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Citizen Support for Civil and  
Political Rights in Asia:  
Evaluating Supply-Demand Congruence

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## **Citizen Support for Civil and Political Rights in Asia: Evaluating Supply-Demand Congruence**

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### **Abstract**

Citizen support for civil and political rights is a hallmark of democratic governance and necessary component in Asia's democratization process. Citizen support for these rights exists to the extent that political elites allow the creation and protection of democratic institutions and practices. With the advent of global opinion polling, recent research has begun to examine the levels of congruence/incongruence between mass demands for democracy and standard measures of democracy. This paper examines how Asians evaluate specific civil and political rights in their country by using survey data from 24 societies along with supply-side indicators from the Freedom House organization. The analysis uncovers strong citizen satisfaction with the political right to vote and moderate satisfaction with civil rights such as freedom of speech. However, comparisons with supply-side measures as well as a multilevel test uncover relatively limited congruence for most of the rights. Mass support for specific rights were often high or low regardless of levels of institutional supply or whether a particular society was classified as free, partly free, or not free. The imbalance between mass support and supply levels in various parts of Asia highlights both current and future democratic challenges and possible setbacks.

The current global wave of democratization reached the shores of Asia beginning with the Philippines (1986), South Korea (1987), Mongolia (1990), Thailand (1992), and Indonesia (1998). Although the number of democratically elected governments in Asia has increased, observers caution that the recent institutional supply of civil and political rights is critically low in many parts of the region. According to a recent annual review by the Freedom House organization in New York, some of the most pronounced setbacks for freedom's march around the world have occurred in Asia in such places as Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, the Philippines, Myanmar, and Malaysia.<sup>1</sup> However, the focus on the institutional supply of civil and political rights by the Freedom House organization overlooks mass support for the ideals and practices of democracy, which scholars argue is required for the transition and consolidation of democracy to occur.<sup>2</sup> What citizens think about the electoral process and their support for specific civil and political rights is therefore a critical ingredient of the democratization process.

Citizen support for civil and political rights across societies is also important because it is assumed to reflect the level of institutional supply. According to congruence theory, "democratic institutions are supplied on a level that is congruent with mass demands for democracy."<sup>3</sup> With the advent of global opinion polls, recent scholarship has begun to test congruence theory with mixed results thus far. Whereas one study finds a weak relationship between mass support for democracy and standard indicators for the supply of democracy, another finds stronger support when corrected measures are utilized.<sup>4</sup> In a study on human rights, limited congruence was uncovered for most regions of the world with the exception of Asia.<sup>5</sup> Although mass support is believed to reflect institutional supply, clearly more research is needed to investigate this relationship.

This paper builds on the previous literature in several major ways. First, the analysis includes a much larger set of 24 societies located in East, Southeast, South and Central Asia. In particular, several empirical questions are addressed. To what extent do citizens in Asia support some of the ideals and practices of democracy? How satisfied are they with various civil and political rights? Which governments fare the best and worst on specific indicators? To address these questions, the paper uses data culled from the

AsiaBarometer Survey (hereafter ABS).<sup>6</sup> The multi-national survey responses, gathered from 2005 to 2007, are based on face-to-face interviews with randomly selected citizens.<sup>7</sup>

Second, this paper strives to capture the supply-demand nexus between mass support and institutional supply in Asia by using more refined expert indicators of democracy. Specifically, this study makes use of recently released Freedom House subcomponent scores for its measures of political rights and civil liberties, which are available for all of the surveyed countries in Asia.<sup>8</sup> By matching the content of ABS to the subcomponent scores, this paper will be able to compare both sets of ratings among Asian publics and to indirectly test aspects of congruence theory. For congruence theory to be strongly supported, the levels of mass support for specific civil and political rights are expected to reflect the institutional supply of democracy as measured by Freedom House subcomponent scores.

This study is organized in six parts. The first section, which immediately follows, offers a brief review of previous research. Based on this review, the second section develops a framework for evaluating public support for civil and political rights and discusses data sources. The third section discusses key theoretical issues including the two main hypotheses to be tested. The fourth section examines the levels of congruence/incongruence for Asian societies and explains the underlying patterns. The fifth section offers a multilevel test using variables measured at both the country and individual level. The final, sixth section summarizes key findings and assesses some of the implications of congruence theory for future democratization in Asia.

### **Prior Research**

There is a considerable literature devoted to assessing civil and political rights in different societies. One of the major debates in this regard is over the definition of democracy and how it should be measured. Scholars are divided whether the definition of democracy refers to a way of selecting a government or whether it implies that specific standards of living and certain types of policy are provided for its citizens. Procedural definitions of democracy are captured in Joseph Schumpeter's definition of democracy as a system "for arriving at political decisions in which individuals acquire the power to decide by means

of a competitive struggle for the people's vote.”<sup>9</sup> Procedural definitions consequently focus on the importance of free and fair elections as a necessary condition of democracy. In contrast, substantive views of democracy stress the importance of elections but add a more extensive slate of rights such as freedom of speech, freedom of association, and freedom of the press.

The Freedom House publishes annual scores for political rights and civil liberties that are widely used in comparative research. The scores are based on a checklist of 25 political rights and civil liberties questions that are derived mainly from the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. There are ten political rights questions that cover three subcategories: Electoral Process, Political Pluralism and Participation, and Functioning of Government. There are fifteen civil liberties questions that cover four subcategories: Freedom of Expression and Belief, Associational and Organizational Rights, Rule of Law, and Personal Autonomy and Individual Rights. Each subcategory is awarded a specific number of points by the expert evaluators. The total number of points is then aggregated to create an overall political rights and civil liberties rating for each country using a one-to-seven scale. Lower ratings indicate higher levels of freedom whereas higher ratings reflect less freedom.

The political rights and civil ratings are also used by Freedom House to classify political regimes around the world as “free,” “partly free,” and “not free.” Countries with combined ratings that average 1.0 to 2.5 are considered free, 3.0 to 5.0 partly free, and 5.5 to 7.0 not free. The regime classifications and the average political rights and civil liberties for the surveyed countries in ABS are depicted in Table 1. Of the 24 countries, approximately six belong to the free category. The highest rating of 1.5 is shared by the three East Asian societies of Taiwan, Japan, and South Korea. A total of seven fall into the partly free classification where the scores range from a high of 3 in Sri Lanka to a low of 5 in Afghanistan. Finally, the remaining 11 countries are in the not free category. One—Uzbekistan—was given a 7 or the worst possible rating by Freedom House organization.

The use of Freedom House ratings has been subject to a variety of criticisms that should be briefly acknowledged. The use of scaled democracy scores is criticized for not accurately representing the multifaceted concept it intends to tap.<sup>10</sup>

**Table 1: Classification of Regimes in Asia by Freedom House**

Free	Partly Free (1-7 scale, 1 equals freest)	Not Free
<b>1.5</b> Taiwan Japan South Korea	<b>3.0</b> Sri Lanka	<b>5.5</b> Nepal Bhutan
<b>2.0</b> Mongolia	<b>3.5</b> Philippines Hong Kong	Cambodia Pakistan Maldives Kazakhstan Kyrgyzstan
<b>2.5</b> Indonesia India	<b>4.0</b> Bangladesh Malaysia	Tajikistan Thailand
	<b>4.5</b> Singapore	<b>6.5</b> China
	<b>5.0</b> Afghanistan	<b>7.0</b> Uzbekistan

Note: The numerical values represent the combined Freedom House scores for political rights and civil liberties, which are coded on a 1-7 scale where 1 is the most free and 7 is the least free. Countries with ratings that average 1.0 to 2.5 are considered Free, 3.0 to 5.0 Partly Free, and 5.5 to 7.0 Not Free. These scores as well as the regime classifications are taken for each country for the year preceding the AsiaBarometer polling dates. From the year prior to the survey to the actual year of the survey, the classifications for Thailand, Kyrgyzstan, and Nepal went from the not free to partly free category.

Others argue that the Freedom House provides scant theoretical justification for its categories and methodology.<sup>11</sup> In addition, there are complaints in some quarters that Freedom House scores reflect a pro-Western bias, which partly extends from the fact that the organization receives most of its funding from the American government.<sup>12</sup> Finally, there is the criticism of the lack of transparency since the organization does not release the underlying data for its ratings.<sup>13</sup>

Despite these and other criticisms, the Freedom House scores are widely used in comparative research and are one of the few indicators available for measuring civil and political rights across time and space. Beginning in 2006, the organization has released the subcomponent ratings for each of the major categories that underlie its political rights and civil liberties scores. This makes it possible to match the content of ABS responses to four of the categories used by Freedom House: electoral process, freedom of expression and belief, associational and organizational rights, and rule of law. Electoral process is one of the central subcomponents of political rights, whereas the other categories are important dimensions of civil liberties.

Recent studies of global opinion have attempted to match the content of expert indicators such as Freedom House scores with levels of mass support for democracy and human rights. One of the major research questions in this area is the extent that expert evaluations and levels of mass support converge or diverge. Many build upon insights from congruence theory, which suggests that democratic institutions are supplied on a level that matches mass demands for democracy. The term “congruence” itself was introduced by political scientists in the 1960s in their studies of political cultures and the structures of political systems.<sup>14</sup> Societies where culture and structure are in congruence were assumed to be politically stable.

With the advent of global opinion surveys, testing the insights of congruence theory has received more attention. Using the World Values Survey conducted in more than 70 societies, Ronald Inglehart analysed the correlation between the percentages of respondents in a given country who prefer a democratic system with the societal-level of democracy (as measured by Freedom House) and found a weak relationship.<sup>15</sup> There were majorities in many societies that preferred a democratic system although there was little correspondence to the level of democracy that could be achieved. In other words, strong mass demand for democracy did not mean that elites would supply it at the level that the masses desired. However, Inglehart’s results are critiqued by Welzel and Klingemann on methodological grounds.<sup>16</sup> They argue that the scholars must use more precise measures to tap mass attitudes as well as the societal-level of democracy for the levels of congruence to be appropriately tested. With the use of alternative measures, they



demonstrate that the levels at which societies supply democracy and mass demands for democracy are much lower than standard measures of democracy and preferences suggest.

The link between public opinion and standard indicators of democracy and human rights scores has also been examined in the case of Eastern Europe and in a broader sample of 55 countries representing most of the world's regions.<sup>17</sup> These studies have confirmed links between expert opinions and mass opinion, which suggests that the meaning of human rights shares some commonalities across diverse societies. However, no link between standard indicators of democracy or human rights practices was found for the region of Asia. The lack of conclusive results may have been related to the relatively small sample of countries examined—only seven—as well as particular countries within this sample. Consequently, a more representative sample of Asia is needed to re-examine this question.

The previous literature has generated useful avenues for assessing and comparing mass attitudes and standard indicators in comparative perspective. However, it suffers from a few major deficiencies. In the study of mass orientations toward democracy, the strong emphasis on procedural definitions has meant that scholars have focused heavily on elections instead of the existence or absence of other civil and political rights. Second, most existing studies have relied upon Freedom House's aggregated political rights and civil liberties scores, which may not adequately capture the specific content of survey questions. The use of the subcomponent scores is thus critical to debates over measurement and conceptualization. Finally, most of the survey-based studies focus narrowly on regions such as Africa, Latin America, and Europe.<sup>18</sup> Consequently, many of the results from these regions have yet to be analysed in the context of Asia.

### **Conceptualization and Data Sources**

To examine the supply-demand nexus in the case of Asia, this paper uses Freedom House subcomponent scores as an indicator of the supply of civil and political rights. Of the seven possible subcategories, four are relevant to this study because they can be matched with ABS survey responses. Support for civil and political rights in this paper are examined using the categories of electoral process, freedom of expression and belief,

associational and organizational rights, and the rule of law. The first category, electoral process, is the centrepiece in procedural interpretations of democracy, whereas the latter categories are at the heart of more substantive definitions.

To study mass orientations on the supply side of the equation, this paper makes use of a merged data set that combines the 2005, 2006, and 2007 ABS. The merged survey allows the examination of 24 societies within and across four subregions in Asia: East Asia (Japan, South Korea, China, Hong Kong, Taiwan, and Mongolia); Southeast Asia (Cambodia, Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines, Thailand, and Singapore); South Asia (Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka); and Central Asia or Central Eurasia (Afghanistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan). ABS is based on face-to-face interviews with randomly selected citizens. The total sample size of the merged survey comes to 23,523 respondents. Within each country, the representative sample includes at least 800 adults, aged 20 years and over, with an average sample size close to 980 respondents.

ABS has several important strengths. First, the survey allows us to examine levels of mass support for civil and political rights and compare survey responses with the ratings of the Freedom House organization for a diverse range of cases. These cases include established liberal democracies to politically closed authoritarian regimes. Importantly, the surveyed countries differ in terms of culture, history, and political conditions. Finally, the merged survey offers better coverage of Asia than other comparable surveys as well as a large number of questions pertinent for examining mass support for civil and political rights.

However, ABS does suffer from a few shortcomings that should be acknowledged. First, many of the polling agencies for the most part sampled most heavily from urban areas. Without the opinions of more rural respondents, the variation is expected to be less than with a nationally representative sample. Second, authorities in several Asian countries deemed questions of a political nature too sensitive to be asked. Consequently it was not possible to analyse these societies in this paper. As all of the excluded societies have authoritarian governments, it was not possible to analyse a more complete spectrum

of opinions that would include some of the least democratic societies in Asia (e.g., Laos, Myanmar, Vietnam, and Brunei).

### **Theoretical Considerations**

Congruence theory suggests that elites make democratic institutions effective at a level that satisfies the masses' genuine demands for democracy. At a general level, one of the major questions addressed by this paper is the extent to which mass support for civil and political rights in Asia converges or diverges from the expert indicators supplied by the Freedom House organization. It is hypothesized that citizen evaluations of civil and political rights reflects political "realities" within their own country as measured by the Freedom House subcomponent scores. The investigation of the first hypothesis will help confirm insights from congruence theory as well as previous studies that were inconclusive in the case of Asia.

A second theoretical consideration is whether the relations between congruence and incongruence are shaped by the type of political system. Some proponents of congruence theory explicitly assumed that political structure and political orientations are more congruent in democratic polities, which contributes to their political stability.<sup>19</sup> In transitioning and not free societies, incongruence rather than congruence was assumed to be more of the norm. However, these claims are largely conjectures as little empirical testing has been done. In addition, there are other good reasons why some attention might be focused on regime type. Citizens who live under authoritarian regimes, for example, likely face less political choice compared to citizens in liberal democracies. The limited supply of rights such as the freedom of expression in authoritarian societies might be expected to curb the likelihood that citizens will offer critical evaluations of their government. As a preliminary effort to examine some of the broader patterns in terms of regime type, a second hypothesis is offered.<sup>20</sup> Specifically, the incongruence *between mass support and standard indicators of civil and political rights should be greater in authoritarian and transitioning political systems than in democratic polities.*

There is at least one body of literature that offers a competing explanation for the second hypothesis, which can be called the "critical citizens" hypothesis.<sup>21</sup> In democratic

polities, particularly in the East Asian societies of Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan, scholars have sought to explain why many mass opinions are low and pessimistic despite relatively high supply-side levels of democracy. According to this view, the criticalness is seen as a hallmark of democratic polities. A second related argument stresses the lack of trust due to ongoing struggles with political corruption or legal reform.<sup>22</sup> To the extent that these alternative explanations are plausible, the variation in the incongruence between authoritarian and democratic polities may not be as great. To test the two main hypotheses, the society-level averages from ABS are examined along with the Freedom House ratings in the next section beginning with electoral process.

## **Citizen Support for Civil and Political Rights**

### **Electoral Process**

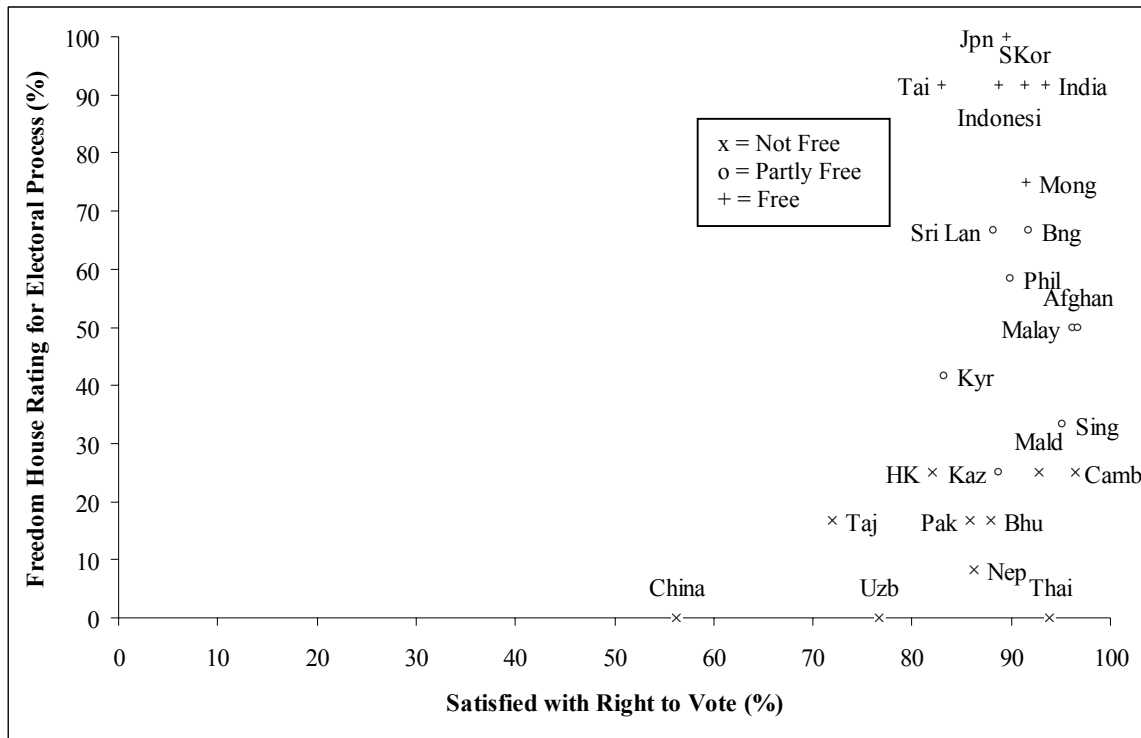
As one of the central subcategories of Freedom House's political rights checklist, electoral process is concerned with the extent that elections are free and fair.<sup>23</sup> To compare this measure against ABS, there is one survey question that can be used: whether respondents are satisfied or not with their right to vote. Ideally, ABS would have included questions pertaining to free and fairness of the process. However, the degree of satisfaction with the right to vote is likely to be an adequate proxy to test the congruence and incongruence between the two sets of measures. Specifically, ABS asked respondents how satisfied they are with the right to vote by selecting one of four response categories: 1) very satisfied; 2) somewhat satisfied; 3) somewhat dissatisfied; and 4) very dissatisfied. The first two response categories are combined to measure the satisfaction with the "electoral process."

All of the Freedom House subcomponent scores, including the one for electoral process, have been converted to a percentage score from 0 to 100, with the latter representing the best possible rating. Figure 1 shows the relationship between the subcomponent scores and the ABS question. The Freedom House classification scheme of free, partly free, and not free societies is used to examine the second hypothesis.

In terms of levels of citizen satisfaction with the right to vote, there is high contentment that reaches over 70 percent in all countries but China. Chinese citizens are

able to vote for deputies to local people’s congresses and for leadership elections to work units or villages, although the process is controlled by the Chinese Communist Party. Nonetheless, still more than half of Chinese respondents are satisfied with their right to vote. The highest level of satisfaction reaches 96.5 percent in Afghanistan. In 2004 Afghanistan elected a new president and in September of 2005 held elections for the provincial councils and new lower house. With the ABS conducted just after the

**Figure 1. Freedom House Ratings and Public Evaluations of Electoral Process**



Source: ABS and Freedom House.

legislative election, there was evidently much enthusiasm for the electoral process in the wake of the fall of the Taliban. What is more puzzling, however, is the second highest satisfaction score of 96.4 percent for Cambodia. This was achieved despite the increasing control of the Cambodian People’s Party, the decline of opposition party strength, and the weak powers of the national elected assembly.

The Freedom House ratings for all societies average 42 percent. Japan earned a perfect score whereas four countries tied for the lowest score of a zero: China, Thailand, Vietnam, and Uzbekistan. Interestingly, the pattern shows that high citizen satisfaction is possible regardless of the Freedom House rating. In the case of Thailand, for example, no points were awarded by Freedom House although Thai respondents demonstrated greater satisfaction with the electoral process than experienced in most of the free countries. This is even more impressive considering that Thailand did not even have an elected parliament at the time of the survey. In short, free and partly free countries may have better subcomponent scores, but this does not necessarily correspond with how satisfied citizens feel with the right to vote.

The pattern captured in Figure 2 does not lend strong support for congruence theory. Satisfaction with the right to vote is high in all Asian countries regardless of the Freedom House rating or whether a country is classified as free, partly free, or not free. One possible reason why there is less correspondence for countries such as Thailand is that short-term changes in Freedom House scores may have little impact on long-term and diffuse support for the political system. This may help explain why evaluations in Thailand were high despite the military coup. A second possibility is that elites in many Asian countries have implemented free and fair elections but have stopped short of granting fuller civil and political rights. Consequently, citizens may be highly satisfied with their right to vote but this does not mean they are satisfied with the availability or absence of other civil and political rights.<sup>24</sup>

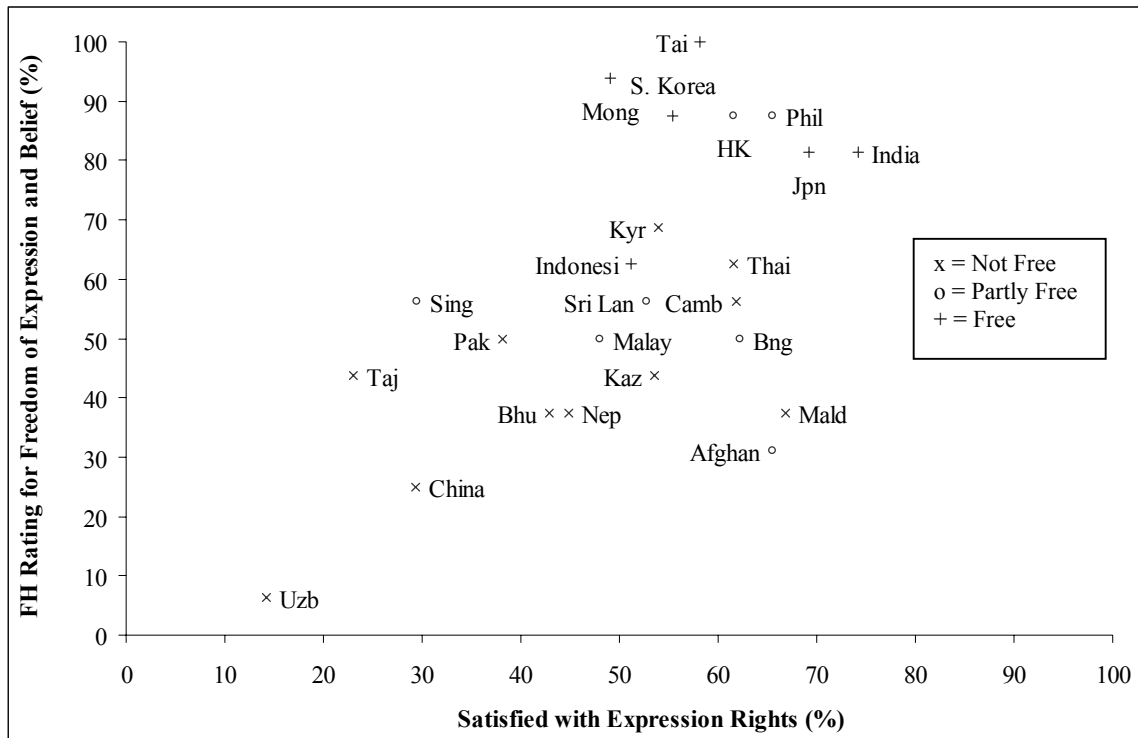
### **Freedom of Expression and Belief**

Because procedural definitions of democracy tend to overemphasize the role of elections, it is important to examine supply and demand for specific civil liberties. The Freedom House subcomponent for freedom of expression and belief focuses on such issues as whether there are free and independent media, academic freedom, and open and free private discussion.<sup>25</sup> There are two questions from ABS that can be used to tap this measure. Both ask respondents how satisfied they are with the freedom of speech and the right to criticize the government. Respondents were given five possible response

categories: 1) very satisfied; 2) somewhat satisfied; 3) somewhat dissatisfied; and 4) very dissatisfied. The first two categories have been combined and represent overall citizen satisfaction with this civil right.

The survey responses from ABS and the Freedom House scores are plotted in Figure 2. In approximately nine of the 24 societies, less than half of respondents are satisfied with freedom of speech and the right to criticize government. Uzbekistan is the least satisfied country with only 14.2 percent satisfied followed by Tajikistan (23%) and China (29.3%). The most satisfied country is India at 74.2 percent followed by Japan (69.2%) and Maldives (66.8%).

**Figure 2. Freedom House Ratings and Public Evaluations on Expression Rights**



Source: ABS and Freedom House.

The Freedom House scores for all societies average approximately 58 percent. Taiwan earned a perfect score followed by three societies that shared a score of 87.5—South Korea, the Philippines, and Hong Kong. Compared to ABS, the Freedom House

ratings are higher in all but nine societies. Mongolia has the largest negative gap of 44.7 points followed by Taiwan and Singapore. In Thailand, Malaysia, and China, however, the two ratings are within one to four points of each other. There appears to be more congruence in general between the two measures than with the right to vote although the overall trend suggests that higher Freedom House ratings do not necessarily translate into a more content citizenry. Cambodia and Singapore, for example, share the same FH score of 56.3 yet the satisfaction average in Cambodia is more than thirty points higher.

In terms of regime classification, freer societies are more satisfied on average than either partly free or not free societies. Freer countries average 59.6 percent satisfaction compared to 55 percent for partly free and 44.6 percent for not free. The relationship is not as strong partly due to cases like the Maldives where a not free rating is paired with one of the highest averages of citizen satisfaction. Not free societies do not appear to be less congruent than either partly free or free societies. If the average gap is calculated by regime classification, not free and partly free countries differ by only two to five points. In contrast, citizen evaluations toward freedom of expression in free societies have a nearly 25-point deficit with Freedom House scores, which is opposite of the hypothesized relationship.

### **Associational and Organizational Rights**

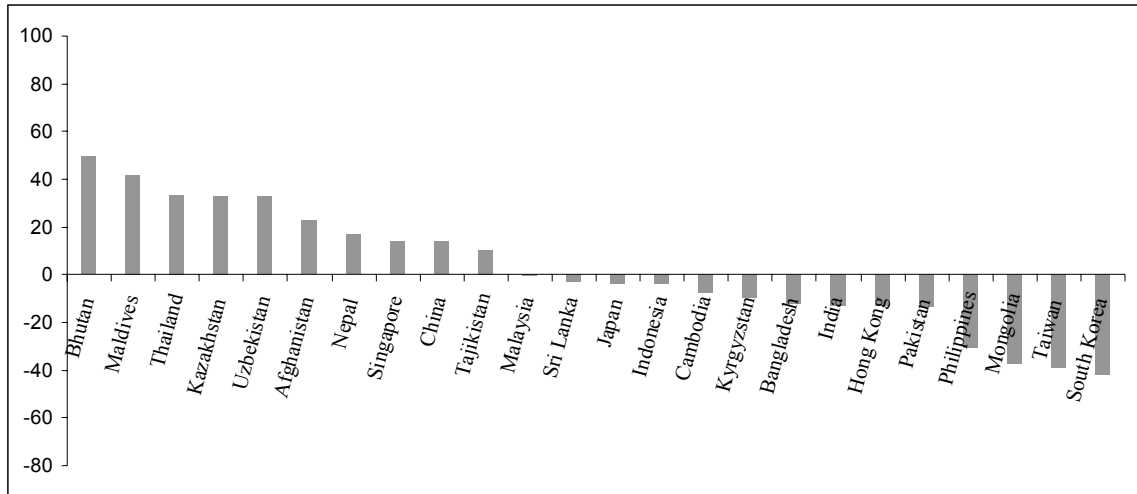
The Freedom House category for associational and organizational rights focuses on whether there is freedom of assembly, freedom for nongovernmental organizations, and free trade unions. There are two questions from ABS that tap salient aspects of this category. Specifically, respondents are asked how satisfied they are with the right to participate in any kind of organization as well as the right to gather and demonstrate. The first two categories of the one-to-four scale are combined as a general measure for satisfaction with associational and organizational rights.

The ABS averages for each society capture moderate satisfaction with associational rights. In ten of the 24 societies surveyed, half of respondents are satisfied with the right to participate in organizations and the right to gather and demonstrate. The countries least satisfied are China (30.4%), Uzbekistan (32.8%), and Pakistan (36.6%),



whereas the most satisfied respondents herald from Japan (79.2%), Thailand (75%), and Sri Lanka (72.0%). For the entire sample, the average Freedom House ratings amount to 47 percent, eleven points below the average for freedom of expression and belief. South Korea and Taiwan are the only two societies with ratings above ninety percent. Myanmar, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan are tied for the lowest ratings with zero points. Instead of showing a plot of both scores, the ABS averages have been subtracted from the Freedom House scores to create a “difference” score, which is reported in Figure 3.

**Figure 3. Difference Scores for Citizen Evaluations of Associational Rights**



Notes: The difference score is the percentage attained on the ABS questions pertaining to associational rights subtracted from the Freedom House subcomponent score for associational rights. Source: ABS and Freedom House.

The pattern in Figure 3 shows that there are ten societies where ABS measures are higher than Freedom House ratings and fourteen where the scores are lower. The highest positive differences are from the not free societies of Bhutan, Maldives, and Thailand. The highest negative differences are found in South Korea, Taiwan, and Mongolia. The societies where there is the least amount of difference between the two measures are Malaysia, Sri Lanka, and Japan.

If we compare across type of regime, free societies average a negative difference of 23 points with Freedom House and partly free three points below. Not free societies, however, have a positive difference of 18 points. This does not offer strong support for the hypothesis that incongruence is greater in authoritarian and transitioning societies.

Freer societies register more critical evaluations toward associational rights despite the relatively high supply of this right (86.1%) as measured by Freedom House. In partly free countries, which are presumably transitioning societies, there appears to be much more congruence between the two scores. Mass support averages 58 percent whereas the Freedom House rating is close to 61 percent. Perhaps the process of political transition and the accompanying improvement in the supply of rights is matched by similar mid-level ratings by citizens.

In not free societies, citizens appear to be much more satisfied than the supply-side of democracy would suggest. As political choice is limited in these societies, perhaps citizens simply signalled agreement and allegiance to their current regimes regardless of the supply of this civil liberty. Political elites in these societies may be able to generate citizen loyalty to the state using authoritarian methods of control, which may explain why there is incongruence in the sense that satisfaction levels are much higher than the expert assessments offered by the Freedom House.

### **Rule of Law**

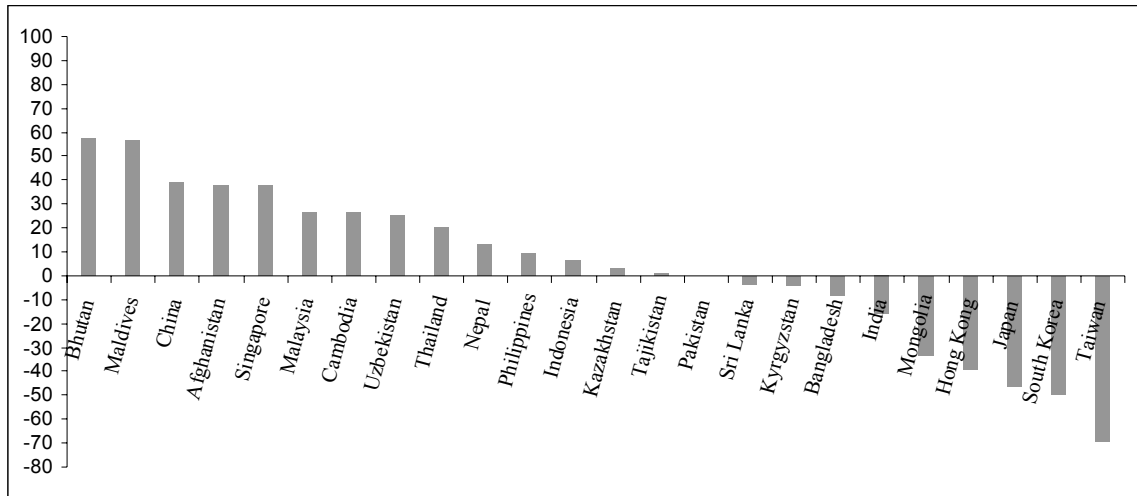
The Freedom House subcomponent for rule of law considers such items as whether there is an independent judiciary and whether the laws guarantee equal treatment of various segments of the population.<sup>26</sup> There are two questions in ABS that are relevant for tapping this category. Specifically, respondents are asked to indicate to what extent they trust the legal system and police to operate in the best interests of society, selecting one of four main response categories: 1) trust a lot; 2) trust to a degree; 3) don't really trust; and 4) don't trust at all. Respondents who answered "trust a lot" and "trust to a degree" are thus combined for the items on the legal system and police.

Across the entire sample, the results show that a little less than half of respondents trust the legal system and police, a level which is close to the levels of satisfaction for freedom of expression and associational rights. The three with the greatest amount of trust are Maldives, Singapore, and Bhutan, whereas the societies with the least amount of trust are Taiwan, Pakistan, and South Korea. The average Freedom House scores for rule of law came to 38 percent, which is the second lowest average after electoral process for

the four categories analysed in this paper. Taiwan and Japan are the only societies with ratings in the nineties whereas the low-scoring societies include Uzbekistan, Cambodia, and China.

The ABS averages are subtracted from the Freedom House to calculate a difference score for the set of surveyed countries, which is captured in Figure 4. Out of the total of 24 societies, 15 have positive differences against Freedom House. Bhutan, Maldives, and China have the largest positive gaps, whereas Taiwan, South Korea, and Japan have the largest negative differences. There is little difference in the two sets of scores in Pakistan, Tajikistan, and Kazakhstan.

**Figure 4. Difference Scores for Citizen Evaluations of Rule of Law**



Notes: The difference score is the percentage attained on the ABS questions pertaining to rule of law subtracted from the Freedom House subcomponent score for rule of law. Source: ABS and Freedom House.

In terms of regime classification, free societies average 34.8 points below Freedom House whereas partly free and not free societies have a positive balance of 8.6 and 24.6 points, respectively. Partly free societies thus appear to have the most congruence between the two sets of scores. The indicators for free and not free societies both diverge considerably, but in the opposite directions. According to the “critical citizens” hypothesis, a certain degree of incongruence might be expected for many of the

democratic societies in Asia. For many of the more authoritarian regimes, it is not entirely clear why satisfaction remains much higher than the evaluations by Freedom House. However, it is also the case that there is some variation within not free societies. In the case of Kyrgyzstan, for example, citizens consistently rated civil and political rights lower than the Freedom House ratings.

### Patterns in the Difference Scores

To summarize the overall patterns for the surveyed countries, the total number of positive or negative difference scores is summed for each country, which can then be used in conjunction with the regime classifications of free, partly free, and not free. In total, there are five major response patterns, which have been summarized in Table 2. The first pattern is societies that have a positive difference score across all four categories of political and civil rights. One-third of the societies fall into this category and all are rated as not free. The second pattern is three positive scores and one negative. There are four societies in this category, which are also all rated as not free. The third response pattern represents the four societies with two positive difference scores. All are partly free societies with the exception of Pakistan. The fourth pattern with one positive score includes the one not free society of Kyrgyzstan, the two partly free societies of Hong Kong and Sri Lanka, and the free societies of Mongolia, Indonesia, and India. The final pattern is the three East Asian societies of Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan with no positive scores.

**Table 2. Number of Positive Difference Scores**

Four	Three	Two	One	None
China (NF)	Cambodia (NF)	Malaysia (PF)	Kyrgyzstan (NF)	Japan (F)
Bhutan (NF)	Singapore (NF)	Bangladesh (PF)	Hong Kong (PF)	South Korea (F)
Maldives (NF)	Thailand (NF)	Philippines (PF)	Sri Lanka (PF)	Taiwan (F)
Nepal (NF)	Tajikistan (NF)	Pakistan (NF)	Mongolia (F)	
Afghanistan (NF)			Indonesia (F)	
Kazakhstan (NF)			India (F)	
Uzbekistan (NF)				

Notes: The difference scores are calculated for four categories by subtracting the values of ABS from the Freedom House subcomponent scores. The number of positive scores, where the difference between ABS and Freedom House is positive, ranges from four to none. NF = not free; PF= partly free; and F = free. Source: ABS and Freedom House.

In short, the major difference between not free and free societies is that the former are more likely to rate political and civil rights much higher than Freedom House ratings. Kyrgyzstan and Pakistan appear to be the only major exceptions to this pattern. Citizens in free societies, in contrast, are much less satisfied with political and civil rights despite the higher levels of institutional supply of such rights. Partly free societies fall in the middle of each pole. Although regime type appears to shape some of the overall patterns, free societies do not appear to be more congruent than not free societies and the reasons cannot be easily fathomed using public opinion responses alone. Citizens in not free societies, for example, may be satisfied with their current civil and political rights due to the lack of political choices and because elites have devised strategies for capturing their support and allegiance to the political order.

### **Multilevel Analysis**

To better understand the determinants that shape citizen perceptions of political and civil rights in Asia, it is necessary to control for a variety of country-level and individual-level factors in a multivariate test. As the data is hierarchically nested—individuals situated in countries—it is appropriate to employ a statistical method called multilevel analysis using Mlwin software.<sup>27</sup> Multilevel analysis allows us to assume that the variation in the dependent variables is a function of both lower-level and higher-level factors.

Four dependent variables are coded from the ABS questions outlined in previous sections: 1) electoral participation, or satisfaction with the right to vote; 2) freedom of expression (freedom of speech and right to criticize government); 3) freedom of association (right to participate in any kind of organization and right to gather and demonstrate); and 4) rule of law (trust in legal system and police). To construct each dependent variable, the values for each of the individual questions answered by respondents are averaged together.

The major theoretical variables of interest are Freedom House's four subcomponent scores for electoral participation, freedom of expression and belief, associational and organizational rights, and rule of law, which are measured on a 0-to-100 scale, with 100 representing the best rating. As one test of congruence theory to determine the strength of the relationship between these two measures, the general expectation is that there should be a significant and positive association between both ratings.

Beyond the Freedom House measures, the models include two control variables that are measured at the country level. The first is intended to tap economic conditions. In previous studies of global public opinion and human rights, economic development (as measured by per capita GDP) is a statistically and substantively significant variable.<sup>28</sup> In the models per capita GDP is measured in US dollars.<sup>29</sup> The expectation is that respondents in countries with high economic development are more likely to support civil and political rights.

The second country-level measure is a measure of a country's social structure: an ethnic fractionalization score.<sup>30</sup> Countries with more ethnic fractionalization are likely to have greater numbers of minorities and other citizens who have experienced political repression.<sup>31</sup> Consequently, citizens are likely to be more critical of civil and political rights when ethnic fractionalization is greater in their country.

In addition to the variables measured at the country level, the models include four controls captured at the level of the respondent. The first is a control for the level of education. One possible effect of education is that respondents who are highly educated will offer more critical evaluations of political and civil rights. The highly educated may have better access to media and information about the actual conditions of political and civil rights in their country. The highly educated are also likely to hail from the highest social and economic classes in society. To measure the level of education, the ABS asks respondents about the highest level of education they have completed, which has been recoded on a 1-3 scale, where "1" represents low education and "3" represents high.

The second individual-level control is a measure that taps subjective perceptions of respondents' standard of living. Respondents who are more satisfied with their current

standard of living are expected to indicate more positive evaluations with specific political and civil rights. The measure is based on a question in ABS that asks respondents to answer how satisfied or dissatisfied they are with their standard of living on a scale of 1-5. The answers are recoded so that higher values indicate greater satisfaction.

The models also include controls for gender and age. There are different expectations for each of these variables in the literature. Females, for example, are hypothesized to be more critical than men because they are more likely to suffer discrimination.<sup>32</sup> In terms of age, there may be differences between older and younger respondents as an indirect consequence of socio-economic change and political history. As the effects of age and gender are not likely to be uniform across the diverse set of Asian societies, it is difficult to hypothesize whether the overall effect will be positive or negative. However, to the extent that gender and age are important controls, they should be statistically significant. To measure gender, all female respondents are coded with the value of “1” and males with “0.” Age is recoded on a scale of 1-5, where the youngest group (20–29 years old) is labeled “1” and the oldest group (60–69 years old) is “5.”

### **Results and Discussion**

The multilevel results are reported in Table 3. Each column contains one of the four main dependent variables. The results for the country-level variables are reported at the top of the table followed by the individual-level results. In terms of the main independent variable, the Freedom House subcomponent score, the results show a statistically significant and positive correlation for all of the dependent variables with the exception of rule of law. This suggests that citizen evaluations concerning the electoral process, freedom of expression, and associational rights in Asia become more positive with an increase in the corresponding Freedom House subcomponent score. However, the overall substantive effect is not particularly strong in each case (0.003 to 0.006). None of the other country-level controls proved to be statistically significant in more than one model.<sup>33</sup>

## Citizen Support for Civil and Political Rights in Asia

At the individual level, the most significant and consistent result was the statistically significant and positive association with respondents' subjective view of their standard of living. Those who report satisfaction with their standard of living appear to be much more likely to positively rate specific rights in their country. Education is also statistically significant in two of the models although it is not clear whether more education contributes to a more critical or less critical citizenry. In the case of the electoral process and the rule of law, higher education is negatively associated yet is positively associated in the areas of freedom of expression and associational rights.

**Table 3. Multilevel Analysis of Citizen Support for Civil and Political Rights**

Independent Variables	Electoral participation	Freedom of expression	Associational rights	Rule of law
Constant	3.129*** (0.351)	2.769*** (0.385)	2.263*** (0.237)	2.040*** (0.385)
FH subcomponent score	0.004* (0.002)	0.006** (0.002)	0.003** (0.001)	-0.001 (0.002)
GDP per capita	-0.033 (0.039)	-0.050 (0.043)	0.026 (0.026)	0.060 (0.043)
Ethnic fractionalization	0.263 (0.249)	-0.049 (0.273)	0.318 (0.167)	0.328 (0.273)
Education	-0.011 (0.007)	0.011 (0.008)	0.017* (0.007)	-0.025*** (0.007)
Gender	-0.001 (0.010)	-0.016 (0.011)	-0.020* (0.009)	0.012 (0.010)
Age	0.029*** (0.004)	0.015*** (0.004)	0.013** (0.004)	0.006 (0.004)
Standard of living	0.036*** (0.006)	0.034*** (0.006)	0.027*** (0.005)	0.057*** (0.006)
Country-level	0.062** (0.019)	0.075** (0.023)	0.028** (0.009)	0.075** (0.023)
Individual-level	0.499*** (0.005)	0.546*** (0.005)	0.423*** (0.004)	0.473*** (0.005)
N	21275	20063	19435	20653
-2 log likelihood	45699.230	44890.930	38518.110	43260.300

Maximum likelihood estimates using MLwin 2.02; standard errors in parentheses. \*p<.05; \*\*p<.01; \*\*\*p<.001.

There are also some significant effects for age in three of the models. Older respondents are more likely to offer more positive evaluations for electoral participation, freedom of



expression, and associational rights. The variable for gender is only significant in the model for associational rights, which suggests that women are more likely than men to offer a more critical evaluation.

With the exception of rule of law, the results of the multilevel test confirm a positive association between ABS survey responses and Freedom House subcomponent scores after controlling for important country and individual-level factors. The multivariate results also support the general conclusions derived from bivariate analyses of ABS and Freedom House evaluations. Specifically, the link between the survey responses and Freedom House is often weak or opposite of what is expected. The multilevel results confirm a positive relationship although the substantive impact of the Freedom House scores was not particularly strong.

The same models were also tested separately for regime classification using ordered logistic regression due to the much smaller number of country units (results not reported). For free societies, the results confirm a negative relationship between ABS and Freedom House in three of the four dependent variables. For not free societies, there is a positive relationship for two of the four variables. In the case of partly free societies, there was no statistical relationship at all in any of the models. There were no major discernible differences across regime types for any of the individual-level controls. These results are generally in line with the patterns uncovered in previous sections.

At the theoretical level, the weak but positive association between the ABS and Freedom House measures offers some lukewarm support for congruence theory and is consistent with the weak links uncovered in previous research. The current results likewise build upon the previous research by demonstrating that a weak link can also be uncovered for the case of Asia.

## **Conclusion**

Congruence theory suggests that democratic institutions such as the availability of civil and political rights are supplied on levels that are congruent with mass demands for such rights. Congruence was expected to be stronger in stable, free societies. Using survey responses to tap mass demands for civil and political rights and Freedom House ratings to

reflect the institutional supply, this paper examined and compared citizen support for civil and political rights and tested insights from congruence theory.

An examination of the society-level averages demonstrated that satisfaction or trust most usually could be attained at all levels often regardless of Freedom House score or regime type. Societies with the same Freedom House subcomponent score often exhibited considerably different levels of enthusiasm for political and civil rights. The levels of mass support also differed in regard to the categories of rights. Satisfaction with the electoral process, for example, was widely supported by majorities in all countries, whereas support for specific civil rights achieved only moderate levels of support.

The results of the multilevel analysis confirmed the weak underlying patterns for the categories of political and civil rights. The results for standard measures of the level of economic development, population size, and social structure did not have strong statistically significant effects. At the individual level, however, greater satisfaction with standard of living fostered higher support for political and civil rights. The effect of education also proved to be statistically significant for two of the rights, although the direction of the effect was both positive and negative.

There was not strong support for the hypothesis that the level of incongruence was greater in authoritarian and transitioning political systems than in democratic polities. The overall patterns generally revealed that the levels of mass support in not free societies were much higher than the measures for institutional supply. The levels of support were much lower than the supply in free societies. Partly free societies, those assumed to be in political transition, were surprisingly more congruent as a whole. The causal mechanisms that shape this relationship were difficult to pinpoint using the available data. The “critical citizen” hypothesis has been suggested as one possible explanation as well as the critical role of political elites in fostering allegiance in not free societies.

Another reason why the insights of congruence theory were not strongly supported in this paper may be related to measurement issues. Because the questions used in surveys may not perfectly converge with the content of supply indicators of democracy, there are obvious limits with this sort of test. The use of Freedom House subcomponent

scores may help improve efforts to better tailor supply-side measures of democracy. However, there are limits to their utility given the wide range of checklist questions that underlies each subcomponent score.

If levels of mass support are considered, the strong to moderate levels of support for political and civil rights does not suggest that some of the most pronounced setbacks for democracy have occurred in Asia. At the same time, the near-universal appetite for such rights in Asia does not mean that freedom's stalled march will recommence. What would be required for the demand-supply nexus to become more balanced in not free societies? On one hand, citizens in not free societies might venture more critical and discerning evaluations that are closer to the levels of supply. This would seem to be one of the general distinctions between not free and partly free societies. Alternatively, elites in not free societies could narrow the gap by supplying more civil and political rights, perhaps in response to political instability as congruence theory might suggest. The paradox still remains why elites would do this if citizens are compliant.

In free Asian societies, the incongruence between mass support and the institutional supply is also difficult to assess. Are citizens not satisfied and less trusting of politics because the institutional supply is too high? Is their high level of criticalness related to democratic society itself or is it somehow caused by the malaise of democracy-still-in-consolidation such as the occurrence of political corruption? Finally, which political systems are more stable: those with a positive or negative balance in the demand and supply? Future research can hopefully better pinpoint answers to these questions.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Arch Puddington, “Freedom in Retreat: Is the Tide Turning? Findings of Freedom in the World 2008,” (New York: Freedom House, 2008), available at <http://www.freedomhouse.org/>.

<sup>2</sup> See Thomas Carothers, “The End of the Transition Paradigm,” *Journal of Democracy* 13, no. 3 (2002): 5–21; Juan Linz and Alfred Stephan, *Problems of Democratic Consolidation: Southern Europe, Southern America, and Post-Communist Countries* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996); Larry Diamond, *Developing Democracy: Toward Consolidation* (Baltimore: John Hopkins Press, 1999); Doh Chull Shin and Jason Wells, “Is Democracy the Only Game in Town,” *Journal of Democracy* 16, no. 2 (2005): 88-101; and Chong-Min Park, “Democratic Consolidation in East Asia,” *Japanese Journal of Political Science*, 8, no. 3 (2007): 305-326.

<sup>3</sup> Christian Welzel and Hans-Dieter Klingemann, “Understanding Democratic Congruence: A Demand-Supply Perspective” (UC Irvine: Center for the Study of Democracy, 2007), p. 1.

<sup>4</sup> See Ronald Inglehart, “How Solid is Mass Support Democracy—And How Can We Measure It?” *PS: Political Science and Politics* 36, no. 1 (2003): 51-57; and Welzel and Klingemann, “Understanding Democratic Congruence: A Demand-Supply Perspective,” p. 16.

<sup>5</sup> Matthew Carlson and Ola Listhaug, “Citizens’ Perceptions of Human Rights Practices: An Analysis of 55 Countries,” *Journal of Peace Research* 44, no. 4 (2007): 465-483.

<sup>6</sup> See <https://www.asiabarometer.org/> for more information.

<sup>7</sup> The 24 represent all of the societies polled by ABS where authorities permitted questions to be asked about the political situation. This did not occur in Brunei, Vietnam, Laos, and Myanmar. The survey responses for Turkmenistan have also been excluded due to data quality issues. In cases where countries were surveyed more than once, the most recent survey is analysed.

<sup>8</sup> For more information about the Freedom House and its methodology, see <http://www.freedomhouse.org>.

<sup>9</sup> Joseph Schumpeter, *Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1943 and 1976).

<sup>10</sup> See Yasuaki Onuma, “Toward a Intercivilizational Approach to Human Rights,” in

Joanne Bauer and Daniel Bell, eds., *The East Asian Challenge for Human Rights* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999); and James McCormick and Neil Mitchell, "Human Rights Violations, Umbrella Concepts, and Empirical Analysis," *World Politics* 49, no. 4 (1997): 510–525.

<sup>11</sup> Gerardo L. Munck and Jay Verkuilen, "Conceptualizing and Measuring Democracy," *Comparative Political Studies* 35, no. 1 (2002): 5-34.

<sup>12</sup> See "When Freedom Stumbles," *Economist*, January 17, 2008.

<sup>13</sup> Munck and Verkuilen, "Conceptualizing and Measuring Democracy," p. 21.

<sup>14</sup> Gabriel Almond and Sidney Verba, *The Civic Culture* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1963), pp. 20-35; Harry Eckstein, *A Theory of Stable Democracy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1966).

<sup>15</sup> Inglehart, "How Solid is Mass Support Democracy—And How Can We Measure It?," pp. 53-54.

<sup>16</sup> Welzel and Klingemann, "Understanding Democratic Congruence: A Demand-Supply Perspective," pp. 4-5.

<sup>17</sup> See Christopher Anderson, Aida Paskeviciute, Maria Sandovici, and Yuliya Tverdova, "In the Eye of the Beholder? The Foundations of Subjective Human Rights Conditions in East Central Europe," *Comparative Political Studies* 38, no. 7 (2005): 771–798; and Carlson and Listhaug, *Citizens' Perceptions of Human Rights Practices: An Analysis of 55 Countries.*"

<sup>18</sup> For a review of many of the global opinion surveys, see Anthony Heath, Stephen Fisher, and Shawna Smith, "The Globalization of Public Opinion Research," *Annual Review of Political Science* 8 (2005): 297-331.

<sup>19</sup> Almond and Verba, *The Civic Culture*, pp. 20-35.

<sup>20</sup> The effort is deemed preliminary because there are an extensive number of typologies for classifying political regimes. A more complete investigation would not only need to examine different typologies, but also differences between regimes that are grouped together.

<sup>21</sup> See Pippa Norris, "Introduction: The Growth of Critical Citizens," in Pippa Norris, ed., *Critical Citizens: Global Support for Democratic Governance* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), pp. 1-27.

<sup>22</sup> See Robert Putnam, Susan Pharr, and Russell Dalton, “Introduction: What’s Troubling the Trilateral Democracies,” in Robert Putnam, Susan Pharr, and Russell Dalton, eds., *Disaffected Democracies: What’s Troubling the Trilateral Countries?* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), pp. 1-27.

<sup>23</sup> Specifically, it focuses on three major questions: whether the government or chief national authority is elected through free and fair elections, whether the national legislative members are elected through free and fair elections, and whether the electoral laws and framework is fair.

<sup>24</sup> The high support levels are also confirmed in other ABS questions that pertain to participation in national and local elections as well as citizen duty to vote in elections.

<sup>25</sup> The subcomponent score also includes a question whether religious institutions and communities are free to practice their faith and express themselves in public and private.

<sup>26</sup> The subcomponent score also considers whether the rule of law prevails in civil and criminal matters and whether there is protection from political terror.

<sup>27</sup> For information about MLwiN, see Jon Rasbash, Fiona Steele, William Browne and Bob Prosser, *A User’s Guide to MLwiN*, version 2.0 (London: Institute of Education, 2005).

<sup>28</sup> See Steven Poe; C. Neal Tate and Linda Camp Keith, “Repression of the Human Right to Personal Integrity Revisited: A Global Cross-National Study Covering the Years 1976-1993,” *International Studies Quarterly* 43, no. 2 (1999): 291–313; and Christian Welzel, Ronald Inglehart, and Hans-Dieter Klingemann, “The Theory of Human Development: A Cross-Cultural Analysis,” *European Journal of Political Research* 42, no. 3 (2003): 341–379.

<sup>29</sup> Figures for per capita GDP are converted using a linear log and are taken from the United Nations’ Monthly Bulletin of Statistics.

<sup>30</sup> This is derived from Alesina et al.’s (2003) Ethnic Fractionalization Index and is a scale from 0 to 1, where 0 indicates the least fractionalization. The measure reflects the probability that two randomly selected individuals from a population belong to different groups. See Alberto Alesina, Arvind Devleeschauwer, William Easterly, Sergio Kurlat, and Romain Wacziarg, “Fractionalization,” *Journal of Economic Growth* 8, no. 2 (2003): 155–194.

<sup>31</sup> Anderson et al., “In the Eye of the Beholder? The Foundations of Subjective Human Rights Conditions in East Central Europe,” p. 786.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., p. 784; and Julie Peters and Andrea Wolper, “Introduction,” in Julie Peters and Andrea Wolper, eds., *Women’s Rights, Human Rights: International Feminist Perspectives* (New York: Routledge, 1995), pp. 1–8.

<sup>33</sup> The models also tested several other country-level controls such as variables for region, population size, history of previous conflict, and different measures of regime type, none of which proved to be statistically or substantively significant.