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Changing Mass Attitudes and Democratic Deepening

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A large literature evaluates the correlates of mass attitudes toward democracy because such attitudes are regarded as critical for the stability and depth of democratic regimes. This article uses cross-national public opinion surveys to conduct the first comprehensive test of this conventional wisdom. The authors examine whether aggregate levels of democratic legitimacy are related to the level, stability, and deepening of democracy and find no empirical support for these theoretical expectations. Rather, the authors find evidence that legitimacy attitudes are significantly shaped by the prior institutionalization of democracy, suggesting that the existing literature may have reversed the direction of the causal arrow.

Keywords: *comparative democratization; political culture; democratic legitimacy*

It is by now a central tenet of empirical democratic theory that stable democracy also requires a *belief in the legitimacy of democracy*.

—Diamond (1999, 168)

No matter how well or badly international aid donors or academic think tanks rate the extent of democracy in a given country, this form of regime will only consolidate if ordinary people believe that democracy is being supplied.

—Mattes and Bratton (2007, 193)

...It is people who shape institutions not the other way around.

—Lagos (2003, 173)

Recent scholarship, epitomized by the above epigraphs, highlights the role of mass attitudes in promoting the persistence of democratic governance. To quote di Palma's (1990) illustrative phrase, stable democracy depends on average citizens accepting it as "the only game in town."

Starting with Almond and Verba's (1963) insights on the patterns of political culture most conducive to stable democracy, a large literature analyzes the determinants of these supportive attitudes (e.g., Evans and Whitefield 1995; Anderson and Guillory 1997; Shin

1999; Lagos 2003). Such studies offer rich depictions of the shifting patterns of political attitudes for citizens in transitional regimes. However, most assume that di Palma's (1990) dictum is correct and proceed to analyze individual attributes that make citizens more or less likely to be supportive and satisfied with democracy.

This article argues that despite recent progress in survey research across democratizing regions, the research program still lacks a systematic test of this underlying assumption. Are mass attitudes of democratic legitimacy really instrumental for the stability of democratic governance? Or, conversely, do such attitudes originate in citizens' experience with the prior institutionalization of democracy? Is there an identifiable causal effect on regime stability when democracy becomes "more acceptable" to the mass public? These questions constitute the core of this entire research agenda but have not yet been systematically evaluated. This article utilizes cross-national public opinion data from several regional surveys to test variants of this assumption.

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To foreshadow our findings, we discover that attitudes of democratic legitimacy do not affect a country's level of democracy and that higher levels of democratic legitimacy cannot predict whether a country's democratic quality declines over a period of time. Moreover, changes in democratic legitimacy have no significant effect on the deepening of democracy within a country. Instead, we find evidence that the prior institutionalization of democracy has a significant effect on the formation of mass attitudes, suggesting that the causal arrow may actually run from democracy to the formation of supportive public attitudes.

The remainder of the article is structured as follows. The first section describes the widely hypothesized linkage between attitudes of democratic legitimacy and the stability and quality of democratic governance. The second section argues that existing efforts to evaluate the linkage between attitudes and democracy are incomplete and describes three distinct ways in which we test the underlying assumption of the conventional wisdom. The third section discusses our use of individual-level survey data to test the county-level relationship between mass attitudes and democratic deepening. The fourth section presents our key results, and the fifth section concludes with some important implications about the future of this research program.

Mass Attitudes toward Democracy

Scholarly attention to mass attitudes toward democracy is part of a deep-rooted political culture tradition, dating back to de Tocqueville's (1835/2001) early observations on "democracy in America" and seminal cross-national survey research conducted by Almond and Verba (1963). Political culture analysis has recently flourished, facilitated by the development of a series of cross-national surveys measuring attitudes toward democracy as well as the uneven development of democracy over the recent decades. As Diamond (1999, 162) noted, increasing numbers of hybrid regimes and the growing gap between liberal and electoral democracy returned political culture analysis to "a central place in the comparative study of democracy."

What specific elements of political culture are believed to impact democracy? The overwhelming emphasis is on the development of mass attitudes of democratic legitimacy. Legitimacy attitudes, according to Lipset (1963, 64), reflect the "belief that the existing political institutions are the most appropriate ones for the society." Democratic legitimacy is the

subset that taps citizens' assessments of the suitability of *democratic* political institutions for their countries. Democratic legitimacy attitudes exist at two levels: (1) in principle, representing individuals' acknowledgment of the inherent virtues of democracy, and (2) in practice, tapping their support for democracy as currently experienced in their country (Shin 2007; Linde and Ekman 2003, 395).

Higher aggregate levels of democratic legitimacy are said to promote two particular outcomes. First, Diamond (1999, 169; see also Lipset 1963) argued that high aggregate levels of democratic legitimacy prevent regime breakdown and encourage stability. High levels of democratic legitimacy ensure that mass political dissatisfaction leads to reform through legislative and electoral channels rather than extra-constitutional means such as coups and revolutions. Citizens who acknowledge the legitimacy of democracy are less likely to subvert the democratic process or to acquiesce to those who attempt to do so.

Second, democratic legitimacy attitudes are commonly invoked to explain the evolutionary prospects for transitional regimes. Rose and Shin (2001, 349-50), for instance, noted that most transitional regimes are "incomplete democracies" that can either complete the democratization process to become liberal democracies, repudiate the transition and revert to authoritarianism, or persist in a low-level equilibrium trap (see also Rose, Mishler, and Haerpfer 1998, 200; Linz and Stepan 1996). Regimes characterized by higher levels of democratic legitimacy are more likely to complete the process of democratization; citizens "demand" democracy and push the regime toward further liberalization.

Diamond (1999, 18) has described this process as democratic "deepening," reflecting the continuous ability of democratic institutions to improve, political participation to become more open and vigorous, and accountability to be enhanced. This perspective broadly captures the positive benefits assumed to accrue in democratic regimes when citizens accept democracy as "the only game in town." Democratic deepening is a distinct perspective from Lipset's (1963) original discussion of the stabilizing effects of legitimacy attitudes. Our empirical analysis evaluates the effect of mass attitudes on both hypothesized outcomes.

The importance of democratic legitimacy attitudes has spawned a large literature analyzing their individual and country-level correlates (e.g., Evans and Whitefield 1995; Anderson and Guillory 1997; Shin 1999; Bratton and Mattes 2001; Mishler and Rose 2002; Wells and Kriekhaus 2006a). What unifies all

of these studies—across different survey instruments, across various measures of democratic legitimacy, across different correlates of these attitudes, and even across levels of measurement—is the assumption that how average citizens perceive democracy has an important impact on the stability and deepening of new regimes. Importantly, however, most previous studies simply assert this as true.

Mattes and Bratton (2007), for instance, invoked di Palma (1990) and Linz and Stepan (1996) by reiterating the “only game in town” argument. Mishler and Rose (2001, 303) began their analysis by stating that “a defining feature of democratic regimes is that they depend for their survival and effective functioning on the public’s willing acquiescence and support” (see also Mishler and Rose 2002). Inglehart (1997, 164) argued, “Whether or not [democracy] survives through good times and bad depends on whether its institutions have built up deep-rooted cultural attachments among the citizens.”

Evaluating whether this assumption actually explains patterns of democratic decline and democratic deepening is an important extension of this literature. The next section discusses existing efforts to do this, describes how each has been unable to comprehensively test this assumption, and outlines three hypotheses that we empirically evaluate.

Previous Tests of the Culture-Democracy Linkage

Few studies have actually evaluated the relationship between mass attitudes of democratic legitimacy and the stability and depth of democratic institutions. Most notable are several contributions from Inglehart and company and their critics (Inglehart 1990, 1997; Inglehart and Welzel 2005; Welzel 2007; Hadenius and Teorell 2005). As we describe below, existing tests exhibit several shortcomings that prevent them from comprehensively testing whether democracy stabilizes and deepens when it becomes “the only game in town.” Nevertheless, they provide a useful starting point for our analyses.

This study improves upon earlier work in two distinct ways. First, much of this literature (e.g., Inglehart 1990, 1997, chap. 6; Muller and Seligson 1994) uses individual attitudes, such as interpersonal trust, life satisfaction, and attitudes toward revolutionary political change, as the key explanatory variables instead of measuring what individuals think about democracy as a regime. Such attitudes are theoretically interesting

in their own right but do not test how democratic legitimacy attitudes influence democracy.

Second, our work makes multiple analytic improvements that facilitate a more comprehensive test of the cultural democratization thesis. For instance, Inglehart (2003, 54) interpreted the correlation between legitimacy attitudes and a country’s democracy level as illustrating the importance of political culture “in determining whether democracy survives over the long term.” These conclusions, however, are tempered by two important problems in the analysis.

First, Inglehart’s (2003) research design is plagued by potential endogeneity. Specifically, Inglehart measured mass attitudes using survey data from the late 1990s and early 2000s but measured democracy using a cumulative index from 1981 until 2000. In other words, the results suggest that political culture measured in the late 1990s “impacts” democracy levels from the prior decade. At a minimum, Inglehart’s conclusions on the democracy-sustaining power of mass attitudes are suspect. Second, the correlations are simple bivariate relationships and are likely to change considerably once prominent structural factors that affect both the level of democracy and mass attitudes toward it are included.

In a series of related studies, Inglehart and Welzel (2003, 2005) found that individual’s self-expressive values have a much stronger impact on a country’s level of “effective democracy” than legitimacy attitudes.¹ Once again, we improve on these designs in our own analysis. First, we avoid using the authors’ measurement of “effective democracy,” a variable that has been extensively critiqued by Hadenius and Teorell (2005) and has since been abandoned by Welzel (2007). Second, we expand their measurement of attitudes of democratic legitimacy by including additional indicators of citizens’ rejection of authoritarian alternatives, items that figure prominently in the cultural democratization literature but are not included in Inglehart and Welzel (2003). Finally, unlike Inglehart and Welzel (2005), we test the impact of legitimacy attitudes on the stability and depth of democracy while controlling for other prominent factors.²

The most recent contribution to this literature is by Welzel (2007). His analysis, while concentrated on citizens’ “emancipative orientations” such as individualism and tolerance, also tests whether democratic legitimacy affects a country’s level of democracy. The real innovation involves the sophisticated research design that tests the impact of mass attitudes on *changes* in the level of democracy, all while considering the

potential for a given country to become more or less democratic based on their initial value (pp. 411-16). However, Welzel did not evaluate the impact of democratic legitimacy attitudes on this change, despite a research design that would easily facilitate this test.

Each of these studies attempts to evaluate whether mass attitudes of democratic legitimacy do indeed influence the quality and depth of democracy in a country. Yet each previous effort, from Inglehart's (1990) earliest work emphasizing interpersonal trust to Welzel's (2007) state-of-the-art design, has been unable to answer this core question. Through their reliance on independent variables that do not measure the legitimacy of democracy, research design flaws that contaminate the reported results, and overly narrow conceptualizations of how mass attitudes affect democracy, these studies have not yet provided comprehensive findings on the role of mass attitudes of democratic legitimacy.

In an attempt to fill this important gap, we test three variants of the cultural democratization literature's general emphasis on democratic legitimacy and its effect on the long-term stability and depth of democratic institutions in transitional regimes. The first and most general test simply links aggregate levels of democratic legitimacy with a country's level of democracy. That is, are countries with higher levels of democratic legitimacy more democratic? This specific hypothesis is not a test of the stabilizing or deepening potential of mass attitudes but provides a first attempt to link cultural traits with the overall level of democracy in transitional regimes. To minimize the potential that endogeneity influences our results, we measure levels of democracy five years after the survey year.³ We also test the rival hypothesis that the formation of mass attitudes toward democracy is a function of the prior institutionalization of the regime. In these tests, we examine whether the level of democracy five years *before* the survey period significantly affects mass attitudes of democratic legitimacy.

Our remaining two hypotheses reflect the different theoretical expectations on how mass attitudes of democratic legitimacy shape the stability and depth of democracy, respectively. First, we test Diamond's (1999) and Lipset's (1963) thesis that democratic legitimacy prevents regime breakdown. In other words, countries with higher levels of democratic legitimacy should be less likely to witness a decline in their level of democracy over subsequent years.

Second, we test the hypothesis that increasing acceptance of the legitimacy of democracy is associated with democratic deepening (Rose and Shin 2001). This hypothesis expects that increasing rates of

democratic legitimacy among the mass public encourages a further liberalization of democracy. In other words, when citizens learn to embrace democracy as a more acceptable game, the institutions of democracy become deeper. We test this hypothesis with a first-differences model, where across-time changes in the level of democratic legitimacy affect across-time changes in the level of democracy. This represents the most demanding test of the cultural democratization thesis. Nevertheless, we find this view to be consistent with the widespread view that mass attitudes encourage the deepening of democratic institutions.

Data Sources and Variables

We evaluate these hypotheses using data from several regional public opinion surveys, including the Afrobarometer, Asia Barometer, East Asia Barometer, Latinobarometer, World Values Survey, and Comparative Studies of Electoral Systems. These surveys have recently proliferated and become an invaluable source of cross-national data on citizen attitudes toward democracy. Their broad country coverage allows us to investigate the role of mass attitudes of democratic legitimacy in new democracies and accords with Shin's (1999, 67) argument that "newly installed representative institutions and procedures can crystallize into a truly democratic pattern . . . only when ordinary citizens become fully willing." Rose and Shin (2001) also argued that mass attitudes of democratic legitimacy can further the transformation of electoral democracy into a liberal variant, which precludes analyzing the established democracies, which by definition have completed the democratization process. If this conventional wisdom is correct, we expect to find the most pronounced effect of such mass attitudes on the quality and depth of democracy in these transitional regimes.

The tens of thousands of individual-level observations can be aggregated to create societal-level indicators of democratic legitimacy, which can then be used to predict theoretically relevant measures of democratic stability and deepening. However, a comprehensive test of this assumption has not been done previously. We attribute this principally to the great difficulty required to assemble the necessary data. To use this survey data to its maximum advantage, we first assemble all of the relevant raw data files—large survey databases using individual respondents as the units of observation. Many of these barometer surveys make their data freely available for researchers. The

World Values Survey, Afrobarometer, and Comparative Study of Electoral Systems, for instance, allow access through their respective Web sites. Other sources are less accessible. For example, the Latinobarometer data is available only for a substantial fee; however, previously published work by Lagos (2003) described the relevant aggregate-level variables we employ.⁴

Next, we compare the survey questionnaires to identify equivalent and theoretically relevant measures. Because these surveys are administered independently of one another, questions are often worded differently or, even worse, not consistently included across the various sources. Nevertheless, we identify equivalent indicators for three distinct democratic legitimacy attitudes: citizens' *support for democracy*, *rejection of authoritarianism*, and *satisfaction with democracy*.

Our three measures are widely used in the literature and strike a useful balance between expanding the scope of the analysis and validly measuring the attitudes assumed to affect democratic stability and deepening. Shin (1999, 70), for instance, argued that stable democracies depend on citizens who support the democratic regime and reject authoritarian alternatives. Diamond (1999) similarly noted how these indicators capture citizens' views on the legitimacy of democracy. Our indicator *support for democracy* measures the proportion of respondents who profess that democracy is preferable to alternative forms of government. *Rejection of authoritarianism* measures the percentage of respondents who strongly condemn nondemocratic alternatives such as military, technocratic, one-man, and single-party rule and the abolishment of the legislature and elections.

Our third indicator, *satisfaction with democracy*, measures the proportion of respondents who are satisfied with the performance of democracy in their particular country. This indicator of democratic legitimacy appears in nearly every major survey and factors prominently in cutting-edge research on the correlates of mass attitudes toward democracy. Bratton, Mattes, and Gyimah-Boadi (2005) and Mattes and Bratton (2007), for example, relied on this variable as part of their "supply" of democracy construct. More important, our usage captures the existing literature's argument that citizens' evaluations of the performance of democracy—the concept measured by *satisfaction with democracy*—is an important component of overall legitimacy attitudes (Linde and Ekman 2003, 405).⁵

With these equivalent indicators identified, we then construct the coding criteria for each measure of democratic legitimacy. That is, what constitutes a

respondent who "supports democracy," and how could we measure the relative proportion of democrats amongst the entire population? This process is similar to creating individual constructs that would be used in a conventional survey analysis. We use the existing literature's discussion of thresholds of legitimacy attitudes (e.g., Bratton, Mattes, and Gyimah-Boadi 2005, appendix A) to construct the variables.⁶

We merge the various sources together to create a data set organized by country-survey year. Note that this process, although necessary for our purposes, has been previously criticized as representing the ecological fallacy. Seligson (2002), for instance, argued that researchers engaged in this activity should first check to ensure that macro-level relationships are present at the individual level before using aggregated responses to represent national characteristics. Inglehart and Welzel (2003) provided a spirited rebuttal to this claim and argued that the ecological fallacy as originally formulated only cautioned researchers against *assuming* that individual-level relationships were always present at higher levels of analysis. While recognizing this legitimate issue, we are comfortable with our decision. As Inglehart and Welzel (2003) noted, democracy is a societal-level concept; exploring a micro-level version of the cultural democratization thesis is both empirically impossible and makes little sense conceptually.

Finally, note that our sample does not automatically exclude countries simply because their level of democracy is low. This does not present a problem for our analysis. Most barometer surveys are conducted in liberalizing countries, and thus, already exclude many of the least-democratic regimes. Bratton, Mattes, and Gyimah-Boadi (2005, 54), for instance, were explicit that their survey data from liberalizing regimes in Africa should *not* be generalized to the rest of the (less-democratic) continent. Additionally, at least two of our indicators of democratic legitimacy tap citizens' support for the principles of democratic governance—attitudes that can be held no matter the degree of democracy in a respondents' country (Shin 2007). Finally, in the instance that a country's low level of democracy could affect the results—such as the models where we measure citizens' *satisfaction with democracy* as experienced in their country—we conducted several sensitivity analyses excluding the least-democratic nations in the sample and found very similar results.

The remainder of the data and variables are less complicated to construct. First, note that all three hypotheses require different measurements of

democracy as the dependent variable. Hypothesis 1 refers to the level of democracy, Hypothesis 2 to whether the level of democracy declined over a given period of years, and Hypothesis 3 to the increase or decrease in the level of democracy over time. We employ the Freedom House data, adding together individual scores for political rights and civil liberties, to construct all of these variables. Thus, we begin with yearly scores that range from 2 to 14, where higher numbers indicate greater levels of democracy, and use these values to construct the necessary dependent variable for evaluating each hypothesis. We discuss each relevant dependent variable in the Results section below.⁷

We also include several control variables to minimize the possibility that our results are spurious. First, we control for income since one of the most robust findings in the democratization literature has been the link between wealth and democracy (e.g., Przeworski et al. 2000). Specifically, we measure GDP per capita in 1995, in purchasing power parity accounts. These data are taken from the World Development Indicators (World Bank 2004).

Second, we control for the average rate of annual growth in income per capita from 1980 until 1995, since numerous studies have identified a strong effect of economic performance on democratic survival (Bernhard, Nordstrom, and Reenock 2001; Haggard and Kaufman 1995). This variable is also measured using data from the World Bank (2004).

Third, we control for income inequality by averaging the Gini coefficients for the period 1980 to 2002. Muller and Seligson (1994) have shown that less equitable income distributions are significantly correlated with lower levels of democracy, and we follow their argument here. We use a longer time span for this variable because data coverage from the World Bank (2004) is particularly sparse for the developing world. Increasing the years used for this variable allows us to measure this key control variable for a larger sample of countries.

Finally, we control for the level of ethnic fractionalization in a country. Ethnic heterogeneity has been linked to levels of democracy in studies analyzing political culture variables (Muller and Seligson 1994) and is included in the broader literature emphasizing democratic survival and stability (e.g., Gasiorowski and Power 1998). Specifically, we employ Alesina et al.'s (2003) measure of ethnic fractionalization.

Results

Hypothesis 1

Our first hypothesis simply links the prevalence of democratic legitimacy attitudes to a country's level of democracy. To test this, we measure democratic legitimacy with our three separate indicators: the percentage of population indicating support for democracy, the percentage of the population that rejects authoritarian alternatives, and the percentage of the population satisfied with democracy. The dependent variable for this hypothesis is the combined Freedom House score observed five years after the survey year.

Table 1 presents six ordinary least squares (OLS) regression models testing whether the level of democratic legitimacy influences the level of democracy, using all three indicators of democratic legitimacy, across two different samples. The first sample includes only measures taken from the first year each country was surveyed (models 1.1, 2.1, and 3.1), while the second is a pooled sample of all surveys taken in multiple years (models 1.2, 2.2, and 3.2). For the pooled sample, the unit of analysis is the country-survey year.⁸

Contrary to the conventional wisdom, these models all show that democratic legitimacy is not a significant predictor of level of democracy. None of the estimated coefficients for the indicators of democratic legitimacy are statistically significant. In other words, countries with greater proportions of citizens supportive and satisfied with democracy and who reject authoritarian alternatives do *not* have higher levels of democracy. Although this is only a first test of the relationship between mass attitudes and democracy, the results suggest that mass attitudes of democratic legitimacy are not associated with the subsequent level of democracy.

Turning to the control variables, the results are much more consistent with prior expectations. Across all six models, countries with higher levels of income are more democratic. Countries experiencing higher rates of economic growth are also significantly more democratic when measuring legitimacy as *support for democracy* and *rejection of authoritarianism*. Ethnic fractionalization is unrelated to the overall level of democracy. Finally, income inequality has mixed and relatively weak effects on the level of democracy. Overall, Table 1 demonstrates that mass attitudes have no significant effect on the level of democracy within a country, regardless of how democratic legitimacy is measured.⁹

Table 2 tests the alternative hypothesis by evaluating whether the prior institutionalization of democracy shapes citizen attitudes of democratic legitimacy.

Table 1
Effect of Level of Democratic Legitimacy on Level of Democracy

Variable	Model 1.1	Model 1.2	Model 2.1	Model 2.2	Model 3.1	Model 3.2
Support for democracy	0.007 (0.019)	-0.003 (0.015)				
Rejection of authoritarianism			-0.002 (0.029)	0.003 (0.022)		
Democratic satisfaction					-0.006 (0.018)	0.008 (0.010)
GDP per capita	0.332*** (0.108)	0.291*** (0.081)	0.377*** (0.118)	0.335*** (0.089)	0.458*** (0.126)	0.368*** (0.056)
Economic growth	0.152* (0.096)	0.247*** (0.077)	0.114 (0.094)	0.187*** (0.077)	-0.042 (0.104)	0.005 (0.058)
Income inequality	-0.018 (0.031)	-0.035* (0.024)	-0.001 (0.040)	-0.030 (0.029)	0.056* (0.037)	0.018 (0.019)
Ethnic fractionalization	0.838 (1.693)	1.161 (1.390)	0.951 (2.121)	0.557 (1.677)	2.224 (1.945)	0.816 (1.031)
Intercept	8.717*** (1.933)	10.284*** (1.470)	7.785*** (1.991)	9.541*** (1.507)	3.933* (2.393)	6.354*** (1.198)
<i>N</i>	55	86	42	72	52	149
<i>R</i> ²	.313	.370	.331	.366	.248	.285
<i>F</i>	4.47	9.38	3.57	7.62	3.03	11.38

Note: The dependent variable for all models 1.1 through 3.2 is measured using each country's Freedom House score five years after the survey. The sample for models 1.1, 2.1, and 3.1 includes the first survey for each country only. Models 1.2, 2.2, and 3.2 use a pooled sample of all survey years. Standard errors are reported in parentheses.

* $\alpha = .1$. *** $\alpha = .01$ (one-tailed tests).

Specifically, the models assess whether the level of democracy five years before the survey predicts the observed prevalence of mass attitudes of democratic legitimacy. Models 4.1 and 4.2 test the effect of the prior level of democracy on *support for democracy*, models 5.1 and 5.2 use *rejection of authoritarianism* as the dependent variable, and models 6.1 and 6.2 use *satisfaction with democracy*. We present models estimated from both samples. Models 4.1, 5.1, and 6.1 employ only the first survey available for each country, while the others use a pooled sample of all surveys taken across time.

Models 4.1 and 4.2 indicate that level of democracy is a positive and statistically significant predictor of subsequent democratic support. In the simplest terms, an important determinant of democratic legitimacy is a country's prior level of democracy. Highly democratic countries are associated with significantly larger percentages of citizens who support the principle of democracy, and the effects are substantively large. For instance, the results in model 4.1 demonstrate that a 4-point increase in the Freedom House scale is associated with an almost 10 percent increase in the proportion of the population subsequently expressing support for democracy. The prior level of democracy, however, does not have a significant impact on the aggregate *rejection of authoritarianism*

(models 5.1 and 5.2) or *satisfaction with democracy* (models 6.1 and 6.2).

The control variables also exert significant effects on the observed levels of democratic legitimacy. Where income per capita is significant, the effect is negative, suggesting that higher levels of income reduce citizens' *support for democracy* after controlling for the prior level of democracy. Economic growth rates significantly increase the level of *support for democracy* and *satisfaction with democracy* but have marginally significant negative effects on the proportion of citizens rejecting authoritarian alternatives. High levels of inequality and ethnic fractionalization also have relatively consistent and significant positive effects on the level of democratic legitimacy.

Although some of these findings appear surprising, they are not entirely unanticipated. Bratton and Mattes (2001, 457), for instance, have noted that African citizens exhibit surprisingly high levels of *support for democracy*, yet countries in Africa also rank among the lowest in terms of income per capita and highest in terms of ethnic heterogeneity. We attribute the negative effect of income and the positive effect of fractionalization to this unique Africa effect. African citizens are especially supportive of democracy in spite of residing in the poorest and most heterogeneous societies.

Table 2
Effect of Level of Democracy on Level of Democratic Legitimacy

Variable	Model 4.1	Model 4.2	Model 5.1	Model 5.2	Model 6.1	Model 6.2
Level of democracy	2.331*** (0.956)	1.303** (0.627)	0.874 (0.801)	0.214 (0.521)	-0.808 (1.270)	0.351 (0.729)
GDP per capita	-1.864** (0.795)	-1.176*** (0.458)	0.458 (0.575)	0.466 (0.362)	0.08 (1.208)	-0.567 (0.535)
Economic growth	1.576*** (0.605)	1.471*** (0.412)	-0.740* (0.487)	-0.381 (0.330)	2.538*** (0.788)	2.455*** (0.442)
Income inequality	0.270 (0.225)	0.296** (0.135)	0.545*** (0.203)	0.197* (0.121)	-0.129 (0.336)	-0.159 (0.161)
Ethnic fractionalization	16.329* (11.805)	13.011** (7.312)	6.444 (10.465)	14.423** (6.390)	7.806 (15.913)	11.784* (8.563)
Intercept	18.374* (12.985)	23.702*** (8.260)	-14.932* (11.391)	-0.303 (6.889)	54.654*** (17.763)	45.110*** (9.760)
<i>N</i>	68	152	56	122	52	149
<i>R</i> ²	.278	.214	.184	.096	.251	.186
<i>F</i>	4.77	7.94	2.25	2.47	3.08	6.53

Note: For models 4.1 and 4.2, the dependent variable is *support for democracy*. For models 5.1 and 5.2, the dependent variable is *rejection of authoritarianism*. For models 6.1 and 6.2, the dependent variable is *satisfaction with democracy*. Standard errors are reported in parentheses.

* $\alpha = .1$. ** $\alpha = .05$. *** $\alpha = .01$ (one-tailed tests).

Higher economic growth rates encourage citizens to support and be satisfied with democracy yet simultaneously create enough performance legitimacy to reduce citizens' full rejection of authoritarian alternatives. During booming economic times, mass publics appear to moderate their overall commitment to democracy. Regarding income inequality, scholars have often argued that citizens use democracy as a mechanism for reducing inequitable distribution of resources (Przeworski and Limongi 1993; Reuschemeyer, Stephens, and Stephens 1992; Wells and Kriekhaus 2006b). Following these arguments, we conclude that countries with higher levels of inequality are populated by more supportive democrats—although most likely because this system of government offers the clearest means for redistribution.¹⁰

In summary, the findings from Tables 1 and 2 suggest that mass attitudes of democratic legitimacy have a negligible effect on future levels of democracy. However, these attitudes are significantly shaped by a country's prior level of democracy as well as other country-level contextual factors such as economic performance and the prevalence of income inequality.

Hypothesis 2

The second hypothesis states that the level of democratic legitimacy enhances the stability of democracy. We test this hypothesis by measuring the effect of the three indicators of democratic legitimacy on a dichotomous indicator of democratic decline.

This variable indicates whether a country's democracy level decreased (1) or not (0) between the year of the survey and five years later. We use a dichotomous variable because this best captures the conventional wisdom's implicit conceptualization of democratic decline. Bratton, Mattes, and Gyimah-Boadi (2005, 320-21), for instance, divided regimes in Africa between those in "equilibrium" and those not. Diamond (1999, 64) also dichotomized regime stability by describing consolidated democracies and those regimes experiencing "defections" from this ideal. Because of the construction of this dependent variable, only countries that were surveyed at least two times can be included in the models.

If the conventional wisdom is correct, we should observe a negative relationship between democratic legitimacy and democratic decline. We employ logistic regression to test this hypothesis; a negative coefficient will indicate that higher levels of democratic legitimacy reduce the probability of democratic decline. However, we recognize the limitations of this method in small samples and supplement the regression models with additional descriptive statistics calculating the mean level of each indicator of democratic legitimacy in both groups. We also include *prior level of democracy*—measured as the level of democracy at the time of the survey—as a control variable, since countries that are more democratic have greater potential for a reversal.¹¹ The results of these tests are reported in Table 3.

Table 3
Effect of Level of Democratic Legitimacy
on Stability of Democracy

Variable	Model 7.1	Model 7.2	Model 7.3
Support for democracy	0.043 (0.034)		
Rejection of authoritarianism		0.005 (0.036)	
Democratic satisfaction			-0.008 (0.029)
Prior level of democracy	0.089 (0.206)	0.042 (0.176)	0.055 (0.247)
GDP per capita	-0.309* (0.234)	-0.345* (0.238)	-0.210 (0.298)
Economic growth	-0.405** (0.209)	-0.151* (0.098)	-0.258** (0.149)
Income inequality	0.066* (0.047)	0.027 (0.047)	0.095** (0.057)
Ethnic fractionalization	-4.955** (2.412)	-2.715 (2.192)	-1.362 (2.732)
Intercept	-5.450* (3.364)	-1.532 (3.057)	-5.720* (3.660)
N	70	58	52
Log-likelihood (full)	-17.233	-17.146	-14.111
Log-likelihood (intercept)	-24.877	-21.361	-18.597
χ^2	15.29	8.43	8.97
Prob > χ^2	.018	.208	.175
Pseudo R^2	.307	.197	.241
Group	Mean ^a	Mean ^b	Mean ^c
Group 1 (no decline)	47.75 (n = 67)	36.91 (n = 55)	45.20 (n = 47)
Group 2 (decline)	48.00 (n = 8)	37.73 (n = 7)	35.30 (n = 6)

Note: Standard errors are reported in parentheses.

a. Mean support for democracy.

b. Mean rejection of authoritarianism.

c. Mean satisfaction with democracy.

* $\alpha = .1$. ** $\alpha = .05$ (one-tailed tests).

It is immediately clear that none of the attitudes of democratic legitimacy significantly impact the probability that a country experiences democratic decline. Countries with higher aggregate levels of *support for democracy*, for example, are neither more nor less stable than those with substantially lower observed levels of democratic legitimacy. This null result is consistent across all three models in Table 3. The prevalence of democratic legitimacy attitudes is unrelated to the observance of democratic reversals.

The final panel of Table 3 provides even starker evidence of this conclusion. The mean levels of democratic legitimacy attitudes are nearly identical between the two groups of countries for the indicators of *support for democracy* and *rejection of*

authoritarianism. While the difference between the two groups is larger for *satisfaction with democracy*, the variable is still insignificant in the multivariate model. We find no evidence to support the long-standing assumption that legitimacy attitudes stabilize democracy and prevent reversals.

The control variables exhibit much stronger effects on the likelihood of a democratic decline. Economic factors are particularly important: greater income per capita and higher rates of economic growth significantly reduce the probability of democratic decline, while greater income inequality significantly increases the likelihood. Countries that are unable to reduce inequality are more likely to experience a democratic decline. The role of inequality in effecting democratic decline deserves additional research, but for now we note that this finding is consistent with the long-standing emphasis on class structure in the study of democracy (e.g., Moore 1966; Reuschemeyer, Stephens, and Stephens 1992).

Hypothesis 3

Hypothesis 3 posits that changes in mass support for democracy lead to changes in level of democracy and is thus the most difficult test for the cultural democratization's conventional wisdom to pass. To test the effect of mass attitudes on the deepening of democracy, we measure a change over time in both the independent and dependent variables. Changes in level of democracy are measured from the first survey year to 2005, the last available time point in the Freedom House data. The models use the variable *support for democracy*, as it is the most broadly employed measure of democratic legitimacy within the existing literature.

We measure changes in level of *support for democracy* using data from the same survey across time. Because the time intervals between surveys vary by country, we divide this change by the number of years between surveys. Following the same logic as in Table 3, we also control for the prior level of democracy. The left panel of Table 4 presents OLS regressions testing this hypothesis. The panel on the right side tests the opposite version—whether an improvement in the level of democracy promotes positive changes in the level of *support for democracy*.

Models 8.1 and 8.2 test the effect of a change in democratic support on the change in level of democracy, measured from the time of the first survey to 2005. Model 8.1 employs only data from the World Values Survey to control for cross-survey error. Both models report a negative and significant coefficient

Table 4
Changes in Support for Democracy and Changes in Level of Democracy

Dependent Variable: Change in Level of Democracy			Dependent Variable: Change in Democratic Support	
Variable	Model 8.1	Model 8.2	Variable	Model 9.1
Change in democratic support	-0.211** (0.104)	-0.099** (0.074)	Change in level of democracy	0.271 (0.220)
Prior level of democracy	0.121 (0.178)	0.221** (0.119)	Prior level of democratic support	-0.104*** (0.036)
GDP per capita	-0.045 (0.102)	-0.038 (0.082)	GDP per capita	-0.015 (0.162)
Economic growth	0.162* (0.109)	0.094 (0.089)	Economic growth	-0.420* (0.321)
Income inequality	-0.056* (0.037)	-0.032* (0.022)	Income inequality	0.047 (0.048)
Ethnic fractionalization	4.741** (2.202)	2.138* (1.317)	Ethnic fractionalization	-1.969 (2.716)
Intercept	0.608 (2.181)	-0.758 (1.657)	Intercept	3.583 (3.389)
<i>N</i>	28	50	<i>N</i>	39
<i>R</i> ²	.433	.218	<i>R</i> ²	.317
<i>F</i>	2.68	2.00	<i>F</i>	2.47

Note: The sample for model 8.1 includes data from the World Values Survey only. Standard errors are reported in parentheses.

* $\alpha = .1$. ** $\alpha = .05$. *** $\alpha = .01$ (one-tailed tests).

for the change in democratic support, demonstrating that as countries develop a political culture more supportive of democracy, the rate of change in democracy decreases. This is in marked contrast to the expectations in the existing literature regarding political culture and democratic deepening. This relationship is visually illustrated by the partial regression plot in Figure 1. There is, however, a strong and positive effect of the prior level of democracy on democratic deepening in Model 8.2, indicating that this regime is largely self-reinforcing. More democratic regimes have more rapid increases in the level of democracy.

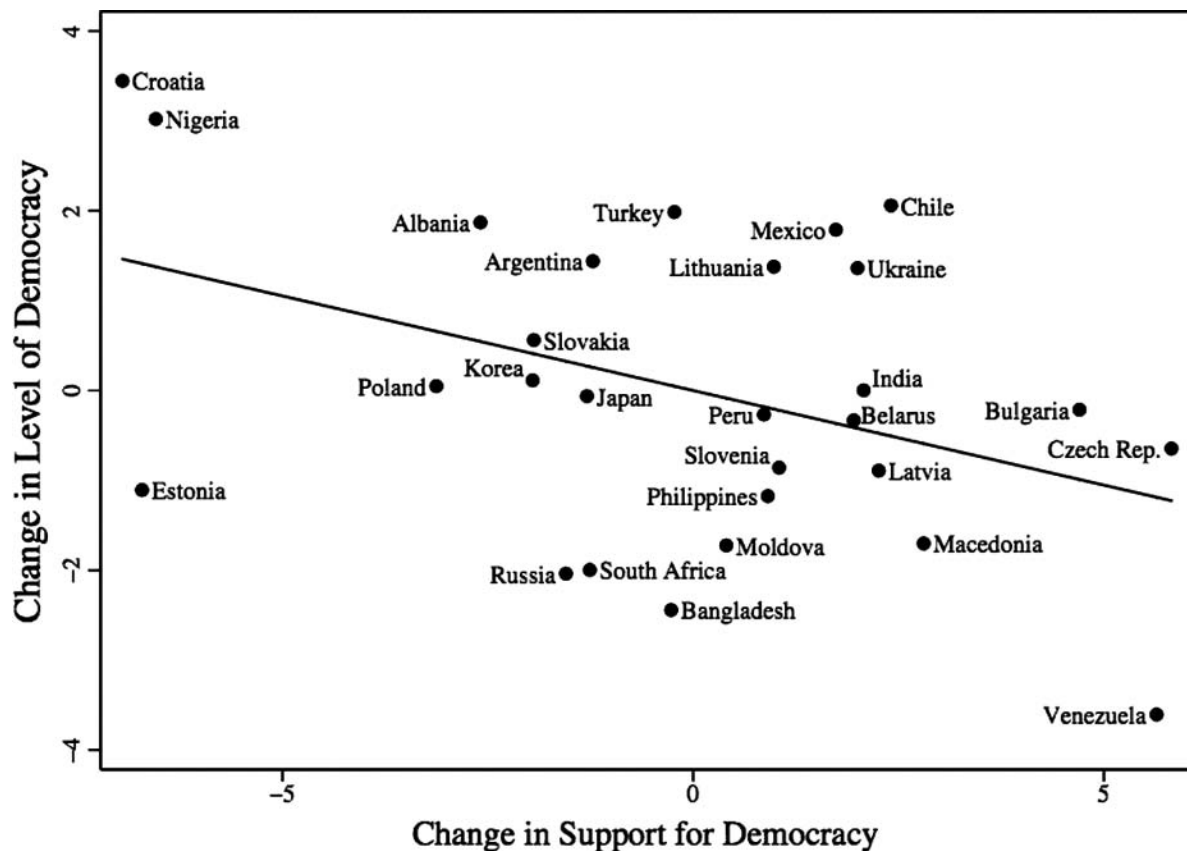
The negative findings for change in democratic support are evidence that democratic legitimacy does not deepen democracy in transitional regimes. Instead, increases in support for democracy are inversely related to changes in democratic level. We postulate several explanations of these surprising findings. Analytically, these results support elite-centered theories of democracy, which argue that democratic regimes depend on the support of political leaders to a much greater extent than the legitimacy attitudes of mass citizenries (e.g., Rustow 1970). For instance, Venezuela declined from a "free" rating from the Freedom House in the early 1990s to "partly free" in 2005, despite a large *increase* in the proportion of citizens supporting democracy as an ideal. On the other hand, Nigeria has maintained status as "partly free" ever since the transition from a "not free" military

regime in the late 1990s, despite a precipitous *decline* in the level of legitimacy exhibited by the citizenry. Without delving excessively into individual country narratives, we note that democracy may also depend on what is supplied from the top.

Most important, our results are the first empirical test of this particular variant of the cultural democratization thesis; we simply have no prior findings with which to compare. Thus, our results appear surprising because they are counter to the literature's (previously unsubstantiated) expectation. Further theorizing and analysis is an important direction for future research in this tradition. For now, we note that the relationship is not positive, as hypothesized by the cultural democratization literature.

The control variables also demonstrate some interesting findings. The level of income has no effect on democratic deepening, although there is some evidence that countries with higher rates of economic growth experience significantly greater improvements in the level of democracy. We also identify a consistently negative, but only marginally significant, effect of income inequality on the rate of change in the level of democracy. The effects of income inequality on both democratic legitimacy (Table 2) and the stabilization and deepening of democracy (Tables 3 and 4) are interesting findings that deserve future attention. Finally, we find significant and positive effects of ethnic fractionalization on the change in level of

Figure 1
Partial Regression Plot: Change in Democracy on Change in Democratic Support (Model 8.1)



Note: Coefficient = 0.211; $SE = 0.104$; $t = -2.02$.

democracy, indicating that ethnic heterogeneity is not an impediment to democratic deepening.

Model 9.1 tests the reverse of this hypothesis by evaluating whether presurvey changes in the level of democracy influence the postsurvey change in democratic support. The change in level of democracy has no effect on the subsequent change in observed support for democracy. We also find that greater prior levels of democratic support are associated with smaller subsequent changes in these legitimacy attitudes.

Overall, the tests of Hypothesis 3 provide no support for the assumption underlying the conventional wisdom and even display some countertheoretical evidence regarding the relationship between changes in mass attitudes and democratic deepening. These relationships should be the subject of future theoretical and empirical scrutiny. Nevertheless, our empirical assessment demonstrates several novel findings. Most important, there is no evidence that democracy deepens when it becomes “the only game in town.”

Conclusion

A prominent literature, dating back to Almond and Verba's (1963) seminal cross-national work, argues that certain attitudes are compatible with stable democracy. Using this insight as an intellectual foundation, a voluminous literature describes the individual and country-level factors that promote democratic legitimacy. This research provides rich descriptions of the evolution of democratic norms in citizens across a diverse set of democratizing countries. However, it has not comprehensively tested whether mass attitudes of democratic legitimacy actually affect the stability of transitional democratic regimes or the process of democratic deepening.

We have remedied this gap by using regional public opinion barometers to test three specific hypotheses. Each hypothesis describes a distinct linkage between mass attitudes and democracy, but they are all consistent with the cultural democratization literature's

underlying assumption. We first tested whether aggregate levels of democratic legitimacy could explain the subsequent level of democracy. The results clearly demonstrated that mass attitudes have a negligible affect on the level of democracy in a country. We also evaluated Lipset's (1963) argument on the importance of democratic legitimacy for regime stability and Rose and Shin's (2001) thesis on mass attitudes and their ability to promote democratic deepening. Our analysis finds no support for either of these widely held assumptions.

We have, however, presented results demonstrating that the prior institutionalization of democracy significantly shapes the prevalence of democratic legitimacy. Our results also indicate that increases in democratic legitimacy are associated with slower rates of democratic deepening. Additionally, we find that economic factors strongly influence democracy *and* legitimacy attitudes. Many of these results, including the effect of inequality on legitimacy attitudes and democratic stability and deepening, should be the subject of continued research.

More important, however, this article demonstrates that the conventional ways of linking mass attitudes with the stability and deepening of democracy have no empirical support. In light of these findings, we identify several measurement and theoretical challenges that must be confronted if this research program is to progress.

There are at least two significant measurement challenges for future research. First, and perhaps foremost, cross-national surveys must become more comparable. In this we fully agree with Diamond (1999, 214), who argued for "much more collaboration across countries and surveys to apply standardized items that can be confidently compared." This standardization is likely to become even more important, given Schedler and Sarsfield's (2007) recent argument that standard survey indicators—such as those we employ above—ought to be enhanced with additional measures to cluster respondents according to their degree of commitment to liberal democracy. We applaud their efforts to create better measurements of democratic legitimacy attitudes. Nevertheless, we cannot evaluate the causal effect of this more complicated measurement until such indicators become integrated into additional surveys and are available cross-nationally.

A second measurement challenge involves subjecting alternative theories on the role of mass attitudes and democracy to the sort of cross-national

and cross-regional analyses we performed. Putnam's (1993) work on social capital and the functioning of democracy, for example, would benefit from a comprehensive empirical evaluation cross-nationally. Similarly, Inglehart and Welzel's (2005) recent body of work seems particularly suited for this sort of analysis. Future work could take their theoretical framework and expand the analysis beyond the set of countries included in the World Values Survey. While our work has confirmed their findings on the relative unimportance of democratic legitimacy attitudes, our findings are silent on their second point, which emphasizes alternative mass attitudes of self-expression and emancipative orientation. Future research should concentrate on operationalizing these authors' theoretically relevant variables across surveys and rigorously testing their arguments.

Future research in this tradition must also directly confront the nature of the causal relationship between mass attitudes and democracy. We highlight two particular ways this can be accomplished. First, newly emerging theoretical perspectives on the relationship between mass attitudes and democracy should be refined and empirically evaluated to the same standards we employed above. For instance, Mattes and Bratton (2007) argued that congruence between citizens' demands for democracy and their perceived institutional supply of democracy contributes to regime stability. This new variant of the cultural democratization literature has not yet been evaluated but should be considered a plausible way of theoretically linking attitudes to the stability of democracy.

Second, future research should focus on endogeneity and its influence on the causal relationship. While we have attempted to minimize the prevalence of endogeneity in our analyses above, mass attitudes and democracy may be interrelated in a more complex manner than is typically acknowledged. For instance, Bratton, Mattes, and Gyimah-Boadi (2005, 27) argued that cultural and institutional intellectual traditions are falsely divided and suggested that attitudes and institutions may "co-evolve, each shaping the other" (see also Muller and Seligson 1994). Paxton (2002) has made a similar point on civil society's influence on the level of democracy *and* democracy's promotion of a vigorous civil society. Future research could theorize a reciprocal relationship like this and subject this version to empirical validation.

Similarly, our findings suggest that country-level explanations may be the key to understanding how the prior institutionalization of democracy affects attitudes.

For instance, we have shown a significant effect of Freedom House scores on attitudes of democratic legitimacy. Yet we concede that such indicators of democracy are imperfect and that they may reflect a variety of other important country characteristics. If this is true, then continuing to examine country-level variables may present considerable opportunity to balance the results we presented here with the conventional wisdom emphasizing the role of mass attitudes. Recent research has already indicated that these country-level variables have a stronger formative impact on attitudes of democratic legitimacy than most individual traits (Wells and Kriekhaus 2006a, 2006b). Continuing this line of analysis may present the best opportunity to develop a more consistent and accurate theory of how mass attitudes affect the stability and deepening of democracy.

Notes

1. "Effective democracy" weights a country's Freedom House indicator by the degree of corruption present in the country. Welzel, Inglehart, and Klingemann (2003) described the theoretical concept of self-expressive values.

2. Inglehart and Welzel (2005) generated a heated debate between the authors and Hadenius and Teorell (2005; see also Welzel and Inglehart [2006] and Teorell and Hadenius [2006] for rejoinders). We refer the interested reader to this exchange.

3. We also perform a variety of analyses with longer and shorter lag periods. These and other robustness results are presented in the online Appendix B, available at <http://prq.sagepub.com>.

4. Table A.3 in Appendix A details the countries included in each survey, the years surveyed, and the relevant sources.

5. Note also that some scholars view attitudes of democratic legitimacy as multidimensional, including citizens' aspirations that democracy can enhance human happiness and reduce suffering (see Shin 1999, 63). We focus on regime evaluations because these are most consistently linked to regime stability and democratic deepening in the existing literature.

6. Table A.1 in our online Appendix A describes the precise documentation of each variable, including the survey item number, the exact question wording, and the specific coding rules.

7. We employ the Freedom House measure because it best captures the qualities of democracy assumed to respond to changes in citizen attitudes of democratic legitimacy. Table A.2 in the online Appendix A describes in detail the coding scheme for each variable.

8. Although we consider these "pooled" samples, the panels are quite small. We have at most five observations for a single country and fewer for most countries. In many of the reported models, construction of the key variables limits the sample to just one observation per country. Consequently, standard techniques accounting for autocorrelation are not feasible. For example, our data lack fifteen observations per unit and equal time intervals that Beck (2001) noted are required for panel-corrected standard errors. Moreover, we cannot lag the dependent variable, since many countries only have one observation. To control for autocorrelation, we complement each pooled data model with a corresponding model using data from the first or only survey per country. Results are

consistent across the pooled and nonpooled samples, suggesting that autocorrelation is not unduly influencing the results.

9. Our online Appendix B contains several robustness analyses of this initial finding. Table B.1 presents bivariate and multivariate regressions testing whether *support for democracy* impacts level of democracy at different time lags of the dependent variable. Table B.2 repeats this analysis using the Polity score as a measurement of democracy. Table B.3 replicates the results in Table 1 while including a dummy variable accounting for whether the country's data come from the World Values Survey. Table B.6 contains replications of models 3.1 and 3.2 while dropping all countries scoring a 4 or less on the Freedom House scale. The results confirm our finding that legitimacy attitudes have no significant impact on the level of democracy.

10. Table B.4 in our online Appendix B replicates the models in Table 2 while including a dummy variable for whether a country's data came from the World Values Survey. Table B.5 replicates Table 2 while controlling for the change in the level of democracy during the five years before the survey. Finally, Table B.6 replicates models 6.1 and 6.2 from Table 2 while excluding countries scoring 4 or less on the Freedom House scale. The results of these robustness analyses confirm the findings reported here.

11. We thank an anonymous reviewer for this point.

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