, the democratic potential among the citizenry is greater

than previously presumed. It should not be surprising that people want freedom, liberty, and control over their lives—and that they see democracy as a means of achieving these goals.

We realize that one must be cautious in placing too much emphasis on broad categories of responses coded from open-ended questions, and some caution is warranted. One expects that when an American or an Austrian discusses the meaning of democracy, that person draws upon greater understanding and experience than is available to residents in a newly democratizing nation. Yet there is a surprising awareness of democracy, even in unexpected places, and respondents' emphasis on freedom and liberty suggests that democracy's worth is readily recognized by those who value such principles.

NOTES

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1. Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man* (New York: Free Press, 1992).

2. Ronald Inglehart, "How Solid Is Mass Support for Democracy—and How Can We Measure It?" *PS: Political Science & Politics* 36 (March 2003): 51.

3. Doh Chull Shin, "Democratization: Perspectives from Global Citizenries," in Russell Dalton and Han-Dieter Klingemann, eds. *Oxford Handbook of Political Behavior* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007); Russell Dalton and Doh Chull Shin, eds., *Citizens, Democracy and Markets around the Pacific Rim* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006); Michael Bratton, Robert Mattes, and E. Gyimah-Boadi, *Public Opinion, Democracy, and Market Reform in Africa* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004); and Richard Rose, William Mishler, and Christian Haerpfer, *Democracy and Its Alternatives: Understanding Post-communist Societies* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998).

4. Bratton, Mattes, and Gyimah-Boadi, *Public Opinion, Democracy, and Market Reform in Africa*; and Roderic Camp, ed., *Citizen Views of Democracy in Latin America* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2001).

5. Robert Dahl, *Polyarchy: Participation and Opposition* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1971).

6. Dieter Fuchs and Edeltraud Roller, "Learned Democracy? Support for Democracy in Central and Eastern Europe," *International Journal of Sociology* 36 (Fall 2006): 70–96.

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

8. Janos Simon, "Popular Conceptions of Democracy in Postcommunist Europe," in Samuel H. Barnes and Janos Simon, eds., *The Postcommunist Citizen* (Budapest: Erasmus Foundation, 1998).

9. Bratton, Mattes, and Gyimah-Boadi, *Public Opinion, Democracy, and Market Reform in Africa*; and Camp, ed., *Citizen Views of Democracy in Latin America,* 17.

10. We hear this comment frequently when presenting findings on the remarkable level of support for democracy in many autocratic or transitional political systems. For instance, when 72 percent of the Vietnamese public (in the World Values Survey) say that democracy is the best form of government, the critics claim that this means they want to have the higher standard of living that they identify with the United States but not the U.S. system of government.

11. Mary McIntosh and Martha Abele, "The Meaning of Democracy in a Redefined Europe," paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Association for Public Opinion, St. Charles, Illinois, 1993. In contrast, the same study found that citizens in Britain, France, and West Germany emphasized the political values of political freedom, party competition, and a fair justice system.

12. *The Postcommunist Citizen* survey was conducted in 1990; it asked: "There is considerable argument concerning the meaning of democracy. What is your opinion about this question? What is for you the meaning of democracy?" This dataset does not include the open-ended responses; we received these marginals from Hans-Dieter Klingemann. The 2000–2001 Afrobarometer question reads: "What, if anything, do you understand by the word 'democracy?' What comes to mind when you hear the word?" *(www.afrobarometer.org)*. The East Asia Barometer used two different questions that overlap with other studies: "To you, what does 'democracy' mean? What else?" or "What for you is the meaning of the word 'democracy?' What else?" (EAB website: *eacsurvey.law.ntu.edu.tw*). The 2001 Latinobarómetro asked "To you, what does 'democracy' mean? What else?" *(www.latinobarometro.org)*. The U.S. results are from Camp, ed., *Citizen Views of Democracy in Latin America*. The Spanish and Austrian results are from Simon, "Popular Conceptions of Democracy in Postcommunist Europe." The Russian and Ukraine surveys are from the New Soviet Citizen Project (Inter-university Consortium for Political and Social Research ICPSR 6521). The Asia Foundation collected the Afghan and Indonesia surveys *(www.asiafoundation.org)*. We appreciate access to all these surveys, and the analyses presented below are the responsibility of the authors.

13. Before presenting the results, we want to acknowledge the limitations. Comparing responses given to open-ended questions across nations presents a methodological challenge. Even in established democracies, there is an active debate about the political knowledge and sophistication of mass publics. Furthermore, it is difficult to ask open-ended questions in a comparable manner, because they are subject to different interpretations by respondents and answers are often imprecise and must be transcribed by interviewers. Question-order effects may influence open-ended responses, especially when combining different survey projects. The administration of the interview by different survey-research firms can affect the extensiveness of responses and the number of responses to open-ended questions. Then, coders identify the meaning, which can add further variability into the data. In our case, the stem question was similar—but not identical—across nations. Each project then independently coded the responses. Therefore, we used the available coding to construct comparability between these different coding systems. The resulting cross-national evidence is admittedly imprecise (although they are probably more comparable within projects than between projects). Yet this evidence provides valuable insights into public thinking, and the results do present a surprisingly consistent view of how ordinary people think about the meaning of democracy. We therefore focus on broad crossregional patterns rather than the specific percentages in any single nation.

14. The full country-by-country results are presented in Russell Dalton, Doh Chull Shin, and Willy Jou, "Popular Conceptions of the Meaning of Democracy: Democratic Understanding in Unlikely Places," available at *http://repositories.cdlib.org/csd/07-03/*. The number of nations in each group is as follows: established democracies (4); Eastern Europe (7); Asia (9); Latin America (17); and Africa (12).

15. Each project used its own categories in coding responses. To the best of our ability, we generated comparable broad categories from the specific codes. Using the Afrobarometer as an illustration, "freedom and liberties" includes civil liberties, personal

freedoms, group rights, and group freedoms; "institutions and governmental processes" includes voting, electoral choice, multiparty competition, government by the people, government effectiveness and accountability, majority rule; and "social benefits" includes socioeconomic development, personal security, equality and justice, peace, and unity. Other responses, such as general positive or negative comments about democracy, were coded as "other."

16. For instance, the East Asian Barometer and Latinobarómetro included categories of "other positive terms" and "other negative terms." Without further information we included these in the "other" category. In addition, "other" included miscellaneous responses such as "national independence," "change government," and references to individual politicians or political parties.

17. Most of the surveys coded up to three responses to the open-ended question. In some nations, however, only one or two responses were coded. To adjust for this difference, we compare substantive responses in Figure 1 as a percentage of all the total responses. Thus if 59.3 percent of Koreans mentioned freedom and civil liberties, this is divided by the total responses (158.3 percent), so that 37.4 percent of the total Korean responses deal with freedom or liberties. Thus the percentages in Figure 1 sum to 100 percent in each column, but the percentage that cites each of the three substantive categories is generally higher when multiple responses are counted.

18. Previous research on advanced industrial democracies debates the sophistication of contemporary publics, and the average citizen's political information and knowledge is limited. Thus we are not implying that responses citing freedom or liberties reflect a full philosophical understanding of these terms. We are suggesting that citizens in developing nations have an understanding of the key tenets of democracy that is greater than previous research has presumed, and the patterns are not dramatically different from the responses offered by citizens in established democracies.

19. Robert Rohrschneider, *Learning Democracy: Democratic and Economic Values in Unified Germany* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999); on the diffusion of international norms, see Wayne Sandholtz and Mark Gray, "International Integration and National Corruption," *International Organization* 57 (Fall 2003): 761–800.

20. Rohrschneider, *Learning Democracy*.

21. Rose, Mishler, and Haerpfer, *Democracy and Its Alternatives*; and Robert Mattes and Michael Bratton, "Learning about Democracy in Africa: Awareness, Performance, and Experience," *American Journal of Political Science* 51 (January 2007): 192–217.

22. GNP per capita is positively correlated with freedom and liberty responses (.27), and negatively related to "don't know" (-.17), institutions (-.19), and social-benefits responses (-.12). Freedom House democracy scores are positively related to freedom and liberty (.34) and social-benefits responses (.24), and negatively related to "don't know" (-.18) and institutions (-.36) responses.

23. Gabriel Almond and Sidney Verba, *The Civic Culture* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1963); and Lucian Pye and Sidney Verba, eds., *Political Culture and Political Development* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1965).

24. The Afghanistan (2004 and 2006) and Indonesia (1999 and 2004) surveys were conducted by the Asia Foundation. The five East European nations were included in the first wave of the Postcommunist Citizen Project and a second wave conducted around 2000.

25. The full country-by-country results are presented in Dalton, Shin, and Jou, "Popular Conceptions of the Meaning of Democracy." Figures for the Czech Republic at the second timepoint may not be entirely comparable with the Czechoslovak responses at the

first timepoint, since the early survey combined the Czech Republic and Slovakia. We could not correct for this because we do not have access to the original surveys.

26. In the five Central and East European countries, the first wave of the survey contained a "rights" category, but the second wave did not. Between 6 percent and 17 percent of respondents were coded as giving a rights response in the first survey. The lack of this category may lower the percentage of "freedom and liberties"–focused responses at the second timepoint.

27. Bratton, Mattes, and Gyimah-Boadi, *Public Opinion, Democracy, and Market Reform in Africa,* 274.

28. Amartya Sen, "Democracy as a Universal Value," *Journal of Democracy* 10 (July 1999): 3–17; and Inglehart and Welzel, *Modernization, Cultural Change, and Democracy*.

29. Almond and Verba, *The Civic Culture*; and Pye and Verba, *Political Culture and Political Development*.