

ASIAN  BAROMETER

A Comparative Survey of

DEMOCRACY, GOVERNANCE AND DEVELOPMENT

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East Asia's Challenged Democracies in Global
Perspectives:

Evidences from Asian Barometer Survey

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The Asian Barometer (ABS) is an applied research program on public opinion on political values, democracy, and governance around the region. The regional network encompasses research teams from thirteen East Asian political systems (Japan, Mongolia, South Korea, Taiwan, Hong Kong, China, the Philippines, Thailand, Vietnam, Cambodia, Singapore, Malaysia, and Indonesia), and five South Asian countries (India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, and Nepal). Together, this regional survey network covers virtually all major political systems in the region, systems that have experienced different trajectories of regime evolution and are currently at different stages of political transition.

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East Asia's Challenged Democracies in Global Perspectives: Evidences from Asian Barometer Survey

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Asia's Challenged Democracies in Global Perspectives

Democracy is in trouble in every region of the world. Attempted democratic transitions are failing, new democracies are having trouble consolidating themselves, established democracies are suffering from a depletion of public trust in democratic institutions and a growing disillusion among many voters believing that existing political channels have failed to further their interests and preferences in a meaningful way while, at the same time, rising authoritarian powers radiate confidence in the effectiveness of their political systems (Diamond, 2015).

How do East Asian democracies fare in the face of the headwind of global democratic recession (Diamond 2015)? Do East Asian democracies show any signs of democratic deconsolidation comparable to what Roberto Foa and Yascha Mounk have observed in the established democracies (2016; 2017)? In this chapter, we assess and ascertain whether democratic regimes in East Asia are still enjoying a solid foundation of popular support by applying an integrated framework of evaluating the popular perception of and orientations toward democracy. Thanks to the many innovations in survey design initiated by Asian Barometer Survey (ABS),² we are in a position to study these crucial issues with a robust micro-foundation, i.e., seeing through the eyes of citizens, who are the final judge on width and depth of a regime's popular foundation (Chu, et. al. 2008).

Democracies become consolidated only when, in Linz and Stepan's incisive phrase, not only all significant elites, but also an overwhelming proportion of ordinary citizens, see democracy as "the only game in town" (Linz and Stepan 1996, 15). The

² The Asian Barometer Survey is a research network dedicated to democratic studies through survey methodology. The network comprises 14 country teams. Its regional headquarters is co-hosted by the Institute of Political Science, Academia Sinica and the Center for East Asia Democratic Studies at National Taiwan University. For the background and methodological details of the ABS, please refer to the project's website: www.asianbarometer.org.

consolidation of 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, 65). Thus the state of normative commitment to democracy among the public at large is crucial for evaluating how far the political system has traveled toward democratic consolidation.

The Challenges of Democratic Consolidation in East Asia

Over the last four decades, as the tidal wave of the third wave democratization swept through the political landscape of the developing world and brought down numerous authoritarian regimes, people have taken for granted that democratic regimes by default enjoy a more robust foundation of legitimacy and thus are expected to be more resilient than non-democratic regimes in times of economic crisis and social turmoil. However, most recently there have been a number of developments that should prompt us to revisit this prevailing view.

As we enter the 21st century, the momentum of third wave of democratization has gradually come to a halt and the large-scale trend of concurrent movement toward democracy has been arrested by the force of a new “democratic recession” (Diamond 2015). Many third-wave democracies have suffered from bad governance, political gridlock, setbacks in freedom and human rights, or even democratic breakdown. Signs of democratic deconsolidation have taken place in many third wave democracies from Turkey, Ukraine, Hungary to Bangladesh. Although the 2011 Arab Spring was a potential cause for optimism, thus far only Tunisia’s democratic transition has made visible progress, while democracy failed to take hold in Egypt, Yemen, and Libya. During the late Third Wave, many transitions, perhaps even the majority, resulted in what Steven Levitsky and Lucan Way called competitive authoritarian regimes and

others labeled illiberal democracies , semi authoritarian , electoral authoritarian , or hybrid regimes (2010). These governments held elections and tolerated limited opposition, but only within narrowly constrained political spaces delimited by the incumbents. At the same time, authoritarianism remains a fierce competitor to democracy in Asia, Middle East, Africa and the vast region of the former Soviet Union.

In East Asia, in particular, liberal democracy has yet to establish itself in the region's ideological arena as "the only game in town," i.e., the only acceptable mode of political legitimacy, as witnessed by the sustained interest in the debates over Asian values, the Chinese model of development, and Asian meritocracy (Bell, 2015). Nearly forty-five years after democracy's third wave began with the Carnation Revolution in Portugal, liberal democracy has yet achieved Fukuyama's (1992) expected historical triumph. This reality is very apparent in East Asia, where despite decades of economic growth and rapid social transformation. Most East Asians do not live under democratic governments. As Huntington (1968, 1991) has pointed out, East Asia is a site of competition between civilizations. The reasons for this include the region's long history of human civilization, its diverse cultural heritage, the resiliency of the competing non-democratic political models, and the strong presence of Sino-US strategic rivalry.

Before the arrival of Western modernization in the 19th century, East Asia had its own political and economic hierarchy and international order. East Asian civilization is marked by the diversity of its cultural heritage and forms of social organization, including Confucian culture, Buddhist culture, and Islamic culture. The presence of these cultural traditions forms the backdrop to conflicts between traditional and modern values during the process of modernization. According to some observers, major cultural traditions in the region, including Confucianism and Islam, may be

incompatible with democracy (Huntington, 1984, 1991).

East Asia is also a fertile soil for resilient non-democratic regimes competing with the model of representative democracy. The recent economic rise of China has led many to view the “China Model” as a viable alternative to Western democracy.³ After China’s economic success was showcased to the world at the Beijing Olympics, the intellectual debate over whether China has embarked on an alternative path to modernization has gathered momentum. Prior to this, the rise of East Asia’s “four little dragons” and the public pronouncements of Singapore leader Lee Kuan Yew resulted in widespread discussion surrounding “Asian values.” Thirty years later, the rise of China has led to a reemergence of this debate. Does this mean that there is a genuine alternative to Western-style democracy? The Thai military coup in 2006, and the continuing failure of countries such as Malaysia and the Philippines to strengthen democracy provide a stark illustration of the continuing challenges for democratic consolidation in the region. Even Indonesian democracy, widely held up as an exception to the democratic recession elsewhere in the world, has been “stagnating” in recent years under attack from anti-reformist elements (Mietzner, 2012).

East Asia in Comparative Perspective

East Asia is not unique in its uneasy relationship with democracy due to traditional culture or authoritarianism legacies. Regional barometer surveys that cover Africa, Latin America, the Arab world, and South Asia likewise show that support for democracy can be thin. But in Latin America and Africa democratic legitimacy has declined least in the best-governed and most democratic countries, while in East Asia it is in precisely such countries -- Japan, Korea, and Taiwan -- that democratic

³ The China model is generally defined as including one-party rule and a compromise between state-owned enterprises and the free market (Naughton, 2010). Recently Bell (2015; 2017) argues the China's meritocracy is a fierce competitor to the Western liberal democracy.

legitimacy has been most fragile (Chu et al., 2008; Diamond and Plattner, 2008; Diamond, Plattner and Chu, 2013).

According to Freedom House report in 2017, of the 195 countries assessed, 87 (45 percent) were rated Free, 59 (30 percent) Partly Free, and 49 (25 percent) Not Free.⁴ East Asia, however, lagged behind the global trend. The region has long been the cradle of “developmental authoritarianism,” with Japan being the lone liberal democracy, and for decades a one-party dominant system at that. At the time the Fourth Wave of ABS ended in 2016, only five of the region’s eighteen sovereign states and autonomous territories were ranked “free” by Freedom House’s standards of political rights and civil liberties. Among the five, only four (South Korea, Taiwan, Mongolia, and Indonesia) had undergone democratic transition during the time span of the third wave. Two recently re-democratized systems, Thailand and the Philippines, suffered serious backsliding and were downgraded by Freedom House to “partially free.” The bulk of the region was still governed by one-party authoritarian and electoral-authoritarian regimes. The region not only lagged the global trend of third-wave democratization but also was not immune from worrisome trend of global democratic recession. Furthermore, with the shift of the center of regional economic gravity from Japan to China, East Asia become perhaps the only region in the world where newly democratized countries become economically enmeshed with non-democratic countries.

Even after democratic transition, few of the region’s former authoritarian regimes were thoroughly discredited. Many people recalled the old regimes as having delivered social stability and miraculous economic growth and as seemingly less susceptible than democracies to money politics. Many of the old authoritarian regimes had allowed some organized opposition and limited electoral contestation, so citizens

⁴ <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/freedom-world-2017>.

did not experience as dramatic an increase in the area of political rights and freedoms after the transition as did citizens in third-wave democracies in other regions (Chang, Chu and Park, 2007).

In terms of regime performance, many of East Asia's new democracies struggled with governance challenges -- political strife, bureaucratic paralysis, recurring political scandals, financial crises, and sluggish economic growth. At the same time, the region's more resilient one-party authoritarian and electoral-authoritarian regimes, such as China, Vietnam, Singapore, and Malaysia, were seemingly able to cope with complex economies, diverse interests, economic globalization and financial crises. These historical and contemporary benchmarks tended to generate extraordinarily high expectations for the performance of democratic regimes.

To assess the challenges of democratic consolidation in East Asia, we draw on the empirical data that reveal how the citizens perceive and evaluate the state of democracy in their given country. More specifically, we examine how far the citizens think their country has traveled down the road of democratic progress thus far, to what extent the citizens have acquired strong and deep normative commitments to democratic form of government, whether the majority of the citizenry are satisfied with the way democracy works, how much public trust that democratic institutions are enjoying, and to what extent the political system lives up to the citizens' expectation about controlling corruption, the most cited factor that erodes the legitimacy of the regime. By analyzing the data from ABS across four waves, we provide a systematic and longitudinal assessment of the state of democracy in East Asia.

The data from South Korea, Mongolia, Taiwan, the Philippines, and Thailand allow us to compare popular legitimation of democracy across the region's five new democracies. Data collected from Japan, Hong Kong, and China throws light on popular beliefs and attitudes in societies living under different kinds of regimes: the

only long-established democracy in the region; a former British colony that has enjoyed the world's highest degree of economic freedom but witnessed its momentum of democratic transition slow after retrocession to Chinese control in 1997; and a one-party authoritarian regime wrestling with the political implications of rapid socio-economic transformation while resisting any fundamental change in its political regime.

Perceived extent of democracy

The ABS introduced a direct way to find out how far the citizens think their country has traveled down the path of democratic development. The respondents were asked to indicate where their country stand under the present government on a 10-point dictatorship-democracy scale. A score of 1 means "complete dictatorship" whereas a score of 10 indicates "complete democracy." Since the mid-point of the scale lies between 5 and 6, those in the top half (6 or above on the scale) may be seen as locating the country in the democratic territory.

As shown in Figure 1, with the exception of Hong Kong, the overwhelming majority of East Asian people is of the opinion that their democracy has not made significant democratic progress over the last fifteen years despite of the fact that their countries are rated by Freedom House as "Free". On the contrary, the popular perception is that their democracy has suffered some backsliding with the rating of the country's level of democratic development gradually declining. For example, whereas Taiwan citizens previously rated the island's democratic progress at 7.3, it is now reduced to 6.5. In Japan, this score has fallen from 7.0 points to 6.3. The most worrisome nation is Mongolia, where the score has fallen from 6.5 to 5.4. Hong Kong's story is encouraging but not impressive. In the eyes of Hong Kong people, this former British colony has made some progress from a rather low level of democratic

development over the recent decade probably thanks to the growing mass demand for direct popular election of the chief executive of Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR) under the Basic Law.

[Figure 1 about here]

Support for Democracy

A necessary condition for the consolidation of democracy is met when an overwhelming proportion of citizens believe that “the democratic regime is the most right and appropriate for their society, better than any other realistic alternative they can imagine”(Diamond, 1999: 65). By this standard, East Asia’s young democracies have not yet achieved a strong and resilient popular base for democratic legitimacy. The four waves of Asian Barometer Survey confirm that many East Asian citizens still possess ambivalent attitudes toward democracy and that new democracies in the region have experienced nil growth or even some noticeable waning in popular legitimacy. On the one hand, democracy as an ideal is still appealing to a great majority of ordinary citizens.

For many years, students of democracies have relied heavily on a single item for measuring popular support for democracy as a preferred political system (Bratton and Mattes 2001). Typically, respondents were asked to choose among three statements: “Democracy is always preferable to any other kind of government,” “Under some circumstances, an authoritarian government can be preferable to a democratic one,” and “For people like me, it does not matter whether we have a democratic or a non-democratic regime.” It has been the most widely used item not only for its face validity but also for its wide availability. But a single-item measurement always suffers from a lack of conceptual breadth and depth, not to mention the familiar

problem of yielding lower reliability as compared to multiple indicators.

Like any other complex concept, normative commitment to democracy consists of many attitudinal dimensions. The ABS from the very beginning has employed a more sophisticated four-item battery which asks respectively about democracy as a preferred political system, a desired political system, a suitable political system, and an effective political system capable of the society's major problems (Chang, Chu and Park, 2007; Shin, 2007; Chu et. al. 2008).

This four-item battery is supplemented with two related measures. The first is to look at popular satisfaction with the way democracy works. The second the popular rejection of authoritarian alternatives, which is also frequently labels as detachment from authoritarianism. By combining the direct measure of support for democratic with two supplemental measures, the ABS data enable us to conduct an systematic assessment of the legitimacy foundation of East Asian democracies.

Preferability of Democracy

As shown in Figure 2, in East Asia the proportion of respondents regarding democracy as the most preferable form of government has been growing albeit from a relatively low baseline. The observed upward trend in Japan, Korea and Hong Kong is probably due to the socializing effect of democratic political institutions. The dynamics is more complicated in Taiwan and Mongolia. When this question was employed the first time in 2001-2002 in Taiwan, 64% of our respondents believing in the preferability of democracy but it sank to only 50% during the second term of Chen Shui-bian's presidency as the popular support for democracy was dampened by the contested electoral outcomes during Chen's reelection bid in 2004 as well as the shocking revelation of his family's involvement in widespread corruption. Mongolia also suffered a sharp decline as the country's democracy was weakened by disputed and inconclusive electoral outcomes and sluggish economic performance. In both

Taiwan and Mongolia, the level of democratic support bounced during the ABS's third wave as political stability was restored. But, in both countries, there was still a significant proportion of the electorate registering their reservation toward democracy during ABS fourth wave survey around 2014-15, and the level of support remained sluggish hovering around the same level of percentage observed in the first wave of ABS about fourteen years ago.

[Figure 2 about here]

Figure 3 provides additional information collected from the rest of the ABS-surveyed countries including four South Asian countries.⁵ The overall picture is rather paradoxical as the observed level of democratic support based on this most commonly used item is substantially higher in many non-democratic countries, such as Vietnam, Cambodia, Malaysia and Myanmar. Apparently, democracy has become an universal brand name nowadays, even authoritarian regimes embrace the concept of democracy and claim that their systems are democracies of some sorts. In contrast, in Mongolia, South Korea and Taiwan, the size of believers in the preferability of democracy has yet reached the threshold of two-third of the population more than a quarter of a century after they had made the successful transition to democracy.

[Figure 3 about here]

Efficacy of Democracy: Perceived Problem-Solving Capacity

The second indicator of democratic support is anchored on the efficacy of democracy, which dwells on the perceived effectiveness of democratic regime in

⁵ The South Asian Barometer Survey is headquartered in the Centre for the Study of Developing Societies. The data shown here is based on the second wave of South Asian survey which was conducted between 2011-2015.

dealing with the major problems that the country is facing. On this measure, most East Asian democracies do not bode well. During ABS' third and fourth waves, only 43% and 38% respectively of our Taiwan respondents believe that democracy is capable of solving the country's major problems. Japan fares just slightly better during the fourth wave of ABS as the LDP government under Abe has shown its resolve to jumpstart the Japanese economy after two "lost decades". Comparable to what we found earlier, the popular aspiration for democracy is superficially high in many Asian hybrid and authoritarian regime as their citizens register much stronger confidence in democracy's problem-solving capacity. In contrast, the euphoria that came with young democracies has long gone among citizens in East Asian third-wave democracies after they have experienced many disappointing developments after several rounds of power rotation. They drew this conclusion through living under the real-life democracy for more than two decades. Indeed, over the last two decades, many of the region's authoritarian regimes have outperformed the third-wave democracies at least on economical score.

[Figure 4 about here]

Perceived suitability of democracy

The third indicator that the ABS employed is perceived suitability of democracy. The ABS asked respondents to indicate the level of suitability of democracy for their country on a 10-point scale. A score of 1 means "completely unsuitable" whereas a score of 10 indicates "completely suitable." As with the dictatorship-democracy 10-point scale, those in the top half (6 or above on the scale) may be identified as expressing a belief in suitability of democracy. This cut-off point, however, should be considered a low threshold for showing a minimal propensity in believing that democracy is at least viable.

Figure 5 shows the longitudinal trend of this indicator over the four waves of the ABS. The popular belief in the suitability of democracy has by and large settled on an equilibrium in Japan as well as Korea with very little fluctuation over the 15-year span. Taiwan and Hong Kong had started off fifteen years ago at a much lower level but have made steady progress toward a great majority believing in it. In contrast, Mongolia has declined from a rather higher level of popular belief in the suitability of democracy. Overall speaking, all East Asian democracies have passed the test of this low-threshold measure of support for democracy. In Taiwan and Hong Kong, the proportion of respondents who believe that democracy is suitable for their country is somewhat lower, but still accounts for a majority of respondents. Aside from Mongolia, a growing number of respondents in democracies across East Asia believe that democracy is suitable for their country. In Japan, the pattern is very stable over the four waves, with around three-quarters of respondents believing that democracy is suitable for their country. We also found a relatively stable pattern in South Korea, with between 78% and 88% of respondents affirming the suitability of democracy in each of the four waves. In addition, we found upward trends in the perceived suitability of democracy in Hong Kong and Taiwan, increasing from 59% to 79% over the four survey waves in Taiwan, and 67% to 88% over the same period in Hong Kong. This finding indicates that, despite their differences in levels of actual democracy, citizens in both Taiwan and Hong Kong increasingly believe that democracy is a viable political system for their society. In contrast, in Mongolia scandals and electoral malpractice under democracy have led people to question the viability of democratic institutions. Finally, in Taiwan, South Korea, and Hong Kong, around four in five respondents believe that democracy is suitable for their own country, showing that these East Asian citizens do not accept the claims of some politicians in the region that democracy is not appropriate for Asia.

[Figure 5 about here]

Desirability of democracy

The ABS series asked respondents indicate where they want their country to be now on a 10-point dictatorship-democracy scale.⁶ A score of 1 means “complete dictatorship” whereas a score of 10 indicates “complete democracy.” Since the mid-point of the scale lies between 5 and 6, those in the top half (6 or above on the scale) may be regarded as expressing desire for democracy. Again, this cut-off point should be viewed as the minimum threshold for showing their support.

As Figure 6 indicates that aside from the most recent two waves in Japan, respondents from across the region generally agree that democracy is desirable. In South Korea, the proportion of respondents giving a positive answer to this item increased to more than 90% in the fourth wave, while in Taiwan the same figure increased from around 72% during the first wave to 92% in the fourth wave. Even in Mongolia, around 90% of citizens consistently seek democracy, while in Hong Kong, the proportion of respondents seeking democracy increased from 88% during the first wave to 98% in the third wave, before falling to 80% in the fourth wave. However, Japan has become a special case among Asian democracies. In both the first wave and second wave, 88% of respondents gave positive responses to the desirability item. However, in the third and fourth waves, this figure declined to only 65% of our respondents. The reasons for this decline deserve further investigation before we jump to the conclusion that Japanese democracy has shown signs of democratic fatigue. It is also worth noting that Japan is quite unique as it is the only East Asian democracy

⁶ The ABS 2010 survey asked respondents to indicate where they want their country to be in the future on a 10-point democracy scale. A score of 1 indicates “completely undemocratic” whereas a score of 10 indicates “completely democratic.” Hence, data from the latest ABS may not be comparable with data from the other surveys.

with more citizens believing the suitability for democracy than the desirability of democracy.

[Figure 6 about here]

Satisfaction with Democracy

It has been the emerging consensus among students of democratic studies that satisfaction with democracy is both empirically and conceptually separate from support for democracy (Schedler and Sarsfield 2007). It is more susceptible to economic up-and-downs, partisan consideration, and the outbreak of political events such as scandals and terrorist attacks. In some cases, it can have an inverse relationship with normative commitment to democracy as literature on critical citizens have demonstrated (Norris 1999). But it is a very useful measure for an understanding of how citizens evaluate the overall democratic performance. Furthermore, if the performance of a democratic regime has disappointed the majority of its citizens for a protracted period, eventually it will take the toll on the regime's legitimacy.

To measure popular satisfaction with the way democracy works, the ABS series used a four-point verbal scale, with 1 indicating “very satisfied” and 4 “not at all satisfied.” In order to make the scales comparable with other items from the survey the four values were collapsed into two categories: satisfied and dissatisfied.

Figure 7 shows that among Japanese voters the level of satisfaction with democracy has increased from 50% in the first wave to 65% in the fourth wave. South Korea showed a more stable pattern, fluctuating consistently around the 60% mark without seeing any large fluctuations. Taiwan and Hong Kong showed only 50% satisfaction with democracy during the first wave, but along with the passing of time increased to around 65% satisfaction. In contrast, Mongolia is going in the reverse

direction, from 70% satisfaction during the first wave, it dropped to 48% during the third wave, and then slightly picked up again to 54%. Overall, except for Mongolia, citizens in East Asian democracies can be considered satisfied with the workings of democracy. In Taiwan and Japan, the level of satisfaction has steadily improved over time. There are two plausible explanations. First, this is a sign of democratic maturing in which citizens adapt their expectation to what is realistically deliverable. Second, it is due to the actual functioning of the mechanism of popular accountability. In both Taiwan and Japan, our four waves were synchronized with two rounds of power rotation. People are satisfied by the fact that the democratic system provides them a meaningful chance to replace the government they don't like. In comparison, electoral fraud and political corruption in Mongolia have triggered widespread disaffection.

[Figure 7 about here]

If we compare the responses of young people with the population as a whole, the results are very interesting. Figure 8 shows to the left the results of the population as a whole, and to the right the responses of people under thirty. We can roughly conclude that the degree of satisfaction among young people with the workings of democracy is slightly lower than that of the whole population. If we then further calculate the differences between the two, as shown in Figure 8, we can see differences in the generational effect across political systems. In Japan, South Korea, and Hong Kong, satisfaction with democracy among young people is lower or far lower than the average. In Japan, satisfaction with democracy among young people was 5% to 9% lower than the average for the whole population over the four waves. In South Korea, generational differences emerged during the third and fourth wave. In Mongolia, the degree of satisfaction with democracy among young people and the

population as a whole is about the same. However, in Taiwan and Hong Kong, we found opposite trends. In Taiwan, young people are relatively satisfied with the workings of democracy compared to the population as a whole. This shows that the Taiwanese political system gives young people a chance to voice their opinion on political affairs. In practice, the activists among the younger generation have frequently organized protests and demonstration and compelled the government to meet their demands. This development gave the young people a much stronger sense of empowerment. In comparison, in Hong Kong, where there were also large scale street protests involving many youngsters, young people feel more disappointed. Whereas there was only a 5% gap in satisfaction with the democratic system between young people and the population as a whole during the first wave and second wave, the gap has widened to 22% by the fourth wave. Younger generation become increasingly frustrated because their demand for democratic has been repeated rejected by Beijing leaders, who have the final say over the scope and pace of political reform. Thus, the feeling of powerlessness towards politics among the young generations of Hong Kong is reflected in the discontent with the workings of the democratic system.

[Figure 8 about here]

Detachment from Authoritarianism

As an inverse measure of support for democracy, detachment from authoritarianism proves a useful way to assess the public's commitment to an existing democratic regime even when respondents express disappointment with the regime's achievements and weak commitment to its values. This is grounded in an argument by Richard Rose and others about the competitive justification of democratic regimes.

Referring to Winston Churchill's famous line, "Democracy is the worst form of government except all those [other] forms that have been tried from time to time," they argued that democracies often survive not because a majority believes in the intrinsic legitimacy of that form of government but because there are no alternatives that they prefer (Rose, Mishler and Haerpfer 1998).

Many East Asian citizens have vivid memory of non-democratic alternatives. All the countries in the region have had experiences of authoritarian rule in the last century. Japan have had a long history of militarism before its defeat in the World War II. Before their regime transition during the third wave of democratization, Taiwan and South Korea had been ruled by one-party and military authoritarian regime respectively. Mongolia was a client state of the Soviet Union and only underwent its democratic revolution in 1990. Indonesia and the Philippines were subject to strongman rule, and even after democratization remain trapped in a low quality and unstable democracy. Thailand's modern history was saturated with military coups. It has suffered two incidences of democratic breakdown in the recent past and it is now under the firm grip of the military rule.

The ABS employed a three-item battery measuring disapproval of three non-democratic alternative regime types – one-party rule, military government, and strong-man rule – all forms of government with which most East Asian are familiar and to which they can provide experience-based responses.⁷ In our formulation, a fully committed democrat is someone who rejects all three forms of authoritarian rule.

Overall, we found that a great majority of citizens in Japan, South Korea, and

⁷ On detachment from authoritarianism, the ABS third wave asks respondents if they agree with the following statements: "We should get rid of parliament and elections and have a strong leader decide things." "Only one political party should be allowed to stand for election and hold office." "The army (military) should come in to govern the country." "We should get rid of elections and parliaments and have experts make decisions on behalf of the people." Responses are given on a four-point scale, which we code into positive and negative answers.

Taiwan reject all three authoritarian alternatives, showing that in terms of competitive legitimacy democracy is now entrenched in the three Northeast Asian industrialized societies as the only game in the town by the time we completed the fourth wave of ABS. Figure 9 shows that level of detachment from authoritarianism has steadily increased in both Taiwan and Japan. Despite considerable changes in the economic and political situation, the proportion of respondents in Japan who rejected all three authoritarian alternatives increased from 61% to 84%, with a corresponding increase from 56% to 80% in Taiwan over the same period. Even in South Korea, where levels of rejection of authoritarianism have stagnated, more than 70% of respondents consistently reject authoritarian alternatives. In contrast, although Hong Kong has not attained democracy, over the four waves of the survey, with the proportion of respondents rejecting authoritarian alternatives climbing from little over half in the first wave to 88% in the third wave. Although this figure fell back to 73% in the fourth wave, this still represents a substantial shift in opinion over the four waves of the survey. Even though a fully-fledged democracy may not be attainable in the short run in Hong Kong, it is increasingly impossible to turn back the political clock. In comparison, the situation in Mongolia is a cause for concern, with a decline in the proportion of respondents rejecting authoritarian alternatives from 50% in the first wave to just 29% in the fourth wave. This finding suggests that democracy in Mongolia has become ever more fragile over time and it will be vulnerable to anti-system political forces in the case protracted economic stress.

[Figure 9 about here]

Assessing Quality of Democracy: Corruption and Institutional Trust

In many emerging democracies, money politics, corruption, vote-buying, and so on, are significant sources of popular resentment. East Asian countries are no

exception. Figure 10 shows that citizens in Taiwan and Mongolia is increasing of concern of the widespread of corruption among officials at national level. The ABS data show that the situation in Mongolia is most serious among East Asian democracies. Across the four waves of ABS 75% to 80% of the respondents believed that a majority of high-level government officials were corrupt. For Mongolia corruption is nothing new. Benefiting from the discovery of large quantities of mineral resources at the beginning of the twentieth century, the annual growth rate of Mongolia's economy has gradually increased, reaching the highest point of 17.3% in 2011. Although growth has stalled a little over the last two years due to a lack in demand for raw materials, the economy continues to heavily reliant on raw material exports. And along with the influx of large amounts of capital caused by the large-scale expansion of government licensed industries such as the mining industry, corruption also flourished. Before the 2012 presidential elections, the uproar caused by the corruption scandal of former president Nambaryn Enkhbayar was also the product of the rapid expansion of the mining industry. In the context of these high-level corruption scandals, it is not surprising at Mongolians have particularly strong feelings about corruption.

Taiwan's electorate has also become increasingly suspicious and cynical of the integrity of the government officials at national level. About 65% of respondents in the first wave believed that most national officials are corrupt and that perception has steadily risen to 75% in the fourth wave. While this subjective measure does not necessarily correspond to the expert-based evaluation such as Transparency International's country rating,⁸ but this perception does undermine the public trust. Taiwan's situation has nothing to do with natural resources, but with former president

⁸ According to the 2015 Perception of Corruption Index reported by Transparency International, Taiwan is the 30th least corruption country out of 175 nations. Its global ranking has steadily improved since 2008. In comparison, South Korea was ranked the 52nd.

Chen Shui-bian and his wife's scandalous behaviors. Although in the past Taiwan's local politics operated under a framework of political factions and money politics, at the central government level corruption scandals have been less of a factor. However, after the corruption scandal involving Chen Shui-bian erupted in 2006, the tremendous amount of money involved and methods of lobbying used caused "corruption" to become an important part of the political vocabulary in the subsequent 2008 presidential elections. Another effect of the scandal was that citizens no longer believed in the integrity of the political leaders at national level, even after the election of Ma Ying-jeou as president, a politician who generally enjoyed a reputation of being clean. This illustrates the persistent influence of the scandal at the highest echelon on Taiwanese politics, and that perhaps can only be changed by the passing of time and the self-restraint of future political leaders.

In comparison, the perceived level of corruption has steadily declined in Japan. The reason lies probably in the effect of the 2009 elections and the defeat of the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) that had been long associated with money politics. Even though the LDP came back in power a few years later, but the political vigor the Abe regime was still remarkably different from the LDP politics in the past, meaning that "corrupt" no longer a catchword to describe the party.

South Korea is positioned somewhere in the middle. Over the four waves of survey, on average about 50% of the population believed that high-ranking officials are mostly corrupt. Money politics has become a constant ingredient of Korean politics with very loose regulation over political donation and ubiquitous infiltration of Korea's powerful business conglomerates into electoral politics.

Hong Kong looks like a model of clean politics in East Asia witnessing a very low level of perceived corruption across the four waves of survey. The exceptionally low degree of corruption in Hong Kong has a lot to do with its strong legacy of the

rule of law. More specifically, it reflects the impact of the Independent Commission Against Corruption (ICAC) on the territory's politics. The effective functioning of this watch-dog institution has led a great majority of Hong Kong to believe that the likelihood of high-ranking officials committing bribe-taking has diminished. However, this relatively healthy situation may be dented a little bit by the prosecution of former chief executive Donald Tsang implicated in several bribe-taking charges.

[Figure 10 about here]

Last but by no means the least, trust in political institutions is an important pillar supporting the legitimacy of any political regime, and democratic regimes in particular. Emerging democracies in East Asia have to compete with not only the former authoritarian regime that had performed well in the memories of many citizens but also seemingly efficient and responsive authoritarian or semi-authoritarian regimes in their neighborhood. When citizens express distrustfulness toward the political institutions, it indicates that the performance of the various components of the political system have betrayed people's trust and/or failed to respond to citizens' demands and needs.

While the ABS trust battery covers a full range of political institution, here we focus on the five major political institutions: the presidency (or the office of prime minister), military, the parliament, civil service, and the courts. We recoded the trust of people in specific institutions from 1 point (no trust at all) to 4 points (a great deal of trust). The bar charts show the average level of trust that people in each country express toward these institutions between ABS Wave 2 and Wave 4. Moreover, we average value of the trust in the five institutions combined is shown using a horizontal line. Figure 11 shows that average levels of trust in institutions is quite low. The

highest levels of trust were found in Hong Kong. However, trust in Hong Kong institutions decreased from 2.9 in the first wave to 2.5 in the fourth wave probably due to the escalation of polarized conflict over the "Occupy Central" movement, the large-scale protest demanding popular election of the chief executive of the HKSAR. The trend line in Mongolia shows a familiar downward movement. Taiwan, Japan, and South Korea all exhibit very similar results, with scores of around 2.3 points suggesting that the number of people who express distrust significantly outnumber people expressing trust.

In most countries, the permanent institutions within the state apparatus, such as the military, the court and civil service, usually enjoy higher level of public trust while the democratically elected offices, such as the executive and the legislative branch are less trustworthy thanks to the polemic nature of partisan politics. The military in particular enjoy considerably higher level of public trust, approaching 3.0 (implying an overwhelming majority expressing trust) in Mongolia and Japan. A notable exception is the extremely low level of trust that Mongolian populace expressed toward the court. The court in Mongolia suffers from a worse level of trust than the parliament and this raise the serious question about both the independence and integrity of the judicial system in Mongolia. Without a systematic crackdown on corruption within the Mongolian judicial system, it is difficult to restore the public trust.

Much like we have observed in the United States, the legislature is almost always the least trusted institution. This is especially true in the case South Korea, where the mean trust score is only 1.5. In South Korea and Taiwan, citizens are appalled by the preponderant influence of fat-cat donors politics over legislative agenda and perennial partisan gridlock on the parliamentary floor, not to mention the frequent incidents of fist-fighting in the National Assembly or the Legislative Yuan.

[Figure 11 about here]

Conclusion

When we start our analysis we do not expect to find a strong and resilient popular base for democratic legitimacy in East Asia's new democracies. While many East Asian democracies are endowed with some favorable socio-economic conditions -- such as a sizable middle class, well-educated population and highly internationalized economy -- that are in principle conducive to the growth of democratic legitimacy, the region's overall geo-political configuration, political history and culture could put a strong drag on the development of a robust democratic culture.

The empirical data show that citizens in East Asia have mixed feelings about democracy. Democracy elicits approval as a brand name in East Asia but receives only sluggish popular support as an actual form of government. Although large numbers of people say that democracy is desirable and also deem it suitable for their own countries now, but fewer view it as an effective form of government, and even few consider it always more preferable than other forms of government. In the region's new democracies, a great majority of citizens say they are not willing to return to one or another form of authoritarian rule but they are not impressed by government performance, worry about the widespread of corruption in national politics, and express low levels of trust in government institutions.

However, our data also show that with the exception of Mongolia the legitimation foundation of democracy has been strengthened, rather than weakened. This makes East Asia a bright spot in the context of global democratic recession. While the popular euphoria has long gone, democracy as an ideal still appeals to a

great majority of ordinary citizens. Although the proportion of citizens who believe that Mongolia is a democracy has declined over recent years, this decline has not yet reached the stage of democratic deconsolidation. In terms of competitive legitimacy, democracy is well entrenched in Japan, South Korea and Taiwan.

However, we should caution ourselves against being over-confident about the resiliency of democracy in East Asia. At the end of the day, if deepening democratic reform is an imperative for all emerging democracies, it is even more so for young democracies in East Asia. In this region democracy not only faces gathering problem of aging population, economic stagnation and growing inequality but also some fierce competitors. Democracy has to compete not only with its predecessor that still lingers on in people's memory (sometimes in a nostalgic way) but also with its efficacious authoritarian and semi-authoritarian neighbors. In this context, the democratic future of East Asia depends very much on the emerging characteristics as well as the performance of the region's existing democracies. If the perceived quality of democracy fails to live up to people's expectation, democracy will not be able to win over the heart of the people in the long run. Also, if democracy does not shine in the eyes of the people of East Asia, its demonstration effect will be very limited and the region's further democratization will be cast in doubt.

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