



A Comparative Survey of

*DEMOCRACY, GOVERNANCE AND DEVELOPMENT*

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Democratic Quality of Institutions and Regime

Support: Evidence from East Asia

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## **Asian Barometer**

A Comparative Survey of Democracy, Governance and Development

# **Working Paper Series**

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**Globalbarometer**

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**Democratic Quality of Institutions and Regime Support: Evidence from East Asia**

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Prepared for a conference on “How the Public Views Democracy and its Competitors in East Asia:  
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For more than a decade democracy researchers have sought to assess the quality of political institutions and practices in third-wave democracies and to identify the areas of reform or improvement. This stream of empirical research was driven by a growing concern that many third-wave democracies fail to embody institutions and mechanisms of democracy. As the discrepancy between regime performance and expectations of democracy widens, third-wave democracies are likely to face popular political discontent and citizen withdrawal from politics. In this context, we consider it timely and pertinent to examine how East Asians evaluate the democratic quality of political institutions and how the evaluation influences support for the prevailing system of government.

This paper is organized into six sections. The first section presents experts-based assessment of democratic governance in the sample countries. The second section reviews some conceptualization of democratic quality as standards of political performance and advances our measurement. The third section describes popular perceptions of institutional quality in the sample countries. The fourth section explores the linkages between dimensions of institutional quality and their underlying empirical structure. The fifth section examines the impact of perceived institutional quality on support for the prevailing system of government and compares it with that of commitment to democracy as well as that of perceived policy performance. The last section highlights the key findings and explores their implications for the prospects of democracy.

The analysis is confined to nine East Asian countries. They include Japan, the oldest liberal democracy in the region and South Korea and Taiwan, third-wave liberal democracies; Mongolia, Indonesia, the Philippines, and Thailand, third-wave electoral democracies; and Malaysia and Singapore, two pseudo-democracies with a façade of competitive multiparty system or competitive authoritarian regimes (Diamond 2012).

### **Experts-Based Assessments of Democratic Governance**

Before examining how ordinary people in the sample countries evaluate the democratic quality of their political institutions and practices, we present three experts-based assessments: Freedom House's freedom

in the world, the World Bank's worldwide governance indicators and the *Economists* Intelligence Unit's democracy index.

Freedom House annually reports a country's level of freedom on a seven-point scale of political rights and civil liberties, which runs from 1 (most free) to 7 (least free). As shown in Table 1, in 2010 Japan, Korea and Taiwan each received an average score of 1.5 while Mongolia and Indonesia 2.0 and 2.5, respectively. They all were rated as "free." The Philippines received an average score of 3.0, Malaysia 4.0 and both of Thailand and Singapore 4.5. They all were rated as "partly free." The ratings show that there existed some variation in the degree of freedom among the region's third-wave democracies and that none of them received the perfect degree of freedom many advanced Western democracies enjoyed.

Furthermore, Freedom House considered seven of nine - Japan, South Korea, Taiwan, Mongolia, Indonesia, the Philippines and Thailand - electoral democracies, indicating that they possessed basic properties of democracy such as a competitive multiparty system, universal adult suffrage, regularly contested elections and equal access of major political parties to the electorate. In contrast, Malaysia and Singapore were not regarded as electoral democracies. Distinguished from full authoritarianism, both of them may be regarded as competitive authoritarian regimes because the playing field is uneven and the electoral contest unfair (Levitsky and Way 2010). Considering the "thick" standards of democracy, Japan, Korea, and Taiwan may be distinguished from other electoral democracies and treated as liberal democracies (Diamond 2008).

(Table 1 about here)

The worldwide governance indicators developed by the World Bank Institute assess the quality of state governance in terms of six dimensions - voice and accountability, political stability, government effectiveness, regulatory quality, rule of law, and control of corruption. Country rankings are provided with the point estimates that have an expected value of zero and a standard deviation of one and thus range from -2.5 to +2.5. As shown in Table 2, in 2010 Japan, South Korea and Taiwan each received positive ratings for all six dimensions. Mongolia and Thailand received positive ratings for only two

dimensions (voice and accountability and political stability for Mongolia and government effectiveness and regulatory quality for Thailand). In contrast, Indonesia and the Philippines received no positive ratings for any dimension, even though both of them were considered electoral democracies. Although Singapore and Malaysia were not considered electoral democracies, both of them received positive ratings for all six dimensions including voice and accountability. Notable is that Singapore led East Asia in every dimension of governance except for voice and accountability and even Malaysia fared better than our electoral democracies in most dimensions. This finding suggests that good governance is compatible with non-democracies and that the quality of governance does not correspond to levels of democracy.

The percentile ranking points to each country's institutional strengths and shortcomings. Japan and Taiwan displayed high quality governance with no notable weaknesses. South Korea exhibited high quality governance without political stability. Mongolia exhibited stable and reasonably accountable governance with low effectiveness and high corruption. Indonesia and the Philippines had reasonably accountable and effective governance with weak rule of law and high corruption. Thailand displayed reasonably effective governance with low accountability and high political instability. Malaysia had highly effective and law-based governance without accountability. Singapore exhibited high quality governance without accountability. Government effectiveness appears to be the most notable strength of most sample countries, democratic or authoritarian. In contrast, political instability turns out to be the most notable weaknesses facing new democracies. As expected, voice and accountability proves to be the weakest point of competitive authoritarian regimes.

(Table 2 about here)

More recently the *Economist* Intelligence Unit began to release democracy index designed to capture the state of democracy. The index from zero to ten is based on indicators grouped in five different general categories: electoral process and pluralism, civil liberties, the functioning of government, political participation and political culture. On the basis of index scores, countries are classified into four types of regimes: full democracies (8-10), flawed democracies (6-7.9), hybrid regimes (4-5.9) and authoritarian

regimes (0-3.9). As shown in Table 3, in 2010, South Korea and Japan were rated as full democracies; Taiwan, Thailand, Indonesia, Mongolia, Malaysia and the Philippines, flawed democracies; and Singapore, a hybrid regime. More specifically, South Korea and Japan were rated as high performers of democracy with no apparent weaknesses. Taiwan was rated as a high performer of democracy with some weakness on political participation and democratic political culture. Thailand and Indonesia were perceived as middling performers of democracy with each having its own weaknesses. They all were more or less weak in political participation. Indonesia was also weak in democratic political culture. Mongolia and the Philippines were also rated as middling performers of democracy with some weakness on the functioning of government, political participation and democratic political culture. These countries were rivaled by Malaysia which was weak in political participation and civil liberties. Among the sample countries Singapore was the only hybrid regime, with low performance on electoral process and political participation. Noteworthy is that citizen political disengagement proved to be a common problem for most sample countries. A weak political culture of democracy seemed another problem for some third-wave democracies.

(Table 3 about here)

As compared to the experts-based assessments, how do ordinary citizens of each sample country perceive their political institutions and practices? We now turn to this question on the assumption that ordinary citizens are the final, if not the best, judges.

### **Democratic Quality: Conceptualization and Measurement**

In developing an analytic framework for citizen evaluation of institutional quality, we distinguish evaluation of democratic quality from support for democracy as an idea. We consider evaluation of democratic quality to refer to perceptions of the extent to which a regime-in-practice embodies institutions and mechanisms of democracy. In contrast, support for democracy refers to normative commitment to principles and institutions of democracy (Easton 1965; Norris 1999; Dalton 2004).

Prior theory and research employ different properties of democracy to distinguish high-quality

democracies from low-quality ones. The normative range and depth of these properties vary considerably from one study to another. Yet, they all seek to assess the extent to which political institutions and practices embody generic values of democracy and realize its basic principles and institutions. Among others, Dahl (1971) proposes freedom, universal suffrage, free and fair elections, competitive party politics, and alternative sources of information as basic institutional properties of democracy. Kaldor and Vejtova (1997) assemble their criteria of democracy: inclusive citizenship, rule of law, separation of power, elected power-holders, free and fair elections, freedom of expression and alternative sources of information, associational autonomy, and civilian control over the security forces. Lijphart (1999) uses a group of indicators to compare the quality of democracy: women's representation, political equality, electoral participation, satisfaction with democracy, government-voter proximity, accountability and corruption. Foweraker and Krznaric (2000) recommend eight indicators of liberal democratic performance: accountability, constraint, representation, participation, civil rights, property rights, political rights, and minority rights. Altman and Perez-Linan (2002) advance simple standards of democracy: accountability, representation, and civil liberties. Beetham (2004) emphasizes two basic principles - popular control and political equality - and derives from them seven standards: participation, authorization, representation, accountability, transparency, responsiveness and solidarity. Diamond and Morlino (2004) identify eight dimensions of democratic quality: rule of law, participation, competition, vertical accountability, horizontal accountability, freedom, equality and responsiveness. Since democracy is an essentially contested concept, it is hardly surprising that standards of democracy vary from one researcher to another.

Although each scholarly effort has its own strengths and weaknesses, we adopt Diamond and Morlino's dimensions of democratic quality because the data analyzed here are drawn from the 2010-2012 Asian Barometer Surveys which developed a battery of democratic quality items based on their conceptualization. For the present analysis we identify nine democratic qualities with further dividing their rule of law dimension into two: law-based governance, control of corruption, participation,

competition, vertical accountability, horizontal accountability, freedom, equality, and responsiveness. It should be noted that some qualities may not be distinctive properties of democracy. For instance, control of corruption and law-based governance may be viewed as standards of good governance, although democracies are more likely to ensure their provision than non-democracies.

To measure perception of each democratic quality of political institutions and practices, we selected a pair of questions even though they may not cover the breadth and depth of its meaning. First, law-based governance concerns the extent to which public officials abide by laws and are responsible before the law. To measure perceived quality of this dimension we selected two closed-ended questions: one reads “How often do you think government leaders break the law or abuse their power?” and the other “Do officials who commit crimes go unpunished?” Second, control of corruption concerns the extent of official corruption and the amount of government efforts to curb it. To measure perceived quality of this dimension we select two closed-ended questions: one reads “How widespread do you think corruption and bribe-taking are in the national government?” and the other “Is the government working to crack down on corruption and root out bribery?”

Third, participation concerns the extent to which citizens engage in various forms of political activity to influence government decisions. To measure perceived quality of this dimension we selected two questions: one agree-disagree statement reads “Most citizens don’t make much effort to influence government decisions” and the other closed-ended “In your neighborhood or community do people voice their interests and concerns in local affairs?” Fourth, competition concerns the fairness and meaningfulness of electoral contest. To measure perceived quality of this dimension we selected two questions: one agree-disagree statement reads “Political parties or candidates in our country have equal access to the mass media during the election period” and the other closed-ended “How often do you think our elections offer voters a real choice between parties or candidates?”

Fifth, vertical accountability concerns the relationship between citizens and government. Although electoral punishment or compensation constitutes the ultimate means of vertical accountability, we

emphasize other means such as disclosure of government information and non-electoral accountability. To measure perceived quality of this dimension we selected two questions: one closed-ended reads “How often do government officials withhold important information from the public view?” and the other agree-disagree statement “Between elections, the people have no way of holding the government responsible for its actions.” Sixth, horizontal accountability concerns the relationship between autonomous institutions of government and its benchmarks includes the separation and balances of power. To measure perceived quality of this dimension we selected two questions: one agree-disagree statement reads: “When government leaders break the laws, there is nothing the court can do” and the other closed-ended “To what extent is the legislature capable of keeping government leaders in check?”

Seventh, freedom concerns the extent to which political rights and civil liberties are guaranteed. Among an array of democratic rights, we consider freedoms of speech and association. To measure perceived quality of this dimension we selected two agree-disagree questions: one reads “People are free to speak what they think without fear” and the other “People can join any organization they like without fear.” Eighth, equality concerns the extent to which every citizen and group has equal rights under the law. In this study we consider wealth- and ethnicity-blind equal treatment by government. To measure perceived quality of this dimension we selected two agree-disagree questions: one reads “Rich and poor people are treated equally by the government” and the other “All citizens from different ethnic communities are treated equally by the government.” Lastly, responsiveness concerns the extent to which government is responsive to the demands and preferences of citizens. To measure perceived quality of this dimension we selected two closed-ended questions: one reads “How well do you think the government responds to what people want?” and other “How much do you feel that having elections makes the government pay attention to what the people think?”

### **Public Perceptions of Democratic Quality**

Which valued property of democracy was considered most and least lacking in the sample countries?

Table 4 summarizes how ordinary people evaluated the democratic quality of their political institutions

and practices. To ascertain the patterns of evaluation more succinctly, we compute percentage difference index (PDI) scores by subtracting the percent of those with unfavorable responses from the percent of those with favorable responses. The PDI scores range from -100 to +100. The magnitude of a positive score indicates a preponderance of approval while a negative score, a higher degree of disapproval.

First, in three liberal democracies citizens appeared to be generally critical of institutional quality. Although they were favorable toward the state of freedom and competition, they were critical of other dimensions, especially equality and participation. This finding suggests that the democracy-in-practice in each of these countries is viewed as far short of citizen expectations of democracy. More specifically, Japan displayed positive scores on control of corruption, freedom, law-based governance and competition. The first three had PDI scores higher than +20. In contrast, it displayed negative scores on participation, equality, vertical accountability, horizontal accountability, and responsiveness. The first four had PDI scores lower than -20. Overall, Japanese considered low participation the greatest weakness of their political regime while control of corruption a modest strength.

South Korea exhibited positive scores only on freedom and competition whose PDI scores were equal to +20. In contrast, it exhibited negative scores on equality, vertical accountability, law-based governance, participation, responsiveness, control of corruption and horizontal accountability. The first four had PDI scores lower than -20. Overall, South Koreans found their political regime particularly weak in equality and vertical accountability while no marked strengths.

Taiwan displayed positive scores on freedom, competition, responsiveness, control of corruption and horizontal accountability. Only the first two had PDI scores high than +20. It displayed negative scores on equality, law-based governance, participation and vertical accountability. The first three had PDI scores equal to or lower than -20. Overall, Taiwanese considered freedom and competition the marked strengths of their political regime but found equality most lacking.

In the eyes of their publics electoral democracies generally fared better than liberal democracies. They were seen as performing better on freedom and competition while worse on law-based governance.

More specifically, Mongolia displayed positive scores on freedom, equality and competition. Freedom was the only dimension whose PDI score was higher than +20. In contrast, it displayed negative scores on horizontal accountability, law-based governance, participation, control of corruption, vertical accountability, and responsiveness. Each of them had PDI scores lower than -20. Overall, Mongolians found their political regime lacking in most procedural qualities of democracy.

Indonesia exhibited positive scores on freedom, equality, competition, horizontal accountability, responsiveness and vertical accountability. The first four had PDI scores higher than +20. The last two had PDI scores lower than +5, indicating largely mixed judgment. In contrast, it exhibited negative scores on participation, law-based governance and control of corruption. The last two had PDI scores no lower than -5, indicating polarized evaluation of rule of law. Overall, Indonesians considered freedom, equality and competition the strengths of their political regime and found no critical weaknesses.

The Philippines exhibited positive scores on freedom, horizontal accountability, competition, and responsiveness. The first three had PDI scores higher than +20. In contrast, it exhibited negative scores on equality, vertical accountability, law-based governance, control of corruption, and participation. The first four had PDI scores equal to or lower than -20. Overall, Filipinos considered freedom the strength of their political regime while found the rule of law lacking.

Thailand displayed positive scores on every dimension except for participation. Equality, freedom, competition, law-based governance had PDI scores higher than +20. Vertical accountability, control of corruption and responsiveness had PDI scores no higher than +5, indicating mixed evaluation. The PDI scores of participation, the only negative dimension, was no lower than -20. Overall, Thais considered equality, freedom and competition the strengths of their political regime but found no serious failures.

In the eyes of their publics competitive authoritarian regimes also fared better than liberal democracies. Yet, they differed in their strengths and weaknesses. Malaysia displayed positive scores on every dimension except for participation. Freedom, control of corruption, horizontal accountability, equality, responsiveness and competition had PDI scores higher than +20. Law-based governance and

vertical accountability had PDI scores lower than +10, indicating divided judgment. In contrast, participation had PDI scores equal to -20. Overall, Malaysians considered their political regime to embody most elements of democracy. They only found it modestly lacking in political participation.

Similarly, Singapore displayed positive scores on every dimension except for participation. Law-based governance, control of corruption, horizontal accountability, vertical accountability, equality, and responsiveness had PDI scores higher than +20. Freedom and competition had PDI scores close to zero, indicating mixed evaluation of basic elements of electoral democracy. In contrast, participation had PDI close to -50. Overall, Singaporeans considered rule of law the greatest strength of the system while public apathy its greatest weakness.

(Table 4 about here)

It is evident that public evaluation of democratic quality diverged from experts-based assessments. Citizens in liberal democracies were most critical whereas their counterparts in competitive authoritarian regimes least critical. Citizens in electoral democracies had largely mixed judgment. In view of experts-based assessments the findings may suggest that citizen expectations of democracy were higher in liberal democracies than they were either in electoral democracies or in competitive authoritarian regimes. Evidently, East Asian democracies remained far short of citizen expectations of democracy. All democracies, liberal and electoral alike, were found missing in citizen participation. Most democracies were considered weak in vertical accountability and the rule of law. It seems that new democracies in East Asia face the challenge of better rule of law from one of the competitive authoritarian regimes.

### **Dimensionality of Democratic Quality**

The nine dimensions of democratic quality examined here are expected not only to overlap but also to interact with one another. Diamond and Morlino (2004) maintain that “democratic quality can be thought of as a system, in which improvement in one dimension can have diffuse benefits for others (and vice versa).” Yet, they also point out that “there are sometimes tradeoffs between the different dimensions of democratic quality.” To explore whether the different elements of democratic quality hang together in

the minds of ordinary people, we first performed simple correlation analysis. To examine the underlying structure of perceived democratic quality we further performed factor analysis and estimated the proximity of their relations.

Table 5 shows simple correlation coefficients between the different elements of democratic quality across regime types. In liberal democracies, most elements were related to one another, with a varying degree. There was one exception: participation was not linked to control of corruption. Five of thirty-six bivariate relationships (14%) were weak ( $r < 0.1$ ). For instance, participation was weakly linked to law-based governance, freedom, equality, and competition, suggesting that citizen political activism is distinguishable from many aspects of democratic quality. Competition was also weakly related to control of corruption. On the other hand, nine of thirty-six bivariate relationships (25%) were fairly strong ( $r > 0.3$ ). In particular, control of corruption, law-based governance, and both types of accountability were strongly linked to one another, suggesting that accountability and good governance reinforce each other. Both types of account ability were strongly linked each other, indicating a considerable overlap between them.

(Table 5 about here)

As in liberal democracies, in electoral democracies most elements of democratic quality were linked to one another, with a varying degree. There was one exception: participation was unrelated to equality. Nine of thirty-six bivariate relationships (25%) were weak ( $r < 0.1$ ). For instance, freedom was weakly related to law-based governance, control of corruption, participation and vertical accountability, suggesting the liberal aspect is not perceived as critical to good governance and popular sovereignty. Participation was either weakly related or unrelated to competition, freedom, and equality, suggesting that citizen participation is not perceived as interacting with substantive aspects of democratic quality. On the other hand, six of thirty-six bivariate relationships (17%) were fairly strong ( $r > 0.3$ ). In particular, vertical accountability and law-based governance were most strongly linked, suggesting that popular control and good governance reinforce each other. Both types of accountability were also strongly linked,

indicating their considerable overlap.

By contrast, in competitive authoritarian regimes the pattern of relationships turned out to be complicated. Although most elements of democratic quality were linked to one another with a varying degree, their direction appeared to be mixed. Twenty-four of thirty-six bivariate relationships (67%) were positive while nine (25%) negative. Three pairs (control of corruption and competition, law-based governance and responsiveness, and vertical accountability and equality) were not significant. Six positive relationships (17%) were fairly strong ( $r > 0.3$ ) whereas three (8%), weak ( $r < 0.1$ ). Notable is that law-based governance and control of corruption were most strongly related, indicating that they shared the same underlying structure. Interesting is that competition was perceived as reinforcing the substantive aspects of democratic quality.

Overall, the different elements of democratic quality were most often strongly linked in liberal and electoral democracies. There were no perceived tensions among the different dimensions of democratic quality. By contrast, in competitive authoritarian regimes some of them did not move together, suggesting some tensions or trade-offs.

How do ordinary citizens distinguish the different elements of democratic quality? As shown in Table 6, in liberal democracies public evaluation of democratic quality was grouped into three clusters: law-based governance, vertical accountability, control of corruption and horizontal accountability displayed primary loadings on the first factor; freedom, competition, equality and responsiveness, the second factor; and participation, the third factor. Responsiveness, the results dimension, had substantial loading on the first factor, suggesting that it is associated with both procedural and substantive aspects. Horizontal accountability had substantial loading on the third factor, suggesting that the vitality of checks and balances is linked to citizen participation.

A similar pattern was found in electoral democracies. Public evaluation of democratic quality was grouped into three clusters: law-based governance, vertical accountability, and control of corruption displayed primary loadings on the first factor; participation, responsiveness and horizontal accountability,

the second factor; and competition, equality and freedom, the third factor.

In competitive authoritarian regimes, by contrast, public evaluation of democratic quality was grouped into two clusters: competition, responsiveness, equality, freedom and horizontal accountability displayed primary loading on the first factor: and law-based governance, control of corruption, vertical account ability and participation, the second factor. Notable is that participation had negative loading, suggesting that citizen political activism is perceived as antithetical to the rule of law.

(Table 6 about here)

The results indicate that the empirical structure of perceived democratic quality did not correspond to the conceptual distinction of democratic quality such as procedural, substantive and results. Noteworthy, however, is that law-based governance, control of corruption and vertical accountability belonged to the same cluster regardless of regime types. Since vertical accountability involves government transparency, it seemed closely associated with elements of the rule of law. Another notable finding is that freedom, equality and competition loaded on the same factor regardless of regime types, suggesting that freedom and equality, foundational values of democracy, are closely associated with fair and meaningful elections. In brief, the number of clusters underlying the nine elements of perceived democratic quality and their constituent elements differ depending upon regime types. The public evaluation of democratic quality was clearly multidimensional. Moreover, in democracies there appear to be some negligible linkages, if not trade-offs whereas in competitive authoritarian regimes, some trade-offs as well as negligible linkages. The use of a simple analytic scale to measure democratic quality would be difficult to justify.

### **Regime Support: Performance or Commitment**

In this section we relate evaluation of institutional quality to support for the prevailing system of government. There are two competing accounts of regime support. The instrumental account emphasizes performance-driven regime allegiance. Among those who subscribe to this instrumental view, some theorists assert that economic effectiveness or performance matters. For instance, modernization theorists regard economic outcomes as having the greatest influence in people's judgments (Lipset 1959; Kotzian

2011). Yet, others consider political performance more influential than economic performance. For instance, recent studies of third-wave democracies demonstrate that political gains matter more than economic ones (Clarke *at al.* 1993; Evans and Whitefield 1995; Rose *at al.* 1998; Bratton and Mattes 2001). In contrast to the instrumental account, the intrinsic view stresses norm-based regime allegiance. Intrinsic theorists assert that values and norms acquired through political socialization or learning matter more than short-term performance. Both views allow for a broad understanding of the dynamics of regime support. When people support a regime as an end, their support tends to be diffuse, and short-term poor performance may have little effect on the regime's stability. In contrast, when they support it as a means, their support tends to depend on performance, and even short-term poor performance may threaten the regime's survival. Considering both views, we may divide sources of regime support into three broad categories: (1) normative commitment to democratic principles and institutions, (2) evaluation of political institutional performance or institutional quality, and (3) evaluation of policy performance.

Our dependent variable, regime support, was measured by combining responses to five questions (four agree-disagree statements and one closed-ended): "Over the long run, our system of government is capable of solving the problems our country faces," "Thinking in general, I am proud of our system of government," "A system like ours, even if it runs into problems, deserves the people's support," "I would rather live under our system of government than any other that I can think of," and "Compared with other systems in the world, would you say our system of government works fine as it is, needs minor change, needs major change, or should be replaced?"

The first cluster of explanatory variables pertains to normative commitment to democratic principles and institutions and consists of four components –the legitimacy of democracy,<sup>1</sup> checks and balances,

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<sup>1</sup> The belief in democratic legitimacy was measured by two forced-choice questions and one agree-disagree question: "Democracy is always preferable to any other kind of government, or under some circumstances an authoritarian government can be preferable to a democratic one, or for people like me, it does not matter whether we have a democratic or a nondemocratic regime," "Democracy is capable of solving the problems of our society or democracy cannot solve our society's problems," and "Democracy may have its problems, but it is still the best form of government."

social pluralism, and minimalist democratic institutions.<sup>2</sup> The second cluster pertains to evaluation of institutional quality and consists of nine components – law-based governance, control of corruption, participation, competition, vertical accountability, horizontal accountability, freedom, equality and responsiveness. The third cluster pertains to evaluation of policy performance and consists of four components – national economy, personal economy, basic welfare and public security (Roller 2005).<sup>3</sup> The last cluster represents demographic controls – age, education and income.<sup>4</sup> We employed pooled cross-sectional data from the countries of each regime type and performed OLS regression.

Table 7 reports the results of analysis for each regime type. Overall, the four sets of predictors accounted for much of the variance in regime support regardless of regime types: 29 percent for liberal democracies, 26 percent for electoral democracies and 35 percent for competitive authoritarian regimes.

Let us turn to the impact of each cluster of explanatory variables by regime types. First, in liberal democracies only two of four commitment variables had significant, albeit negative, effects. The more individuals are committed to the principle of checks and balances or social pluralism, the less likely they are to be supportive of the prevailing system of government, suggesting that their democracy-in-practice failed to meet the liberal ideal of limited government. Notable is that neither the belief in democratic

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<sup>2</sup> First, commitment to checks and balances was measured by two agree-disagree questions: “When judges decide important cases, they should accept the view of the executive branch” and “If the government is constantly checked by the legislature, it cannot accomplish great things.” Second, commitment to social pluralism was measured by two agree-disagree questions: “Harmony of the community will be disrupted if people organize lots of people” and “If people have too many different ways of thinking, society will be chaotic.” Lastly, commitment to minimalist democratic institutions was measured by two forced-choice questions: “Political leaders are chosen by the people through open and competitive elections, or political leaders are chosen on the basis on their virtue and capability even without election” and “Multiple parties compete to represent political interests or one party represents the interests of all the people.”

<sup>3</sup> First, evaluation of national economy we measured by a single closed-ended question: “How would you rate the overall economic condition of our country today?” Second, evaluation of personal economy was measured by a single closed-ended question: “As for your own family, how would you rate the economic situation of your family today?” Third, evaluation of basic welfare was measured by a single agree-disagree item: “People have basic necessities like food, clothes and shelter.” Lastly, evaluation of public safety was measured by a single closed-ended question: “Generally speaking, how safe is living in this city/town/village?”

<sup>4</sup> Age was coded as 17-29=1, 30-39=2, 40-49=3, 50-59=4 and 60+=5. Education was coded as less than high school=1, high school=2, and some college+=3. Income was indirectly measured by a single question: “Does the total income of your household allow you satisfactorily cover your needs?” Responses were coded as follows: “our income covers the needs well, we can save”=4, “our income covers the needs all right, without much difficulty”=3, “our income does not cover the needs, there are difficulties”=2 and “our income does not cover the needs, there are great difficulties”=1.

legitimacy nor preference for democratic institutions had significant effects. By contrast, all nine dimensions of institutional quality had significant, albeit varying, effects. The more individuals were favorable toward each dimension of institutional performance, the more likely they were to be supportive of the ongoing political order. Among them responsiveness had the largest effect. It was followed by control of corruption and equality. All four policy performance variables had significant effects. Economic assessment mattered to regime support more than basic welfare and public security. Of the demographic controls, only age had a significant effect, indicating that older people were less critical than younger people.

In electoral democracies only two of four commitment variables had significant effects. Yet, they were in the opposite direction. Those considering democracy as legitimate were more allegiant to the regime. In contrast, those committed to checks and balances were less allegiant, suggesting that the regime was found short of the principle of limited government. Yet, neither support for a pluralist civil society nor preference for minimalist democratic institutions had significant effects. Six of nine dimensions of institutional quality had significant, albeit varying, effects. Among them equality had the greatest effects. Notable is that key procedural elements of democratic quality such as participation and two types of accountability had no effects. Three of four policy performance variables – national economy, basic welfare and public safety - had significant effects. Notable is that the effects of policy performance were generally greater than those of political performance. Of the demographic controls age had positive effects while education negative effects. Notable is that the more educated were more critical of the ongoing political order, suggesting the influence of cognitive resources and value orientations. Yet, income had no effects, indicating that economic winners were no more allegiant.

In competitive authoritarian regimes three of four commitment variables had significant, albeit negative, effects. The more individuals were committed to liberal democratic principles, the less likely they were to be supportive of the ongoing political order. Similarly, those supportive of institutions of minimalist democracy were less allegiant to the regime. In contrast, the belief in democratic legitimacy

had no effects, suggesting that support for democracy may reflect just “lip-service to democracy” (Welzel and Inglehart 2008). Seven of nine dimensions of institutional quality had significant effects: the more individuals were favorable toward institutional quality, the more likely they were to be allegiant to the regime. Among them equality of treatment and control of corruption, more features of good governance than those of democracy, played a greater role. In contrast, participation and vertical accountability, features of popular sovereignty, had no effects. Three of four policy performance variables had significant positive effects. Especially, national economy and basic welfare had greater effects. Of the demographic controls income negative effects, with the better off being far less allegiant, suggesting that the central concern of the affluent may shift to the quality of political life.

(Table 7 about here)

The findings evidently show that citizen allegiance to the prevailing system of government is shaped by regime performance more than normative commitment. Contrary to recent evidence from new democracies, economic performance was no less important than political performance. Moreover, public safety and basic welfare also mattered to regime support, indicating that economic performance was not the only source of policy performance encouraging allegiance to the ongoing political order. One of the reasons why our findings differ from much of the recent findings drawn from new democracies may have to do with our dependent variable. Much of prior research treated support for democracy as a dependent variable. Since support for democracy can be distinguished from regime support even in democracies (Shin 2007), our findings may be more relevant to assessing the instrumental and intrinsic accounts for regime support. What is evident is that support for the prevailing system of government, democratic or non-democratic, rests on not only political performance but also economic and social performance.

The analysis confirms that political performance played a notable role in engendering regime allegiance. Yet, the contribution of every dimension was not equal. In liberal democracies it was the results dimension – responsiveness - that was the strongest predictor. In contrast, in electoral democracies and competitive authoritarian regimes it was equality of treatment. Notable is that citizen political

activism, a symptom of vibrant civil society, made negligible or no contribution to regime allegiance.

Perhaps the most noteworthy finding is that support for democracy as an idea had a mixed role. It had no effects in liberal democracies as well as competitive authoritarian regimes. Yet, it had large effects in electoral democracies. This finding suggests that the belief in democratic legitimacy itself may not shore up regime support in liberal democracies whereas it bolsters regime support in electoral democracies. Surprisingly, however, commitment to the separation of powers and social pluralism decreased rather than increased regime support in liberal and electoral democracies, suggesting that these regimes remained short of the ideals of limited government. In contrast, commitment to popular election and multiparty system had no effects, suggesting that these regimes lived up to standards of minimalist democracy. In competitive authoritarian regimes commitment to liberal principles and democratic institutions had negative effects, suggesting that these regimes fell short of standards of limited government and minimalist democracy. The findings suggest that commitment to liberal democratic values and principles may contribute to citizen perceptions of democratic deficit (Norris 2011).

Noteworthy is that in competitive authoritarian regimes, regime performance including even political performance contributed to regime allegiance, suggesting that better governance reform would help to a certain extent strengthen regime stability. Especially notable is that economic and welfare performance stand out as being more important than any others, suggesting policy performance remained the main source of regime support. What would undermine allegiance to the ongoing political order would be the spread of normative commitment to limited government and minimalist democratic institutions.

Overall, what emerged from the analysis is that political and policy performance made a considerable contribution to diffuse regime support. In contrast, commitment to democratic principles and institutions made little contribution to it. Regardless of regime types citizen allegiance to the prevailing system of government appears to be largely performance-based, not norm-based.

### **Summary and Conclusion**

In this paper we attempted to examine systematically how ordinary people in East Asian countries

evaluated the democratic quality of their political institutions and practices and how the evaluation fared in accounting for regime support, as compared with evaluation of policy performance as well as normative commitment to democracy. We adopted Diamond and Morlino's multidimensional conceptualization of democratic quality and identified nine dimensions of political performance: law-based governance, control of corruption, participation, electoral competition, vertical accountability, horizontal accountability, freedom, equality and responsiveness.

It was found that public evaluation of democratic quality diverged from experts-based assessments. In the eyes of their publics, liberal democracies fared worse while competitive authoritarian regimes best. The more a county is democratic, the more likely its citizens are to be critical of their political institutions and practices. Perhaps competitive authoritarian regimes actually performed better than liberal democracies. But a more plausible interpretation is that citizens in liberal democracies are better informed about government than their counterparts in competitive authoritarian regimes. Moreover, public expectations of government may be higher in liberal democracies than competitive authoritarian regimes perhaps because expectations have risen with additional democratic improvement. Hence, it becomes more difficult for a democratic government to satisfy higher or divergent citizen expectations. In any way East Asian democracies remained far short of citizen expectations of democracy. They were plagued by popular political apathy and withdrawal. The region's third-wave democracies largely suffered from weak rule of law and have yet to establish themselves as full liberal democracies in the eyes of their publics.

The analysis shows that the different components of democratic quality are multidimensional. Foundational values of democracy seemed distinguishable from procedural aspects of democratic governance. There existed reinforcing linkages among some elements of democracy while negligible linkages or even tensions among others. In liberal and electoral democracies, nearly every linkage was significant although many remained weak. By contrast, in competitive authoritarian regimes fewer significant linkages were found and some of the linkages were even negative. This finding suggests that people may become aware that the different elements of democratic quality reinforce one another as they

have more experience of democratic governance.

Lastly, political performance mattered to regime allegiance. In liberal and electoral democracies institutional quality proved to be more relevant than policy performance. Even in competitive authoritarian regimes it mattered, albeit less than policy performance. In contrast, normative commitment to democracy failed to encourage regime support. They rather undermined regime allegiance, suggesting that the ongoing political order remained short of citizen expectations of democracy. Regardless of regime types, not only political performance but also policy performance contributed to regime support and allegiance to the prevailing system of government is performance-based not norms-based.

One final word is the prospect of regime change or resilience on the basis of the findings. First, in liberal democracies such as South Korea and Taiwan where approval of institutional quality was low, we may expect popular demand for further democratic deepening. Second, in some electoral democracies such as Mongolia and the Philippines where approval of institutional quality was low, we may expect popular indifference to democratic backsliding. Third, in other electoral democracies such as Indonesia and Thailand where approval of institutional quality was high, we may expect popular acceptance of slow or faltering democratic progress. Lastly, in competitive authoritarian regimes such as Malaysia and Singapore where approval of institutional quality was high, we may expect popular ambivalence of democratic transition.

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**Table 1 Freedom House Ratings of Political Rights and Civil Liberties, 2010**

	Political Rights	Civil Liberties	Freedom Rating	Status	Electoral democracy
Japan	1	2	1.5	Free	Yes
South Korea	1	2	1.5	Free	Yes
Taiwan	1	2	1.5	Free	Yes
Mongolia	2	2	2.0	Free	Yes
Indonesia	2	3	2.5	Free	Yes
Philippines	3	3	3.0	Partly free	Yes
Malaysia	4	4	4.0	Partly free	No
Thailand	5	4	4.5	Partly free	No
Singapore	5	4	4.5	Partly free	No

Source: Freedom House

**Table 2 World Bank's Worldwide Governance Indicators, 2010**

	Voice and accountability		Political Stability		Government effectiveness		Regulatory quality		Rule of law		Control of corruption	
	Point Estimate	Percentile Rank	Point Estimate	Percentile Rank	Point Estimate	Percentile Rank	Point Estimate	Percentile Rank	Point Estimate	Percentile Rank	Point Estimate	Percentile Rank
Japan	+1.05	82.5	+0.87	76.9	+1.40	88.5	+0.98	80.9	+1.31	88.2	+1.54	91.9
South Korea	+0.71	69.2	+0.10	34.3	+1.19	84.2	+0.91	78.9	+0.99	81.0	+0.42	69.4
Taiwan	+0.90	73.9	+0.79	72.6	+1.21	84.7	+1.18	83.7	+1.01	81.5	+0.75	74.2
Mongolia	+0.00	48.8	+0.51	65.1	-0.61	32.6	-0.28	42.6	-0.43	41.2	-0.71	27.8
Indonesia	-0.06	48.3	-0.89	18.9	-0.20	47.8	-0.38	39.7	-0.63	31.3	-0.73	27.3
Philippines	-0.09	46.9	-1.56	6.6	-0.10	51.7	-0.26	44.0	-0.54	32.6	-0.82	22.5
Thailand	-0.56	30.3	-1.22	12.7	+0.09	58.4	+0.19	56.5	-0.20	49.8	-0.34	46.9
Malaysia	+0.53	31.3	+0.14	51.9	+1.10	82.3	+0.58	71.3	+0.51	65.4	+0.12	61.2
Singapore	+0.29	37.4	+1.12	89.6	+2.25	100	+1.80	98.6	+1.69	93.4	+2.18	98.6

Source: World Bank

**Table 3 Economist Intelligence Unit's Democracy Index, 2010**

	Electoral process and pluralism	Functioning of government	Political participation	Political culture	Civil liberties	Overall score	Regime types
South Korea	9.17	7.86	7.22	7.50	8.82	8.11	Full democracy
Japan	9.17	8.21	6.11	7.50	9.41	8.08	Full democracy
Taiwan	9.58	7.14	5.56	5.63	9.71	7.52	Flawed democracy
Thailand	7.83	6.07	5.56	6.25	7.06	6.55	Flawed democracy
Indonesia	6.92	7.50	5.56	5.63	7.06	6.53	Flawed democracy
Mongolia	8.33	5.71	3.89	5.63	8.24	6.36	Flawed democracy
Malaysia	6.50	6.79	5.56	6.25	5.88	6.19	Flawed democracy
Philippines	8.33	5.00	5.00	3.13	9.12	6.12	Flawed democracy
Singapore	4.33	7.50	2.78	7.50	7.35	5.89	Hybrid regime

Source: *Economist* Intelligence Unit

**Table 4 Evaluation of Democratic Quality by Regime Types**

	Law-based governance	Control of corruption	Participation	Competition	Vertical accountability	Horizontal accountability	Freedom	Equality	Responsiveness
<i>Liberal democracy</i>									
Japan	+21	+27	-58	+12	-27	-23	+22	-29	-12
South Korea	-29	-7	-27	+20	-38	-4	+20	-45	-17
Taiwan	-21	+7	-20	+31	-14	+1	+55	-26	+15
<i>Electoral democracy</i>									
Mongolia	-49	-44	-48	+18	-43	-65	+36	+19	-27
Indonesia	-5	-4	-12	+44	+1	+31	+68	+50	+4
Philippines	-22	-20	-9	+29	-23	+30	+51	-29	+11
Thailand	+25	+4	-11	+48	+5	+10	+71	+82	+2
<i>Competitive authoritarianism</i>									
Malaysia	+7	+40	-20	+27	+1	+40	+64	+39	+36
Singapore	+77	+74	-51	+1	+27	+51	+3	+26	+26

Entries are PDI scores computed by subtracting the percent of those with unfavorable responses from the percent of those with favorable responses. The PDI scores range from -100 to +100.

Source: ABS III

**Table 5 Correlations between Dimensions of Democratic Quality by Regime Types**

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)
<i>Liberal democracy</i>								
(1) Law-based governance	-							
(2) Control of corruption	.413**	-						
(3) Competition	.161**	.073**	-					
(4) Participation	.033*	Ns	.091**	-				
(5) Vertical accountability	.286**	.435**	.115**	.178**	-			
(6) Horizontal accountability	.306**	.324**	.231**	.227**	.409**	-		
(7) Freedom	.164**	.125**	.273**	.044**	.131**	.130**	-	
(8) Equality	.274**	.235**	.204**	.033*	.220**	.222**	.305**	-
(9) Responsiveness	.383**	.250**	.292**	.192**	.306**	.378**	.278**	.287**
<i>Electoral democracy</i>								
(1) Law-based governance	-							
(2) Control of corruption	.332**	-						
(3) Competition	.092**	.158**	-					
(4) Participation	.095**	.140**	.079**	-				
(5) Vertical accountability	.380**	.220**	.037*	.175**	-			
(6) Horizontal accountability	.248**	.270**	.184**	.318**	.359**	-		
(7) Freedom	.070**	.043**	.232**	.067**	.033*	.124**	-	
(8) Equality	.212**	.173**	.277**	Ns	.109**	.084**	.282**	-
(9) Responsiveness	.208**	.349**	.218**	.253**	.120**	.301**	.128**	.116**
<i>Competitive authoritarianism</i>								
(1) Law-based governance	-							
(2) Control of corruption	.526**	-						
(3) Competition	-.172**	Ns	-					
(4) Participation	-.257**	-.114**	.135**	-				
(5) Vertical accountability	.459**	.233**	-.196**	-.079**	-			
(6) Horizontal accountability	.181**	.247**	.118**	.065**	.243**	-		
(7) Freedom	-.217**	-.087**	.384**	.224**	-.114**	.152**	-	
(8) Equality	.097**	.155**	.315**	.046*	Ns	.201**	.311**	-
(9) Responsiveness	Ns	.223**	.332**	.128**	-.089**	.251**	.188**	.246**

Entries are Pearson Correlation Coefficients. \*\* Significant at the 0.01 level. \* Significant at the 0.05 level.  
Source: ABS III

**Table 6 Factor Structure of Democratic Quality by Regime Types**

	Factor I	Factor II	Factor III	Communalities
<i>Liberal democracy</i>				
Law-based governance	<b>.814</b>	.032	-.051	.666
Vertical accountability	<b>.694</b>	.027	.294	.570
Control of corruption	<b>.690</b>	.231	-.043	.532
Horizontal accountability	<b>.525</b>	.185	<b>.501</b>	.561
Freedom	.057	<b>.761</b>	-.039	.583
Competition	-.019	<b>.698</b>	.230	.541
Equality	.351	<b>.566</b>	-.116	.457
Responsiveness	<b>.410</b>	<b>.477</b>	.358	.524
Participation	-.017	.006	<b>.873</b>	.762
<i>Electoral democracy</i>				
Law-based governance	<b>.804</b>	.028	.079	.654
Vertical accountability	<b>.731</b>	.156	-.095	.568
Control of corruption	<b>.526</b>	.311	.172	.402
Participation	.015	<b>.774</b>	-.074	.605
Responsiveness	.161	<b>.637</b>	.235	.488
Horizontal accountability	.372	<b>.619</b>	.117	.535
Competition	-.009	.219	<b>.697</b>	.533
Equality	.330	-.248	<b>.695</b>	.654
Freedom	-.054	.126	<b>.683</b>	.486
<i>Competitive authoritarianism</i>				
Competition	<b>.699</b>	-.258	-	.555
Responsiveness	<b>.683</b>	.091	-	.475
Equality	<b>.667</b>	.042	-	.447
Freedom	<b>.590</b>	-.377	-	.491
Horizontal accountability	<b>.532</b>	.329	-	.391
Law-based governance	.025	<b>.848</b>	-	.719
Control of corruption	.288	<b>.717</b>	-	.597
Vertical accountability	-.101	<b>.657</b>	-	.442
Participation	.273	-.389	-	.226

The reported loadings were from a principal component solution with varimax rotation using the listwise deletion of missing data. Loadings of greater than 0.40 are in bold.

Source: ABS III

**Table 7 Multivariate Analysis of Regime Support by Regime Types**

	Liberal Democracy	Electoral Democracy	Competitive authoritarianism
<i>Commitment to democracy</i>			
Democratic legitimacy	Ns	.308***	Ns
Checks and balances	-.082**	-.060*	-.146***
Social pluralism	-.074*	Ns	-.112**
Minimalist institutions	Ns	Ns	-.092*
<i>Institutional quality</i>			
Law-based governance	.065*	.114***	.140***
Control of corruption	.187***	.175***	.195***
Participation	.069*	Ns	Ns
Competition	.136***	.106***	.135**
Vertical accountability	.093**	Ns	Ns
Horizontal accountability	.142***	Ns	.169***
Freedom	.087**	.107***	.099**
Equality	.170***	.300***	.220***
Responsiveness	.369***	.130***	.108*
<i>Policy performance</i>			
National economy	.244***	.324***	.426***
Personal economy	.172***	Ns	Ns
Basic welfare	.135**	.192***	.445***
Public safety	.151**	.243***	.206*
<i>Demographic controls</i>			
Age	.191***	.090**	Ns
Education	Ns	-.205***	Ns
Income	Ns	Ns	-.233***
R-square	.289	.262	.354
(N)	(2,997)	(3,024)	(1,251)

\*p&lt;0.05 \*\*p&lt;0.01 \*\*\*p&lt;0.001

Source: ABS III