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Peter Kotzian

Abstract

This article analyzes the importance of system-level features, such as political and economic development, and individual-level factors for the support of liberal democracy. Using multilevel modeling, the study explicitly distinguishes between the role of subjective evaluations at the individual level and objective facts at the system level. The findings obtained using a sample of 36 countries indicate that objective economic performance is the most important system-level factor for system support. Improvements in the degree of democracy do not affect public support. Individual subjective perception is predominant for determining specific support. Contrary to previous studies, there is no evidence that the liberal-democratic society reaches a degree of acceptance that immunizes it from economic developments. Nor is there evidence that citizens of non-democratic regime types will urge for democratic change when the regime performs well in economic terms.

Keywords

economic performance, liberal democracy, public support

Introduction

Liberal democracy is often considered to be the most desirable form of government. Yet, democracy needs the support of its citizens to be established, to be sustained and to function in an optimal way. While all forms of government need some kind of acceptance by the governed, this need is crucial in a democracy. Thus, the question of what determines this public support is a perennial issue. Often, arguments presume an interdependent relationship between economic development and democracy, suggesting that citizens in non-democratic regimes will seek democratic change in conditions of economic progress (Vanhanen, 1997). Over time, it is also argued, the liberal-democratic model of society reaches a degree of acceptance that immunizes it from economic developments (Easton, 1965). The question posed in this article is, which of these arguments is true?

There is substantial evidence that citizens living in established democracies are increasingly disaffected by the democratic process and the liberal-capitalist model of society in general (Norris 1999a; Pharr and Putnam, 2000; Macedo et al., 2005). Thus economic development seems to

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matter, making the economic sources of support for liberal democracy an important issue. This is particularly the case in times of dramatic economic decline.

Public support, or rather the public demand, for democracy is even more important in societies moving from an authoritarian form of government or a more closed form of society towards a liberal democracy with an open society. Some are progressing steadily on this course, others are stuck in a 'defect democracy' (Merkel et al., 2003), or are even regressing. In unsettled democracies, lack of public support may well allow the system to slip back into a more authoritarian mode, with Russia being a case in point (Rose and Shin, 2001; Welzel, 2007; but see Hadenius and Teorell, 2005, for a contrary view). Thus, for established and nascent democracies, but also non-democratic regimes, the issue of how support for a society based on liberal democracy is created, sustained or undermined is crucial.

This article examines the sources of specific and general aspects of individual-level support for a liberal-democratic society. The central hypothesis is whether people are more supportive of liberal democracy in systems that are highly developed in political and economic terms. It begins by briefly outlining the concept of support and the current theories in the literature. It then identifies individual- and system-level variables, which are tested for their explanatory power through use of the 1995 World Values Survey. The findings indicate that support for liberal democracy is contingent on economic growth being sustained. In other words, economic performance matters more than institutional and political developments.

Public Support for Liberal Democracy: An Overview

The analysis of public support for a 'system' has a clear focus on the political aspects. It addresses the elements making up this support, how those elements interact and the factors explaining the determinants of support. David Easton (1965) distinguishes between specific support for the current political actors holding government offices, and the more diffuse support for the 'political system' – in this instance, the liberal-democratic system. This distinction was elaborated in the more recent literature and remains the most fundamental in studies of this kind (Muller and Jukam, 1977; Norris, 1999b).

Measures of support for different elements of a system are often empirically correlated, and some theories arrange them in a certain causal order. While, for instance, satisfaction with government and support for the democratic principle are related, they are nevertheless conceptually distinct, are subject to different influences (such as that of the electoral system, see Anderson and Guillory, 1997) and exert different effects (for example, on anti-system behavior, see Muller et al. 1982). The argument is that specific support, for example, support for the incumbent government, may fluctuate and is affected by short-term performance and events, but support for democracy as the basic political procedure is much more robust. Regarding the role of support for the long-term processes of democratization, the argument is, as Chu et al. (2008) succinctly observe, that a new regime 'pays its way,' that is, earns public support, through consistent high performance. Over time and by the mechanism of socialization this is transformed into diffuse support, which stabilizes the system (though not the government) in times of crisis.

Specific support is distinct both from satisfaction with the way democracy works in a given system and from support for the democratic principle (Weil, 1989; Linde and Ekman, 2003). Citizens may be fervent democrats, but still think that what goes under the label of 'democracy' in their country is dissatisfying. Thus with regard to what type of public support one is studying in a liberal democracy, there is an important difference between whether one is referring to the current government, the democratic

principle, encompassing the political institutions and procedures, or the society and its principles as a whole. This last element encompasses more features than a narrowly conceived democratic political system and includes economic arrangements (such as capitalism) or a certain role for the state (extent of the welfare state or the relationship between the state and religion).

All types of support – specific, for the government, as well as the more diffuse ‘political confidence’ in democratic and social institutions – are found to be influenced by a range of different factors located at the system and the individual levels. The factor found most often to be of the highest importance is economic performance. Current economic performance is among the features most important for support of the current government and for its chances of retaining electoral support, both of which are aspects of specific support (Lipset and Schneider, 1987; Lewis-Beck and Stegmaier, 2000; Criado and Herrerros 2007). Regarding the confidence citizens have in the country’s institutional setting as a form of ‘diffuse support,’ the evidence indicates that even in the case of countries in which democracy is established and sufficiently ‘internalized,’ the performance of the institutional setting is crucial for public support of the political system: if things are going badly, in particular in economic terms, the ‘diffuse’ support for the institutional setting declines, even in established democracies (Seligson and Booth, 1993; Norris, 2000; Newton and Norris, 2000; Newton, 2006). This is true at the micro-level, that is, when studying an individual’s confidence in political institutions, but also at the macro-level, that is, when studying average levels of confidence in institutions across countries (Clarke et al., 1993; Alesina and Wacziarg, 2000).

Further factors affecting the short-term evaluation of the government and the political system are the incidence of political scandal (Bowler and Karp, 2004), though there is also the argument that even this may be dominated by the economic performance (Weatherford, 1984). Typical sources of short-term fluctuation in satisfaction levels include government policy orientation (Miller, 1974), ‘rally around the flag’ events, such as a war or crisis (Norpoth, 1987; Chanley, 2002), or elections (Kaase, 1988). Longer-term factors are procedural fairness and legitimacy (Tyler, 2006), but also institutional features of the system, which for instance make electoral defeat more acceptable (Anderson and Guillory, 1997; Norris, 1999b).

Political factors, for example, citizens’ experience of the political system and what it delivers in political terms, can be considered an alternative to the economic or ‘rationalist’ models of support. In a study of eight post-communist countries, Evans and Whitefield (1995) found that these factors are more important for support of recently installed institutions than economic performance. This finding is supported by Chu et al. (2008) who argue that citizens are supportive of democracy if they gain more ‘political goods’ by means of a say in the way the country is run and what policies are made. Increasing political goods may compensate for a worsening in the economic situation. The argument is that the effect of policy on individual welfare is less important than the feeling that one had a say in how the policy was decided. Chu et al. (2008: 85) conclude that ‘citizens of most new democracies can distinguish between political and economic dimensions of regime performance. Many of them come to value democracy for the political goods it produces even when its economic performance is perceived to be poor in the short-term.’ They (2008: 85) summarize their argument by stating that ‘(i)n a nutshell, democracy needs to “pay its way” by delivering acceptable levels of citizen control and good governance.’ Conversely, they (2008: 85) also recognize that there might be an indirect effect, in ‘that protracted economic stagnation will sap popular support for democracy by destroying that sense of satisfaction with democracy’s performance that is essential to democracy’s legitimation.’ The methodologically more sophisticated study by Huang et al. (2008) comes to the same conclusion.

However, these findings are based on studies of industrialized countries, for which survey data can be most readily obtained. When looking at the support in 'new' democracies, such as countries in Eastern and Central Europe, the evidence indicates that in cases where economic decline accompanied, or even dominated, the transition to democracy, institutional confidence declined and the new system was not accepted as readily as in other countries (Whitefield and Evans, 1999; Mishler and Rose, 2001b, 2005; Catterberg and Moreno, 2005). The same finding holds for cases in which a country moved from a non-communist variant of authoritarian government to a more or less democratic form (Carothers, 1999). In contrast to these findings Bratton and Mattes (2001) found that African citizens support the recently installed democracy, even though they are highly dissatisfied with the current government's performance, while Mishler and Rose (2002) found that in post-communist countries political performance was more important than economic performance. In particular, Mishler and Rose's study indicates that there may be differences between younger and older democracies regarding the factors for public support of the liberal-democratic system.

The empirical relationship between specific and diffuse support for political and other institutions in the liberal-democratic model also differs substantially between countries, as two instances may show: On the one hand, the study by Waldron-Moore (1999: 53), comparing the effect of citizens' satisfaction with the working of democracy on their support for democracy, found an effect only in some of the Eastern European countries. Huang et al. (2008), on the other hand, using a larger and more heterogeneous sample of countries found that satisfaction with the way democracy works strongly increases the belief in the superiority of democracy. As for the causal order between specific and diffuse support, the assumption underlying Waldron-Moore, Huang et al. and also Clarke et al. (1993) is that specific support is transformed into diffuse support. One mechanism, presented by Miller (1974), is that a failure of the government to deliver certain policies questions the ability of the political system and thus erodes diffuse support for liberal-democratic arrangements.

The liberal-democratic model of society also implies a certain economic model, though with scope for extensive variation. There is, for instance, a substantial difference between the mode of capitalism dominant in Scandinavian countries and the form dominant in the USA. The political change to liberal democracy in most transition countries (particularly in Eastern Europe) was accompanied by a change from a state-governed economy to a relatively free and liberal one, often unmodified by the welfarism of many established democracies. In these cases, even if citizens are in favor of democracy, they may be appalled by the new economic model and the loss of a basic welfare safety net, which often followed political liberalization. Kluegel and Mason (2004) found that attitudes towards the fairness of the economy, in particular the evaluation of the market system as it is operating in the country, is a strong determinant of political legitimacy: if citizens believe that the economic system is basically fair, people will accept the political system that has installed this economic model.

Analyzing Public Support for Liberal Democracy: Isolating the Relevant Variables

The question at hand, then, is what determines public support for the liberal-democratic model of society? Is it determined predominantly by economic performance or political 'performance,' the latter referring to the involvement of citizens in the political process? This approach combines system-level features and individual-level properties to explain individual support. It addresses several problems that beset existing research including insufficient variability at system level (Bratton and Mattes, 2001), reliance on subjective evaluations of economic or political conditions

(Linde and Ekman, 2003), and the tendency for macro-level models to overstate the importance of macro-level features (Clarke et al., 1993). To address these shortcomings, this study ensures that there is sufficient variation in all explanatory variables, in particular at the system level by using the 1995 World Values Survey (WVS). This wave of the WVS survey is chosen as it covers a period in which substantial change occurred in many countries. It also permits the inclusion of subjective evaluations and 'objective' system-level data in the analysis, facilitating multilevel modeling.

The main goal of this article is to compare the impact of two system-level factors, political and economic, which can to some degree be treated as 'objective' developments. One view predicts that political factors are the most important in determining support for liberal democracy, while the contrasting view argues that economic factors matter more. Both sets of factors have a static and a dynamic aspect. One can argue that it is the level of democracy or economic development achieved that matters. It can also be suggested that recent development is more relevant than past progress. For the individual citizen, the current political situation might be bad, but be accepted nevertheless, because it is seen as an improvement, and a step towards a better state. Inversely, a liberal-democratic system might be basically robust, but be seen as dissatisfying, because it is taken for granted. Thus, in addition to static (and often used) indicators of the *level* of political and economic development, I will also look at the *development* of the system over time. In addition to the effects of levels, I want to distinguish whether the change towards more democracy or the change towards more wealth matters more for public support of democracy.

First, let us look at the political factors determining support for liberal democracy. Simplified, the argument by Chu et al. (2008) and Huang et al. (2008) is that people want a say in politics, and that this is more important for them than economic development. People thus value this 'political output' higher than the economic progress the system delivers. If citizens genuinely want democracy, the level of support for democracy should be higher in more democratic countries. I also want to look at political progress: are people who obtained democracy only recently more supportive of this mode of governance? Or are they not yet supportive of it? To obtain an answer, the sample must encompass not only countries with different levels of democracy, but also countries in which the recent development of democracy differs substantially. Based on the Freedom House Scores of political liberty, I calculated a measure of the change towards more or less democracy for the 10-year period preceding the survey used.

Second, I examine the economic situation, proxied by the level of gross domestic product (GDP). I am also interested in economic progress, that is, the development of GDP in the five years preceding the survey. Lipset (1959) and other scholars in the modernization school imply that economic development is a major determinant of democratization. Contrary to this, Przeworski (2005) suggests that a certain level of GDP is a 'security net,' which prevents a slipping back into non-democratic modes of government. However, economic development does not imply that every country above that level automatically becomes a democracy, as the many examples of wealthy non-democracies prove. Contrary to the level of GDP, economic progress varies quite independently from the political situation and its development pattern. Democratic countries usually have higher levels of GDP, but not necessarily higher growth rates of GDP. There are transition countries where GDP increased, but also cases where GDP decreased sharply during the transition period.

Theories of political support also see several other system-level factors as being relevant for public support. The system-level features that are used here as control variables are also 'objective' in the sense that they are not subjective evaluations by the citizens but are either measurable inter-subjectively, by aggregated individual perceptions, or are evaluated by neutral observers.

A first factor for public support is the moral integrity of the political system (Pharr, 2000; della Porta, 2000). If the system is corrupt it will be held in low regard and receive less support. This feature is conceptually independent from the development status of the country, there are developed, as well as developing, countries with endemic corruption. An indicator for this is the corruption perception index (CPI) compiled by Transparency International. Although survey based, it is nevertheless a relatively 'objective' estimate of the incidence of corruption in a country.

A second factor, to be considered when looking at the society and social structures, is social and economic equality. Supportive acceptance of the system may prevail because the political and economic system – while perhaps not performing well in creating wealth – at least creates a society in which there are no social groups excluded from political decision making and socially marginalized. In particular, income equality was found to have positive effects on the acceptance of the societal constitution (Kluegel and Mason, 2004; Rothstein and Uslaner, 2005). An indicator of this is the Gini index of inequality of income distribution, obtained from the UN Human Development Report.

At the individual level, several factors were found in the abovementioned literature to be more significant for support and thus were included as control variables. To some degree, they complement the system-level features by capturing how an individual respondent perceives the state of affairs to be in the country – an evaluation which may differ from the objective situation.

As a specific indicator of how the individual perceives the economic situation and development, I use the individual's evaluation of their financial situation. The GDP and economic growth may be high, but if individuals feel unable to make ends meet, their support for the system may be low. As a supplementary, I included the individual's perception of whether people in general are better off now than they were in the past.

General satisfaction with the state of affairs is a potential factor for support. If people are satisfied, they tend to be supportive of the current status quo, encompassing also the institutional setting (Kinder and Kiewiet, 1979; Clarke et al., 1993: 1002). I use life satisfaction as proxy for this factor.

Many societies in the sample underwent political as well as societal changes, and the question is, how have individuals evaluated these changes? To cover this subjective evaluation of political developments, I generated an indicator that compares individuals' evaluation of the political system as it was 10 years previously with their evaluation of the political system as it was at the time of the survey. The indicator captures whether the respondent personally feels politically better off now than in the past.

Corruption can undermine the support for the system even in an established democracy (Pharr, 2000; Anderson and Tverdova, 2003). While the CPI might measure this in a more objective way, the subjective perception may differ. The indicator 'perceived corruption' measures the individual's belief that public officials are corrupt. A complementary indicator is the individual's trust in the political institutions, which are operating the 'democracy'. The democratic principle can be discredited if the people and institutions in charge of the day-to-day operation of the system are not seen as trustworthy.

Political involvement is presumed to lead to support because citizens start to identify with the system if they participate and feel interested in it (Finkel, 1987; Bowler and Donovan, 2002). Under an authoritarian, and even more so under a totalitarian regime, people are forced to participate, to engage in what Mishler and Rose (1997: 420) labeled a 'hypocritical show of involvement,' while being fully aware that they are excluded from real decision making. This is supposed to result in alienation from the 'political' process, while voluntary engagement is presumed to have the opposite effect. Moreover, citizens involved in politics perceive the rules and decisions of the political system as legitimate because they themselves have participated in the decision, by voting or otherwise (Tyler, 2006). While there is also evidence that the level of political

involvement – interest and discussion – is itself a result of economic development (van Deth and Elff, 2004), political involvement may enhance affiliation to the democratic principle. Political involvement was proxied by three indicators: practical involvement (campaigning, belonging to a party?), political activity (signing petitions, demonstrating) and also intellectual involvement (frequency of political discussions and the interest in politics).

Social involvement and attitudes towards fellow citizens are seen in the social capital literature as a precondition to support for democracy (Almond and Verba, 1963; Putnam, 1993). Social trust, that is, trust extended to unknown people, is presumed to ‘spill up’ towards the more abstract and distanced political and social institutions and the persons in charge of these institutions (Boix and Posner, 1998; Mishler and Rose, 2001a: 34). Social involvement – membership in voluntary non-governmental associations, ranging from private ones, such as sport clubs, to publicly oriented ones, such as trade unions – is supposed to create support for the democratic principle. Decision making in these settings serves as a teaching ground for democracy, where people learn to accept majority decisions along with the need for compromise.

According to Inglehart (1988, 1999), economic development generates in the long run a change of preferences from material things and policies, which are taken for granted, towards post-material, or rather immaterial, things and policies, such as self-expression, concern for environmental protection and support for gender equality. Regarding support for the liberal-democratic model, the argument implies that post-materialists are more critical of government and more in favor of societal changes. Conversely, Welzel et al. (2003) state that these self-expression values actually create and stabilize democracy in a country. To control for this effect, an index of post-materialist preferences was included.

For at least two variables, one at the system level and one at the individual level, a conditionality of their effect is implied. Both concern the importance of economic performance for support of liberal democracy. First, one can argue that in established democracies, there is some basic level of support for the political system that is independent of economic performance. In other words, in a country that has been democratic for a long time, current economic performance matters less for public support of the political arrangements and context. To capture this, I generated a system-level interaction effect between age of democracy, counted from the date of the first continuous free elections, and the economic performance indicator. By construction, the interaction effect indicates if economic performance is more important in younger or in older democracies.

Second, the effect of value change assumes that for people who put more emphasis on post-material issues, economic performance is a less relevant criterion for their support of the society they are living in. To capture this effect, I generated a cross-level interaction effect between the system-level variable of economic performance and the individual-level variable of post-materialism. The variable will indicate if economic performance has a reduced relevance for post-materialists, and a higher one for materialists.

These features from the political sphere are supplemented by a set of demographic control variables, such as gender, income, educational achievement, religiousness and age. Regarding the latter, I tested for a generational effect to see if persons who were socialized under a non-democratic regime were inclined to be less supportive of the new, usually more democratic regime. The content and source of each variable is given in the Appendix.

Research Design, Data and Method

By testing the effect of system- and individual-level features, I want to see whether support for liberal democracy is determined by political or economic outputs. Taken together, the factors covering levels and changes will test whether people are more supportive of systems that are

highly developed in economic and political terms. The political change variable will test whether people are more supportive of democracy, if they obtained it only recently. The economic change variable will test whether people are supportive of the recently installed democracy only if it brought economic progress. Or, put differently, are people also supportive of democracy if it arrived accompanied by economic decline? Imagine two countries, with the same level of democracy and similar in all other regards apart from the recent political change. Examples would be a West and an East European country in 1995, the date for which survey data was selected. Now, the level of democracy is equivalent in both, but one is an old democracy, the other a younger one. So the level of democracy will not matter, because it does not differ among the two, but the recent political change will. For the 'older' country, the variable democratic change is zero and there is no negative effect, because the value of the variable, which contains the effect of recent political change, is zero.

The political variable tests if citizens in countries in which democracy improved recently, are – everything else being equal – more supportive of the government, democracy and the society as a whole. As the sample contains countries that are similar in everything but the recent political and the economic development, one can also test whether it is the political or economic development that matters more. As for the usage of the levels and the change in democracy, one possible counter argument is that not using the current level of democracy could introduce bias to the results, because the countries that are now the most democratic could also be those that did not change during the period of observation. While correct in principle, the argument does not hold up under analysis. The correlations between the level and the change variables, and the dependent variables are weak at best. Due to the selection of countries by the organizers of the 1995 wave of the WVS, the problem does not occur empirically, hence, there is no bias. In addition, I ran the very same model using both the current level of and recent change in democracy and consistently found that the current level of democracy is insignificant and does not affect the other coefficients.

Choosing the 1995 wave of the WVS also ensures sufficient variation in the system-level variables. The dataset also covers a period in which political changes of substantial magnitude have occurred only recently. For cross-national research, it is particularly advantageous that economic development varies quite independently from political development. In some countries, for example, some African countries, there was political progress but little economic change. In some East European and Asian countries there was an economic boom, often triggered by, or at least parallel to, the political transformation process. In others, the transformation process led to an economic downturn. It is possible that economic developments – both negative and positive – were attributed to the new model of society. A further reason to choose this survey rather than a more recent wave is that it covers the immediate post-transition period, and most respondents still had first-hand experience of the state of affairs before the transition. Using a more recent survey would yield a sample with respondents for whom the current system (a more or less liberal democracy) is either the only or the most accessible reference. The dataset used yielded a net sample of 35,000 persons in 36 countries.

The statistical method must reflect that the underlying explanation for support of the liberal-democratic model of society uses individual- as well as system-level features. Respondents show support as individuals with individual properties but also as citizens of a country with certain properties. All individuals within a country experienced the same political development. If a development towards democracy does have a positive effect, it will do so by increasing the average of support. The variation between countries in their average level of support is due to the difference in the system-level variables. At the individual level, respondents differ in personal features, such

as wealth and education, which affect support. For instance, people who are satisfied with their financial situation will state more support for the current system than those who are dissatisfied. In the terms of a regression equation, a part of the respondent's support is due to their personal features, but another part is due to their being a citizen of a country which has certain properties. The appropriate statistical method is multilevel regression (Snijders and Bosker, 1999; Steenbergen and Jones, 2002), which allows simultaneous use of the properties of the countries (system-level features) and the properties of citizens (individual-level features) to explain the attitude of a respondent. Because the dependent variables' measurement levels are ordinal, the statistical model is an ordinal logit model, implemented using the GLLAMM routine in STATA (Rabe-Hesketh et al., 2004). The explanatory variables were standardized.

Results

Table 1 gives the determinants of support for government (specific support), support for democracy as the best form of government (diffuse support) and support for the current model of society as installed in the country (diffuse support). Support for democracy as the best form of government was questioned with one item in an item-battery, asking also for evaluation of other, less- or even non-democratic forms of government. The respondents can thus be assumed to be aware of what is meant by democracy, viz. not a technocracy, not a 'strong-man government' and the like.

Because the aim of the study is to test two competing approaches, the analysis uses the same set of explanatory variables for all three dependent variables. The analyses of specific and diffuse support show noteworthy differences, both in the main determinants, their location (individual versus system level), the criteria by which different aspects are evaluated and also in the degree to which support can be explained.

System-level Features

The focus here is on economic progress as opposed to 'political' progress: Does the increase in wealth matter more for system support than the production of 'political goods' such as democratic involvement and control over policymaking?

As for specific support, system-level variables matter significantly in determining support for the current government. The two strongest effects are the CPI, where high values indicate low levels of corruption, and the level of economic development, that is, GDP. Support for the government is higher where levels of corruption are low, implying that the current government is held accountable for corruption. However, specific support is usually lower in economically developed countries, where citizens are on average more critical of the government. Economic growth in recent years is a weaker, but still significant factor, indicating that support for the current government is higher in periods of economic growth. Much of the effect of economic progress is intermediated by the interaction variable between economic progress and the age of democracy: the older the democracy, the more important is economic growth as a criterion to evaluate the government. Recent democratic development does not matter for support of the government, implying that even if citizens welcome the new political system, this does not mean they invariably support the staff operating the new system. Summing up, the finding indicates that in the minds of the citizens, the institutional setting and the government operating the institutional setting are seen as different things. This is good news insofar as government failure may not immediately jeopardize public affiliation to the institutional setting.

Table 1. Determinants of Support for Government, Democracy and Model of Society

	Support Government	Support Democracy	Support Society
System-level variables			
CPI	0.298***	0.146***	-0.049
GINI	0.004	-0.090***	-0.071***
DemocraticChange 1985/1995	0.032	-0.098***	0.213***
EconomicPerformance	0.108***	0.369***	0.305***
GDP	-0.356***	-0.494***	-0.039
Individual-level variables			
SatisfactionLife	0.083***	0.067***	0.055**
SatisfactionFinancial	0.196***	-0.062***	0.072***
PolitChangeEvaluation	0.335***	0.320***	0.028*
PerceivedCorruption	-0.306***	-0.029*	-0.015
LessPoverty	0.224***	0.013	0.064***
SocialTrust	0.028**	0.052***	-0.054***
SocialActivity	0.029**	-0.055***	0.055***
PoliticalDiscussion	-0.085***	0.065***	-0.036*
PoliticalInterest	0.080***	0.076***	-0.078***
PoliticalActivity	-0.054***	0.079***	-0.162***
Post-Materialism	-0.056***	0.070***	-0.105***
TrustGovernment	0.491***	0.040**	0.171***
TrustParties	0.036*	-0.015	-0.061***
TrustParliament	0.152***	0.080***	0.035
TrustCivilService	0.104***	-0.008	-0.014
Socioeconomic background			
Female	-0.004	-0.002	0.045***
Age	-0.048***	0.128***	0.066***
Pre-democratic generation	-0.061**	-0.075**	-0.100***
Income	-0.042***	0.062***	-0.038**
Religious	0.043***	0.064***	0.066***
Educational level	-0.083***	0.133***	-0.086***
Interaction effects			
AgeDemocracy × Economy	0.229***	0.162***	0.277***
Materialism × Economy	0.082*	0.103**	0.133**
Cutpoints			
Threshold 1	-1.363***	-4.159***	-2.525***
Threshold 2	1.023***	-2.093***	1.857***
Threshold 3	4.249***	0.570***	
Number of countries	36	36	36
Number of persons	35639	34001	34907
Final LogLikelihood	-35321.09	-33012.66	-23367.79
McFadden pseudo R ²	0.145	0.066	0.030

Note: * p < 0.05; ** p < 0.01; *** p < 0.001.

For both forms of ‘diffuse support,’ a main result is that economic progress increases public support for the current political, as well as the societal, model. And again, this effect is even stronger in older democracies. This factor represents the objective economic performance, not the subjective evaluation of it. If things are going well objectively, the average support citizens show for the system is higher. Recent democratic progress actually decreases, albeit only slightly, the level of support for democracy. The implication may also be that citizens in a country that recently underwent massive change in that regard have persisting reservations about denoting democracy as

the best form of government. Democratic change is a more important criterion for support of the societal model, which is higher in countries where the level of democracy improved recently.

Citizens in wealthier societies are more critical of democracy as the best form of government while the level of wealth does not matter for support of the societal model. Social inequality, measured by the Gini index, is not a criterion for support of democracy. Corruption, which is a criterion for measuring satisfaction with the government, matters much less for attitudes towards the democratic principle and not at all for the current model of society. Corruption is not seen as a problem of the institutional setting but rather as a failure of the politicians running the system. Of interest too is the system-level interaction effect, which was significantly positive and of substantial magnitude: economic growth is an even more important criterion in older democracies.

To address the central question, the effect of democratic change is dwarfed by the effect of economic developments in all three forms of support. Economic progress induces higher levels of support for the government, the principle of democracy and the society, and this effect is even stronger in older democracies. This is in clear contradiction to the findings of Chu et al. (2008), which indicate that political factors and 'political outputs' matter most. Moreover, the fact that higher levels of economic development increase the critical view of the democracy indicates also that the pressure to perform (in particular, economically) is permanent: it is not the case that citizens are satisfied once a certain level of economic development is reached. Even if citizens are doing well, their support is conditional, they expect constant improvements. This result modifies the finding by Przeworski (2005), namely that no country with a GDP above US\$6055 has ever slipped back into a non-democratic form of government. However, it may well do so if it constantly moves in that direction.

Individual-level Features

Most of the individual-level variables are significant, due to the larger number of cases at this level. However, statistical significance alone is not sufficient to make an effect noteworthy, unless it is also of a substantial magnitude. Using these criteria, few effects of the individual-level variables stand out and of those that do, most relate to satisfaction with the government.

First, if the individual evaluates the recent political change positively, they will support the new political system, that is, democracy, and also the government in charge of operating the new system. Those who perceive themselves as having lost out in the recent changes are not supportive of the new regime. Since the 'recent' change usually refers to a transition from some form of dictatorship to some form of democracy, one would expect the effect to be strongest for the political aspects of support, and indeed this is the case. The evaluation of political change only affects support for the government and democracy, but is irrelevant for support of the overall society. Second, the perception that there is less poverty and most citizens are economically better off under the current regime increases support for the government, and the same is true for the individual's perception of their own financial situation. No comparable effect can be found for the support of the political system and the society. Thus, the answer to whether political or economic progress matters more for support is slightly different at the individual level. Here, perceived political progress matters more than perceived economic progress.

The perception that there is a lot of corruption among public officials significantly decreases the support for the current government, but does not matter for the democracy or society. The effect is equivalent to the finding of the CPI at the system level. The implication, again, is that the current personnel running the affairs are to blame for corruption, not the system, that is, democracy. Trust

in the political institutions – those making policy (government and parliament) as well as those executing policy (civil service) – increases only specific support. The effect most noteworthy is the respondent's trust in the current government. If the citizen trusts the people in charge of ruling the country, she will be satisfied with the government and supportive of it.

The remaining individual-level control variables are statistically significant, in the main, but only some are of a magnitude that justifies a detailed discussion. Political activity matters for support, but this study indicates that it is more appropriate to see it as a mutual influence. People who are politically active (participate in demonstrations, sign petitions and so on) tend to think that the society should at least be changed gradually, rather than that the societal status quo should be defended. However, this protest and the wish for societal changes does not imply a wish to abolish democracy, even though they are somewhat less satisfied with the government than are other citizens.

Respondents with a post-materialist set of values differ little from materialists in their evaluation of the current government and democracy, but are clearly apart in terms of their attitude towards societal change. Post-materialists are less supportive of the societal status quo and more open to change. The effect of post-materialism arises also by the mechanism: it makes pure economic performance less important for the evaluation of the liberal-democratic system, and society in particular. For materialists, economic development is a much stronger factor for all types of support than for post-materialists.

As for the remaining micro-level variables, the findings are of interest insofar as they refute some predictions about supposed effects. It is not the case that people who are satisfied with their life in general are on the whole more supportive of the regime that grants them the things on which their present satisfied condition depends.

Interpersonal trust, seen by the social capitalist approach as a precondition and strong correlate of democracy and support for democracy, does not matter a great deal for support of a liberal-democratic regime. The same is true for social involvement, as the second factor social capitalists perceive as crucial for the functioning of democracy. Both have significant effects, but their magnitude is negligible, indicating that they are part of a different domain. While one can argue that social capital is at least partly created by institutions, and is higher in democracies or at least higher in countries subject to the rule of law (Herrerros and Criado, 2008), the finding indicates that despite its relevance for other domains, such as economics, it is not relevant for support of democracy.

The socioeconomic features of individuals matter, some are also significant, but their effects are small in magnitude on the whole. Older people are more supportive of democracy despite the fact that in many countries these respondents were politically socialized during non-democratic times. Respondents with higher levels of education are somewhat more critical of the government but much more supportive of democracy. Having been socialized under a non-democratic regime significantly lowers support for the democracy and the current societal model, which is frequently both more open and more democratic than its precursor.

What are the results regarding the explanatory power of the variables used and the sources of the variation in popular support? Overall variation – the deviation of a respondent from the overall mean of the sample – is composed of the between- and within-country variation. System-level features determine the deviation of the country mean from the overall mean, individual-level features determine the deviation of an individual from the country mean.

Conducting an analysis of variance shows that the major share of variation occurs within countries, due to individual-level features. The variation occurring between countries makes up 15 percent of the total variation in 'Satisfaction with government', 10 percent for 'Democracy best form of government' and 5 percent for 'Support for the current society'. This also sets the maximum level for the explanatory contribution of system-level features.

Looking at the share of explained overall variation, reported in Table 1, the first finding is that satisfaction with the government is explained best, but even here the explanatory power measured by McFadden's pseudo R^2 is quite low.

GLLAMM does not report shares of explained variation by level but comparing models using only the macro- or only micro-level explanatory variables allows an estimate of the explanatory contribution of each level. I found that the explanatory contribution of factors such as personal attitudes and subjective evaluations is small. Most of the explanatory power is due to the system-level variables, a fact which is also obvious from the substantial effects found for system-level variables. The between-country variation can be explained satisfactorily, a finding consistent with studies using aggregated data, such as Clarke et al. (1993). But this variation does not contribute much to explaining overall variation. While there are significant relationships at the level of individuals, they are of minor magnitude and explain little of the individual-level variation within the countries.

Conclusion

The most striking conclusion is that support for liberal democracy, and its attendant social and economic systems, is never stable, never insulated from economic developments, thus implying that this model is never the 'end of history' (Fukuyama, 1992). It might appear to be well established if the preconditions, notably economic growth and improvement of citizens' material situation, are met. If the economic situation and the material living conditions are stagnating or deteriorating, citizens withdraw their support for the democratic model of society. Thus, as for Easton's argument that the liberal-democratic model of society reaches a degree of acceptance that immunizes it from economic developments, this too has to be put in perspective. For the majority of democracies in the sample the probability that the economic situation deteriorates to a fundamental degree is indeed quite low. Nonetheless, it is constant economic growth which matters, not the increased participatory role democracy accords to citizens. Liberal-democratic societies are stable because this model of society is most able to produce constant economic growth. This dependency of support on the system's ability to produce constant economic growth is not a passing phenomenon but gets even stronger in the older democracies.

The factors found to be relevant for support also outline the tasks of the institutions studied here. One may conclude that if a factor matters for support for a certain institution, it does so because it is something that citizens see as a relevant output of the institution in question. Because most of the explanatory factors used here matter for the government, we know most about the expectations about government, less about the demands and criteria concerning the society.

Comparing transition countries and established democracies, the findings indicate that if the political transition goes together with economic growth, that is, if the respondents in a country are in situations in which – for them, subjectively – democracy means economic well-being, the support for all aspects of the new system is higher. More democracy per se does not increase the level of support for democracy if there is no pay off in material terms as well. Moreover, for political support, the subjective perception that the political system is better now than it was a decade ago matters much more than the 'objective' development of democracy.

In established democracies, people take the level of wealth they currently have for granted and seemingly want ever more. Economic growth may not be sufficient to make people fully satisfied, but without it support for democracy is at risk. Democracy, it seems, has to pay both its way and its place by constantly delivering material wealth.

Coming back to the question of the likelihood of democracy taking hold in non-democratic countries, the results imply that Vanhanen's argument that economic progress will lead in the long run to democratization has its limits. Given the strong role of economic progress and prosperity for the support of the status quo there is no reason to presume that economic progress will automatically make people demand democracy, that is, institutional change. Typically, democratic systems outperform non-democratic systems, and the findings suggest that citizens chose democracy for its economic consequences. If the non-democratic ones perform equally well or better, Vanhanen's prediction fails. In particular the fact that some non-democratic countries, in particular in Asia, managed the recession in the wake of the subprime lending crisis better than some democracies is a case in point.

The findings are also relevant for democracy promotion. There is little hope of influencing attitudes towards democracy: one knows next to nothing about the individual-level factors for support, let alone how to influence them. But, while limited in its impact, the fact that economic performance matters and matters more than institutional and political development, indicates that economic assistance – an instrument which is feasible and cost-effective – is a promising way of helping a newly democratic country to remain a democracy. The optimal context in which to promote democracy in this manner is through providing economic assistance to a country which has undergone political change. If the economy prospers due to financial help from the outside, democracy means (personal) wealth for the citizens. This reflects our central finding: support for democracy is inextricably linked with (continued) economic progress.

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Appendix

Variables Used in the Analysis

Dependent Variables

Support Government: Satisfaction with the government: 1 ‘Very dissatisfied’, 4 ‘Very satisfied’

Support Democracy: Is democracy better than any other form of government? 1 ‘Disagree strongly’, 4 ‘Agree strongly’

Support Society: Support of the present form of society and to changes in society: 1 ‘Entire society needs radical changes’, 3 ‘Society must be defended against all subversive forces’

System-level Features

CPI (Corruption Perception Index) (0 = maximum; 10 = minimum of corruption); Transparency International; 1995 or closest available year

GINI Index of Income Inequality, high values indicate unequal distribution of income, UN Human Development Report; 1995 or closest available year

DemocraticChange: Change in democracy measured as change in political liberties between 1985 and 1995; minimum -3; maximum +6. Positive values indicate progress towards more democracy; based on data by Freedom House

EcoProgress: Economic progress as percentage change in GDP in US\$ per head from 1990 to 1995; UN Human Development Report

GDP: Level of economic development, GDP per capita in int. US\$ as of 1995; UN Human Development Report

Individual-level Features

SatisfactionLife: Satisfaction with life: 1 'Dissatisfied', 10 'Satisfied'

SatisfactionFinancial: Satisfaction with personal financial situation: 1 'Dissatisfied', 10 'Satisfied'

PolitChangeEvaluation: Evaluation of the changes in the political system: evaluation of the present political system compared with the system as it was 10 years ago; positive values indicate that the respondents believe the present system to be better than the system 10 years ago; -9 minimum; +9 maximum

PerceivedCorruption: Perceived corruption by public officials: 1 'Almost no public officials are corrupt', 4 'Almost all public officials are corrupt'

LessPoverty: Perception of poverty: Are there more people in the country living in poverty than there were 10 years ago? 1 'Larger share', 2 'About the same', 3 'Smaller share'

SocialTrust: Social trust of the respondent: 1 = 'In general, people can be trusted'

SocialActivity: Additive index of participation in voluntary organizations like sports clubs, trade unions, professional organizations and so on, ranging from 0 to 8.

PoliticalDiscussion: Frequency of discussing political matters: 1 'Never', 2 'Occasionally', 3 'Frequently'

PoliticalInterest: Degree of interest in political affairs: 1 'Not at all interested', 4 'Very interested'

PoliticalActivity: Additive index of participation in political activities: joining demonstrations, signing petitions, boycotts, strikes and so on, ranging from 0 to 5

Post-materialism: Number of post-materialist items the respondent chose out of three lists: 0 'materialist: only materialist items chosen', 6 'postmaterialist: only post-materialist items chosen'

TrustGovernment: Trust in government: 1 'None at all', 4 'A great deal'

Same coding for Trust in Parties, Trust in Parliament, Trust in Civil Service.

Socioeconomic Variables

Female: 1 = Female

Age of Respondent: in years

Income: Family income in deciles

Religious: Respondent is religious (1 = Yes)

Educational level: Educational level in nine classes, 9 = university degree

Pre-democratic generation: Respondent was socialized under a non-democratic regime

Interaction Variables

AgeDemocracy \times Economy: Macro-level interaction effect between the age of democracy and the economic progress variable. Generated by multiplying economic progress with the age of democracy, it has higher values for older democracies. A positive effect indicates that economic development is more important in older democracies.

Materialism \times Economy: Cross-level interaction effect between the economic progress variable and the individual-level degree of materialism. Generated by multiplying the materialism score with the economic progress, it indicates whether economic progress is more important for materialist persons.

