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Impacts of Rural-Urban Cleavages and Cultural Orientations on Attitudes toward Elements of Democracy: A Cross-National, Within Nation Analysis

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Impacts of Urban-Rural Cleavages and Cultural Orientations on Attitudes toward Elements of Democracy: A Cross-National, Within-Nation Analysis

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Traditional frameworks of comparative analysis are not always the most productive for understanding sources of support for democracy. Despite the large Ns of national surveys (including the NES), examination of what enables democracies to take root, sustain themselves, and consolidate over time is still shaped largely by idiographic studies that assume unique national histories, cultures, and ideologies. Social and economic supports for democracy have been addressed at an aggregate level in comparative, cross-national analysis, but Linz and Stepan suggest that democratic consolidation is rooted primarily in beliefs about democratic government and procedures and the general acceptance of laws, procedures, and institutions created through democratic processes (2001, 95). In attempting to generalize to this individual behavior from aggregated studies, an analysis encounters problems of ecological inference.

The projects represented by various "barometers" represent an effort to penetrate this individual level as a perspective for examining the "ideology" of democracy and its association with beliefs, attitudes, and cultural orientations within nations, but, in fact, also grounded in behavioral theories that transcend any one history, society, or culture. Having amassed such quantities of data at the individual level, however, it is puzzling as to why the data should be aggregated for comparison with other nations, given the

substantial variation within societies that, to use an ANOVA analogy, is often greater than variance between nations. If within-nation variance is greater, analysis should be guided by Prezyworski and Teune's admonition from decades ago that the goal of comparative study should be to "substitute the names of variables for the names of social systems" (1971). If supports for democracy are rooted in individual variations, more than national ones, aggregating data from large surveys of national populations for purposes of comparing nations discards opportunities for general theoretical knowledge as to why democracies succeed or why citizens fail to support democracy, controlling for specific national contexts.

In our investigations of the Thai data, we encounter variables associated with adherence to an "ideology" of democracy that vary not only across individuals in the population, but also, dramatically, across regions. Differences by region, however, turn out to be surrogates for more individually-based indicators that are distributed geographically. When the appropriate variables are identified, impacts of geography disappear.

This paper follows the lead in substituting variable names for national social systems from the project on "Democratization and Value Change in East Asia." Specifically, it investigates the association between urbanism and adherence to democracy across nations in a merged data set. The findings hint that variations among nations in support for democracy are often more a function of urban-rural cleavages that transcend national boundaries and of similarities in these respective cultures associated with this cleavage, regardless of country, than they are of peculiarities of national cultures or other social or economic configurations represented as geographic entities.

The Urban-Rural Cleavage and Its Implications for Democracy

At least two Thai scholars have argued that Thailand is a "tale of two democracies" – that of sophisticated, urban elites (with origins or current status in the metropole) and that of rural population with often isolated, parochial interests that view political activity, especially elections, as opportunities for personal or community benefit (Laothamatas, 1996; Pongphaichit and Baker, 2001). In terms of democracy, the elite view holds that:

> Voting in farming areas is not guided by political principles, policy issues, or what is perceived to be in the national interest, all of which is (regarded as) the only legitimate rationale for citizens casting their ballots in a democratic election. The ideal candidates for rural voters are those who visit them often, address their immediate grievances effectively, and bring numerous public works to their communities. (Laothamatas, 1996, 202).

The ability of rural constituencies to acquire substantial power in parliament under conditions of democratic government leads to doubts among the middle class, the mass media, and even academics as to the efficacy of the democratic process. For these groups, "democracy turns out to be the rule of the corrupt and incompetent" (Laothamatas, 1996, 208). This creates a significant dilemma for urban elites. Although the middle class opposes authoritarian rule, in principle, they hold government by rural constituencies in contempt, regarding them as "parochial in outlook, boorish in manner, and too uneducated to be competent lawmakers or cabinet members" (Laothamatas, 1006, 208).

The problem arises from the fact that urban, educated, cosmopolitan elites, who are skilled policy experts, are often held in equal contempt by villagers. They are often regarded as being alien to rural electorates in terms of taste, culture, and outlook, who

"fail to stay close to the voters in both a physical and cultural sense" (Laothamatas, 1996, 208). Veiled contempt for rural-dwellers by sophisticated Bangkok elites poses no problems under authoritarian regimes. However, once democratic elections tip the balance in favor of rural areas, significant gaps in perceptions and meanings of democracy develop.

The major threat posed by this cleavage lies in a relative lack of enthusiasm for democracy in the more influential urban areas, thus hindering democratic consolidation. There is growing evidence that, while the urban middle class opposes authoritarian forms of government that restrict individual freedoms and exercise a heavy hand over commerce, the uncertainty of changes in government, even by democratic processes, can be viewed as destabilizing economic environments on which entrepreneurs depend. The possibility that government may be seized by politicians with "populist" agendas poses an even more direct threat to the interests of a class that stands significantly above the average voter in Thai elections. The traditional emphasis on the middle-class as an engine of democracy in Thailand appears to be declining in favor of a view that middle-class support for democracy exists primarily when it coincides with class interests in curbing the power of government. This means that one cannot expect middle-class enthusiasm for democracy when it poses conflicts with private interests of the middle class. This view is cogently articulated by Laothamatas, who argues that the 1991 coup could not have been sustained except for support from the middle class, and Samudavanija and Chotiya (1998), who note that the role of the middle class in Thailand, vis-à-vis democracy, has been "reactive rather than proactive" (156) and that its primary interest in democracy has been "to safeguard their own freedom and the freedom of the market" (158).

Some studies (Albritton and Prabudhanitisarn, 1997; Albritton, et al., 1995) indicate that these differences between urban and rural constituencies disappear when controlling for education. Secondary analysis of data gathered by Logerfo (1996) indicates that, even when controlling for education, significant differences between Bangkok and rural areas remain. More recent research (Albritton and Bureekul, 2001; Albritton and Bureekul, 2002) supports the latter view. In a previous study, with more extensive measurement of discrete attitudes, we were able to show that residents of Bangkok and rural areas differ significantly in support for democracy, criteria for choosing candidates in elections, and even tolerance of corruption.

What are the sources of this difference between urban and rural society that have an impact on attitudes toward democracy? People living in rural areas live a significantly more precarious existence. Their livelihood is constantly threatened by nature and they are exposed to lack of personal security in a significantly more anarchic society. This leads to a greater dependence upon social networks for "getting by" in life and, as in almost any society, rural dwellers are significantly more communal, as well as being interested in the welfare of their neighbors (which can be either positive of negative, from some perspectives). Urban dwellers live in an environment in which they are more autonomous, isolated, and individualistic, relishing the anonymity presented by urban life. For these urbanites, individual independence from society and government leads to a greater interest in protections from government interference that we often associate with what are generally described as "civil liberties." These divergences between urban and rural populations appear to have significant impacts on how democracy is viewed by

individuals living in these two contexts, rural dwellers opting for security and urban dwellers for freedom.

The fundamental assumption of this study is that, whatever its content, the rural-urban cleavage is a significant factor in support for democracy in other societal contexts, just as it is in Thailand. In addition, we assume that some proportion of the variance in support for democracy across nations is a result of differential experiences of the urban culture and that these experiences may be mistaken for unique characteristics of nations and cultures, rather than more generalized, common factors that happen to coincide with national differences. Other factors, of course, come into play, but the purpose of this paper is to suggest a quest for the "names of variables" that can be substituted for names of social systems, thus contributing to less idiosyncratic and more generalizable theory.

Organization of the Study

This study utilizes the data from five nations that make up the data set on "Democratization and Value Change in East Asia." These nations have sufficient data on questions expressing an ideology of democracy ("support for democracy") as well as coding that lends itself to generation of an indicator of an urban-rural cleavage. We were, given the pressures of time, unable to include Japan, because of absence of data for the latter indicator, and there were too many missing cases among the questions on democratic ideology for us to include the PRC and Mongolia.

As most of you know, these data were obtained by probability sampling from national populations. In the Thai case, we conducted a true probability sample of the nation. Some teams conducted stratified samples and weighted them to conform to overall parameters of the national populations obtained from national censuses. From the

roughly 6473 respondents, we were able to obtain 5340 respondents on all indicators relevant to the study.

Support for Democracy is represented by the sum of scores on seven questions. (See Appendix 1) Because the variances of the responses are not the same, Z-scores were calculated before the responses were summed. In this, as well as in other studies, we have found that the indicator standardized in this way is more reliable and consistent than alternative forms of a summed score. The Urban-Rural Cleavage is represented as a 0-1 indicator between what our informants suggest are urban and rural areas in each of the five countries – Hong Kong, South Korea, the Philippines, Taiwan, and Thailand.[1] In addition, "dummy variables" are generated for each of the five countries and included as controls, but also as variables of interest in the analysis.

In a summed index, a missing value for any one question eliminates that case from the overall index. Given the substantial number of missing values from the "support for democracy" index, it becomes interesting to examine whether missing values represent respondents who are significantly different from the rest of the sample.[2] Table 1 provides demographics on "valid cases" respondents compared to "missing values" on the "support for democracy" index.

Table 1: Demographic Differences between Missing Values and Valid Cases on the Support for Democracy Variable.

	N	Pct. Urban	Pct. Female	Mean Age	Mean Educ.
Valid Cases	**5514**	**37.73**	**49.8**	**41.48**	**9.731**
Missing	**951**	**56.22**	**60.3**	**49.62**	**7.853**

[1] Hong Kong is coded as 1 for all respondents.

[2] With an N in excess of 5000, most sub-samples will be different from other populations, so significance tests are virtually useless. The examination does, however, help to detect what type of person is less likely to respond to what are, sometimes, quite sensitive questions about political attitudes.

The data indicate that missing cases are associated with urban, older women with lower levels of education. One would expect this group to be more anxious about the kinds of questions asked in our surveys. Unfortunately, we cannot determine whether this sub-group is significantly different on "support for democracy," as these data include the missing values. Among the valid cases, however, urban location, years of education, and female gender are all negatively associated with support for democracy.[3] Age does not appear to be a significant difference in contributing to an explanation of this variable. This population of missing values, however, represents characteristics that are likely to have less impact on futures of democracy in the respective countries.

The major purpose of the analysis, however, is to ascertain the extent to which individual-level indicators substitute for country contexts. The strategy is first to estimate differences in support for democracy with "dummy variables" representing countries in the analysis, then to include the variables of interest that plausibly substitute for the country dummies.[4] For the latter, we include, of course, an indicator locating the respondent in an urban or non-urban setting. We also include a measure of "modernistic" orientations, constructed by summing scores on traditional attitudes, as well as a separate indicator of "trust in other people" and an indicator of optimism about future economic conditions.[5] Finally, we add demographic indicators of socio-economic status and gender, primarily as control variables. (Age falls out of the analysis.)

[3] When these demographics are combined in a factorial design, urban women are significantly less supportive of democracy than the rest of the sample.
[4] The approach here assumes that "dummy variables" are not models, as mannequins are for the human form: rather, "dummy variables" imply that the researcher is a "dummy" in not knowing their content, the causal factors that they represent.
[5] The latter is respondent's estimate of personal economic condition five years hence.

Effects of Urban Location and Modernistic Attitudes on Support for Democracy

Table 2 shows considerable support for democracy from the country dummies, using Hong Kong as the omitted category. The correlation of the indicator of support for democracy shows that nearly one-third of the variance is explained simply by differences among the five nations of the study. Relative to Hong Kong, the other four countries are more positive in their support for democracy. In this regard, the coefficients indicate that Thailand is substantially higher in support for democracy than Hong Kong and, by implication, more supportive than any of the other countries.

Table 2: Comparison of Countries in Support for Democracy, a Dummy-Variable Interpretation : Five Asian Nations

Country	Regression Coefficient	Beta	t-test	Sig. of t
South Korea	.508	.056	2.953	.000
Philippines	.623	.064	3.520	.000
Taiwan	.469	.045	2.559	.011
Thailand	5.406	.589	31.229	.000
Constant	-1.596			.000
R-Square = .291				

When individual-level variables are added to the equation, the coefficients change dramatically. All of the added variables prove to be significant explanations of support for democracy (with the possible exception of socio-economic status). The country dummies, however, turn non-significant, even at a .05 criterion, except for Thailand, the explanatory power of the equation increasing to, virtually, one-third of the variance (Table 3).

Table 3: Introduction of Variable Names as Substitutes for Dummy Variable Surrogates in an Analysis of Support for Democracy in Five Asian Nations

Variable	Regression Coefficient	Beta	t-value	Sig. of t
South Korea	.004	.005	.238	.812
Philippines	.009	.010	.419	.675
Taiwan	.295	.025	1.366	.172
Thailand	4.741	.526	21.513	.000
Urban Location	-.546	-.065	-4.625	.000
Modern Attitudes	-.007	-.059	-4.840	.000
SES	-.117	-.029	-2.408	.016
Trust in People	.641	.071	5.840	.000
Optimism for Economic Future	.456	.100	8.052	.000
Constant	-1.949		-4.790	.000
R-Squared = .570				

The analysis indicates that individual-level data (within-variance) contributes in highly significant ways to explaining support for democracy across the five nations of the study. Urban and modernistic orientations, as well as an ability to trust other people, and optimism about one's personal economic future all contribute to support for democracy, even controlling for country contexts. Thailand is an anomaly in that it continues to show a high degree of independent variation associated with a democratic ideology. Although we should have substantially more insight in this matter, a ready explanation does not come to mind.

These results require some interpretation of the dummy-variable coefficients. As you know, dummy variables do not lend themselves to an interpretation that the regression coefficient represents a change in the dependent variable for each unit of change in the independent variable. A proper interpretation is that the coefficient represents the difference in a specific dummy from the association of the omitted

category with the dependent variable. In Table 2, above, the coefficients show significant difference between each country and Hong Kong. All differences are significant, indicating that the other four countries have higher levels of support for democracy than Hong Kong.

When other variables are added to the equation, the differences between three of the countries and Hong Kong disappear. This implies that the added variables substantially explain the differences between their relationships with support for democracy and that of Hong Kong. In other words, differences among Hong Kong, South Korea, Philippines, and Taiwan disappear when the other variables of interest are included in the analysis. Furthermore, the added variables can be construed as replacing the surrogates representing national idiosyncracies. What the dummies measure, to a significant degree, are the factors that we have identified and included in the equation.

There are also important substantive interpretations that transcend the epistemological ones. The data strongly support findings in studies of Thailand that people with urban and "modern" orientations tend to be less supportive of democracy than those from rural, more traditional backgrounds. These relationships appear to be sustained across the five Asian nations.

Of equal interest are the more personal, psychological factors – trust in other people and optimism about one's personal economic future. Sources of both these attitudes deserve much deeper study and analysis. In the Thai case, we believe that a lack of trust in others is communicated by Thai culture, socialization from an early age. The King Prajadhipok's Institute is currently sponsoring an anthropological study to probe

these factors more deeply. Both factors appear to be significant in support for democracy across the five nations in this study.

Analysis and Interpretation

This paper represents an early test of data collected in the project on "Democratization and Value Change in East Asia." The guiding assumption is that these data, from several Asian nations, facilitate development of theories about development and consolidation of democracy that transcend data aggregated by individual nations. The results show that what are presumed to be unique national differences, in fact are, often, a reflection of differing patterns or levels of individual characteristics that can be tapped with cross-national, individual data. In other words, the data enable us to substitute the names of variables for the names of social systems.

This study also identifies a variety of indicators for which national identities are surrogates. Much of the difference among nations in support for democracy are, really, attributable to differences in respondent location in urban versus rural culture, their movement away from "traditional" attitudes and patterns, their ability to trust other people, and their optimism about future economic status. When these variables are included in the model, differences among four of the five nations in support for democracy virtually disappear.

The position of Thailand remains a mystery. Although the authors of this study should have specialized knowledge that would help to explain why Thailand is so distinctly different from the other nations in support for democracy, we do not have clear answers to this anomaly. This, of course will be a subject of intense reflection. In previous work, we have engaged in a much deeper level of analysis of political cultures

as products of traditional cultures. We have developed both subjective measures of culture that we combine with objective measures of culture that result in significant explanations of support for democracy.

The data for this analysis do have measurement problems that we hope to correct in the near future. The data on Japan are quite compatible with that of the other nations, if we can settle on an indicator of the urban-rural cleavage. The urban-rural data from the Philippines is coded by region; we used the National Capital Region as distinctly urban, versus everything else. In the case of South Korea, we used the first seven categories of the "level1" variable as urban; in the Taiwan case, we used the first five. Making the data consistent with national data on urban-rural populations would be very helpful for extending the analysis. We feel confident about the reliability of the other indicators.

We do believe that this analysis holds significant promise for rethinking how we approach comparative politics. The explanations of support for democracy in this preliminary analysis suggest that between-nation variation often masks individual-level variation, that what we see as national differences are really different distributions of individual-level characteristics. It is these latter characteristics that produce outcomes of interest, such as support for democracy. The ability to substitute names of variables for names of systems in this way permits development of general theories of politics (and, of course, democracy) that can be far more useful than comparisons of national aggregates. The development of such general theory is, after all, what we should be about.

APPENDIX 1
Definitions of Variables Used in the Analysis

Support for Democracy: Sum of five Z-scores from responses on:

1. desirability of democracy – now
2. want democracy
2. suitability of democracy
3. satisfaction with democracy
4. preference for democracy
5. ability of democracy to solve problems
6. democracy versus the economy

Modernism: Sum of responses to 9 questions:

1 obedience to parents even when they are unreasonable
2. hiring preferences for friends and relatives
3. give way in conflict with a neighbor
4. future determined by fate
5. give way in opinions if co-workers disagree
6. family needs take precedence over those of individual
7. male loses face to work under female supervisor
8. elders should be consulted to resolve disputes
9. husbands should persuade daughters-in-law to obey mother

Trust Other People: Response to question:

Which is closest to you view:

1. One cannot be too careful in dealing with other people.
2. Most people can be trusted

Optimism about Respondent's Economic Future: Response to question on economic future of respondent in five years:

5-point scale from "Much Worse – Much Better"

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Asian Barometer

A Comparative Survey of Democracy, Governance and Development

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

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

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

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