

Democratic Development and Economic Development:
Linkages and Policy Imperatives¹

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For the Democracy and Development Round Table,
International IDEA and the Center for the Study of Developing Societies
New Delhi, 17-18 June, 2008

Few subjects in the comparative study of democracy have attracted more scholarly attention and more intellectual debate than the relationship between democracy and development. The issues are multifold but come down to understanding the reciprocal relationship. What impact does economic development have on the type of political system in a country: democracy or not, and if democracy, how democratic? And what impact does democracy—and in particular, the form or degree of democracy—have on the prospects for rapid and broad-based economic development?

There are a number of assumptions in the established academic literatures on these issues that I want to call into question here. First there is the longstanding proposition that the prospects for democracy are closely related to the level of economic development, and therefore that democratic prospects are poor in poor countries. Related to this is the idea, second, that the poor do not care about political and civil rights, or that they are in no position to care until their basic economic needs are met. There is as well a raft of arguments about the impact of type of regime on economic development. In this paper, I will not systematically address this other end of the equation. My point here, briefly, is that we ask the wrong question when we pose it this way, and that we need to look at more specific institutional features of a regime. This relates to the third question, what is the impact on democracy of the economic performance of the system? The

assumption has been that democracy must deliver the economic goods if it is to survive. Without question, this is important, but we must not neglect the questions of political process and of distributive equity. In essence, I will argue here that the poor care about and need democracy as much as the wealthy; that more poor countries are democracies today than ever before; that the survival of democracy in low and lower-middle income countries depends heavily but not exclusively or even immediately on economic performance; and that the two key challenges are first to improve the quality and accountability of democracy, and second to devise specific and effective policies to reduce poverty and social injustice.

Before proceeding, I must make clear the strictly political sense in which I am using the term “democracy.” At a minimum, democracy is a system of government in which all (or virtually all) adult citizens can choose their leaders and replace their leaders in regular, free, fair, and competitive (multiparty) elections. Even this merely “electoral” form of democracy requires some significant levels of freedom in politics and public space and of neutrality in the administration of elections in order to ensure the democratic character of elections.² However, I will argue that to advance broad-based development—in other words, genuine human development, which encompasses not just improvement in per capita income but a fair distribution of income and life opportunities, and broadly improving levels of education and health—a higher level of democracy is required. My principal argument is that democracy advances broad-based development to the extent that it reflects these dimensions of democratic quality:

- Extensive *freedom* for citizens and groups to express their opinions and beliefs, organize, petition, demonstrate, write, speak, and broadcast.

- Extensive pluralism in the sources of information and sources of organization independent of the state—in other words, an open and vigorous civil society.
- Equality of all citizens before the law and in their rights and abilities to express and secure their interests.
- Genuine and diverse opportunities at all levels of formal and informal power for citizens to participate in the decisions that affect their lives and hold political authorities accountable.
- A rule of law, protected and upheld by an independent judiciary, that treats all citizens equally, ensures human rights, and that holds government officials, local power brokers, and the privileged accountable before the law.
- Institutional checks on the power of elected officials by an independent legislature, the courts, counter-corruption commissions, auditing agencies, and other instruments of “horizontal accountability.”
- A high degree of transparency in the way that government conducts its affairs, affording citizens widespread access to information.
- Civilian democratic control of the military and state security apparatus.

A democratic system, then, will be much more likely to advance broad-based development to the extent that it is deep and genuine in these respects: competitive, participatory, vertically accountable to citizens, horizontally accountable in its relations

among institutions, bound by a rule of law, transparent in its functioning, limiting of corruption, affirming of citizen equality, and responsive to citizen needs and concerns.

Democracy and Development

Over the last half century, the notion that there is a strong association between a country's level of economic development and its likelihood of being a democracy has been one of the most prominent theories of the social sciences, and one of the best sustained by the evidence. Since 1959, when Seymour Martin Lipset published his famous essay, "Some Social Requisites of Democracy," one study after another, using a variety of statistical methods, has documented the powerful relationship between economic development and democracy.³

At the upper end of the continuum of development, the relationship remains quite striking. The UN Development Program annually ranks 177 countries on its "Human Development Index," which takes into account per capita national income, life expectancy at birth, and average levels of knowledge (mainly, the adult literacy rate).⁴ Of the 25 independent countries with the highest level of "human development," only Singapore is not a democracy. Of the 40 most developed countries, only three small oil-rich monarchies, Kuwait, Bahrain, and Brunei, join the list of nondemocracies. In the 50 wealthiest countries, there are only two more authoritarian exceptions, Qatar and the United Arab Emirates, which are also small, oil-rich states.⁵

The association between economic development and freedom—political rights and civil liberties, as measured annually by Freedom House—is no less striking.⁶ In fact, the 44 democracies among the world's 50 most developed states are all liberal

democracies, save for the tiny island country of Seychelles. Most of them (38 of the 44) have the highest freedom ratings granted by Freedom House on both political rights and civil liberties. Illiberal democracies now only emerge at lower levels of economic development.

At the lower end of the spectrum of countries, however, the relationship between development and democracy has eroded dramatically in recent years, as a surprising number of poor countries have adopted democratic systems. Of the 22 countries ranking low on the latest UNDP Human Development Index (HDI, for 2005), 9 of them (41%) are at least electoral democracies. Of the next 37 countries (low-medium HDI), 14 (38%) are democracies. If we take the bottom third of the distribution of countries, in all, 39% (23 of 59) relatively poor countries are democracies today. To be sure, many of these are low-quality, illiberal democracies, with very serious problems of governance, and in some cases one could debate whether they even meet the test of electoral democracy.⁷ Still, there is no historical precedent for so many poor countries in the world being democracies.

There is debate about the grounds for this association between development and democracy, and between development and freedom. Some social scientists have suggested that democracies produce more rapid economic development, but the evidence is murky. For a time, there was a vogue for the argument that it was because democracy had emerged in the West, and the West, with its Protestant, capitalist, and liberal traditions, was better poised for development; thus, development followed or coincided with democracy. That causal just-so story turned out to be untenable when a number of poorer countries in Asia and Latin America developed and then became democracies.

Clearly, countries could develop economically and then transition to democracy, regardless of their region and history: An authoritarian regime could lift the country into middle or upper-middle income status, and then give way to democracy. Indeed, outside the West, the relationship between democracy and development is very strong. Stanford economist Henry Rowen found in 1990 that the positive association between economic development and freedom remains powerful even when the rich Western democracies are excluded. In fact, the strong correlation between economic development and freedom levels holds as well *within* all but one of the major cultural groupings of countries that Huntington labeled “civilizations.” The exception: the Islamic civilization, and there the exceptional group is not all Muslim-majority countries, but the Arab world. Rowen concluded, “These results support the interpretation that the wealth-democracy nexus is more than just a Western phenomenon.”⁸

Of course, this still leaves open two possibilities. One is that development makes transitions to democracy more likely. The other—Lipset’s original argument—is that development sustains democracy whenever it emerges. Both appear to be true. A comprehensive study of regime change between 1850 and 1990 found that per capita income levels have a strong positive effect on transitions to democracy. This was especially true before World War II, but the effect remains strong today at lower to moderate levels of development. “More development always increases the probability that a transition to democracy will occur.”⁹

Studying the narrower period of 1950 to 1990, Adam Przeworski and his colleagues showed that economic development powerfully maintains democracy—the poorer the country, the greater the likelihood of a breakdown of democracy. In the

poorest countries, democracy had a 12 percent chance of collapsing in any given year (yielding a democratic regime “life expectancy” of eight years). At the next level of income, the expected duration increased to eighteen years, and so on, up to the level of per capita income Argentina had in 1975, about \$9300,¹⁰ and no democracy above that level broke down during the four decades (and since then, none ever has).¹¹ If one examines the fifty-eight countries in the world today that lie above that income level, a striking rule emerges. Aside from the eight countries that derive the bulk of their national income from oil—which distorts politics, social structure, and development in ways I examined in chapter 3—there are only two non-democratic countries in the world richer than Argentina was in 1975: Singapore and Malaysia.¹² It is also worth noting that during this latter phase of the Third Wave of global democratization (beginning around 1990), several of the low-income democracies in the world—such as Mali, Malawi, and Benin—have now survived well beyond the eight year life expectancy predicted by Przeworski and his colleagues. Among the bottom third of countries in terms of human development, democracy has been in place for over four decades in Botswana, for over half a century in India (with only a brief interruption), and for almost two decades in Namibia.

Social Change, and Attitude and Value Change

Economic development transforms a society in several ways that make it more difficult to sustain the concentration of power in one man, one party, or a narrow, unaccountable elite. First, it alters a country’s social and economic structure, widely dispersing power and resources. Second, it profoundly shifts attitudes and values in a democratic direction.

On the structural side, economic development enlarges the middle class and raises levels of education and information among the general public. After a country attains a middling level of development and national income, inequality tends to fall, reducing the social distance, and political polarization, between classes. For Lipset, well before the democratic boom of the third wave, this was a crucial factor in making democracy feasible: “Economic development, producing increased income, greater economic security, and widespread higher education, largely determines the form of the ‘class struggle’ by permitting those in the lower strata to develop longer time perspectives and more complex and gradualist views of politics.”¹³ In recent years, Princeton University political scientist Carles Boix has shown that this is not just theory. As countries develop, incomes do become more equally distributed, which diminishes the threat of excessive taxation and intense class conflict and enables the wealthy to tolerate the uncertainties of dispensing with authoritarian rule—and the less well off to be patient for change. Hence, greater equality increases the chances both for a transition to democracy and then for its survival.¹⁴

Often, economic development also realigns interest coalitions, as shrewder or more visionary elites realize that the withering of extremist threats renders a dictator obsolete; that uneven development under authoritarian rule—as in Brazil and South Africa—must be mitigated to preserve the state’s stability; or that newly assertive social groups must be incorporated into the political system. In large part, this may be because as more people join the middle class, the power of populist labor and peasant organizations declines. In such populations flushed with economic development, middle

class groups “became increasingly confident of their ability to advance their interests through electoral politics.”¹⁵

This newly emerging middle class may embrace what the late social scientist Daniel Lerner calls “psychic mobility.”¹⁶ As people leave the countryside for the cities, cutting their ties to traditional oligarchs, bosses, or *caciques*, they also adopt new political attitudes and beliefs, transformed by rising education levels and expanding, and increasingly global, communication. With development, the quantity and variety of information available explodes, and more important, control over it is dispersed. Radios, satellite television dishes, computers, Internet access, cell phones, text messaging, and other technology become physically and financially accessible to a much wider range of people. With recent technological revolutions, the ability to generate information and opinion has been radically decentralized through low-cost FM radio, cable television stations, and Web-based blogs and international news sources, all of which are more difficult for authoritarian regimes to control than past mass media. As people acquire more income and information, they become more politically aware and confident, more inclined to participate in politics, to think for themselves, and thus to break free of traditional patron-client ties.

With these sweeping social and psychological changes, people in growing numbers form and join organizations—including professional and student associations, trade unions, human rights and civic groups—to service their interests and needs. As these independent organizations grow in number, resources, and sophistication, they become more assertive and more capable of checking and challenging the state, generating the

foundations for a vibrant civil society. So as a country gets richer, the balance of power shifts from the state to the society.

Most striking, however, is the wealth of data that has accumulated to show that as people's lives are transformed by economic development, they increasingly espouse democratic values: the higher the levels of education, income, mass media exposure, and occupational status, the more democratic the people's attitudes, values, and behavior. In particular, more educated people tend to be more tolerant of differences and opposition, more respectful of minority rights, more valuing of freedom, and more trustful of other people. They are more inclined to participate in politics and to join organizations and more confident of their capacities to influence government.¹⁷ Some of these democratic values—trust, tolerance, anti-authoritarianism, and confidence in one's ability to influence politics—even appear to be fostered simply by living in a more developed country, independent of the individual's socioeconomic status.¹⁸

The most recent, comprehensive, and ambitious analysis of the relationship between development, value change, and democracy comes from Ronald Inglehart of the University of Michigan, the founder of the World Values Survey, who has been analyzing global trends in basic value orientations for over thirty years. Inglehart began in the 1970s with a simple thesis, based on the psychologist Abraham Maslow's theory of a hierarchy of human needs. According to Maslow, the "lower order" needs for safety, security, and sustenance take precedence until they are met, after which people will give priority to such "higher order" needs as belonging, esteem, and self-expression. Through an ingenious research design, Inglehart showed, initially across a number of Western societies, that people who grew up in periods of economic prosperity and security tended

to have “postmaterialist” values, emphasizing (for example) freedom and the environment, while those who grew up and had their values formed in periods of economic insecurity and stress tended to have “materialist” values (emphasizing economic and physical security). With economic development and generational change, there was a marked shift over time from materialist to postmaterialist values.¹⁹

As the World Values Survey expanded to include a eighty-one countries in every major region of the world, Inglehart and the German political scientist Christian Welzel dug into four waves of surveys conducted between 1981 and 2001 to assess what impact this value distinction might have on democracy. Their results are stunning. Adding to the materialist/postmaterialist distinction, they analyzed survey questions measuring trust, tolerance of diversity, and willingness to protest, which together yield an assessment of a society’s “survival values” versus “self-expression values,” which emphasize “human autonomy and choice.”²⁰ Societies tend to cluster in consistent ways around these value orientations. The post-Soviet states and low-income developing countries veer strongly toward survival values (and toward more culturally traditional and religious values), while Western, high-income countries bunch around self-expression values (and “secular-rational” values). Middle- and upper-middle income developing countries in Latin America and Asia tend to be in the middle—in what seems a transition toward self-expression values that is quite visible in Korea and Taiwan, despite the supposed “Asian” emphasis on order, authority, and community. Self-expression values flower fully in postindustrial countries, where the service economy dominates and values are shaped by the reality of prosperity and pluralism. Thus, Inglehart and Welzel write, “socioeconomic development tends to propel societies in a common direction”—toward self-expression

values and “emancipation from authority”—“regardless of their cultural heritage.”²¹

Consequently, there is an extremely high correlation between a country’s level of development and its level of self-expression values.²²

This cultural shift toward tolerance, trust in others, suspicion of authority, and valuing of freedom has profound political consequences. For one thing, it generates higher levels of peaceful protest activities (such as petitions, demonstrations, and consumer boycotts) that challenge ruling elites. This effect holds for both old and new democracies, and in the latter case, even well after the surge of mass mobilization to bring down dictatorship has subsided.²³ And as people come to embrace self-expression values, and so to challenge authority, they come to demand democracy—and not just any democracy, but the institutions to protect individual freedom and choice that encompass liberal democracy. The extent of self-expression values in a society, Inglehart and Welzel find, is highly correlated with the extent of democracy, even stronger when measured against the status of liberal democracy (based on Freedom House rankings), and astonishingly so when indexed against the level of “effective democracy” (which also factors in the World Bank’s anticorruption index).²⁴ In fact, “without exception, any society in which more than half the population emphasizes self-expression values scores at least 90 percent of the maximum score on liberal democracy.”²⁵ Moreover, their statistical analysis shows, this is not just an association. Rather, the growth of self-expression values have “a strong causal impact” on the emergence of electoral democracy and effective, liberal democracy, in part because these values generate the associations and civic actions that compel rulers to be more honest, accountable, and respectful of the law.²⁶

From this extraordinary work, we see economic development as an integrated and powerful process unleashing individual choice and autonomy. As people's income, education, access to information, and occupational status rise, they become more independent financially and intellectually. At the same time, they become more socially independent and capable, and thus they more easily form and join organizations and come together to protest. "As growing socioeconomic resources broaden the range of activities that people can choose, self-expression values broaden the range of activities to which they aspire." Sooner or later, people who have become "materially, intellectually, and socially more independent" also want political independence. Thus they are led to give "liberty priority over discipline, diversity over conformity, and autonomy over authority"—and therefore "to seek the civil and political rights that define liberal democracy."²⁷ These value transformations are so ineluctable that Inglehart and Welzel predict that China and Vietnam, with their booming economic growth, will experience transitions to democracy within twenty years, and that Singapore, already developed, will achieve full democracy within ten years. I believe they may be off a bit in their timing, but not in their essential logic.

Is Democracy a Luxury for the Poor?

The above analysis suggests that there is a particularly powerful relationship between economic development and "effective," liberal, or high-quality democracy. It could still be argued, then, that poor people in low-income countries are mainly obsessed with the material struggle for survival, and in manifesting "survival values" they are relatively apathetic about, or unsupportive of, democracy. This does not accord with the

evidence, however. Liberal values of accountability and rule of law are more widespread among the citizenries of more developed countries, but the aspiration for democracy has become surprisingly universal.

To be sure, democracy is weak and is in serious difficulty in many poor and even some middle-income countries. But in most of these countries, the problems of democracy have more to do with the shortcomings and betrayals of elites than the apathy or authoritarian sentiments of the population. If democracy can emerge and persist for more than fifteen years in a destitute, landlocked, overwhelmingly Muslim country like Mali—in which the vast majority of adults are illiterate and live in absolute poverty, and the life expectancy is forty-eight years—then there would seem to be no intrinsic reason why democracy cannot develop in every poor country, and indeed every country.

In fact, a strong case has been made that democracy is not an extravagance for the poor but a necessity. Amartya Sen won the Nobel Prize for Economics in 1998 in part for showing that democracies do not have famines. This is because the relatively free flows of information in a democracy raise the flag on food (and other) emergencies, while the mechanisms of political accountability give politicians a powerful incentive to be responsive. Beyond this, however, Sen argues that people cannot even properly conceive their economic needs until they have some sense of what is feasible—until they determine, through free discussion and information, which types of deprivations are preventable and what can be done about them. Thus, “People in economic need also need a political voice. Democracy is not a luxury that can await the arrival of general prosperity [and] there is very little evidence that poor people, given the choice, prefer to reject democracy.”²⁸ Sen notes the vigor with which Indians defended their freedom and

democracy in the 1977 election, tossing from office the Prime Minister, Indira Gandhi, who had suspended political and civil rights. But there have been countless other instances—from Burma and Bangladesh to Kenya and South Africa—where poor people have mobilized passionately for (and in defense of) democratic change. The fact that they have sometimes, as in Burma, been crushed by sheer force, while a timid world watched and protested ineffectually, does not negate the overwhelming expression of their sentiment. Neither do the pervasive abuses of power and theft of public resources by elites who have been given (or have claimed) the power to rule.

Sen argues that the mark of a universal value is not that it has the consent of everyone, but that “people anywhere may have reason to see it as valuable.”²⁹ By this measure, there is growing evidence of all kinds, as we shall see, that democracy is becoming a truly universal value.

Fortunately, a growing body of data from public opinion surveys is telling us what ordinary people in diverse regions really think about democracy. One way to gauge whether democracy is a universal value is to ask people around the world whether they think democracy is the best form of government. Another way is to see to what extent people living in democracies would approve of some authoritarian form of government instead. Globally, answers to these and related questions show surprisingly high levels of democratic commitment in non-Western societies. Moreover, while regions or cultural groupings (and certainly countries) differ in their levels of commitment to democratic values, those differences are not always in the direction that cultural theories expect.

The most eye-opening public opinion data come from two sources. One is the World Values Survey, a comprehensive survey of attitudes concerning everything from politics to national goals to gender roles. It is conducted about every decade, and the most recent survey (1999-2001) spans eighty countries, from very rich to very poor, that account for approximately 85 percent of the world's population.³⁰ While the survey only contains a few questions on democracy, its advantage is that the questions are worded the same in every country.³¹ Since the mid to late-1990s, a second (and for our purposes, richer) source of data has emerged in the form of regional barometers that periodically assess how citizens feel about democracy, authority, and the performance of their government. The barometers more deeply cover regions with a history of democratic struggle or uncertainty—Latin America, Africa, East Asia, South Asia, postcommunist Europe, and soon (with an Arab Barometer now in formation) the Middle East. However, since they represent several distinct survey projects rather than a single global one, the questions asked are less standardized. This makes comparison more difficult. Nevertheless, these regional barometers of public opinion are increasingly using identical questions, on which we can compare how people from widely divergent cultures and development levels view democracy.

Three questions from the World Values Survey provide a good initial picture of democratic inclinations. First, to what extent do people support democracy, by agreeing with the statement, “Democracy may have its problems, but it’s better than any other form of government”? Second, to what extent do people reveal an authoritarian temptation, by approving the idea of “Having a strong leader who does not have to bother with parliament and elections”? Third, to what extent do people say it would be “a good

thing” if there were “greater respect for authority”—a signal of less liberal values?³² The belief that democracy is (at least in principle) the best system is overwhelming and universal. While there is a slightly higher preference among the Western industrialized countries, in every region—even the former Soviet Union—no less than 80 percent of people on average say democracy is the best system. When the question about democratic preference is worded a little differently, however, people are often much more willing to give a non-democratic answer, even when concrete regime alternatives are posed. So, for example, the idea of a “strong leader” who would override mechanisms of democratic accountability appeals to nearly half of those in the former Soviet Union (and as we will see in chapter 9, an even larger percentage in Russia), an average of 45 percent of respondents in nine Latin American states, about two in five people on average from eleven Asian states (including China and India), and a little over a third of the public in six Middle Eastern Muslim states. This compares to only a quarter of citizens in 22 Western countries and a third in the sixteen countries of Central and Eastern Europe. Finally, majorities in every region would like to see greater respect for authority. But while there is no difference between the slight majorities favoring more respect in the West, Asia, and Eastern Europe, it is clearly desired in the former Soviet Union, and especially in Latin America and the Muslim Middle East.

What do we learn from these regional comparisons, partial though they are in coverage of some of the countries? One lesson is to be wary of the stereotypes and assumptions of culturally based theories. There is a broad desire for democracy in the world, stretching across regions. Even in Africa, the poorest region of the world, there is surprisingly strong commitment to democracy, with three in five citizens, on average,

saying that democracy is preferable to any other form of government—a proportion exceeding those in Latin America and the former Soviet Union.³³ In fact, in every major region outside the West, the majority preference is for democracy. When random, national samples are asked, across each of the regions, whether they think democracy is always the best form of government, or that sometimes an authoritarian government can be preferable, or that to someone like them it doesn't matter, average levels of support for democracy appear as follows:

Table 1, Support for Democracy

Item	Africa 2005	East Asia 2002	South Asia 2004	Latin America, 2007	E. Europe 2004
Support for Democracy	62%	60%	64%	53%	53%
Satisfaction with the way democracy works	45	61	64	31 (in 2005)	38

Support for democracy appears particularly robust in a number of relatively poor African countries:

Table 2, Democratic Orientations in Selected African Countries

Countries	Botswana	S Africa	Kenya	Senegal	Ghana	Nigeria
Democracy Always Pref	69	65	75	75	75	65
Authoritar sometimes	10	10	5	6	7	17
Reject Military rule	80	72	89	81	83	72
Reject 1-party rule	82	66	74	76	82	82
Reject 1-man rule	89	64	88	86	85	75

Yes, outside the West, there is a stronger authoritarian temptation, but in no region does it reach a majority preference on average. And if some non-Western societies may tend toward a less liberal (or illiberal) form of democracy compared to the West, others may approach more closely the Western commitment to liberal values, even in East Asia.

The “Asian Values” Thesis and Economic Development

The public opinion data also sound a rebuttal to the idea, long held by Asian autocrats but also by many in the West, that Asians, and more specifically East Asians, manifest more authoritarian, communitarian, and illiberal political values than others. Even in fairly poor countries, Asians prefer democracy as a political regime at levels very close to those in the West. Russell Dalton and Doh Chull Shin constructed an index of commitment to democratic rule by identifying four broader beliefs: that having a democratic political system is good and that having rule by a strong leader, by the army, or by “experts” is bad. While the four “Western” countries of the Pacific Rim (New Zealand, Canada, Australia, and the United States—in that order) score highest on this scale, the differences with Asian countries were on the whole “quite modest,” and in the case of Japan, Singapore, Korea, and Hong Kong, negligible.³⁴

On a similar scale asking how democracy works—whether it causes problems of order, indecision, or bad economic performance—it is even more difficult to distinguish between West and East. While Western citizens are remarkably positive about democracy, so are East Asians, even those (in China and Vietnam) who live in extremely authoritarian countries. In particular, “Given the presumed emphasis on agreement and aversion to conflict in Asian societies, it is striking that large majorities reject the view that democracy is not good at maintaining order.”³⁵ Moreover, Dalton and Shin cite a 2002 Pew survey indicating that two-thirds of Vietnamese even favor “democracy as it exists in the United States.”

If arguments about “East Asian values” have any validity, then East Asians should support democracy of a distinctly illiberal type, privileging order over freedom, the community over the individual, and the leader over the law. But this assumption also

holds up poorly against the public opinion data. Asians do not seek “greater respect for authority” any more frequently than do Western citizens. In fact, when Dalton and Nhu-Ngoc T. Ong looked at authority in the family and other social realms, they found that people in Canada, Australia, and the United States were more likely to rank highly on it (65 percent on average) than people in East Asia (49 percent on average, across eight countries).³⁶

The East Asia Barometer posed a number of more political value statements to individuals in six East Asian democracies.³⁷ On average, six in ten disagreed that “the most important thing for a political leader is to accomplish his goals even if he has to ignore the established procedures,” and the same proportion rejected the idea that a leader with majority support could “disregard the views of the minority.”³⁸ Only a third said it is okay for the government to disregard the law when “facing a difficult situation,” and over half stood up against state censorship and for judicial independence. Indeed, when looking at one of the purest expressions of the presumed “Asian values”—“Government leaders are like the head of a family; we should all follow their decisions”—the survey found that 53 percent rejected the principle. While the proportion in China was only a little over a third, in Hong Kong it was two-thirds.

On each of these indicators of liberal values, the economically developed Asian countries—Japan, Korea, and Taiwan (and also Hong Kong)—regularly exhibit a much stronger commitment to liberal values and the rule of law than the less developed countries (Thailand, the Philippines, and Mongolia). In addition, in Taiwan—where some of these survey questions have been administered since 1984—we observe a striking (though not uniform) trend of continuing growth in liberal value orientations,

including tolerance for pluralism and an unwillingness to defer blindly to government authority.³⁹ All of this suggests that Asian values are eroding with economic development and the practice of democracy itself, precisely as the theory and evidence of Inglehard and Welzel would predict. Rather than representing a barrier to democracy, it appears that these traditional values, to the extent they are suspicious of freedom and democratic pluralism, tend to give way as people become wealthier, more educated, and more experienced with democracy.

Yet less developed Asian countries can be surprisingly insistent on democratic principles. When Indonesians were interviewed (for the first time for the Asian Barometer) in 2006, 64 percent said democracy is always preferable (one of the highest levels in the survey) and over 80 percent (equal to the proportion in Taiwan) disagreed that political leaders should ignore established procedures if necessary to achieve their goals.⁴⁰ When we look closely at the poorer and more authoritarian Asian countries, the political values of their people do not well fit the Asian values thesis. According to Dalton and Shin, “Instead of the hesitancy (or outright opposition) to liberal democracy that some previous scholarship had suggested, contemporary public opinion surveys are finding a breadth of support for democracy as a regime and the working of the democratic process across most nations in East Asia.”⁴¹

Sustaining Democracy in Poor Countries

If democracy is to survive for the long run, it must develop legitimacy, a belief on the part of both political leaders and activists as well as the population at large that democracy is the best system of government—better than any other they can imagine—

and that their own constitutional system is worth obeying and defending. Historically, democracy has been fragile in the less developed world because this legitimacy has been hard to come by. Historically, in the majority of less developed countries, democracy has performed poorly, both economically and politically, and as a result of tepid growth, persistent injustice, and massive corruption and abuse of power, people have lost faith in it. This, in turn, has made it easy for ambitious politicians or military officers to overturn or subvert democracy in the name of development. This was not only the fate of most new democracies in Asia and Africa following decolonization after World War II. It has been the repeated fate of numerous influential lower-income countries—such as Pakistan, Bangladesh, Nigeria, and Kenya. And even some much more developed countries, like Thailand, have not been able to escape the cycle of democratic crisis, military intervention, and then popular mobilization and a return to democracy. Then there is the considerable number of “hybrid” or “electoral authoritarian” regimes, that combine the superficial or even substantial reality of multiparty electoral competition with hegemonic degrees of ruling party control over the state and the electoral machinery that are inconsistent with electoral democracy. Such hybrid regimes are found in countries with a wide range of economic development levels, from Singapore and Malaysia on one end to Cambodia, Tanzania, and Morocco on the other. They also vary widely in their real levels of social and political pluralism, and in their levels of repression.

The standing assumption, as I noted earlier in this paper, has been that poor countries were likely doomed to democratic failure, if they made transitions to democracy at all. Or by a different logic, that sustained economic growth is particularly vital to the survival of democracy in poor countries (and Przeworski and his colleagues

do find that the death rate of democracy in poor countries rises sharply in years when the economy contracts). Lipset as well, in thinking about the relationship between legitimacy and effective performance, did so primarily in terms of economic performance.⁴²

But there is another dimension to the relationship between regime performance and legitimation. We should not assume that people only value economic development. After the considerable investment that so many people in so many societies have made in mobilizing for democracy, and after the extensive abuses they have experienced under authoritarian rule, we should not be surprised to find that people value the *political* performance of democracy as well, both as an end in itself and as a means to getting broad-based, sustainable economic development. Over the years, a growing body of evidence has suggested that this is in fact the case: that people in new democracies form their judgments about the legitimacy of democracy (and thus their willingness to continue to support it, and to reject authoritarian alternatives) based partly on the extent to which they perceive the new system to really be delivering on its promises of great freedom, accountability and rule of law. In fact, data from the postcommunist democracies during the 1990s showed that these popular perceptions of the political performance of the regime had a stronger impact on democratic legitimacy than did perceptions of economic performance.⁴³ Country-level evidence from Korea and South Africa pointed in a similar direction.⁴⁴ In South Africa, survey research in the 1990s found a “close association between people’s beliefs about ethics and corruption... and their views on parliament and democracy.” People who saw the new democracy to be accountable and responsive were much more likely to be satisfied with parliament’s performance and with democracy in general.⁴⁵

In the past ten years, with the growth of the regional barometers of attitudes and values toward democracy around the world, we have a much better and more comprehensive basis for assessing the relationship between regime performance and legitimacy. When we examine the evidence from these surveys in East Asia, South Asia, Latin America, Africa, and the Arab world, it shows “economic factors to be relatively *unimportant* in explaining levels of popular support for democracy.”⁴⁶ (The one exception to this pattern is East Asia, where democratization occurred after authoritarian developmental success and publics have higher expectations of performance). Across a large number of developing countries, levels of support for democracy do not appear to be related at all to evaluations of economic performance. And at the individual level, the propensity for citizens to express support for democracy appears much more related to political evaluations of the regime than to assessments of the country’s economic performance (which in turn matter more than evaluations of their own personal economic circumstances). “The levels of trust that people feel toward parliament, parties, and courts, as well as respondents’ sense that citizens are politically empowered, far outweigh judgments of national or personal economic well or woe.”⁴⁷ And in the bulk of countries, “the single most important factor in account for people’s normative commitment to democracy is their level of overall satisfaction with the way democracy works.”⁴⁸

Satisfaction with the way democracy is performing is of course affected by economic performance, so there is an indirect effect as well. But both democratic satisfaction and support for democracy directly are shaped by how democracy performs

in delivering what people most expect from democracy: free and fair elections, individual freedom, rule of law, and accountability (in particular, control of corruption).

We can observe this in both negative and positive developments. Negatively, we see erosion of support for democracy when citizens experience protracted bad government, or a sharp decline in the above political parameters of democratic performance. Thus in the wake of deepening corruption and cronyism support for democracy fell in the Philippines between 2001 and 2005 along the following dimensions:

“Democracy is always preferable”	64% to 51%
“Democracy is suitable for our country”	80% to 57%
“Satisfaction with the way democracy works in our country”	54% to 39%
Percent rejecting the alternative of a strong authoritarian leader:	70% to 59%

Similar declines were recorded in Nigeria between 2000 and 2005, as seen in Table 2

Table 2, Trends in Political Attitudes and Values in Nigeria, in percent

	2000	2001	2003	2005
Democracy Always Preferable	84	71	68	65
Reject Military Rule	90	81	69	72
Satisfied with Democracy	81	57	35	25
Trust President	78	39	18	26
Believe Government Controls Corruption	64	48	26	36

A key factor driving the declines in democratic legitimacy, trust, and satisfaction was the sharp decline in the percentage of Nigerians over this period of time who believed that the government was working to control corruption. This signals a broader dynamic of public opinion in Africa, disappointment with the lack of supply of democratic governance. In essence, demand for democracy and good governance in Africa often appears to exceed what citizens feel they are getting from their regimes. For example, while 81 percent of Africans want free and fair elections that can remove leaders, only 47 percent think they are getting this in their country. Two-thirds of Africans want their president to be subject to the rule of law, but barely a third (36 percent) thinks he is. And while two-thirds want a representative parliament, only 46 percent think they have one that reflects “the views of voters.”⁴⁹ The problem is not that Africans do not value and demand democracy but rather that African parties and politicians are not meeting their citizens’ aspirations.

Consequently, some disillusionment is setting in. Between the surveys in 2000 and those in 2005, satisfaction with the way democracy works declined an average of 13 percentage points (from 58 to 45 percent). While satisfaction rose in a few well functioning democracies like Ghana and South Africa, it declined in eight of the twelve countries surveyed both times. Nevertheless, even on the supply side there are cautious grounds for optimism. The perception that one’s own country is a democracy has held constant at around 50 percent, and 54 percent think it is likely their country will remain a democracy.⁵⁰ Analyzing the early Afrobarometer surveys (from 2000 and 2002), Bratton and his survey co-founders, Robert Mattes and E. Gyimah-Boadi, found that the most powerful factors shaping the “supply of democracy” (a combination of satisfaction with

democracy and the perceived extent of democracy) concerned the performance of the system. In keeping with the prevalence of neopatrimonial rule, evaluation of presidential performance had the most powerful impact on the supply of democracy, but whether citizens believed the last elections were free and fair was almost as strong a factor. Other factors included the government's overall performance on employment, education, and health; the perceived level of corruption; trust in state institutions; and the perceptions that political rights are being protected and that one's own ethnic group is being treated fairly.⁵¹ Analyzing the 2005 data, Bratton found that perceiving the last elections to have been free and fair has become far and away the most powerful in shaping the extent of democracy citizens perceive. Thus, the ruler's performance is no longer enough to satisfy the public and formal institutions are starting to matter more than informal ones.⁵²

Conclusion

Public opinion is giving us a new and powerful window on the possibilities and imperatives of democracy in poor countries. It is not that poor people do not value democracy, nor is it that they expect democracy to transform their life circumstances immediately. Increasingly, it appears, poor people and mass publics in lower-income countries are coming to realize that free and fair elections, accessible courts, and honest government are important instruments for economic development and social justice. The quality of governance is thus the essential and too often neglected intervening variable between democracy and development. Once we pay attention to that, and once we focus on improving the fairness and neutrality of electoral administration, the independence and capacity of the courts, the representativeness, capacity and accessibility of political

parties local representative bodies at all levels, and the overall transparency and accountability of government to use public resources to advance the public welfare, we will find that democracy is not only consistent with economic development, but can be a great asset for getting the kind of development that lifts people out of poverty and into dignified lives.

¹ Portions of this paper draw from my new book, *The Spirit of Democracy: The Struggle to Build Free Societies Throughout the World* (New York: Times Books, 2008).

² For an elaboration of these conditions, see Larry Diamond, *The Spirit of Democracy*, pp. 22-26.

³ Seymour Martin Lipset, "Some Social Requisites of Democracy: Economic Development and Political Legitimacy," *American Political Science Review*, vol. 53, March 1959, pp. 69-105; Larry Diamond, "Economic Development and Democracy Reconsidered," in Gary Marks and Larry Diamond, eds., *Reexamining Democracy: Essays in Honor of Seymour Martin Lipset* (Newbury Park, Calif.: SAGE, 1992), pp. 93-139.

⁴ The three dimensions are weighted equally, but the formula for calculating scores is more complicated. For example, the per capita income measure is statistically adjusted to give less emphasis to very high levels of income (which also helps to correct for the distortions of the oil-rich countries). See UNDP, *Human Development Report 2004* (New York: United Nations Development Program, 2004), pp. 258-59.

⁵ UNDP, *Human Development Report 2006* (New York: United Nations Development Program, 2006), Table 1, p. 283. Cuba is ranked 50 by the UNDP, but speciously, as the ranking is based on only two of the three indicators (health and education, not income). If the per capita income data were available, Cuba would rank well below 50, and I therefore exclude Cuba from the rankings here.

⁶ Diamond, "Economic Development and Democracy Reconsidered;" Henry S. Rowen, "The Tide Underneath the 'Third Wave,'" *Journal of Democracy*, vol. 6, January 1995, pp. 52-64.

⁷ In other words, whether elections are truly free and fair. With only a very few exceptions, I rely on the annual classifications of Freedom House as to which countries qualify as electoral democracies, but one could argue that in some cases the countries they consider democracies are really better considered "electoral authoritarian."

⁸ Rowen, "The Tide Underneath the 'Third Wave,'" p. 55.

⁹ Carlos Boix and Susan C. Stokes, "Endogenous Democratization," *World Politics*, vol. 55, July 2003, p. 531. Ronald Inglehart and Christian Welzel reach a somewhat similar conclusion using 1950-1990 data. *Modernization, Cultural Change and Democracy: The Human Development Sequence* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), p. 169. Both studies specifically reject the finding of Adam Przeworski and his colleagues that the likelihood of emergence of democracy is not related to the level of economic development. Adam Przeworski, Michael E. Alvarez, Jose Antonio Cheibub, and Fernando Limongi, *Democracy and Development: Political Institutions and Well-Being in the World, 1950-1990* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

¹⁰ Again, this per capita income figure (and all others in this chapter) are expressed in 2004 purchasing power parity dollars. Przeworski et al., *Democracy and Development*, p. 98.

¹¹ Among cases of democratic breakdown in the third wave, the two richest cases were Russia in 2000, where the per capita income was about \$8600 (in 2004 purchasing power parity dollars) and Thailand in 2005, where it was about the same.

¹² The eight relatively rich oil states (in order of development level) are Kuwait, Brunei, Bahrain, Qatar, United Arab Emirates, Oman, Russia, and Saudi Arabia.

¹³ Seymour Martin Lipset, *Political Man: The Social Bases of Politics* (Baltimore, Md.: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1981), p. 45. The book was originally published in 1960, and the chapter from which this is drawn essentially reproduces his 1959 article, "Some Social Requisites of Democracy."

¹⁴ Carles Boix, *Democracy and Redistribution* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

¹⁵ Huntington, *The Third Wave*, p. 67. This was not simply the result of economic development, however. In much of Latin America, the power of populist groups often decreased precisely because of repression under authoritarian rule.

¹⁶ Daniel Lerner, *The Passing of Traditional Society: Modernizing the Middle East* (New York: Free Press, 1958).

¹⁷ The early studies establishing this were Gabriel Almond and Sidney Verba, *The Civic Culture* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1963) and Alex Inkeles, "Participant Citizenship in Six Developing Countries," *American Political Science Review*, vol. 63, 1969, pp. 1120-41. But these associations also emerge in most of the recent studies of attitudes and values toward democracy cited in chapter 1 as well as in the research associated with the World Values Survey. See Inglehart and Welzel, *Modernization, Cultural Change and Democracy*, and the sources they cite on p. 164.

¹⁸ Alex Inkeles and Larry J. Diamond, "Personal Development and National Development: A Cross-National Perspective," in Alexander Szalai and Frank M. Andrews, eds., *The Quality of Life: Comparative Studies* (London: Sage, 1980), pp. 73-109.

¹⁹ Ronald Inglehart, *The Silent Revolution* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1977) and *Culture Shift in Advanced Industrial Societies* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1990).

²⁰ Inglehart and Welzel, *Modernization, Cultural Change and Democracy*, p. 54.

²¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 58 and 76. The transition from traditional to secular values is associated with industrialization and thus represents a first phase of cultural shift.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 150.

²³ *Ibid.*, pp. 123-24.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 151. The correlation of self-expression values with "effective democracy" is .90, meaning that 80 percent of the variation in levels of effective democracy in the world can be explained by the extent of self-expression values in each society. Such a high correlation between two entirely independent phenomena (one, values, the other political institutions) is virtually never seen in comparative political studies.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 153.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 209. See chapter 8 for the evidence. They also find that there is no reverse effect, that is, the experience of democracy does not seem, in and of itself, to generate self-expression values to a significant degree.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 152.

²⁸ Amartya Sen, "Democracy as a Universal Value," in Larry Diamond and Marc F.

Plattner, eds., *The Global Divergence of Democracies* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins

University Press, 2001): 13.

²⁹ Sen, "Democracy as a Universal Value," p. 12.

³⁰ See <http://www.worldvaluessurvey.org/>.

³¹ Of course there is the huge challenge of translating questions across a vast number of languages i to capture precisely the right nuance, but these comparative surveys work hard to check the reliability of translations.

³² The raw data and content of the survey may be found in Ronald Inglehart, Miguel Basáñez, Jaime Díez-Medrano, Loek Halman, and Ruud Luijckx, *Human Beliefs and Values: a cross-cultural sourcebook based on the 1999-2002 values surveys* (Buenos Aires: Siglo XXI Editores, 2004), questions E018, E114, and E123.

³³ This question may seem similar to the first one in Table 1.1, but it is actually more demanding, because it is not a simple yes/no question, but allows two other potentially plausible options: “In some circumstances a non-democratic government can be preferable,” or “For someone like me, it doesn’t matter what kind of government we have.” Wording varies slightly across regional barometers. This one is drawn from the AFrobarometer, <http://www.afrobarometer.org/questionnaires/nig-R3Questionnaire-23aug05.pdf>.

³⁴ Russell J. Dalton and Doh Chull Shin, “Democratic Aspirations and Social Modernization,” in Dalton and Shin, eds., *Citizens, Democracy, and Markets around the Pacific Rim* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), p. 83.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 85.

³⁶ Russell J. Dalton and Nhu-Ngoc T. Ong, “Authority Orientations and Democratic Attitudes: A Test of the ‘Asian Values’ Hypothesis,” in Dalton and Shin, eds., *Citizens, Democracy, and Markets Around the Pacific Rim*, p. 101.

³⁷ At the time of the first East Asia Barometer, when these questions were asked, the six democracies surveyed were Japan, Korea, Taiwan, the Philippines, Thailand, and Mongolia, but Thailand recently suffered a military coup, and Indonesia (among others) has been added to the second round of the survey, conducted in 2005 and 2006.

³⁸ Doh Chull Shin and Jason Wells, “Challenge and Change in East Asia: Is Democracy the Only Game in Town?” *Journal of Democracy* 16 (April 2005): 95-96.

³⁹ Diamond, *Developing Democracy*, pp. 188-190. Even as people in Taiwan have become weary of political deadlock and cynical about corruption, this commitment to liberal values has continued to deepen. Between the 2001 and 2005 surveys, the percentage who disagree that the government should decide what ideas are allowed to be discussed increased from 63 to 71 percent (continuing a trend from 1990 when it was only at about 50 percent), and those disagreeing that government leaders’ decisions should be followed because they “are like the head of a family” increased from 63 to 71 percent.

⁴⁰ Data are from the second round of the Asian Barometer.

⁴¹ Dalton and Shin, “Democratic Aspirations,” pp. 87-88.

⁴² See *Political Man*, pp. 64-70.

⁴³ See in particular Richard Rose, William Mishler, and Christian Haerpfer, *Democracy and Its Alternatives: Understanding Postcommunist Societies* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1998), ch’s 7-9.

⁴⁴ See *Political Man*, pp. 64-70.

⁴⁴ Larry Diamond, *Developing Democracy: Toward Consolidation* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999): 192-200.

⁴⁵ “Parliamentary Ethics and Government Corruption: Playing with Public Trust,” Institute for Democracy in South Africa (Idasa), *Public Opinion Service Reports* 3 (1996):12-13.

⁴⁶ Yun-han Chu, Michael Bratton, Marta Lagos, Sandeep Shastri, and Mark Tessler, “Public Opinion and Democratic Legitimacy,” *Journal of Democracy* 19 (April 2008): 75.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 79.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 82.

⁴⁹ Bratton, *Journal of Democracy* 2007, Figure 2.

⁵⁰ Bratton, *Journal of Democracy* 2007

⁵¹ Michael Bratton, Robert Mattes, and E. Gyimah-Boadi, *Public Opinion, Democracy, and Market Reform in Africa* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), pp. 272-277. These results are based on analysis of the first two rounds of surveys (around 2000 and 2002), not on the third round in 2005.

⁵² Bratton, *Journal of Democracy*, Table 2.