Chapter 8

Democratic knowledge

Previous chapters have demonstrated that overt support for democracy as an ideal form of governance proves almost universal today; almost nine out of ten respondents in the WVS survey approved of democratic governance as either a ‘very’ or ‘fairly’ good political system for their own country. The majority of citizens in every country under comparison express the wish to live in a democracy. These sentiments are not restricted by levels of development or the type of regime in power. If taken at face-value, this world-wide pattern could be celebrated as indicating popular aspirations for democracy, indeed even signaling the end of normative debate about the best type of governance. If attitudes shape actions, then these sentiments have the potential to fuel enthusiasm for mass reform movements in Western nations, as well as strengthening the legitimacy of fragile democracies and catalyzing ‘people power’ street protests and dissident movements challenging repressive autocracies, such as those in Iran. This evidence cannot be dismissed as simply a technical artifact of the World Values Survey research methods, or measurement error, since similar aspirations have been widely observed in many other studies.1

Yet it would be unwise to treat the meaning of the survey evidence as straightforward and unproblematic without establishing what people in diverse cultures understand when they express the desire for democracy as an ideal principle or when they approve of the performance of democratic governance in their own country. After all, earlier chapters also demonstrated that positive evaluations of how well democracy works proved remarkably high in certain states with poor human rights records, such as the one-party Communist regimes of Viet Nam and China, as well as the monarchy-dominated electoral autocracy of Jordan. One reason for any democratic deficit could be inflated, uninformed, or inaccurate expectations of this form of governance, and thus levels of political knowledge, especially in societies which lack experience of how democracies work. Accordingly this chapter builds upon a substantial literature which has examined what people know and how people learn about democracy within particular contexts and regions. This includes studies comparing the public of the unified Germany (Rohrschneider), societies within post-communist Europe (Rose, Mishler and Haerpfer), and states in Sub-Saharan Africa (Mattes and Bratton).2

Part I consider the longstanding debate about levels of political knowledge and the capacity of the public to make rational and informed judgments, when expressing political aspirations and when evaluating the performance of democracy in their own country. Four perspectives are compared. In
contrast to these approaches, this chapter builds upon traditional theories of social learning through socialization processes. The study predicts that as a result, democratic knowledge is usually strengthened by levels of formal education and literacy, by access to the independent news media, and by the historical legacy of democratic traditions within each nation. Societies and groups not meeting these conditions lack the necessary awareness and information to evaluate the quality of democratic regimes with any degree of accuracy.

Part II establishes the research design used to test these propositions. Enlightened democratic knowledge is defined and measured by awareness of some basic principles at the heart of democratic regimes – as well as the ability to distinguish those which are incompatible. The 5th wave of the World Values Survey (2005-7), covering more than fifty societies, is again the source of evidence used to analyze the distribution of enlightened democratic knowledge. The results of the multilevel regression analysis models presented in Part III support the core propositions derived from socialization theories of political learning; enlightened democratic knowledge is significantly strengthened at macro-level by longer historical experience of democratic governance in any state, and at micro-level by the cognitive skills and knowledge derived from education, and by access to news media information, after controlling for the effects of age, sex and income. Alternative model specifications demonstrate that macro-level cosmopolitan communications and levels of economic development also strongly influence democratic knowledge. The conclusion discusses the implications of these results for understanding the democratic deficit, where lack of knowledge can help to explain the anomalies observed in societies lacking previous experience of this type of regime.

I: Theoretical perspectives on democratic knowledge

Traditional socialization theories of political learning

This chapter builds upon classic accounts of learning processes provided by socialization theories. This mainstream approach in the disciplines of educational studies, social psychology, political sociology, and cultural anthropology has long emphasized that political knowledge, behavioral norms and cultural values are acquired from formative experiences occurring during earliest childhood through adolescence and beyond. The primary role models and sources of learning include the immediate family and peer-groups, as well as the school, local community, mass media, civic institutions, and other agencies of cultural transmission. Traditional theories of socialization emphasize that enduring social and political values, attitudes and beliefs are gradually acquired during the formative years in childhood and adolescence, due to early experiences. Socialization processes are thought to shape the ways in
which an individual acquires their attitudes, beliefs, and values of the political culture from their surrounding environment, and how they take on a role as citizen within that political framework. Longitudinal panel surveys are the most effective technique to establish socialization processes; studies of the American public using this approach established that distinctive generational differences could be attributed to certain events occurring at the early, formative life stages.\(^4\)

The type of regime in power and contemporary political conditions are expected to play a significant role in the acquisition of political learning during the formative years. According to socialization theory, once established, cultural orientations are likely to crystallize and persist, even if the regime changes through the breakdown of autocracy and the gradual consolidation of democratic states. Therefore past political conditions, decisive historical events, and formative political experiences within each society should have stamped an enduring imprint which should remains evident today in contemporary political cultures. At macro-level, citizens living in cultures with experience of democratic governance over many years, or even decades and centuries, are therefore expected to display more informed attitudes and familiarity with how democracy works than the public growing up under autocracy. Accordingly the cumulative historical index of democratization, used earlier, should prove an important predictor of enlightened democratic knowledge.

In addition to direct experience, people are also expected to learn about democracy through political information provided by the independent news media in their own country, as well as via channels of cosmopolitan communications flowing from abroad. Elsewhere previous comparative studies have demonstrated that individual use of the news media is positively associated with many types of civic engagement, including strengthening support for democratic values.\(^5\) These results are consistent with the ‘virtuous circle’ thesis, where media use and civic engagement are regarded as complimentary processes.\(^6\) In addition living in a more cosmopolitan society, with border open to information flows, where people can learn about the rights, principles, and procedures which characterize this type of governance, has been found to be positively associated with support for democratic values, with use the news media within cosmopolitan societies reinforcing these effects.\(^7\)

Therefore, traditional socialization theories suggest a series of testable propositions. At macro-level, enlightened knowledge about liberal democratic regimes is predicted to be most common (i) in states with extensive historical democratic traditions, as well as (ii) in the most cosmopolitan societies, where political information is easily available from the independent mass media, and (iii) in affluent post-industrial societies, characterized by high levels of literacy and education, with multiple
communication channels and widespread public access to the news media. Given the strong interrelationship between these macro-level factors, each is entered separately in separate models, to avoid problems of multi-collinearity. At individual level, information and awareness of the core procedures associated with liberal democracy should be greater (iv) among citizens with formal education and (v) among regular news media users. Multiple studies have reported that political knowledge gaps within societies are consistently associated with levels of education, although the size of this gap is typically conditioned by the type of media system (whether predominately commercial or public sector), the type of media channels which people use, and the dimensions and level of knowledge which is tested.\(^8\)

Skeptical theories of political knowledge

Nevertheless all these propositions derived from socialization theory are challenged by alternative perspectives about levels of political knowledge. Perhaps the most common approach emphasizes the limits of citizen’s cognitive awareness, even in long-standing democratic states and highly educated societies. There has long been general concern about the consequence of asking the public to express their opinions in social surveys on many complex topics to which they have previously given little attention and which are beyond their immediate daily experience. More than forty years ago Converse suggested that many citizens lack meaningful beliefs and enduring preferences about many basic political facts, even on topics of public policy which have been the subject of intense debate among elites.\(^9\) Nevertheless, when interviewed in the artificial context of social surveys and opinion polls, Converse argues, the public often offers responses to questions, in the attempt to avoid appearing ignorant or negligent. These statements, Converse suggests, commonly reflect ‘non-attitudes’, rather than deeply-held convictions, sophisticated knowledge, and enduring beliefs. By contrast, well-educated and informed political elites are thought to display more abstract, coherent, and well-organized belief systems. To support his argument, Converse emphasized that many statements of public opinion recorded by polls often proved unstable, inconsistent, and superficial, vacillating across repeated interviews, and responding to trivial methodological differences in fieldwork practices, questionnaire construction, and item phrasing in each survey.\(^10\)

The long-standing debate about non-attitudes has given rise to a substantial literature in public opinion research, with scholars generating alternative models seeking to understand the rationality, coherence, and sophistication of social psychological decision-making process involved in voting choice and public policy preferences, as well as the role of measurement error.\(^11\) In an influential study which
revised the Converse thesis, Zaller emphasized that ordinary people who are asked survey questions do not lack opinions; instead they often have to shuffle through a wide range of conflicting considerations. The artificial interview process prompts respondent to offer what Zaller calls ‘top-of-the-head responses’, triggered by the specific question wording and order, and other related contextual framing cues, without necessarily attaching any deeper meaning to their answers.\textsuperscript{12} The replies offered by respondents may be perfectly genuine and sincere in the context, but, at the same time, repeated surveys with the same respondents are likely to prompt different answers reflecting alternative questionnaire designs. In this regard, when asked to express the meaning or the characteristics of democracy, the answers are expected to depend upon the survey context and question framing.

The skeptical interpretation of opinion polls therefore implies that survey data about mass attitudes towards democracy is not necessarily based on a sophisticated, informed, and coherent grasp of the main principles of democracy. The skeptical perspective is in line with Schedler and Sarsfield’s argument that abstract notions of democracy are a social valence issue, similar to concepts such as personal success and happiness, which provoke positive reactions although people are often unable to define more concrete meanings to these terms.\textsuperscript{13} Popular misconceptions, irrational beliefs, and lack of awareness of some basic facts concerning political events, issues, persons and institutions have been widely documented in many social surveys, particularly among the politically disengaged and uninterested citizens.\textsuperscript{14} In the United States, for example, public opinion polls have demonstrated limited knowledge, such as being able to identify the name of the vice president, rights guaranteed by the First Amendment, the size of the federal budget deficit, which party controls Congress, or the proportion of minorities in the American population.\textsuperscript{15} Lack of understanding about the fundamental principles of democracy is reported even in long-established liberal democratic states, such as the US and Western Europe. This general problem can be expected to be exacerbated in countries which lack historical experience of this form of governance, and in developing societies with restricted access to information from the independent news media, as well as among the less educated and literate sectors of the population. Although the issue of limited knowledge is widely recognized in social psychological studies of decision-making processes shaping consumer choices, voting behavior, and public policy preferences, less is known about the extent of public awareness about democracy, for example when surveys ask respondents to rate the importance of living in a democracy, to evaluate the democratic performance of their own government, and to express their preferences towards democracy and autocracy. These sorts of questions are also potentially vulnerable to prompting politically-correct answers which are perceived to be socially-acceptable to the interviewer. This danger is common
everywhere but it is particularly acute in autocracies such as China, Belarus and Iran which severely limit freedom of expression, encouraging respondents to disguise the expression of their true opinions.

In a related argument, Inglehart and Welzel suggest that although most people around the world say that they like the general idea of democracy and that they support democratic values, this does not necessarily indicate strong motivations or deep-rooted coherent orientations.\(^\text{16}\) Inglehart and Welzel reason that in many societies a marked disjuncture is evident between overt public expressions of support for democracy and the actual type of regime in power (measured historically by Freedom House). By contrast, they argue, the presence of more deeply-rooted ‘emancipative’ or ‘self-expression’ attitudes, values and behaviors in society, exemplified by feelings of social (inter-personal) trust, tolerance of out-groups, and political participation, prove a more accurate cultural predictor of the persistence of democratic regimes.\(^\text{17}\) For Inglehart: “Although lip-service to democracy is almost universal today, it is not necessarily an accurate indicator of how deeply democracy has taken root in a given country. The extent to which a society emphasizes a syndrome of tolerance, trust, political activism and Post-materialist values is a much stronger predictor of stable democracy.”\(^\text{18}\)

Yet it may be highly misleading to assume that strong democratic aspirations, by themselves, would be directly related to either the attainment or the persistence of democratic regimes. Public opinion can overwhelmingly favor democratic rule, as can be observed in the cases of China, Vietnam and Iran, and yet citizens in these states may be powerless to overthrow long-established autocracies.\(^\text{19}\) Democratic aspirations may be genuine but unrealized or even repressed. In Iran, for example, Amnesty International reports that days of street protests in the disputed June 2009 presidential election were followed by a security crackdown resulting in almost a dozen deaths and the arrest of hundreds of demonstrators, including activists, journalists, academics and lawyers.\(^\text{20}\) In a context where states are willing to imprison opponents and suppress opposition reform movements then it is a flawed logic to expect that public opinion, no matter how favorable towards democracy, would reflect the type of regime in power. Even in more liberal regimes which respect human rights, both institutional structures and also levels of human development may prove more powerful drivers of democratization than cultural values alone.\(^\text{21}\) In this context, the expression of widespread democratic aspirations could reflect deeply-rooted, stable, and consistent attitudes and values, and yet public opinion could still prove a poor predictor of contemporary or historical patterns of democratic governance. The meaningfulness of public expressions of support for democracy, like other types of attitudes and values, can be explored at by seeing whether public opinion remains stable over time where conditions are also
relatively unchanged, and whether attitudes and values are coherently structured, displaying a consistent underlying logic.

Relativism

An alternative interpretation offered by the relativistic view emphasizes that the concept of democracy holds culturally-specific meanings in different contexts, with the word changing its connotation in translation and in everyday usage. One major challenge in understanding public opinion on this issue, especially in comparative perspective, is that democracy is an essentially-contested, multidimensional, normative concept which is open to multiple meanings. Thus assessing the factual basis for any understanding of democracy is different from, for example, testing how many Americans can correctly identify the name of their local congressional representative or the number of members in the U.S. Senate, where there are clearly right or wrong answers. With the essentially-contested concept of democracy, it is difficult to establish an appropriate clear-cut factual baseline of agreed truth against which to assess levels of knowledge. Hence theorists have long argued about the alternative virtues of participatory, direct, deliberative, cosmopolitan, liberal, associational, social, and representative versions of democracy.22 Institutionalists continue to debate the pros and cons concerning consensus and majoritarian democracies.23 More recently, a plethora of adjectives have been used to try to account for contrasts among regimes in the ‘grey’ area located between the most clear-cut cases of absolute autocracies and liberal democracies. Alternative approaches have struggled to categorize these regimes variously as ‘semi-democracy’, ‘semi-free’, ‘partly democratic’, ‘electoral democracy’, ‘hybrid democracy’, ‘electoral autocracy’, or ‘illiberal democracy’.24 According to John Keane, for example, the language, institutions, and meaning of democracy is remade and evolves within each society, so that classical liberal notions based on Western political thought are not fixed in stone when transported to other cultures.25 Instead Keane argues that a process of ‘indigenisation’ means that democracy experiences a process of metamorphosis which adapts to its specific local environment. As such, focusing on institutions such as elections and parties represents a relatively narrow prism which excludes democratic evolutions in non-Western societies. In terms of empirical measurement, as well, debate between those scholars advocating minimalist and maximalist approaches also reflect deeper arguments about conceptual definitions and underlying meanings.26 Not surprisingly, where experts and scholars disagree, there is considerable lassitude for different understandings of ambiguous terms in ordinary language and popular discourse.
Moreover claims about the performance of democracy are themselves political and thus subject to contestation. Politicians, governments, the mass media, and advocacy organizations can all attempt to manipulate citizen’s judgments by providing misleading information. Well-known examples of influential myths include American polls showing that in July 2006, a majority of Republicans continued to believe that before the Iraq war, Saddam Hussein had weapons of mass destruction or a major program for developing them, a perception bolstered by the rhetoric of the Bush administration, despite the report from UN inspectors discounting such claims.27 Similarly, despite overwhelming evidence that President Obama was born in Hawaii, following discussion on the conservative talk show radio circuit, U.S. polls in July 2009 reported that less than a majority of Republicans believed that President Obama was a natural-born citizen, compared with 28% who thought he was not and 30% who were unsure.28 The general public may be particularly muddled or ill-informed about the idea of democracy in states where powerful elites in autocratic regimes restrict the free flow of information across national borders, censor internal dissent, and propagate Orwellian rhetoric by claiming that their states are already democratic; for example Kim Jung Il rules the country officially entitled the Democratic People’s Republic of North Korea. In China, Chairman Mao proclaimed that the Communist party served democracy by acting for the people, while by contrast he argued that competing interest groups represented narrow cliques rather than the public good.29 The cultural meaning of democracy therefore deserves closer scrutiny, most especially among publics in long-standing autocracies, such as in China, Viet Nam, Belarus, and Saudi Arabia, where the independent news media are restricted and where ordinary people lack historical experience of this form of governance.

The relativistic perspective was emphasized by Schaffer, based on evidence derived from in-depth interviews conducted in Senegal, a mostly Islamic and agrarian country with a long history of electoral politics. He discovered that ideas of “demokaraasi” held by Wolof-speakers often reflect concerns about collective security, rather than the standard liberal concepts of free and fair elections, accountable executives, and respect for human rights.30

Elsewhere it has been suggested by other scholars that the Confucian tradition which predominates in the Chinese culture has translated the idea of democracy into ‘government for the people’, meaning rule in their general interests, rather than ‘government by the people’, as conventionally understood in Western cultures.31 If so, then the meaning of democracy in China, Vietnam, Taiwan, and other East Asian societies sharing a common Confucian tradition may display a distinctive understanding of the characteristics of this form of government. If this is indeed the
pervasive understanding in East Asia, then the performance of the state in delivering record economic growth in the ‘East Asian Tigers’, lifting millions out of poverty, could help to explain why an instrumental evaluation would lead citizens in these countries to award high marks to their governments.

Another indicator of the culturally-specific meaning of democracy was derived from comparisons within the newly united Germany. After the fall of the Berlin wall, Hofferbert and Klingemann found that the attitudes of West and East Germans shared certain common notions about what defines democracy in terms of procedures and processes, such as the association of this form of governance with freedom of speech and competitive elections. Nevertheless during the 1990s, West and East German citizens differed significantly in their understanding of the social and economic features of democracy.32

If the relativistic perspective is correct, then people in societies as diverse as the U.S., China, Ghana, Jordan, and Sweden may endorse democratic values in the abstract, but cultures will differ sharply in how the term is understand. As a result, there may be no agreed factual yardstick against which to judge the rationality of mass (or, indeed, elite) opinions about democracy. This also raises long-standing methodological issues about the functional equivalence of concepts, measures, questions, and translated words when survey questionnaires travel across different cultures.33 In the original Civic Culture study, for example, concern was raised whether core concepts such as ‘national pride’ carried similar meanings in Italy, Germany and Britain.34 Conceptual equivalence is a constant challenge for cross-national questionnaires which extends far beyond matters of linguistic translation. Languages are not just ways to communicate the same ideas and values; instead they may carry alternative ways of thinking and understanding. This problem is often encountered when ideas such as the left-right continuum or the liberal-conservative scale are interpreted quite differently in different societies; for example ‘liberal’ in the United States is usually understood as social liberalism located on the ‘left’ of the political spectrum, while ‘liberal’ in Europe is commonly regarded as ‘economic’ or ‘free market’ liberalism located on the center-right. The complexity of notions which are carried in social surveys, such as the concepts of ‘democracy’, ‘corruption’, ‘freedom’, ‘religiosity’ or ‘nationalism’, may well generate responses to the same words and phrases which are far from functionally-equivalent.

Open ended questions tapping the meaning of democracy are one way which helps to establish whether understandings of the concept of democracy are shared around the world or whether they diverge cross-nationally. Using Global Barometer surveys conducted in more than fifty countries, Dalton,
Shin and Jou analyzed the result of open-ended responses when ordinary people were asked to describe the meaning of democracy. The study found that in most places, democracy was broadly associated with ideas of freedom and civil liberties. This response was far more common that defining the meaning of democracy in terms of institutions and procedures, such as elections or rule of law, or describing it in terms of instrumental social benefits, such as peace, stability, and social equality. At the same time, they also found that in open-ended questions, roughly one fifth of the public could not offer any substantive definition, even in many long established democracies. This overall pattern suggests that when indicating approval of democracy, people living in countries such as Nigeria, Egypt, and China may share a common understanding of the basic values, structures, and processes associated with liberal democracy.

The use of ‘anchoring vignettes’ is an alternative methodology designed to generate more accurate survey measurement of complex notions, especially those involving differences among respondents on normative issues, such as democracy, freedom, privacy, and corruption. This approach measures responses to hypothetical examples, allowing analysts to arrive at an inductively-derived understanding of the common usage of core concept, and reducing interpersonal incomparability (where survey questions hold different meanings for each respondent). Using vignettes allows analysts to examine the meaning of democracy, then to use this measure to rescale the rating of democracy in their own country.

If we accept the logic of the relativist argument, however, it implies that it is not possible to use many of the existing standard survey instruments to test cognitive awareness of democracy, since the essential meaning of democracy varies cross-culturally. Where truth is contested, no agreed yardstick is available to evaluate whether views are more or less informed about democracy, as societies lack a common understanding of the core concept.

**Instrumental support**

Yet another viewpoint suggests that widespread support for democracy is often reflects popular calculations about the material benefits which accrue from this type of government, rather than reflecting notions of democratic practices and political ideals. Indeed in this regard citizens may not distinguish between ‘democracy’ and ‘good government’. Hence Bratton and Mattes emphasize that some citizens in Africa favor democracy for instrumental reasons, where this type of regime is associated with economic prosperity, improvements in living standards, the alleviation of poverty, and the provision of public services, such as health clinics and schools. On balance, however, the study
found that African approval hinges less on the government’s capacity at delivering substantive economic goods than on its ability to guarantee basic political rights. Similarly Moreno compared what Costa Ricans, Chileans and Mexicans regarded as the main task of democracy, concluding that instrumental benefits (notably fighting crime and redistributing wealth) were often cited as major priorities by many citizens, while elections and the protection of minorities were not regarded as so important.\footnote{38} Moreno found that both news media use and political knowledge were consistently found to determine the conceptualization of democracy, with these factors strengthening the focus on procedural characteristics.

Instrumental support for democracy is important and real, but it is also limited and conditional, as continued approval relies upon the perceived performance of governments when delivering economic and social goods. If governments fail to deliver jobs, prosperity and social services, then public enthusiasm for democracy may fade.\footnote{39} Democratic governance has long predominated in Western nations, and hence it may have become associated in the public’s mind with the world’s richest and most powerful nations. Nevertheless instrumental approval does not mean that citizens possess detailed knowledge about the complex principles, practices, and procedures underlying how this form of governance works, or that they approve of these characteristics. Moreover the idea that democracy inevitably lead to greater affluence, social equality, or improved public services is a deeply contested normative claim, rather than a universally-accepted scientific truth. Research remains divided; some studies suggest that poor democracies usually outperform poor autocracies in economic growth and the delivery of social services, as shown by indicators of maternal mortality, education spending, or poverty, but other scholars continue to cast doubt on these claims.\footnote{40} The widespread belief in the instrumental benefits of democracy can therefore be regarded as a contested truth which may prove to be factually incorrect. Instrumental aspirations for democracy are meaningful and genuine but also probably misplaced and erroneous, if founded upon the belief that democratic reforms will automatically generate certain material benefits.

To summarize these arguments, socialization theories are widely popular accounts of social learning but they are also challenged by the skeptical interpretation, which emphasizes that ordinary people in many societies are often unaware, or simply ignorant, about civic affairs, including constitutional principles, basic public policies issues, government leaders, public sector institutions, and political events. If political knowledge is indeed usually limited, then it would not be surprised if many citizens commonly lack the capacity to distinguish some of the basic features of democratic and
autocratic regimes. As a result, public evaluations of the workings of their own regime may prove grossly inaccurate. The relativistic view suggests that the meaning of many complex concepts are usually culturally-specific, including ideas of democracy. Experts often disagree deeply about the most appropriate way to define democracy, so it would hardly be surprising if meanings differ among ordinary people in different cultures. This logic suggests that people in China, Viet Nam and Jordan have the capacity to provide informed evaluations of their regime and to express genuine aspirations for democracy, but at the same time the concept of ‘democracy’ is not equivalent in meaning across societies; in this perspective, the Chinese want Chinese democracy, not American, British or French. The instrumental argument claims that satisfaction with the democratic performance of their regime is often based primarily upon judgments about the effective delivery of public goods and services more than any adherence to basic democratic principles. In this view, people in African and Asian developing societies approve of democracy because they associate this type of regime with modernity and development, including more prosperous living standards and economic security, both characteristics of Western societies, without any detailed grasp of how this form of governance actually does and does not work. Democratic states evolved during earlier centuries in some of the world’s most stable and affluent societies, so the reverse logic infers that democracy will generate socioeconomic development elsewhere.

II: Evidence about levels of democratic knowledge

The empirical survey evidence can be scrutinized to establish what people in diverse societies know and understand by the idea of democracy. There remains considerable debate, however, about the most appropriate way of conceptualizing and measuring ‘political knowledge’. The simple true-false factual knowledge approach, or the so-called "civics test" approach, exemplified by Delli Carpini and Keeter, assumes that voters need to grasp the basic institutional arrangements in any regime (typified in American studies by being able to identify the name of the US Vice President or which party controls Congress), comprehensive and detailed information about the policy platforms of the main contenders for office; and familiarity with the fine-print of the government’s record. The main problem with the encyclopedic approach is that, even in long-established democracies and highly educated societies, the majority of citizens appear to fail these test most of the time. Often the trivial is weighted equally with the important in knowledge scores, and no allowance is made for whether it makes any difference or whether there are any consequences if citizens get the answers right or wrong.
In contrast, the “relativist” approach acknowledges that people have a limited reservoir of political information, but suggests that this can be sufficient for citizens. Relativists argue that cognitive shortcuts, such as ideology or ‘schema’, like a handy ready reckoner, reduce the time and effort required to make a reasoned choice about the performance of government with imperfect information. In this view, citizens are capable of making good low-information decisions because the costs of keeping fully informed are high, whereas the rewards for engaging in politics in contemporary democracies are low. Relativists lower the necessary information hurdles, producing a more realistic assessment so that most citizens get at least a passing grade. Yet one major difficulty with this approach is that the cognitive shortcuts that voters use to decide may be helpful in reducing the buzzing clutter of multiple messages, or they may be based on serious factual inaccuracies – or “false knowledge” – especially if the public is not paying attention when evaluating the quality of democracy.

The last approach, associated with the work of Lupia and McCubbins, focuses on the importance of “practical knowledge”. In this view, citizens need to acquire sufficient information, primarily from the news media, for them to be able to estimate how their democracy works. People need practical knowledge – in domains that matter to them – to connect their political preferences for democracy accurately to how democracy works. This approach strikes a middle way on the assumption that citizens do not need to know everything about democratic governance, as if cramming for a school civics test. Nor do they need to rely upon ideological shortcuts, such as feelings of national pride, to evaluate the performance of democracy in their own country, as such shortcuts may prove misleadingly dated or inaccurate. Instead the practical knowledge approach, which is adopted in this study, implies that for rational judgments, citizens need sufficient practical information to connect their preferences for living in a democratic state with how far their government meets democratic standards.

Accordingly the concept of ‘enlightened democratic knowledge’ is defined and measured in this study by whether citizens can accurately identify a few of the core principles, institutions, and processes which are most closely associated with liberal democracy, as well as applying the more rigorous test of whether they can also clearly distinguish characteristics which are incompatible with this form of rule. In terms of the core procedures of democracy, the benchmark adopted in this study for measuring an accurate understanding is defined by Dahl’s notion of polyarchy, emphasizing the importance of the institutions leading towards political participation and contestation. In particular, knowledgeable citizens should be aware that democratic states use regular, competitive, multiparty elections with universal suffrage to fill the major legislative and executive offices. But this, by itself, sets the
knowledge benchmark test fairly low. In addition, knowledgeable citizens should also recognize that liberal democracies respect a wide range of fundamental freedoms and civil liberties, so that contending interests can be expressed and compete through processes of articulation and representation, including freedom of belief, speech and publication, assembly, and association. Knowledgeable citizens should also recognize that liberal democratic states are based on the rule of law and judicial independence; so that legal rules are applied fairly and consistently across equivalent cases and all citizens have equal access to justice. This form of governance also respects the principle of equal rights for women and for ethnic, religious and cultural minority groups, not restricting the participation and representation of minorities in political processes. Conversely as well as getting the ‘true’ statement correct, knowledgeable citizens should also be able to distinguish the ‘false’ statements in any multiple-choice test, by rejecting certain practices which are incompatible with liberal democracy. Hence knowledgeable citizens should be able to recognize that democracies incorporate civilian control of the military, where the army stays in the barracks in any political crisis, as well as understanding the principle of the separation of church and state, maintaining the distinction between governmental and spiritual authority.

To analyze democratic knowledge, this chapter draws upon a battery of items included in the 2005-7 wave of the WVS. The survey asked people to identify the essential characteristics associated with democracy, using a ten-point scale to rank the importance of a list of ten items shown in Table 6.1, with the following question:

“Many things may be desirable, but not all of them are essential characteristics of democracy. Please tell me for each of the following things how essential you think it is as a characteristic of democracy. Use this scale where 1 means “not at all an essential characteristic of democracy” and 10 means it definitely is “an essential characteristic of democracy”.”

Four characteristics in the list reflect an understanding of the procedures associated with democratic governance, including the idea that democracies respect civil rights to protect people against oppression, and under this form of governance people typically choose their leaders through a process of free elections, women have equal rights to men, and people can change laws through referendums. The design of these items unfortunately contains certain ambiguities which make them less than ideal. Respect for equal rights for women is not exclusively associated with liberal democracies, by any means; for example gender quotas for parliamentary office were used in many communist states before they became widely adopted elsewhere. Only certain democracies, not all, allow the use of legally-binding
referendums. In parliamentary democracies, electors choose parties as collectivities, but prime ministers and party leaders are usually selected through other indirect mechanisms. Nevertheless these four survey items serve as proxy measures for some of the basic components of Dahl’s notion of polyarchy and thus best fit a procedural understanding of democratic governance.

The idea that elections are at the heart of any liberal democracy sets the knowledge bar relatively low, however, as this notion is so widely endorsed. Being able to distinguish characteristics which are not an integral and essential part of liberal democracy provides a more stringent and rigorous test of knowledge. Another four items listed in the battery of characteristics tap instrumental notions of democracy, including whether democracy is characterized by economic prosperity, punishment of criminals, state aid for unemployment, and redistributive taxation/welfare states. Again the design of these items is not ideal, but they reflect the general notion that democratic states are usually more effective in delivering material benefits through improved living standards, economic growth, and the alleviation of poverty, maintaining law and public safety again crime, and managing an efficient and equitable delivery of public goods and services. People may come to regard democracy favorably on instrumental grounds, if this type of regime becomes associated in their minds with the world’s most powerful states, affluent post-industrial societies, and advanced economies. This perception is not uninformed; historically, most democratic states have typically displayed these characteristics. Instrumental notions reflect genuine attitudes and perceptions, not non-attitudes. Nevertheless this type of support does not imply any durable commitment to the procedures and principles associated with how democratic governance works, nor does it display any awareness of the institutional characteristics of this type of regime. The last two items contained in the list are closely associated with certain types of authoritarian governance, namely a situation where the army takes over when the government is incompetent (through military rule or a coup d’état), and states where religious authorities interpret the law (theocracy). Knowledgeable citizens should be capable of rejecting principles which are, in fact, antithetical to conventional notions of liberal democracy. This form of governance requires, at a minimum, that the military is always kept under civilian control and that religious and state authorities are clearly separated. Citizens with a fuzzier understanding will be less capable of distinguishing how different types of regimes work.

Using the complete battery of closed-ended items allows us to examine the characteristics which the public thought to be most closely associated with the concept of democracy. The procedural knowledge scale was constructed by adding together scores on each of the four institutional
characteristics of liberal democracy (standardized to construct a 0-10-point scale). Similar processes were followed by adding together the scores which identified the instrumental and the authoritarian understanding of the characteristics of democracy, to construct standardized instrumental and authoritarian scales. Lastly, to summarize the patterns, an enlightened awareness of liberal democracy scale was constructed by deducting the scores on the combined instrumental and authoritarian scales from the procedural scale. That is to say that a more knowledgeable grasp of liberal democracy was defined as those citizens who both understood some of the core principles and practices of how liberal democratic states work, as well as rejecting the idea that democracy generates certain instrumental benefits, and the idea that democracy is compatible with certain autocratic practices. In examining knowledge, models need to control for the standard individual-level social characteristics most closely associated with access to education and the media, namely sex, household income, and socioeconomic status. Multilevel models allow us to monitor simultaneously both the societal and the individual characteristics of the most knowledgeable citizens.

III: Awareness of the procedural characteristics of democracy

Table 8.1 and Figure 8.1 show the perceived characteristics of democracy by countries with extensive, moderate, and restricted historical experience of democracy. Several important findings emerge. First, the procedural understanding of democracy proves the most widespread and popular interpretation across all types of societies. Hence for most people democracy is closely associated with the principles and procedures of equality for women and men in human rights, the use of free elections to choose political leaders, the existence of civil liberties as protection against oppression, and the use of referenda. People in countries with the longest historical experience of democracy give the greatest emphasis to these procedures, providing some initial support for the experiential thesis, but the public in other types of regimes also recognize these characteristics. The instrumental understanding of the characteristics of democracy proves slightly less popular, although not uncommon. The instrumental benefits are emphasized most often by citizens living in autocracies, such as China, Russia, Iraq and Jordan, with little or no historical experience of other regimes. Lastly the authoritarian understanding of the characteristics of democracy is far less common, especially among those who have lived under democracy.

[Table 8.1 and figure 8.1 about here]

If we look at the regional patterns, in Table 8.2, overall the procedural conception of democracy – including the principles of women’s equal rights, free election, civil liberties, and referenda -- was seen...
by respondents in all world regions as the most essential characteristic of democracy. Indeed although Scandinavia led the way in regarding these features as essential, a broad consensus about the importance of these characteristics for democracy was found worldwide. Many people also agreed that democracy was characterized by the instrumental benefits, albeit slightly less strongly. Hence people in Vietnam, Taiwan and Ethiopia were particularly like to say that democracy was important but for instrumental reasons, because of the material benefits it was assumed to bring. But this understanding was not confined to developing countries, by any means; for example the majority of West Europeans also thought that democracies were characterized by economic prosperity, rule of law, state welfare, and progressive taxation. Lastly, the majority of people in all world regions reject the notion that military rule or theocracy are compatible with democracy. But authoritarian notions of democracy were particularly common in highly religious Muslim societies, such as Jordan, Iran, Ethiopia, Mali, and Iraq, where many people believed that it was not inconsistent with democracy for religious authorities to interpret the law or for the security forces to intervene if the government proved incompetent.

To explore the underlying factors helping to explain these alternative understandings of the characteristics of democracy, multilevel regression models were used, controlling for age, sex, and income at individual level, all standard factors commonly associated with social and political attitudes and beliefs. The models seek to test how far on political knowledge is influenced by historical experience of democracy at societal level, and by education and news media use at micro-level. These models were run for the procedural, instrumental and authoritarian perceptions of democracy, each standardized to 100-point scales. Moreover an overall summary measure of enlightened knowledge was constructed by subtracting the instrumental and authoritarian scales from the procedural scale. All independent variables were standardized using mean-centering, as is conventional in multilevel models. This helps to reduce the dangers of multi-collinearity, as well as facilitating comparison of the strength of the regression coefficients across all variables, as discussed in the previous chapter.

Table 8.3 demonstrates that a procedural understanding of the characteristics of democracy was most strongly predicted by education and use of the news media, and, to a lesser extent, by age, sex, and income. Thus an understanding of some of the basic processes within liberal democracy, such as the use of elections to select leaders and respect for civil liberties, is strengthened both by formal education and by use of the media for information, as well as proving greater among the older generation and the more affluent sectors of the population. These findings conformed with prior
expectations derived from socialization theory. After controlling for all these factors, however, contrary to expectations, the historical experience of democracy in each society did not help to predict a correct procedural understanding. Figure 8.1 illustrates the national comparisons, showing that although some long-established democracies such as Sweden and Switzerland emphasized the procedural understanding, this understanding was widely shared by younger democracies such as Argentina and Romania, as well as by Russians and the Chinese. At the same time, some other younger democracies, such as Ghana, Mexico and Malaysia, regarded these characteristics as more weakly linked with democracy. It appears that democratic regimes are so closely associated with elections and civil liberties that awareness of these defining features has become almost universal today.

[Figure 8.2 about here]

In the multilevel model, an instrumental understanding of democracy was significantly predicted by all the factors expected to prove important, including (negatively) the historical experience of democracy in each society, as well as (positively) by individual-level education and use of the news media, as well as varying by age and sex. As shown in Figure 8.2, in the simple correlations without any controls, longer historical experience of democracy in each society weakened instrumental conceptions; people living in autocracies such as China, Russia and Iraq were most likely to perceive democracy in terms of instrumental characteristics, such as economic growth or improved living standards. Although far from negligible, this conception was generally less common in long-established democracies, especially in Sweden, Norway and the U.S. Democratic experience therefore undermines instrumental understandings of democracy. This finding has important implications for understanding the meaning of the widespread demand for democracy, observed in previous chapters. Hence people living in Iraq, China, Sweden and Norway all say that they strongly endorse the importance of living in a democracy, but the cultural meaning and understanding of this statement appears to differ substantially among these countries. The Chinese and Iraqis, for example, are more likely to express democratic aspirations because they believe that this regime will improve living standards and strengthen economic growth. By contrast, Scandinavians typically desire democracy because they think it will bolster human rights and fundamental freedoms.

[Figure 8.3 about here]

Lastly, the authoritarian perception of the characteristics of democracy, where the military takes over in case of need or religious leaders define the law, is also far stronger among those societies lacking the historical experience of democracy (see Figure 8.3). Hence few citizens subscribed to these notions
in Germany, Switzerland, and Japan, although the authoritarian view proved widespread in Iraq, Jordan, Ethiopia, Iran and China. In the multilevel models, the authoritarian perception of democracy was strongly predicted by lack of historical experience of democracy, as well as by lack of education. This pattern helps to explain some of the anomalies observed earlier, for example why Jordanians see their state as more democratic than the standard expert perceptual indicators; the authoritarian notion of democracy, which is widespread in this culture, could lead logically to these evaluations. In this regard, democratic experience sharpens an accurate awareness of what liberal democracy is and is not, and thus undermines authoritarian understandings.

To summarize the overall patterns, enlightened knowledge of democracy is calculated by measuring the perception that procedural features are important, minus the identification of the instrumental or authoritarian characteristics. The final column in Table 8.3 shows that an enlightened understanding of liberal democracy was most strongly predicted by the historical experience of democracy in each society and by education, as well as by news media use. As predicted by socialization theory, knowledge of democracy is far from randomly distributed. Instead, citizens who have grown up in long-standing democratic states have learnt how democratic procedures and principles do and do not work, a process reinforced by the cognitive skills and civic knowledge acquired through education and by political information about public affairs derived from the independent news media. In particular, democratic experience strongly undermines instrumental and authoritarian understandings. Enlightened knowledge of democracy also strengthens with age, among men more than women, and in more affluent households (which is closely associated with education and literacy).

[Figure 8.4 about here]

Figure 8.4 illustrates the proportion of citizens in each country who reported an enlightened understanding of the characteristics of democracy plotted against each country’s historical experience of democracy, on the horizontal axis, measured by the standardized cumulative score derived from Freedom House’s index of civil liberties and political rights from 1972-2008. The scatter-gram demonstrates that enlightened knowledge of democracy rises in a curvilinear pattern with the length of experience of living in such a regime ($R^2$ cubic = 0.49). Hence people in Iraq, Jordan and Iran score exceptionally poorly on this scale. Typically many third-wave electoral democracies and middle-income economies display a moderate understanding of these concepts, such as Argentina, Poland, and South Korea. By contrast, citizens in long-established democracies, such as Sweden, Switzerland and Australia, recognize these principles most fully.
Nevertheless it is difficult to establish that it was the historical experience of democracy, per se, which generated awareness of democracy, rather than the many other factors which are commonly associated with long-standing democratic states. To test whether other societal conditions also predict awareness of democracy, Table 8.4 compares a series of multilevel models for the effects of the historical experience of democracy, human development (measured by the UNDP’s 2006 Human Development Index), economic development (the World Bank 2006 measure of per capita GDP in purchasing power parity), and the Cosmopolitan Communications Index. The concept of cosmopolitan societies is defined as those which have the lowest external and internal barriers in access to information. The Cosmopolitanism index, developed for the earlier study, allows us to test the impact of communication flows on knowledge about democracy. The index is constructed by combining indicators of Media Freedom (from Freedom House), Economic Development (GDP per capita in purchasing power parity) and the KOF Globalization Index (including economic, political and cultural components). These indices were first standardized around the mean, with a standard deviation of 1, to give each component equal weighting, and then combined into a single Cosmopolitanism index. Since levels of historical democracy, human and economic development, and cosmopolitan communications are all closely correlated, they cannot all be entered into the same regression model. A series of rival multilevel models, however, allows us to examine each of these indicators.

[Table 8.4 about here]

The results in Table 8.4 confirm the expectations concerning societal-level predictors; after controlling for the individual factors, knowledge about democracy is indeed significantly stronger in nations with longer experience of democracy, as well as in societies which are more affluent, cosmopolitan, and developed. Among these factors, human development was most weakly associated with democratic knowledge, and the other factors proved roughly equal in importance. Overall the historical experience of democracy, cosmopolitan communications, and economic development all proved stronger predictors of democratic knowledge than the effect of any of the individual-level variables, including the impact of education.

Conclusions and discussion

Many scholars remain skeptical about the public’s competency to make informed judgments about the quality of their own democracy with any degree of accuracy. Following in the deep footsteps of Converse, skeptics have argued that many respondents express opinions in surveys even though they lack coherent and enduring attitudes towards government policies on the most important issues. For
instance, the Pew Research Center regularly monitors public awareness of many issues in American politics, reporting that even after a year-long debate about health care reform, in January 2010 only one third of Americans were aware of Senate legislative rules or party voting on this issue. If we believe that the public often lacks meaningful and stable opinions on basic political matters featured in the daily news headlines, it seems unlikely that citizens will display a sophisticated grasp of more complex and abstract ideas, such as the principles and procedures of liberal democracy. In particular, learning about democracy is expected to be strengthened by growing up during childhood and early adult life in democratic societies. It follows that the correct identification of the universal principles, basic processes, and standard institutions which define democratic regimes should be most extensive among citizens living in long-standing democratic states, such as in Sweden, Australia and India, with less awareness evident among the general public living in autocratic states --such as China, Ethiopia, or Jordan. Similarly, democratic knowledge should be increased due to cognitive skills and information derived from formal education and by access to information from the independent news media. Lack of democratic knowledge is expected to be particularly evident among citizens who are largely unfamiliar and inexperienced with this type of governance, such as those growing up in the former Soviet Union or in contemporary Arab states, as well as among poorer sectors of the population lacking literacy, formal educational qualifications, and access to the independent media to find out about democratic politics.

Relativists suggest reasons to doubt the claim that a universally shared understanding of the notion of democracy exists in different cultures. Alternative instrumental interpretations suggest that people genuinely support democracy mainly due to the material benefits believed to flow from this type of regime, rather than endorsing the principles and ideals of this form of governance for intrinsic reasons. If survey responses towards democracy reflect relatively superficial and uninformed expressions of opinion, as these arguments claim, and if the public is unaware about some basic facts about how democratic governance works, then the results of opinion polls should indeed be regarded cautiously. For all these reasons, ‘expert’ estimates about the quality of democratic performance, derived from scholars and consultants, NGOs, lawyers, journalists, and business investors, are likely to provide more reliable and informed assessments than public opinion polls.

The socialization theory of enlightened democratic knowledge presented here focuses on how people learn about democratic regimes, throwing new light on this old debate. The empirical analysis indicates several key findings.
First, in the countries under comparison, many people subscribe to a procedural understanding of the meaning of democracy; therefore democracy is most commonly associated with certain basic procedures, practices, and institutions, such as leadership elections, women’s rights, and civil liberties. In this regard, the public often shares a procedural understanding of democracy which reflects the check-list of institutional arrangements which has been long propounded by Robert Dahl. In some societies, however, particularly those less familiar with this type of regime, democracy is also widely regarded as generating concrete instrumental benefits, such as states which are effective at fighting crime, reducing poverty, or redistributing wealth. Moreover some citizens also proved unable to distinguish between the principles of democracy and autocracy, for example mistakenly regarding democracy as consistent with military rule. Enlightened knowledge about democracy (which emphasized procedural over instrumental or authoritarian notions) deepened at macro-level with a country’s historical experience with this form of governance, as well as with exposure to cosmopolitan communications and economic development. Knowledge was further strengthened at micro-level among social sectors with greater education and access to the news media.

What do these findings imply for the broader issues at the heart of this book? The way that enlightened knowledge of democracy is predicted by these conditions serves to undermine the more skeptical interpretation; learning about democracy should indeed be strongest among countries such as Sweden, Norway and Australia, where cognitive skills and civics lessons are widely available through schooling, where awareness of public affairs, world events, and political leaders is absorbed from attention to the independent news media, and where people directly experience the processes and procedures associated with democratic citizenship. By contrast, less structured and coherent awareness about how liberal democracy works would be predicted in traditional societies, such as Iraq, Ethiopia, and Jordan, especially among the less educated and illiterate populations. Authoritarian perceptions of democracy were more commonly found in autocracies which lacked historical experience of this form of governance, in poorer developing societies, and in states which were more isolated from cosmopolitan communication flows of political information across national borders.

The results also suggest that public expressions of support for democratic principles, and evaluations of the democratic performance of the government in their own country, should be carefully interpreted, as people endorse democracy for different reasons. The public in long-established democratic societies often displays an understanding which demonstrates an accurate grasp of some basic principles and processes embodied in liberal democratic theory, including the importance of civil
liberties, equal rights, and holding government leaders accountable to the people through electoral processes, and an awareness of principles such as military rule which are clearly incompatible with any form of democracy. This procedural understanding strengthens due to educational skills and information from news media use. In this context, democratic aspirations should be understood to reflect a genuine desire for the procedures and ideals most closely associated with liberal democracy.

At the same time, the meaning of democratic aspirations and evaluations of democratic performance should indeed be regarded with considerable caution in autocracies where experience of liberal democracy remains limited, in developing societies where the mass population lacks literacy and formal education, and in states where the free flow of political information in the domestic media and from abroad is restricted. In this context, democratic aspirations are often widely expressed in the general public, many people say that living in a democracy is important to them. But this should not be taken to mean that people necessarily yearn deeply for democratic procedural reforms, or indeed that citizens have the capacity to draw a bright line between democracy and autocracy.

Many Western observers share an unconscious normative bias where they want to believe that all people worldwide, shackled by repressive states, are yearning for freedom and human rights. In places such as Ukraine, Georgia, and Iran, opposition movements have mobilized mass protests under the rhetorical banner of democracy. Western commentators and policymakers have often taken the rhetorical claims at face value, interpreted these developments as ‘color’ revolutions seeking to expand democratic freedoms and civil liberties. In fact, however, the process of regime change in these societies may reflect the complex outcome of competitive power-struggles among rival elites, where opposition forces seek to oust incumbent leaders, but with little deep commitment to democratic principles per se. Moreover the mass publics engaged in street protests in Tehran, Kyiv and T’bilisi may be driven by the desire for good governance, exemplified by a state capable of providing jobs, health-care, security and public services, far more than by the abstract and lofty ideals of democracy. But does news media framing and priming also shape public perceptions of government performance more directly? The next chapter turns to consider this issue.
**Figure 8.1: Perceived characteristics of democracy, 2005-7**

**Note:** Q “Many things may be desirable, but not all of them are essential characteristics of democracy. Please tell me for each of the following things how essential you think it is as a characteristic of democracy. Use this scale where 1 means “not at all an essential characteristic of democracy” and 10 means it definitely is “an essential characteristic of democracy” “Don’t know” is coded as 0. See Table 6.1 for details of the perceived characteristics classified into the procedural, instrumental and authoritarian 10-point scales.

The historical experience of democratization is measured by the cumulative Freedom House index for political rights and civil liberties 1972-2006, standardized to a 100-point scale, then categorized into restricted, moderate or extensive experience. N.70,930. Tested with ANOVA, the mean difference among groups are all statistically significant.

**Source:** World Values Survey 2005-7
Figure 8.2: Procedural notions of democracy, 2005-7

Note: Q “Many things may be desirable, but not all of them are essential characteristics of democracy. Please tell me for each of the following things how essential you think it is as a characteristic of democracy. Use this scale where 1 means “not at all an essential characteristic of democracy” and 10 means it definitely is “an essential characteristic of democracy.” Don’t know” is coded as 0. See Table 6.1 for details of the perceived characteristics classified into the procedural, instrumental and authoritarian 10-point scales. The historical experience of democratization is measured by the cumulative Freedom House index for political rights and civil liberties 1972-2006, standardized to a 100-point scale, then categorized into restricted, moderate or extensive experience.

Source: World Values Survey 2005-7
Figure 8.3: Instrumental notions of democracy

Note: Q “Many things may be desirable, but not all of them are essential characteristics of democracy. Please tell me for each of the following things how essential you think it is as a characteristic of democracy. Use this scale where 1 means “not at all an essential characteristic of democracy” and 10 means it definitely is “an essential characteristic of democracy” “Don’t know” is coded as 0. See Table 6.1 for details of the perceived characteristics classified into the procedural, instrumental and authoritarian 10-point scales. The historical experience of democratization is measured by the cumulative Freedom House index for political rights and civil liberties 1972-2006, standardized to a 100-point scale, then categorized into restricted, moderate or extensive experience.

Source: World Values Survey 2005
Figure 8.4: Authoritarian notions of democracy

Note: Q “Many things may be desirable, but not all of them are essential characteristics of democracy. Please tell me for each of the following things how essential you think it is as a characteristic of democracy. Use this scale where 1 means “not at all an essential characteristic of democracy” and 10 means it definitely is “an essential characteristic of democracy”.” “Don’t know” is coded as 0. See Table 6.1 for details of the perceived characteristics classified into the procedural, instrumental and authoritarian 10-point scales. The historical experience of democratization is measured by the cumulative Freedom House index for political rights and civil liberties 1972-2006, standardized to a 100-point scale, then categorized into restricted, moderate or extensive experience.

Source: World Values Survey 2005
Figure 8.5: Enlightened awareness of democracy

Note: Q “Many things may be desirable, but not all of them are essential characteristics of democracy. Please tell me for each of the following things how essential you think it is as a characteristic of democracy. Use this scale where 1 means “not at all an essential characteristic of democracy” and 10 means it definitely is “an essential characteristic of democracy” “Don’t know” is coded as 0. See Table 6.1 for details of the perceived characteristics classified into the procedural, instrumental and authoritarian 10-point scales. The measure of enlightened understanding was constructed by subtracting the instrumental and authoritarian scales from the procedural scale. The historical experience of democracy is measured by the cumulative Freedom House index for political rights and civil liberties 1972-2006, standardized to a 100-point scale, then categorized into restricted, moderate or extensive experience.

Source: World Values Survey 2005
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country's historical experience of democracy</th>
<th>Procedural understanding</th>
<th>Instrumental understanding</th>
<th>Authoritarian understanding</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Women have the same rights as men</td>
<td>People choose their leaders in free elections</td>
<td>Civil liberties protect against oppression</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extensive</td>
<td>8.76</td>
<td>8.39</td>
<td>7.66</td>
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<tr>
<td>Moderate</td>
<td>8.00</td>
<td>8.08</td>
<td>7.06</td>
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<tr>
<td>Restricted</td>
<td>8.38</td>
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<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>8.32</td>
<td>8.14</td>
<td>7.36</td>
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**Note:** Q “Many things may be desirable, but not all of them are essential characteristics of democracy. Please tell me for each of the following things how essential you think it is as a characteristic of democracy. Use this scale where 1 means “not at all an essential characteristic of democracy” and 10 means it definitely is “an essential characteristic of democracy”” “Don’t knows” are coded 0. N. 55,485. The historical experience of democratization is measured by the cumulative Freedom House index for political rights and civil liberties 1972-2006, standardized to a 100-point scale, then categorized into restricted, moderate or extensive experience.

**Source:** World Values Survey 2005
Table 8.2: Understanding of democracy by world region

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>World Region</th>
<th>Procedural understanding</th>
<th>Instrumental understanding</th>
<th>Authoritarian understanding</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Women have the</td>
<td>The economy</td>
<td>Army takes over when</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>same rights as men</td>
<td></td>
<td>government is incompete</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>People choose their</td>
<td>Criminals are severely</td>
<td>nt</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>leaders in free</td>
<td>punished</td>
<td>Religious authorities</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>elections</td>
<td>People receive state aid</td>
<td>interpret the laws</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Civil liberties protect</td>
<td>for unemployment</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>against oppression</td>
<td>People governments tax</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>People can change laws</td>
<td>the rich and subsidize</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>through referenda</td>
<td>the poor</td>
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<td>Africa</td>
<td>8.22</td>
<td>7.71</td>
<td>4.87</td>
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<td>Asia-Pacific</td>
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<td>8.24</td>
<td>4.62</td>
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<td>Central &amp; Eastern</td>
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<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
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<td><strong>7.80</strong></td>
<td><strong>4.21</strong></td>
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**Note:** Q “Many things may be desirable, but not all of them are essential characteristics of democracy. Please tell me for each of the following things how essential you think it is as a characteristic of democracy. Use this scale where 1 means “not at all an essential characteristic of democracy” and 10 means it definitely is “an essential characteristic of democracy.”” “Don’t knows” are coded 0. N. 55,485.

**Source:** World Values Survey 2005
## Table 8.3: Explaining perceptions of democracy

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th>Perceptions of democracy’s characteristics</th>
<th>Procedural (i)</th>
<th>Instrumental (ii)</th>
<th>Authoritarian (iii)</th>
<th>Enlightened (i-ii+iii)</th>
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<td><strong>Demographic characteristics</strong></td>
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<td>(.009)</td>
<td>(.012)</td>
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<td>(.008)</td>
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<td>News media use scale</td>
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<td>(.010)</td>
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<td><strong>NATIONAL-LEVEL</strong></td>
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<td>Historical experience of democracy</td>
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<td>Schwartz BIC</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

**Note:** All independent variables were standardized using mean centering (z-scores). Models present the results of the REML multilevel regression models (for details, see Appendix C) including the beta coefficient, (the standard error below in parenthesis), and the significance. The 100 point scales are constructed from the items listed in Table 6.1. The 100-point media use scale combined use of newspapers, radio/TV news, the internet, books, and magazines. See appendix A for details about the measurement, coding and construction of all variables. Significant coefficients are highlighted in **bold**. The *historical experience of democratization* is measured by the cumulative Freedom House index for political rights and civil liberties 1972-2006, standardized to a 100-point scale.

**Source:** World Values Survey 2005-7
Table 8.4: Explaining enlightened awareness of democracy

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Demographic characteristics</th>
<th>Predictors of democratic knowledge</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Historical democracy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age (years)</td>
<td>.078 (.008)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender (male=1)</td>
<td>.047 (.007)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Socioeconomic resources</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Household income 10-pt scale</td>
<td>.069 (.009)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education 9-pt scale</td>
<td>.337 (.011)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Media use</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>News media use scale</td>
<td>.068 (.011)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| NATIONAL-LEVEL               |                      |                              |                      |                  |
| Historical experience of democracy | .493 (.103)                                      |
| Cosmopolitan communications  | .557 (.098)          |
| Economic development (per capita GDP) | .452 (.092)                                      |
| Human development (HDI)      | .267 (.092)          |

| Constant (intercept)         | 2.05                 | 1.89                        | 1.95                 | 1.89 |
| Schwartz BIC                 | 216,945              | 208,785                     | 213,345              | 200,564 |
| N. respondents               | 53,625               | 51,545                      | 52,691               | 49,381 |

| N. nations                   | 43                   | 41                          | 42                   | 39 |

Note: All independent variables were standardized using mean centering (z-scores). Models present the results of the REML multilevel regression models (for details, see Appendix C) including the beta coefficient, (the standard error below in parenthesis), and the significance. The 100 point scales are constructed from the items listed in Table 6.1. See appendix A for details about the measurement, coding and construction of all variables. Significant coefficients are highlighted in **bold**. The **historical experience of democratization** is measured by the cumulative Freedom House index for political rights and civil liberties 1972-2006, standardized to a 100-point scale. **Source:** World Values Survey 2005-7


18 Ronald Inglehart. 2003. ‘How solid is mass support for democracy: and how do we measure it?’ *Political Science and Politics* 36:51-57.


