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Cultural, institutional, and structural explanations of people's

Commitment to democracy

By

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Abstract

On what basis do Asians form their attitudes toward democracy? Does detachment from dictatorship automatically make one commit oneself to democracy? Answers to these questions are critical in furthering our understandings of the process of democratization and possible reversion to authoritarianism. Though students of politics have paid great attention to the structural and institutional features that facilitate democratic transition and consolidation, few studies have been devoted to what ordinary people think about democracy and whether they are seriously detached from dictatorship. As democracy is the regime of the people, public opinion should play an important role in democratic consolidation. Using data collected in Asian Barometer Surveys, we probe the origin of mass attitudes towards democracy in eight Asian countries and regions. Specifically, we tested cultural, structural, and institutional explanations of people's preferences toward regime types with a special emphasis on a particular institutional factor -- political participation.

How committed are Asians to principles of democracy? Will they allow procedures and principles of liberal democracy to be temporarily disregarded and violated in difficult situations, e.g. economic crisis? If a charismatic leader or military strongman shows up during difficult times, will they accept him as an alternative to chaos, even an expedient one, at the cost of democracy? Answers to these questions are critical for us to understand the prospects for consolidation of new democracies in Asia. Since democracy is a polity “for the people,” its sustainability requires citizens who demand democracy and cherish the values associated with this political forum {Mattes & Bratton 2007 #16142}. Though scholars have been working hard in identifying structural and institutional features that facilitate democratic transitions and consolidation (e.g. Boix 2003; Przeworski 2000), much less effort has been devoted to the role of people’s attitudes towards democracy vs. authoritarianism. Even fewer empirical studies have tried to explore the sources and origin of people’s attitudes toward democracy aiming at uncovering underlying mechanisms that may generate, reinforce, or weaken such attitudes.

With the help of the first wave of Asian Barometer Survey (ABS) data, we 1) explore people’s commitment to democracy and detachment from authoritarianism in eight Asian countries and regions included in the survey; 2) study the relationship between commitment to democracy and detachment from authoritarian rule; and 3) test cultural, structural, and institutional explanations of people’s preferences regarding different regime types, with special emphasis on a particular institutional factor -- political participation. We conclude this article with a discussion of the implications of the findings from our empirical work and suggest some avenues for future research on similar topics.

What Is Missing in Theories of Democratization?

Contemporary literature on democratic transition and consolidation has predominantly focused on identifying socioeconomic and institutional foundations for countries to reject dictatorship and establish democracy. Most studies have focused on the impacts of economic growth (e.g. Lipset 1959; Przeworski 2000), the emergence of the middle class (e.g. Moore 1967; Rueschemeyer, Stephens, and Stephens 1992), economic crisis (e.g. Haggard and Kaufman 1995), or economic inequality (e.g. Boix 2003; Boix and Stokes 2003; Feng and Zak 1999) on the probability that a country might democratize and consolidate democracy. However, it is important for us to remember that one macro correlation might be explained by various possible micro stories and such different stories can have substantially different political implications. Without empirically testing and specifying underlying micro-mechanisms, researchers can never understand well documented macro relationships and their political implications.¹ Coleman (1990) thus cogently argued that research of social scientists should not be confined to showing macro correlations but should also explore the underlying micro-mechanisms that sustain such correlations.

No structural and institutional features can “determine” the preferences and choices of people embedded within them. As political agents, people in different societies usually have the freedom to choose their strategies in response to outside stimuli. Therefore, the responses of people toward structural and institutional changes in their societies can and usually vary. Unfortunately, few scholars have tried to study the micro mechanisms by which structural and

¹ Both Boix (2003) and Feng and Zak (1999) have found that economic growth can facilitate democratic transition. For Boix, it was through decreasing income inequality that economic growth generated more favorable environment for democratization. However, for Feng and Zak, the bridging mechanism is totally different. They suggested that people’s value for freedom and political rights actually increased accompanying economic growth. It was this increased demand for freedom and political rights that generated the momentum for democratic transition. Studying only macro correlations cannot solve these different interpretations of the same empirical phenomenon.

institutional factors influence and shape the preferences of individuals. Democracy is but one of many institutional arrangements that may be adopted by people in different societies to resolve their problems; thus sustainable democracy requires constant support from its citizens. Unless people see democracy as “the only game in town” {Linz & Stepan 1996 #16143 /ft " 15"}, there would always be a possibility for newly established democratic regimes to breakdown. Unfortunately, this critical micro linkage is mysteriously missing from current theories of democratization. Without evidence showing that the structural and institutional changes in Asian societies have altered people’s attitudes towards demands for democracy and rejection of authoritarian alternatives, we cannot fully understand the probability of democratic consolidation in these societies.

Measuring Demand for Democracy

Students of political culture have been arguing for more than half a century that people’s attitudes and values can play an important role in macro-socioeconomic changes and regime transition.² Among various values and attitudes, people’s commitment to democracy and

² Actually, people’s value and attitudes collected through representative sampling surveys have long been used by political scientists to examine the quality and development of democracy in different countries. The ground-breaking work by Almond and Verba (1963) has sent a strong signal to political scientists that: values and attitudes held by individual citizens might be strongly associated with the quality and development of democracy. Unfortunately, this research avenue pioneered by Almond and Verba had not developed as fruitful as expected in the following decades due to theoretical and methodological deficiencies. Now with dramatic progress in theories of cultural studies and significant improvement in survey and statistical techniques, survey research has increasingly attracted brilliant minds in comparative politics and made serious contributions to theories of democracy and democratic transition (e.g. Inglehart 2003; Inglehart and Welzel 2005). Now it has been generally acknowledged that, whether following the paradigm of rational choice (e.g. Tsebelis 1999) or cultural studies (e.g. Geertz 1973), the impact of values and attitudes held by individuals on their behaviors and choices, at least, cannot be overlooked. A booming industry based on survey research, such as various barometer surveys in different continents, has clearly shown that values and attitudes do have independent and significant impacts over people’s political behavior and their choice among different strategies during political and social transitions, both of which are consequential for the development of democracy in their respective countries. In a nutshell, values and

detachment from dictatorship, are perceived as directly related to democratic transition and possible reversions, which are salient for many new democracies {Dalton 1999 #16144}{Logos 2001 #16145}{Mattes & Bratton 2007 #16142}. In transitional societies, popular demands for democracy may take two forms; commitment to democracy (CTD) and/or detachment from authoritarianism (DFA). To measure people's commitment to democracy, researchers need to offer people with choices among different types of regime. Following other cross-national research, we choose a widely used and reported question to track people's preferences among various regime types {Mattes & Bratton 2007 #16142}. The question asked respondents: which of the following statements is closest to your opinion: A) democracy is preferable to any other form of government; B) in certain situations, a non-democratic government can be preferable; or C) to people like me, it does not matter what form of government we have. Those who choose A over B and C are coded as fully committed to democracy, and the rest are coded the other way. This gives us a dummy variable for analysis.

As we have reported elsewhere, people's understanding of democracy can and usually differ. To make the issue more complicated, authoritarian regimes also deliberately twist the meaning of democracy and try to indoctrinate the people under their governances with such ideas. As forcefully argued by Larry Diamond, every regime in the modern world, even a totalitarian one, claims itself to be some form of democracy. Therefore, even if we do learn from the previous survey question that our respondents prefer democracy over other regime types, we still do not know if they are committed to genuine democratic principles. Commitment to democracy

attitudes held by individuals do matter for democratic transitions along with different structural and institutional features.

requires people not only paying lip service to democracy but also rejecting possible alternative forms of government.

To measure people's detachment from authoritarian regimes, ABS adopted a scale developed by Rose, Mishler, and Haerpfer (Rose, Mishler, et al. 1998 #16146). Each respondent was asked if they approve or disapprove of a range of non-democratic alternatives, including presidential dictatorship, one party rule, and military government. The question assured people that "some people in our country would like to change the way in which our country is governed." Then, interviewers informed respondents that they wanted to know their personal views on this issue. Specifically, respondents were asked to report if they strongly agree, agree, disagree, or strongly disagree with the following statements: A) we should get rid of parliament and elections and have a strong leader decide things; B) no opposition party should be allowed to compete for power; C) the military should come in to govern the country; and D) we should get rid of parliament and elections and have experts decide everything. To make presentations and analysis easier, we collapsed the four response categories into dummy coding, in which a zero score (coded as 0) means respondents have some attachment to authoritarian rule and a positive score (coded as 1) indicates respondent is detached from authoritarianism with respect to the particular alternative. In this paper, only those who reject all authoritarian alternatives will be coded as fully detached from authoritarianism; and the rest are coded the other way.³

Commitment to Democracy and Detachment from Authoritarian Rules

In Figure I, we report the percentage of population in each of the eight Asian polities who

³ In mainland China, only the last two statements had been presented to respondents for their opinions. Thus, inhabitants of mainland China will be coded as rejecting all authoritarian alternatives if they give negative answers to both statements.

clearly indicated their preferences for democracy and reject all possible alternatives to democratic regimes, i.e., detached from dictatorship, together with the Freedom House ratings of democracy in 2001 which have been normalized from 100 (completely free) to 0 (completely not free). The analysis shows that democracy enjoys considerable popular support in Asia – 57.3 percent of people reported that they were committed to democracy. However, the analysis also reveals the level of commitment to democracy among Asians varies significantly from society to society. While a majority of people in 5 out of 8 societies included in the survey expressed their support for liberal democracies, only in one country (Thailand) did popular support reach 80 percent. What puzzles us more from the analysis is that the popular commitment to democracy is rather low for new democracies in this region, especially South Korea and Taiwan, where it is even lower than in mainland China. Although pro-democracy sentiment in post-transition regimes is usually low, the level of popular commitment to democracy in these two societies should be more alarming. Last but not least, the most committed population in this region are people in Thailand. However, it is exactly large portions of that population that warmly welcomed a military coup two years ago.

[Figure I about here]

Two Sides of the Same Coin? Are people who claim to be committed to democratic rule really committed to democracy, i.e. its principles and the practice associated with democratic rule? Do those who are committed to democracy clearly understand the fundamental principles of democratic rule thus firmly reject various non-democratic alternatives? Most empirical democratic theorists treat these questions as two sides of the same coin in their studies. They expect the more a person is committed to

democracy, the more this person will reject authoritarian alternatives; and vice versa. For example, students of African politics actually grouped these two attitudes together to represent people's democratic demands. They further argued that democratic demands measured by popular commitment to democracy and rejection of dictatorship work together to promote democratic transitions and facilitate the consolidation of newly democracies (e.g. Bratton and Van de Walle 1997; Bratton, Mattes, and Gyimah-Boadi 2005; Mattes and Bratton 2007).

But is this the case in reality? In addition to the complexity caused by distinct meanings assigned by different people to democracy, the counterpart of democracy may not necessarily be dictatorship. Though some students of comparative politics have criticized the approach of stretching key concepts like democracy in academic works (e.g. Collier and Levitsky 1997; Collier and Mahoney 1993), "democracies with adjectives" do reflect the reality in today's world (e.g. Lijphart 1977; O'Donnell 1994). Many regimes are somewhat different from both democracy and dictatorship, and can only be appropriately labeled as hybrid regimes. In some non-democracies, people's interests might still be addressed and taken care of when political leaders make decisions, though the channels of doing so may not be as formalized and institutionalized as that in democracy. For example, the Confucian culture that dominates many Asian countries and has significant impact over people's behavior requires rulers to take people's interests into consideration and listen to people's opinions {Pye 1985 #510}. Although such regimes are characterized by many politicians as democracies, they are essentially different from the liberal democratic ideology of the Schumpeterian tradition.

This raises a possibility that those who perceive themselves as committed to democracy are actually committed to “democracies with special characteristics,” i.e., something that is essentially different from what has been conceptualized by students of political science in the West. If “democracy” in the minds of Asians is identical to the “liberal democracy” understood by most Western political scientists, then the two measurements we examined should be two sides of the same coin. In other words, those who were committed to “democracy” should at the same time reject all authoritarian alternatives; and vice versa. Moreover, if commitment to democracy and detachment from dictatorship represent two sides of the same coin, as conventionally assumed, then we would expect that these two critical attitudes come from the same sources: any increase in people’s commitment to democracy would be automatically transmitted into their rejection of authoritarian alternatives. Unfortunately, abundant empirical cases and anecdotes suggested other trends: these two concepts are related but different psychological traits -- they are NOT two sides of the same coin.

A closer examination of the data presented in Figure I reveals that there is great variation in self reported commitments to democracy and detachment from dictatorship among Asians covered in the ABS. In terms of people’s commitment to democracy, Thailand has the largest percentage of committed people, with Japan, the Philippines, Mongolia, mainland China, South Korea, Taiwan, and Hong Kong following in descending order. With respect to people’s detachment from dictatorship, however, South Korea enjoys the highest score among the above eight societies, with mainland China, Japan, Taiwan, Hong Kong, Thailand, Mongolia, and Philippines follows in descending

order. Further statistical analysis reveals that the correlation between commitment to democracy and detachment from dictatorship is really low: the Pearson's correlation coefficient is only 0.185. Finally, the distribution of these two attitudes appears to be different from each other. While in four societies (Japan, Mongolia, the Philippines, and Thailand), the percentage of people who claimed commitment to democracy exceeds the percentage of people who reject authoritarian alternatives; in the other four other societies (Hong Kong, South Korea, mainland China, and Taiwan), the percentage of people who reported rejecting authoritarian alternatives exceeds the percentage of people who reported that they were committed to democracy. Moreover, the variance of the percentage of people claiming commitment to democracy across these societies is larger than that for the percentage of people reporting detachment from dictatorship, with the coefficient of variation standing at 0.235 for the former and 0.194 for the latter. In other words, for Asian societies covered in ABS I, on average, people are more similar to each other in rebuffing dictatorship, and more diverse in embracing democracy.

Taiwan has been rated as a free political system by Freedom House, while mainland China has been constantly criticized as being politically not free by the same organization. These two societies can be used as a critical case to further demonstrate the above two attitudes are related but distinctive psychological properties. While 13% percent more people in mainland China reported that they are committed to democracy than the percentage of people who reported the same in Taiwan, the difference between the two societies with respect to the percentage of people who reported that they are detached from dictatorship is only 8 percent. All the above suggests that there exists a major

difference between the claimed commitment to democracy and detachment from dictatorship. An important implication of this finding is that the perceived support for democracy cannot automatically make people distance themselves from authoritarian rule. Instead, pro-democracy sentiment may coexist with support for some kind of authoritarian rule. More important, the finding also suggests that these two critical attitudes may come from different socio-economical, institutional, and cultural sources. Empirically, we should treat them as separate issues and study their respective impact on democratic transition and consolidation.

Explaining CTD and DFA

Students of comparative politics attribute democratic transition and consolidation to cultural, structural, and institutional reasons. If we believe those variables shape people's choices on regime type, which in turn influences regime transition, we should argue that those three sets of variables may also help us understand the formation of people's preferences over different regime types.

Structural Explanations Despite having been buried by scholars several times, modernization theory is still used by students of Asian politics to explain democratic transition in this region. "Becoming modern" (Inkeles and Smith 1974) refers not only to the way people deal with each other and their increasing demands for modernized institutions to deal with transformed lives and increased involvement in national politics, but also the values and norms they hold (e.g. Inglehart and Welzel 2005; Lerner and Pevsner 1962; Smelser 1966), among which commitments to democracy and detachment

from dictatorship might be important ones. Traditional research reveals that modernization can change people's attitudes towards regimes through the interaction of two key mechanisms: 1) it increases contact between people and their government which can make people raise demands for increased participation; and 2) increases in the level of education brought about by modernization improves the skill and resources under people's control for participation in politics. Progressive attitudinal change is considered as a critical intervening variable between modernization and democratic transition {Nie, Powell, et al. 1969 #436}{Nie, Powell, et al. 1969 #437}{Huntington, Nelson, et al. 1976 #4280}. Another important, but generally neglected causal link attributes the impact of modernization on attitudinal change to transformed communication. It is important to remember that the idea of democracy in different societies may come from different sources. For most industrial societies, the idea of liberal democracy usually endogenously developed over a couple of hundred years. For most developing societies, the idea of liberal democracy is *always* exogenously imported from abroad. The process of modernization which increases mass communication, scholarly exchange, and education should play a critical role in facilitating the transformation of ideas. Therefore, we have incorporated each respondent's 1) education,⁴ 2) income⁵ 3) age and age squared,⁶ 4) gender, and 6) media exposure⁷ in our statistical model for analysis. Furthermore, people who are interested in politics are

⁴ Education level has been measured with years of formal education that our respondents finished.

⁵ Income has been measured with our respondents' relative position in the distribution of income in his/her country, from the lowest quintile to the highest quintile.

⁶ Squared age has also been entered into the regression equation to capture a possible curve-linear relationship. When both age and squared age are not statistically significant in the following regression analysis, we also dropped the squared item to see if a simple linear relationship exists.

⁷ Media exposure has been measured with a 5-point scale from 1 (practically never) to 5 (almost every day) to gauge people's frequency of following political news in different media.

more likely to seek information about politics and, thus, more inclined to hold strong opinions on political issues, we expect people's interest in politics⁸ to be a strong predictor of their commitment to democracy and detachment from authoritarianism. Following the logic proposed by Huntington, those who perceive significant impact of government⁹ on their life are also inclined to form strong opinions on what kind of government should be more appropriate and better for their lives. We therefore also included the perceived influence of government in the following analyses.

Institutional Influences A second approach argues that the attitudes of individuals are shaped by political institutions in a society. Among various institutional effects, some argue that political participation should play a critical role in shaping people's support for democracy. Repeated participation in various democratic processes can increase skills, interests, and efficacy and through which forges people's support for democracy. Although political participation is an indispensable institutional arrangement for democratic societies, that institution is also available in some non-democratic regimes. Of course, the function of political participation is somewhat different for democratic and non-democratic regimes. In democracies, people communicate their opinion to national leaders and choose government personnel through elections (e.g. Verba and Nie 1972; Verba, Nie, and Kim 1971; Verba, Nie, and Kim 1978; Verba, Schlozman, and Brady 1995). In non-democracies, people may still have opinions expressed through various forms of participation or non-participation (e.g. Gilson 1968; Karklins 1986), or address

⁸ Political interest has been measured with a 4-point scale from 1 (not at all interested in politics) to 4 (very interested in politics)

⁹ The impact of government has been measured with a 4-point scale from 1 (no impact at all) to 4 (a great deal of impact)

their own problems through participatory behaviors shaped by institutional set-ups that are essentially different from those in democracy (e.g. Shi 1997), although they cannot choose government personnel through elections. Given the different functions served by political participation in different societies included in the ABS, it is difficult for us to specify a general impact of participation on people's commitment to democracy and detachment from dictatorship. Following the approach adopted by Verba and his colleagues (1971), we will theoretically and empirically examine the possible impact of different modes of political participation on people's commitment to democracy and detachment from dictatorship respectively.¹⁰

Despite voting occupying a critical position in democratic theory, research seldom tries to examine the impact of voting on people's attitudes towards democracy. Theoretically, one may argue that as long as voters can express their preferences through voting, participation in elections should enhance their support for democracy. However, different arguments may also be offered to explain the effects of voting on people's attitudes towards democracy. Students of voting behavior generally agree that voting involves low costs, provides low benefit, thus is believed to require low initiative for participants in different societies (e.g. Aldrich 1993; Campbell 1964; Verba and Nie 1972). When casting a ballot in national and local elections becomes a routine of almost every day life, the impact of voting on people's attitudes towards democracy would decline. Recent studies on voting behavior reveal that once voting becomes a habitual activity, different parts of the brain brought people to the ballot booth which deprives the political

¹⁰ Another reason that we decompose a political participation into four modes is that factor analyses of the items used by ABS show that for most countries and regions these items are loaded on four different dimensions, rather than a single one. Results of factor analyses are available from the authors upon requests.

significance of voting behavior (Aldrich et al. 2007). In non-democracies, however, voting in semi-competitive elections may still bring people some benefits and can put at least some constraints on government officials (e.g. Manion 1996; Manion 2006; Shi 1999a; Shi 1999b; Shi and Lu 2005). Such semi-competitive elections may generate people's support and desire for democracy so that they may control their own fate. Given such diversity, we will not specify the role of voting on people's commitment to democracy and detachment from dictatorship.

Compared with voting, participation in campaign activities has higher demands on resources that people should invest, such as time and money. The conventional wisdom assumes that people's involvement in campaign activities is likely to reinforce their appreciation of party competition and publicly debating public policies. Unfortunately, this theoretical specification is based on the experience of advanced democracies with program-based linkages between politicians and electorates. The situation in new democracies are usually different: linkages between elites and the general populace in those societies is usually based on patron-client relationships, or clientelism (e.g. Kitschelt 2000). In many new democracies, campaign activities have become arenas for delivering material benefits for ballots and citizens' participation in such activities has nothing to do with the appreciation of democratic principles and values but simply seeking tangible material rewards (e.g. Kitschelt and Wilkinson 2006; Stokes 2005). For example, the Philippines, Thailand and Taiwan are infamous for active machine politics in national and local elections. Given the mixed nature of the linkages between politicians and electorates, what can be pre-specified theoretically is that the impact of participation

in campaign activities on people's commitment to democracy and detachment from dictatorship, if there is any, should vary according to the different nature of political competition.

Contacting is another important mode of political participation in both democracies and non-democracies. In contrast to voting and campaign activities, contacting has a smaller scope of influence with a more restricted focus. It is primarily aimed at resolving issues concerning its initiators.¹¹ While contacting may help participants to re-establish confidence towards different political agents, whether this increased confidence in different political agents can be transmitted into a commitment to democracy is a different story. Furthermore, contacting success may even reduce the likelihood for people to support democracies, particularly in non-democracies. If one can get his problem resolved through contacting non-elected officials, the person would have no intention to support regime change and changes of governing principle in his society. Theoretically we predict that the impact of contacting people's commitment to democracy and detachment from dictatorship should be contingent upon the nature of the polity in the particular society involved.

Unconventional political participation, like strikes and sit-in, has been traditionally regarded as "another channel of communication" for people to get their voice heard when established institutional channels are blocked or cannot accommodate their opinions without being substantially changed (e.g. Barnes and Kasse 1979). Compared to

¹¹ This is only applicable to average situation. In elections dominated by machine politics, voting and participating in campaign activities can also bring direct material benefits to initiators of such behavior, in addition to possible influence over national and/or regional policies.

conventional political participation, these participatory behaviors are more risky and demand more resources on the part of participants. In democracies, unconventional participation has been found to be associated with people's efforts in protecting and expanding the scope of their political rights, such as civil rights movements, the green movement, and the gay-lesbian movement (Kriesi et al. 1995). Thus involvement in unconventional participation is likely to enhance people's commitment to democracy and detachment from dictatorship. Nevertheless, such kinds of mass movements have also been manipulated by politicians in democracies dominated by clientelism and non-democracies for parochial party or personal benefits, at the cost of democratic principles. It will be difficult to argue that unconventional participation in the latter situation can also increase people's commitment to democracy and further their detachment from dictatorship, if not the other way round.

In sum, without knowing the institutional settings in different societies for people to participate in politics, it is difficult, if not impossible, for researchers to specify the impact of different modes of political participation on people's attitudes toward democracy. The only possible conclusion we can derive herein is that the impacts of political participation on people's commitment to democracy and detachment from dictatorship is contingent upon the nature of the political system in which actors are embedded.

Cultural Explanation If democratic values in some Asian societies are exogenously imported from abroad as suggested previously, the formation of people's attitudes toward democracy should be a result of the interaction between the new ideas and endogenously developed values and norms. We thus expect people's commitment to democracy and

detachment from authoritarian rule to be dependent upon values and norms embedded in those societies, produced by their unique historical experience and transmitted through socialization {Almond & Verba 1963 #18} {Inglehart & Welzel 2005 #15958}.

Which particular norm can influence people's attitudes toward democracy? We argue that two norms -- orientation towards the authority (OTA) and definition of self interests (DSI) -- are crucially important. There are two ways to define the relationship between individual and public authority and such a definition not only shapes people's expectations of public authority but also determines the standard used by people to evaluate their government overall. In Western value systems, the relationship between individuals and authority is defined as reciprocal, which can be labeled as reciprocal orientation towards authority (ROTA). In this tradition, the power of public authority comes from the consent of the people. If government fails to deliver what its people asked for, ROTA authorizes people to withdraw support from their government and replace it with a new one. Rather than defining the relationship between individuals and authority as "a reciprocal one in which the obligations of obedience and respect are contingent upon the behavior of those with power," Confucian culture defines the relationship between individuals and authority as hierarchical {Pye 1988 #514} which created a Hierarchical Orientation Toward Authority (HOTA). As HOTA defines the bond between citizens and their government as modeling traditional family relationship, citizens are expected to respect, trust, rely and depend on their government rather than keeping vigilant eyes upon it. We therefore expect that those who hold HOTA as more likely to accept benign dictators; while those holding ROTA are more likely to reject such

an option.¹²

Another important dimension of cultural norms that might influence people's attitudes towards democracy taps people's definition of self interest. There are two ways for individuals to define their self interests. While individualism pushes actors to care only about their own personal gains, collectivism makes people define their private interests as being associated with certain social groups.¹³ Theoretically, we should expect people with individualistic orientation to be more interested in protecting their own interests through well established procedures and institutions while people with a collectivistic orientation would be less likely to emphasize the significance of procedures and institutions, given the strong belief in other people's shared emphasis on collective interests.¹⁴ It is important to understand that well established procedures and institutions are the essence of the rule of law, rather than a key difference between democracy and non-democracies. In authoritarian regimes, people with individualistic orientations might also be more likely to collude with dictatorships to protect their own benefits through well established but biased institutions. In democracies where the logic of politics changes, such people might be more committed to established democratic principles.

Thus, the role of individualism regarding people's attitudes towards democracy and

¹² We used three items in the ABS to measure people's orientation toward authority. All respondents in the ABS were asked to say if they strongly agree, agree, disagree, or strongly disagree with the following statements: 1) even if parents' demands are unreasonable, children still should do what they ask; 2) if there is a quarrel, we should ask an elder to resolve the dispute; and 3) government leaders are the head of a family and we should all follow their decisions. After collapsing the Likert-scale into dummy coding, we average the index for analysis.

¹³ We used three items in the ABS to measure people's definition of interest. All respondents in the ABS have been asked to say if they strongly agree, agree, disagree, or strongly disagree with following statements: 1) for the sake of the family, the individual should put his personal interests second; 2) if people have too many ways of thinking, society will be chaotic; and 3) for the sake of the national community/society, the individual should be prepared to sacrifice his personal interests. After collapsing the Likert-scale into dummy coding, we average the index for analysis.

¹⁴ This is a kind of game-theoretical explanation. Given the cost of establishing procedures/institutions and solving problems through procedures/institutions, the common knowledge on each other's individualistic or collectivistic orientation may lead to a different equilibrium. Due to the limited space here, we save further analysis for another paper.

authoritarianism is expected to vary across different societies.

Performance of the current Regime: People's attitudes toward democracy may also be shaped by current regime. Here, studies on the linkage between economic performance and voter's choice in liberal democracies may be borrowed by us to explain people's attitudes towards democracy and dictatorship. Literature on economic voting suggests that economic performance in a society has an independent effect on voters' choice (Anderson 2007; Duch and Stevenson 2005; Hibbs 1977; Kinder and Kiewet 1979; Kramer 1983; Powell and Whitten 1993). The same logic should also be applicable to partly understanding people's commitment to democracy and detachment from dictatorship. To capture different but possible performance-based impacts, we used four questions in the ABS to measure 1) sociotropic retrospective evaluation, 2) sociotropic prospective evaluation, 3) egocentric retrospective evaluation, and 4) egocentric prospective evaluation.¹⁵ We use these variables in our statistical analysis as controls.

Determinants of CTD and DTA

Since our assignment is to examine the impacts of political participation on people's attitudes toward democracy, we first examine the empirical relationship between four modes of political participation and people's commitment to democracy and detachment from authoritarianism. Table I reports pair-wise correlation coefficients between various modes of participation and people's commitment to democracy and detachment from dictatorship for eight Asian societies included in the first wave of ABS.

¹⁵ All four variables are measured with a 5-point scale from 1 (very bad) to 5 (very good).

[Table I about here]

The analysis presented in Table I shows that no persistent pattern can be found between any mode of political participation and people's commitment to democracy and detachment from authoritarianism. Voting is only positively and significantly related to people's commitment to democracy in Japan and Hong Kong. For the rest of the countries and regions in Asia, electoral participation does not enhance people's commitment to democracy. Voting in elections makes people become detached from authoritarianism only in Japan and Hong Kong, but make people more attached to dictatorship in South Korea and mainland China.

The signals we get on campaign activities, contacting government officials, and unconventional participation are mixed as well. People's involvement in campaign activities is positively and significantly associated with their commitment to democracy in mainland China, Mongolia, and Taiwan; but negatively correlated to CTD in South Korea and Thailand. For the relationship between people's participation in campaign activities and their detachment from dictatorship, we found positive relationship in Hong Kong, Mongolia, and Taiwan but a negative relationship in South Korea. Contacting government officials seems to make people significantly more committed to democracy in mainland China and Mongolia. At the same time, while contacting makes people in Hong Kong, mainland China, Taiwan, and the Thailand become detached from dictatorship, the same act makes people in South Korea and Philippines become attached to authoritarianism. Unconventional participation also has no persistent impact on people's attitudes towards democracy in these eight societies. While participation in

unconventional political acts makes people more likely to be committed to democracy and at the same time make people in mainland China, Japan, Hong Kong, and Taiwan become more detached from authoritarianism, it has no impact on people's attitudes towards democracy in the other Asian societies under study. In a nutshell, the preliminary empirical results are compatible with our theoretical speculation on contingent stories for the impact of political participation on people's commitment to democracy and detachment from dictatorship.

Readers should keep in mind that since the effects of participation on people's attitudes towards democracy may be contingent on other sociological, institutional, and cultural conditions where the respondents live and that none of those critical and relevant independent variables are under control, the bivariate associations presented in Table I might be spurious thus misleading.

ABS data's unique structure including respondents nested with countries/regions, has offered a rare opportunity for us to explore different mechanisms that might emerge in different countries and regions in shaping people's commitments to democracy and detachment from dictatorship. In the following analysis, we will take advantage of hierarchical linear models (e.g. Gelman and Hill 2007; Luke 2004; Raudenbush and Bryk 2002) to examine the impact of explanatory variables specified previously regarding people's commitment to democracy and detachment from dictatorship across societies covered in the ABS. Since our two dependent variables, CTD and DFA are both dummy variables, Logistic models, rather than OLS regression, will be used in the empirical analysis.

[Table II about here]

Table II has shown the results of two-level zero-order Logistic models for people's commitment to democracy and "detachment from dictatorship." As reflected in the analysis, a 95% confidence interval for the probability of people in different societies, on average, to become fully committed to democracy ranges from 28.36% to 83.68%. This result indicates that in some societies, the probability for people to become fully committed to democracy is around 28%; but in some other societies, the probability is around 84%. Similarly, the probability for people in some societies to become fully detached from authoritarianism is around 29%; but in some others, the probability is around 71%. These findings clearly tell us that there are cross-society variances in people's attitudes towards democracy that cannot be explained by individual level differences – the data structure warrants for two level models.

In Table III, we presented a full HLM model. To test if people's commitment to democracy and detachment from dictatorship comes from the same sources, we ran parallel models for CTD and DFA. To facilitate a comparison, we put the results of these analyses side by side. The second and third columns are regression coefficients with associated standard errors for people's commitment to democracy and detachment from dictatorship respectively. Probably the first and a very important finding is that the analysis reveals that the mechanisms of formation of these two important political attitudes appear to be different.

[Table III about here]

Political participation appears to have no significant impact on CTD. Impacts of voting, participation in campaign activities, contacting, and unconventional participation on CTD all are insignificant. Moreover, none of them shows significant random components at the second level. We then ran an F-test to see if the coefficients of various modes of political participation can be fixed to zero simultaneously for CTD. The result of this analysis is again insignificant, which implies that none of the different modes of participation in any of these societies contributes at all to people's commitment to democracy.¹⁶ Similar patterns are also found in our results for DFA. None of the regression coefficients of voting, participation in campaign activities, contacting, and unconventional participation are significant in shaping respondents' detachment from authoritarianism. Nevertheless, contacting different political agents does have a significant random component at the second level. This seemingly "puzzling" result should no longer be strange if we understand the differences between the meaning of regression coefficients at the first and second level. For regression coefficients at the first level, they are the pooled population average coefficient. If contacting political agents has positive impacts on people's detachment from dictatorship in one society, but negative impacts in another, the pooled population coefficient will be statistically insignificant as they cancel each other out. However, since its impact is statistically different from one society to another, the impact of this variable at the second level should vary significantly. This empirical finding is compatible with our theoretical speculation on the contingent nature of contacting on people's detachment from dictatorship.

¹⁶ Chi-square statistic is 5.522 with 4 degrees of freedom, and the p-value is 0.237.

Moreover, when we do an F-test to see if the coefficients of all four modes of political participation can be fixed to zero simultaneously for DFA, we did get significant results.¹⁷

We will come back to this point later with further discussion.

Though we have controlled different socioeconomic features, gender still has a significant impact on both attitudes, with males more committed to democracy and detached from dictatorship. There is a significant linear relationship between age and people's commitment to democracy (the elder are more committed!) as well, but not a significant relationship between age and people's detachment from dictatorship.¹⁸ Education does have a persistent, significant and positive impact on both attitudes. People with more education are more committed to democracy and detached from dictatorship than others. Moreover, the impact of education varies across countries/regions for both political attitudes. People's income level is not significantly related to their commitment to democracy; but more income does dramatically weaken people's attachment to dictatorship. Media exposure has a statistically significant role in strengthening people's detachment from dictatorship; but its impact on their commitment to democracy is cross-cutting across different societies, as indicated by the significant random component at the second level. In some societies, more exposure to media does increase people's commitment to democracy; but in some others, the impact is negative.

Political interest is also a significant predictor for people's commitment to both democracy and detachment from dictatorship and its impact does not vary across

¹⁷ Chi-square statistic is 14.456 with 4 degrees of freedom, and p-value is 0.0004.

¹⁸ We have re-run the model by dropping the squared age to see if a linear relationship might have been covered by the issue of collinearity. However, we found no impact of age in the model for people's detachment from dictatorship.

countries/regions. Subjectively perceived government's impact has statistically significant and positive influence over people's detachment from authoritarianism. However, we find cross-society differences in the impact of the perceived influence of government on people's commitment to democracy. In some societies, the perceived impact of government makes people more committed to democracy. In others, it makes people less committed. In sum, the finding forcefully confirms the modernization thesis -- that is -- structural variables play a critical role in shaping people's attitudes towards democracy.

The analysis also shows that political culture also plays a decisive role in shaping people's attitudes towards democracy. Those who are indoctrinated with a paternalistic orientation regarding authority through their early socialization are less likely to commit themselves to democracy and more attached to dictatorship. This impact however, varies across countries/regions for the latter political attitudes. As expected, individualism does have contrasting impacts on people's commitment to democracy and detachment from dictatorship. In some societies, people with an individualistic orientation are more likely to be detached from dictatorship and committed to democracy. In other societies, similar people are more attached to authoritarian rule and less committed to democracy. Political culture apparently plays a significant and substantial role in shaping people's attitudes towards democracy.

The analysis suggests that performance of public authorities has little impact on people's attitudes towards authority. Egocentric performance evaluation, regardless of its retrospective or prospective nature, has no statistically significant impact on people's

commitment to democracy and their detachment from dictatorship. For sociotropic performance evaluation, the situation is a little bit different. People's sociotropic retrospective and prospective evaluation of a regime's economic performance both have contrasting impacts on people's commitment to democracy in different states/regions. But for people's detachment from dictatorship, only their sociotropic retrospective evaluation of government performance shows a cross-cutting effect in its influence over people's political attitudes. Prospective evaluation has no statistically significant impact in this situation.¹⁹

Due to the limit of cases at the second level (we have only 8 cases), we cannot fully explore the dynamics the county/regional differences at the second level by adding more compositional or structural variables. However, the cross-cutting effect in the impacts of contacting on people's detachment from dictatorship revealed in the HLM model merits further exploration. To do this, we have run parallel logistic regression analysis for the impacts of contacting on people's detachment from dictatorship in each society with the same model specification. The results of these analyses are demonstrated in Table IV.

[Table IV about here]

As we can see in Table IV, contacting has significant negative impacts on DFA in South Korea and the Philippines but a significant positive impact in Hong Kong. This pattern is compatible with the cross-cutting effect we found in the HLM results. At the same time, the analysis confirms that a reciprocal orientation towards authority has

¹⁹ Since we did not have much confidence in the robustness of the significant impact of sociotropic prospective evaluation on people's detachment from dictatorship, we did not further explore this issue.

persistent, positive and significant impact on detachment from dictatorship across all Asian societies. Individualistic orientation however, has significant positive impacts on people's detachment from dictatorship in Japan, Hong Kong, Mongolia, and the Philippines; but a significant negative impact in mainland China and Thailand. Conclusions we drew on the impact of education, income and gender are also confirmed in these parallel regression analyses.

Conclusions and Suggestions

Despite people's commitment to democracy and detachment from dictatorship being critical for democratic transitions and possible reversal in regime change, few empirical efforts have been made to understand the mechanisms that facilitate the formation of these critical attitudes. Taking advantage of the ABS data, we systematically examined the distribution of these two related political attitudes -- commitment to democracy and detachment from dictatorship in eight Asian societies. Although these two critical political attitudes are usually believed to be two sides of the same coin and closely related, our analysis shows that they tap different dimensions of people's psychological orientation. In other words, self reported commitments to democracy and detachment from dictatorship are not two sides of the same coin.

To explore the mechanisms by which democratic sentiments are formed, we tested structural, institutional and cultural explanations with a particular emphasis on the effects of political participation. The analysis shows that voting, campaign activities, and unconventional participation has no significant impact either on people's commitment to

democracy or detachment from dictatorship. However, contacting has contrasting impacts on people's detachment from dictatorship in different societies. In some countries, such as South Korea and the Philippines, contacting enhances people's attachment to authoritarian rule. In Hong Kong, however, contacting make people become detached from dictatorship. Lacking detailed information on the nature of political regimes and linkages between politicians and electorates in each society prevent us from further exploring the political dynamics by which contacting influences people's attitudes towards authoritarian rule. Future researches in this regard should integrate the findings and knowledge from the literature on various forms of democratic accountability and political competition to advance our understanding.

Another interesting and extremely important finding in this paper is that political culture has a persistent and a robust impact on people's commitment to liberal democracy and detachment from dictatorship. Asians who hold paternalistic orientations towards authority are less likely to commit themselves to liberal democracy and more likely to attach themselves to authoritarianism. As the "Asian Values" do make people more attached to authoritarianism, the task of converting Asians away from authoritarianism to democracy might be more demanding than it appears. Since the transformation of cultural values is usually a long and slow process that lags behind economic growth and technological innovation, the conditions that facilitate the shifting of cultural values that dominating people's mind in Asian societies should be an important, interesting, and promising topic for future studies on democratic transition and regime change in this populous but economically emerging continent.

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Appendix I: Distribution of Political Participation

In the first wave of ABS, we asked questions in all eight countries and regions to gauge people's involvement in different modes of political participation. For voting, one question has been used: whether the respondent voted in the last election. For campaign activities, two questions have been used: 1) whether the respondent has attended campaign meetings or rallies; and 2) whether the respondent has tried to persuade others to vote for a particular candidate. For contacting, respondents were asked whether they have ever contacted 1) government officials, 2) elected legislators, 3) political parties, and 4) media regarding policy issues. Questions were also designed to ask respondents if they have engaged in a strike, sit-in or other similar activity. These answers are coded as dummy variables with 1 indicating positive answers. For campaign activities and contacting different political agents, which have more than one indicator, the average score across different indicators has been used to create an index. The country/region weighted population means for voting, campaign activities, contacting political agents, and unconventional participation are presented in Figure II, III, IV, and V.

[Figure II, III, IV, and V about here]

In terms of voting, as shown in Figure II, the percentage of people who voted in the last election is persistently high in all eight Asian countries and regions. Thailand, Taiwan, Mongolia, and South Korea are outstanding in this regard. Moreover, the differences among these eight societies are not salient. As we can see in Figure III, Mongolians and Thai outperform their counterparts in their participation in campaign activities. Rather surprising to most readers is that Chinese are also quite active in campaign activities, even more than citizens of South Korea; and Japan, the two most advanced and established democracies in the region. The variance in

people's engagement in contacting is less than that of campaign activities, as displayed in Figure IV. Thai, on average, are much more likely than citizens of other countries and regions in contacting government officials, elected legislators, political parties, and media regarding policy issues. We next have Koreans and the inhabitants of mainland China and Hong Kong in showing a relatively high inclination in contacting political agents. It is also surprising that the Japanese are not as active as their counterparts in contacting different political agents regarding policy issues, though this country is also famous for *guanxi*-based (relationship-based) social interaction. As shown in Figure V, unconventional political participation shows the highest variance²⁰ among Asian societies though the absolute number of people who reported that they have been involved in such acts is quite small. Citizens of Hong Kong exceed their counterparts in the rest of countries and the regions in this regard. Thai, Koreans, and Mongolians also show relatively high levels of participation through unconventional means. Comparatively speaking, Chinese are the least likely to engage in unconventional political activities.

²⁰ The coefficients of variation (CV) for voting, campaign activities, contacting political agents, and unconventional participation are 0.222, 0.656, 0.367, and 0.715 respectively.

Figure I: Commitment to Democracy and Detachment from Authoritarian Rule

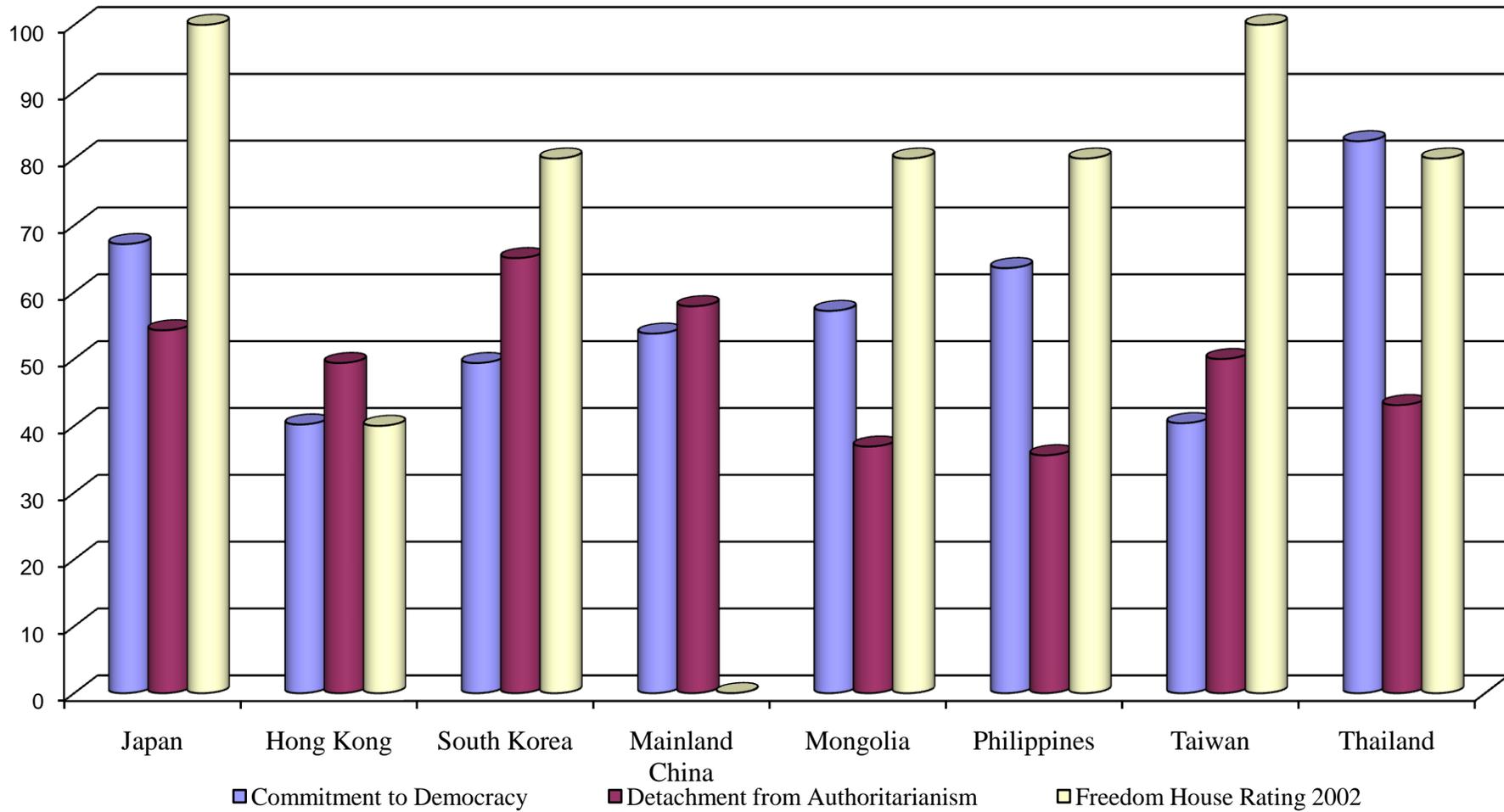


Figure II: Voting

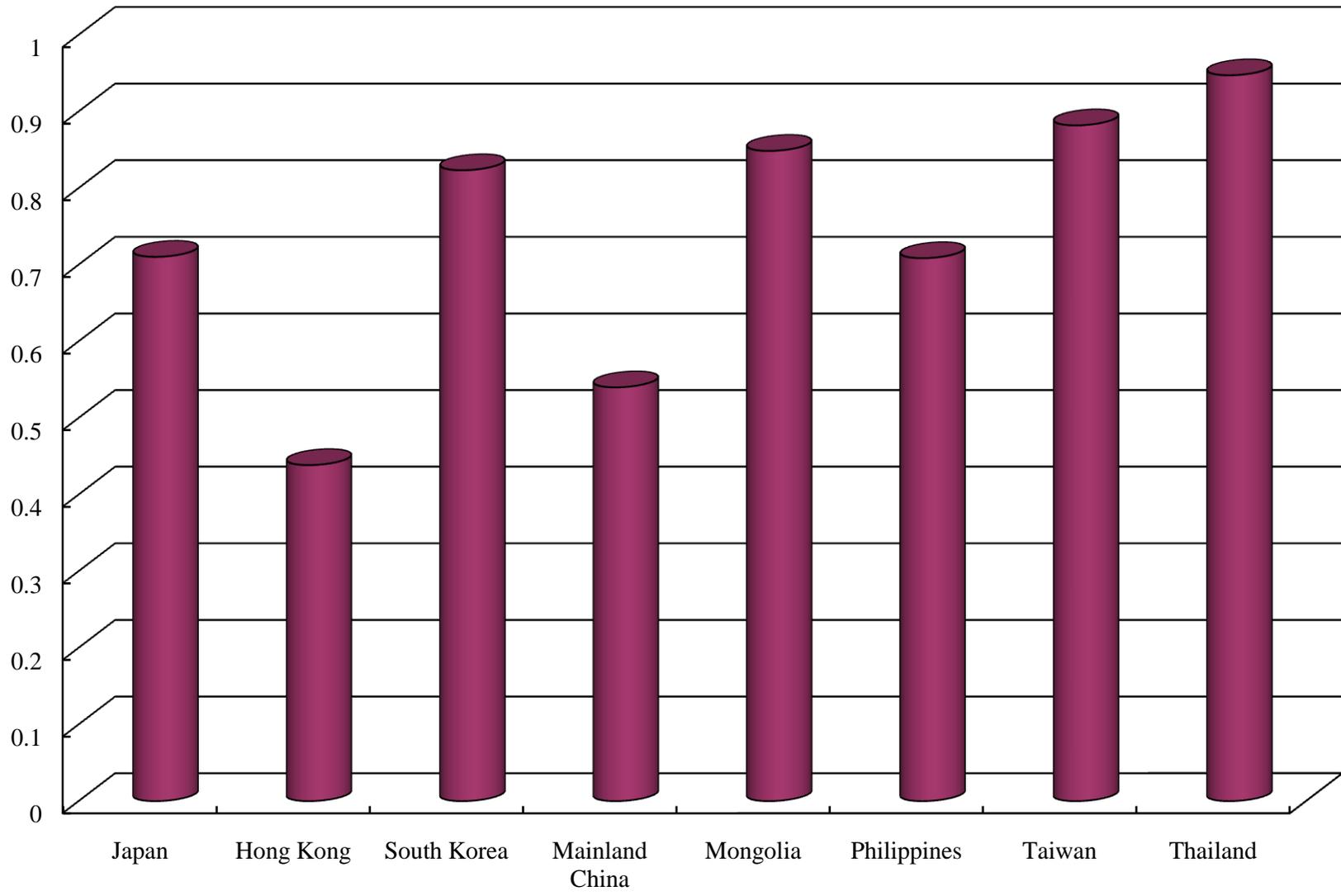


Figure III: Campaign Activities

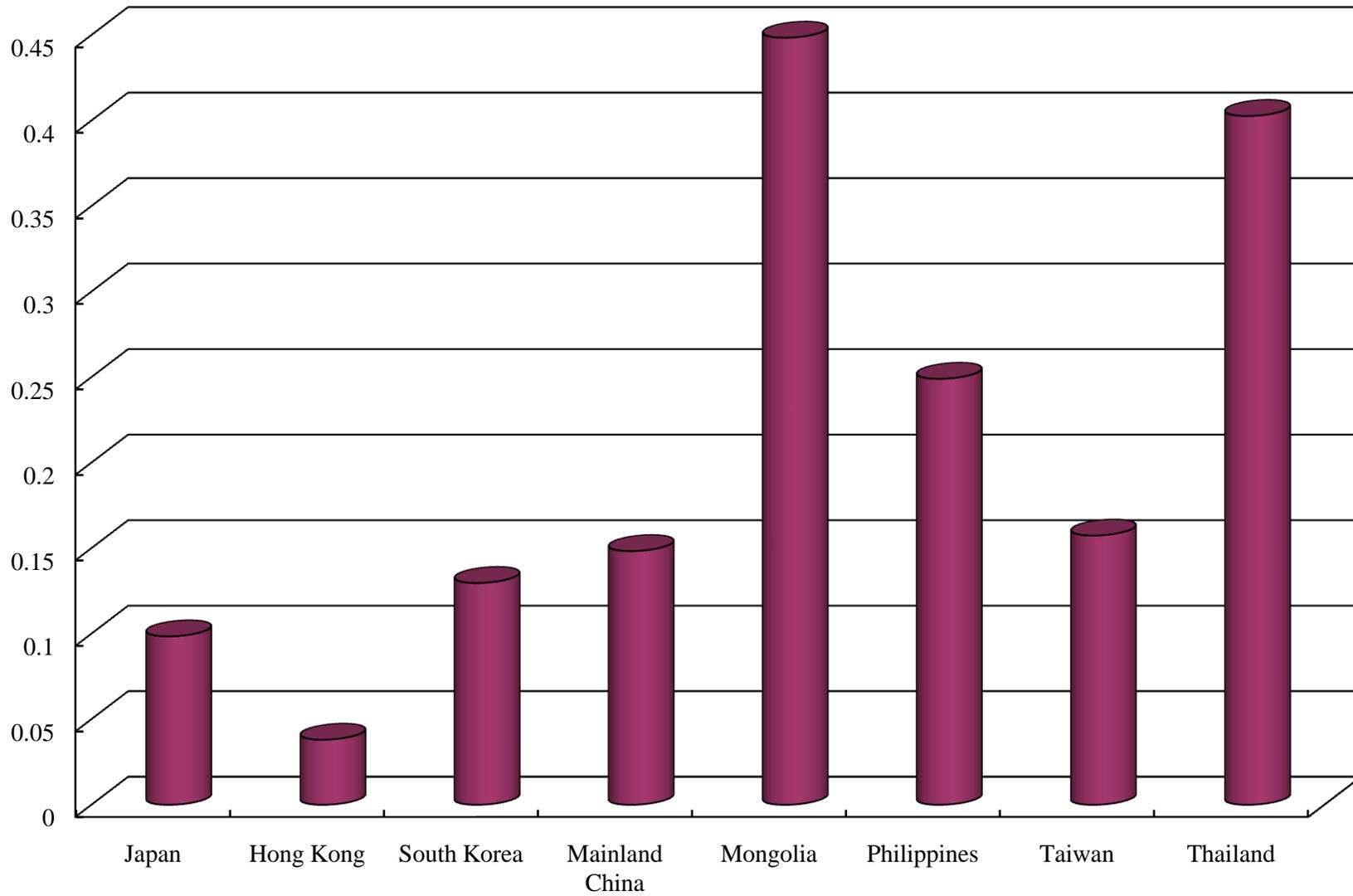


Figure IV: Contacting Officials and Other Political Agents

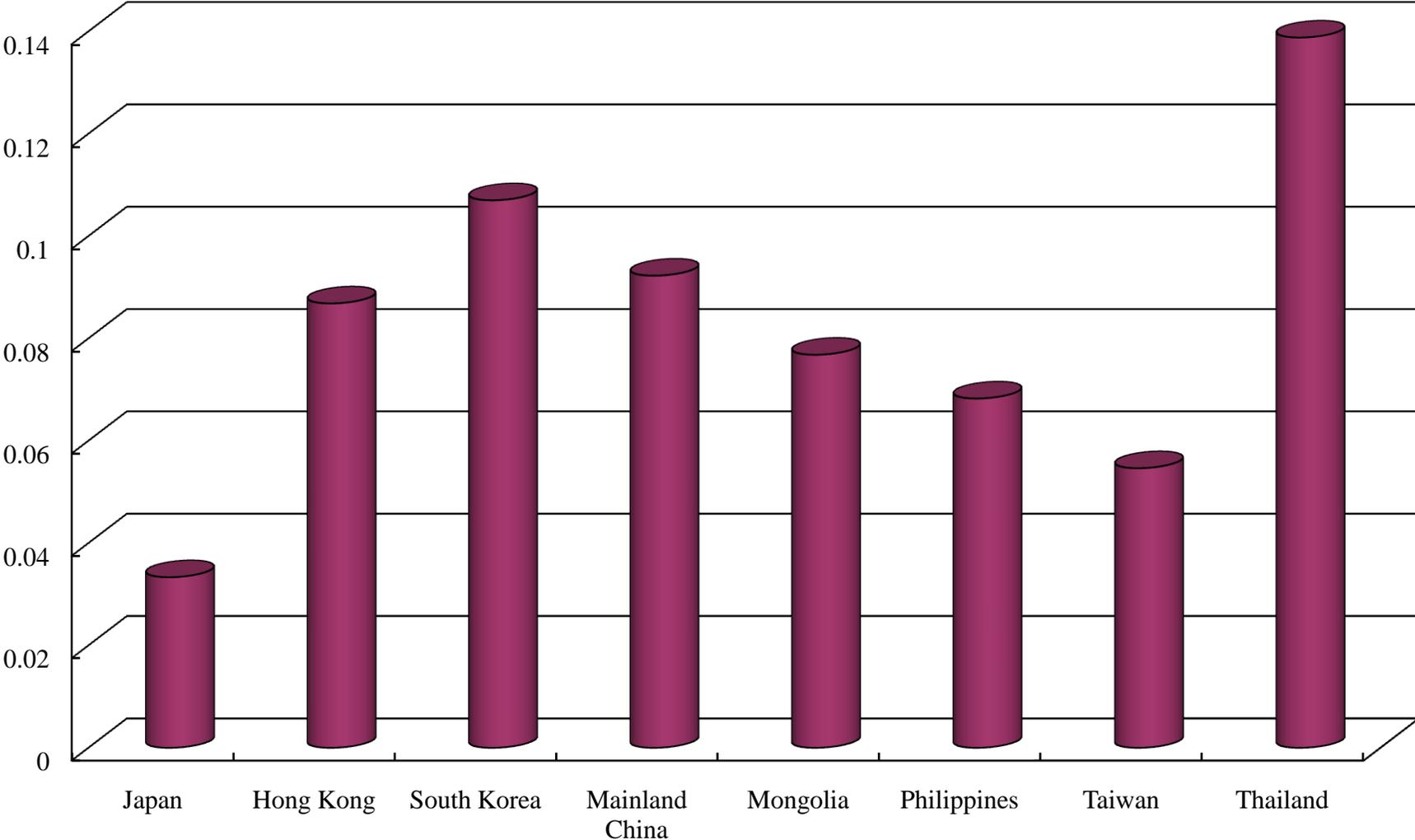


Figure V: Unconventional Political Participation

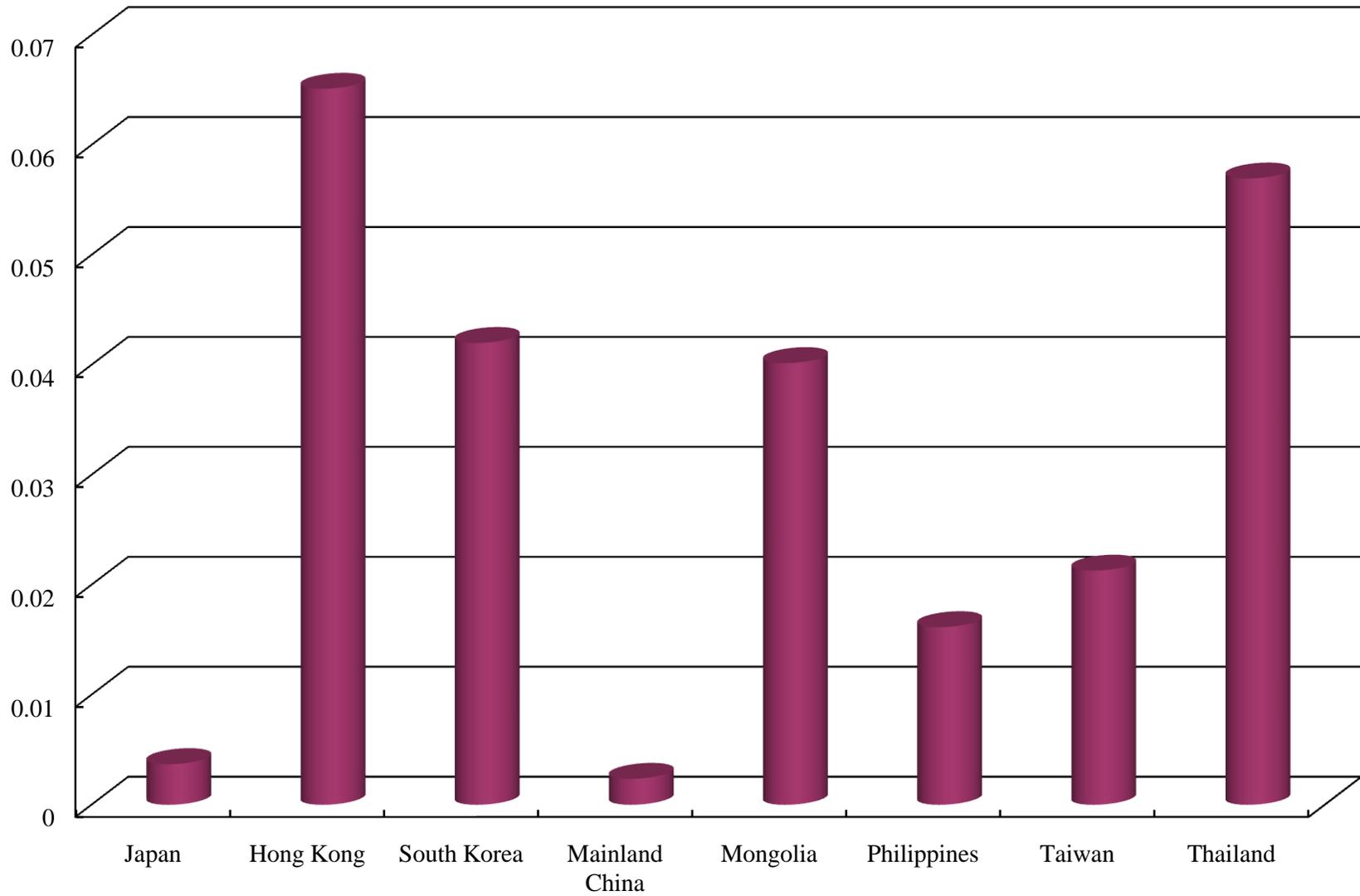


Table I: Pairwise Correlation Coefficients between Different Participatory Behavior and CTD/DFA

		Voting	Campaign Activities	Contacting Political Agents	Unconventional Participation
Japan	CTD	0.1132 ^{***}	0.0147	0.0114	0.0148
	DFA	0.0587 ^{**}	0.019	0.0257	0.0536 ^{**}
Hong Kong	CTD	0.2000 ^{***}	0.0283	-0.0088	-0.0182
	DFA	0.0981 ^{***}	0.0956 ^{**}	0.1300 ^{***}	0.1125 ^{***}
South Korea	CTD	-0.0143	-0.0605 ^{**}	0.0133	0.0191
	DFA	-0.0424 [*]	-0.0447 [*]	-0.0604 ^{**}	0.007
Mainland China	CTD	-0.0207	0.0656 ^{***}	0.0806 ^{***}	0.0320 [*]
	DFA	-0.0519 ^{***}	0.0218	0.0616 ^{***}	0.0065
Mongolia	CTD	0.0226	0.0779 ^{***}	0.0577 ^{**}	0.0179
	DFA	-0.0325	0.1054 ^{***}	0.0034	0.0248
Philippines	CTD	0.0089	0.043	0.0063	0.0019
	DFA	-0.0423	-0.0418	-0.0731 ^{**}	-0.0298
Taiwan	CTD	-0.0093	0.0754 ^{***}	-0.0009	-0.0010
	DFA	-0.0038	0.1369 ^{***}	0.1010 ^{***}	0.0673 ^{**}
Thailand	CTD	0.0312	-0.0418 [*]	-0.0398	-0.0054
	DFA	0.0039	-0.0007	0.0538 ^{**}	-0.0215

Source: Asian Barometer I Survey

CTD: Commitment to Democracy DFA: Detachment from Authoritarianism

*** p < 0.01 ** p < 0.05 * p < 0.1

Table II: Two-Level Zero-Order Logistic Unit-Specific Models

Parameter	CTD		DFA	
	Estimate	DF	Estimate	DF
<i>Fixed Effects</i>				
Constant	0.354 (0.217)	7	-0.002 (0.154)	7
<i>Variance Components</i>				
State/Region-Level	0.42694***		0.213***	
95% Confidence Interval the Second Level	28.36%		28.78%	
	83.68%		71.14%	

Source: Asian Barometer I Survey

Note: Entries are restricted penalized quasi-likelihood (PQL) coefficients with robust standard errors in parentheses. Software is HLM 6.0.

*=p < 0.1, **=p < 0.05, ***=p < 0.01

Table III: Two-Level Logistic Models with Random Components

Parameter	CTD		DFA	
	Estimate	DF	Estimate	DF
<i>Fixed Effects</i>				
Constant (intercept)	0.490 (0.227)*	7	0.176 (0.210)	7
Voting	-0.022 (0.058)	8989	-0.086 (0.060)	8988
Campaign Activities	0.092 (0.080)	8989	-0.025 (0.077)	8988
Contacting Political Agents	-0.145 (0.141)	8989	-0.008 (0.257)	7
Unconventional Participation	0.021 (0.143)	8989	-0.041 (0.146)	8988
Gender	0.152 (0.047)***	8989	0.182 (0.047)***	8988
Age	0.049 (0.010)***	8989	0.055 (0.040)	8988
Age Squared			-0.003 (0.003)	8988
Education	0.044 (0.015)**	7	0.042 (0.023)*	7
Income Level	0.025 (0.020)	8989	0.089 (0.020)***	8988
Media Exposure	0.018 (0.038)	7	0.080 (0.022)***	8988
Political Interest	0.126 (0.031)***	8989	0.064 (0.031)**	8988
Governmental Impacts	0.020 (0.053)	7	0.123 (0.025)***	8988
ROTA	0.175 (0.047)***	8989	0.724 (0.103)***	7
Individualism	-0.070 (0.105)	7	0.224 (0.142)	7
Sociotropic Retrospective Evaluation	-0.011 (0.042)	7	-0.026 (0.064)	7
Sociotropic Prospective Evaluation	0.064 (0.058)	7	0.045 (0.029)	8988
Ecocentric Retrospective Evaluation	0.029 (0.027)	8989	0.016 (0.026)	8988
Ecocentric Prospective Evaluation	-0.047 (0.030)	8989	0.018 (0.030)	8988
<i>Variance Components</i>				
State/Region-Level				
Contacting Political Agents			0.3556***	7
Education	0.0013***	7	0.0037***	7
Media Exposure	0.0076***			
Governmental Impacts	0.0173***	7		
ROTA			0.0646***	7
Individualism	0.0661***	7	0.1371***	7
Sociotropic Retrospective Evaluation	0.0084**	7	0.0266***	7
Sociotropic Prospective Evaluation	0.0196***	7		
Constant	0.4091***	7	0.3449***	7

Source: Asian Barometer I Survey

CTD: Commitment to Democracy DFA: Detachment from Authoritarianism

Note: Entries are restricted to penalized quasi-likelihood (PQL) coefficients with standard errors in parentheses. Software is HLM 6.0.

*=p < 0.1, **=p < 0.05, ***=p < 0.01

Table IV: Parallel Regressions for Different Countries and Regions on DFA

	Japan	HK	Korea	Mainland	Mongolia	Philipp	Taiwan	Thailand
Gender		+		+	+	+		
Age				—				
Age squared				+				
Education	+	+		+		+	+	—
Income Level				+		+	+	
Media Exposure			+	+			+	
Voting						—		
Campaign Activities					+			
Contacting Political Agents		+	—			—		
Unconventional Participation								—
Political Interest					+		+	
Governmental Impacts	+			+			+	+
Anti-authority	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+
Individualism	+	+		—	+	+		—
Sociotropic Retrospective Evaluation			—	+	—			+
Sociotropic Prospective Evaluation			+					
Ecocentric Retrospective Evaluation					+			
Ecocentric Prospective Evaluation								

Source: Asian Barometer I Survey

Entries are signs of logistic regression coefficients, which are statistically significant with p-values less than 0.1 based on robust standard errors