
**The Study of Democracy and Democratization**

**The Challenge of Authoritarian Persistence and Democratic Consolidation**

*Dennis Patterson*

Scholarship on democracy and the process of democratization is extensive, and it has always reflected the moods and challenges that the realities of democratic political development have presented to scholars. This is true for the scholarship that was produced in the wake of the fall of the Berlin Wall, which very much reflected the optimism that this important sea change in international politics portended at the time. Indeed, we witnessed statements in the early 1990s not only that democracy and capitalism had won against competing communist/totalitarian systems, but also that they had ended the Cold War and, in a sense, history itself.1 We also have witnessed scholarly discussions of democracy predicting that the third wave of democratization, which began with the democratic transformation of Portugal, would continue into the foreseeable future and lead to a more open and democratic world. There was good reason for this optimism because, as editors Croissant and Haynes of the volume reviewed below have noted, five years into the twenty-first century, over 60 percent of the world’s nations had become democratic. The spread of democracy following the mid-1970s was remarkable, indeed, but the last two decades have witnessed some negative developments with respect to democracy and democratization. These developments have suggested that the optimistic predictions made previously may have been premature. The reference, here, is to the distinct decline in the rate at which

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1 The reference here is to the writing of Francis Fukuyama. See this author’s, *The End of History and the Last Man* (New York: Free Press, 1992).
democratic transformations have occurred over the last two decades; the persistence of authoritarian forms of government that have resisted democratic transformation; the lack of purported democratic consolidation among nations that were expected to evolve into consolidated democracies; and some notable reversals of democracy in countries that had made initial democratic transitions. As expected, these negative trends have led scholars to produce reassessments of democracy and democratization that are more sober than those issued right after the Cold War. They also have led to more recent scholarship on democracy and democratization that confronts these challenging trends, with an eye toward producing deeper levels of analysis of these phenomena and applying new concepts and data to achieve a broader understanding of the democratization process in all of its complexities. The three books listed above are excellent examples of the more recent work on democracy and democratization, which is case-based, quantitative, and theoretical.

The first of these volumes, taken from a special issue of the academic journal, *Democratization*, focuses on the part of the world where there have been both manifest successes and setbacks in the process of democratic transition and, more importantly, where a lack of democratic consolidation more or less has been expected. The focus is sub-Saharan Africa, which has witnessed some successful democratic transitions. In the volume by Crawford and Lynch, however, the editors have assembled a group of essays that do not merely attempt to explain what has occurred in the nations of Africa, but rather analyze the experiences of Africa to help readers to understand recent negative trends in a more in-depth way. This is made clear in the volume’s first essay by Lynch and Crawford, who provide a detailed assessment of trends and prospects for democracy and successful democratization on the African continent. What is important in their assessment is not just the nature of the problems that scholars have identified with respect to democracy and democratization in Africa, but also, more critically, the editors’ identification of the specific issues that have led to recent democratic challenges in Africa. These issues, then, can be interpreted as problems that form a research agenda that can lead to a better understanding of the recent trends we have been witnessing.

The chapters in the Crawford and Lynch volume consider the ongoing problems that have rendered democratic transition and consolidation a challenge of particular concern in Africa. These include the well-known problems of military intervention, elite corruption, and rigged elections, all of which persist in many African nations and continue to impede progress toward true democratic political development. These concerns are investigated, however, with the benefit of more data and a longer historical experience than in previous studies, and, thus, are treated in greater depth and with some new insights. For

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2 This is essentially the limitation of earlier works such as that by Van de Walle and Bratton versus the chapters in this volume. See Michael Bratton and Nicholas Van de Walle, *Democratic Experiments in Africa* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997).
example, several chapters in the volume provide more in-depth assessment than prior analyses of how governments in Africa undermine the electoral process to sustain themselves in power. This includes behaving in ways that do not fulfill the will of the electorate, as the chapter by Adebanwi and Obadare shows. By examining the recent experiences of Zimbabwe, Kenya, and Nigeria, the authors conclude that the “(s)electorates” in these countries essentially have been “abrogated.” A similar conclusion is reached in the chapter by Obi, after assessing the results of Nigeria’s two most recent elections. The chapters in the volume also reveal that the problems frustrating democratic progress are found not just in countries that have conducted relatively free and fair elections, but also where unity governments have formed as the result of coalition building. This is the main contribution of the chapter by Cheesman in his investigation of governments that have formed through power-sharing arrangements.

While the volume’s chapters involve new assessments of old problems, some chapters also present relatively new ideas about the problems of democracy and democratization in sub-Saharan Africa. Many ideas that are presented are specific to the volume’s individual chapters, but one rather interesting theme aptly subsumes the problems with democracy that are facing the nations of this important region. This problem is inherent in the fact that sub-Saharan nations have become more democratic. Specifically, a large number of African nations that produced governments through relatively free and fair elections subsequently have experienced behavior from those same governments that has undermined the very process by which they gained power. Whether leaders simply undermine democracy through manipulation of the institutions and processes that brought them to power (i.e., the Albaugh chapter on Cameroon) or owed to the manner in which ethnicity and party support correspond in certain African countries (i.e., the Basedao et al. chapter on this exact situation), the problem is, as Keating points out in his essay on the struggle with economic and political reform in Uganda, that democratization can be the beginning of the effort to undermine the democratic transition that many African nations have struggled to complete.

All in all, the chapters are essential reading for scholars whose research is focused specifically on recent political developments in sub-Saharan Africa, as well as for those interested in democracy, particularly democratic transition and consolidation. The essays on efforts to promote democracy and policies concerning development assistance are particularly useful, as they add an international dimension to a phenomenon that traditionally has been treated domestically. This is aptly illustrated by the Hinthorne chapter on the 2009 political crisis in Madagascar, which employs an innovative interviewing technique to compare local perceptions with the values and ideas promoted by the international community.

A similar assessment can be made of the second volume reviewed, here, the volume edited by Aurel Croissant and Jeffrey Haynes. While this volume is somewhat more broadly gauged and thematically focused than Crawford
and Lynch’s book, it is designed to provide a deeper understanding of recent trends in the process of democratization. It, too, involves a set of chapters that originally were printed in the journal, Democratization, and it also is similar to Crawford and Lynch’s volume in that its chapters address the more recent negative trends in democratization by using both case analytic and quantitative methods.

Much of the theoretical work of Croissant and Haynes’s volume is dedicated to understanding the persistence of authoritarian governments and their ability to remain in power, even though many came to power through the electoral process. In this sense, there is a similar thematic emphasis among some of this volume’s chapters concerning how the democratic process itself can undermine a nation’s progress toward democratic consolidation. The chapter by Birch is particularly relevant because she shows that the strength of the state is a critical factor. Her point is that weak states can be more easily undermined than stronger ones because they are susceptible to the deleterious effects of clientelism, which can hinder progress toward democratic consolidation. Another unexpected but no less negative effect is captured in the Jayasuriya and Rodan chapter on regimes in Southeast Asia. The focus of these authors is regimes that contain both authoritarian and democratic features (hybrid regimes), which include nations such as Vietnam, Thailand, and Singapore. Jayasuriya and Rodan show that, for democratic transitions to occur, the key electoral element is a true contestation for governmental power. This is important because their analysis reveals that merely increasing participation does not necessarily lead to more contestation, and, in fact, can reduce the incidence of this essential element of a successful democratic transition.

Other chapters address the familiar problems of markets, states, and democracy as well as the lack of democracy in the Middle East. Concerning the latter, Hinnebush provides a critical analysis of why authoritarianism has persisted in the Middle East and how scholars’ attempts to explain this experience through the application of standard democratization theory have failed. The chapter by Khan examines modernization theory and the argument that authoritarianism may be good for a country’s economic performance and, thus, the important relationship among markets, states, and democracy. He shows that, while it is not authoritarianism per se that stimulates economic development in developing countries, the center of the problem is the fact that the incidence of patron-client relationships to which democratic countries are very susceptible can undermine the development process. This problem also is reflected in the Rose and Mishler chapter, which uses World Values Survey data to explain support for regimes in democratic versus authoritarian countries. The most important factors they identify are not cultural or civilizational but the variables indicating the extent to which a regime performs well for its citizens.

Like the Crawford and Lynch volume, the chapters of the Croissant and Haynes volume are essential reading for scholars who are interested in the state
of research on democracy and the current understanding of the democratization process. This is true for the general and theoretically informed contributions this volume contains, and also for the narrower country-based contributions in the collection of essays. The reason for this is that, while there are country-based chapters—Cuba and China, they are handled in a way that helps to advance a theoretical understanding of the present-day problem of democratization internationally. This is particularly true for the chapter by Gilley, which introduces the concept of “democratic enclaves” in authoritarian states, in contrast to the better known idea of “authoritarian enclaves” in democratic states. The importance of this idea is not just the identification of a political phenomenon that was not recognized before, but also how Gilley develops it as a concept that will be useful for future research and as an indicator of the potential for a nation to experience a democratic transition. In addition to Gilley’s essay, the Lambie chapter on promoting political participation in Cuba is intellectually interesting because it draws a strong connection between what we know about expanded democratic participation and the new developmental path that a post-Castro regime could implement.

Finally, the third volume by Dore, Ku, and Jackson is the first book-length effort out of the decade-long project of the School of Advanced International Studies (SAIS) at Johns Hopkins University to investigate “the role played by the attitudes and behavior of ordinary people in the democratization process.” This unique study of the state of democracy in Indonesia, Korea, Thailand, and the Philippines is based on two public opinion surveys designed and implemented by SAIS. The first is the SAIS 2000 Survey, which investigated public attitudes about politics and government in these nations. This survey also focused on public perceptions of these governments’ responses to the impacts associated with the 1997 Asian Financial Crisis. This survey was followed by a more broadly gauged sample eleven years later, the SAIS 2011 Survey, conducted in the field by SAIS researchers between February and June 2011. In this more recent survey, respondents were not limited to each country’s capital city, as in the first survey, but rather were drawn from national samples, which resulted in a total sample of more than four thousand respondents.

The Dore, Ku, and Jackson edited volume was produced through analyses of data from the SAIS 2000 and 2011 surveys, and, from their interpretations, the contributors make the argument that democracy in the four countries is incomplete. What this means is that, in each of the four nations, there are certain observable patterns that reduce the quality of each country’s democratic institutions and processes. Specifically, the chapters’ authors argue that there is an insufficient level of participation by peaceful citizens between elections, and that democratic consolidation is further hampered by the ongoing political influence of traditional social structures; continued susceptibility to crises that threaten the legitimacy of the democratic governments that are in power; and inadequate development of civil society. The authors stress that these deficiencies result in an insufficient level of citizen demand for good
governance, and, as a result, ongoing elite influence not only is permitted in the four countries but also, in some ways, authorized by popular attitudes toward democracy and governance.

The result of the analytical effort is an interesting investigation of the attitudinal foundations of democracy in four important Asian nations. While the findings from the individual chapters are too numerous to review in detail, some illustrations from the data presented and the conclusions drawn are in order. In chapter 2, for instance, the author investigates how democracy is understood and valued among respondents in the four countries. Among the interesting questions asked is how respondents understand democracy. Determination was accomplished by grouping responses into four categories: (1) civil liberties, (2) institutions and processes, (3) rights, and (4) the economy and the private sector. Results reveal that, in Thailand, most respondents understand democracy in terms of institutions and political processes, while, in Indonesia, the plurality understands it in terms of civil liberties. In addition to interesting questions such as this, the data presented in this chapter build a comparative index of the authoritarian leanings of the respondents of the four countries. Answers to such questions as whether respondents approve of rule by the military, whether it is good for experts to make decisions for the country, and whether respondents approve of strong leaders who bypass parliament and elections form the index of authoritarianism. Results reveal that authoritarian attitudes became more prevalent in the four countries between 2000 and 2011. This trend is significant enough for the volume’s authors to conclude that support for democracy in these nations is “shallow at best” and that citizens’ understanding of democracy in Asia is “pre-democratic.”

The data and the ways they have been presented and analyzed in the chapters are difficult to challenge. However, there are certain interpretive aspects of this volume’s arguments that need to be rethought. First, the underlying assumption throughout the Dore, Ku, and Jackson volume is that attitudes are more important as factors explaining political outcomes than as indicators of the public’s reactions to political events. Clearly, attitudes matter, and no one would argue against the idea that high levels of public support for democracy are better than low levels. Moreover, no one would maintain that the trend in the data showing that the indicators of support for authoritarianism are on the rise is a welcome development. On the other hand, as revealed in the Crawford and Lynch and the Croissant and Haynes volumes, these trends may reflect popular reactions to such things as increasing clientelism, poor regime performance, and authoritarian manipulation rather than portend an increasingly lower quality of Asian democracy. Consider Thailand where there has been a drop in public support for democracy. This attitudinal shift may have more to do with regional and institutional divisions that define Thailand’s electoral politics and how these divisions have become increasingly troublesome during the controversial Thaksin and successive administrations than with a larger number of Thais not wanting democracy, as suggested in
In spite of some criticisms of the authors’ interpretations, the data presented in the Dore, Ku, and Jackson volume are notable and recommended reading for specialists in comparative public opinion and Asian politics. Moreover, the patterns in the public opinion data identified in this third book under review, in fact, reflect the larger trends that scholars attempt to address in the first two volumes considered above. Perhaps progress understanding the negative trends identified in these works can be made by greater efforts at conceptual and methodological integration, that is, where we as scholars who are concerned with democracy think more carefully about the existing connections between developments in public opinion and how the institutions and processes of democracy have been functioning. Taken together, the three scholarly volumes considered in this review essay offer an excellent beginning for such future research efforts.