Working Paper Series: No. 35

Jointly Published by

GLOBALBAROMETER™

Singapore Country Report

Second Wave of Asian Barometer Survey

Tan Ern Ser
Wang Zhengxu

National University of Singapore

Asian Barometer
A Comparative Survey of Democracy, Governance and Development
Working Paper Series

Jointly Published by
Globalbarometer

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

The ABS Working Paper Series is intended to make research result within the ABS network available to the academic community and other interested readers in preliminary form to encourage discussion and suggestions for revision before final publication. Scholars in the ABS network also devote their work to the Series with the hope that a timely dissemination of the findings of their surveys to the general public as well as the policy makers would help illuminate the public discourse on democratic reform and good governance. The topics covered in the Series range from country-specific assessment of values change and democratic development, region-wide comparative analysis of citizen participation, popular orientation toward democracy and evaluation of quality of governance, and discussion of survey methodology and data analysis strategies.

The ABS Working Paper Series supercedes the existing East Asia Barometer Working Paper Series as the network is expanding to cover more countries in East and South Asia. Maintaining the same high standard of research methodology, the new series both incorporates the existing papers in the old series and offers newly written papers with a broader scope and more penetrating analyses.

The ABS Working Paper Series is issued by the Asian Barometer Project Office, which is jointly sponsored by the Department of Political Science of National Taiwan University and the Institute of Political Science of Academia Sinica. At present, papers are issued only in electronic version.

Contact Information   *Tel: 886 2-2357 0427*

Asian Barometer Project Office   *Fax: 886-2-2357 0420*

Department of Political Science   *E-mail: asianbarometer@ntu.edu.tw*

National Taiwan University   *Website: www.asianbarometer.org*

21 Hsu-Chow Road, Taipei, Taiwan 100

Preamble

First ever in Singapore

Singapore is privileged to be part of the Asian Barometer research group. The new partnership not only enabled us to embark on comparative research, and thereby test broader questions about politics, governance, and democracy in Asia, but it also paved the way for us to conduct the first ever survey in Singapore on a topic thought to be taboo in the country.

Apprehension and Response

Indeed, when Professor Chu Yunhan first approached us to explore the possibility of conducting the Asian Barometer survey in Singapore, he was not too sure if it could be done in Singapore. One of our team members, David Yang, also harbored the same apprehensions. This is all quite understandable, given that there is a general perception that doing such a survey could get the researchers involved into trouble with the authorities.

While I too felt that there is a need to be cautious when dealing with political issues, my own sense is that the problem does not lie in the likelihood of the authorities clamping down on the project, or even arresting us, but that respondents may not feel comfortable telling interviewers what they think of the government and how they evaluate its policies and performance. My main concern is that asking such questions may elicit politically correct or socially desirable responses, the kind of data which lack validity.

Fortunately, there were not too many items in the questionnaire that require our rethinking and re-crafting for the purpose of reducing the risk of securing answers that do not accurately reflect the respondents' true feelings or opinions. Nevertheless, there were some items which the team debated quite hard before including them in the questionnaire.

One of the items asks for the respondent's stand on the need for Opposition members in Parliament. This item seems fairly innocent, but with Singapore having a "one-party dominance" state since it attained self-government in 1959 and independence in 1965, it is understandable if many voters are unwilling to reveal their inclination towards the Opposition. Conversely, there could be some respondents who want to appear "anti-establishment" or pro-democracy, but would vote for the ruling party in the interest of political stability and economic growth. Nevertheless, it is hoped that the assurance of confidentiality had enhanced the validity of responses to this item.

Apart from this item, there is a set of items relating to opinions about specific political parties in Singapore. The intent of the original Asian Barometer questionnaire is to find out how respondents voted in the latest general election. The Singapore team felt that, for the same reason that respondents are not inclined to reveal their opinion on whether there ought to be Opposition members in Parliament, they would be unwilling to reveal

how they voted, regardless of which party they actually voted for. Eventually, we settled for asking respondents to indicate whether or not they thought each of the main parties, ruling and Opposition, were credible.

The following sections will highlight some of the key findings for the purpose of ascertaining the validity of some of the common perceptions—or perhaps, misperceptions—about politics, governance and democracy in Singapore.

Findings

Trust in Institutions

Table 1 indicates that in Singapore there is a high degree of trust in the national government and related institutions, such as the military and the police; whereas political parties and civil society organizations did not fare as well. This is plausible given the current PAP Government's long tenure of almost 50 years and its track record of employment creation and delivery of social services: housing, healthcare, and education.

Table 1: Trust in Institutions (1=hi score, 4=lo score)

Institution	Mean Score	Rank
Prime Minister	1.94	3
Law Courts	1.96	5
National Government	1.94	3
Political parties	2.45	12
Parliament	2.07	7
Civil Service	1.99	6
Military	1.91	2
Police	1.89	1
Town Councils	2.13	8
National newspapers	2.17	10
National TV	2.14	9
International TV	2.20	11
NGO's	2.73	13

Interest in Politics

One implication of having a government they trust is that citizens may thereby be more tolerant of some degree of authoritarianism as well as possess a low degree of interest in politics. Table 2 shows that slightly less than a quarter of Singaporeans are interested in politics. A large majority (75%) said that they are not very interested in politics; among these are 37% who are "not at all interested".

Table 2: Interest in politics

	Frequency	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Very interested	20	2.0	2.0
Somewhat interested	221	22.1	24.1
Not very interested	383	38.3	62.4

	Frequency	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Not at all interested	370	36.9	99.3
Can t choose	4	.4	99.7
Decline to answer	3	.3	100.0
Total	1002	100.0	

Evaluation of extent of democracy

Table 3 indicates that most Singaporeans (82%) are at least fairly satisfied with democracy as it is practiced in Singapore. This may have more to do with the Government's performance—the outputs of government—rather than the input process involving the participation of citizens in the policy decisions that affect them.

Perhaps, for this reason, it can be seen in Table 4 that only 15% of Singaporeans think of Singapore as a "full democracy", while a large majority (71%) considered Singapore to be somewhat less of what they expect of a full democracy. Their evaluation of the extent of democracy in Singapore is also reflected in Tables 5 to 8. These tables indicate lower percentages of Singaporeans who perceive they could hold the Government accountable between elections (40%), enjoy freedom of speech (39%) and association (46%). However, two-thirds of Singaporeans consider the Government to be responsive to the people. It is not clear if this responsiveness is an indication of democracy or "good government", which could plausibly be attributed to an authoritarian regime.

Gap between preference for democracy and satisfaction with "less than full democracy" in Singapore

Nevertheless, the finding reported in Table 9 suggests that close to 60% of Singaporeans prefer democracy to other forms of government, while 21% give conditional support for authoritarianism and 13% take a neutral stand between the two forms. Table 10, which shows that close to 80% of Singaporeans consider it important to have elected Opposition members in parliament, provides another indication regarding their preference for democracy. The implication here is that Singaporeans are largely pro-democratic in orientation. At the same time, they do not evaluate the form of democracy as it is practiced in Singapore every highly, yet they are fairly satisfied with it.

It is obvious that there is a gap between these three dimensions. That there is no apparent tension may be attributed to the good performance of the Government and the people's perception that they have a "good, responsive government". A further argument here is that a majority of Singaporeans (close to two-thirds) assign economic development greater priority than democracy (Table 10).

Table 3: Satisfaction with the way democracy works in Singapore

	Frequency	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Very satisfied	131	13.1	13.1
Fairly satisfied	691	68.9	82.0

	Frequency	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Not very satisfied	137	13.7	95.7
Not at all satisfied	12	1.2	96.9
Dan t choose	18	1.8	98.7
Decline to answer	13	1.3	100.0
Total	1002	100.0	

Table 4: Evaluation of extent of democracy is Singapore

	Frequency	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
A full democracy	147	14.6	14.6
A democracy, but with minor problems	716	71.5	86.1
A democracy, with major problems	50	5.0	91.1
Not a democracy	36	3.6	94.7
Don t understand the question	9	.9	95.6
Can t choose	35	3.5	99.1
Decline to answer	9	.9	100.0
Total	1002	100.0	

Table 5: Evaluation of extent of democracy in Singapore: political efficacy (holding the Government accountable between elections)

	Frequency	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Strongly disagree	59	5.9	5.9
Somewhat disagree	466	46.5	52.4
Somewhat agree	260	26.0	78.4
Strongly agree	142	14.2	92.5
Don t understand	16	1.6	94.2
Can t choose	41	4.1	98.3
Decline to answer	17	1.7	100.0
Total	1002	100.0	

Table 6: Evaluation of extent of democracy in Singapore: freedom of speech

	Frequency	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Strongly agree	64	6.4	6.4
Somewhat agree	324	32.3	38.7
Somewhat disagree	373	37.3	76.0
Strongly disagree	225	22.5	98.4
Can t choose	8	.8	99.2

	Frequency	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Decline to answer	8	.8	100.0
Total	1002	100.0	

Table 7: Evaluation of extent of democracy: freedom of association

	Frequency	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Strongly agree	53	5.3	5.3
Somewhat agree	409	40.8	46.1
Somewhat disagree	320	31.9	78.0
Strongly disagree	192	19.2	97.2
Don t understand	6	.6	97.8
Can t choose	19	1.9	99.6
Decline to answer	4	.4	100.0
Total	1002	100.0	

Table 8: Evaluation of extent of democracy in Singapore--responsiveness of the Government

	Frequency	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Very responsive	83	8.3	8.3
Largely responsive	586	58.5	66.7
Not very responsive	286	28.6	95.3
Not responsive at all	14	1.4	96.7
Don t understand the question	1	.1	96.7
Can t choose	20	2.0	98.8
Decline to answer	12	1.2	100.0
Total	1002	100.0	

Table 9: Preference for democracy

	Frequency	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Democracy is always preferable to any other kind of government	589	58.8	58.8

	Frequency	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Under some circumstances, an authoritarian government can be preferable	210	21.0	79.8
For people like me, it does not matter whether we have a democracy	132	13.2	93.0
Do not understand the question	13	1.3	94.3
Can t choose	45	4.5	98.8
Decline to answer	12	1.2	100.0
Total	1002	100.0	

Table 10: Importance of having elected Opposition members in parliament

	Frequency	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Strongly agree	425	42.4	42.4
Agree	396	39.5	81.9
Neither	86	8.6	90.5
Disagree	41	4.1	94.6
Strongly disagree	4	.4	95.0
Don t understand the question	2	.2	95.2
Can t choose	27	2.7	97.9
Decline to answer	21	2.1	100.0
Total	1002	100.0	

Table 11: Importance of democracy relative to economic development

	Frequency	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Economic development is definitely more important	282	28.1	28.1

	Frequency	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Economic development is somewhat important	360	36.0	64.1
Democracy is somewhat more important	73	7.3	71.4
Democracy is definitely more important	48	4.8	76.2
They are both equally important	192	19.2	95.4
Do not understand the question	8	.8	96.2
Can t choose	26	2.6	98.8
Decline to answer	12	1.2	100.0
Total	1002	100.0	

What do voters think of the main political parties in Singapore?

Despite the gap between preference for democracy and evaluation of the extent of democracy as practiced in Singapore, voters seem to have a clear preference for the current ruling party. The ruling PAP is thought of favorably by 83%, while the other main Opposition parties receive between 48% and 16% (Tables 12 to 15). These "scores" parallel the results of the 2006 General Election.

Table 12: Opinion of the ruling party: "The People s Action Party (PAP) is a credible party"

	Frequency	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Strongly disagree	17	1.7	1.7
Disagree	24	2.4	4.1
Neither	96	9.6	13.7
Agree	705	70.3	84.0
Strongly agree	130	13.0	97.0
Don t understand the question	14	1.4	98.3
Can t choose	16	1.6	99.9
Decline to answer	1	.1	100.0
Total	1002	100.0	

Table 13: Opinion of Opposition party: "The Worker s Party (WP) is a credible party"

	Frequency	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Strongly disagree	8	.8	.8
Disagree	90	9.0	9.8
Neither	358	35.8	45.6

	Frequency	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Agree	466	46.5	92.1
Strongly agree	25	2.4	94.6
Don t understand the question	34	3.4	98.0
Can t choose	19	1.9	99.9
Decline to answer	1	.1	100.0
Total	1002	100.0	

Table 14: Opinion of Opposition party: "The Singapore Democratic Alliance (SDA) is a credible party"

	Frequency	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Strongly disagree	19	1.9	1.9
Disagree	142	14.2	16.1
Neither	435	43.4	59.5
Agree	322	32.1	91.6
Strongly agree	20	2.0	93.6
Don t understand the question	43	4.3	97.9
Can t choose	20	2.0	99.9
Decline to answer	1	.1	100.0
Total	1002	100.0	

Table 15: Opinion of Opposition party: "The Singapore Democratic Party (SDP) is a credible party"

	Frequency	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Strongly disagree	78	7.8	7.8
Disagree	307	30.6	38.4
Neither	396	39.6	78.0
Agree	148	14.8	92.8
Strongly agree	10	1.0	93.8
Don t understand the question	41	4.1	97.9
Can t choose	20	2.0	99.9
Decline to answer	1	.1	100.0
Total	1002	100.0	

Conclusion

The findings extracted from the Singapore survey indicates that Singaporeans are generally satisfied with the ruling party and the way democracy is practiced in Singapore. However, there is a gap between their pro-democratic orientation and their perceived extent of democracy in Singapore. This gap is reconciled by their satisfaction with the Government's performance, which resonates with the priority they assign to economic development over democracy. One may argue that this represents a conservative view.

An alternative explanation for why the gap has not led to the manifestation of tensions and conflicts between the people and government is that oppositional forces remain poorly organized and, thereby, weak vis-à-vis the powerful ruling party.

Asian Barometer
A Comparative Survey of Democracy, Governance and Development

Working Paper Series

01. Yu-tzung Chang and Yun-han Chu. 2002. Confucianism and Democracy: Empirical Study of Mainland China, Taiwan, and Hong Kong.

02. Yu-tzung Chang, Alfred Hu, and Yun-han Chu. 2002. The Political Significance of Insignificant Class Voting: Taiwan and Hong Kong Comparison.

03. Albritton, Robert B. and Thawilwadee Bureekul. 2002. Support for Democracy in Thailand.

04. Robert Albritton, and Thawilwadee Bureekul. 2002. The Role of Civil Society in Thai Electoral Politics.

05. Jose Abueva and Linda Luz Guerrero. 2003. What Democracy Means to Filipinos.

06. Robert Albritton, Thawilwadee Bureekul and Gang Guo. 2003. Impacts of Rural-Urban Cleavages and Cultural Orientations on Attitudes toward Elements of Democracy: A Cross-National, Within-Nation Analysis.

07. Eric C.C. Chang, Yun-han Chu, and Fu Hu. 2003. Regime Performance and Support for Democratization.

08. Yun-han Chu, Yu-tzung Chang and Fu Hu. 2003. Regime Performance, Value Change and Authoritarian Detachment in East Asia.

09. Alfred Ko-wei Hu. 2003. Attitudes toward Democracy between Mass Publics and Elites in Taiwan and Hong Kong.

10. Ken'ichi Ikeda, Yasuo Yamada and Masaru Kohno. 2003. Influence of Social Capital on Political Participation in Asian Cultural Context.

11. Wai-man Lam and Hsin-Chi Kuan. 2003. Noises and Interruptions – the Road to Democracy.

12. Chong-Min Park and Doh Chull Shin. 2003. Social Capital and Democratic Citizenship: The Case of South Korea.

13. Tianjian Shi. 2003. Does it Matter or Not? Cultural Impacts on the Political Process.

14. Chih-yu Shih. 2003. Back from the Future: Ambivalence in Taiwan's Democratic Conditions.

15. Doh Chull Shin, and Chong-min Park. 2003. The Mass Public and Democratic Politics in South Korea: Exploring the Subjective World of Democratization in Flux.

16. Yun-han Chu. 2003. Lessons from East Asia's Struggling Democracies.

17. Robert Albritton, and Thawilwadee Bureekul. 2004. Development Electoral Democracy in a Developing Nation: Thailand.

18. Yu-tzung Chang, Yun-han Chu, Fu Hu, and Huo-yan Shyu. 2004. How Citizens Evaluate Taiwan's New Democracy.

19. Roger Henke, and Sokhom Hean. 2004. The State of democracy in Cambodia, the Added Value of Opinion Polls.

20. Chong-min Park. 2004. Support for Democracy in Korea: Its Treads and Determinants.

21. Chih-jou Jay Chen. 2004. Getting Ahead in Rural China.

22. Yun-han Chu, Yu-tzung Chang, and Ming-hua Huang. 2004. Modernization, Institutionalism, Traditionalism, and the Development of Democratic Orientation in Rural China.

23. Andrew Nathan, and Tse-hsin Chen. 2004. Traditional Social Values, Democratic Values, and Political Participation.

24. Tianjian Shi. 2004. Economic Development and Political Participation: Comparison of Mainland China, Taiwan, and Hong Kong.

25. Yun-han Chu, and Doh Chull Shin. 2004. The Quality of Democracy in South Korea and Taiwan: Subjective Assessment from the Perspectives of Ordinary Citizens.

26. Chong-min Park, and Doh Chull Shin. 2004. Do Asian Values Deter Popular Support for Democracy? The Case of South Korea.

27. Ken'ichi Ikeda, Yasuo Yamada and Masaru Kohno. 2004. Japanese Attitudes and Values toward Democracy.

28. Robert Albritton, and Thawilwadee Bureekul. 2004. Developing Democracy under a New Constitution in Thailand.

29. Damba Ganbat. 2004. The Mass Public and Democratic Politics in Mongolia.

30. Chong-min Park, and Doh Chull Shin. 2005. Do East Asians View Democracy as a Lesser Evil? Testing the Churchill's Notion of Democracy in East Asia.

31. Robert Albritton, and Thawilwadee Bureekul. 2005. Social and Cultural Supports for Plural Democracy in Eight Asian Nations: A Cross-National, Within-Nation Analysis.

32. Ken'ichi Ikeda et al. 2007. Japan Country Report. Second Wave of Asian Barometer Survey.

33. Damba Ganbat. 2007. Mongolia Country Report. Second Wave of Asian Barometer

Survey.

34. Robert B. Albritton, and Thawilwadee Bureekul. 2007. Thailand Country Report: Public Opinion and Political Power in Thailand. (Second Wave of Asian Barometer Survey).

35. Tan Ern Ser, and Wang Zhengxu. 2007. Singapore Country Report. Second Wave of Asian Barometer Survey.

36. Wang Zhengxu, and Tan Ern Ser. 2007. Are Younger People in Asia more Pro-democratic: Lifecycle Effects or Generational Changes?

37. Ken'ichi Ikeda, and Tetsuro Kobayashi. 2007. The Influence of Social Capital on Political Participation in the Cultural Context of Asia.

38. Chong-min Park, and Jaechul Lee. 2007. Are Associations the Schools of Democracy across Asia?

39. Yu-tzung Chang, and Yun-han Chu. 2007. Traditionalism, Political Learning and Conceptions of Democracy in East Asia.

40. Min-hua Huang, Yun-han Chu, and Yu-tzung Chang. 2007. Quality of Democracy and Regime Legitimacy in East Asia.

41. Yun-han Chu, and Min-hua Huang. 2007. A Synthetic Analysis of Sources of Democratic Legitimacy.

42. Chin-en Wu, and Yun-han Chu. 2007. Income Inequality and Satisfaction with Democracy: Evidence from East Asia.

43. Andrew J. Nathan. 2007. Political Culture and Diffuse Regime Support in Asia.

44. Doh Chull Shin. 2007. Is Not So Bad Good Enough: Retesting Churchill's Lesser-Evil Notion of Democracy in East Asia.

45. Doh Chull Shin. 2007. Why East Asians React Differently to democratic Regime Change: Discerning Their Routes to Becoming Authentic Democrats.

Asian Barometer

A Comparative Survey of Democracy, Governance and Development

The Asian Barometer Survey (ABS) grows out of the Comparative Survey of Democratization and Value Change in East Asia Project (also known as East Asia Barometer), which was launched in mid-2000 and funded by the Ministry of Education of Taiwan under the MOE-NSC Program for Promoting Academic Excellence of University. The headquarters of ABS is based in Taipei, and is jointly sponsored by the Department of Political Science at NTU and the Institute of Political Science of Academia Sinica. The East Asian component of the project is coordinated by Prof. Yun-han Chu, who also serves as the overall coordinator of the Asian Barometer. In organizing its first-wave survey (2001-2003), the East Asia Barometer (EABS) brought together eight country teams and more than thirty leading scholars from across the region and the United States. Since its founding, the EABS Project has been increasingly recognized as the region's first systematic and most careful comparative survey of attitudes and orientations toward political regime, democracy, governance, and economic reform.

In July 2001, the EABS joined with three partner projects -- New Europe Barometer, Latinobarometro and Afrobarometer -- in a path-breathing effort to launch Global Barometer Survey (GBS), a global consortium of comparative surveys across emerging democracies and transitional societies.

The EABS is now becoming a true pan-Asian survey research initiative. New collaborative teams from Indonesia, Singapore, Cambodia, and Vietnam are joining the EABS as the project enters its second phase (2004-2008). Also, the State of Democracy in South Asia Project, based at the Centre for the Study of Developing Societies (in New Delhi) and directed by Yogendra Yadav, is collaborating with the EABS for the creation of a more inclusive regional survey network under the new identity of the Asian Barometer Survey. This path-breaking regional initiative builds upon a substantial base of completed scholarly work in a number of Asian countries. Most of the participating national teams were established more than a decade ago, have acquired abundant experience and methodological know-how in administering nationwide surveys on citizen's political attitudes and behaviors, and have published a substantial number of works both in their native languages and in English.

For more information, please visit our website: www.asianbarometer.org