

The Democracy Barometers

SURVEYING SOUTH ASIA

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The citizens of South Asia share the contemporary global aspiration for democracy. As the idea of democracy travels to different parts of the world and to various social groups and communities, ordinary citizens come to attach positive connotations to the word “democracy” as understood in the various languages of this region. They buy into the idea of democracy as well as what is today the most commonly accepted institutional form of democracy, namely, rule by elected representatives. More than an abstract preference or a simple acquiescence, most South Asians believe that democracy is suitable for their country and prefer democracy over authoritarianism. While support for the institutional form of democracy is determined by access to education, media exposure, and the experience of living under democratic conditions, support for the idea of democracy cuts across social barriers.

If the end of the twentieth century was marked by the triumph of democracy all over the world, the beginning of the twenty-first century has been characterized by an anxiety about the extent, depth, and implications of this triumph. As democracy becomes the “only game in town” in more and more countries in the various regions of the world, the idea of democracy has also acquired a currency that it may not have had at any other point in human history. Yet this global march of democracy does not by itself mean popular support for it. Do citizens simply acquiesce in the new form of government just as they had acquiesced in the earlier

forms of government? Do they only accept the idea of democracy on an abstract plane, or are they willing to endorse the institutional form of democracy over its alternatives? In short, do the citizens really support democracy? This question is especially worth asking in South Asia, for the answer is neither well known nor self-evident.

South Asia does not fully fit into the story of the global triumph of democracy. The countries in this region have not experienced a linear progression toward democracy; more often than not, theirs has been a story of forward movements followed by setbacks and regression. The region's story is far from a narrative of unalloyed democratic triumph, especially if we include such nearby countries as Afghanistan, Myanmar (Burma), Bhutan, and the Maldives. The larger neighborhood, be it China or West and Central Asia, is hardly conducive to democratic sentiments. Furthermore, those who believe that certain preconditions must obtain if democratic culture is to take root often list given levels of economic development and prosperity among these prior necessities. South Asia is one of the world regions where this condition is clearly not met, for it continues to be home to the largest number of poor people on earth.

Finally, the world since 9/11 has seen the rise of a hypothesis proposing a disconnect between Islam and democracy. South Asia is home to more than a quarter of the global Muslim population; Muslims are either the majority or a significant minority in all five countries of this region. Thus if the citizens in this region support democracy, it would have implications far beyond South Asia. But despite the significance of this question—Do the people of South Asia really support democracy?—it had long been impossible to offer any credible answer, as South Asia remained outside the purview of the “barometers” of public opinion and attitudes about democracy. *The State of Democracy in South Asia* study carried out the first-ever simultaneous survey of attitudes toward democracy in the five countries of South Asia—Bangladesh, India, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka—based on a large and representative sample of adult citizens.¹ The survey provides enough evidence to suggest widespread support for democracy throughout the region.

When asked to spell out what the word “democracy” meant to them, nearly everyone who responded offered positive descriptions. Negative “top-of-the-mind” associations were fewer than one out of ten in each of the five countries. This confirms a similar finding of the World Values Survey conducted in 2001 in three countries of the region. In that survey, as many as 98 percent of the respondents in Bangladesh and 93 percent in India indicated their approval of the “democratic system.” Pakistan, however, was second to last, just ahead of Russia in that global survey, with a mere 68 percent approving of democracy.²

Support for democracy, however, goes beyond a liking for the word “democracy” and extends to expressing approval of the institutional

form of democratic government. People in the region overwhelmingly favor the rule of “leaders elected by the people,” with only a handful of respondents disagreeing with the idea of representative democracy. In Pakistan and Nepal, the two countries that did not have representative democracy at the time of the survey, about a quarter of the respondents offered no response to this question.

People not only approve of democratic arrangements, but they find them suitable for their own contexts. Seven out of eight respondents in South Asia—a higher proportion than one finds in East Asia—held that democracy was “suitable” or “very suitable” for their own country. Doubt or uncertainty regarding the suitability of democracy surfaced in the form of “no response”: nearly a third of the persons interviewed in the region—many more in Pakistan and Bangladesh—did not offer any response to this question.

Finally, the citizens of South Asia do not simply *like* democracy, they *prefer* it to authoritarian rule. With the exception of Pakistan, about two-thirds of those who responded preferred democracy over any other form of government. Only one out of ten responses overtly supported the idea that “sometimes dictatorship is better than democracy.” But there is a significant number of people who are either indifferent or ignorant about this crucial choice. About half the respondents in Pakistan and a quarter in other countries said that the distinction between a democratic and a nondemocratic form of government made no difference to them. Roughly a third of those interviewed either did not understand this question or could give no response.

A comparison of the findings from South Asia with the responses to this question from the rest of the world suggests that unless we see “no response” as a sign of ambiguity, support for democracy in the region is not very different from what it is anywhere else. For every one South Asian response that endorses dictatorship, there are six South Asian responses that prefer democracy; this compares favorably with the ratio obtained for the same question in East Asia, Latin America, and the postcommunist countries of Europe.

What do we make of this support for the idea of democracy? When people say that they desire or prefer democracy, are they saying anything significant? Or are they just paying lip service to a universal norm, to what is seen as the only legitimate model for governing a country? The evidence presented thus far permits a limited conclusion: “Democracy” has become an object of desire—something that is viewed positively, is considered suitable, and is generally preferred over its opposite. This is not a trivial finding coming from a region where conditions are considered unfriendly to the growth of democracy. Moreover, when the study took place in 2005, the region had two of the few surviving military dictatorships and executive monarchies of our time. When the people living under nondemocratic regimes are paying even lip service to the

idea of democracy, they are making a significant statement. But does this support for the idea of democracy translate into an endorsement of the institutional form of representative democracy and the negation of its alternatives? What do people mean by the “democracy” that they say they support?

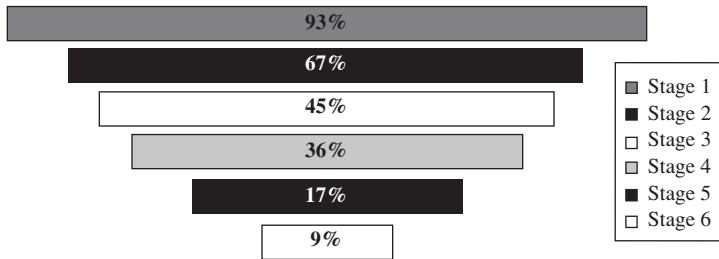
The “Funnel of Democracy”: Support Is Equivocal

One way to measure the depth of support for democracy is to ask whether those who affirm the representative form of democratic government reject its various real-life alternatives. This is what the “funnel of democracy” seeks to capture. As we move from unambiguously anti-democratic alternatives to the more subtle forms of nondemocratic alternatives, we find a sharp drop in the proportion of those who continue to negate alternatives to democracy. The shape of the resultant funnel captures the depth of support for democratic government: the wider the base of the funnel, the more robust the support for the institutional form of democratic government.

The funnel of support for democracy in the region as a whole has a conical shape—a very wide mouth but a fairly narrow base (see Figure 1).³ The proportion of supporters of the representative form of democratic government drops sharply with successive stages. Thus, unlike in many longstanding democracies, in South Asia an affirmation of democratic government does not lead to the negation of authoritarian options. At the same time, the situation in South Asia does not resemble that of Latin America or postcommunist Europe, where more citizens reject authoritarianism than support a democratic form of government. In all South Asian countries, the proportion of those who support democracy is much higher than the proportion of those who negate its alternatives. The pattern varies across countries, from a wineglass-shaped funnel in the case of Pakistan to a relatively broad-based funnel in the case of India, because different stages have varying effects in different countries.

At stage one—the affirmation of rule by elected representatives—support for democratic government is very broad in all five countries. But the pattern begins to diverge by stage two. At this stage, those who entertain the idea of dictatorship or feel indifferent about the choice between democracy and dictatorship are excluded. More than half the responses from Pakistan drop out here, as compared to one-quarter to one-third for the other countries.

The fragility of support for democracy begins to show as we move through stages three and four, the rejection of the two obviously non-democratic forms of government: military rule and monarchy, respectively. Six out of every ten respondents in Pakistan and Bangladesh, the two countries with a record of army rule, endorsed the idea that the country should be governed by the army. This is one of the highest

FIGURE 1—THE FUNNEL OF DEMOCRACY IN SOUTH ASIA

Stage 1: Includes all those who support government by elected leaders

Stage 2: Excludes those who prefer dictatorship sometimes or are indifferent between democracy and dictatorship

Stage 3: Excludes those who want army rule

Stage 4: Excludes those who want rule by king

Stage 5: Excludes those who want a strong leader without any democratic restraint

Stage 6: Excludes those who want the rule of experts rather than politicians

Note: Percentages calculated from merged data set with equal weights for each country (Bangladesh, India, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka).

levels of support for army rule recorded in any part of the world. Even in the other three countries, where opponents of government by the military outnumber its supporters, the level of endorsement for army rule cannot be dismissed as trivial.

It is true that in countries with no experience of army rule, respondents do not understand what they are endorsing. Their response is best interpreted as support for the army as an institution—for its discipline and professionalism, which form such a stark contrast with the messy realities of civilian politics, and for its role as a symbol of national pride—rather than as a demand for the replacement of democratic representatives by the army. This is not peculiar to South Asia. What is perhaps special is the willingness to accept a political role for the army in countries such as Bangladesh, where the people have a history of struggling against and successfully dislodging army rule. Some of this may be attributed to poor education and a lack of awareness about army rule. In all the region's countries, it is the least-educated citizens who are the most likely to endorse army rule.

Compared to support for army rule, support for monarchy is a minor factor in all South Asian countries except Nepal, which at the time of the survey was a land ruled for all practical purposes by an executive monarch. A majority of the respondents in Nepal endorsed the idea of "rule by the king." They did not, however, understand that to mean an all-powerful executive monarchy: Those citizens who understood these fine distinctions preferred constitutional monarchy to an active rule of the kind that the king was to inaugurate after February 2005. Since the popular uprising and restoration of the parliament in 2006, public opinion has registered a dramatic shift in favor of a republican form of

government. While it remains to be seen if democratic Nepal opts for the republican form of government, it nevertheless seems unlikely that monarchy will remain an important factor in South Asia. The only other monarch in the region, the king of Bhutan, has already announced several steps leading to a transition toward constitutional monarchy.

The first four stages involving overt support for democracy and rejection of its obvious alternatives lead to a considerable narrowing of the funnel in each country except India and Sri Lanka. Close to half the responses in these two longstanding democracies manage to pass the first four filters. But they do not pass the remaining stages very well. Throughout the region, there is a two-thirds approval of the rule of a “strong leader who does not have to bother about elections.” Only in India do those who disapprove of such a rule outnumber those who approve of it. The introduction of this fifth stage leads to a significant attrition of support for democratic government in all of these countries, especially in Nepal and Sri Lanka. This should come as no surprise in a region that has a long tradition of strong leaders such as Indira Gandhi, Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, and Sheikh Mujib-ur Rahman, who owed their power to democratic popularity but once safely entrenched, tended to bypass institutional norms of liberal democracy.

The same is true in even greater measure of support for decision making by “experts rather than politicians”: Four out of every five respondents agreed with this suggestion. This sixth and final check reduces the support for democratic government to a single digit in all countries except India. To be sure, the last two conditions are stiff for any democracy in the world. Yearning for a strong leader and preferring experts over politicians are universal themes in contemporary public opinion. Besides, the support for strong leaders or experts need not always reflect a nondemocratic orientation; it very often stems from a desire for effective rule and seeks fulfillment within a democratic frame.

Democrats Outnumber Nondemocrats

Another way of measuring the depth of support for democratic governments is to calculate the proportion of “democrats” in the citizenry and to examine the nature of the relationship between the democrats and “nondemocrats.” In this sense, the depth of democracy is measured by how favorable the ratio of democrats to nondemocrats is within a society. This way of measuring support for democracy has the advantage of bringing greater precision and rigor to a comparison across countries, but at the cost of focusing narrowly on just one kind of support for democracy as an institutional form of government.

The picture of support for democracy in South Asia that this analysis yields is mixed—positive on balance but not free of reasons for worry. A little more than a quarter of the respondents can be described as “strong

**TABLE—LEVEL OF SUPPORT FOR DEMOCRACY BY COUNTRY
(IN PERCENTAGES)**

COUNTRY	STRONG DEMOCRAT	WEAK DEMOCRAT	NONDEMOCRAT	SUPPORT FOR DEMOCRACY RATIO
Bangladesh	19	62	19	1.03
India	41	43	15	2.71
Nepal	22	54	24	0.92
Pakistan	10	49	41	0.24
Sri Lanka	36	50	14	2.52
South Asia	26	52	22	1.17

Note: The figure for South Asia is from a merged data set with equal weights for each country. The ratio of support for democracy is the proportion of strong supporters divided by the proportion of skeptics. “Don’t know” (including those who could not understand the questions) have been treated as a missing value.

democrats,” for they are consistent in supporting democracy and in opposing obviously nondemocratic forms of government. A strong democrat here is someone who supports rule by elected representatives *and* always prefers it to any other form of government *and* is opposed to rule by the army or the king. The proportion of strong democrats is higher in India and Sri Lanka than the regional average, but substantially lower in Pakistan.

On the other end of the spectrum, slightly fewer than a quarter of respondents fall in the category of nondemocrats, those who prefer a nondemocratic alternative to democracy. Thus a nondemocrat here is someone who prefers dictatorship (or is indifferent to the choice between democracy and dictatorship) *and* who supports either army rule or rule by the king. Here again, the picture is relatively better in India and Sri Lanka, which have lower proportions of nondemocrats. The proportion of nondemocrats in Pakistan is twice as high as in the rest of the region (see Table).

If we look at regional averages, the proportion of strong democrats is marginally higher than that of nondemocrats. This is reflected in the Support for Democracy Ratio (SDR) of 1.17 in the region. This ratio is the proportion of strong democrats to nondemocrats; an SDR of 1.0 would indicate a perfect balance between the two extreme categories. A higher SDR indicates deeper support for democracy. It is therefore not surprising that the two countries with the longest and least interrupted experience of democracy are the countries with the highest support for democracy. The proportion of strong supporters of democracy in India and Sri Lanka is two-and-a-half times that of the nondemocrats and thus suggests a robust dominance of democratic sentiment. In Bangladesh and Nepal, there appears to be a precarious balance of democratic and nondemocratic forces, with an SDR of around 1.0. The situation in Pakistan does not appear encouraging for democracy. Although the strong

and weak democrats together outnumber nondemocrats, the balance of the two extreme categories is rather unfavorable, with an SDR of just 0.24. This means that in Pakistan, there are four nondemocrats for every strong democrat.

This reading, however, needs to be qualified. First, what appear to be the characteristics of a country need not reflect anything essential about the culture and society of that country. As our analysis shows, this reflects above all the experience of democracy in Pakistan. Second, as noted above, this measure is limited to the support for representative democracy as a form of government; support for the idea of democracy has a wider base in Pakistan. Third, we do not know how stable are the attitudes of support for democratic government, or how well our measure captures the dimension of stability. It is likely that our measure reflects the popular mood of cynicism and exasperation born from the existence of army rule on the one hand and the uninspiring experience with party politics and Islamist forces on the other. We do know, for instance, that in Nepal, support for democracy leapt upward after the democratic surge of May 2006. It could well be that another round of movement for democracy in Pakistan may lead to dramatic changes in popular support for democracy.

The burden of interpretation thus hangs on the majority of the respondents in South Asia, more in Bangladesh and fewer in India, who fall into the residual category of “weak democrats.” They are democrats because they support at least one of the key attributes of a democratic government, but should be labeled “weak” since they are not quite consistent in negating nondemocratic forms of government. Nearly half these weak democrats affirm support for democracy but do not clearly negate one of the nondemocratic options. Another third of respondents are ambivalent, for they either support both democracy and its alternatives or support neither. This leaves a small fraction of weak democrats who lean toward being nondemocrats, supporting nondemocratic options without quite negating the democratic option. Thus it is reasonable to infer that democrats, including both strong and weak, outnumber nondemocrats in all the countries. This is as true in Pakistan as it is in the region’s other countries. Yet this conclusion remains tentative, for weak democrats can swing in either direction.

Education, Exposure, and Experience

Analyses of support for democracy across different countries in the region may give the impression that some countries or their dominant religions are more democratic than others. This needs to be checked carefully by a detailed breakdown of support for democracy as that support relates to different social variables within and across these countries. A quick analysis shows that support for democracy within each of

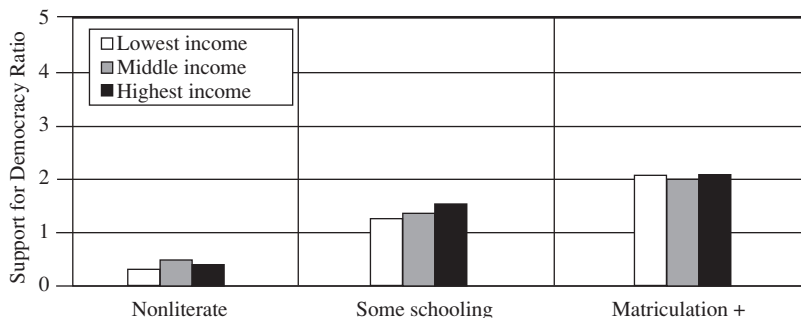
these countries varies sharply among different social groups. Those who are socially privileged tend to support democracy much more than do those at the lower end of the social order. This is true of various aspects of social privilege: Elites, or those in higher occupations, are much more supportive of democracy than the mass public; men support democracy substantially more than women do, particularly in Bangladesh, Nepal, and Pakistan; urban dwellers support democracy more than do villagers in Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, and Pakistan, although this is not true in Nepal and India; in each of the countries, those who are well-off tend to support democracy at higher rates than do those with lower incomes.

This first impression needs to be fine-tuned, for much of what appears to be the effect of income, gender, and urbanity reflects the unequal degrees of access to education enjoyed by different social groups. In determining the level of support for democracy, formal education turns out to be the strongest factor: The higher a respondent's level of educational attainment, the greater that respondent's support for democracy is likely to be. In this respect, completing school with a matriculation degree or its equivalent is a crucial step that leads to a leap in support for democracy. In South Asia, someone with a graduate degree is seven times more likely to support democracy than is a nonliterate person. This relationship holds with varying degrees of intensity across all five countries of the region. The relationship is strongest in Nepal, which has the region's lowest literacy rate, and is weakest in Sri Lanka, which has the highest level of literacy. This suggests that once education ceases to be a scarce commodity, its effect begins to diminish. The effect of education is reinforced by exposure to the media: the higher the exposure, the greater the support for a democratic government.

Once the effects of formal education and media exposure are taken into account, other factors become less important than initially thought. For example, there is no difference in support for a democratic government among urban and rural residents; if anything, educated villagers tend to support democracy more than do equally educated urbanites. Additionally, among respondents with equal education there is only a weak relationship between being well-off and supporting democracy, and the relationship disappears if we look only at those who have completed schooling (see Figure 2). Finally, gender matters much less than it seemed at first. Men and women with equal levels of education and exposure to the media tend to support democratic government in equal measure.

While formal education explains a good deal of the differences in the levels of support for democracy, it does not quite explain the differences between countries. It does not explain, for instance, why a nonliterate person from India is twice as likely to support democracy as is a college graduate from Pakistan. For this we need to turn to another kind of learning, the learning that takes place through living in a democracy (see Figure 3). The overall ratio of support for democracy in these five countries

FIGURE 2—THE EFFECT OF INCOME VERSUS EDUCATION ON SUPPORT FOR DEMOCRACY

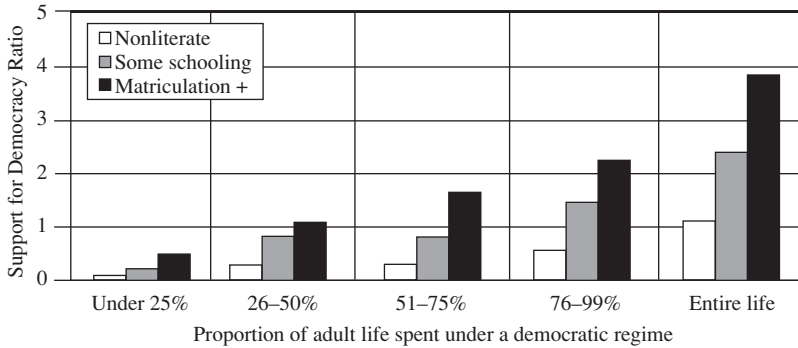


roughly follows the extent of their experience with democratic regimes: India and Sri Lanka are at the top, followed by Bangladesh and then Nepal and Pakistan. (Although Nepal has less democratic experience than Pakistan, its experience is more recent and therefore more influential for the current population.) This intuitive sense is confirmed by a careful analysis of the relationship between the proportion of one's adult life, since age fifteen, spent under a democratic regime and one's support for democracy. For those who have never or only very briefly experienced democracy, the SDR is 0.27—there are four nondemocrats to each democrat in this group. The ratio steadily goes up with an increase in the proportion of adult life spent under democracy and turns favorable (more democrats than nondemocrats) at about the 75 percent mark. For those who have never lived under a nondemocratic system, the SDR is 2.39; there are more than two democrats for each nondemocrat in this group. Thus what appears to be a difference in support for democracy among the countries is better seen as a difference in exposure to democracy.

A combination of these three factors—formal education, media exposure, and the informal political education that democracy provides—accounts for many of the differences in support for democracy in South Asia. The lowest support for democracy (SDR of 0.1; one democrat to ten nondemocrats) comes from nonliterate people who have never or only rarely experienced democracy. The level of support with the same degree of exposure to democracy is four times greater among those who have completed matriculation, and eleven times greater for those who have always lived under democracy but are nonliterate. The highest level of support for democracy (an SDR of 3.81, nearly four democrats to each nondemocrat) is recorded among those who have completed secondary school and have always lived in a democracy (see Figure 3).

The religious diversity that characterizes South Asia makes the region a promising laboratory in which to test the notion that believers in Islam are reluctant supporters of democracy. The fact that democracy has a checkered record in the two Muslim-majority countries of the region

FIGURE 3—COMBINED EFFECT OF EDUCATION AND EXPERIENCE OF DEMOCRACY



might lend strength to this suspicion. But a careful breakdown of the support for democracy among major religious and ethnic communities in each country shows otherwise. Followers of Islam are a significant presence in all five countries, but their level of support for democracy varies by country. If Muslims living in Pakistan record the lowest level of support for democracy, Muslims in Sri Lanka register the highest. Likewise, Hindus living in India, Nepal, and Pakistan register strikingly different levels of support for democracy. As a rule, different religious communities are closer to their compatriots in their attitude toward democracy than they are to their coreligionists in other countries.

What matters more than religion is the minority status of the community. In countries where the majority-minority question has acquired public salience, the minorities tend to invest themselves more heavily in democracy than the majority community does. Thus the Tamils and Muslims in Sri Lanka, Hindus and ethnic minorities in Bangladesh, and non-Punjabis in Pakistan express greater faith in democracy. This pattern, however, does not hold in India, where the majority-minority lines are drawn differently at different levels, leading to a crisscrossing and fuzziness of boundaries; nor does it hold in Nepal, where this is not yet a public-political issue. If we go by self-identification, the relationship is clear: Those who think that they belong to a minority tend to be more supportive of democracy.

If we see support for democracy not as a function of some immutable cultural trait but as a product of different kinds of learning, we can say that the current uneven distribution of support for democracy in the different countries of South Asia can, and is likely to, change in the future. As formal education, exposure to the media, and democratic experience become more widespread, we are likely to witness an upswing in the levels of support for democracy as a form of government.

How do we reconcile the widespread support for the idea of democracy with the somewhat shallow and uneven support for democracy as an

institutional form? Clearly there is no seamless translation of the idea of democracy into an agreed institutional form, nor is there a consensus on what is incompatible with democracy. One possible approach would be to treat general support for the idea of democracy as a surface phenomenon that cannot be taken at face value unless verified by support for the institutional form of democracy and the negation of nondemocratic alternatives. According to this approach, effective support for democracy in South Asia is fairly limited. One can hope that it will grow with the spread of education, a greater penetration of the mass media, and more experience with modern democracy.

There is, however, an alternative and richer method of interpreting this difference that merits careful consideration. In this approach, support for the idea of democracy and the institutional form of democracy are two distinct but not incompatible dimensions of expressing an aspiration for democracy. Thus support for the idea of democracy need not always be verified by the negation of apparently nondemocratic forms of government; a simultaneous affirmation of democracy and its alternatives need not be seen as a sign of incoherence or contradiction. Ordinary citizens may have many models of democracy in their minds that they are unable to articulate in coherent and general terms, especially if they have not had the benefit of formal education or exposure to the media, which reinforce each other.

Thus an overwhelming support for strong leaders and experts or limited support for religious leaders can be interpreted in different ways.⁴ It can be seen as a sign that support for democracy is vulnerable. It can also be viewed as an expression of unease with the received model of democracy and a desire to combine the existing model with other virtues: discipline (as exemplified by the army), order (as personified by a strong leader), wisdom (as embodied by experts) and values (as represented by religious leaders). People may see modern politics as much too competitive, faction-ridden, and devoid of values; hence the attraction that may be exerted by any alternative which promises to enforce order and reduce social divisions. While the people of South Asia do not wish to give up on popular rule, they appear willing to relax some of the legal-institutional requirements associated with a modern liberal democracy. Rather than choosing a nondemocratic government over a democratic one, they seem to be demanding a redefinition of what it means to be democratic.

An analysis of how the two dimensions—conceptual and practical—relate to each other shows that they are mutually reinforcing. In other words, stronger support for the idea of democracy in general terms is associated with a higher score on the index of support for democracy as an institutional form. The index of support for a democratic government directly and positively correlates with a belief in the suitability of democracy in one's own country. Those who believe that democracy is

suitable or very suitable for their country are much more likely to be democrats than those who find democracy unsuitable for their country. A similar, though less strong, relationship exists between being satisfied with the working of democracy and the index of support for a democratic government. The relationship is understandably weaker in Nepal and Pakistan, where respondents found it difficult to relate to the question about “satisfaction with the way democracy works in our country.” The more active one is in politics, the more likely one is to support democracy; and the higher the degree of one’s participation—from being a one-time voter to a regular voter to a participant in nonelectoral political activity and finally to being a member of political organizations—the higher is likely to be one’s support for democratic governance.

Support for the idea of democracy and support for the institutional form of democratic governance therefore fit together in a meaningful pattern that holds positive implications for democracy’s future in the region. Those who are more active participants and who feel more satisfied with the working of the political system are likely to be more supportive of a democratic government. In addition, the division between strong democrats and nondemocrats does not follow the social fault lines of these societies. Although democracy has yet to become the only game in town in the region, the factors that drive support for democracy are such that one can expect a strengthening of democratic sentiment where it is currently weak.

NOTES

1. For details of the study, see www.democracy-asia.org.

2. European and World Values Surveys Four-Wave Integrated Data File, 1981–2004, v.20060423, 2006, European Values Study Foundation and World Values Survey Association; available at www.worldvaluessurvey.org.

3. A complete set of supporting graphics can be found at www.journalofdemocracy.org/articles/gratis/YadavGraphics-19-1.pdf.

4. Nearly 40 percent of respondents agreed with the suggestion that “religious leaders rather than politicians” should make the major decisions in the country. The pattern across the five countries, however, is mixed: majority support in Bangladesh and Pakistan, ambivalence in Nepal, and clear rejection in Sri Lanka and India. This suggests that popular perceptions are shaped by the extent to which the state has adopted an official religion and has allowed religious leaders some space in the secular domain. The Sunni *ulama* play a significant political role in Pakistan, although they may not directly contest elections. The rise of the politics of Hindutva (“Hindu-ness”) in India and of Islamist parties in Bangladesh has heralded religious leaders’ entrance into electoral politics. Likewise, the political clout that Sri Lanka’s Buddhist monks wield is a clear indicator of the presence of religious leaders in the political process. Not surprisingly, religious leaders who enjoy political popularity do not formally demand the rejection of electoral democracy; instead, they use the mechanisms of electoral democracy to expand the role of religion in the political arena. Therefore, the distinction between politician and religious leader may not always be clear. Moreover, widespread support for religious leaders indicates a vulnerability to subdemocratic or parademocratic forms of politics.