Title
Does Social Capital Lead to Support for Democracy in East Asia?

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The idea that the sustainability and quality of democracy increase with the number of citizens actively engaged in their communities has constituted a major tenet of democratic theory at least since the days of Alexis de Tocqueville, and reverberates anew with the recent application of the concept of social capital on a societal level (Putnam 1993, 2000).[1] Similarly, political culture theories also emphasize the importance of people's beliefs, rather than mere institutional design, in facilitating both transitions away from authoritarian rule and consolidation of democratic regimes.

The attraction of these propositions lies in the importance they attribute to ordinary citizens, ascribing to any men and women on the street the potential to influence decisions that govern their lives. However, most of the existing literature on the effect of civic engagement on democratic performance (e.g. Putnam 1993) comprise of studies of western societies which, notwithstanding differences among them, can be described as sharing common historical and cultural legacies. Thus, one may ask whether this heritage might exert an impact on the hypothesized linkage between interpersonal trust and civic engagement on one hand and democratic values on the other. In other words, can the same impact be observed in societies that developed under entirely different ethos and traditions?

The selection of cases from east Asia, covering countries at different stages of both economic development and democratic experience, seems particularly suitable for examining the impact of social capital on democratic support, partly to gain insights into the role of civil society in countries' potential for democratization, and also in view of the debate over whether Asian societies remain less fertile ground for liberal democracy due to their historical and cultural heritage that allegedly constitute impediments to public support for principles, institutions and procedures of democratic governance. Evidence that social capital theories operate with equal validity in east Asia as they do in western societies would suggest their wider, perhaps universal, applicability.

In exploring these questions in depth, this paper begins with a review of the origins and conceptualizations of social capital, particularly the effects of interpersonal trust and participation in voluntarily associations on support for democracy. The next section introduces a "two-step process" proposition, suggesting that while a causal relationship exists between social capital and democratic support, this link is mediated by intervening variables in the form of knowledge and skills resulting from trust and participation. Empirical tests are conducted on survey data from seven countries covered by the East Asian Barometer to examine the validity of this hypothesis.

Literature Review

Differences in terminology notwithstanding, studies on the impact of civic norms on democracy have a long history, dating at least as far back as Tocqueville in the early nineteenth century. This tradition continues with Arendt's "mass society" (1948), Truman's "pluralism" (1951), Almond and Verba's "civic culture" (1963), and Putnam's "social capital" (1993), to name just a few examples. In addition to these works, scholars have stressed the role of voluntary associations involving multiple and cross-cutting group affiliations in contributing to democracy (Kornhauser 1959; Lipset 1960). A long line of scholarship has also discussed the importance of groups in both molding individual outlooks and influencing the decision-making process, exemplified by the seminal works of Bentley (1908) and Truman (1951). We will discuss a number of these works in some detail below, both to trace the evolution of this paradigm and to elucidate how norms such as associational participation and interpersonal trust influence attitudes toward democracy.

Tocqueville's *Democracy in America*

Consideration of the role of civic engagement in democracies begins with Tocqueville's magnum opus, *Democracy in America*. Impressed with the pervasiveness and vibrancy of civic associations in the United States, the author both recognized the necessity of these organizations and extolled their contribution to strengthening democracy. These voluntary associations play a role in undergirding democracy through the cultivation of skills and values which allow citizens to enjoy their liberties while simultaneously safeguard against abuses by the state. Highlighting the deleterious effects of government interference in civic life, Tocqueville asserted the autonomy of civil society vis-à-vis the state: "The morals and intelligence of a democratic people would be in danger… if ever a government wholly usurped the place of private associations" (1969:515). Not only does freedom of association not endanger public peace, according to the author, "it might give stability to a state" (1969:523).[2] Thus, not only does civic engagement bring *individual* rewards, it also produces *collective* benefits.

Tocqueville also reminded readers that civic associations mostly revolve around non-political issues, but nevertheless teach their members both the intrinsic worth of participation and the wherewithal to do so. Through civic engagement, citizens acquire a sense of both internal and external political efficacy, namely the belief that one has the capacity and right to form opinions on political subjects, and that these opinions would be heeded by decision-makers. This feeling of efficacy renders any literal application of democracy – rule by the *demos* – meaningful.

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[2] For the rulers, Tocqueville remarks perceptively that "civil associations… far from directing public attention to public affairs, serve to turn men's minds away therefrom, and getting them more and more occupied with projects for which public tranquility is essential, [thus] discourage thoughts of revolution" (1969:523).

Almond and Verba's *The Civic Culture*

The theme of how civic associations contribute to democratic governance finds its first empirical corroboration in the cross-national surveys conducted by Gabriel Almond and Sidney Verba in *The Civic Culture*. Almond and Verba stressed that citizens must *believe* in their aptitude to influence government: "The belief in one's competence is a key political attitude. The self-confident citizen appears to be the democratic citizen. Not only does he think he can participate, he thinks that others ought to participate as well" (1963:257). In fact, this belief, or sense of efficacy, may be even more important than the actual act of participation, since "if decision makers believe that the ordinary man *could* participate… they are likely to behave quite differently than if such a belief did not exist" (1963:183). Thus, the key to government responsiveness lies in the belief in citizens' efficacy by both elites and masses.

The significance of civic associations lies precisely in their function of fostering this sense of efficacy. Through civic engagement, "the individual is able to relate himself effectively and meaningfully to the political system" (1963:300). Even participation in non-political associations is shown to nurture members' awareness and competence to engage politically, because frequent interaction cultivates norms of trust and expands channels of information. Through engagement, participants often come to feel that they have a greater stake in issues of common interest to their fellow group members, and hence become more disposed to not only pay attention to but also publicly defend or advocate these issues. Thus, Almond and Verba concluded that "The existence of voluntary associations increases the democratic potential of a society. Democracy depends upon citizen participation, and it is clear that organizational membership is directly related to such participation" (1963:318).

The Concept of Social Capital

The concept of social capital traces it origins to sociology, and initially focuses on individuals or small groups as units of analysis (Portes 2000). One of the first scholars to develop the notion of social capital defined it as "the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance or recognition" (Bourdieu 1985). This description imparts an instrumental purpose to the creation and maintenance of social capital, entailing a deliberate effort on the part of individuals seeking private gains through social relationships.

Another early proponent of social capital is James Coleman, who offers the following definition: "Social capital is defined by its function. It is not a single entity but a variety of different entities, with two elements in common: they all consist of some aspect of social structures, and they facilitate certain actions of actors – whether persons or corporate actors – within the structure" (Coleman 1988:98). One notes that here social capital is understood as conferring certain benefits through the intermediation of social structures, and therefore it "inheres in the *structure of relations* between actors and among actors. It is not lodged either in the actors themselves or physical implements of

production" (Coleman 1988:98; italics added). The latitude of this definition allows interpretations of social capital as being based on either instrumental or normative incentives.[3]

Whereas Coleman's primary emphasis lies in *individual* benefits derived from social capital, political scientists are inclined to view this concept in terms of prospective *collective* gains: "A subtle transition took place as the concept was exported into other disciplines where social capital became an attribute of *the community itself*" (Portes 2000; original italics). In practical terms, in place of personal connections facilitating access to jobs or loans, the new adaptation of social capital now offers communal benefits in terms of lowering crime and corruption, as well as improving the quality of governance.

Putnam's *Making Democracy Work*

The focus of social capital shifts to the societal or national level with Putnam's analysis of institutional performance of regional governments in Italy. The term is now defined as "features of social organization, such as trust, norms, and networks, that can improve the efficiency of society by facilitating coordinated actions" (1993:167). This implies that benefits accruing from social capital are not particularistic and exclusive; instead, Putnam argued that "one special feature of social capital, like trust, norms, and networks, is that it is ordinarily a public good" (1993:168).

It is reasonable to seek further clarification concerning the relationship among trust, norms, and networks. According to Putnam, "Social trust in complex modern settings can arise from two related sources – norms of reciprocity and networks of civic engagement" (1993:171). Norms and networks are in turn closely linked: "An effective norm of generalized reciprocity is likely to be associated with dense networks of social exchange" (1993:172). On the individual level, Putnam asserted that participation in civic association creates both internal and external efficacy, instilling in members "habits of cooperation, solidarity, and public-spiritedness," in addition to "skills of cooperation as well as a sense of shared responsibility for collective endeavors" (1993:90). On the societal level, "civic traditions may have powerful consequences for economic development and social welfare, as well as institutional performance" (1993:157), as evidenced by high positive correlations between civic traditions and levels of both political and economic performance.

Other Studies on Social Capital

Social capital can be inductive to facilitate both transition to, and consolidation of, democracy. During democratic transitions, social capital helps "reduce the ability of the state to directly oppress citizens and provide a space for growth in organized opposition to a non-democratic regime" (Paxton 2002). This applies not only to associations with explicitly anti-regime orientations, but also to non-political groups that disseminate antigovernment information and foster ties among various opponents of the authoritarian

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[3] Social capital as conceptualized by Coleman includes the following aspects 1) obligations, expectations, and trustworthiness of structures; 2) information channels; 3) norms and effective sanctions (1988:102-105).

government.[4] After the establishment of democracy, the function of social capital transforms into one of instilling values favorable to consolidating the new regime, through associations that "teach tolerance, promote compromise, stimulate political participation, and train leaders" (Paxton 2002). Stressing the importance of civil society, some scholars assert that civil groups "can and indeed *must* develop in order to establish a more deeply rooted, legitimate, and effective democracy" (Howard 2003:43; see also Diamond 1994).

Alongside these positive contributions of social capital, however, one must also recognize some potentially negative consequences resulting from civic engagement. Putnam distinguishes between *bonding* and *bridging* social capital, with the former being "inward looking and tend[ing] to reinforce exclusive identities and homogeneous groups," while the latter "is good for undergirding specific reciprocity and mobilizing solidarity," and hence "can generate broader identities" (2000:22-23). In other words, bridging social capital helps to form generalized trust, i.e. trust toward all people including strangers, whereas bonding social capital leads to the creation of particularistic trust, where trust is extended to members of one's in-group to the exclusion of all others. Portes and Landolt (2000) list some negative consequences of this negative form of social capital: exclusion of outsiders, excess claims on group members, and even restrictions on individual freedoms.

In addition to the distinction made in the previous paragraph, a further note of caution regarding the concept of social capital is necessary, namely the question on levels of measurement. While Putnam (1993) describes the benefits of civic engagement and interpersonal trust for both individuals and society as a whole, Norris (2002) points out that "social capital is a relational phenomenon that can be the property of groups, local communities, and nations, *but not of individuals*" (italics added), and therefore "measurement needs to be at the societal level." While the present paper follows the micro-level approach in line with the empirical studies briefly reviewed below, one should be aware of the debate over the level at which social capital can best be assessed.

Empirical Works

Noting the differing effect of social capital depending on whether group memberships are homogeneous or heterogeneous, Brehm and Rahn (1997) find that participation in heterogeneous groups increases generalized trust, while Theiss-Morse and Hibbing (2005) explain that "people involved in homogeneous associations do not learn generalized trust". Similarly, Paxton (1999) argues that "negative effects on democracy would be expected when there is high within-group trust and networks but low between-group trust and networks," and Knack (2002) points out that in the case of intolerant or undemocratic groups, "active associational life worked to reinforce rather than overcome narrow particularistic interests."

Also, instead of positing that joining voluntary groups leads to greater political engagement, Bowler, Donovan and Hanneman (2003) propose in a study of eleven European democracies that the type of group one joins mediates this link. In addition to the expected finding that membership in groups pursuing political goals facilitates

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[4] For example the church, as cases in both Latin American and eastern Europe demonstrate

engagement, the authors also show that charities and arts groups having a stronger influence than church and sports groups. This corroborates Stolle and Rochon's (1998) suggestion that "a generalized enthusiasm for the effects of association membership must be tempered by a specification of what types of groups we are talking about."

Other studies examine the two major components of social capital, namely civic engagement and interpersonal trust, separately to assess the impact of each. Using data from the US, Brehm and Rahn (1997) find that these two components actually exert opposite effects on trust in government institutions, so that "the net effect of social capital upon confidence may be a wash: civic engagement negatively affects confidence, while interpersonal trust positively affects confidence." Examining the linkage between social capital and support for democratic institutions and processes in Russia, Gibson (2001) finds that while membership in "weak" (i.e. more open and heterogeneous) networks contributes to greater support, trust turns out to be insignificant. However, Park and Shin's (2003) study of Korea finds that associational membership influences political activism, but has no significant effect on support for democracy. Instead, what impact social capital exerts on democratic support is attributable to interpersonal trust.

Hypotheses

Civic Engagement and Generalized Trust

According to Putnam (1993), active civic communities lie at the heart of social capital creation.[5] Among the benefits of associational life, Hooghe (2003) finds greater tolerance among people who are more civically engaged, and both Booth and Richard (1996) and McDonough, Shin and Moises (1998) find group membership exerting a significant influence on political participation in their studies on different regions. Joining voluntary associations also serve to raise awareness of issues, extend networks of information, foster norms of tolerance and cooperation, facilitate skills of negotiation and leadership, and develop members' sense of efficacy. Furthermore, these associations are relevant politically because they "shape the beliefs, preferences, self-understandings and habits of thought and action that individuals bring to more encompassing political arenas" (Cohen and Rogers 1992).

Trust is another key component of social capital. Putnam (2000) proposes that "Frequent interaction among a diverse set of people tends to produce a norm of generalized reciprocity," referring to the psychological expectation that generates trust. This proposition finds confirmation in studies by Brehm and Rahn (1997) and Claibourn and Martin (2000), both of which find that people who participate in voluntary groups are more trustful of others than those who are not similarly involved.

The casual relationship between interpersonal trust and group membership is more complicated than one might assume (Van Deth 1997: 11-15; Brehm and Rahn 1997), and lies beyond the scope of this study. Suffice it to mention that while some propose a causal link leading from group membership to trust (e.g. Putnam 1993), due to

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[5] It must be noted that social capital and civic engagement (or group membership) are not interchangeable terms. The former represents a theoretical concept, and the latter is an operationalization thereof.

the effect of generalized reciprocity generated through frequent interaction, others claim the reverse (e.g. Newton 2001), asserting that it is the more trustful citizens who are more likely to join voluntary groups in the first place. For the purpose of this analysis, both aspects of social capital are assumed to assert independent effects on the dependent variables described below.

Intermediary Factors: Knowledge and Skills

While civic engagement and generalized trust are hypothesized to cultivate values and dispositions such as moderation, tolerance, bargaining, accommodation, and commitment to democratic procedures, all of which are deemed essential for resolving conflicts and building consensus, one may still ask whether the existence of these features of social capital necessarily predicts support for democracy. Instead of drawing a direct causal arrow linking non-political behavior to attitudes on highly political issues, one may plausibly argue that there are intermediary factors operating in a two-step process: social capital generates certain skills and beliefs, which in turn lead to political support.

What are these intermediary factors? Social capital involves "the ability to secure resources by virtue of membership in social networks" (Portes and Landolt 2000), and one of these resources is information. Since group members by definition share common interests and/or pursue common objectives, membership is likely to both heighten participants' awareness of their interests (including how these are affected by the political process) and introduce them to means of securing their objectives through collective action. This proposition is supported by Norris's (1996) finding that members of voluntary groups are more likely to follow the news both in newspapers and on television. Thus, *social capital generates greater interest in politics and propensity to follow politics in the news*.

Through civic engagement, members also derive individual benefits beyond gains from the achievement of group goals. Specifically, the knowledge and skills accrued through participation in collective pursuits may allow each participant to develop a sense of personal efficacy, specifically the beliefs that one is capable of expressing one's preferences (internal efficacy), which encourage one to take action aimed at achieving desired outcomes (political activism). This corroborates Joslyn and Cigler's (2001) finding that membership in voluntary groups increases participants' feeling of political efficacy. One may hypothesize that those endowed with this feeling of efficacy – those classified as "participants" by Almond and Verba – are more likely to become engaged in the democratic process. In short, *social capital leads to greater internal efficacy and political activism*.

Democratic Support

Support for democracy encompasses several dimensions. Norris (1999) states that citizens "seem to distinguish between different levels of the regime," often identifying with democratic values while expressing dissatisfaction with how democracy functions in

practice. She proposes a framework consisting of five levels of political support.[6] The present study centers on the levels she labels "regime principle" and "regime institutions". Rather than references to political actors at any given time, the focus is on attitudes toward democracy as an ideal form, so that "the object of the attitude is not the functioning of a particular system of democracy but the very idea of democracy" (Fuchs, Guidorossi, Svensson 1995). Even when citizens lack familiarity with the criteria for democracy, it is plausible to assume that most people believe in concepts such as civil liberties and equal rights as features of what democracy should entail. Examples of support at this level include preference for a democratic system of government and belief in its ability to address society's ills.

A corollary to support for principles underlying democratic regimes may be the repudiation of other regime types. This echoes Churchill's words that "democracy is the worst form of government, except all those other forms that have been tried," and finds corroboration in both Sartori's (1987) assertion that "we cannot… prove democracy, but we can convincingly argue that democracy is preferable," and Linz's (1988) assertion that democracy must be evaluated relative to other forms of government. Following this argument, support for democratic principles is conceptualized not only as the acceptance of a set of values, but also the rejection of competing alternatives. This is of particular importance in newly democratized countries, because citizens "know, as a matter of firsthand experience, that democracy is only one among several alternatives… This, their support of the new regime is relative" (Mishler and Rose 1996). One should note that while support for democratic principles and anti-authoritarian proclivities often coincide, the former is motivated by an *idealistic* view on the virtues of democracy, while the latter only requires a *realistic* assessment that democracy, while imperfect, remains preferable to its alternatives.

On a separate dimension, support for democracy may be evaluated at the level of regime institutions. This is distinct from regime principles, since one can profess democratic ideals without necessarily deeming the performance of institutions under democracy adequate. At the same time, institutions "constitute a framework which lasts beyond the time and day of particular incumbents" (Listhaug and Wiberg 1995), and thus confidence in institutions can be termed a middle-range indicator of support (Niemi, Mueller, Smith 1989) located between abstract principles and specific actors. One may also view support for democratic principles as normative, and support for democratic institutions as instrumental. The latter entails attitudes towards governments, parliaments, the executive, the legal system, political parties, and the bureaucracy (Lipset and Schneider 1987). Indeed, Norris (1999) warns that, cross-nationally, "the most important concern about support for government… points towards this institutional level."

Table 1 summarizes the links between social capital and democratic support proposed in the preceding paragraphs. To reiterate, while social capital is believed to exert an influence on support for democracy, it is hypothesized that the process occurs in two steps, as shown in the table below. Instead of conjecturing that the non-political behavior of joining voluntary groups or trusting fellow citizens leads directly to political

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[6] These range from identification with one's territorial political unity (the most diffuse support) to approval of politicians currently in power (the most specific support), with support for regime principles, performance and institutions in between.

attitudes of regime support, it is argued here that knowledge and skills created by social capital constitute key intervening variables that facilitate this process.

In addition, it is also plausible to argue that the strength of social capital's impact on various norms and skills may not be uniform. Specifically, one may speculate that while it is relatively easy to create interest in political issues and the habit of following politics in the news, to cultivate a feeling efficacy requires greater, and probably longer-term, effort. The former activities are less costly both in terms of time and psychological commitment than the latter, and therefore one may expect that civic engagement and trust (generalized or particularistic) may exert a greater impact on political interest than political efficacy.

At the same time, one may also surmise that the attitudinal quality of efficacy would be more closely linked than the behavioral quality of interest with support for democracy. One can easily imagine interest in politics, and particularly attention to politics in the news, creating disillusionment and cynicism rather than fostering allegiance toward democratic principles and institutions, whereas both internal efficacy and political activism are by definition attributes which correspond to ideals of democratic citizenship, namely the belief in government by the people.

Table 1: Hypothesized Effect of Social Capital on Democratic Support

SOCIAL CAPITAL		KNOWLEDGE/SKILLS		DEMOCRATIC SUPPORT
number of groups		interest in politics		trust in institutions
generalized trust	→	follow political news	→	anti-authoritarian orientation
connections		internal efficacy		belief in democratic principles
		political activism		

The East Asian Context

Having reviewed the concept of social capital and the hypothesis of a two-step mechanism through which social capital influences support for democracy, one may raise the question of whether this linkage could be applied universally, since "political cultures will always have a strongly parochial dimension because every political system is anchored in its distinction history" (Pye 1985:342). In other words, does the impact of social capital depend on historical background, generating culture-specific responses prompted by the psychological orientations of those who have been socialized into such a culture?

While a detailed discussion of Asian cultural heritage, largely based on Confucianism, lies beyond the scope of the present paper, key features include emphasis on family ties, community harmony, education, diligence, and prioritizing the group over the individual (e.g. Bauer and Bell 1999). Park and Shin (2004) sum up the most politically relevant contrast between Asian and western ethos as follows:

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[T]he Confucian moral tradition is qualitatively different from the Western moral tradition. The former stresses the norms of social obligations and collective good and the practice of fulfilling duties and living up to social-relational standards. In striking contrast, the latter emphasizes the principles of individual freedom and autonomy and the practice of respecting the rights of other people.

Thus, testing the impact of social capital in east Asia would offer additional insights into whether its much-discussed benefits remain valid in a setting so different from the western context. Against this view on the universal applicability of social capital stand advocates of "Asian values". This argument, advanced by political leaders in Singapore and Malaysia (e.g. Kausikan 1993; Mahbubani 1995), claims that liberal democracy represents a western concept foreign to the cultural traditions of Asia, so that instead of aspiring to, and being measured by, standards of western democracy, an alternative form of governance with its roots in indigenous values is most suitable to Asia.

In addition to practitioners, some scholars also stress the incompatibility between Asian cultural traditions and the liberal democracy. Politically relevant characteristics of Asian values include "distaste for open criticism of authority, fear of upsetting the unity of the community, and knowledge that any violation of the community's rules of propriety will lead to ostracism" (Pye 1985). While not necessary resistant to democracy, Chan (1997) mentions that the prominence given to duties and social order over rights under Confucianism "might easily be made to serve authoritarian purposes."

Fukuyama (1995a) stresses that in many Asian countries networks are based on narrow family or community ties rather than broader ones that contribute to building up civil society, and Kihl (2005) proposes that not only does the family constitute the basic social unit in Confucian societies, but the state also represents "personification of family values." This emphasis on personal kinship ties implies both that people feel strong affiliation and trust toward members within their closely-knit groups, but this sentiment does not extend beyond their immediate circle. One would predict that this phenomenon creates bonding social capital described in Section II (v), reducing generalized trust while encouraging reliance on personal connections. Furthermore, a preference for harmony as a noble virtue (Rozman 1991) suggests that where citizens participate in voluntary associations, they are more likely to join homogenous rather than heterogeneous groups in order to avoid the discomfort of divergent views. This may in turn diminish the impact of civic participation on fostering knowledge and skills conducive to democratic support.

If Asian (or Confucian) values emphasize "the group over individual, authority over liberty, and responsibilities over rights," and consequently "the conflict of ideas, groups, and parties were viewed as dangerous and illegitimate" in Asian societies (Huntington 1991), one would expect lower support for democracy in principle. In addition, Rozman's (1991) argument that Confucianism emphasizes hierarchically organized means of social control, and Pye's (1985) assertion that a prevailing "ideal of paternalistic authority makes authoritarian rule more endurable," both lead to expectations of lower propensity to reject authoritarian alternatives to democracy. Finally, the belief that "rule should be by virtuous men and not by impersonal law" (Pye 1985) may render the populace less inclined to trust and rely on democratic institutions founded on laws.

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This perspective invites substantial counter-arguments, however. Thompson (2001) points out that the 'Asian values' discourse "did not necessarily enjoy a high degree of popular support in Malaysia and Singapore," but rather represent a means by which governments seek to suppress dissenting views. Dalton (2006) finds a positive impact of civic participation in fostering both trust and self-expressive values among Asian publics. On a related note, Emmerson (1995) cautions that "purportedly Asian values were neither monolithic nor exclusive," and cites survey data to put forward the proposition that support for democracy – albeit as a "procedural system of public responsibility and choice" rather than one emphasizing rights and freedoms – is not incompatible with Asian values. Fukuyama (1995b) supports this contention by asserting that "there is no fundamental cultural obstacle to the democratization of contemporary Confucian societies."

In addition, one may be interested in examining whether the impact of social capital differs as a function of how advanced countries are on the path toward democratic consolidation, and at what stage (if any) the so-called Asian values would play a significant role. The East Asian Barometer covers countries in various stages of democratic development, and thus provides an opportunity to address this question. Dalton's (2006) empirical examination of five east Asian countries finds that "levels of group membership and activity are not clearly linked to the level of democratic development of nations." Would social capital exert a greater influence in more established democracies because patterns of generalized trust and especially civic engagement have more time to become internalized? Alternatively, has democracy in these countries become so entrenched that support for its principles and institutions would be offered by the citizenry regardless of social capital?

Data and Variables

Data for this study is taken from the East Asian Barometer survey,[7] conducted in eight countries/regions during 2001-2003. The analyses below test the relationship among social capital, political knowledge and skills, and democratic support in Hong Kong, Japan, Korea, Mongolia, the Philippines, Taiwan, and Thailand (the case of China is excluded from the analyses below because questions on social capital were not asked). Except for Hong Kong, data for each country contains 1100-1600 responses to the survey questions. Wording for questions used in this analysis can be found in the appendix.

The number of voluntary group memberships is used as a proxy for the extent of civic participation. While the relevant question in the East Asian Barometer survey (Q19) allows respondents to indicate only up to three organizations they belong to, and might therefore fail to adequately account for those who are members of more than three groups, data for countries which are also covered in the World Values Survey indicate that such cases are relatively rare.[8]

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[7] I gratefully acknowledge the assistance of the Asian Barometer Survey team at National Taiwan University for making this data available.

[8] According to the World Values Survey, 95.2% of respondents in Japan belong to three groups or less. The figures for Korea and the Philippines are 90.5% and 88.9%, respectively.

Generalized trust is measured by the question on whether respondents believe most people can be trusted (Q24). At the same time, the ability to rely on personal connections (Q25) can be construed as an indicator of the aforementioned bonding social capital, since these ties obviate the need for more widely-based civic engagement and generalized trust. Ikeda, Yamada and Kohno (2003) emphasize that "having connections to powerful others enables [people] to bypass the trust-social capital route," sometimes through unfair and undemocratic means. Thus, connections are hypothesized to exert an impact opposite to that of group membership and generalized trust.

The hypothesized knowledge and skills that are consequences of social capital are captured by variables measuring awareness and efficacy. The former is measured by two questions on how interested respondents are in politics (Q56), and how often they follow news about politics (Q57). Higher social capital is predicted to increase both political interest and the frequency of attention to political news.[9]

Internal efficacy, namely the belief in one's ability to comprehend and engage in government decision-making, is measured by a composite index comprising of questions on respondents' sense of understanding and influence vis-à-vis the political process (Q126, 127, 129). Only questions phrased to contain words such as "I" or "me" are used, to ensure that answers gauge attitudes specific to each respondent, rather than broader conceptions regarding the citizenry in general.

Political activism complements the belief in one's internal efficacy. One participates in the belief that the expression of one's opinions can achieve desired outcomes. In the analysis below, whether one has made contacts with political authorities, including government officials (Q73), elected representatives (Q75), parties (Q76), plus whether one has engaged in protest activities (Q79), are used as proxies for political participation. It is assumed that such contacts are made for the purpose of voicing one's concerns or preferences over specific political outcomes, and that only people who believe in the usefulness of making representations would engage in these actions. However, it should also be pointed out that voting is not included in this composite variable, since one may be motivated to go to the polls for reasons other than expressing one's political views.[10]

The second step of our model involves democratic support. Confidence in political institutions measures respondents' level of trust in courts (Q7), the national government (Q8), political parties (Q9), parliament (Q10), and the civil service (Q11). These questions refer to institutions at the national rather than local levels. Also, unlike the military or the police, these institutions are intrinsically endowed with the capacity to exert influence on political decision-making as long as a democratic system of government persists.[11]

Even more broadly, we want to measure support for democracy. Recalling the "Churchill hypothesis" above, one is reminded that democracy can be evaluated relative to its alternatives. Rose, Mishler and Haerpfer (1998) explain how democratic support and detachment from authoritarianism are both theoretically and empirically

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[9] Interest in politics and frequency of following political news have a correlation coefficient of 0.436.

[10] Internal efficacy and participation have a correlation coefficient of 0.124.

[11] Confidence in the electoral commission, where this question is asked, is significantly correlated with confidence in the five institutions mentioned above: 0. 490 with courts, 0.469 with the national government, 0.480 with political parties, 0.491 with parliament, and 0.476 with the civil service.

distinguishable, and Shin and Park (2003) point out that growth in pro-democratic attitudes does not necessarily bring about a corresponding decline in authoritarian orientations. This may be particularly true in the case of citizens who have little experience with democracy, and thus do not perceive the mutually exclusive character between democracy and authoritarianism. Thus, anti-authoritarian propensities are presented as a separable variable of democratic support, comprised of questions on attitudes toward undemocratic means of conducting government (Q121-125).

According to Linz and Stepan (2001), the belief that democracy represents the most appropriate regime type constitutes a significant indicator of democratic consolidation. Thus, the variable on democratic principles comprises of questions on the desirability (Q101) and suitability (Q103) of democracy for one's country, as well as those on the legitimacy and capacity of democracy (Q117-119). The construction of this variable closely corresponds to the "support for democracy" variable identified by Albritton, Bureekul and Guo (2005). In the following section, data analysis will be conducted to test the validity of these propositions.[12]

Analyses and Discussions

Before carrying out regression analysis, it is useful to present descriptive data on the stock of social capital available in the countries examined. Table 2 summarizes how respondents in each country replied to questions probing the three dimensions of social capital described in the previous section.

Table 2: State of Social Capital in East Asia

a) Number of Formal Group Memberships

	Hong Kong	Japan	Korea	Mongolia	Philippines	Taiwan	Thailand
none	85.9%	32.9%	91.2%	36.8%	80.1%	70.6%	60.7%
one	11.1%	27.0%	6.9%	29.4%		19.6%	25.2%
two	2.5%	18.8%	1.5%	11.7%	17.1%	6.2%	9.2%
three	0.5%	21.2%	0.4%	22.1%	2.8%	3.5%	4.9%

b) Attitude toward Strangers

	Hong Kong	Japan	Korea	Mongolia	Philippines	Taiwan	Thailand
be careful	66.9%	68.2%	60.6%	87.4%	91.2%	59.3%	82.3%
trust	29.4%	31.8%	39.4%	12.6%	8.8%	40.7%	17.7%

c) Availability of Personal Connections

	Hong Kong	Japan	Korea	Mongolia	Philippines	Taiwan	Thailand
yes	74.7%	69.3%	67.6%	74.1%	62.7%	61.7%	56.8%
no	25.3%	30.8%	32.4%	25.8%	37.3%	38.2%	43.3%

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[12] The democratic principles variable has a correlation of 0.180 with the institutional trust variable at 0.180, and 0.162 with the anti-authoritarian variable.

Nearly two-thirds of respondents do not belong to any civic organizations,[13] but behind this figure lie enormous variations among countries, ranging from Korea where less one in ten people cite membership in any group, to Japan and Mongolia where two-thirds of the population join one or more groups.

Overall, only about one-quarter of respondents agree with the statement that most people can be trusted. Once again, however, figures vary considerably among the seven countries surveyed, ranging from Taiwan where four out ten people express interpersonal trust, to the Philippines where less than a tenth of the population do so. In contrast, answers to whether respondents feel that they can rely on connections to get things done are more similar across the seven countries, with about two-thirds of respondents acknowledging the availability of such channels.

To put these results in comparative context, Table 3 shows responses to similar surveys in the fifteen countries which are members of the European Union by 1995, and also twenty-two former communist countries in eastern and central Europe (CEE).[14] It is notable that levels of both civic engagement and interpersonal trust in East Asia are closer to figures for the CEE than to the EU 15, perhaps a reflection of long periods of authoritarian rule that the region has in common with ex-communist countries.

Table 3: Comparison of Social Capital in Europe and East Asia

a) Number of Formal Group Memberships

	EU 15	CEE 22	East Asia 7
none	45.0%	73.6%	64.8%
one	23.9%	18.5%	17.5%
two	13.9%	4.8%	9.7%
three	17.2%	3.1%	8.0%

b) Attitude toward Strangers

	EU 15	CEE 22	East Asia 7
be careful	60.8%	75.5%	72.0%
trust	34.8%	20.6%	25.6%

The next step of our analysis links the three measures of social capital to our three measures of political knowledge and skills. Table 4 shows that group membership has a highly significant impact on the propensity to both express interest in politics and follow political news. This finding is all the more striking because it holds true across all seven countries.

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[13] Groups include residential associations, parent-teacher associations, trade associations, agricultural associations, labor unions, producer and consumer cooperatives, volunteer groups, citizen movements, religious groups, alumni associations, candidate support organizations, political parties, and sports/leisure clubs.

[14] Results compiled from the World Values Survey. Group membership calculated by adding the number of organizations respondents belong to (questions a64-a79); interpersonal trust based on agreement or otherwise with the statement that most people can be trusted (question a165).

Table 4: Impact of Social Capital on Knowledge and Skills

	ALL	Hong Kong	Korea	Japan	Mongolia	Philippines	Taiwan	Thailand
interest in politics								
# of groups	0.14 **	0.12 **	0.13 **	0.21 **	0.14 **	0.08 **	0.16 **	0.15 **
trust	-0.03 *	0.17 **	-0.02	0.10 **	0.06	0.04	0.05	0.03
connections	-0.06 **	-0.10 **	-0.11 **	-0.09 **	-0.07 *	-0.10 **	-0.13 **	-0.23 **
multiple R	0.15	0.24	0.17	0.27	0.18	0.13	0.23	0.28
follow political news								
# of groups	0.12 **	0.08 *	0.15 **	0.21 ***	0.21 **	0.06 *	0.15 **	0.13 **
trust	0.01	0.14 **	-0.03	0.03	0.01	0.01	0.00	0.02
connections	-0.04 **	0.02	-0.07 **	-0.07 *	-0.06	0.01	-0.07 **	-0.22 **
multiple R	0.13	0.15	0.17	0.23	0.22	0.04	0.17	0.26
internal efficacy								
# of groups	0.05 **	0.14 **	0.02	0.10 **	0.10 **	0.08 **	0.13 **	0.05
trust	-0.04 **	0.12 **	0.02	0.13 **	-0.01	0.06	0.07 *	0.10 **
connections	-0.03 *	-0.07	-0.02	-0.01	-0.04	-0.03	-0.13 **	0.01
multiple R	0.08	0.20	0.00	0.16	0.10	0.09	0.21	0.10
political activism								
# of groups	0.06 **	0.19 **	0.02	0.18 **	0.17 **	0.12 **	0.24 **	0.13 **
trust	-0.03 *	-0.04	0.05 *	0.08 **	0.01	0.02	0.04	0.09 **
connections	-0.04 **	-0.11 **	-0.04	0.01	0.00	-0.16 **	-0.06 *	-0.05
multiple R	0.06	0.21	0.06	0.20	0.16	0.20	0.26	0.17

Note: All coefficients are standardized. ** $p<0.01$; * $p<0.5$

Equally notable is the finding that having personal connections allowing one to sidestep activities that help foster social capital significantly dampens interest in politics everywhere, and also reduces the frequency of following political news in five of the seven countries. Interestingly, generalized trust seems to exert lesser influence on respondents' political interest, and almost none at all on their penchant for following news on politics.

Turning to efficacy, group membership again plays a significant role in raising both internal efficacy and political activism in six of the seven countries surveyed, with Korea standing out as the sole exception in both cases. Generalized trust has a greater impact on internal efficacy than activism, with Japan and Thailand the only cases where trust affects both measures of efficacy. This is a counterintuitive finding, since one might have predicted that higher levels of general trust would make one more inclined to feel confident that expressing one's opinions could secure desired results. Not surprisingly, relying on connections is negatively correlated with political activism more than internal efficacy, since these private ties by definition obviate one's need to voice preferences through public channels.

It is notable that social capital variables explain a greater amount of variation in interest than efficacy. In other words, participation and trust (whether generalized or particularistic) affect behavioral patterns of paying attention to politics, but are less influential in nurturing a psychological sense of citizen empowerment. Interestingly, the countries where social capital has the greatest impact on both measures of political interest are Thailand and Japan; the latter can boast the longest history of established democracy among the countries under analysis, while the former has undergone several periods of authoritarian government.[15] Length of democratic experience does not seem to affect the impact of social capital on political interest.In contrast, the impact of social capital on both internal efficacy and political activism is greatest in Taiwan and Hong Kong, and weakest in Korea. While the unique status of Hong Kong lies beyond the scope of this discussion, many scholars have cited Korea and Taiwan as parallel cases exemplifying the third wave of democracy in east Asia. However, behind the generally assumed similarities in the timing of democratization, the role of social capital, and particularly associational life, is clearly different in these two countries. Length of democracy experience does not appear important in influencing the applicability of social capital on political efficacy.

The second step in our model asks if social capital directly influences democratic support. We can answer this question using the same three independent variables to predict regime support, with results shown in Table 5. For trust in institutions, it is not surprising that this is significantly correlated with generalized trust in most of the countries, as citizens' social attitudes carry over to the political arena. Also expected are the significant and negative impact of particularistic trust, since the knowledge that benefits could be secured through favoritism on the part of certain government officials, judges, or MPs through personal ties necessarily undermines confidence in the fairness of the institutions they are part of.

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[15] Thailand recently reverted to military rule. The coup illustrates the fragility of democracy in this country.

Table 5: Impact of Social Capital on Democratic Support

	ALL	Hong Kong	Korea	Japan	Mongolia	Philippines	Taiwan	Thailand
institutional trust								
# of groups	0.02	0.04	-0.01	0.05	0.03	-0.03	-0.02	0.11 **
trust	-0.02 *	0.13 **	0.14 **	0.13 **	0.01	0.08 **	0.05	0.08 **
connections	0.02	-0.12 **	-0.03	-0.05	-0.10 **	-0.20 **	0.00	-0.19 **
multiple R	0.03	0.18	0.14	0.15	0.09	0.21	0.00	0.24
anti-authoritarian attitudes								
# of groups	0.06 **	0.09 *	0.05	0.06 *	0.03	0.05	0.09 **	0.04
trust	0.04 **	0.09 *	0.03	0.06	-0.05	0.02	0.11 **	-0.01
connections	0.01	-0.05	0.07 **	0.00	0.06 *	0.11 **	-0.03	-0.02
multiple R	0.08	0.12	0.07	0.07	0.06	0.11	0.14	0.00
democratic principles								
# of groups	0.10 **	-0.02	0.07 **	0.09 **	0.06	0.01	-0.05	0.00
trust	0.01	0.05	0.15 **	0.07 *	0.05	0.03	0.05	0.01
connections	-0.05 **	0.00	-0.05 *	0.00	-0.05	-0.06 *	-0.08 *	-0.06 *
multiple R	0.10	0.00	0.18	0.10	0.08	0.05	0.08	0.04

Note: All coefficients are standardized. ** $p<0.01$; * $p<0.5$

Table 6: Impact of Knowledge and Skills on Democratic Support

	ALL	Hong Kong	Korea	Japan	Mongolia	Philippines	Taiwan	Thailand
institutional trust								
interest	0.16 **	0.12 *	0.17 **	0.04	0.03	0.18 **	0.01	0.13 **
follow news	-0.11 **	-0.04	-0.05	-0.07	0.06	-0.16 **	-0.06	0.05
int. efficacy	0.01	0.07	-0.04	0.07 *	0.00	0.07 *	0.02	-0.10 **
activism	0.04 **	-0.09 *	0.10 **	0.00	0.03	-0.01	-0.07 *	-0.05
multiple R	0.16	0.13	0.18	0.07	0.05	0.18	0.06	0.17
anti-authoritarian attitudes								
interest	0.01	0.04	-0.11 **	0.10 **	0.07 *	-0.02	0.12 **	-0.04
follow news	0.13 **	0.07	0.06 *	0.05	-0.03	0.07 *	0.07 *	0.12 **
int. efficacy	0.07 **	0.09 *	0.02	0.10 **	0.16 **	-0.01	0.15 **	0.13 **
activism	-0.03 *	0.11 **	-0.04	0.00	0.03	-0.09 **	0.04	0.03
multiple R	0.15	0.18	0.09	0.18	0.18	0.09	0.26	0.18
democratic principles								
interest	0.18 **	0.01	0.04	0.11 **	0.13 **	0.11 **	0.04	0.09 **
follow news	0.01	0.04	0.00	0.06	0.02	-0.12 **	-0.02	0.05
int. efficacy	0.08 **	0.08	0.03	0.11 **	0.09 **	0.05	0.17 **	0.01
activism	-0.02	-0.05	0.00	-0.06	-0.01	0.00	-0.04	-0.03
multiple R	0.21	0.05	0.00	0.19	0.17	0.12	0.17	0.14

Note: All coefficients are standardized. ** $p<0.01$; * $p<0.5$

The low correlation coefficients between social capital on one hand and support for both anti-authoritarian and pro-democratic principles on the other suggests that a casual relationship, if existing at all, is not a direct one. It is interesting to note that in Korea, Mongolia and the Philippines, connections are significantly and *positively* correlated with anti-authoritarian beliefs (a significant and negative correlation is not found anywhere), perhaps inferring that these personal ties either exist outside the (former) authoritarian regimes, or that connections to persons associated with such regimes do not generate system support.

Turning from the direct impact of social capital on democratic support to the indirect impact thereof via intervening variables of interest and efficacy, does one observe greater variation in support accounted for by the latter? Comparing the R squares in Table 6, this "indirect impact" hypothesis finds little support with regard to trust in democratic institutions, but appears more valid in explaining anti-authoritarian and pro-democratic beliefs. The multiple R improves in six of the seven countries for each of the latter two measures.[16]

On institutional trust, interest in politics is found to be the most significant influence in four of the seven countries (Hong Kong, Korea, the Philippines, Thailand). In the remaining three countries, the knowledge and skills variables fail to explain the variance in the dependent variable. Where it is significant, following politics on the news is associated with lesser confidence in institutions (with the exception of Mongolia), presumably because some of the news involves exposés of government failings or scandals.

The effect of efficacy on confidence in institutions is particularly mixed in countries where the two efficacy variables are significant, as the signs point toward different directions. Here the "two step" hypothesis stating that the impact of social capital on support for democratic institutions is mediated by certain knowledge and skills is, for the most part, not sustained by the data.
Instead, in countries where civic engagement and generalized trust have a bearing on support, the causal relationship is more likely to be a direct one.

Anti-authoritarian attitudes are significantly and positively correlated with following political news in five of the seven countries, which reflects well on stances taken by the media's coverage of political events. This does not necessarily portray the media as defenders of democracy against despotic tendencies; one could conjecture that even superficial or sensationalistic reporting of politics would make viewers aware of political debates – debates which probably could not have taken place under authoritarian rule.

A sense of internal efficacy enhances anti-authoritarian attitudes, a relationship found to be significant in five of the seven countries. This is not unexpected, since restrictions on participation imposed by authoritarian regimes are especially likely to inflame citizens who consider themselves capable of playing a meaningful role in politics. Less intuitive is the overall negative (albeit small) correlation with political activism. In fact this variable is significant in only two countries, and they point toward different directions, so it is perhaps not unreasonable to attribute this finding to country-specific circumstances.

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[16] The exceptions are the Philippines on anti-authoritarian attitudes and Korea on democratic principles.

Finally, in explaining support for democratic principles, interest in politics again turns out to be the most influential variable. In the four countries where a significant correlation is found, this variable shows the highest standardized coefficient. In fact, political interest exerts a greater impact on support for democratic principles than on institutional confidence and anti-authoritarian attitudes. One plausible explanation is that those who express interest in politics are not mere spectators or cynics, but instead feel that they have a stake in the political process. One may speculate that these "critical citizens" would expect, and probably insist, that the quality of democratic governance live up to the democratic principles they endorse.

As in the case of anti-authoritarian attitudes, citizens who profess internal efficacy are more likely to express support for democratic principles. This correlation is significant in five of the seven countries. The rationale behind this finding is straightforward: those who deem themselves capable of participating in the decision-making process would demand opportunities to do so, and such channels are most readily available under democracy.

While one may tentatively conclude that the "two step" hypothesis is valid in most of the cases examined as an explanation of support for anti-authoritarian and pro-democratic principles, one may ask these attitudes derive more from interest or efficacy. Additional regression results (not shown) paint to a decidedly mixed picture. In explaining anti-authoritarian attitudes, political interest account for greater variation than feelings of efficacy in Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan, but the reverse is true in Hong Kong, Mongolia, and Thailand (neither has any impact in the Philippines). Regarding support for democratic principles, political interest is the predominant factor in Japan, Mongolia, the Philippines, and Thailand; only in Taiwan is efficacy found to be more important.[17]

Conclusion

This paper has examined the impact of social capital on support for democracy through a "two-step process", with attributes of social capital such as civic engagement and generalized trust generating knowledge and skills in the form of political interest and efficacy, which in turn foster support for democratic principles and institutions. Data presented above show that social capital indeed enhances political interest and, to a lesser extent, feelings of efficacy, and that these habits and norms particularly affect support for democratic principles.[18]

The impact of political activism seems conspicuous by its absence, and thus warrants a word of explanation. Rather than dismissing the contribution of activism to democratic support, the results displayed above may simply reflect the fact that this variable counts only those who have either made contacts with political actors or participated in protest activities as endowed with external efficacy, and the proportion of survey respondents (or of the population as a whole) belonging in this category is quite

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[17] The impact of both sets of variables is absent in South Korea and negligible in Hong Kong

[18] Only variables directly relevant to testing the hypotheses in this paper are included in the statistical tests. The inclusion of demographic variables such as age, gender, education, income, and place of residence does not change the results substantially.

small. Instead of measuring the manifestation of activism, if questions that tap into sentiments of external efficacy were available (as in the case of internal efficacy), one may see this variable having greater explanatory power.

One innovative aspect examined in this paper involves the characterization of personal connections as a negative form of social capital. Regression analyses in the preceding section find these connections, which may constitute patron-client ties in some cases, often have an effect on knowledge, skills, and attitudes toward democracy opposite from that exerted by group membership and interpersonal trust. This affirms the importance of distinguishing among different types of networks, particularly between those that generate bridging and bonding social capital. It would be of considerable interest to explore whether personal connections serve as substitutes for membership in voluntary associations.

Another aspect warranting greater analysis is whether social capital exerts an influence on individuals in societies with high levels of civic engagement and interpersonal trust, even when they lack these attributes personally. In other words, can individuals who belong to no voluntary groups and show no trust toward strangers nevertheless acquire the knowledge, skills, and political attitudes associated with social capital, on account of their being surrounded by civically engaged and trusting fellow citizens? Alternatively, would one expect a weaker impact of social capital for individuals who reside in societies where both voluntary group membership and generalized trust are in short supply? These questions on the interactive effect of individual and societal attributes of social capital lie beyond the scope of the present paper, but certainly call for detailed inquiry.

The question of whether Asian values constitute a barrier to the influence of social capital on democratic support can be answered with a qualified no. As the previous section shows, group membership and interpersonal trust (or the lack thereof) exert an impact both behaviorally and attitudinally (raising interest in politics and sense of efficacy, respectively), and these knowledge and skills in turn play an important role in shaping support for various dimensions of democracy in most of the countries examined in this study via mechanisms not distinctively different to patterns found in western nations.

A dataset that includes countries at various stages of democratic development allows comparisons to be drawn between the impact of social capital in more established versus newer democracies. Interestingly, the statistical analysis reveals none of the patterns one might have expected, namely that the effective social capital would be greater where democracy is more deeply rooted, since habits of associational life and social trust become entrenched over time. Instead, one observes a diverse array of pathways to democratic support which do not seem related to the length of democratic experience in each country.

Since most of the countries examined here are relatively new democracies,[19] the relationship between social capital, norms and skills, and democratic support identified in these pages may only reflect popular attitudes at one specific moment in the middle of a

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[19] Freedom House began to categorize the countries as "free" in the following years: The Philippines, 1987; South Korea, 1988; Mongolia, 1991; Taiwan, 1996; Thailand, 1998. Only Japan has consistently been rated "free" since the index began in 1973. Thailand has since been downgraded to "partly free" following a military coup in September 2006.

transition process. Transitions to democratic government, manifested by regime change, take place within relatively short periods of time, whereas transitions to democratic civil culture can only occur gradually. The latter's evolution, involving shifting dynamics of interaction between social capital and democratic support, calls for continued study from scholars and practitioners alike.

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