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Keynote Speech I

East Asia amid the Receding Tide of the Third Wave of Democracy

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The period of global politics since 1974, which Samuel P. Huntington defined as the “third wave” of global democratization, has seen the most sweeping transformation in the way that states are governed in the history of human civilization. During this period, democracy has gone from being a preserve of the West and a few odd developing countries to a truly global phenomenon, the most common form of government in the world and the type of political system that the majority of human beings on earth live in. Moreover, East Asia has gone from being the cradle and locus of “developmental authoritarianism,” with Japan being the lone democracy—and a longstanding one-party dominant system at that—to at least a mixed and progressing set of systems. Seven of the region’s seventeen states are democracies (Japan, Taiwan, South Korea, Mongolia, Indonesia, the Philippines, and East Timor), one is a recurrent and probable future democracy (Thailand), and two more are poised to become democracies within a generation (Malaysia and Singapore).¹ As I briefly speculate in conclusion, China and Vietnam will become democracies as they modernize rapidly in the coming generation or two (at most, in other words, within the next 20 to 40 years). Moreover, the first four of the democracies above are among the by now very substantial number of countries—77—that can be classified as reasonably liberal or “higher quality” democracies, and—withstanding the familiar citizen complaints and disappointments—democracy in Taiwan and Korea can now be considered consolidated and essentially irreversible (barring some external calamity). It is not difficult to draw additional hope and inspiration about the future of democracy in the world from these other facts:

- About three of every five states in the world are democracies.
- Democracy is reasonably liberal and consolidated and in all ten former communist states that have joined the European Union.
- Democracy now seems here to stay as the dominant political system and value in Latin America, after more than a century of bloody oscillation and struggle.

- Democracy has become consolidated or at least endures in most of the important emerging market countries that have become members of the G20: India, Brazil, Mexico, Argentina, South Korea, Indonesia, Turkey and South Africa; only China and Saudi Arabia among this group are authoritarian.²

- And there is still no other type of political system in the world that represents anything approaching a rival model, despite the supposed growing attraction of China's authoritarian development "miracle".

However, most analysts would agree that the global democratic trend in recent years has been one of recession or retrenchment. This is indicated by several statistics. First, the number of democracies has been declining in the last several years. By my count (which is very close to that of Freedom House), the number of electoral democracies has declined from a peak of 121 in 2006 to 114 in 2010, the lowest number since 1994, and lowest percentage of states that are democracies (58.5%) since 1993 (Table 1 and Figure 1).³ Second, there has been a rising tide of breakdowns of democracy. Nearly a third of all the democracies that have existed during the third wave have broken down (with some countries like Thailand and Nigeria experiencing repeated breakdowns). And the pace of breakdowns has accelerated since the 1999 coup that toppled the civilian democracy in Pakistan. If we divide the 37 years of the third wave into three roughly equal periods of about a dozen years, we find that 12 democracies broke down during the years 1974 through 1985, 15 during 1986-98, and 26 during the past twelve years (1999 through 2010). In other words, of the 53 breakdowns or reversals of democracy that have occurred since the third wave began in 1974, roughly half of them have occurred since 1999. And 15 of these have taken place just in the past five years, beginning in 2006, when the global democratic recession became more visible. The rate of democratic breakdown has also accelerated. While 16 percent of all democratic regimes broke down in the 1974-85 period, and less than 12 percent in the 1986-98 period, the rate accelerated to nearly 20 percent during the period since 1999 (Figure 2).

During these past five years, freedom levels have steadily declined. The years 2006 through 2010 have been the longest period of decline in freedom since the great burst of democratic expansion after the Cold War ended, and almost surely the longest period since the third wave began. In each of these five years, more countries declined than improved in their Freedom House ratings of political rights and civil liberties, and the deterioration was

particularly marked in the years 2007 through 2010, when in each year more than twice as many countries declined as improved in their freedom levels (Figure 3). 2007 was a particularly bad year, when nearly four times as many countries declined as improved in freedom.

Of course, the declines in democracy and in freedom are related. First, obviously, when democracy is lost, freedom levels decline. But as we see in Table 2, particularly since 1990 (around when Freedom House became more rigorous in scoring levels of freedom), democracy has generally broken down where it has been of lower quality. Since 1990, only four of the 39 democratic breakdowns have occurred in democracies with average freedom scores (on the two scales of political rights and civil liberties) of 2.5 or better (Table 2). In other words, these have been illiberal democracies, and in a number of cases, extremely illiberal ones: 18 of the 39 failed democracies since 1990 (almost half) had average freedom scores of 4 or worse (on the 7-point scale) in the year before their reversal.⁴

From this perspective, a number of current electoral democracies seem particularly at risk because of their relatively low (and in some cases, declining) freedom scores, around the midpoint on the seven-point scales of political rights and civil liberties, and their very bad governance scores as measured by the World Bank. Table 3 provides a list of democracies “at risk” of reversal because of their low quality. This is not a comprehensive list of all the existing democracies in the world that are at risk. But it does call attention to many of the most vulnerable democracies, and an overarching reason why they are vulnerable. There is a significant correlation between the quality of democracy and the political stability, legitimacy, and progress toward consolidation of democracy, a point I have been stressing (often with reference to public opinion survey data) for more than a decade now.⁵ If one were to attempt a more qualitative case assessment of democratic risk, I think it would point to a similar pattern. None of the most vulnerable democracies in the world are liberal democracies—which I define empirically as political systems that obtain a score of 1 or 2 on each of the twin political scales of political rights and civil liberties (where 1 indicates most free and 7 least free). And as we see in Table 2, all of the democracies that have broken down since 1999 were illiberal (and a number of them had gradually been getting more so over time).⁶

There is another sobering aspect to the state of democracy in the world, what may be suggested by the table of “at risk democracies.” A number of the countries that Freedom House classifies as electoral democracies Levitsky and Way insist should be removed from the list

because elections are so unfair, or the political playing field is so uneven, or civil liberties are so constrained, that the system is really better understood as “competitive authoritarian.” By a rigorous application of these more demanding standards for electoral democracy, the real number of democracies in the world might be little more than 100, closer to half of the states of the world (but still comprising a majority of world population).⁷

Worries about the resilience of the third wave of democracy arise from less tangible or measurable factors as well. With China’s continuing economic boom has come a rising prestige and growing projection of its economic (and at least within parts of Asia, military) power. Not just among elites in Asia and Africa looking for a way to legitimate their authoritarian rule or aspirations, but also among a certain number of intellectuals and opinion leaders in some developing countries, there is growing fascination with the “China model,” which (it is argued) can cut through the tedious delays and coalitional demands of democratic politics and simply make economic decisions, budgetary allocations, and infrastructural investments based on what will yield the greatest and most rapid national gains in development. It is hard to argue with success, and neo-Communist China is booming (just as neo-Communist Vietnam is starting to do as well). But China also struggles with some very big developmental problems and contradictions, and the bigger story that is starting to gain notice is the continuing shift in the locus of global economic growth and energy away from the advanced industrial democracies toward the emerging market economies like those that have recently joined the G20. As noted above, most of these countries are actually democracies, and some of the big emerging market authoritarian regimes, like Iran and Venezuela, are actually doing quite poorly economically, due to gross mismanagement and politicization of the economy. For every authoritarian developmental success story in the world today, like Ethiopia and Rwanda, there are actually more cases of authoritarian stagnation or democratic progress. In fact, the striking thing about the 17 emerging-market democracies that Steven Radelet identifies as the core of a new, more economically dynamic “emerging Africa” is that most of them are electoral democracies, or near-democracies.⁸

Two other negative trends cast a certain shadow over global democratic prospects in the near term. One is the backlash against civil society and international democracy assistance that has been building for the past six to seven years. Particularly since the color revolutions, authoritarian regimes like those in Russia, Belarus, China, Iran and throughout Central Asia have

noted the positive contribution that international democracy assistance (including grants to civil society organizations and election monitoring) have made to democratic advances and breakthroughs, and thus they have sought to frustrate, close off, and even criminalize these flows.⁹ Some African autocracies like Ethiopia and Sudan have eagerly jumped on the bandwagon of this backlash and appear to have (at least for now) consolidated or entrenched their authoritarian rule as a result. In some ways the more deeply worrisome concern, however, is the mounting fiscal disarray and political stalemate of many advanced industrial democracies like Greece, Portugal, and Italy, and most alarmingly if it does not get its political and fiscal house in order, the United States. If the democracies of Europe and North America cease to be models that appear to work and to be worth emulating, it will be hard to imagine a bigger blow to the prospects for democracy worldwide.

If we examine carefully the character and trends of democracy in the world, there are, then, grounds for acute concern. But there are also sound bases for judicious optimism. If there is restlessness with democracy in many places, there is generally greater unease if not disgust with authoritarian rule. Although we are still a long ways from the arrival of democracy in a single Arab country, the diverse forms of popular protest that have toppled two Arab dictators this year in Tunisia and Egypt and challenged authoritarian rule in the face of often brutal repression in Bahrain, Yemen, Libya, and Syria show the underlying insecurity and fragility of many (if not most) of the world's remaining authoritarian regimes and affirm that the desire to live in dignity, with freedom and political choice, is as nearly universal a political value as we have in our time. Even if democracy does not arrive any time soon in the Arab world, the old authoritarian model of rule has been shown decisively to lack legitimacy and staying power. And this will come as no surprise to those who have seen the results in recent years from the Arab Barometer, showing overwhelming proportions of Arabs in several countries preferring a democratic system. In other regions (where democracy actually predominates), majorities of the public in most countries continue to believe that democracy is the best form of government, or at least that all other known forms are worse. Even where (as in much of East Asia) citizens have a low opinion of parties, politicians, and parliaments, they do not prefer to live under authoritarianism in general or concrete authoritarian options that they can imagine.

For all of democracy's troubles in the past decade or so, there has still been no "reverse wave" of democratic breakdowns on anything like the scale of what ended the first and second

waves of global democratization during the 1920s and 30s (preceding but accelerating with the Great Depression) and then again during the 1958-75 heyday of military coups and socialist or developmental autocracies.¹⁰ This is all the more remarkable given that the world has been living through the worst period of economic turmoil and downturn since the Great Depression. Unfortunately, more (and even worse) financial crisis could be in store for the world, but so far, third wave democracies have mainly responded to economic crisis and pain by replacing incumbent governments at the ballot box, rather than by replacing democratic regimes. Moreover, economic contraction does not seem to have been a significant cause of democratic breakdowns in the last decade or so (as some democracies fell with quite good rates of aggregate economic growth).¹¹ And it remains the case that above a certain upper-middle threshold of per capita income, roughly \$10,000 in 2009 purchasing power parity dollars, there is virtually no instance of a democracy breaking down.¹² About 25 third-wave democracies (not just Taiwan, Korea, and the new EU entrants but including, perhaps surprisingly, Turkey, Brazil and South Africa as well) are now above that minimum threshold, and Malaysia and Singapore would be well above it if they became democracies (Singapore in fact by this somewhat misleading measure has one of the highest standards of living in the world).¹³ In short, the universe of stable and consolidated or relatively secure democracies seems to have expanded significantly, probably placing substantial limits on how far a “democratic reverse wave” could proceed.

That said, there are still a number of very vulnerable democracies in the world, including probably the majority of democracies in countries with low and lower-middle income and deep ethnic or religious divisions (which have accounted for the bulk of the democratic breakdowns indicated in Table 2). What makes these democracies vulnerable is not poverty per se but several other conditions that are much harder to surmount at lower levels of economic development: rampant corruption, low state capacity and efficiency, weak rule of law, crime and insecurity, political and ethnic violence, and political polarization. It is not that middle-income (and even some upper-income countries) do not struggle with these problems, but the quality of governance simply tends to be poorer in lower-income countries, and this in itself makes democracy more vulnerable. And in addition, other dimensions of the quality of democracy, such as participation, civil society, and the fairness and transparency of elections themselves, also tend to be weaker in lower-income countries. Thus, this is where the disproportionate share of the democratic erosion has been during the third wave. That said, democracy persists in a

surprising number of lower-income countries in Africa and Asia.

Now, what does all this mean for East Asia? How well is democracy doing in East Asia, and what are its future prospects?

The Democracies of East Asia

There are three democracies in East Asia today that rank among the stable liberal democracies of the industrialized world: Japan, Korea, and Taiwan. To say this is not to say that they are without stiff economic and political challenges. Neither is it to ignore the very considerable citizen skepticism that persists in Korea and Taiwan in particular. But even though these two countries have surprisingly tepid levels of overt support for democracy, as evidenced by the fact that half or less of the public in each countries affirms that “democracy is always preferable” as a form of government, other data show these publics (and Japan’s) strongly reject authoritarian alternatives to democracy and overwhelmingly believe that democracy is “suitable” for their country. Moreover, liberal values of rule of law, freedom of expression, and judicial independence are now reasonably entrenched in the value orientations of citizens in each country.¹⁴ Comparative analysis of detailed freedom and governance scores indicates that these are indeed liberal democracies, but could become better, more liberal ones.

If we look beyond the annual seven-point Freedom House ratings of political rights and civil liberties to the more detailed total scores on their subcategories, we see that each of these three countries falls well short of a perfect score on both political rights and civil liberties. The three components of the Freedom House scale of Political Rights are “electoral process,” “political pluralism and participation,” and “functioning of government,” which has to do with accountability and transparency. These scales range from zero to total scores of 12, 16, and 12 respectively. On the first two, Japan’s scores are very good (12 and 15), and Korea’s and Taiwan’s scores are only one point short of the maximum on each scale (11 and 15, respectively; see Table 4). But on the functioning of government, which mainly involves accountability and the control of corruption, each of these three liberal East Asian democracies falls two points short (10). Thus, each of these three countries is outscored in political rights by some other third-wave democracies, such as Chile and Uruguay (39), and Poland and the Czech Republic (38). Even Ghana a very poor emerging democracy, has a total political rights score as high as

Japan's (37) and a point better than Korea and Taiwan. It is also worth noting that over the last five years (2005-2010), none of these three East Asian democracies has seen any measurable improvements in its scores on political rights.

On civil liberties, which has four component scales that generate a possible maximum score of 60, Taiwan's and Japan's overall score of 51 is at the upper end of the point range (44-52) that places a country a "2" on civil liberties (while Korea has 50 points total). As we see in Table 5, there seems to be a "Northeast Asian" pattern of democratic performance on civil liberties, as Taiwan, South Korea, Japan, and Mongolia all have very similar scores, both in total (50 or 51 points) and on the four component categories of the Civil Liberties scale. Part of this is due to scores on freedom of expression scores at least two points short of the maximum (16) in Japan, Korea, and Taiwan, but also to rather low scores on individual rights, which is a kind of grab-bag that measures not only personal autonomy but the penetration of crime and corruption into private business.¹⁵ This raises the possibility of an East Asian style of democracy that is—at least so far—slightly less liberal than the European model. Yet among third wave democracies (aside from Spain and Portugal), only a few (Chile, Uruguay, Poland, and the Czech Republic) have significantly higher Civil Liberties scores than these East Asian liberal democracies. Outside of Europe—with its long historical roots of liberal thought and experience and the strong gravitational pull of the EU charter and the *Acquis Communautaire*, which require strong adherence to individual rights and the rule of law—and Chile and Uruguay, which are the two Latin American countries with the strongest European influence and liberal traditions, there are no third wave democracies that achieve the most liberal Freedom House score of 1.¹⁶ If one were to identify, then, priorities for deepening democracy in the already liberal democracies of East Asia, they would seem to fall heavily in the areas of individual freedom and rule of law.

This implication seems to be confirmed by a look at the annual governance scores of the World Bank. None of these annual ratings and scores is free from serious methodological flaws or questions, of course, but we can learn something from comparisons across countries and over time. And here we see that while Japan, Korea and Taiwan generally do well in "voice and accountability" a (partial surrogate for political freedom and competitiveness), and in government effectiveness (where each of their scores are above the 80th percentile in the world), Korea and Taiwan score most disappointingly on rule of law and control of corruption, where their absolute scores are much weaker than on the other measures and well below OECD

standards, putting them closer to the 70th percentile (they do not rank worse comparatively only because so many other countries struggle with such serious problems of corruption as well). Interestingly, Japan's scores on these two governance measures are much better, about on a par with Chile, which generally has the best freedom and governance scores of any prominent emerging-market democracy outside of Europe. (While the average OECD country score on control of corruption in 2010 was 1.33, on a scale from -2.5 to +2.5, Taiwan scored 0.57, Korea 0.52, but Japan 1.35 and Chile 1.37).

The merely electoral democracies of East Asia of course have further to go toward the deepening and consolidation of democracy. Indonesia's democratic performance in the past decade has been much better than what many experts on that country might have expected. Its total point scores on political rights and civil liberties are below some prominent peer emerging-market democracies, like India and Brazil, but not dramatically below (Tables 4 and 5). The most glaring deficiencies in democracy in Indonesia and the Philippines as well have to do with the rule of law and control of corruption (as indicated by the low scores on "functioning of government" under political rights). Here the picture that emerges from cross checking the expert evaluations of Freedom House and the World Bank multi-source scores (mainly from surveys of investors and political risk firms, but also of organizations like Transparency International) is strikingly consistent. Indonesia and the Philippines both fall into the bottom third of countries in the world in terms of corruption control. In 2008, among such emerging-market democracies as India, Bangladesh, Argentina, Brazil, Mexico, South Africa and Turkey, only Bangladesh did slightly worse than Indonesia on rule of law, and on corruption, Indonesia and the Philippines scored worst after Bangladesh.¹⁷

Worrisome as well, perhaps, is that while Indonesia has held its own as a democracy during the years of the SBY (Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono) presidency, and the Philippines has returned to democracy with the 2010 free and fair election that replaced a president, Gloria Macapagal Arroyo, who had tampered with the electoral process and the constitutional order, neither country has improved its overall levels of freedom from where they were five years ago. Indonesia's total scores on political rights and civil liberties remained in 2010 what they had been in 2005: 30 and 35 respectively. On the latter, Indonesia did improve two points in rights of association, but it declined by the same margin (and to a very low score, 5 out of 16) in terms of rule of law. The struggle over Indonesia's anticorruption commission (the Corruption

Eradication Commission, or KPK)—which has seen the chef of the commission go on trial for murder, accusations of extortion by two of his deputy chairmen, and the exposure of a conspiracy by police and prosecutors to weaken the commission—is indicative of the afflicted state of the rule of law in Indonesia and the ways in which corruption undermines democracy and governance. If the situation is clearly better than the plundering final years of Suharto’s era, it may also be worse in that the decentralization of government under democracy is also believed to have decentralized and spread corruption. One bright sign is that four MPs were convicted in May 2010 of receiving bribes, and the Indonesian public does invest some high hopes in the anti-corruption commission. But since the fall of Suharto in 1999, Indonesia has really known only one effective president, SBY, who has been president since 2004 and was reelected in 2009. And his political capital is declining and will likely continue to decline in the run-up to the 2014 elections.

In the Philippines, democracy has returned in the sense that the country is no longer afflicted with a presidency of dubious electoral legitimacy (indeed the 2010 elections were deemed a significant step forward in electoral integrity). However, the core problems of “guns, goons, and gold” persists, and it remains to be seen if recently elected president Benigno Aquino can deliver on his promises of reining in corruption and reforming the country’s political system. One core problem is that semi-feudal elites retain a very strong—and not just corrupt, but often violent—hold on the politics of many provinces and constituencies, and they are able to win seats in the House and Senate and control of various pieces of what pass for political parties to a degree that has so far largely blocked fundamental reform.

Prospects for Further Democratization in East Asia

East Asia is still predominantly authoritarian—in marked contrast to Latin America or what used to be called “Eastern Europe.” And in fact, there has been little to no change in the levels of political rights and civil liberties in East Asia’s autocracies over the last five years, save that freedom levels in Thailand declined markedly after the 2006 military coup, while Cambodia has continued its steady descent into a deeply corrupt and abusive one-party hegemonic autocracy. Singapore, Malaysia, China, Vietnam, and Laos (along with even more brutally authoritarian Burma and North Korea), all remained stuck in their existing levels of political constraint or

repression (Tables 6 and 7). However, modernization theory would predict that a number of these countries will change politically as they rapidly development economically. For this reason, East Asia seems to be the region with the best prospects for democratic expansion in the next generation.

One cannot posit a mechanical relationship between the growth of per capita income, educational levels, and other indices of modernization, but it is obvious that Singapore is long since “overdue for democratic change,” and the decline in the electoral performance and credibility of the long-ruling PAP (with the opposition winning its first-ever group constituency in the recent parliamentary election) is a likely harbinger of bigger changes in the next five to ten years. Malaysia is poised to make a transition to democracy in the next decade as well, as the fissures within the ruling establishment and the discontent of many elements of the new middle class ripen. Thailand has been a democracy several times before, and while the country remains deeply polarized between the pro-Thaksin and pro-monarchy camps, national elections are at least highly competitive and seem to meet the “free and fair” standard of electoral democracy. With the decisive opposition victory of the new Pheu Thai Party (led by Yingluck Shinawatra, the sister of former prime minister Thaksin) in the May 2011 parliamentary elections, bringing back to power the political force deposed by the military in the 2006 coup, most experts may judge that Thailand has returned to electoral democracy. The country seems in for a rocky road when the long-reigning King passes from the scene, but if that produces in end a weaker monarchy (and military), this might also help eventually to loosen political polarization and create a more mature and institutional politics.

It is by now widely appreciated that Singapore is a massive anomaly, by far the most economically developed non-democracy in the history of the world, and among non-oil countries, also by far the richest autocracy. Scholars debate whether it is a permanent or transitory anomaly, and perhaps we will discover when the founding generation of leadership, particularly Lee Kuan Yew, passes from the scene (he will be 88 in September of this year, and recently resigned from the Cabinet, along with former prime minister Goh Chok Tong, in the wake of the ruling party’s disappointing electoral showing). Those hoping for an imminent democratic transition draw hope from the May 2011 parliamentary elections, when the ruling party (the PAP) recorded its weakest electoral performance since independence, winning “only” 60 percent of the vote. While it still won, yet again, well over 90 percent of the seats in parliament in a highly

rigged electoral system, the opposition Workers' Party broke through for the first time to win a five-seat group constituency, and a total of six seats overall, also a record for the political opposition in independent Singapore. The post-election survey of Singapore's Institute for Policy Studies certainly does not suggest that a democratic revolution is imminent. Support for greater political pluralism in Singapore (implicitly at least, democratic change) did not increase from the aftermath of the 2006 election. In fact, it declined by a couple of percentage points (to just under a third), but conservative opposition to greater pluralism also fell by three percentage points, to under a quarter of the citizenry, with the gains coming in the middle, "swing" category. If one is looking for a silver democratic lining, it might be that in the youngest age cohort, 21-29, the pro-pluralism camp increased from 30 to 44 percent in that five-year period.¹⁸ And if Singapore is still in the grip of half-century party hegemony, that now seems to be entering a more pluralistic and fluid phase, as opposition parties find new energy and support, young people flock to social media to express themselves more openly, new independent media crop up in cyberspace to provide news and opinions one could not find in the government-controlled press, and the ruling party feels the need to ease up on censorship and control. As a result, Stephan Ortmann judges that Singapore has already made a partial transition to a "competitive authoritarian" regime, and it is from that category of autocracies that democratic transitions are more likely to happen.¹⁹

Not only is Singapore far richer than other third-wave democracies when they made their transition, Malaysia now also has a higher per capita income (in purchasing power parity current dollars) than most of the countries that made transitions to democracy during the third wave. The competitive authoritarian regime in Malaysia has for more than a decade now faced a much stiffer challenge than anything Singapore has seen, and as the opposition gains in unity, credibility, and mobilizing power, the long-ruling coalition and dominant party, UMNO, feels under increasing threat. A good part of what is driving change in Malaysia is not only exhaustion with half a century of one ruling force, but also a much better educated and more pluralistic society, with the attendant growth in independent organizations and intensive, creative use of social media. One of the most influential and innovative examples of contentious online journalism is the trailblazing Malaysian paper, *Malaysiakini*. Last week, Malaysian Prime Minister Najib Razak pledged to appoint a broad committee to review the country's electoral system and make recommendations for reform. Many opposition and civil society leaders think

the pledge is empty and will have no impact on parliamentary elections due by 2013 (and possibly to be called earlier, in 2012). But the new opposition alliance, Pakatan Rakyat, is gaining momentum, and the regime's renewed effort to destroy former deputy prime minister Anwar Ibrahim with what appeared to be trumped-up charges of homosexual misconduct seem even less credible than when the regime tried this ploy the first time around. To be sure, the regime still has a lot of resources and assets, but a transition to democracy could happen in Malaysia any time in the coming years, and through the familiar instrument that has brought it in other competitive authoritarian regimes: the electoral process.

China's per capita income is still less than half of Malaysia's, but it is now probably only ten years away from that point when it will have a per capita income roughly equivalent to what South Korea had at the time of its democratic transition in 1987. In 1996, Henry Rowen predicted on the basis of purely economic development data and projections that China would transition to a "partly free" country (in Freedom House terminology) by 2015, and to a "free" country (not just a democracy, but one with freedom scores as good as India or Indonesia today) by 2025.²⁰ More recently, Rowen affirmed that analysis, estimating that even if China growth in GDP per capita slowed to 5 percent annually starting in 2015, it would have by 2025 a per capita income (in purchasing power parity dollars) roughly equivalent to that of Argentina's in 2007 (about \$15,000 in current dollars—which is roughly where Malaysia is today).²¹ Rowen's estimates were a bit mechanical in assuming gradual change toward democracy in China. It seems increasingly plausible, given the Chinese Communist Party's apparent conservatism, that change will be sudden and disruptive. The party leadership still shows no sign of embarking on a path of serious political liberalization that might lead, at least gradually, to electoral democracy. But as frustration with corruption and the constraints on free expression rise, so do the possibilities for a sudden crisis to turn into a political catastrophe for the party. Although it was a minor incident, one may see as a possible metaphor for the larger national situation the recent public assault on Fang Binxing, the president of the Beijing University Posts and Telecommunications and principle architect of the Great Firewall that is meant to keep "harmful content" off the Internet in China. Reportedly, Fang was struck by eggs and a shoe while speaking in Wuhan University on the dangers of allowing pro-democratization speech.²² Beyond the ongoing frustrations with censorship, insider dealing, abuse of power, environmental degradation, and other outrages that can only be protested by anti-system activity of one sort or

another, there are the big looming challenges China faces as its one-child policy comes home to roost in a rapidly aging (and perversely disproportionately male) population. According to the sociologist Jack Goldstone, China's workforce has already begun to shrink. Within the coming decade, China could face very significant labor shortages, and well before then, rapidly rising wage rates, while at the same time having to institute social security and other welfare programs to provide social insurance and welfare to this huge bulge. And this assumes that the suspected bubbles in the real estate and financial markets will not burst before then.

What is difficult to imagine, however, is that China can continue moving forward to the per capita income, educational, and informational levels of a middle-income country without experiencing the pressures for democratic change that Korea and Taiwan did. Those pressures are rising palpably now in Singapore and Malaysia. They will rise in Vietnam as it follows in China's path of transformational (even if not quite as rapid) economic development. They will eventually level and reorganize Thai society in a way that will make democracy more difficult to resist and less difficult to sustain. In short, within a generation or so, I think it is reasonable to expect that most of East Asia will be democratic.

Table 1. The Growth of Electoral Democracy, 1973-2010²³				
Year	Number of Democracies	Number of Countries	Democracies as Percent of All Countries	Annual Rate of Increase in Democracies
1973	40	150	26.70%	
1974	45	152	29.61%	12.5%
1975	46	158	29.11%	2.2%
1976	46	158	29.11%	0%
1977	45	154	29.22%	-2.2%
1978	50	157	31.85%	11.1%
1979	55	160	34.38%	10%
1980	54	161	33.54%	-1.8%
1981-82	55	163	33.74%	1.0%
1982-83	58	164	35.37%	5.5%
1984	58	165	35.15%	0%
1985	61	165	36.97%	5.2%
1986	62	165	37.58%	1.6%
1987	62	165	37.58%	0%
1988	67	165	40.61%	8.1%
1989	67	166	40.36%	0%
1990	75	164	45.73%	11.9%
1991	88	182	48.35%	17.3%
1992	96	186	51.61%	9.1%
1993	106	190	55.79%	10.4%
1994	109	191	57.07%	2.8%
1995	111	191	58.12%	0.9%
1996	112	191	58.64%	0.9%
1997	113	191	59.16%	0.9%
1998	114	191	59.69%	0.9%
1999	116	192	60.42%	1.8%
2000	115	192	59.90%	-0.9%
2001	116	192	60.42%	0.9%
2002	117	192	60.94%	0.9%
2003	115	192	59.90%	-1.7%
2004	117	192	60.94%	1.7%
2005	120	192	62.50%	2.6%
2006	121	193	62.69%	0.8%
2007	119	193	61.66%	-1.7%
2008	119	193	61.66%	0%
2009	116	194	59.79%	-2.5%
2010	114	194	58.76%	-1.7%

Figure 1. The Growth of Democracy, 1974-2010

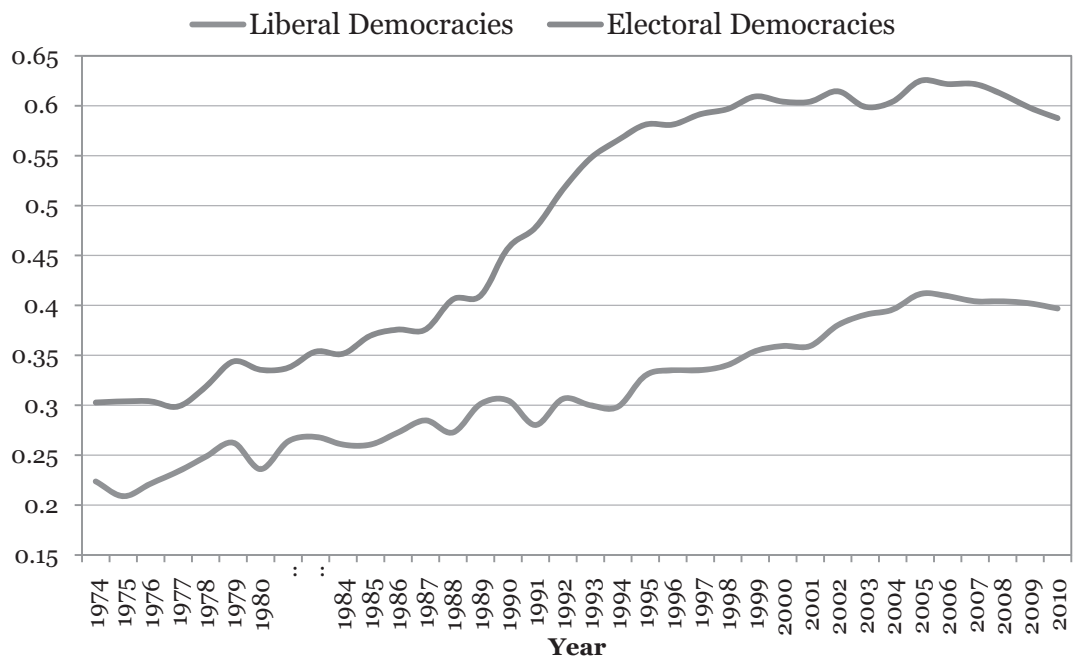


Table 2
Breakdowns of Democracy during the Third Wave (1974 through 2010)

Type of Breakdown	Number of Such Breakdowns	Percent of all Democracies (167) during Third Wave*	Countries & Dates of Breakdown & Renewal	FH Scores in Year Preceding Breakdown (PR, CL)
Breakdown with subsequent return to democracy	26	15.6%	India (1975, 1977) Thailand (1976, 1988) Argentina (1976, 1983) Seychelles (1977, 1993) Grenada (1979, 1985) Turkey (1980, 1983) Suriname (1980, 1988) Ghana (1981, 2000) Nigeria (1983,1999) Fiji (1987, 1997) Suriname (1990, 1991) Antigua & Barbuda (1991, 2004) Haiti (1991, 2006) Thailand (1991,1993) Peru (1992, 2001) Kyrgyzstan (1993, 1995) Dominican Republic (1994, 1996) Lesotho (1994, 2002) Niger (1996, 2000) Zambia (1996, 2002) Ukraine (2000, 2005) Liberia (2000, 2005) Georgia (2002, 2004) Guinea Bissau (2003, 2005) Bangladesh (2007, 2008) Philippines (2007, 2010)	2, 3 2, 3 2, 4 1, 2 2, 3 2, 3 2, 2 2, 3 2, 3 2, 2 3, 3 3, 2 4, 4 2, 3 3, 5 4, 2 3, 3 3, 4 3, 5 3, 4 3, 4 4, 5 4, 4 4, 5 4, 4 4, 5 4, 4
Breakdown with no return to democracy by 2011	27	16.2%	Lebanon (1975) Burkina Faso (1980) Djibouti (1981) Sudan (1989) The Gambia (1994) Congo-Brazzaville (1997) Kyrgyzstan (1998) Pakistan (1999) Fiji (2000) Russia (2000) Central African Republic (2001) Nepal (2002) Nigeria (2003) Venezuela (2005) Thailand (2006) Solomon Islands (2006) Kenya (2007) Georgia (2008) Mauritania (2008) Honduras (2009) Madagascar (2009) Niger (2009) Mozambique (2009) Burundi (2010) Guinea-Bissau (2010) Haiti (2010) Sri Lanka (2010)	2, 2 2, 3 3, 4 4, 5 2, 2 4, 4 4, 4 4, 5 2, 3 4, 5 3, 4 3, 4 3, 3 3, 3 3, 3 3, 3 4, 4 4, 4 3, 3 4, 3 3, 4 3, 3 4, 5 4, 4 4, 4 3, 3 3, 3 4, 5 4, 4 4, 5 4, 4
Total	53	30.9%		

*This counts all the democratic regimes that existed between April 1974 (the beginning of the third wave) and the end of 2010.

Figure 2. Rate of Democratic Breakdown

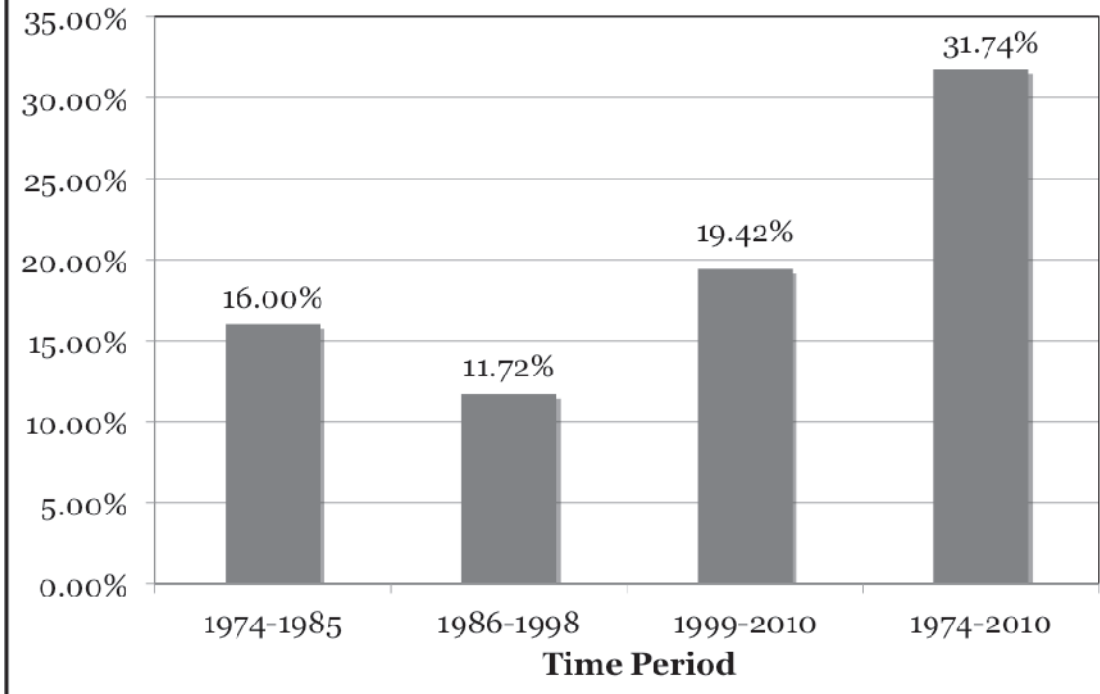


Figure 3

Ratio of Gains to Declines in Freedom, 1991-2020

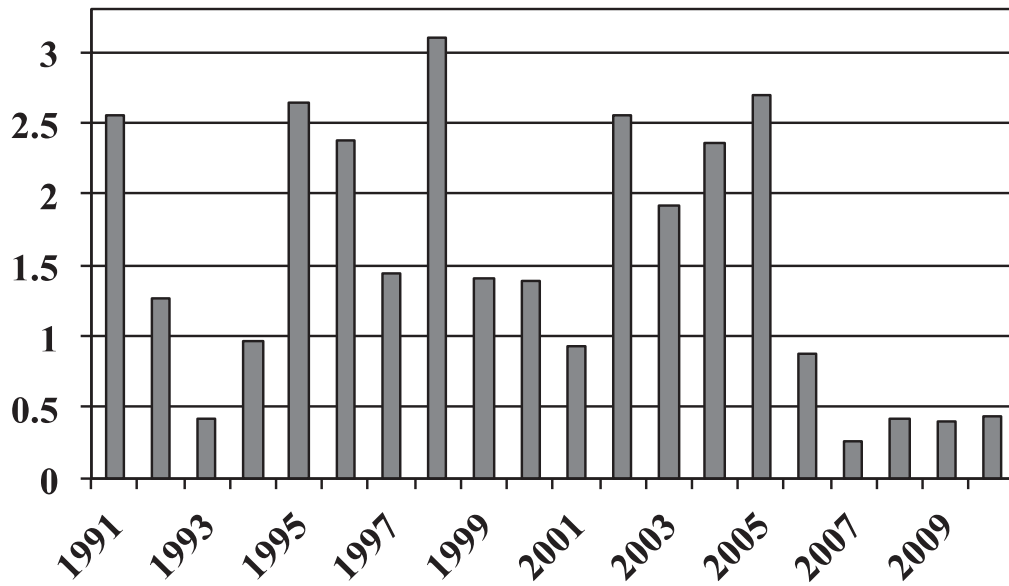


Table 3
Low-Quality and At-Risk Electoral Democracies, 2011

Country	Freedom Scores (Pol Rts, Civ Lib) 2010 2005	World Bank Control Corruption Percentile 2009	World Bank Political Stability Percentile 2009	World Bank Govt Effectiveness Percentile 2009	Per Capita GNP PPP\$ 2010	Country Status
Bangladesh	4,4 4,4	16.7	7.5	16.7	1,620	Political party polarization, corruption
Bolivia	3, 3 3,3	27.6	19.8	27.6	4,560	Severe Political Polarization on class and ideological lines, constitutional disputes, presidential populism
East Timor	3,4 3,3	15.7	29.2	11.0	3,570	Ethnic tensions, weak state
Ecuador	3,3 3,3	17.6	20.8	21.9	9,270	Severe Political Polarization, presidential populism
Guatemala	4,4 4,4	32.4	21.2	29.0	4,610	Severe inequality, high levels of violence and human rights abuse
Liberia	3,4 4,4	34.3	16.5	10.5	330	Weak state, post-conflict
Malawi	3,4 4,4	38.6	42.5	36.7	850	Tendency to executive abuse of power
Maldives	3,4 6,5	29.5	39.2	42.4	5,480	Tension between executive and legislative
Nicaragua	4,4 3,3	24.3	27.4	14.3	2,610	Ideological polarization, abusive president
Senegal	3,3 2,3	35.7	38.7	41.0	1,850	Presidential abuse of power
Sierra Leone	3,3 4,3	16.2	31.6	10.0	830	Weak state, post-conflict
Ukraine	3,3 3,2	19.5	34.4	23.8	6,580	Presidential populism, corruption
Zambia	3,4 4,4	37.1	64.2	30.0	1,370	Corruption, media and civil society restrictions

Table 4
Trends in Political Rights Scores
East Asian and Other Third Wave Democracies

Country	Per Capita GDP, 2010 PPP\$	Total Points Political Rights		Electoral Process		Political Pluralism & Participation		Functioning of Government	
		2005	2010	2005	2010	2005	2010	2005	2010
Max score		40	40	12	12	16	16	12	12
Japan	33,805	37	37	12	12	15	15	10	10
S. Korea	29,836	36	36	11	11	15	15	10	10
Taiwan	35,227	36	36	11	11	15	15	10	10
Mongolia	4,006	34	35	9	10	15	15	10	10
Indonesia	4,394	30	30	11	11	13	13	6	6
Philippines	3,737	29	25	7	9	14	10	8	6
East Timor	2,861	29	28	11	11	10	11	8	6
<i>Comparisons</i>									
Czech Rep	24,869	37	38	12	12	15	15	10	11
Poland	18,936	38	38	12	12	16	16	10	10
Chile	15,002	39	39	12	12	15	15	12	12
Mexico	14,330	35	29	12	10	14	12	9	7
Brazil	11,239	32	32	11	11	14	14	7	7
S. Africa	10,498	36	35	12	12	14	14	10	9
Guatemala	4,885	22	23	9	9	8	10	5	4
India	3,339	34	34	11	11	14	14	9	9
Ghana	2,615	37	37	12	12	15	15	10	10

Source: Freedom in the World, <http://www.freedomhouse.org/template.cfm?page=276>.

Table 5
Trends in Civil Liberties Scores
East Asian and Other Third Wave Democracies

Country	Per Capita GDP, 2010 PPP\$	Total Points Civil Liberties		Freedom of Expression		Rights of Association		Rule of Law		Individual Rights	
		2005	2010	2005	2010	2005	2010	2005	2010	2005	2010
Max score		60	60	16	16	12	12	16	16	16	16
Japan	33,805	51	51	13	13	10	10	15	15	13	13
S. Korea	29,836	49	50	14	14	12	11	12	13	11	12
Taiwan	35,227	55	51	16	14	11	10	15	14	13	13
Mongolia	4,006	49	50	15	15	10	11	12	12	12	12
Indonesia	4,394	35	35	11	11	8	10	7	5	9	9
Philippines	3,737	43	36	15	14	9	8	9	4	10	10
East Timor	2,861	38	34	13	12	8	7	8	6	9	9
<i>Comparisons</i>											
Czech Rep	24,869	55	57	16	16	12	12	13	14	14	15
Poland	18,936	54	55	16	16	12	12	13	13	13	14
Chile	15,002	57	58	16	16	12	12	15	15	14	15
Mexico	14,330	45	37	15	13	10	8	8	6	12	10
Brazil	11,239	45	46	15	15	10	10	8	9	12	12
S. Africa	10,498	52	48	15	15	12	12	13	10	12	11
Guatemala	4,885	33	34	12	12	8	8	5	6	8	8
India	3,339	42	42	13	13	10	10	9	9	10	10
Ghana	2,615	47	47	14	14	11	11	12	12	10	10

Table 6
Trends in Political Rights Scores
East Asian and Other Autocracies

Country	Per Capita GDP, 2010 PPP\$	Total Points Political Rights		Electoral Process		Political Pluralism & Participation		Functioning of Government	
		2005	2010	2005	2010	2005	2010	2005	2010
Max score		40	40	12	12	16	16	12	12
Singapore	58,522	17	17	4	4	6	6	7	7
Malaysia	14,670	19	20	6	6	7	8	6	6
Thailand	9,187	19	12	9	3	12	5	8	4
China	7,519	2	3	0	0	1	1	1	2
Vietnam	3,134	2	2	0	0	1	1	1	1
Laos	2,436	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	0
Cambodia	2,100	11	9	3	3	5	3	3	3
Burma	1,250	1	3	0	0	1	3	0	0
North Korea	n.a.	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
<i>Comparisons</i>									
Bahrain	26,852	14	13	3	3	6	6	5	4
Russia	15,837	11	7	3	1	5	3	3	3
Venezuela	11,829	23	17	10	6	8	8	5	3
Iran	10,865	9	6	3	2	3	2	3	2
Cuba	9,900	1	1	0	0	0	0	1	1
Tunisia	9,483	6	5	1	1	3	3	2	1
Sudan	2,492	5	9	0	2	4	4	1	3
Kyrgyzstan	2,248	16	15	5	6	7	6	4	3

Sources: Freedom in the World, <http://www.freedomhouse.org/template.cfm?page=276>, and for per capita GNP, the IMF, save for Cuba, which is an estimate of the CIA World Factbook.

Table 7
Trends in Civil Liberties Scores
East Asian and Other Autocracies

Country	Per Capita GDP, 2010 PPP\$	Total Points Civil Liberties		Freedom of Expression		Rights of Association		Rule of Law		Individual Rights	
		2005	2010	2005	2010	2005	2010	2005	2010	2005	2010
Max score		60	60	16	16	12	16	16	16	16	16
Singapore	58,522	33	31	9	9	4	3	8	7	12	12
Malaysia	14,670	31	29	10	9	6	6	6	6	9	8
Thailand	9,187	38	30	11	9	8	5	8	6	11	10
China	7,519	15	15	4	4	2	3	2	2	7	6
Vietnam	3,134	17	18	3	5	2	1	4	4	8	8
Laos	2,436	12	12	4	4	1	1	2	2	5	5
Cambodia	2,100	24	20	9	9	6	4	2	1	7	6
Burma	1,250	6	5	2	2	0	0	0	0	4	3
North Korea	n.a.	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
<i>Comparisons</i>											
Bahrain	26,852	22	19	8	8	5	3	4	1	5	7
Russia	15,837	24	20	8	6	6	4	4	3	6	7
Venezuela	11,829	31	25	11	9	7	4	5	5	8	7
Iran	10,865	15	11	5	2	3	2	3	3	4	4
Cuba	9,900	7	9	2	3	2	1	1	2	2	3
Tunisia	9,483	18	18	4	4	2	2	4	4	8	8
Sudan	2,492	6	6	4	4	1	2	0	0	1	0

NOTES

I would like to thank Anne Sophie Lambert for her very meticulous and effective research assistance on this paper, particularly in the preparation of the data.

¹ I define East Asia as the seventeen independent states of Northeast and Southeast Asia. This includes in the latter case all ten ASEAN members plus East Timor.

² Marc F. Plattner, “The Impact of the Economic Crisis: From the G-8 to the G-20,” *Journal of Democracy* 22 (January 2011): 31-38.

³ My brief definition of electoral democracy is a political system in which citizens can choose and replace their leaders in regular, free, fair and meaningful elections. If we take each of these words seriously, this is not all that minimalist of a concept, as I explain in *The Spirit of Democracy: The Struggle to Build Free Societies Throughout the World* (New York: Times Books, 2008). My definition of essentially coincides with that of Freedom House, which stipulates that a state must satisfy each of the following criteria to qualify as an electoral democracy:

1. A competitive, multiparty political system;
2. Universal adult suffrage for all citizens (with exceptions for restrictions that states may legitimately place on citizens as sanctions for criminal offenses);
3. Regularly contested elections conducted in conditions of ballot secrecy, reasonable ballot security, and in the absence of massive voter fraud, and that yield results that are representative of the public will;
4. Significant public access of major political parties to the electorate through the media and through generally open political campaigning.

However, at times I judge that Freedom House has been a bit too generous in applying these criteria, and I have reclassified a few states in a few years as authoritarian that Freedom House labeled democratic. A more demanding standard would move many more regimes into the non-democratic category (see below).

⁴ And in a way I am undercounting, in that I have chosen not to count as democracies those few political systems which Freedom House classified as such even though they had a 5 on political rights. I don't think a political system can score that low on rights of contestation and participation and be considered an electoral democracy.

⁵ See for example Larry Diamond, *Developing Democracy: Toward Consolidation* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999), especially chapter 5.

⁶ It may be seen as validating this analytic approach that 4 of the 15 democracies I placed in this table when I first constructed it for another conference two years ago have since broken down.

⁷ In counting the number of democracies in the world each year, I have sometimes made these judgments myself to remove countries, but Levitsky and Way classified in 2008 as “competitive authoritarian” a number of other countries where I simply accepted (sometimes with reservations) the Freedom House designation of democracy: Albania, Botswana, Malawi, Moldova, Nicaragua, Senegal, and Zambia. Moreover, this was not an exhaustive list of the regimes they would classify as competitive authoritarian, but rather a list drawn for the historical analysis in their book. Their criteria of “competitive authoritarianism” might well also apply today to Bolivia, Ecuador, Guatemala, and perhaps one or two others. In other words, a case could be made, from an effort to apply a more rigorous definition of electoral democracy, that the real number of democracies in the world today is not 114 or 115, but something closer to 100, and indeed that there have been many fewer breakdowns of democracy during the third wave than I am counting here because so many of these states (such as Nigeria, Mozambique, and Haiti) were not real electoral democracies to begin with. For their measurement scheme and classifications, see Steven Levitsky and Lucan Way, *Competitive Authoritarianism: Hybrid Regimes after the Cold War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), Appendix 1, pp. 365-371.

⁸ Steve Radelet, *Emerging Africa* (Washington, DC: Center for Global Development, 2010).

⁹ Carl Gershman and Michael Allen, “New Threats to freedom: The Assault on Democracy Assistance,” *Journal of Democracy* 17 (April 2006): 36-51.

¹⁰ Samuel P. Huntington, *The Third Wave: Global Democratization in the Late Twentieth Century* (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1991), pp. 16-21.

¹¹ Larry Diamond, “The Impact of the Economic Crisis: Why Democracies Survive,” *Journal of Democracy* 22 (January 2011): 17-30.

¹² Adam Przeworski and his colleagues locate that threshold at \$6,055 in 1985 Purchasing Power Parity dollars (the per capita income of Argentina at the time of its military coup in 1976). Adam Przeworski, Michael E. Alvarez, Jose Antonio Cheibub, and Fernando Limongi, *Democracy and Development: Political Institutions and Well-Being in the World, 1950-90* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p. 98. Adjusted for inflation, that level is now slightly over \$10,000 in 2009 dollars. Russia was actually above the level the inflation-adjusted level for year, 2000, when it can be considered to have lost its democracy, but the point still stands that there are now a number of

¹³ Recent data are from the IMF, as presented at

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_countries_by_GDP_\(PPP\)_per_capita](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_countries_by_GDP_(PPP)_per_capita).

¹⁴ I leave to other work, my own and from the Asian Barometer, the detailed documentation and analysis

of attitudes and values toward democracy. See my recent paper, “How Good a Democracy has the Republic of China Become? Taiwan’s Democracy in Comparative Perspective,” Presented to the INPR Conference: “A Spectacular Century: The Republic of China Centennial Democracy Forums,” Taipei, June 24-25, 2011, and the extensive work of Yun-han Chu and his colleagues in the Asian Barometer, including Yun-han Chu, Larry Diamond, Andrew J. Nathan, and Doh Chull Shin, *How East Asians View Democracy* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008), and Yun-han Chu, Larry Diamond, Min-Hua Huang, and Andrew J. Nathan, eds., *Ambivalent Democrats: Political Culture and Democratic Legitimacy in Asia*, forthcoming.

¹⁵ For the complete list of questions for each sub-category of the Freedom House annual survey of “Freedom in the World,” see

http://www.freedomhouse.org/template.cfm?page=351&ana_page=374&year=2011.

¹⁶ I exclude here small countries with populations of less than one million, mainly small island states.

¹⁷ Larry Diamond, “Indonesia’s Place in Global Democracy,” in Edward Aspinall and Marcus Mietzner, eds., *Problems of Democratisation in Indonesia: Elections, Institutions, and Society* (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies), p. 32, Table 2.4.

¹⁸ “IPS Post-Election Survey 2011,” Institute for Policy-Studies, Singapore. My thanks to Tan Ern Ser for sharing a copy of the summary findings. Support for greater political pluralism is indicated by six measures in the survey, such as the need for checks and balances in parliament, the need for different views in parliament, and disagreement with the statement that there is no need to change the electoral system.

¹⁹ Stephan Ortmann, “Regime Transformation in Singapore,” forthcoming in the *Journal of Democracy*, October 2011.

²⁰ Henry S. Rowen, “The Short March: China’s Road to Democracy,” *National Interest* 45 (Fall 1996): 61-70.

²¹ Henry S. Rowen, “When Will the Chinese People Be Free?” *Journal of Democracy* 18 (July 2007): 38-52.

²² Tania Branigan, “China’s ‘great firewall’ creator pelted with shoes,” *The Guardian*, May 20, 2011. I thank Matt Chalmers (Stanford undergraduate) for noting this incident to me.

²³ Methodological note to Table 1: Most of these classifications of regimes as electoral democracies are gathered from Freedom House lists of electoral democracies published each year since 1989, and from the individual country descriptions in its *Freedom in the World* book series prior to that date. However, the following countries for the following time periods are not counted as democracies in Table 1, despite the fact that Freedom House classified them as such: El Salvador 1974-1978, 1989; Spain 1976; Burkina

Faso 1977; Bolivia 1979; Malaysia 1984-1987; Georgia 1992-1995; Fiji 1992-1996, 2001-2002; Bosnia-Herzegovina 1992, 1996-1998; Haiti 1994-1995; Lesotho 1994-1997; Sierra Leone 1996; Ghana 1996-1999; Haiti 1996-2000; Niger 1999; Armenia 1999-2002; Djibouti 2000-2001; Russia 2000-2003; Ukraine 2000-2004; Nigeria 2003-2005; Venezuela 2005-2007; Central African Republic 2005-2007; Tanzania 2010. In some cases this is because I judge a political rights score of 5 is simply incompatible with the standard of electoral democracy. In most cases it results from my best effort to assess the actual conditions of political competition and pluralism on the ground at the time. I have erred on the side of caution in deferring to Freedom House judgments when in doubt, but some observers may question whether the democratic regimes recorded in Table 2 as having broken down were really instances of democracy in the first place. This dilemma of “gray zone” or ambiguous democracies applies to both instances of democracy in Nigeria, 1979-83 and 1999-2003, to the Liberian regime after the election of Charles Taylor in the late 1990s, to all of Haiti’s attempts at democracy, to Mozambique in recent years until it was removed from the list by Freedom House in 2010, and to possibly several others. Moreover, even if we agree that regimes like Russia, Kyrgyzstan, Ukraine, Georgia, and Venezuela under Hugo Chavez were democracies for some time, a difficult and disputable judgment is often required to establish the date at which the regime slipped below the minimum threshold of electoral democracy.