

Democratic Conceptions in East Asian Societies A Contextualized Analysis

Jie Lu

Abstract

Using a new survey battery of democratic conceptions from the third wave of the Asian Barometer Survey (ABS III), this essay (1) examines the validity of this new survey battery in varying political contexts, and (2) explores the possible origins of democratic conceptions in the sampled East Asian societies. There are three major findings. First, measurement models confirm the validity of this new survey battery across different contexts. This new instrument effectively taps a unidimensional latent construct that registers the surveyed East Asians' propensity to understand democracy in varying ways. The latent construct falls on a continuous spectrum, ranging from one end of a substance-based democratic conception to the other end of a procedure-based conception. Second, within each sampled society, there is a significant amount of variance regarding its citizens' democratic conceptions. This within-society variance overwhelms the across-society variance in the East Asians' democratic conceptions. Finally, regression analyses show that two factors are critical for understanding the within-society variance: government performance and the extent to which people appreciate the intrinsic value of democracy. And, the impact of government performance is conditional upon its surrounding political context.

Keywords: Democratic conceptions, East Asia, contextualized analysis.

Living in a society that is free and democratic is a widely shared goal in today's world. Thanks to the people who have risked their lives in pursuit of the goal they cherish dearly, democracy is making progress in becoming the only game in town in many societies. Even some authoritarian regimes that had luckily dodged the Third Wave of democratization were later transformed into democracies by the Color Revolutions or, more recently, seriously challenged by the Arab Spring. Democracy has also successfully consolidated its status as

Jie Lu is Assistant Professor in the Department of Government, School of Public Affairs, American University. <jlu@american.edu>

the only game in contemporary political discourse: even many authoritarian leaders publicly acknowledge that “democracy is a good thing,”¹ and claim their regimes to be some sort of a democracy.

Nevertheless, it is also well known that democracy is a contested concept with numerous connotations. The various meanings attached to democracy not only complicate civil and academic debates on how to assess and improve democratic practice, but also generate considerable leeway for possible concept-stretching that authoritarian leaders are keen on exploiting to camouflage and facilitate their authoritarian rule.² Moreover, many of the empirical puzzles identified by students of comparative public opinion cannot be effectively addressed, without systematically incorporating the various meanings that people associate with the D-word. For instance, in the third wave of the Asian Barometer Survey (ABS III), people in twelve East Asian societies were asked to evaluate the practice of democracy in their respective societies (Q89).³ Weighted percentages of respondents reporting “Very satisfied” or “Fairly satisfied” are plotted in figure 1, ranked in ascending order. Contrary to most scholars’ expectations, a large majority of people—more than 65 percent—in authoritarian societies such as mainland China, Malaysia, Cambodia, Vietnam, and Singapore are quite satisfied with the practice of democracy in their countries. Some of these authoritarian societies even outrank mature democracies such as Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan in this regard.

The first, and also quite natural, response from most readers may be that the survey results from nondemocracies cannot be trusted, that is, the respondents simply lied, given their repressive authoritarian governments. Theoretically, the impact of preference falsification or coerced silence on public opinion surveys can never be ruled out.⁴ This is not only the case in authoritarian societies for obvious reasons, but also in democratic societies due to social pressure or other concerns.⁵ Nevertheless, as shown in later sections, a significant percentage

¹ Keping Yu, *Democracy Is a Good Thing: Essays on Politics, Society, and Culture in Contemporary China* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution, 2009).

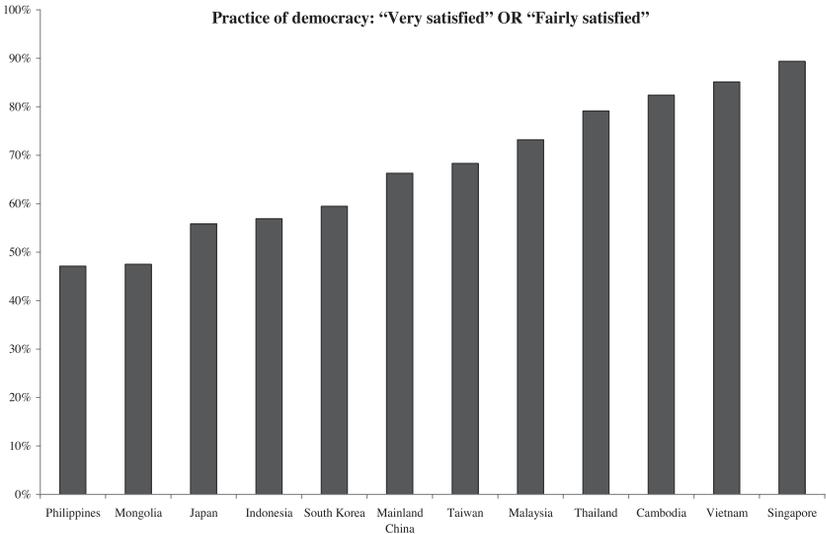
² For instance, Singapore’s then premier, Lee Kuan Yew, argued for “democracy embedded in Asian values.” Fareed Zakaria, “A Conversation with Lee Kuan Yew,” *Foreign Affairs* 73, no. 2 (1994): 109-126.

³ For detailed wording of the survey questions used in this essay, see appendix A in this *TJD* issue’s Introduction.

⁴ Timur Kuran, *Private Truths, Public Lies: The Social Consequences of Preference Falsification* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995), and Elisabeth Noelle-Neumann, *The Spiral of Silence: Public Opinion Our Social Skin* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1984).

⁵ Carroll J. Glynn, Andrew F. Hayes, and James Shanahan, “Perceived Support for One’s Opinions and Willingness to Speak Out: A Meta-Analysis of Survey Studies on the ‘Spiral of Silence,’” *Public Opinion Quarterly* 61, no. 3 (1997): 452-463; Jon A. Krosnick, “The Causes of Non-Opinion Responses to Attitude Measures in Survey: They Are Rarely What They Appear to Be,” in *Survey Nonresponse*, ed. Robert M. Groves et al. (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley, 2002): 87-102; and Roger Tourangeau, Lance J. Rips, and Kenneth A. Rasinski, *The Psychology of Survey Response* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

Figure 1. Satisfaction with the Practice of Democracy



Source: ABS III ($N = 18229$).

of the same respondents reported negative assessment of their authoritarian governments on issues such as the rule of law, freedom of speech, or corruption, which suggests that political wariness cannot be the key factor that drives the findings in figure 1. Meanwhile, existing empirical research using data from the ABS, as well as other comparative survey projects including the World Values Survey, shows that the effect of political wariness on public opinion surveys from authoritarian societies usually is not substantively significant, in most cases even statistically insignificant.⁶

Another equally plausible explanation lies in the varying meanings that people may have associated with the D-word. When popular conceptions of democracy vary and do not necessarily follow the liberalism-based criteria that emphasize, *inter alia*, institutionalized protection of rights and liberty, checks and balances, and election-centered party politics, it is very likely that popular assessment of the practice of democracy in different societies may diverge from most scholars' expectations. Indeed, the growing literature of popular understandings of democracy has effectively documented the existence of

⁶ Liying Ren, *Surveying Public Opinion in Transitional China: An Examination of Survey Response* (Ph.D. dissertation, Political Science, University of Pittsburgh, 2009); Tianjian Shi, "Cultural Values and Political Trust: A Comparison of the People's Republic of China and Taiwan," *Comparative Politics* 33, no. 4 (2001): 401-419; and Tianjian Shi and Diqing Lou, "Subjective Evaluation of Changes in Civil Liberties and Political Rights in China," *Journal of Contemporary China* 19, no. 63 (2010): 175-199.

different democratic conceptions and established the salience of the varying democratic conceptions for democratic transition and consolidation.⁷ To enrich our understanding of democratic conceptions and provide more systematic empirical evidence from East Asia to inform and extend related comparative research, this essay uses a new survey battery from ABS III to explore the situation of democratic conceptions, as well as their possible origins, in twelve East Asian societies with varying political contexts.

The essay's first section introduces the new survey battery (including the logic and methodology of its design) used by ABS III to measure popular understandings of democracy, and examines its measurement validity across varying political contexts with appropriate measurement models. Then, with the help of this new instrument, this essay demonstrates the cross-society and within-country variance in the surveyed East Asians' conceptions of democracy. After this, using regression analysis, this essay further presents some preliminary evidence on the possible origins of democratic conceptions in the sampled East Asian societies. The last section concludes and provides suggestions for future research.

Democratic Conceptions in East Asia: New Survey Evidence from ABS III

Democratic conceptions have consequential implications for both democracies and nondemocracies: they provide the lens through which people value the practice of democracy in their societies.⁸ In democracies, when a large number of citizens are not satisfied with the way democracy works, they may resort to more radical means such as civil disobedience (e.g., Occupy Wall Street) to push for changes, or they may become apathetic and estranged from politics, thus seriously damaging the quality of democracy. In nondemocracies, when

⁷ Michael Bratton and Robert Mattes, "Support for Democracy in Africa: Intrinsic or Instrumental?" *British Journal of Political Science* 31, no. 3 (2001): 447-474; Damarys Canache, "Citizens' Conceptualization of Democracy: Structural Complexity, Substantive Content, and Political Significance," *Comparative Political Studies* 45, no. 9 (2012): 1132-1158; Ellen Carnaghan, "The Difficulty of Measuring Support for Democracy in a Changing Society: Evidence from Russia," *Democratization* 18, no. 3 (2011): 682-706; Russell Dalton, Doh Chull Shin, and Willy Jou, "Understanding Democracy: Data from Unlikely Places," *Journal of Democracy* 18, no. 4 (2007): 142-156; Richard Rose, William Mishler, and Christian W. Haerpfer, *Democracy and Its Alternatives: Understanding Post-Communist Societies* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998); Doh Chull Shin, *Confucianism and Democratization in East Asia* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011); David Crow, "The Party's Over: Citizens' Conceptions of Democracy and Political Dissatisfaction in Mexico," *Comparative Politics* 43, no. 1 (2010): 41-62; and Christian Welzel, "The Asian Values Thesis Revisited: Evidence from the World Values Surveys," *Japanese Journal of Political Science* 12, no. 1 (2011): 1-31.

⁸ For the implications of democratic conceptions for regime legitimacy in East Asia, see Min-hua Huang, Yun-han Chu, and Yu-tzung Chang's contribution to this *TJD* issue.

a significant number of citizens is satisfied with the practice of democracy (regardless of how they understand democracy), authoritarian leaders enjoy the upper hand against pressure and mobilization for political reform or even for regime transition. The leaders in nondemocracies, therefore, have every incentive to sustain or even indoctrinate different discourses on and conceptions of democracy that could facilitate and even prolong their authoritarian rule.

To unpack the D-word and examine the varying meanings that people associate with democracy, as well as their implications for other critical political attitudes and behavior, students of comparative public opinion have adopted different strategies. One group of scholars scrutinizes respondents' answers to a widely used open-ended survey question (i.e., "What does democracy mean to you?") to identify different meanings attached to the D-word.⁹ Another group of scholars relies on respondents' choices (from a list of preselected attributes) of the most essential characteristics of democracy to gauge their democratic conceptions.¹⁰ Both strategies have their own advantages and disadvantages. To minimize the bias caused by questionnaire design, the open-ended question provides sufficient flexibility and freedom for respondents and collects all possible responses; however, it is very expensive and difficult to implement, and the findings are heavily conditioned by the coding schemes (usually decided by scholars with distinct research concerns and theoretical interests) used for analysis. Close-ended survey instruments with preselected answer categories significantly ease the implementation, reduce the subjective bias in data analysis, and facilitate cross-regional comparative research; however, the preselected answer categories (again usually decided by scholars with distinct research concerns and theoretical interests) significantly shape and constrain respondents' answers. To more effectively and systematically unpack the D-word and examine various democratic conceptions, the ABS took advantage of the two strategies across its three waves of surveys to develop some context-sensitive instruments that not only ensure sufficient flexibility for both respondents and scholars (with varying research interests) but also enable efficient data collection and rigorous cross-regional comparative research.

In ABS I and II, the conventional open-ended question was used to collect as many responses as possible from East Asians. Then ABS researchers conducted extensive and independent content analysis, and cross-validated their findings and coding schemes to identify some key components in the East

⁹ Canache, "Citizens' Conceptualization of Democracy"; Dalton, Shin, and Jou, "Understanding Democracy"; and Tianjian Shi and Jie Lu, "The Shadow of Confucianism," *Journal of Democracy* 21, no. 4 (2010): 123-130.

¹⁰ Bratton and Mattes, "Support for Democracy in Africa"; Carnaghan, "The Difficulty of Measuring Support for Democracy in a Changing Society"; Arthur Miller, Vicki Helsi, and William Reisinger, "Conceptions of Democracy among Mass and Elite in Post-Soviet Societies," *British Journal of Political Science* 27, no. 2 (1997): 157-190; and Welzel, "The Asian Values Thesis Revisited."

Asians' answers to the open-ended question. More specifically, the qualitative analysis of the ABS I and II data shows that the following four components have been regularly and repeatedly emphasized: (1) norms and procedures, (2) freedom and liberty, (3) social equity, and (4) good government.¹¹

Using these regularly and repeatedly emphasized components in East Asians' self-reported conceptions of democracy, the ABS designed a new close-ended survey battery and used it to gauge distinct democratic conceptions in its third wave. The extensive qualitative work based on previous ABS surveys offered valuable information to minimize the influence of researchers' subjective bias on crafting close-ended survey instruments. Focusing on the four components also helped streamline the design of survey instruments that not only are sensitive to the context under examination, but also provide sufficient flexibility for post-survey analysis in various theoretically meaningful ways. Moreover, the close-ended format adopted in ABS III significantly eased its implementation in the field, increased the quality of collected data, and enabled more systematic and rigorous cross-regional comparative research. To further decrease the possible influence of measurement errors on post-survey inferences, ABS III intentionally included four sets of questions in the new survey battery, tapping the four components from distinct perspectives.

In ABS III, all respondents were asked to identify the most essential characteristic of democracy out of the four groups of statements (Q85, Q86, Q87, and Q88) presented to them in sequence. Within each group, there were four choices that tapped (1) norms and procedures, (2) freedom and liberty, (3) social equity, and (4) good government, respectively. To minimize the possible question order effect, ABS III also rotated the order of the four components in the four groups. Weighted frequencies from twelve East Asian societies are presented in table 1.

First of all, except in Vietnam where there was a very high rate of item nonresponse (i.e., more than 50 percent answered "Don't know" in all four measures), this new battery was not cognitively challenging for most respondents in the surveyed East Asian societies. Secondly, when the four components are juxtaposed for selection, "social equity" and "good government" (as compared to "norms and procedures" and "freedom and liberty") are more likely to be recognized as essential characteristics of democracy by the citizens of East Asian societies. This prevailing inclination toward defining democracy in terms of social equity or good government among East Asians resonates with a critical differentiation between procedure-based versus substance-based conceptions of democracy, a differentiation identified by relevant research on

¹¹ These four components are also part of the themes identified by researchers using information collected through the open-ended question from other regions of the world. Canache, "Citizens' Conceptualization of Democracy," and Dalton, Shin, and Jou, "Understanding Democracy."

Table 1. Frequency Distribution of the New Survey Battery on Democratic Conceptions in Twelve East Asian Societies

	Liberal Democracy			Electoral Democracy			Electoral Authoritarian Regime			One-Party Authoritarian Regime		
	Japan	South Korea	Taiwan	Mongolia	Philippines	Thailand	Indonesia	Singapore	Cambodia	Malaysia	Mainland China	Vietnam
Q85												
Government narrows the gap between the rich and the poor. (social equity)	11.64%	26.57%	32.50%	17.97%	9.71%	27.04%	9.18%	22.25%	14.60%	15.58%	30.91%	26.53%
People choose the government leaders in free and fair election. (norms and procedures)	18.92%	32.22%	26.32%	32.58%	49.89%	16.57%	33.80%	33.21%	43.58%	46.75%	27.54%	13.27%
Government does not waste any public money. (good government)	45.65%	19.20%	17.77%	21.30%	14.03%	23.50%	16.01%	23.31%	5.80%	14.12%	12.27%	4.11%
People are free to express their political views openly. (freedom and liberty)	21.35%	17.65%	19.40%	26.15%	26.03%	24.58%	26.09%	19.05%	35.28%	19.98%	14.16%	4.11%
Don't know	2.45%	4.36%	4.02%	2.00%	0.34%	8.30%	14.93%	2.18%	0.74%	3.57%	15.12%	51.97%
Q86												
The legislature has oversight over the government. (norms and procedures)	11.26%	10.43%	13.08%	23.79%	9.59%	13.29%	11.84%	11.00%	12.12%	9.04%	15.20%	12.01%
Basic necessities, like food, clothes and shelter, are provided for all. (social equity)	34.10%	24.52%	34.44%	12.99%	46.83%	31.22%	22.89%	46.76%	26.75%	28.66%	36.39%	19.14%
People are free to organize political groups. (freedom and liberty)	12.93%	12.37%	9.18%	23.80%	20.90%	4.58%	8.33%	9.77%	16.67%	12.94%	4.46%	1.76%
Government provides people with quality public services. (good government)	36.72%	43.77%	38.72%	36.08%	22.28%	42.99%	42.39%	30.01%	43.54%	45.29%	28.06%	13.35%
Don't know	4.98%	8.91%	4.58%	3.33%	0.40%	7.82%	14.55%	2.45%	0.92%	4.07%	15.88%	53.74%
Q87												
Government ensures law and order. (good government)	30.53%	37.26%	31.56%	23.35%	19.00%	15.97%	18.51%	42.77%	18.62%	28.56%	30.33%	23.09%
Media is free to criticize the things government does. (freedom and liberty)	9.85%	25.03%	6.57%	17.34%	36.50%	11.99%	12.00%	18.28%	15.12%	13.06%	10.64%	2.60%
Government ensures job opportunities for all. (social equity)	37.98%	19.14%	40.08%	39.82%	35.07%	38.72%	36.90%	25.26%	35.98%	33.63%	31.05%	19.48%
Multiple parties compete fairly in the election. (norms and procedures)	17.52%	12.46%	16.39%	17.57%	8.85%	22.55%	15.30%	12.22%	29.70%	21.23%	11.64%	1.01%
Don't know	4.12%	6.10%	5.40%	1.91%	0.59%	10.78%	17.29%	1.47%	0.58%	3.53%	16.34%	53.82%
Q88												
People have the freedom to take part in protests and demonstrations. (freedom and liberty)	6.68%	14.42%	14.64%	25.74%	26.63%	6.90%	10.42%	15.71%	19.75%	8.90%	5.37%	3.02%
Politics is clean and free of corruption. (good government)	49.35%	43.58%	28.63%	39.13%	28.76%	36.86%	39.22%	45.14%	27.55%	46.67%	29.15%	27.04%
The court protects the ordinary people from the abuse of government power. (norms and procedures)	16.79%	26.13%	29.50%	15.65%	20.75%	9.82%	17.08%	14.46%	20.64%	24.02%	30.48%	2.69%
People receive state aid if they are unemployed. (social equity)	23.58%	10.11%	22.36%	17.02%	22.80%	36.62%	17.08%	21.68%	31.48%	15.86%	19.02%	13.43%
Don't know	3.60%	5.48%	4.87%	2.45%	1.06%	9.80%	16.19%	3.02%	0.57%	4.54%	15.97%	53.82%

Source: ABS III (N = 18229).

Note: Weighted percentages in cells.

Latin American, African, and East European societies.¹²

Theoretically, the four indicators of social equity (a narrow rich-poor gap, wide access to basic necessities, sufficient job opportunities, and state-guaranteed unemployment aid), as well as the four indicators of good government (no squandering of public money, high-quality public service, ensured socioeconomic and political order, and a clean government), clearly capture a conception of democracy that prioritizes the substantive outputs of a political system. In other words, among those who are inclined to pick the indicators of social equity or good government as the most essential characteristic of democracy, their democratic conceptions are primarily dictated by the instrumental value of democracy—improving the performance of a government in various aspects, thereby generating good governance. As long as this substance-based understanding of democracy is widely shared, even those living in a mature democracy such as Japan may hold quite negative views of the practice of democracy in their society, once the government’s performance deteriorates or stagnates at an unsatisfying level. Meanwhile, if most citizens of an authoritarian regime such as mainland China have internalized this substance-based conception of democracy, their government’s continuous and stunning performance in delivering good governance may result in prevailing positive views of the practice of democracy in their society (despite the obvious lack of some fundamental democratic institutions or frequent infringement of citizens’ basic rights).

In contrast, the four indicators of norms and procedures (choosing leaders via free election, the legislature’s check of the government, party politics, and the rule of law), as well as the four indicators of freedom and liberty (freedom of speech, freedom of association, free media, and the political right of participation), directly tap the gist of liberal democracy, which emphasizes the indispensability of institutions and procedures for running a society, making decisions, and ensuring the dignity and some unalienable rights of individuals. Though this conception of democracy does not speak directly to the substantive outputs of a political system, there is a hidden assumption that decent life can be secured for most people once such institutions and procedures are in place and followed. Moreover, besides the instrumental value of democracy as a means toward good governance, this procedure-based understanding of democracy also emphasizes the intrinsic value of freedom and liberty, which should be protected and defended for their own sake through democratic institutions and procedures. Once this procedure-based understanding of democracy is widely shared, even those living in an authoritarian regime with a stunning record of

¹² Bratton and Mattes, “Support for Democracy in Africa”; Canache, “Citizens’ Conceptualization of Democracy”; Carnaghan, “The Difficulty of Measuring Support for Democracy in a Changing Society”; Dalton, Shin, and Jou, “Understanding Democracy”; Miller, Helsi, and Reisinger, “Conceptions of Democracy among Mass and Elite in Post-Soviet Societies”; and Rose, Mishler, and Haerpfer, *Democracy and Its Alternatives*.

delivering quality governance are unlikely to view the practice of democracy in their society positively, simply due to the lack of some indispensable institutions and procedures that can protect their rights and ensure their dignity. Similarly, even confronted with some short-term turbulence or a down-turn in their government's performance, the citizens of a mature democracy who have internalized the procedure-based conception of democracy may still appreciate the practice of democracy in their society, as long as the key institutions and procedures are well-maintained and their rights are effectively protected against possible infringement.¹³

Therefore, to facilitate further meaningful comparative studies and the dialogue with existing research, and also to simplify readers' interpretation of table 1, I have followed the aforementioned framework that differentiates between procedure-based and substance-based democratic conceptions and recoded the nominal variables with four categories into binary variables with two categories that stand for procedure-based (i.e., choosing norms and procedures, or freedom and liberty) versus substance-based (i.e., choosing social equity, or good government) democratic conceptions, respectively. Weighted percentages of citizens in the twelve East Asian societies, who prioritize norms, procedures, freedom, or liberty as essential characteristics of democracy, are illustrated in figure 2.

Generally, except for the first measure as displayed in figure 2A (Q85), the procedure-based democratic conception does not effectively win the hearts and minds of the majority of the surveyed East Asians: most columns in figure 2B (Q86), 2C (Q87), and 2D (Q88) are lower than the line of 50 percent. Surprisingly, even in mature democracies such as Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan (depending on the specific measures examined), the percentages of their citizens who have embraced the procedure-based democratic conception may go as low as about 23 percent (e.g., Taiwan and South Korea in figure 2B, Taiwan in figure 2C, and Japan in figure 2D). And, these mature democracies do not necessarily outperform their less democratic neighbors in this regard: the Philippines, Cambodia, and Mongolia are persistently the leading runners in all four measures. Moreover, except for Vietnam (affected by a serious problem of item nonresponse), authoritarian societies included in the ABS III (i.e., Singapore, Malaysia, Cambodia, and mainland China) actually boast a significant percentage of citizens who prioritize norms, procedures, freedom, or liberty as essential features of democracy. Depending on the specific measures examined (e.g., figures 2B and 2D), these authoritarian societies even outperform their democratic neighbors such as Thailand and Indonesia with

¹³ In his empirical examination of the "Asian values thesis," Welzel differentiates among four notions of democracy: a Western liberal notion, a social notion, a populist notion, and an authoritarian notion. The procedure-based democratic conception closely follows the Western liberal notion of democracy. And both the social and populist notions of democracy resonate with the substance-based democratic conception. Welzel, "The Asian Values Thesis Revisited."

a larger percentage of citizens who embrace the procedure-based democratic conception.

The variation in the percentages and ranking orders shown in figure 2 suggests some measurement errors incurred in each of the four measures. Hence, to systematically and rigorously examine the validity of this new survey battery and to minimize the possible influence of measurement errors in subsequent analyses, I adopted the confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) with binary indicators to examine the validity of the four measures.¹⁴ Using the CFA with binary indicators, it is possible to tell whether the four binary indicators, as theoretically expected, tap a latent construct that measures people's propensity to hold varying democratic conceptions with statistical justification. Since I coded the procedure-based democratic conception as 1 for each indicator, this latent propensity, if statistically validated, should fall on a continuous spectrum that ranges from the lowest end of a pure substance-based democratic conception (which solely emphasizes social equity or good government) to the highest end of a pure procedure-based understanding of democracy (which exclusively focuses on norms, procedures, freedom, or liberty), with some mixed democratic conceptions in between. The CFA results for the twelve East Asian societies are presented in table 2.

Four statistics of the CFA models can tell how effective the indicators are at capturing the East Asians' democratic conceptions that fall on the latent substance-procedure spectrum: Chi-square statistics, Comparative-Fit-Index (CFI), Tucker-Lewis-Index (TLI), and Root-Mean-Square-Error-of-Approximation (RMSEA). An *insignificant* Chi-square statistic suggests that the one-factor CFA model satisfactorily fits the latent structure of the raw data. Even with a significant Chi-square statistic—which is likely to be the case for large samples—a large value of CFI and TLI (larger than 0.9) and a small value of RMSEA (less than 0.08) also indicate a good fit of the one-factor CFA model.¹⁵

As displayed in table 2, except in Thailand, mainland China, and Vietnam, the one-factor CFA model with four binary indicators shows an *insignificant* Chi-square statistic in each of the remaining nine societies, regardless of their

¹⁴ The CFA model with binary indicators is mathematically equivalent to the 2-parameter Item Response Theory (IRT) model. Thus, the factor scores that I extract via the CFA here are exactly the same as the IRT scores used by Huang, Chu, and Chang in their contribution to this *TJD* issue. Steven P. Reise, Keith F. Widaman, and Robin H. Pugh, "Confirmatory Factor Analysis and Item Response Theory: Two Approaches for Exploring Measurement Invariance," *Psychological Bulletin* 114 (1993): 552-566.

¹⁵ Li-tze Hu and Peter Bentler, "Cutoff Criteria for Fit Indexes in Covariance Structure Analysis: Conventional Criteria versus New Alternatives," *Structural Equation Modeling* 6, no. 1 (1999): 1-55; Peter Bentler, "Rites, Wrongs, and Gold in Model Testing," *Structural Equation Modeling* 7 (2000): 82-91; and Michael Browne and Robert Cudeck, "Alternative Ways of Assessing Model Fit," in *Testing Structural Equation Models*, ed. Kenneth A. Bollen and Scott Long (Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publication, 1993): 136-162.

Figure 2. Percentages of Citizens Holding a Procedure-Based Democratic Conception

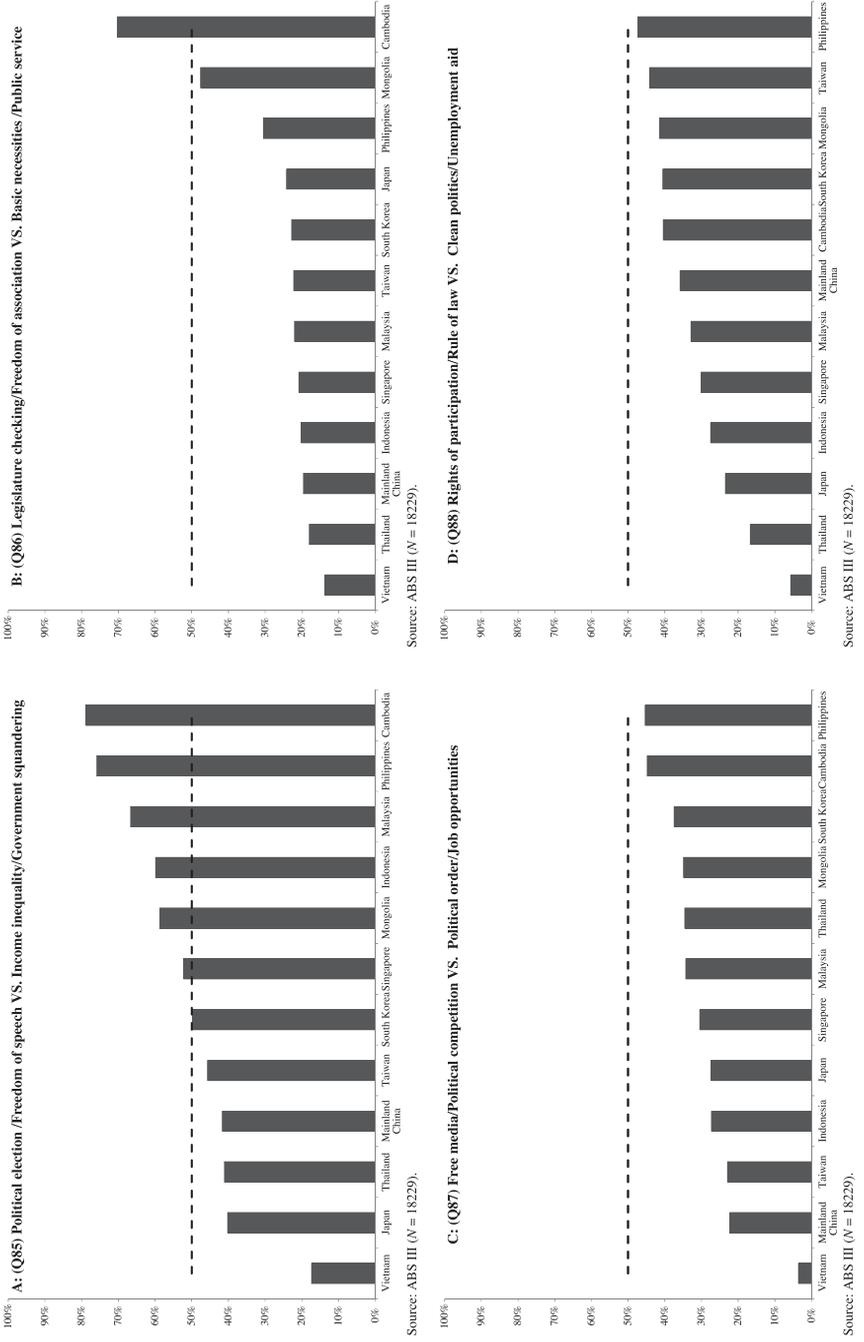


Table 2. CFA Results for Democratic Conceptions in Twelve East Asian Societies

Standardized factor loadings	Liberal Democracy			Electoral Democracy			Electoral Authoritarian Regime			One-Party Authoritarian Regime		
	Japan	South Korea	Taiwan	Mongolia	Philippines	Thailand	Indonesia	Singapore	Cambodia	Malaysia	Mainland China	Vietnam
Q85	0.475*	0.569*	0.622*	0.434*	0.006	0.382*	0.319*	0.426*	0.260*	0.349*	0.566*	0.464*
Q86	0.606*	0.479*	0.749*	0.382*	0.306*	0.495*	0.836*	0.684*	0.473*	0.621*	0.447*	0.292*
Q87	0.418*	0.398*	0.716*	0.527*	0.544*	0.458*	0.540*	0.749*	0.551*	0.601*	0.480*	0.673*
Q88	0.566*	0.441*	0.501*	0.500*	0.654*	0.509*	0.240*	0.515*	0.406*	0.149*	0.441*	0.790*
<i>Model fit statistics</i>												
Chi-square	(3.329, 2)	(0.698, 2)	(0.588, 2)	(1.551, 2)	(2.829, 2)	(11.37, 2)#	(2.824, 2)	(0.909, 2)	(4.554, 2)	(1.546, 2)	(7.218, 2)#	(10.86, 2)#
CFI	0.994	1.000	1.000	1.000	0.990	0.916	0.989	1.000	0.963	1.000	0.984	0.885
TLI	0.981	1.033	1.006	1.012	0.970	0.747	0.968	1.012	0.890	1.014	0.985	0.656
RMSA	0.019	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.019	0.057	0.017	0.000	0.033	0.000	0.029	0.086
Used Obs.	1850	1188	1557	1195	1198	1446	1389	989	1197	1181	3017	597
N	1880	1207	1592	1210	1200	1512	1550	1000	1200	1214	3473	1191

Source: ABS III (N = 18229).

Notes: * $p < 0.05$ for two-tailed tests.

$p < 0.05$ for Chi-square statistics.

Mplus 7.0 with WLSMV estimators.

Missing values are addressed by Mplus with MAT assumption (only observations with missing values for all indicators were dropped).

political contexts. The standardized factor loadings for the four binary indicators are statistically significant at the conventional level.¹⁶ In both Thailand and mainland China, despite their significant Chi-square statistics, the large values of CFI and TLI, as well as the small values of RMSEA, still confirm the validity of this one-factor CFA model. Vietnam is the only society where the one-factor CFA model does not perform satisfactorily, probably due to its significant number of missing values. In summation, the new survey battery does a fairly satisfactory job in measuring varying democratic conceptions in the sampled East Asian societies. The four measures work effectively, in a statistical sense, in tapping East Asians' inclination to have different democratic conceptions, which fall on a continuous spectrum, ranging from a pure substance-based conception to a pure procedure-based one.

To minimize the possible influence of measurement errors in subsequent analyses, I extracted the factor score for each survey respondent using the aforementioned one-factor CFA model.¹⁷ To ensure the same benchmark for effective comparison, I pooled all observations (excluding those from Vietnam) together to run a pooled one-factor CFA model.¹⁸ In this way, all surveyed East Asians who prioritized norms, procedures, freedom, or liberty as essential characteristics of democracy in all four measures were given the same highest score; those who exclusively emphasized social equity or good government in all four measures were given the same lowest score. The distribution of the factor scores of democratic conceptions for each of the eleven East Asian societies is presented in figure 3.

The two bold lines in figure 3 indicate the minimum and maximum values of the factor scores, respectively. Since pooling all observations together enforces the same anchor-point, the minimum and maximum values are the same for all eleven societies. The dotted line stands for the hypothetical population mean if respondents' factor scores of democratic conceptions follow a symmetric distribution between the minimum and maximum values. The round dots stand for the estimated population mean for each of the eleven East Asian societies, while the associated upper and lower caps indicate the standard deviation (e.g., dispersion) of the factor scores in each of the eleven societies.

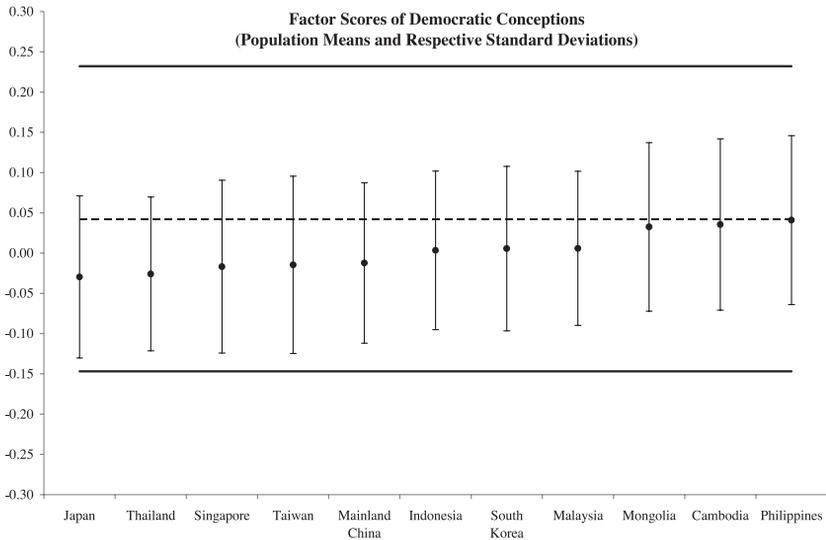
Statistically speaking, if the estimated population mean in a society is

¹⁶ In the Philippines, the factor loading for the first measure is not statistically significant at the 0.1 level.

¹⁷ Given the dichotomous nature of the indicators, the factor scores can be interpreted as respondents' latent propensity (i.e., a larger value standing for a higher probability) of embracing the procedure-based understanding of democracy.

¹⁸ Following best practice in analyzing comparative survey data, the pooled data are weighted to ensure the same effective sample size for each of the eleven societies. For related information, see Guy Moors and Jeroen K. Vermunt, "Heterogeneity in Post-materialist Value Priorities: Evidence from a Latent Class Discrete Choice Approach," *European Sociological Review* 23, no. 5 (2007): 631-648. I also ran another one-factor CFA model including Vietnamese observations. The key findings hold. Related results are available upon request from the author.

Figure 3. Distribution of the Factor Scores of Democratic Conceptions in Eleven East Asian Societies



Source: ABS III ($N = 17108$).

larger than the hypothetical mean, there are relatively more citizens who have embraced the procedure-based conception of democracy. If the estimated population mean is less than the hypothetical mean, there are relatively more citizens who have internalized the substance-based conception. The further away the estimated population mean is from the hypothetical mean, the more skewed the distribution is toward either the minimum or maximum value. Meanwhile, the gap between the upper and lower caps of the estimated mean of each society approximates the magnitude of variance in the society: the larger the gap, the more significant the variance in a society's popular understandings of democracy.

There are three major findings in figure 3. First, except in the Philippines, the substance-based democratic conception dominates the popular understandings of democracy in the remaining ten societies. Even in the Philippines, the estimated population mean is not statistically larger than the hypothetical mean.¹⁹ Thus, it is reasonable to argue that the substance-based conception of democracy defines how most people in the eleven East Asian societies understand democracy: a majority of them are more inclined to recognize

¹⁹ The difference between the Philippines's estimated population mean and the hypothetical mean is not statistically significant at the 0.1 level.

social equity or good government (rather than norms, procedures, freedom, or liberty) as essential characteristics of democracy. In other words, for these people, high-quality substantive outputs of a political system are much more important in demonstrating its democratic nature.

Second, despite their much longer life experiences with liberal democracy, a large percentage of Japanese, Taiwanese, and South Koreans actually are more inclined to prioritize social equity or good government as essential characteristics of democracy. The estimated population mean in Japan is the lowest among the eleven East Asian societies, even lower than that in Singapore and mainland China. The estimated population mean in Taiwan is higher than that in Singapore, but slightly lower than that in mainland China.²⁰ South Korea boasts the highest estimated population mean among the three mature democracies; however, its population mean is still lower than that of Malaysia, Mongolia, Cambodia, and the Philippines. It seems that more life experiences with liberal democracy do not necessarily orient people's understanding of democracy toward the procedure-based conception. Of course, the reality is much more complicated, and I will come back to this point with more details in a later section on the origins of democratic conceptions.

Finally, the within-society variance in people's democratic conceptions is much larger than the cross-society variation. Most saliently, the difference between the estimated population mean of Japan (the lowest) and the Philippines (the highest) is even less than one standard deviation of the factor scores in Japan. To rigorously evaluate the composition of the variance in the East Asians' democratic conceptions, I ran a hierarchical ANOVA model to estimate the inter-class correlation coefficient (ICC) of the factor scores of democratic conceptions across the eleven societies: the estimated ICC is 5.45 percent.²¹ In other words, around 95 percent of the variance in the East Asians' democratic conceptions should be attributed to domestic factors, and only a little more than 5 percent of the total variance can be attributed to cross-society differences.

In summary, the ABS III's new survey battery on democratic conceptions performs satisfactorily across distinct political contexts and effectively captures the surveyed East Asians' varying conceptions of democracy. Following a prominent theoretical differentiation between procedure-based and substance-based democratic conceptions in existing research, I rigorously tested the measurement validity of the new battery using the CFA technique. All statistical indicators confirm the validity of this new battery in tapping people's latent propensity to embrace distinct democratic conceptions. This latent

²⁰ The difference between Taiwan's and Singapore's estimated population means, as well as that between Taiwan's and mainland China's, is not statistically significant at the 0.1 level.

²¹ Results of the hierarchical ANOVA model are attached to the appendix of this essay as table A1.

propensity falls on a continuous spectrum, as theoretically expected, ranging from one end of a procedure-based democratic conception to the other end of a substance-based conception. Further examination of the distributional features of the factor scores of democratic conceptions reveals that the substance-based democratic conception has won the hearts and minds of a majority of the East Asians, even those who have accumulated sufficient life experiences with liberal democracy in Japan, Taiwan, and South Korea. Meanwhile, most of the variance in the East Asians' democratic conceptions should be attributed to domestic factors.

Political Context and Possible Origins of Democratic Conceptions in East Asia

As Crow argues in his analysis of Mexican citizens' understandings of democracy, "Concepts of democracy are a question of emphasis. Some aspects of democracy are more salient than others in individual images of democracy, and this mix varies from person to person."²² How do we account for the varying salience that citizens of the eleven East Asian societies have attached to different aspects of democracy?

As previously discussed, the substance-based democratic conception is centered on some instrumental assessments of democracy, while the procedure-based democratic conception moves beyond the practical benefits of democratic politics and emphasizes the intrinsic value of democracy as a descent way of life. Thus, to explore some possible origins of the varying democratic conceptions in East Asia, I primarily focused on the instrumental and intrinsic values that the surveyed East Asians may have associated with democracy, as well as how related concerns and evaluations exert their influence on democratic conceptions in distinct political contexts. Given its demonstrated dominance in the data, I focused on the within-society variance of democratic conceptions in the East Asian societies.

Instrumental Value of Democracy

One general conclusion from the public opinion literature is that people's attitudes toward a system or institution are significantly shaped by what this system or institution delivers (i.e., its outputs).²³ This instrumental rationality also affects people's democratic conceptions. As a way of ruling a society, democracy is also expected to deliver, or generate, good governance. Though empirically there is mixed evidence on the impact of democracy on economic

²² Crow, "The Party's Over," 48.

²³ David Easton, *A Systems Analysis of Political Life* (New York: Wiley, 1965), and Cameron D. Anderson, "Economic Voting and Multilevel Governance: A Comparative Individual-Level Analysis," *American Journal of Political Science* 50, no. 2 (2006): 449-463.

growth,²⁴ public goods provision,²⁵ and so on, democracy is still believed to be the most effective system (or the least ineffective system, if we follow Sir Churchill's logic) for constraining the possible abuse of political power and channeling it toward the public interest. Even in authoritarian societies such as mainland China, Vietnam, and Singapore, both politicians and average citizens usually attribute the origins of governance problems, such as corruption or officials' nonfeasance, to insufficient supervision or lack of accountability. Thus, "democracy" is usually the panacea prescribed for governance problems, although adjectival phrases such as "with Chinese characteristics" or "embedded with Asian values" might be added.

To examine how such instrumental concerns affect the East Asians' democratic conceptions, I chose three indicators from the ABS III that place particular emphasis on the behavior of government leaders and officials: the rule of law (Q108 and Q110) and government responsiveness (Q113). Compared with some conventional measures of a government's socioeconomic performance, these three indicators directly address the effectiveness of a political system in supervising government officials, constraining the possible abuse of political power, and creating accountability. The much more direct and straightforward links between these indicators and a society's political system should ease its citizens' cognitive reasoning when making necessary evaluations, thus making the indicators more appropriate for examining how people's instrumental concerns regarding the governance of their society may shape their democratic conceptions. The respondents' answers are presented in table 3.

Generally speaking, some authoritarian societies in East Asia seem to have done a good job in supervising government officials (Singapore and mainland China), constraining political leaders' possible abuse of power (Singapore), and effectively responding to people's needs (mainland China, Malaysia, Singapore, and Cambodia). For instance, according to their citizens' evaluations, the four authoritarian governments outperform their counterparts in Japan, Taiwan, and South Korea—the three mature democracies in East Asia—in effectively responding to their people's needs.²⁶ Nevertheless, there is no clear pattern

²⁴ Hristos Doucouliagos and Mehmet Ali Ulubasoglu, "Democracy and Economic Growth: A Meta-Analysis," *American Journal of Political Science* 52, no. 1 (2008): 61-83, and Torsten Persson and Guido Tabellini, "The Growth Effect of Democracy: Is It Heterogenous and How Can It Be Estimated?" in *Institutions and Economic Performance*, ed. Elhanan Helpman (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008): 544-585.

²⁵ Robert T. Deacon, "Public Good Provision under Dictatorship and Democracy," *Public Choice* 139, no. 1/2 (2009): 241-262, and John R. Hamman, Roberto A. Weber, and Jonathan Woon, "An Experimental Investigation of Electoral Delegation and the Provision of Public Goods," *American Journal of Political Science* 65, no. 4 (2011): 738-752.

²⁶ It is likely that the authoritarian leaders may have paid extra attention to responding to their people's needs, due to their lack of institution/procedure-based legitimacy. In other words, they may have to please the people in exchange for their political support. Andrew Nathan, "Authoritarian Resilience," *Journal of Democracy* 14, no. 1 (2003): 6-17.

Table 3. Evaluations of Governance Quality in Eleven East Asian Societies

Ranking of the population means of democratic conceptions (factor scores)		Q108 Officials unpunished for crimes (Always or Most of the time)	Q110 Government leaders breaking the law (Always or Most of the time)	Q113 Government's responsiveness (Not very responsive or Not responsive at all)
1 (lowest)	Japan	36.78%	43.39%	66.60%
2	Thailand	27.85%	26.20%	55.30%
3	Singapore	8.22%	4.89%	33.34%
4	Taiwan	60.56%	57.70%	58.64%
5	Mainland China	30.46%	65.28%	15.04%
6	Indonesia	37.75%	55.73%	53.60%
7	South Korea	57.95%	69.35%	66.72%
8	Malaysia	40.98%	43.91%	31.62%
9	Mongolia	68.97%	77.66%	85.24%
10	Cambodia	36.05%	18.98%	45.89%
11 (highest)	Philippines	54.00%	64.15%	54.48%

Source: ABS III ($N = 17108$).

Note: Weighted percentages in cells.

revealed in table 3 regarding the possible relationship between democratic conceptions and governance quality at the societal level. A significant number of citizens who are not satisfied with their political system's effectiveness in supervising government officials or generating a responsive government are equally likely to be found in societies dominated by the substance-based conception of democracy (e.g., Japan, Thailand, and Taiwan), as well as those experiencing roughly equal influence from both substance-based and procedure-based democratic conceptions (e.g., Mongolia, Cambodia, and the Philippines).²⁷ This puzzling pattern might have been driven by the moderating effect of the political contexts in which the East Asians are embedded.

In mature democracies such as Japan, Taiwan, and South Korea, democracy as a set of institutions and procedures has been well-established and gradually reinforced over the past decades. The protection of basic rights, freedom, and liberty also has become an integrated component of people's daily lives in these societies. Thus, it is very likely that most citizens of mature democracies take such institutions and procedures for granted as they assess the salience

²⁷ Pearson's correlation coefficients between the performance indicators and the population means of democratic conceptions range between 0.2 and 0.5. But none of them is statistically significant at the 0.1 level.

of different aspects of democracy. Comparatively speaking, in mature democracies, the space for significant institutional change or innovation is limited; and, most of the time for most of their citizens, replacing democracy with any feasible alternative is out of the question. Thus, when their citizens notice problems in governance, they are inclined to put more emphasis on a better enforcement of existing institutions and procedures to achieve better governance. When these citizens (who are not satisfied with the performance of their mature democratic governments) are approached for their views on essential characteristics of democracy, *ceteris paribus*, they are more likely to emphasize the substantive aspects of democracy, thus reporting a substance-based democratic conception.

On the contrary, in new democracies or authoritarian societies, democracy is either not consolidated yet or is still a highly desirable political alternative. Comparatively speaking, there is much more that can be done with the institutions and procedures in new democracies, not to mention in authoritarian societies. Thus, when their citizens perceive problems in governance, it is quite natural for them to point the finger at existing flawed institutions or defective procedures and to demand further institutional improvement or even replacement. When these citizens (who are not satisfied with the performance of their new democratic or authoritarian governments) are approached for their views on essential characteristics of democracy, *ceteris paribus*, they are more likely to emphasize the institutional/procedural aspects of democracy, thus reporting a procedure-based democratic conception. The following two hypotheses have been tested in this round of research:

H1: In mature democracies, poor governance makes people more inclined to understand democracy following the substance-based conception.

H2: In new democracies or authoritarian societies, poor governance makes people more inclined to understand democracy following the procedure-based conception.

Intrinsic Value of Democracy

The almost unshakable status of democracy as the only game in contemporary political discourse is based on something much more than its instrumental value (i.e., generating good governance). Democracy is also created with the aim of securing and protecting people's dignity and "certain endowed unalienable rights" such as life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. Democracy is designed and established with the fundamental assumption that people are created equal, and thus they should be treated as equal and with respect. Such normative connotations of democracy have significantly contributed to its moral superiority in contemporary political discourse. Thus, democracy, instead of simply being an effective means to good governance,

is cherished by many people for its intrinsic value. It is not a coincidence that many authoritarian leaders acknowledge democracy as a universal value (i.e., recognize its moral superiority). And, instead of challenging and denouncing democracy normatively, they actively debate what kind of democracy is good for their society, stretching the concept to disguise their authoritarian nature.

To examine how democracy's normative connotations affect the East Asians' democratic conceptions, I selected one indicator of popular support for democracy (Q126) from ABS III. This instrument offers two advantages that help measure the extent to which people cherish the intrinsic value of democracy. First, by intentionally juxtaposing democracy alongside economic growth, the instrument pushes people to assess democracy beyond its instrumental value (for which generating economic benefits is a key, if not the sole component). Thus, I can safely argue that those who choose democracy over economic growth are more attracted to its intrinsic value. Second, comparing economic growth to democracy, rather than to specific institutions, procedures, or norms, generates sufficient distance between this variable and the dependent variable (i.e., democratic conceptions). Otherwise, the exercise would be meaningless and even close to tautology. Of course, this measure is not flawless: given the salience of material resources and economic benefits in people's daily lives and the ongoing economic challenges and crises around the world, a very high hurdle is raised here for the respondents to reveal their appreciation of the intrinsic value of democracy.²⁸ Their answers are presented in table 4.

As shown in table 4, despite its lowest mean factor score of democratic conceptions—with a large number of citizens embracing the substance-based conception of democracy—Japan significantly outnumbers the remaining ten East Asian societies in terms of the percentage of citizens cherishing the intrinsic value of democracy, while, Indonesia, an unconsolidated democracy, is ranked the lowest. The four authoritarian societies (i.e., Singapore, Malaysia, mainland China, and Cambodia) are ranked in the middle in this regard. Meanwhile, there is a recognizable pattern in table 4 regarding the possible relationship between democratic conceptions and the extent to which people cherish the intrinsic value of democracy at the societal level. On average, a larger number of citizens who appreciate the intrinsic value of democracy are more likely to be observed in societies where the conception of procedure-based democracy has more influence (i.e., there is a higher population mean of the factor scores of democratic conceptions, such as in South Korea, Malaysia, Mongolia, Cambodia, and the Philippines).²⁹ Theoretically, given the close association between the intrinsic value of democracy and the norms, procedures, and institutions that are promoted to secure and protect people's unalienable rights,

²⁸ Statistically, this may bias subsequent analysis to nonfindings.

²⁹ The Pearson's correlation coefficient between the two factors (excluding Japan as the outlier) at the societal level is 0.588 with a *p*-value of 0.074.

Table 4. Appreciation of the Intrinsic Value of Democracy in Eleven East Asian Societies

Ranking of the population means of democratic conceptions (factor scores)		Q126 Choosing democracy over economic development
1 (lowest)	Japan	37.67%
2	Thailand	19.39%
3	Singapore	15.22%
4	Taiwan	15.28%
5	Mainland China	23.38%
6	Indonesia	9.8%
7	South Korea	23.19%
8	Malaysia	19.41%
9	Mongolia	28.24%
10	Cambodia	26.84%
11 (highest)	Philippines	23.10%

Source: ABS III ($N = 17108$).

Note: Weighted percentages in cells.

liberty, and freedom, I expected those who appreciate democracy as more than just an effective means to good governance, *ceteris paribus*, to be more likely to embrace the procedure-based conception of democracy. Moreover, I did not expect this relationship to vary dramatically across societies with distinct political contexts. The following hypothesis was tested:

H3: People who cherish the intrinsic value of democracy are more inclined to understand democracy as understood in the procedure-based conception.

Important Controls

To comprehensively explore the possible origins of democratic conceptions in the East Asian societies, I also incorporated some important factors that have been suggested by existing research. People's demographic features, including their age (SE3A), gender (SE2), educational attainment (SE5), and family income (SE13a), were incorporated to account for the possible stratification of democratic conceptions along these dimensions, thanks to the slow but continual socialization and modernization processes.³⁰ To

³⁰ Ronald Inglehart and Christian Welzel, "Changing Mass Priorities: The Link between Modernization and Democracy," *Perspectives on Politics* 8, no. 2 (2010): 551-567.

control for the respondents' socio-psychological and cognitive features, their general political interest (Q43) and internal political efficacy (Q134) were also included. Respondents' exposure to different sources of information also was expected to be relevant to their democratic conceptions, given the salience of "cosmopolitan communication" in shaping people's attitudes and even values.³¹ Their access to domestic information was measured by their frequency of political news consumption (Q44). Their possible access to foreign information was measured by two indicators: the frequency of using the Internet (Q45) and accessing foreign programs through television, movies, radios, or DVDs (Q150). Moreover, given the significant role of individualism in contemporary literature on popular understandings of democracy,³² respondents' latent factor scores of individualism also were included.³³

Statistically, OLS regressions are sufficient for this essay's empirical analysis, given the continuous nature of the factor scores of democratic conceptions. Furthermore, in order to effectively capture the possible moderating effects of political contexts and facilitate the comparison, eleven parallel OLS regressions were run with the identical model specification. Results of the eleven OLS regressions are presented in table 5.³⁴

Overall, the individual-level statistical analysis is not highly satisfying, given the listed R-square statistics that range between 2 and 9 percent.³⁵ However, the variables measuring people's instrumental concerns and assessment, as well as their appreciation of the intrinsic value of democracy, perform as theoretically expected in shaping the surveyed East Asians' democratic conceptions.

In mature democracies, such as Japan and Taiwan, people who think that government officials often are not effectively punished for their committed crimes, or who complain about the government's nonresponsiveness, show a significantly higher propensity to prioritize social equity or good government as essential characteristics of democracy. It seems that, due to the lack of an appealing political alternative with distinct institutional settings, the residents of mature democracies place more emphasis on effectively enforcing existing institutions and procedures to supervise the government and its officials and

³¹ Pippa Norris and Ronald Inglehart, *Cosmopolitan Communications* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

³² Shin, *Confucianism and Democratization in East Asia*, and Constance A. Flanagan, Leslie S. Galloway, Sukhdeep Gill, Erin Galloway, and Naana Nti, "What Does Democracy Mean? Correlates of Adolescents' Views," *Journal of Adolescent Research* 20, no. 2 (2005): 193-218.

³³ Three indicators of individualism (Q50, Q51, and Q52) were used. A CFA model was run to extract the factor scores of individualism based on the three indicators.

³⁴ I also ran similar analyses for all twelve East Asian societies and the key findings hold. Results are found in the appendix of this essay as table A2.

³⁵ Actually, the R-statistics reported here are close to those of existing research that uses comparative survey data to examine popular understandings of democracy.

Table 5. OLS on Origins of Democratic Conceptions in Eleven East Asian Societies

<i>Demographic features</i>	Liberal Democracy					Electoral Democracy					Electoral Authoritarian Regime					One-Party Authoritarian Regime	
	Japan	South Korea	Taiwan	Mongolia	Philippines	Thailand	Indonesia	Singapore	Cambodia	Malaysia	Malindian China	Vietnam					
Age	0.001 (0.000)*	0.000 (0.000)	0.000 (0.000)	-0.001 (0.000)*	0.000 (0.000)	0.000 (0.000)	0.000 (0.000)	0.000 (0.000)	0.000 (0.001)	0.001 (0.000)*	-0.001 (0.000)*						
Male	0.021 (0.006)*	0.013 (0.007)	0.007 (0.006)	-0.001 (0.007)	0.000 (0.006)	0.011 (0.006)	-0.002 (0.009)	0.007 (0.008)	0.020 (0.007)*	0.004 (0.006)	0.020 (0.004)*						
Education	0.004 (0.002)*	0.004 (0.003)	0.001 (0.002)	0.003 (0.001)*	0.001 (0.002)	0.002 (0.002)	0.003 (0.002)	-0.002 (0.002)	0.007 (0.002)*	0.003 (0.002)	0.001 (0.001)						
Family income	-0.000 (0.004)	-0.001 (0.004)	0.009 (0.004)*	0.012 (0.005)*	-0.008 (0.004)*	0.006 (0.004)	0.004 (0.005)	0.012 (0.007)	-0.001 (0.003)	0.005 (0.003)	0.006 (0.002)*						
<i>Socio-psychological features</i>																	
Political interest	0.005 (0.004)	-0.001 (0.004)	0.012 (0.004)*	0.001 (0.005)	-0.002 (0.004)	0.012 (0.005)*	0.003 (0.004)	-0.006 (0.006)	-0.005 (0.004)	0.009 (0.004)*	-0.008 (0.003)*						
Internal political efficacy	0.004 (0.003)	-0.002 (0.004)	0.017 (0.005)*	-0.001 (0.004)	-0.004 (0.003)	-0.002 (0.005)	0.019 (0.008)*	0.027 (0.006)*	-0.003 (0.004)	0.007 (0.004)	0.012 (0.004)*						
<i>Information access</i>																	
Exposure to political news	-0.002 (0.004)	0.002 (0.004)	0.001 (0.003)	0.002 (0.004)	0.004 (0.003)	0.012 (0.004)*	0.001 (0.004)	-0.009 (0.005)	0.007 (0.003)*	0.005 (0.003)	-0.002 (0.002)						
Internet usage	0.004 (0.003)	0.000 (0.003)	0.005 (0.003)	-0.003 (0.003)	0.002 (0.004)	-0.005 (0.004)	0.000 (0.006)	0.006 (0.004)	-0.008 (0.007)	0.007 (0.003)*	-0.001 (0.002)						
Accessing foreign programs	0.002 (0.002)	0.000 (0.003)	-0.001 (0.002)	0.006 (0.003)*	0.000 (0.003)	0.000 (0.002)	0.003 (0.002)	-0.003 (0.003)	0.001 (0.003)	-0.002 (0.002)	0.005 (0.002)*						
<i>Governance issues</i>																	
Officials unpunished for crimes	-0.007 (0.003)*	0.004 (0.004)	-0.011 (0.004)*	-0.002 (0.004)	0.000 (0.003)	0.006 (0.004)	-0.004 (0.005)	0.001 (0.007)	0.001 (0.003)	0.001 (0.004)	0.007 (0.003)*						
Leaders breaking law	0.002 (0.004)	0.003 (0.005)	0.002 (0.004)	0.004 (0.004)	0.003 (0.003)	0.007 (0.003)*	0.008 (0.007)	0.019 (0.008)*	0.004 (0.004)	0.004 (0.004)	0.001 (0.003)						
Government's non-responsiveness	-0.015 (0.005)*	-0.007 (0.005)	0.008 (0.005)	-0.006 (0.006)	0.010 (0.004)*	0.006 (0.005)	0.003 (0.006)	0.012 (0.007)	0.009 (0.004)*	0.015 (0.005)*	0.003 (0.003)						
<i>Normative orientations</i>																	
Democracy over economic growth	0.011 (0.005)*	0.024 (0.008)*	0.052 (0.008)*	0.015 (0.007)*	0.004 (0.008)	0.018 (0.007)*	-0.004 (0.011)	0.000 (0.012)	0.018 (0.008)*	-0.001 (0.007)	0.022 (0.005)*						
Individualism	0.005 (0.009)	-0.007 (0.010)	-0.002 (0.011)	0.001 (0.012)	0.001 (0.010)	0.047 (0.015)*	-0.015 (0.012)	-0.006 (0.014)	-0.010 (0.011)	-0.004 (0.010)	-0.007 (0.008)						
Intercept	-0.093 (0.030)*	-0.040 (0.034)	-0.124 (0.031)*	0.006 (0.031)	0.009 (0.027)	-0.169 (0.028)*	-0.114 (0.042)*	-0.130 (0.041)*	-0.023 (0.026)	-0.153 (0.024)*	-0.059 (0.025)*						
<i>Model fit statistics</i>																	
R-squared	5.70%	2.78%	8.80%	4.00%	1.75%	7.24%	3.68%	8.50%	5.82%	6.27%	6.02%						
Used Obs.	1707	1095	1417	1077	1128	1036	1139	689	1097	1021	2413						
N	1880	1207	1592	1210	1200	1512	1550	1000	1200	1214	3413	1191					

Source: ABS III (N = 18229).

Notes: * $p < 0.05$ for two-tailed tests.
 Sampling weight incorporated for estimation.
 Robust standard errors in parentheses.

to address their governance problems. For them, a genuine democracy should move beyond the already established institutions/procedures and deliver good governance to better realize its true value. Consequently, unsatisfied citizens of mature democracies are more inclined to prioritize social equity or good government in their conceptions of democracy.

In contrast, in new democracies (such as the Philippines and Thailand), or in authoritarian societies (such as Singapore, Cambodia, Malaysia, and mainland China), people's negative assessment of government officials, leaders, or their government's responsiveness is significantly associated with a higher propensity to identify norms, procedures, freedom, or liberty as defining features of democracy. It seems that, for the residents of societies with insufficient or limited experience with democratic politics, a true democracy with high-quality democratic institutions and procedures offers them a tangible political alternative that is expected to more effectively address all the governance problems they witness. Thus, they are more inclined to push for further institutional building and improvement, or even for a fundamental transformation of existing institutions. Accordingly, these unsatisfied citizens of new democracies or authoritarian societies are more inclined to emphasize norms, procedures, freedom, or liberty as essential characteristics of democracy.

To ease readers' understanding of the varying relationships between the East Asians' perceived governance problems and their democratic conceptions under distinct political contexts, I ran some simulations for the democratic conceptions of typical citizens (whose various features were fixed at the respective mean/median of their national samples) from different societies, as their evaluations of their government's performance deteriorated. The upper section of table 6 shows the relative changes—calculated in terms of the number of standard deviations—in the factor score of the democratic conception of a typical citizen from Japan, Taiwan, and mainland China, as his assessed frequency that government officials are not effectively punished for their committed crimes increased from “Rarely” to “Always.” The lower section of table 6 presents the relative changes for a typical citizen from Japan, the Philippines, and Malaysia, as his perceived government's responsiveness to people's needs decreased from “Very responsive” to “Not responsive at all.”

As clearly shown in the upper section of table 6, in both Japan and Taiwan, as their typical citizens held a more negative view of how government officials were not effectively punished for their committed crimes, their factor scores of democratic conceptions dropped, indicating a higher propensity to embrace the substance-based conception. The situation is reversed in mainland China: as a typical Chinese citizen's belief in how government officials were not effectively punished for their committed crimes worsened, his predicted factor score of democratic conception actually increased, suggesting a significantly higher propensity to embrace the procedure-based conception. The lower section of table 6 tells a similar story. The predicted

Table 6. Relative Changes in Democratic Conceptions as the Assessment of Governance Quality Deteriorates

Government officials unpunished for crimes (Q108)	Relative changes in the factor scores of democratic concepton for a typical citizen (starndard deviations)		
	Japan	Taiwan	Mainland China
“Rarely ” to “Sometimes ”	-0.06	-0.11	0.06
“Rarely ” to “Most of the time ”	-0.12	-0.21	0.12
“Rarely ” to “Always ”	-0.19	-0.31	0.18
Government’s responsivenss to people’s needs (Q113)	Japan	Philippines	Malaysia
“Very responsive ” to “Lagely responsive ”	-0.15	0.10	0.16
“Very responsive ” to “Not very responsive ”	-0.30	0.19	0.33
“Very responsive ” to “Not responsive at all ”	-0.45	0.29	0.49

Source: ABS III (*N* = 18229).

Note: Relative changes calculated on the basis on predicted values.

factors scores of democratic conceptions of typical citizens of the Philippines and Malaysia increased dramatically, as they held a more negative view of their governments’ responsiveness to people’s needs. Conversely, in Japan, the relationship is reversed: the predicted factor score of democratic conception for a typical Japanese citizen plummeted substantially, as his evaluation of the government’s responsiveness deteriorated. In summary, in mature democracies (such as Japan and Taiwan), people’s negative views of their government’s performance tend to shift their democratic conceptions by attaching more salience to democracy’s substantive outputs; in new democracies (such as the Philippines) and authoritarian societies (such as Malaysia and mainland China), negative evaluations tend to shift their citizens’ democratic conceptions by placing more emphasis on liberty and freedom, as well as on democratic procedures and institutions.

Different from the impacts of the aforementioned instrumental concerns of democracy, people’s appreciation of democracy’s intrinsic value generally makes them more likely to embrace the procedure-based democratic conception, regardless of their surrounding political contexts. Whether in mature democracies (Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan), new democracies (Mongolia and Thailand), or authoritarian societies (Cambodia and mainland China), there is persistent and significant evidence for the positive relationship between people’s appreciation of the intrinsic value of democracy and their significantly higher propensity for prioritizing norms, procedures, freedom, or liberty as essential characteristics of democracy. In other words, the more attracted they are to democracy for its own good, the more likely they are to embrace the procedure-based democratic conception.

Conclusions and Suggestions

People have different understandings of democracy and the varying democratic conceptions have serious implications for people's political behavior and attitudes in both democracies and authoritarian societies. Despite the accumulated knowledge from existing research, our understanding of the varying democratic conceptions is still in a preliminary stage. More systematic empirical evidence and better refined theoretical frameworks are needed to further our knowledge in this field. To contribute some systematic evidence from East Asia and extend this line of research, this essay has used a new survey battery from the third wave of the ABS to examine democratic conceptions in twelve East Asian societies and to explore their possible origins under distinct political contexts.

Building upon the qualitative analysis of the public opinion data on popular understandings of democracy collected through the conventional open-ended question in its previous two waves of surveys, the ABS designed a new survey battery for its third wave with a close-ended format to gauge democratic conceptions in East Asian societies. This new survey instrument eases implementation in the field, increases the quality of collected data, and enables more systematic and rigorous cross-regional comparative research, without compromising the flexibility of post-survey analysis in various theoretically meaningful ways. It also includes multiple indicators to decrease the possible influence of measurement errors on statistical inferences.

To facilitate the dialogue with existing research that uses survey data from other regions of the world, this essay has followed a widely adopted theoretical framework that differentiates between substance-based and procedure-based democratic conceptions for analysis. The results of CFA analysis generally confirm the validity of this new survey instrument. Except in Vietnam, primarily due to a very high rate of item nonresponse, this new battery has successfully passed various statistical tests in the remaining eleven societies. It also effectively taps the surveyed East Asians' latent propensity to understand democracy in different ways. More specifically, this latent construct falls on a unidimensional continuous spectrum, ranging from the lowest end of a substance-based democratic conception (which solely prioritizes social equity or good government as essential characteristics of democracy) to the highest end of a procedure-based democratic conception (which exclusively emphasizes norms, procedures, freedom, or liberty as defining features of democracy), with mixed views in between. Further examinations of the distributional features of the factor scores of democratic conceptions reveal that the substance-based democratic conception has won the hearts and minds of a majority of East Asians, including those who have been the citizens of mature democracies, such as Japan, Taiwan, and South Korea, for quite a while. Meanwhile, most of the variation in the East Asians' democratic conceptions comes from domestic sources, rather than from cross-society differences.

Parallel OLS regressions for the eleven East Asian societies (excluding Vietnam, due to its serious item nonresponse) demonstrate that the East Asians' instrumental assessment of democracy, as well as their appreciation of the intrinsic value of democracy, plays a significant role in shaping how they understand democracy. Further, the former's influence is highly conditioned by the political context under examination. More specifically, in mature democracies, bad governance pushes their citizens to prioritize social equity or good government as essential characteristics of democracy, while in new democracies or authoritarian societies, bad governance pushes their citizens to internalize the procedure-based democratic conception. Distinct political contexts and varying experiences with democracy in practice seem to have significantly moderated the relationship between governance quality and democratic conceptions in East Asian societies. Conversely, East Asians' appreciation of the intrinsic value of democracy generally makes them more inclined to embrace the procedure-based conception of democracy (i.e., with more emphasis on norms, procedures, liberty, or freedom as defining features of democracy), regardless of their political contexts.

The significant role of political contexts in moderating the relationship between governance quality and democratic conceptions in East Asian societies actually raises a critical question for contemporary literature on popular understandings of democracy. Although we might be able to effectively conceptualize and measure various democratic conceptions using one coherent theoretical framework (e.g., such as the substance-based versus procedure-based conception) under different political contexts, is it also possible to use one coherent framework to understand the implications and consequences of varying democratic conceptions in societies with distinct experiences of democracy in practice? For instance, in mature democracies such as Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan, the substance-based democratic conception does not necessarily suggest any rejection of the democratic system embodied in well-established institutions, procedures, and norms. The citizens who have embraced the substance-based democratic conception in these societies may simply want improved enforcement of existing institutions and procedures. For them, there is no essential conflict between securing good governance and sustaining a genuine democracy. However, the dynamics in new democracies or authoritarian societies could be very different, and the stakes involved could be much higher. For example, in authoritarian societies such as mainland China and Vietnam, the substance-based democratic conception may have serious implications for possible regime change. The authoritarian leaders have every incentive to avoid establishing a genuine democracy that features, *inter alia*, checks and balances, transparent and competitive party politics, and institutionalized protection of basic individual rights. Those citizens who have embraced the substance-based conception of democracy might be led astray and indoctrinated to believe that their authoritarian regime is democratic in nature as long as it continuously generates satisfying governance. Also, these

governments might be significantly less responsive to the call for democratic reform. In other words, these citizens could (though unconsciously) forsake the opportunity of establishing a genuine democracy, thanks to their substance-based conception of democracy. Therefore, future studies on popular understandings of democracy, particularly their implications for political attitudes and behavior, should pay special attention to the moderating role of political contexts.

Appendix

Table A1. Hierarchical ANOVA Model on Democratic Conceptions in Eleven East Asian Societies

<i>Variance components</i>	
Individual level	0.0104*
Country level	0.0006*
<i>Inter-class correlation</i>	
ICC	5.45%

Source: ABS III (N =17108).
 Note: * $p < 0.05$ for two-tailed tests.

Table A2. OLS on Origins of Democratic Conceptions in Twelve East Asian Societies

<i>Demographic features</i>	Liberal Democracy						Electoral Democracy						Electoral Authoritarian Regime			One-Party Authoritarian Regime	
	Japan	South Korea	Taiwan	Mongolia	Philippines	Thailand	Indonesia	Singapore	Cambodia	Malaysia	Mainland China	Vietnam					
Age	0.001 (0.000)*	0.000 (0.001)	-0.001 (0.001)	-0.001 (0.000)*	0.001 (0.001)	0.000 (0.001)	0.001 (0.001)	0.000 (0.001)	0.000 (0.001)	0.001 (0.000)*	-0.001 (0.000)*	0.001 (0.001)					
Male	0.022 (0.006)*	0.013 (0.007)	0.008 (0.006)	-0.002 (0.007)	-0.001 (0.001)	0.011 (0.007)	-0.003 (0.009)	0.007 (0.009)	0.021 (0.007)*	0.004 (0.006)	0.022 (0.004)*	-0.014 (0.011)					
Education	0.005 (0.002)*	0.004 (0.003)	0.001 (0.002)	0.003 (0.001)*	0.001 (0.002)	0.002 (0.002)	0.003 (0.002)	-0.001 (0.002)	0.007 (0.002)*	0.003 (0.002)	0.001 (0.001)	0.011 (0.003)*					
Family income	0.000 (0.004)	-0.001 (0.004)	0.008 (0.005)	0.012 (0.005)*	-0.008 (0.004)*	0.006 (0.004)	0.004 (0.005)	0.012 (0.007)	-0.001 (0.003)	0.004 (0.004)	0.006 (0.003)*	0.007 (0.007)					
<i>Socio-psychological features</i>																	
Political interest	0.004 (0.004)	0.000 (0.005)	0.012 (0.004)*	0.001 (0.005)	-0.002 (0.004)	0.012 (0.005)*	0.002 (0.005)	-0.007 (0.006)	-0.006 (0.004)	0.008 (0.004)*	-0.008 (0.003)*	-0.003 (0.010)					
Internal political efficacy	0.004 (0.003)	-0.002 (0.004)	0.018 (0.005)*	0.000 (0.004)	-0.005 (0.003)	-0.003 (0.005)	0.020 (0.008)*	0.027 (0.006)*	-0.003 (0.004)	0.007 (0.004)	0.012 (0.004)*	0.001 (0.006)					
<i>Information access</i>																	
Exposure to political news	-0.001 (0.004)	0.001 (0.004)	0.001 (0.003)	0.002 (0.004)	0.004 (0.003)	0.013 (0.004)*	0.001 (0.004)	-0.009 (0.004)*	0.007 (0.003)*	0.005 (0.002)*	-0.002 (0.002)	0.020 (0.009)*					
Internet usage	0.004 (0.003)	0.000 (0.003)	0.004 (0.003)	-0.004 (0.003)	0.003 (0.004)	-0.006 (0.004)	0.000 (0.006)	0.006 (0.004)	-0.008 (0.007)	0.007 (0.003)*	-0.001 (0.002)	0.009 (0.006)					
Accessing foreign programs	0.002 (0.002)	0.000 (0.003)	-0.001 (0.002)	0.006 (0.002)*	0.000 (0.003)	0.001 (0.002)	0.003 (0.002)	-0.002 (0.004)	0.001 (0.003)	-0.002 (0.002)	0.006 (0.002)*	0.001 (0.004)					
<i>Governance issues</i>																	
Officials unpunished for crimes	-0.015 (0.006)*	0.006 (0.007)	-0.015 (0.006)*	0.001 (0.008)	-0.003 (0.007)	0.015 (0.007)*	0.001 (0.009)	0.012 (0.016)	0.005 (0.007)	0.000 (0.008)	0.011 (0.007)	0.020 (0.016)					
Leaders breaking law	0.001 (0.006)	0.007 (0.008)	0.001 (0.007)	0.000 (0.009)	0.010 (0.007)	0.020 (0.008)*	-0.006 (0.009)	0.073 (0.022)*	0.001 (0.009)	0.002 (0.008)	-0.006 (0.005)	0.026 (0.018)					
Government's non-responsiveness	-0.021 (0.006)*	-0.002 (0.007)	0.011 (0.006)	-0.015 (0.010)	0.014 (0.006)*	0.003 (0.007)	0.009 (0.008)	0.019 (0.009)*	0.010 (0.007)	0.022 (0.007)*	0.011 (0.007)	0.008 (0.016)					
<i>Normative orientations</i>																	
Democracy over economic growth	0.013 (0.006)*	0.025 (0.008)*	0.054 (0.009)*	0.015 (0.007)*	0.004 (0.008)	0.020 (0.008)*	-0.005 (0.012)	-0.002 (0.012)	0.019 (0.008)*	-0.002 (0.008)	0.021 (0.005)*	0.038 (0.015)*					
Individualism	0.006 (0.010)	-0.007 (0.011)	-0.001 (0.011)	0.002 (0.012)	0.001 (0.011)	0.047 (0.016)*	-0.015 (0.013)	-0.006 (0.014)	-0.010 (0.011)	-0.003 (0.010)	-0.009 (0.008)	0.027 (0.038)					
Intecept	-0.128 (0.025)*	-0.046 (0.031)	-0.121 (0.028)	0.003 (0.027)	0.035 (0.025)	-0.132 (0.026)*	-0.095 (0.030)*	-0.092 (0.037)*	-0.005 (0.023)	-0.108 (0.022)*	-0.038 (0.021)*	-0.247 (0.037)*					
<i>Model fit statistics</i>																	
R-squared	0.060	0.027	0.086	0.041	0.017	0.074	0.033	0.098	0.055	0.055	0.063	0.277					
Used Obs.	1707	1095	1417	1077	1128	1036	1139	689	1097	1021	2413	226					
N	1880	1207	1592	1210	1200	1512	1550	1000	1200	1214	3413	1191					

Source: ABS III (N = 18229).

Notes: * $p < 0.05$ for two-tailed tests.

Sampling weight incorporated for estimation.

Robust standard errors in parentheses.