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Who Doesn't Want Democracy? A Multilevel Analysis of Elite and Mass Attitudes

Brandon Gorman¹, Ijlal Naqvi², and Charles Kurzman³

Abstract

Despite its global rise in popularity, a significant number of people still oppose democracy. The present study evaluates three competing theories of opposition to democracy—developmentalist, culturalist, and elitist—using a series of multilevel regression models that combine individual- and country-level variables. Results of our statistical analyses suggest that (1) country-level indicators of social, political, and economic development are unrelated to individual support for democracy; (2) macro-cultural factors have mixed effects on individual support for democracy; and (3) individual income and education have strong effects on individual support for democracy, but this relationship is mediated by country-level economic development. Specifically, we find that, in relatively underdeveloped countries, high-income individuals are more likely to oppose democracy than low-income individuals. These results suggest that economic, social, and political development do not necessarily go together, most strongly supporting elitist approaches to studying opposition to democracy.

Keywords

development, democracy, political attitudes, elites, multilevel modeling

Introduction

Not everyone wants democracy. A century ago, antidemocracy movements outnumbered pro-democracy movements (Kurzman 1998; Huntington 1991; Markoff 2015). In the 1920s and 1930s, fascist movements undermined many elected governments in Europe, Asia, and Latin America, claiming that democracy threatened national unity and traditional values. In the 1960s, military coups brought down dozens of elected governments, arguing that democracy was disorderly and un conducive to economic growth.

In recent years, opposition to democracy has revived (Mounk 2018), but it remains rarer in the early twenty-first century than in earlier eras. Today, even antidemocracy movements claim to embrace democracy. Algerian President Abdul Aziz Butefliqa, for example, labeled his autocratic regime “an authentic democratic experiment” and “a pioneer of democracy in our region that so desperately needs it” (Gorman 2016). Movements such as Islamic parties that reject global

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rationales for democracy as Eurocentric often embrace democracy on alternative grounds that they consider more authentic (Gorman 2018; Kurzman and Naqvi 2010). Democracy has become such a positive signifier that almost every government in the world—including many unelected governments—has signed or ratified the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, which enshrines the right of citizens “To vote and to be elected at genuine periodic elections which shall be by universal and equal suffrage and shall be held by secret ballot, guaranteeing the free expression of the will of the electors” (United Nations 1996: Article 25b).

Yet democracy is not universally revered. The World Values Survey (2014), conducted in 99 countries and territories since 1981, has found that 1 to 42 percent of respondents say that “having a democratic political system” is “fairly bad” or “very bad” (the highest percentage was reported in Russia in 1995). Who doesn’t want democracy? The present study uses hierarchical linear modeling techniques (HLM) on World Values Survey data describing political attitudes of more than 280,000 respondents across 87 countries between 1994 and 2011 to investigate the socioeconomic and cultural bases of antidemocracy attitudes.

Opposition to Democracy: Three Approaches

There are three major social-scientific explanations for opposition to democracy. One prominent approach is developmentalism, which emphasizes economic and social development as a prerequisite for pro-democratic attitudes. This approach was crystallized in a famous article by Seymour Martin Lipset in 1959:

From Aristotle down to the present, men have argued that only in a wealthy society in which relatively few citizens lived in real poverty could a situation exist in which the mass of the population could intelligently participate in politics and could develop the self-restraint necessary to avoid succumbing to the appeals of irresponsible demagogues. (Lipset 1959:75)

This self-restraint involved a commitment to democratic procedures, which, Lipset argued, was expressed less frequently among poor and less-educated individuals within a given country, and less frequently among individuals in poorer and less-educated countries than in wealthier and better-educated countries. Although he acknowledged exceptions, Lipset proposed that pro-democracy attitudes generally translated into political institutions, acting as the mediating variable that enabled “the factors subsumed under economic development [to] carry with it the political correlate of democracy” (p. 80). Without appropriate levels of social and economic development, Lipset argued, attitudes would not be “conducive to democracy” and democratic institutions could only be considered “premature” (p. 72).

Not everyone agreed that socioeconomic development would lead to pro-democratic attitudes and then to democratic institutions. Samuel Huntington, for example, suggested that “in practice,” social development “always involves change in and usually the disintegration of a traditional political system, but it does not necessarily involve significant movement toward a modern political system” (Huntington 1968:35). Instead, as development undermined extended families and other traditional social systems, it could produce attitudes of “distrust and hostility—the war of one against all” and “alienation and anomie” (p. 37)—and not necessarily pro-democracy attitudes.

Huntington also identified what he termed the *king’s dilemma*, which he applied not just to monarchies but also to military regimes and one-party states: To the extent that centralizing autocrats succeed in generating social and economic development, they also generate attitudes that oppose autocracy and favor political participation (pp. 143, 191). These demands may not necessarily take democratic forms, he noted, and he suggested that democratic demands were less likely among poor, less-educated, and rural populations, who he saw as more interested in material than political goals.

These foundational debates of the 1950s and 1960s have generated a massive empirical literature that has generally confirmed the developmentalist proposition associating greater wealth and education with greater support for democracy. Much of this literature focuses on the macro-institutional level, such as Przeworski et al.'s (2000) careful comparison of national-level data on economic development in democratic and undemocratic regimes, which found that countries whose per-capita income was less than \$2,000 (1985 U.S. dollars) were less likely to sustain democratic regimes than wealthier countries.

The spread of cross-national attitudinal surveys has permitted analysis at the individual attitudinal level as well (e.g., Dalton 2004; Evans and Whitefield 1995; Haerpfer 2008; Inglehart 2003; Inglehart and Welzel 2010). Among the most systematic of these analyses is by Ronald Inglehart and Christian Welzel (2005), drawing on the World Values Survey. They argue that socioeconomic development generates changes in individual values that support democratic institutions. The most important value change is not necessarily attitudes toward democracy itself, they propose, but rather a broad set of attitudes toward freedom of speech, giving people more say in government, tolerance of homosexuality, willingness to sign a petition, interpersonal trust, and other factors that they combine into an index of "self-expression values." This index correlates strongly with pro-democracy attitudes, although they view some support for democracy as "instrumental"—deeming democracy to be favorable for outcomes such as economic growth—rather than "intrinsic."

A second approach to nondemocratic attitudes may be called culturalist. It focuses less on changing levels of socioeconomic development than on relatively unchanging cultural characteristics. By the early 1990s, both Huntington and Lipset, who had earlier emphasized developmentalist factors, had come to embrace culturalist explanations. In a famous essay in 1993, Huntington repeated his longstanding proposition that at certain "levels of economic and social development . . . autocratic forms of government become inappropriate and efforts to introduce democracy become stronger" (Huntington 1993:32). However, this process was trumped by "cultural characteristics and differences" that he viewed as "less mutable and hence less easily compromised and resolved than political and economic ones" (p. 27). (Two years earlier, writing about waves of democratization, Huntington had made the opposite point: "Cultures historically are dynamic" and "the dominant beliefs and attitudes in a society change. . . . Arguments that particular cultures are permanent obstacles to development in one direction or another should be viewed with a certain skepticism" [Huntington 1991:210–11].) In place of developmentalism, Huntington now emphasized cultural determinants of pro-democracy and other attitudes: "Western ideas of individualism, liberalism, constitutionalism, human rights, equality, liberty, the rule of law, democracy, free markets, the separation of church and state," which "often have little resonance in Islamic, Confucian, Japanese, Hindu, Buddhist or Orthodox cultures" (Huntington 1993:40).

Lipset also revised his earlier developmentalism in the 1990s to incorporate a culturalist approach: "Cross-national historical evaluations of the correlates of democracy have found that cultural factors appear even more important than economic ones" (Lipset 1994:5). Lipset offered the caveat that "belief systems change" and suggested that development might trump culture over the long run, since "the rise of capitalism, a large middle class, an organized working class, increased wealth, and education are associated with secularism and the institutions of civil society which help create autonomy for the state and facilitate other preconditions for democracy." Nevertheless, Lipset proposed, "We are fooling ourselves if we ignore the continuing dysfunctional effects of a number of cultural values and the institutions linked to them" (p. 7).

Similarly, Inglehart and Welzel (2005) and Ronald Inglehart and Christian Welzel (2010) incorporate both "economic *and* socio-cultural history" (Inglehart and Welzel 2010:553): "Rising levels of existential security are conducive to a shift from traditional values to secular-rational values, and from survival values to self-expression values," they argue, and at the same time, "a society's religious values leave a lasting imprint" (Inglehart and Welzel 2010:553).

One of the most hotly contested aspects of the culturalist approach involves Muslims' attitudes toward democracy. A central figure in this debate is Bernard Lewis, a medievalist whose work was cited by both Huntington and Lipset. Lewis acknowledges that "we can discern elements in Islamic law and tradition that could assist the development of one or another form of democracy." However, he argues, Muslim-majority countries are a long way from prioritizing these elements. Prior to the twentieth century, they lacked a word corresponding to the term *citizen* "because the idea—of the citizen as participant, of citizenship as participation—is not there" (Lewis 1996:55). Because church and state are rarely conceived as distinct, "there are still no equivalents for the words 'layman' and 'laity.'" Moreover, Lewis concludes, attitudes are unlikely to change quickly. "Democracy cannot be born like Aphrodite from the sea foam. It comes in slow stages" (p. 62).¹

By contrast, the analysis of cross-national attitudinal surveys has found widespread support for democracy among Muslims. Two major cross-national surveys, the World Values Survey (Norris and Inglehart 2002) and the Gallup World Poll (Esposito and Mogahed 2007), found no difference between Muslims' and non-Muslims' attitudes toward democracy globally, and a study of World Values Survey data in eight countries containing both Muslim and non-Muslim populations found no consistent or significant difference between the two sets of respondents (Esmer 2002). On the other hand, a recent re-analysis of World Values Survey data found that Muslims were slightly less supportive of democracy than non-Muslims (Fish 2011). Our study reexamines these results in an attempt to reconcile the divergent findings.

A third approach to nondemocratic attitudes, elitism, is the inverse of the developmentalist approach. In this view, opposition to democracy is most prevalent not among the poor and uneducated but among elites. This was the argument that Karl Marx made regarding the French revolution of 1848: Capitalists supported "bourgeois democracy" only so long as they could dominate it. When faced with a choice between democratic ideals and the protection of economic privilege, the bourgeoisie abandoned democracy (Marx [1852] 1978). A century later, Joseph Schumpeter generalized this approach beyond France. Schumpeter predicted that as socialist parties appeal to the self-interest of the working classes who form the majority of capitalist societies, calling the bourgeoisie's economic privileges into question, the bourgeoisie would recoil from democratic principles. "So many people have renounced, and so many more are going to renounce, allegiance to the standards of capitalist society that on this ground alone democracy is bound to work with increasing friction" (Schumpeter [1942] 1994:301).

Recent decades have not been kind to Schumpeter's prediction of widespread renunciation of capitalism. However, his theory of bourgeois mistrust of democracy has been taken up by a series of scholars. With special reference to Latin America, some scholars noted the role of the bourgeoisie in undermining democratic regimes in the mid-twentieth century (Cardoso and Faletto 1979; O'Donnell 1973). Others have proposed that the bourgeoisie's support for democracy is contingent on their judgment of whether the system serves its economic interests (Alexander 2002; Bellin 2000; Rueschemeyer, Huber, and Stephens 1992). For example, Scott Greenwood (2008) contrasted business communities in Latin America that supported a return to democracy in the 1980s with business communities in the Middle East that feared democracy might lead to unwelcome policies and civil strife.

Another line of research has generalized this approach beyond the specific case of the bourgeoisie to apply to elites more generally. John Higley and Michael Burton argue, in one of the strongest versions of this approach, that in most countries of the world, "elites are divided into warring factions, each seeking political supremacy at virtually any cost and by virtually any means." The threat of "ruthlessness and violence" is common. "With deep mutual distrusts and little security, elites typically regard open competitions for votes as simply another way by which enemies will undermine them" (Higley and Burton 2006:185; see also Higley and Burton 1989). John Higley and Michael Burton (2006) further propose that elite commitment to democracy

“always forms *before* liberal democratic precepts and practices are adopted by any large number of citizens” (p. 3)—in other words, that elite support for democracy is relatively rare, but still greater than or equal to mass support for democracy.² An alternative version holds that elites’ views of democracy are driven primarily by “fear of expropriation, not redistribution, . . . since richer citizens have more to lose from predatory autocrats”; in this formulation, the bourgeoisie supports democratization only when its assets become too substantial to shield from expropriation by other elites (Ansell and Samuels 2014:174). Empirical findings are mixed on this: Some find that elites are more politically tolerant than nonelites (Sullivan et al. 1993), while others caution that elites often attempt to restrict contestation, policy agendas, and the franchise (Karl 1990), and may not be so committed to democracy “when core interests . . . are made vulnerable” (Stein 1998:348).

Perhaps the most famous formulation of the elitist position is Daron Acemoglu and James A. Robinson’s (2005) formal economic argument that elites generally oppose democracy because majority rule threatens their control of power and resources. They propose that elites and non-elites “have opposing preferences over different political institutions, democracy and dictatorship,” and, all things being equal, “the majority of citizens will be on the side of democracy and the elites will be on the side of nondemocracy” (pp. 16, 22). In this account, elites relax their opposition to democracy only when the costs of maintaining control are greater than the costs of democratic concessions. Acemoglu and Robinson acknowledge that wealthy and better-educated countries are more likely to maintain democracies than poor countries, but they reject the developmentalist argument that social and economic development leads directly to pro-democracy attitudes or institutions (pp. 53-57; see also Acemoglu et al. 2005, 2008). One of the rare empirical examinations of elite attitudes toward democracy, Daniel Stevens, Benjamin G. Bishin, and Robert R. Barr’s (2006) study of six Latin American countries, confirms that elites are most likely to eschew democratic principles in the face of economic threat.

We propose that this sense of threat may vary in rich and poor countries, leading elites to hold different views of democracy in these contexts. Our hypothesis is that elites in poor and less-educated countries may have more qualms about democracy than elites in wealthy and better-educated countries. This hypothesis emerges from the supposition that majority rule may be viewed by elites as more costly when nonelites are poorer. In a country where much of the population lacks basic necessities and public services, elites may fear that democracy will involve expropriation or heavy taxation to pay for the expansion of the educational system to cover all families, the creation of sanitation and other public health measures on a national scale, and the provision of medical care, old-age pensions, and support for unemployed and disabled individuals—the sorts of major investments that states in the current era are now routinely expected to undertake (Meyer et al. 1997; Meyer 2010). In wealthier countries, where many of these investments are already in place and policy debates generally focus on marginal shifts, elites may view the demands of the majority to be less threatening and, therefore, be more supportive of democracy. Moreover, elites in wealthy and better-educated countries may have more confidence in their ability to manage representative institutions in defense of their privileges: “As long as you let us call the shots,” in Jascha Mounk’s summary, “we will pretend to let you rule” (Mounk 2018:54).

These three approaches offer contrasting expectations regarding opposition to democracy. The developmentalist approach proposes that both national-level and individual-level measures of economic and social development will be associated with pro-democratic attitudes. The culturalist approach, on the other hand, suggests that largely static cultural contexts structure attitudes to democracy, with individuals in Protestant and English-speaking countries consistently among the most pro-democracy and individuals in majority-Muslim countries expressing the most opposition to democracy. Finally, our version of the elitist approach leads us to expect an interaction effect between the national and individual characteristics, with elites in poor and less-educated countries expressing less support for democracy than elites in wealthy and better-educated countries.

Data and Method

Dependent Variables

To adjudicate between the three major social-scientific explanations for opposition to democracy outlined previously, we use data from the third, fourth, fifth, and sixth waves of the World Values Survey, in which questions about democracy were posed to more than 280,000 respondents across 87 countries from 1994 to 2011. Questions about democracy were not asked during earlier waves.

Previous scholarship on individual attitudes toward democracy has struggled to create indices with World Values Survey data. Such indices do not consistently meet minimum Cronbach's alpha scores of 0.70 (Ciftci 2010; Robbins and Tessler 2012), and Gal Ariely and Eldad Davidov (2011) find that the underlying construct that these indices are meant to measure is not stable across countries. Instead of attempting to create an index, we follow Robbert Maseland and André van Hoorn (2011) and Ben W. Ansell and David J. Samuels (2014:194-200) in modeling support for democracy using a spectrum of dependent variables. First, we include two items on the World Values Survey that probe respondents' diffuse support for democracy:

I'm going to describe various types of political systems and ask what you think about each as a way of governing this country. For each one, would you say it is a very good, fairly good, fairly bad, or very bad way of governing this country?

Having a democratic political system.

I'm going to read off some things that people sometimes say about a democratic political system. Could you please tell me if you agree strongly, agree, disagree, or disagree strongly, after I read each one of them?

Democracy may have problems but it's better than any other form of government

These questions tap into evaluations of general rather than specific manifestations of democracy (Ciftci 2010), thus allowing respondents to separate attitudes toward political authorities from attitudes toward fundamental aspects of democracy as a system of governance (Easton 1965).

In addition to diffuse support for democracy, we follow Inglehart and Welzel (2005) and Christian Welzel (2007) in including two variables that measure support for an autocratic "strong leader" and for "army rule":

I'm going to describe various types of political systems and ask what you think about each as a way of governing this country. For each one, would you say it is a very good, fairly good, fairly bad, or very bad way of governing this country?

Having a strong leader who does not have to bother with parliament and elections.

Having the army rule.

In their original form, all of these survey items employ four-item response scales. However, because our analyses employ linear regression models, we transform all variables into their reflected square roots, as suggested by statistical literature (Tabachnick and Fidell 2013). For individual i , the transformation for each dependent variable is:

$$Y_i = \sqrt{K - X_i},$$

where Y_i is the value of the transformed dependent variable, K is a constant from which each score is subtracted so that the smallest possible score is 1,³ and X_i is the original value of the dependent variable. Finally, we coded all responses so that pro-democracy attitudes are indicated by higher values in all four survey items.

Independent Variables

To test hypotheses related to the developmentalist approach, we merged individual-level responses from the World Values Survey with a number of country-level datasets. As an indicator of economic development, we use logged gross domestic product (GDP) per capita in 2011 U.S. dollars from the World Bank's World Development Indicators dataset (World Bank 2015). As a proxy for social development, we use country-level average years of schooling (Barro and Lee 2013). We operationalize political development using the "liberal democracy" index from the Varieties of Democracy dataset (V-Dem 7.1), with higher scores indicating a more democratic political system (Coppedge et al. 2017). (As a robustness check, we also ran our models with both the "electoral democracy" index from V-Dem and the Polity measure of democracy [Marshall 2014] and found similar results.) Because all of these data are measured yearly, we use the values for each country for each year in which the World Values Survey was conducted.

To test culturalist approaches to the study of support for democracy, we follow Inglehart and Welzel (2005) in creating a series of binary variables that place countries in distinct cultural zones. "How 'real' are these zones?" Inglehart and Welzel (2005:65) ask. Their answer is that, although other scholars might group countries differently, the cultural zones they propose are "both conceptually and empirically justifiable" (p. 65). While Inglehart and Welzel have proposed at least five different categorizations of cultural zones since 2001 (see online appendix),⁴ we use a more limited set of zones identified by culturalist scholarship as most important for determining support for democracy. First, following Inglehart and Welzel (2005:67), we combine "Protestant Europe and all of the English-speaking zone except Ireland . . . into a broad historically Protestant zone" that the culturalist approach expects to be most supportive of democracy. We also include a category for majority-Muslim countries, identified using the Association of Religion Data Archives (ARDA; 2011), since the culturalist approach often characterizes Islamic contexts as particularly unsupportive toward democracy. We compare attitudes in these two zones to the rest of the world and to each other.⁵

We use two variables at the individual level to test the elitist approach to support for democracy, both drawn from the World Values Survey: a six- to 11-category measure of the respondent's highest level of education, and a 10-category measure of self-reported income. We use these quasi-continuous measures to operationalize aspects of elite status, rather than a threshold, to avoid arbitrary cut-offs that would differ across countries. Both of these measures are centered by country-year to reduce the confounding influence of between-group variation, and then z-standardized to have a mean of 0 and a standard deviation of 1 to aid comparisons between the two variables. The resultant variables measure the difference, in standard deviations, between each respondent and the average respondent in a given country-year. As a robustness check, we also used a binary indicator of elite status using a respondent's stated occupation, with respondents describing themselves as managers, professional workers, and supervisors in nonmanual professions coded as elites; results were similar to the results reported here. Finally, we include two individual-level control variables: age, measured in decades; and gender, coded 1 for female respondents and 0 for male respondents.

Modeling

We employ hierarchical modeling techniques to test hypotheses from all three theoretical approaches. Much previous scholarship on attitudes toward democracy has either a single-country case study to

focus on individual-level correlates of support for democracy (e.g., Collins and Owen 2012; Robbins and Tessler 2012; Tezcür et al. 2012); controlled for country-level covariates by including fixed-effects terms in their regression models (e.g., Ciftci 2010, 2013; Hofmann 2004); or focused on country-level covariates by aggregating individual-level variables into country-level means (e.g., Paxton 2002; Welzel 2007). A handful of other studies of support for democracy (e.g., Kotzian 2011; Maseland and van Hoorn 2011) have also employed hierarchical regression modeling.

Hierarchical modeling accounts for the nested nature of the World Values Survey, which measures individual characteristics of respondents located within country waves. With data in this form, hierarchical modeling is superior to simpler single-level regression modeling because it incorporates submodels and nested error terms that correct for correlated error at both levels of analysis, allowing us to simultaneously model both individual-level and country-wave-level relationships, as well as interactions between variables at both levels. Because timing can affect survey responses, we include fixed effects terms for survey wave in all models to control for unmeasured wave-level effects.⁶ We employ a series of random-intercept linear regression models using country wave as our grouping variable. All of the individual-level slopes are fixed across country waves. Cultural zones are included as country-level fixed effects. Following Guillermo Cordero and Pablo Simon (2016), we use robust standard errors clustered around countries, across all waves in which the country appears in the World Values Survey dataset, to account for unmeasured country effects.

Since our dependent variables are ordinal rather than continuous, readers may wonder whether linear regression models are appropriate for our data. We chose these models because ordinal logistic regression models are notoriously difficult to interpret, and multilevel mixed-effects versions of these models may produce biased estimates (Hsiao 2014). According to a study using Monte Carlo simulations, linear regression models on transformed dependent variables are a suitable alternative to more complicated ordered-response models (Riedl and Geishecker 2014). As a robustness check, we performed two additional supplemental analyses (not reported): (1) a series of mixed-effects regression analyses with untransformed dependent variables treated as continuous and (2) a series of hierarchical generalized linear models for ordinal outcomes. Both sets of analyses produced similar substantive results to the models presented in this manuscript.

Missing Data

Data were dropped for country waves that did not include a particular dependent variable or lacked one or more country-level independent variables.⁷ Of the remaining observations, approximately 10 percent have missing values for at least one individual-level variable. For individual-level missing data, we imputed missing data points using iterative chained equations, creating five imputations for each dependent variable and transforming all variables before imputing (von Hippel 2009).

Analysis

Let us look first at the national level. As displayed in scatterplots in Figure 1, none of the three country-level development indicators is consistently correlated with the two survey items measuring diffuse support for democracy: whether respondents “strongly agree” or “agree” that democracy is better than other systems, and whether having a democratic political system was “very good” or “fairly good.” The scatterplots for these questions are almost flat (past studies report inconsistent findings: Fuchs-Schündeln and Schündeln 2015:1146; Inglehart and Welzel 2005:263–64; Maseland and van Hoorn 2011:493). However, there does appear to be a bivariate country-level relationship between development indicators and opposition to autocracy: the higher the GDP (Figure 1a), the more years of schooling in the country (Figure 1b), and the more democratic the political institutions (Figure 1c), the more respondents said that having a strong

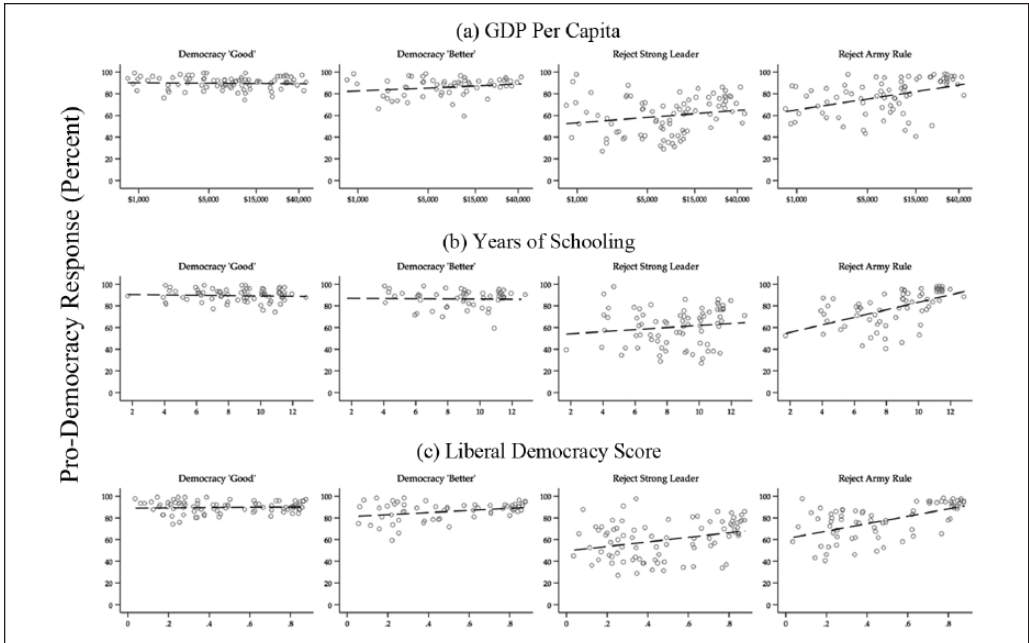


Figure 1. Scatterplots of country-level independent variables by country-level support for democracy. Note. These plots illustrate the country-level relationship between each country-level dependent variable (x-axis) and support for democracy (y-axis). GDP per capita (a) is reported in logged scale. GDP = gross domestic product.

unelected ruler or army rule was “fairly bad” or “very bad.” (Recall that these two questions are reverse coded so that pro-democracy responses are ordered consistently with the other questions about democracy.) This relationship is strongest with regard to opposition to army rule. Taken together, these results provide inconsistent preliminary support for the developmentalist approach to support for democracy.

Support for democracy in three cultural zones is displayed in Figure 2. In keeping with many culturalist approaches, respondents in Protestant and English-speaking countries were among the most likely to give pro-democracy responses. The results for other cultural zones, however, do not support the culturalist approach consistently. Majority-Muslim countries, which culturalist approaches frequently cite as inhospitable toward democracy, rank low on two specific questions about nondemocratic institutions (rejecting strong leaders and army rule) but are similar to the Protestant/English zone on the two measures of diffuse support for democracy. Respondents in the rest of the world seem to consistently be less pro-democracy than respondents in the Protestant/English zone. (When broken out further into additional cultural zones, in results not shown here, the findings are also mixed, with inconsistent variation across the four indicators of support for democracy.) These preliminary findings confirm the culturalist observation about Protestant/English support for democracy but do not consistently confirm the culturalist suggestion that Muslims are opposed to democracy.

In a multivariate framework (Tables 1–4, Model 1), national-level indicators of development again fail to predict individual-level support for democracy consistently. The coefficient for economic development is positive but not statistically significant for any dependent variable, while the coefficient for political development is positive and significant for two (rejecting strong leaders and army rule). Years of schooling, the indicator for social development, is *negatively* correlated with the two questions about diffuse support for democracy (democracy “good” and democracy “better”) and only positively correlated with the rejection of army rule, contrary to the developmentalist approach’s expectation of consistent positive correlations.⁸

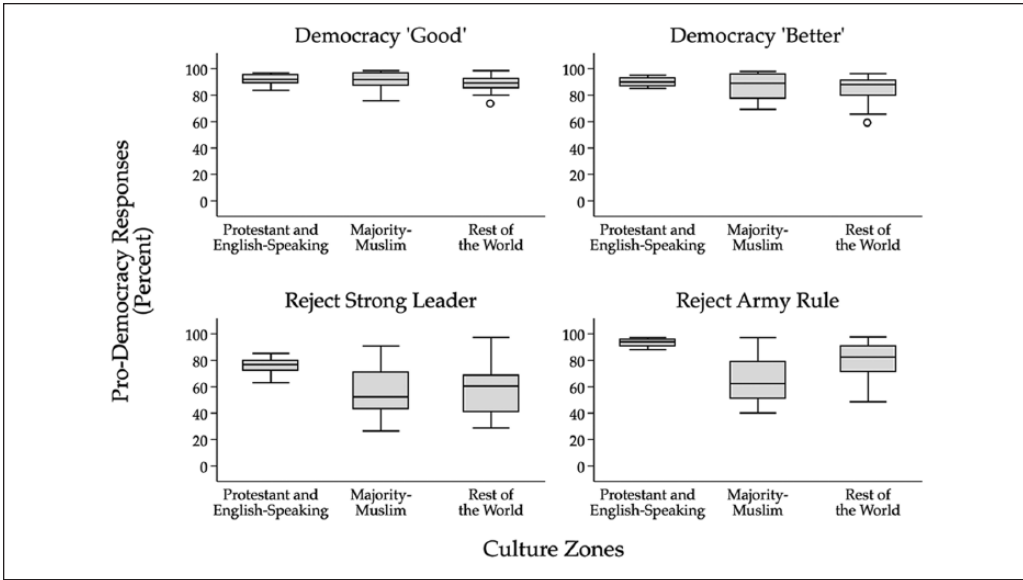


Figure 2. Boxplots of country-level support for democracy by cultural zone.

Note. This boxplot illustrates the relative support for democracy within each cultural zone. The y-axis measures support for democracy as measured by percentage of respondents in each zone who gave pro-democracy responses to each of the dependent variables. The center line indicates the median country-level response, the top and bottom of the box indicate 75th and 25th percentiles, the whiskers represent maximum and minimum adjacent values within 1.5 times the interquartile range, and dots represent outlier cases beyond the adjacent cases.

When cultural zones are included in the multivariate model (Tables 1–4, Model 2), the coefficients for development variables remain largely unchanged, though the coefficient for political development reaches statistical significance at the $p < .05$ level for one dependent variable (democracy “better”).⁹ These models show that respondents in the Protestant/English cultural zone (the omitted category) are no more pro-democracy than respondents in majority-Muslim countries for any of our dependent variables. In supplemental analyses using “Rest of the world” as the reference category, Muslim-majority countries are more pro-democracy than other non-Protestant/English countries for three of four of our dependent variables. Thus majority-Muslim countries do not appear to be especially hostile environments for pro-democracy attitudes, contrary to the culturalist approach.¹⁰

When individual-level indicators are added to the model in a multilevel regression framework (Tables 1–4, Model 3), the country-level indicators do not change in sign or significance.¹¹ Of the two control variables, age is positively correlated with all indicators of support for democracy—Older people are more pro-democracy, and women are less pro-democracy, according to three out of four indicators. As developmentalist theories anticipate, individual educational attainment is positively associated with all four indicators of support for democracy. Coefficients for individual income are also positive but only statistically significant for the two measures of diffuse support for democracy (democracy “good” and democracy “better”). The positive individual-level coefficients for education and income provide some confirmation for developmentalist theories and run counter to elitist theories.

However, individual income and education are not associated with support for democracy in poor countries the same way that they are in rich countries. To examine this difference, we introduce cross-level interactions between the individual-level variables and country-level economic development (Tables 1–4, Model 4). Across the four dependent variables, the interaction terms for income and economic development¹² and for education and economic development¹³ are statistically significant for three out of four dependent variables. Combining the direct and

Table 1. Hierarchical Linear Regressions on Support for Democracy—Democracy “Good.”

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
National development				
GDP/capita (logged)	0.013 (0.01)	−0.001 (0.01)	−0.001 (0.01)	−0.001 (0.01)
Liberal democracy	0.052 (0.05)	0.065 (0.04)	0.061 (0.04)	0.061 (0.04)
Years of schooling	−0.014* (0.01)	−0.012* (0.01)	−0.013* (0.01)	−0.013* (0.01)
Cultural zones				
Majority-Muslim		0.019 (0.04)	0.016 (0.04)	0.016 (0.04)
Rest of the world		−0.082** (0.03)	−0.080** (0.03)	−0.080** (0.03)
Individual level				
Income			0.006** (0.00)	−0.026* (0.01)
Education			0.025*** (0.00)	−0.036* (0.02)
Age			0.009*** (0.00)	0.010*** (0.00)
Female			−0.012*** (0.00)	−0.012*** (0.00)
Cross-level interactions				
Income × GDP				0.004** (0.00)
Education × GDP				0.007*** (0.00)
Survey waves				
1999–2004	0.032 (0.02)	0.027 (0.02)	0.027 (0.02)	0.027 (0.02)
2005–2009	0.038* (0.02)	0.038* (0.02)	0.038* (0.02)	0.038* (0.02)
2010–2014	0.027 (0.02)	0.028 (0.02)	0.027 (0.02)	0.027 (0.02)
Constant	0.695*** (0.09)	0.853*** (0.11)	0.829*** (0.11)	0.828*** (0.11)
N	242,087	242,087	242,087	242,087
Countries	74	74	74	74
Country waves	162	162	162	162

Note. “Protestant/ English” is the reference category for cultural zones and 1995–1998 is the reference category for survey waves. GDP = gross domestic product.

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

interaction effects, we find that income is associated with higher support for democracy only in middle-income and wealthy countries. Figure 3 illustrates the marginal effect of a moving from the lowest to highest level of income on support for democracy at various levels of GDP per capita: for three of four indicators of support for democracy, the mean marginal effect is statistically indistinguishable from zero in countries with a relatively low GDP per capita and positive in countries with a relatively high GDP per capita.

Figure 4 illustrates the marginal effect of moving from the lowest to highest level of education on support for democracy at various levels of GDP per capita: the mean marginal effect of education remains generally positive even in poor countries, but the positive effect is smaller in relatively poor countries than in relatively wealthy countries.

These cross-level interactions run partly in favor of elitist approaches to the study of attitudes toward democracy: Elites in poorer countries are less pro-democracy than elites in wealthier countries. At the same time, according to the World Values Survey’s indicators, individual income and education are not *negatively* associated with support for democracy in poorer countries, contrary to the elitist approach.

Conclusion

Why do some people oppose democracy? This paper attempts to adjudicate among three approaches to attitudes toward democracy: a “developmentalist” approach that emphasizes economic, political, and social development as generating pro-democracy attitudes; a “culturalist”

Table 2. Hierarchical Linear Regressions on Support for Democracy—Democracy “Better.”

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
National development				
GDP/capita (logged)	0.019 (0.02)	0.001 (0.02)	0.002 (0.02)	0.002 (0.02)
Liberal democracy	0.116 (0.06)	0.161* (0.08)	0.153 (0.08)	0.153 (0.08)
Years of schooling	−0.022** (0.01)	−0.019** (0.01)	−0.020*** (0.01)	−0.020*** (0.01)
Cultural zones				
Majority Muslim		0.007 (0.05)	0.007 (0.05)	0.007 (0.06)
Rest of the world		−0.068* (0.03)	−0.068* (0.03)	−0.068* (0.03)
Individual level				
Income			0.006* (0.00)	−0.003 (0.02)
Education			0.021*** (0.00)	−0.021 (0.01)
Age			0.009*** (0.00)	0.010*** (0.00)
Female			−0.010*** (0.00)	−0.010*** (0.00)
Cross-level interactions				
Income × GDP				0.001 (0.00)
Education × GDP				0.005** (0.00)
Survey waves				
1999–2004	−0.005 (0.02)	−0.012 (0.02)	−0.012 (0.02)	−0.012 (0.02)
Constant	0.659*** (0.13)	0.809*** (0.13)	0.780*** (0.13)	0.780*** (0.13)
N	94,393	94,393	94,393	94,393
Countries	49	49	49	49
Country waves	64	64	64	64

Note. “Protestant/ English” is the reference category for cultural zones and 1995–1998 is the reference category for survey waves. GDP = gross domestic product.

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

approach that emphasizes the level of cultural compatibility with democracy; and an “elitist” approach that emphasizes the resistance of elites to democracy in poor countries.

We use individual-level data from the World Values Survey—including four indicators of attitudes toward democracy—and national-level data on development and cultural zones in hierarchical models that allow us to compare all three approaches. The evidence is not entirely conclusive:

- Indicators of economic and political development are rarely correlated with attitudes toward democracy; however, indicators of social development (using educational attainment as a proxy) are positively correlated with support for democracy at the individual level but not at the national level.
- Cultural zones differ in their levels of support for democracy but not always in the order that culturalist approaches expect: Protestant European and English-speaking countries are among the most favorable toward democracy, consistent with culturalist approaches, but individuals in Muslim-majority countries, which culturalist approaches have held to be especially antithetical to pro-democracy attitudes, are no less pro-democratic than Protestant and English-speaking countries, and are more pro-democratic than the rest of the world according to some measures.
- Individual income and educational attainment are associated with more opposition to democracy in poor countries than in rich countries, as the elitist approach suggests. However, contrary to the elitist approach, individual income and education are not negatively correlated with pro-democracy attitudes in poor countries.

Table 3. Hierarchical Linear Regressions on Support for Democracy—Reject Strong Leader.

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
National development				
GDP/capita (logged)	0.029 (0.02)	0.009 (0.02)	0.009 (0.02)	0.009 (0.02)
Liberal democracy	0.180* (0.07)	0.155* (0.07)	0.154* (0.07)	0.154* (0.07)
Years of schooling	−0.008 (0.01)	−0.007 (0.01)	−0.007 (0.01)	−0.007 (0.01)
Cultural zones				
Majority Muslim		0.007 (0.04)	0.008 (0.04)	0.008 (0.04)
Rest of the world		−0.144*** (0.03)	−0.143*** (0.03)	−0.143*** (0.03)
Individual level				
Income			0.002 (0.00)	−0.055*** (0.02)
Education			0.028*** (0.00)	−0.086*** (0.02)
Age			0.004* (0.00)	0.005*** (0.00)
Female			0.000 (0.00)	−0.000 (0.00)
Cross-level interactions				
Income × GDP				0.006*** (0.00)
Education × GDP				0.013*** (0.00)
Survey waves				
1999–2004	0.029 (0.03)	0.027 (0.03)	0.027 (0.03)	0.027 (0.03)
2005–2009	0.000 (0.02)	0.005 (0.02)	0.005 (0.02)	0.005 (0.02)
2010–2014	−0.040 (0.03)	−0.029 (0.03)	−0.029 (0.03)	−0.029 (0.03)
Constant	0.251 (0.19)	0.551* (0.22)	0.538* (0.22)	0.536* (0.22)
N	243,180	243,180	243,180	243,180
Countries	74	74	74	74
Country waves	163	163	163	163

Note. “Protestant/English” is the reference category for cultural zones, and 1995–1998 is the reference category for survey waves. GDP = gross domestic product.

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

On balance, the evidence is weakest for the developmentalist approach: It fails to predict who favors or opposes democracy except through individual-level education, which has not been a major component of developmentalist theories of democracy (but see Kurzman and Leahey 2004, who argued that intellectuals have sometimes provided a social basis for democratization). The evidence for culturalist approaches is decidedly mixed: They correctly anticipate the culture zone with the highest level of support for democracy but incorrectly identify Muslim populations as the site of greatest opposition to democracy. The evidence is also mixed for elitist approaches: Rich and educated people in poor countries are less likely to support democracy than rich and educated people in rich countries, although they are no less likely to support democracy than poor and uneducated people in poor countries.

How much do these attitudes matter for the emergence and survival of democratic political institutions? To provide a tentative answer to this question, we employ a series of country-level models predicting the level of democracy in each country wave included in previous analyses, using three variables: (1) the average level of support for democracy (mean response for each of our four indicators of attitudes toward democracy in each country wave), (2) the slope of individual income’s effect on attitudes toward democracy (the correlation coefficient between individual income and attitudes toward democracy in each country wave),¹⁴ and (3) national-level economic development (the logged per capita GDP of each country wave).

The dependent variable in Table 5 is the V-Dem liberal democracy index. (In previous tables and figures, the level of democracy was an independent variable, and attitudes toward democracy were

Table 4. Hierarchical Linear Regressions on Support for Democracy—Reject Army Rule.

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
National development				
GDP/capita (logged)	0.015 (0.02)	0.009 (0.02)	0.008 (0.02)	0.008 (0.02)
Liberal democracy	0.236*** (0.06)	0.209*** (0.06)	0.205*** (0.06)	0.205*** (0.06)
Years of schooling	0.018** (0.01)	0.016* (0.01)	0.016* (0.01)	0.016* (0.01)
Cultural zones				
Majority Muslim		−0.060 (0.05)	−0.057 (0.05)	−0.056 (0.05)
Rest of the world		−0.054 (0.03)	−0.052 (0.03)	−0.052 (0.03)
Individual level				
Income			0.002 (0.00)	−0.035* (0.02)
Education			0.036*** (0.00)	0.010 (0.02)
Age			0.010*** (0.00)	0.010*** (0.00)
Female			−0.012*** (0.00)	−0.012*** (0.00)
Cross-level interactions				
Income × GDP				0.004* (0.00)
Education × GDP				0.003 (0.00)
Survey waves				
1999–2004	0.002 (0.03)	0.003 (0.03)	0.003 (0.03)	0.003 (0.03)
2005–2009	−0.065*** (0.02)	−0.063*** (0.02)	−0.064*** (0.02)	−0.064*** (0.02)
2010–2014	−0.089*** (0.02)	−0.082*** (0.02)	−0.083*** (0.02)	−0.083*** (0.02)
Constant	0.319* (0.13)	0.444** (0.16)	0.422** (0.16)	0.421** (0.16)
N	224,127	224,127	224,127	224,127
Countries	71	71	71	71
Country waves	150	150	150	150

Note. “Protestant/English” is the reference category for cultural zones and 1995–1998 is the reference category for survey waves. GDP = gross domestic product.

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

the dependent variable.) Economic development is strongly correlated with democratic institutions, consistent with the developmentalist approach. However, the mean level of support for democracy is only correlated with democratic institutions with one of four indicators (opposition to army rule), while the coefficient of income’s effect on pro-democracy attitudes is correlated with democratic institutions in three of four indicators (democracy “good,” democracy “better,” and opposition to a “strong leader”). In other words, countries where rich people are more pro-democracy than poor people are more likely to have democratic institutions. Similar findings result—level of support is significant only for one variable, opposition to “army rule,” and the coefficient for income’s effect on pro-democracy attitudes is significant for two to four variables—when the democratic outcome is lagged by one to five years, when the country-specific coefficients for income are replaced with country-specific coefficients for education, and when using simulation extrapolation methods to account for measurement error in the country-specific coefficients (Hardin, Schmiediche, and Carroll 2003). Given the limited statistical power of this small sample size (a maximum of 185 country-wave samples in the World Values Survey), these simple models say little about the direction of effects, differential effects in low- versus high-income countries, or other factors that may affect democratic institutions. However, they suggest that democratic outcomes may be more associated with elite attitudes toward democracy than with the overall level of support for democracy. Future research should explore this relationship in more detail.

Two recent antidemocratic movements provide illustrations of this finding. In Egypt, leaders and activists associated with the Tamarod (Rebel) movement of 2013 argued that the recently

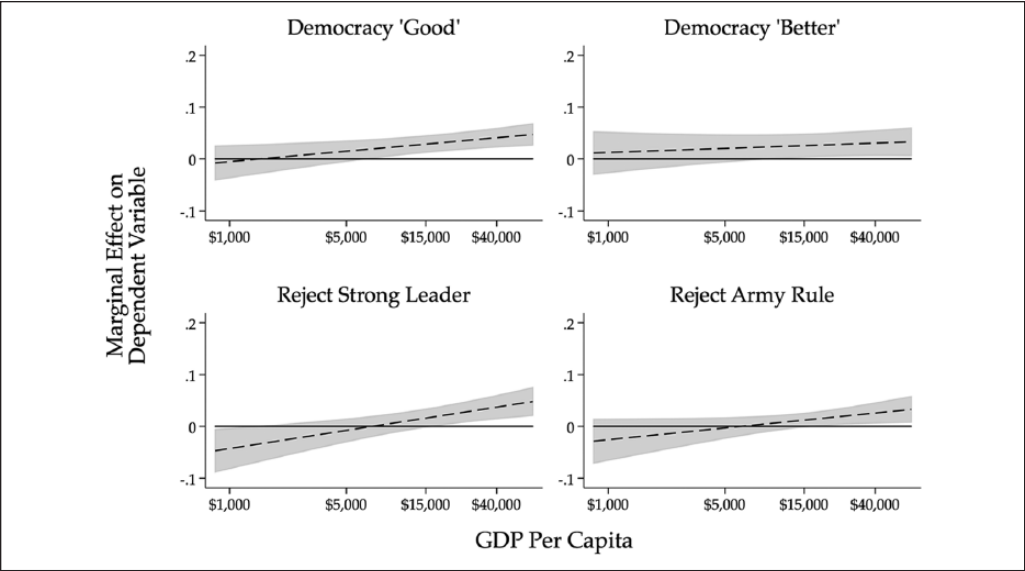


Figure 3. Marginal effect of income on support for democracy at levels of GDP per capita.
Note. This figure illustrates the marginal effect of moving from the lowest level of income to the highest on each dependent variable measuring support for democracy, by levels of GDP per capita (logged scale) with shaded 95 percent confidence intervals. GDP = gross domestic product.

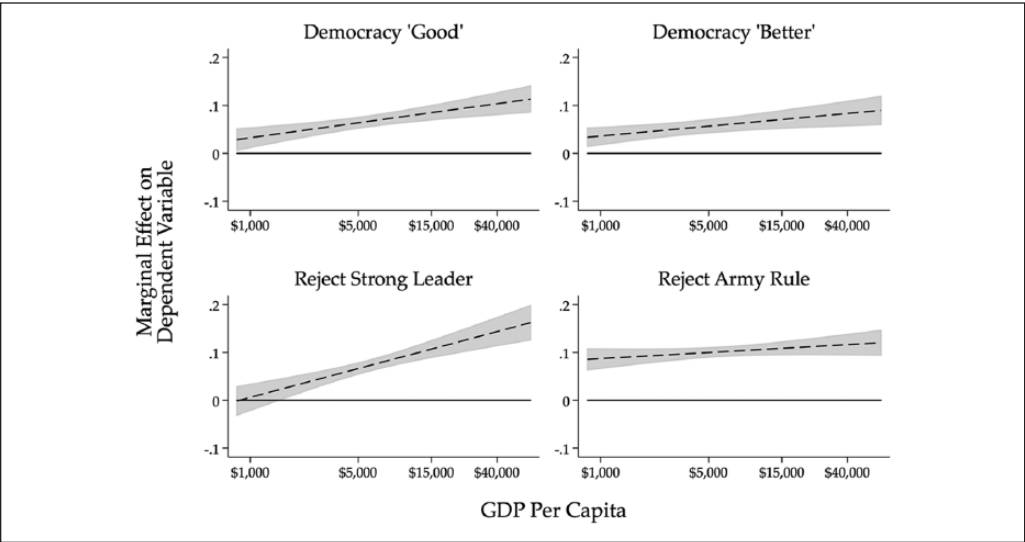


Figure 4. Marginal effect of education on support for democracy at levels of GDP per capita.
Note. This figure illustrates the marginal effect of moving from the lowest level of education to the highest on each of our dependent variables measuring support for democracy, by levels of GDP per capita (logged scale) with shaded 95 percent confidence intervals. GDP = gross domestic product.

elected president was unfit for office and posed a threat to the sovereignty, security, economy, and dignity of the country (Elyachar 2014). In the same year, an opposition movement in Thailand called for the elected parliament and prime minister to cede power to an unelected council that

Table 5. Linear Regressions on Level of Democracy.

	Democracy “good”	Democracy “better”	Reject strong leader	Reject army rule
Pro-democracy attitudes	0.090 (0.16)	-0.117 (0.22)	0.147 (0.09)	0.336** (0.10)
Income slope	4.081** (1.49)	5.614* (2.39)	2.776* (1.11)	1.209 (1.02)
GDP/capita (logged)	0.128*** (0.01)	0.141*** (0.01)	0.122*** (0.01)	0.111*** (0.01)
Constant	-0.667*** (0.15)	-0.608*** (0.18)	-0.619*** (0.09)	-0.661*** (0.08)
N	184	78	185	176
r ²	.537	.592	.545	.543

Note. The discrepancy in the N for these models and the models presented in Tables 1 to 4 is a result of missingness in the years of schooling variable, which is not included in these models. We re-ran these models using only the same country waves that were included in our previous models with no substantive change in the results. GDP = gross domestic product.

would purge the political system of its opponents (Kuhonta and Sinpeng 2014). Both movements staged large-scale protests and triggered coups d'état, although supporters of military rule in both countries reassured observers that their opposition to democracy was only temporary, and that they supported a rapid return to elections once the political system was “reformed” to ensure that the parties in power—the Muslim Brotherhood’s Freedom and Justice Party and the Shinawatra family’s Pheu Thai Party—would not be elected again.

The percentage of World Values Survey respondents in Egypt who said democracy was a “good” or “very good” political system was almost constant before and after the uprising that ousted President Hosni Mubarak in early 2011. However, the coefficient for income’s effect on this pro-democracy attitude dropped from 0.02 in 2004, above the median of all World Values Survey samples, to 0.008, below the median, months after the revolution. Wealthier Egyptians were no longer more supportive of democracy than poorer Egyptians. This is hardly the only factor to take into account, but if this trend continued, it might help explain how well-to-do Egyptians mobilized against democratically elected government two years later, in 2013—According to one survey, a third of Egyptian respondents in the highest of three socioeconomic levels participated in a protest or demonstration during this period, more than double the percentage in the lowest socioeconomic level (Refaie 2015).

The example of Thailand is even more striking. Between 2006 and 2010, the overall level of support for democracy rose in Thailand, according to the World Values Survey. Over the same period, however, the coefficient for income’s effect on this attitude dropped from -0.02—wealthy respondents were slightly more antidemocracy than poor respondents—to -0.05, one of the most negative values of any country in the World Values Survey. Wealthier Thais had become considerably less supportive of democracy than poorer Thais, reflecting a political standoff in which well-to-do urban dwellers rejected the governing party that was repeatedly elected primarily by poorer and rural voters. According to a survey of pro- and antigovernment demonstrators in late 2013, the median household income of the opposition was double the median household income of government supporters (Asia Foundation 2013). Elite rage against democracy (Saxer 2014) disparaged ordinary Thais as “low in mentality” and unsuited for democratic suffrage: “We are rich, and our children are educated in Bangkok,” one protestor told a journalist. “They [the government supporters] are poor, uneducated, and have been bought out by Thaksin [Shinawatra, the former president] and his lot” (Haller 2014).

Whether the antidemocratic movements in Egypt and Thailand are outliers, or form part of a global trend toward elite revolt against democracy (Kurlantzick 2013), the findings from this study suggest that elite support for democracy may not be as strong in poorer countries as it is in richer countries.

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Supplemental Material

Supplementary material for this article is available online.

Notes

1. Lewis later rewrote this essay in a more optimistic vein, removing all reference to citizenship, laity, and Aphrodite and arguing instead that “the democratic ideal is steadily gaining force in the [Middle East] region” (Lewis 2010:72). This revision was part of the shift in Lewis’s views after September 11, 2001, when he encouraged U.S.-led regime change in the Middle East (Kurzman 2011:133–5).
2. Higley and Burton (2006) limit their argument to “liberal democracy,” which they distinguish from illiberal and unrepresentative regimes that involve some form of electoral institutions (pp. 16–19).
3. In the case of our dependent variables with four-item response scales, this constant is 5.
4. Inglehart and Welzel’s categorizations contain some stable cultural zones, such as the Protestant Europe and English-speaking zones, but other zones have changed over time. The Baltic zone, for example, was included in the 2001 and 2015 categorizations, but not in the intervening ones, while the African and Islamic zones were merged in the 2015 categorization (World Values Survey 2015). Of the 79 countries that were included in more than one categorization of cultural zones, 31 countries changed zones at least once in these five iterations. Poland, for example, is categorized in the Catholic Europe, South Asia, and Latin America zones in different iterations.
5. This “rest of the world” category is quite broad, containing many countries with highly pro-democracy attitudes (e.g., France). This sets a high bar for our test of culturalist theories.
6. Cordero and Simon (2016) show that the 2008–2012 global financial crisis affected attitudes toward democracy in affected countries. As such, we ran supplemental analyses including a dummy variable representing these crisis years. These models produced similar results to the results we report in this manuscript.
7. This resulted in the listwise deletion of all observations from 10 countries: Azerbaijan, Bahrain, Bosnia, Belarus, Burkina Faso, Georgia, Lebanon, Macedonia, Nigeria, and Uzbekistan. Mistranslated questions on army rule in Albania, Iran, Indonesia, and Vietnam (Kurzman 2014) were also dropped from the analysis.
8. We find similar results in supplemental analyses that consider each of these indicators alone.
9. The coefficient for years of schooling is positively correlated with opposition to army rule (Table 4) but is negatively correlated with agreement with democracy “good” and democracy “better” (Tables 1 and 2).
10. In supplemental analyses that compare majority-Muslim countries to everyone else, the coefficient for the majority-Muslim zone is only statistically significant in one of our four questions (democracy “good”), where it is positive. This provides additional evidence that Muslim cultures are not particularly hostile to democracy.
11. The only exception is the liberal democracy variable for the models using the “democracy better” dependent variable. When the cultural zone variables are included (Table 2, Models 1 and 2), the coefficient becomes statistically significant at the $p < .05$ level and drops out of significance with the addition of the individual-level covariates (Table 2, Models 3 and 4).
12. The lack of statistical significance for the income by gross domestic product (GDP) per capita interaction term in the models using the “democracy ‘better’” dependent variable may be because this question was not asked in any country in the fifth and sixth waves of the World Values Survey. Because earlier waves contain fewer relatively poor countries than later waves, models using this dependent variable are missing data for many low-income countries that are included in other models (e.g., El Salvador, Ghana, Guatemala, Mali, Rwanda, and Zambia). This may bias model results in favor of the

patterns found in relatively wealthy countries.

13. The education by GDP interaction is statistically significant at the $p < .10$ level and, in supplemental hierarchical generalized linear model (GLM) analyses, is statistically significant at the $p < .05$ level in models for all four dependent variables.
14. We calculate the coefficient using separate ordinary least squares models for each country wave: $Y = \alpha + \beta(\text{income}) + \epsilon$, where Y is an individual's attitude toward democracy, α is the constant term, β is the coefficient for individual income, and ϵ is the error term.

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