

Poverty, Participation, and Democracy

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Introduction

Poor People and Democracy

Anirudh Krishna

Social scientists have steadily believed that democracies will more likely exist in richer rather than poorer countries. Analyses of cross-country data have consistently shown democracy to be more prevalent and more stable in countries that have higher-than-average per capita incomes.¹ Based on these statistical observations, a law-like regularity has been postulated, proposing social prerequisites for democracy, stated in terms of material achievement. Continuing in this vein, a comprehensive analysis concluded that the probability democracy will survive in a country “increases steeply and monotonically as per capita incomes get larger. Indeed, democracy is almost certain to survive in countries with per capita incomes above \$4,000.” Below this level of per capita income, democracy is considered to be at grave risk: “We have learned that the bonds of poverty are difficult to break, that poverty breeds dictatorships” (Przeworski, et al. 2000: 273, 277).

¹ Affirmations include Barro (1997); Bollen and Jackman (1985); Cutwright (1963); Huntington (1984); Lipset (1963, 1994); Lipset, Seong and Torres (1993); Londregan and Poole (1996); Posner (1997); Przeworski et al. (2000); Rueschemeyer, Stephens and Stephens (1992); and Winham (1970). Rare challenges are provided by Arat (1988), Mainwaring and Perez-Linan (2003); Mueller (1992), and O'Donnell (1973), who suggest that the effects of economic advancement can be more varied for democracy.

These expectations are, however, confounded by some recent events. Over the past few decades, democracy has broken out of its erstwhile confines. Today, democracy is no more “the exclusive preserve of wealthy lands,” states Karatnycky (2004: 83). “Many poor and developing countries achieve a record of respect for political and civil liberties . . . the survey data show that there are 38 [democratic] countries with an annual Gross National Income per capita (GNIPC) of US\$3,500 or less. Of these [countries], 15 are places where yearly GNIPC is below US\$1,500” – that is, less than half the threshold level proposed by Przeworski et al. (2000). Apart from India, where democracy has been in place for more than five decades, countries such as Guatemala, Honduras, Mali, Malawi, and Mozambique also now elect their governments and have gained some degree of experience with democratic rule.

Doubts remain about how firmly democracy’s roots will become entrenched within the impoverished soils of these newly entered domains. In Guatemala, Honduras, Mali, Malawi, and Mozambique where, respectively, 56 percent, 53 percent, 63 percent, 65 percent, and 69 percent of all citizens live in poverty, can democracy become the only political game in town?²

Most often, this question has been answered negatively. It is a view consistently upheld – an empirical regularity close to a social science law – that the existence of mass poverty poses a substantial challenge to democracy. A number of reasons have been put forward in support of this view, foremost among which relates to the attitudes and behaviors of poor people.

“Only in a wealthy society in which relatively few citizens live at the level of real poverty could there be a situation in which the mass of the population intelligently participate in politics and develop the self-restraint necessary to avoid succumbing to the appeals of irresponsible demagogues,” asserted Lipset (1963: 31). Later analysts, examining the interrelationship between democracy and economic development, have predominantly hewed to a pessimistic view about the abilities of poor people to support and take part in democracy.

² These poverty data are taken from World Bank (2005: 258–9).

The Conventional Wisdom: Poor People Provide Poor Support for Democracy

Because they have very little time and money to spare, it is claimed, poor people are unable and unwilling to take part in democracy. Barro (1996: 24) claimed that democracy is “a sort of luxury good. Rich places consume more democracy because this good is desirable for its own sake.” In addition, “Human beings appear to frame their values at least partly in response to what psychologist Abraham Maslow . . . termed a ‘hierarchy of needs’” Diamond (1992: 126). “With rising incomes, [they] become more willing – and more able – to supplement the necessities of life with luxury goods [such as] democratic governance” (Landa and Kapstein 2001: 269).

Thus, individuals’ preferences for democracy are expected to rise together with their incomes. Because “the marginal utility of consumption is lower at higher levels of income” (Przeworski and Limongi 1997: 166), relatively richer individuals are expected to have greater concern for democracy, whereas poorer ones are regarded to be more willing to trade off democracy (and other such “luxuries”) for greater material consumption at the present time. “Because the resources of the wealthy are more ample, they do not face the same hard tradeoffs” (Rosenstone and Hansen 1993: 13).³

Poor people make poor democrats, according to this hierarchy-of-needs hypothesis. It is only when individuals break out of poverty that they begin to demand a role in and provide support for democracy. Thus, the removal of mass poverty is essential to inculcate within the population the attitudes and behaviors that are supportive of democracy. Economic growth “leads to an increase in the number of individuals with sufficient time, education, and money to get involved in politics” (Bueno de Mesquita and Downs 2005: 79).

Additional arguments have been put forward that further buttress this view. “Extremist and intolerant movements in modern society

³ A variant of this hypothesis, proposing shorter time-horizons for poorer people, is suggested by Varshney (2000: 730): “For the poor, poverty alleviation measures that are direct carry a great deal more weight in the short run than measures that are indirect and have a long-run impact.”

are more likely to be based on the lower classes than on the middle and upper classes... the lower class way of life produces individuals with rigid and intolerant approaches to politics... the lower strata are relatively more authoritarian... more attracted to an extremist movement than to a moderate or democratic one... once recruited, they will not be alienated by its lack of democracy, while more educated or sophisticated voters will tend to drop away [from authoritarian movements]... The more well-to-do are more liberal, the poorer are more intolerant” (Lipset 1963: 87, 89, 92). One “should not be upset to learn,” claimed (Lipset 1960: 271), “that poverty, insecurity, and ignorance do not produce as ‘decent’ people as do wealth, security, and knowledge.”

Short of money and time, and imbued additionally with the wrong set of values, poor people are presumed to make poor democrats. Similar views, holding out an elite theory of democracy, were also advanced by Schumpeter (1950), and Adorno (1950) equated poverty with an authoritarian personality.

Subsequent arguments about a supposed “culture of poverty” have further tended to bolster the view that poor people are less supportive of democracy. The poor “are a different kind of people,” claimed Michael Harrington (1962: 146). “They think and feel differently” from other people. Poverty “is a way of life,” declared Oscar Lewis (1963: xxiv), which is “remarkably stable and persistent, passed down from generation to generation along family lines. The culture of poverty has its own modalities and distinctive social and psychological consequences for its members... [it] affects participation in the larger national culture, and becomes a subculture of its own.” In particular, the poor are expected to participate much less than others in various democratic activities, constituting an enclave of apathy or – if you believe Adorno and Lipset – actual hostility toward democracy.

As people become richer, their values are supposed to change, becoming increasingly more supportive of democracy. “Democracy has an intrinsic value that is increasingly sought after as populations become better off” (Helliwell 1994: 246). “Economic development is linked with coherent, and to some extent predictable, changes in culture and social and political life... Industrialization leads to... broader political participation and less easily led publics” (Inglehart

and Baker 2000: 21). “Rising levels of existential security and autonomy change people’s firsthand life experiences fundamentally, leading them to emphasize goals that were previously given low priority, including the pursuit of freedom. . . . [These changed] values bring increasing emphasis on the civil and political liberties that constitute democracy” (Inglehart and Welzel 2005: 2–3).

Different traditions of research – including rational choice, encapsulated in the hierarchy-of-needs hypothesis, but also political culture approaches – have commonly arrived at the same conclusion: poorer people make less reliable democrats than richer ones. Democracy is therefore not expected to become firmly entrenched until people become richer and a substantial middle class takes shape.

Poor people living in rural areas are expected to be especially worse off in this regard. Although the depiction of the *urban* working class as apathetic or hostile has been stridently challenged – with Rueschmeyer, Stephens, and Stephens (1992: 8) labeling this group as “the most consistently pro-democratic force” – no similar contentions have been expressed about the poor in rural areas. “The rural population,” stated Lipset (1963: 105), “both farmers and laborers, tends to oppose civil liberties and multi-party systems more than any other occupational group.” Additionally, “The secular evolution of a participant society appears to involve a regular sequence of phases. Urbanization comes first,” asserted Lerner (1958: 60), on whose work Lipset drew to a considerable extent.

Participation in democracy is thus expected to be especially unlikely in rural areas. Small farmers or rural laborers, who constitute the bulk of the poor in South Asia, and self-provisioning peasants, constituting most of the poor in Sub-Saharan Africa, are considered in the conventional wisdom as least likely to come out in support of democracy. “The people of poor societies and societies with high percentages working in the agrarian sector tend to hold traditional values, while the people of richer societies with a higher percentage of the labor force in the industrial sector tend to hold secular – rational values” (Inglehart and Baker 2000: 38). Traditional values, it must be remembered, are supposed to be antithetical to democracy. Thus countries where large numbers of people are in the agrarian sector – and poor to boot – are the ones in which democracy is least likely to gain mass support.

The prognosis for the new democracies of the South is therefore grim, according to these views. Most individuals in these countries are not expected to be particularly democratic in their attitudes and behaviors. Lack of time and lack of money, along with a particular set of values associated with this lifestyle, are expected to diminish support and deter mass participation in democracy. Support for democracy, if there is any, is likely to be confined within a relatively small group of westernized city-based elites, who have ascended to middle-class status, acquiring values associated with urbanization, industrialization, and exposure to mass media. The essays in this volume show that the truth is much less clear cut.

Empirical Holes in the Conventional Vision

Although it has held sway for a very long time, there is a stunning lack of supportive empirical evidence for the conventional wisdom. Analyses supporting such conclusions have *not* directly demonstrated that poor people in poor countries in fact show little support for democracy.

Empirical evidence has been provided demonstrating that at any given point in time poor *countries* are less likely to be democratic than richer ones. Evidence has also been advanced showing that poor people in *rich* countries participate in democracy at a lower level than their fellow citizens.⁴ But it is only a stretch of the imagination that extends these arguments to apply to poor people in poorer countries.

Most analysts, including Lipset, have relied on aggregate, that is, country-level and cross-sectional, data. Conclusions about individual behavior are both assumed in and derived from these aggregate-level analyses. Thus, for example, Bilson (1982: 103), after analyzing differences across countries, nevertheless feels prompted to predict for the individual level “a positive correlation between freedom and real income. On the demand side, freedom must be considered a luxury good so that the resources devoted to the attainment of individual freedom are likely to be greater when per capita income is high. On

⁴ Including Almond and Verba (1965); Jackman (1987); Jackman and Miller (1995); Lijphart (1997); Powell (1982); Rosenstone and Hansen (1993); Verba, Nie, and Kim (1978); Verba, Schlozman, and Brady (1995); and Wolfinger and Rosenstone (1980).

the supply side, it is undoubtedly more costly to repress a wealthy person than a poor person and the need to do so is probably less acute.”

Using aggregate data does not make clear whether the regularities observed in the past at the country level will necessarily continue into the future. Although statistical analyses have been consistent in showing that at any given point in time democracy tends to be stronger in richer rather than poorer countries, it does not follow that as any particular country becomes richer, it will also simultaneously *become* more democratic. In fact, Arat’s (1988: 33–34) longitudinal analysis “yields widely varying relationships between levels of socioeconomic development and democracy . . . [showing that] democracy is not a one-way ladder that countries climb” as their economy expands.

Even though the data do not make clear what governments and concerned others should do in order to support democracy in the future, analysts holding the conventional view have been hardly shy about proposing programs of action that would, in effect, deny democracy to people in poor countries – or at least, withhold it until mass poverty was removed. For example, Barro (1996: 24) proposes that “the advanced [W]estern countries would contribute more to the welfare of poor nations by exporting their economic systems, notably property rights and free markets, rather than their political systems, which typically developed after reasonable standards of living had been attained. If economic freedom can be established in a poor country, then growth would be encouraged, and the country would tend eventually to become more democratic on its own. Thus, in the long run, the propagation of Western-style economic systems would also be the more effective way to expand democracy in the world.”

Apart from the lack of any clear causal framework, the lack of robust micro-foundations makes any such argument deeply suspect. No evidence is available to show whether and how poor individuals in poor democracies care any more or less for democracy than their richer counterparts. “The relation between the ‘macro’ socioeconomic changes and the ‘macro’ political change has to be mediated through ‘micro’ changes in the attitudes, values and behavior of individuals. The [lack of] explanation of the latter is the weak link in the causal change that is assumed to exist,” stated Huntington (1971: 310).

Neither the hierarchy-of-needs hypothesis nor culture-based arguments have been empirically tested at the individual level within developing country contexts, especially not after the establishment of democracy in these countries.⁵ Within industrialized democracies, surveys have shown repeatedly that poor people participate less vigorously than others in democracy – particularly in its “more intensive and time-consuming forms” (Lijphart 1997: 1), such as contacting, organizing, demonstrating, and protesting – and this evidence regarding lower participation levels among poorer people in the West has been projected uncritically to posit a lower general regard for democracy in countries where large numbers of people are poor.

Even as the third and fourth wave of democracies became established in Asia, Africa and Latin America, this conventional wisdom has held sway, albeit without firm empirical underpinnings. The key anomalous case of India, for decades among the world’s poorest nations, but also among the most resilient democracies, has often been brushed aside, or explained away as a legacy of the British colonial tradition (Bollen and Jackman 1985; Lipset, Seong, and Torres 1993), even though that same tradition did not yield democracy in many other settings.

It is time, therefore, to subject the conventional wisdom to systematic empirical testing. If democracy were, indeed, a luxury good, as stated in these arguments, valued and practiced by richer more than poorer individuals, then one would expect to find systematic differences in average levels of democratic attitudes and behavior. Within each country, people with higher incomes should exhibit significantly greater support for democracy, *and* their levels of participation in various democratic activities, particularly the more time-consuming

⁵ Inglehart and Welzel (2005: 233–4), although collecting data at the individual level and framing their hypotheses in terms of individuals’ motivations and values, nevertheless expect their conclusions about value change to operate exclusively at the aggregate national level. They hold that “aggregate data represent mass tendencies that are almost exogenous to each of the individuals from which they are calculated.” However, they do not explain at what particular level of aggregation – locality, district, province, or region – these mass tendencies begin to make themselves manifest. Why should it occur only at the level of the nation – a recent, incomplete, and often, an artificial construct in many non-Western contexts?

ones, should be systematically greater than those of poorer individuals. And if cultural values were, in fact, systematically different among relatively poorer and relatively richer individuals, with some nonparticipative culture of poverty being particularly embedded within the former group, then levels of support and participation rates should diverge further across income groups. An extensive empirical examination, spanning twenty-four countries and more than thirty thousand individual interviews, reveals that these expectations are hardly justified.

The Argument in this Book: Poor People Are *Not* Less Democratic

The essays in this volume present the first set of robust empirical results from a geographically diverse selection of countries spanning three continents. The authors take advantage of the globalization of public attitude survey research that has followed in the wake of democratic transitions in developing countries (Heath, Fisher, and Smith 2005). Undertaken independently of each other, with no prior knowledge or communication among the researchers concerned, these studies nevertheless report a striking common conclusion.

The conventional wisdom, these studies uniformly find, is *wrong* – or at least, if ever correct, it is no longer true. In countries of Africa, Latin America, and South Asia, poor people do not value democracy any less than their richer counterparts. Their faith in democracy is as high as (and sometimes higher than) other citizens', and they participate in democratic activities no less (and sometimes more) than other citizens. These results are empirically robust, geographically widespread, and they provide new and exciting grounds for optimism regarding the future of democracy.

Democracy is widely welcomed in the new domains where it has been introduced. By large majorities, both rich and poor citizens prefer democracy to alternative forms of government, and they turn up in large numbers to participate in various democratic activities.

Social science theories tend to seriously underpredict the vast mass of support for democracy observed among poor people in poor countries. Neither rational choice nor culture-based arguments predict well the actual attitudes and behaviors reported by thousands of

individuals, relatively rich and relatively poor, who were interviewed for the separate research projects reported in this book.

An earlier empirical examination undertaken in India showed that poor people and those with lower social status voted in significantly larger numbers compared with their richer counterparts (Yadav 1999, 2000). Examining voting behavior, Yadav (1999: 2397) concluded that the “textbook rule about political participation is that the higher you are in the social hierarchy, the greater the chance of your participating in political activity, including voting. . . . India is perhaps the only exception to this rule. . . . The continuous influx of people increasingly from the lower orders of society in the arena of democratic contestation provides the setting, the stimuli, and the limits to how the election system unfolds.” The evidence presented here extends this conclusion to different countries, showing that India is not the only exception to the putative “textbook rule.”

The data examined here show that poor people’s positive affinity for democracy is by no means confined to voting. People can vote for a variety of reasons, and if the cynics have it right, poor people might even on occasion be paid to cast their votes. It is found, however, that in terms of a vast variety of engagements with democracy – including campaigning, contacting, protesting, and other time- and resource-intensive forms – poorer people are hardly behind richer ones, and in many instances they are even ahead by a significant distance.

Neither participation nor faith in democracy suffers on account of individual poverty. Poor citizens participate equally vigorously in a plethora of democratic activities. It stands to reason that they should do so; democracy provides an avenue that poor people can utilize for overcoming generations of domination or neglect.

In [chapter 2](#), Michael Bratton examines data from a series of recent Afrobarometer surveys for fifteen countries in sub-Saharan Africa, countries that are among the poorest in the world, with large parts of the population residing in rural areas, mostly self-provisioning peasants following an agrarian lifestyle. He finds a “clear absence of any anti-democracy constituency among the African poor.” People at all levels of material well-being tend to have nearly similar views on political tolerance, political accountability, and political equality. In terms of behaviors, poor people in these countries, even very poor ones, vote

more frequently than richer ones, and they are also more likely than others to participate in various political activities between elections.

Similar results for rural India are presented by Krishna in Chapter 3. Interviewing a random sample of more than two thousand individuals, residents of sixty-one north Indian villages, in 1997 and again in 2004, Krishna finds that faith in democracy is not significantly different across different wealth categories. Poorer as well as richer villagers express themselves strongly in support of democracy. Political efficacy and political participation levels are also not significantly influenced by differences in individuals' wealth. Neither individuals' current levels of material well-being nor their well-being levels seven years ago help explain who participates in various acts associated with making democracy work better.

In chapter 4, Booth and Seligson examine recent survey data from eight Latin American countries. Conducting interviews with 1,500 individuals in each of these countries, selected through a process of stratified random sampling, with special care taken to ensure the representation of the rural poor, they find that individual wealth has no perceptible association with voting, party and campaign activism, communal activism, civil society engagement, or protest participation. Wealth is significantly associated with one aspect of participation – contacting public officials – but it is negatively rather than positively related: poor people are more active than others in contacting officials. Booth and Seligson also present results from a parallel set of analyses undertaken for the aggregate, national level. Per capita income, they find, not significantly related to any of six different aspects of participation. They further find that personal wealth and aggregate-level wealth have no significant impact on preference for elected government or basic democratic norms.

Thus, individual-level as well as national-level examinations point to the same overall conclusion: poverty in Latin America is not a valid predictor, in general, of support for democracy or participation levels.⁶

⁶ Employing a different aggregate-level data set, Mainwaring and Perez-Linan (2003: 131) find similarly that “Democracy in Latin America has survived in the face of a low level of [economic] development, and it has faltered despite moderately high per capita income.”

Taken together, these three sets of analyses, which collectively cover a total of twenty-four countries in Africa, Asia, and Latin America, including individual interviews with more than 35,000 respondents, demonstrate that *democracy is widely supported by poor people in poor countries*. Democracy in poor countries is not likely to become unstable because of lack of support among poor people. Poor people in these countries are not disengaged, apathetic, or averse to democratic governance in their countries. On the contrary, they express themselves staunchly in support of democracy compared to all other alternatives, and they participate no less than their richer counterparts in various activities associated with making democracy work.

Was the conventional wisdom always wrong in relation to the democracies of the South, or have some things changed fundamentally in recent years, altering the individual-level relationship between wealth and democracy? Two factors have changed critically. First, the expansion of education, especially within rural areas and poorer sections of the population, has considerably widened and deepened the base of support for democracy. Second, simultaneously, there has been a broad diffusion, nationally and internationally, of a normative basis of support for democracy: “It is becoming both uncouth and unprofitable to avoid free elections” (Lipset 1994: 16).

It is possible that the conventional wisdom might have been challenged even earlier. However, persistent data gaps have so far stood in the way. Because, individual-level data on poverty are still not readily available within developing countries, analysts have relied on aggregate national-level statistics, and they have projected their conclusions, wrongly, as it turns out, to apply as well to poor *people* in poorer countries. Individual-level data need to be collected afresh so that links with democracy at this level can be directly explored.

The authors in this volume have constructed innovative measures of relative wealth, and they have utilized these measures to assess wealth levels for thousands of individuals selected through random sampling. Utilized in conjunction with surveys of political attitudes, values, and behavior, these individual-level wealth measures have yielded the important new results reported in this volume. These methodological developments are worth noting, along with the conclusions that these studies report. Bratton and colleagues have developed a Lived Poverty

Index based on access, or lack thereof, to basic human needs among the African populations they have surveyed. Krishna has come up with the Stages-of-Progress methodology, which he utilized for investigations not only in rural India but also separately in Kenya, Uganda, Peru, and North Carolina in the United States.⁷ Booth and Seligson utilized an index of assets to gauge relative wealth in the Latin American contexts that they studied. These measures have assisted to a considerable extent in filling the empirical gaps that have remained large, playing a major role in leading the conventional wisdom astray.

Education and Information Matter More than Wealth

Another conclusion that these three studies commonly reach relates to the value added by education for both participation and faith in democracy. Although wealth is not in the most part related to political values and political behaviors, education is strongly and commonly associated with increased support and enhanced participation. In general, people who are more educated participate relatively more often in various democratic activities, and they also show stronger support for democracy.

As education is spreading fast, especially among poorer and more rural communities that were hitherto rarely provided with teachers and schools, a new generation is taking over, composed of educated younger peasants and educated poor people in cities. Democracy is especially strongly supported within this cohort of people, growing rapidly across most of the developing world.

Analyses of democratic engagement conducted in rich democracies have shown that education matters separately from wealth (Jackson 1995; Nie, Junn and Stehlik-Barry 1996, Sullivan and Transue 1999; Wolfinger and Rosenstone 1980). Individual-level data on education and wealth have been available for these Western contexts, and they show that education and wealth are often unaligned, with poorer individuals also acquiring at least some amount of high school education.

⁷ Citations to published papers and copies of working papers along with details of the Stages of Progress methodology are available at www.pubpol.duke.edu/krishna

This availability of micro-level data has made it possible to analyze within richer countries the separate effects of education and wealth.

Similar analyses are now possible for the Third World. More youngsters going to school in ever-increasing numbers have pushed up the average literacy figures for entire countries. Just over the past decade, “literacy levels in developing countries have increased from 70 percent to 76 percent” (UNDP 2005: 20), and this pace of increase continues unabated.

These trends are particularly visible within the younger cohorts in developing countries – and they are hardly confined to a richer subset of people. Surveys conducted on behalf of the World Bank between 2003 and 2005 show that among Kenyans ages fifteen to nineteen years old, more than 75 percent of the poorest 40 percent (and about 90 percent of the richest 20 percent) had completed Grade 5. In Bolivia, within the same age group, a little less than 85 percent of the poorest 40 percent and about 95 percent of the richest 20 percent had completed Grade 5. The comparable figures for Peru show that there is no difference between the poorest 40 percent and the richest 20 percent, with 90 percent of both cohorts having completed Grade 5. For Malawi, the difference between the poor and the rich is larger: 60 percent of the poorest 40 percent and 80 percent of the richest 20 percent ages fifteen to nineteen years had completed Grade 5.

The remaining disparities between rich and poor are growing even smaller as more and more children go to school. Among ten-year-olds, more than 85 percent of the poorest 40 percent in Malawi (and 95 percent of the richest 20 percent) are currently enrolled in school. In Peru, there is virtually no difference in this regard across wealth categories: more than 95 percent of all ten-year-olds, both rich and poor, are enrolled in school. In Kenya as well, there is virtually no difference across these wealth categories, with 90-plus percent commonly enrolled in schools.⁸

Of course, the quality of schooling might (and most likely will) differ across wealth categories, and of course, children who are richer will most likely continue in school for a longer time. But the point is that the

⁸ These data are available at www.worldbank.org/research/projects/edattain

illiterate peasant is increasingly becoming a thing of the past. Education among the poor of developing countries is much higher for the younger generation compared with their mothers and fathers and especially with their grandmothers and grandfathers.⁹ And this acquisition of the ability to read and write gives to these younger generations of poorer people a greater ability than their forebears to negotiate and make sense of the written world, a world in which both contemporary states and markets operate. Previously mostly impenetrable by poor people, democracy is now better understood by them, and they can be better engaged with it.

Bratton, in his analysis of sub-Saharan Africa, finds that as people accumulate years of schooling, they become ever more likely to prefer democracy and to reject authoritarian alternatives. At a time when poorer as well as richer villagers are increasingly going to school, the base of support for African democracy is expanding steadily. In a related study, Evans and Rose (2007) contend that, even when raised under authoritarian rule and lacking access to adult civic education, educated people “have a firmer grasp on meaning: not only do they support democracy but they have a better understanding of why they are supporting it.” Moreover, primary schooling – the modal educational experience of African citizens – has a strong positive effect on general preferences for democracy and rejection of non-democratic alternatives.

In this volume, Krishna’s chapter shows that in rural north India, education is consistently positively associated with both political efficacy and political participation. The correlation coefficient between education and wealth is getting reduced, because poorer as well as richer villagers, especially younger ones, are entering schools in ever-increasing numbers. Educated villagers are expanding the scope of their engagements in the public realm. Their reach is no longer confined to

⁹ Krishna (2003) provides a comparative analysis of educational attainment across age groups for a sample of residents in sixty villages of north India, showing that while they were previously closely aligned, education and wealth are no longer closely associated within north Indian villages. As schools have expanded into even quite remote rural areas over the past twenty-five years, poorer villagers are increasingly acquiring functional literacy, and the educational gap across wealth categories is closing rapidly.

the strongman in their village. Their newfound abilities let them reach out farther, making more numerous and more diverse contacts with public officials and party organizers (Krishna 2002, 2003).

In Latin America as well, Booth and Seligson find that a variable for years of education is consistently associated with individuals' engagements with democracy. More generally, education is closely related to a battery of outcomes associated with strengthening and broad-basing support for democracy. Progressively higher levels of education tend to raise both participation and support for democracy, but in relatively small increments.¹⁰

Education, even primary education, is a powerful resource for participation in democracy. Information, considered separately by Krishna in chapter 3, is an equally powerful resource. Measured in terms of the number of different information sources (out of a total of eight) that a respondent consulted over the thirty-day-period prior to the interview, the variable for information is strongly positively associated with political participation as well as political efficacy.

Similar results regarding the value to democracy of education are also reported in some recent aggregate-level analyses. Modeling democratic transitions and stability for the longer period, 1850–1990, Boix and Stokes (2003: 543; emphasis added) find that the “statistical significance of per capita income . . . is *strongly eroded* by the introduction of the index of education.” Przeworski et al. (2000: 137; emphasis added) – who also posit an income threshold below which democracy is unlikely to survive – remark that “Education helps [democracies] to survive *independently* of income.” Thus, democracy can be stabilized even when the income threshold is not crossed, provided that education is sufficiently expanded.

¹⁰ Once populations become largely school-going, the incremental effects on participation of additional years of school are somewhat modest. In Latin America, where the rate of literacy has been comparatively greater for a longer time, such modest incremental effects are demonstrated by Booth and Seligson in chapter 4. Much larger effects are experienced in India and sub-Saharan Africa, however, where a surge in school-going has been more recently experienced and comparatively larger proportions of the population, especially older folk, continue to remain illiterate. Evidence from the United States also indicates that diminishing returns might set in when levels of education become relatively high on average. See for instance Davis (1998) and Nie et al. (1996).

Expanding education helps stabilize democracy. Becoming a democrat is a cognitive learning process, as Bratton states in his chapter. Education and information help people become better democrats; wealth is mostly inconsequential to this process. The conventional wisdom is, therefore, right in one key respect: socioeconomic characteristics do matter, but it is not wealth so much as education that provides the bedrock of mass support for democracy. It is not only the middle class but also educated peasants and slum dwellers who make up the ranks of committed and engaged democratic citizens.

Is Democracy Safe?

Do poor people make good democrats? The conclusions reported in [chapters 2, 3, and 4](#) would appear to suggest that the answer is, by and large, a resounding “Yes.” The future of democracy is not under threat because of lack of support among poor people in poor countries.

But could it be that democracy is still under threat in these countries either despite – or more worryingly, because of – what poor people feel about democracy? Establishing that poor people strongly support democracy does not amount to showing that democracy is itself firmly established. Alternative scenarios presented in different parts of the literature indicate possibilities for democratic reversal that will need to be separately addressed. Will poor people, now strongly in support, begin to abjure democracy in the future if their economic demands remain largely unfulfilled? Are rising and uncontrollable economic demands from newly mobilized poor people likely to submerge the capacities of fledgling democracies, resulting in ungovernability and possibly a retreat from democracy (Huntington 1968; Huntington and Nelson 1976)? How likely is it that fears of redistributive demands from democratically mobilized poor people will tempt elites in these countries to suspend or roll back democracy (Acemoglu and Robinson 2006; Boix 2003)?

These fears of democratic reversals give reason for concern; they cannot be entirely denied – or confirmed – given the evidence at hand. Yes, democracies in poorer countries can be – and have been – reversed; thus, it is prudent to work unremittingly toward their further consolidation and institutionalization, as Przeworski advises in [chapter 5](#) of

this volume. But civil and political rights in much richer democracies have also been repealed or suspended or surreptitiously whittled away at times. So nurturing democracy and protecting individual rights vigilantly is a crucial task in rich as well as poor democracies. If there is some particular weakness in the newer and poorer democracies, it arises, in my view and Przeworski's (in [chapter 5](#)), from the embryonic nature of political and civic institutions in many of these countries. Strengthening institutions – such as courts, political parties, and a free and active media – provides ordinary citizens with greater protections and is an important remaining task for stabilizing democracy in these countries.

Thus, although remaining optimistic and vigilant, one must be cautious about the survival and consolidation of democracy in poor countries. Some comments on the hypotheses expressed earlier are nevertheless still in order; some insights from this volume speak directly to these hypotheses.

First, there is the hypothesis that poor people might turn against democracy if their economic demands are not amply fulfilled. An important assumption underlying this hypothesis – as well as the one related to elites' fear of redistributive demands – is that individuals' concerns for democracies are instrumental and not intrinsic; people tend to trade-off democracy against their own economic well-being. Thus, people who feel that democracy will more likely help improve their economic situations are assumed to have a positive preference for democracy, whereas those who fear its consequences for their pocket-books are assumed to have the opposite preference. These assumptions imply that people cannot have a preference for democracy *independent* of its expected economic consequences; they do not value democracy for and of itself. Apart from leading to a logical conundrum,¹¹ this assumption, inherent in most rational-choice explanations, is also not verified by the data examined in this volume.

¹¹ Hewing closely to the economic logic makes us prisoner to the following conundrum: A rational person cares more for democracy if it raises his or her income, but a rational person also finds it irrational to vote. Unless people think extra-rationally, therefore, there will be no voters and no democracy. But if they think extra-rationally, then income may not be all they will consider while evaluating their preference for democracy or dictatorship.

Bratton demonstrates in [chapter 2](#) that even though poor people feel – in larger numbers compared to richer ones – that democracy has so far mostly failed them in regard to socioeconomic development, they nevertheless tend to strongly reject all nondemocratic alternatives, including military rule, one-person rule, and one-party rule. “Poor people in Africa will not easily surrender their voting rights and may sometimes even use these rights to discipline poorly performing leaders.” In a head-to-head comparison of these different motivations, he found more intrinsic compared to instrumental support for democracy: 50 percent thought that democracy is worth having simply because it allows a popular voice in decision making versus 38 percent who insisted that democracy must address everyone’s basic material needs. To be sure, richer people were significantly more likely to view democracy intrinsically. But almost half of all poorer Africans expressed an intrinsic appreciation of democracy, which is a greater proportion than those who viewed democracy instrumentally.

A similar result is provided by a recent survey of more than 35,000 adults selected in eight West African capital cities together with more than 50,000 individuals interviewed in four Latin American countries.

While 31 percent of all respondents stated that the economic system does not work well in a democracy and over one-third considered that democracies have problems maintaining order, these shortcomings were minor compared to the advantages that people saw of democracy. Over 80 percent of people were convinced that, all things considered, democracy – understood as a political process for selecting leaders via the ballot box – is still the best system compared to other forms of government. (Herrera, Razafindrakoto, and Roubaud 2006: 48)

It is also important to remember that hard times (or good times) overall do not affect all poor (or rich) individuals equally. A rising tide that lifts all boats is clearly a myth, hardly ever experienced in practice. Investigations of the intertemporal economic fates of different households show clearly that during any given period of time some households rise while others fall into poverty (Krishna 2006a). Thus, no matter how well or how poorly the national economy is doing overall, some individuals always fare poorly, and many actually become impoverished.

Are the individuals who suffer a reversal in fortune more likely than others to lose support for democracy? Krishna provides some evidence in [chapter 3](#) that has the effect of allaying these fears to some extent. His two-period data base – interviewing nearly two thousand individuals in both 1997 and 2004 – identifies those individuals who suffered economic reverses and actually fell into poverty during these seven years. He finds that the level of support for democracy among this subgroup of people is not significantly different than the levels of other subgroups. People who fell into poverty do not blame democracy for their misfortunes.

People, including poor people, are becoming sophisticated enough to differentiate between democracy (as a system of rule) and the government presently in power. Krishna finds in rural India that although “democracy is supported by the vast majority of villagers, rich and poor alike . . . there is widespread cynicism about government agents’ performance on a day-to-day basis.” Similarly, Bratton and Mattes (2001a: 108) draw a sharp distinction between support for democracy and satisfaction with economic results, finding that “survey respondents support democracy even when dissatisfied with [the government’s] capacity to deliver.”

A further confirmation that the poor are not disproportionately unsupportive of democracy is seen in Booth and Seligson’s finding that no significant relationship exists between levels of personal wealth and either support for fundamental democratic norms or a preference for elected leaders over unelected strongman leaders. Even controlling for education, community size, national context, and legitimacy norms, the poor do not differ significantly from the wealthy in these democratic attitudes. This calls seriously into question the idea that working class authoritarianism might threaten democracy, at least in these eight Latin American nations.

There are indications, thus, that people in these countries value democracy as much or more for intrinsic rather than instrumental reasons. Considering parallel changes in the international normative context, Lipset (1994: 2) partially revises his earlier position, holding that democracy may not be so much “a ‘rational choice,’ particularly in the new, less stable, less legitimate polities.” A strengthening normative basis of support is taking hold, he suggests, making democracy both

an international cause and a national imperative. Diamond (1992: 102) refers similarly to a “globalization of democracy, in terms of the near-universalization of popular demands for political freedom, representation, participation, and accountability.”

The authors in this volume find these effects echoed within the rural and urban communities that they have studied in different developing countries. People value democracy more for what it is politically and institutionally than for what it does economically for them. It seems unlikely, therefore, that poor people will lose support for democracy – as a system of government – just because the government of the day fails to meet their material demands. Nevertheless, creating institutions that enable these demands to be channeled in orderly fashion, while respecting the rights of other citizens, remains very important, much as Huntington (1968) observed forty years ago.

What of the second argument? Do elites, instead, support democracy only insofar as their wealth is not threatened by redistributive demands emanating from mobilized poor people? And will they be willing and able to subvert democracy when they feel these threats are growing too large?

Let us take note first that a distinction needs to be made between poverty, on the one hand, and inequality, on the other. Muller (1988: 66; emphasis in original) finds that “a very strong inverse association is observed between income inequality and the likelihood of stability versus breakdown of democracy. . . . [But] this negative effect of income inequality on democratic stability is *independent* of a country’s level of economic development.” Mass poverty is not the factor that tends to jeopardize democracy in this argument – though it can exacerbate these effects, as pointed out by Przeworski in [chapter 5](#) – however, it is inequality that initially moves elites to fear, and on occasion, to subvert democracy. “In highly unequal societies,” as Boix (2003: 3) puts it, “the redistributive demands of the worse-off citizens on the wealthy are particularly intense. As a result, the latter have a strong incentive to oppose the introduction of democracy, which would enable the majority to impose heavy taxes on them.”¹²

¹² The connection with economic development is made by Boix on account of the fact that broadly, over a long historical period, economic growth has, in general, gone

How real are these fears?¹³ Unfortunately, authors who set forth the inequality-redistribution argument – Boix (2003) as much as Acemoglu and Robinson (2006) – provide “no systematic evidence on how the structural variables of inequality and asset specificity play themselves out with real actors, which is where the causal action is said to lie” (Ziblatt 2006: 322). Even though two micro-level assumptions underpin the inequality-redistribution argument – (a) that poor people have systematically stronger preferences for democracy than their richer counterparts, and (b) that rich people’s preferences for democracy are, in fact, weaker in societies that have significantly higher levels of inequality – no micro-level evidence is provided related to these assumed preferences and behaviors.

Micro-level evidence examined here provides support for neither assumption. First, individual wealth is mostly *not* significant in

together with reduced inequality. In his scheme, the prevalence of highly immobile forms of capital such as land exacerbates the probability of the authoritarian solution. Long-term economic growth, by simultaneously both reducing inequality and enhancing elites’ ownership of assets that are comparatively more mobile, that is, financial rather than physical assets, tends to reduce fears of redistribution among elites, thereby lowering their incentives for imposing authoritarian remedies.

¹³ It is curious to note that challenges to the probable coexistence of mass poverty and democracy rely not on any single set of assumptions but on two diametrically opposed sets. The original Lipset hypothesis, recall, was based on the assumption that the poor have no great concern for democracy; authoritarian tendencies associated with the lower classes tend to make their numbers inimical to democracy. The inequality-redistribution arguments turn this assumption on its head. Here it is assumed that poor people are inherently *more* democratic than rich elites. “Where does the demand for democracy come from” in these arguments, asks Ziblatt (2006: 317)? Implicitly, it “*always* emerges ‘from below.’” Thus, whether the poor are assumed to stay distant from democracy (as in the Lipset hypothesis) or whether they are assumed to hold it close (as in the inequality-redistribution arguments), the presence of large numbers of poor people is presumed to have the same ultimate effect: mass poverty is regarded as detrimental to democratic stability, no matter what poor people believe and how they act! Clearly, the Lipset hypothesis and the inequality-redistribution hypothesis cannot both be simultaneously true; if both were true, that would imply that poor people’s attitudes and actions did not matter in the least, and if these attitudes and actions do not matter, then it makes no difference how many poor people live within a country; democracy would have no palpable relationship with the level of economic development. In order to continue proposing the adverse connection between poverty and democracy, either one or both of these hypotheses has to be dismissed as incorrect.

analyses of democratic values, political efficacy, or political participation. Thus, although poor people are not less democratic than richer ones, neither are they consistently and strongly more pro-democracy.

Second, among the subset of richer people interviewed, attitudes and practices are not significantly different across societies that have varying levels of inequality. Krishna undertakes these comparisons across the sixty-one rural communities that he examines, finding that within-community levels of inequality are not significantly related to across-community differences in faith for democracy. People (specifically, richer people) do not express less faith in democracy in communities where inequality is higher. Conducting a similar analysis, Booth and Seligson show that a higher Gini coefficient goes together at the country level in Latin America with a slightly lower overall support for democracy, indicating that greater inequality is associated with less support for democracy. However, their variable for wealth does not correlate significantly with support for democracy, either at the country level or at the individual level, suggesting that it is not particularly the rich in these countries who are fearful of democracy's consequences. Bratton finds for sub-Saharan Africa that the connection between support for democracy (aggregated at the country level) and an inequality ratio (of the richest: poorest quintiles' share of income) is neither strong nor statistically significant.¹⁴

Our data do not, therefore, provide much empirical support for the individual-level assumptions inherent in these inequality – redistribution arguments. However, they also do not entirely remove the disquiet engendered by these arguments.

Apprehensions about instability on account of elite reactions remain. It is possible, for example, that elites, presently strongly pro-democracy, might be led in the future to believe, quite likely at the urging of some demagogues among them – for how else would they collectively gain a call to urgent action? – that all was not well with democracy, and rising demands by the poor for education, employment, and entitlements threatened to upend their well-filled nests. It is also possible that populist administrations that meet (and sometimes

¹⁴ Personal communication from Michael Bratton.

exceed) the demands made by poor people might continue deriving support, at least ostensibly, even after they take an authoritarian turn. Contemporary Venezuela is cited in this context by Booth and Seligson in [chapter 4](#) of this volume. Some clouds remain, therefore, as concerns the future of democracy, as Przeworski remarks in [chapter 5](#).

Building strong institutions is particularly important in this regard. Institutions that can deter potential authoritarians and their supporters while enforcing fair and equitable processes will help entrench people's intrinsic support for democracy. It is significant to note that the longer a democracy survives the more likely it is, by and large, to become more strongly democratic. Booth and Seligson show that the longevity of democracy is positively correlated with many democratic behaviors. These positive effects also spill over to infect other countries of the region (Bernhard, Nordstrom, and Reenock 2001). Democratization in the neighborhood has a strong demonstration effect (Gasirowski 1995). As the new democracies acquire a stronger basis in institutions, the already strong public support for them should become even stronger, possibly also spilling over to other countries in their vicinity.

Consolidating Democracy in Poorer Countries

Three related elements are mentioned by Linz and Stepan (1996) as being associated with and responsible for the consolidation of democracy: *Behaviorally*, no significant actor in the country spends significant resources attempting to achieve their objectives by creating a nondemocratic alternative or by seceding from the democratic state. *Attitudinally*, a strong majority of people hold the belief that democratic procedures and institutions are the most appropriate way to govern collective life in a society such as theirs, and support for anti-system alternatives is quite small. *Constitutionally*, governmental and nongovernmental forces alike become habituated to the resolution of conflict within specified institutions and procedures sanctioned by the new democratic process.

The evidence presented in this volume shows that, in terms of the attitudinal element, opportunities are present for regime consolidation

in the new democracies of Africa and Latin America. Indeed, this outcome may already have come to pass in parts of rural India.

Behaviorally, as well, neither poorer nor richer citizens of these countries appear to be investing in promoting non-democratic alternatives or seceding from their democratic states. People here participate in large numbers in various activities associated with making democracy work, and these figures for participation are larger in comparison to those reported for richer and longer-standing democracies.

Still, all is not as well as it should be. Bratton in [Chapter 2](#) of this volume finds that commitments to democracy, although widespread, continue to be somewhat shallow and tentative in Africa. Access – to the protections, benefits, and opportunities of democracy – continues to remain a significant problem, especially for poorer people and those who live in more remote areas. “The central state remains a relatively remote and inaccessible apparatus to most Africans.” Although political parties remain weak and not highly trusted, they are still capable of mobilizing poorer Africans to vote, especially in rural areas. At the same time, poor rural dwellers continue to direct their political demands most often along informal channels, relying on traditional authorities, religious leaders, and other local notables. Krishna finds that individuals who feel excluded because of lack of access are likely to experience a lower sense of personal efficacy; their participation scores are also lower than those of others. Political parties and other intermediate institutions – such as local governments, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), and other civil society organizations – do not provide most people with a viable avenue for upward representation.

Increasing access to the agencies and institutions that uphold the protections, opportunities, and benefits of democracy is critically important for enhancing people’s commitments to democracy. In addition to the national institutions that are usually mentioned in discussions about consolidation, it is equally important in developing country contexts to build and strengthen the intermediate – or middle-level – institutions that enable individual citizens to develop more regular and reliable links with elected representatives and other officials.

Herrera et al. (2006: 57), after surveying the opinions of people in eight West African cities, state that “the populations who tend

to be excluded from the social body express high expectations and count explicitly on greater democracy, with its underlying principles of equality before the law and equal opportunities.” Institutions that better enable these principles to be converted into practice need to be designed and installed with urgency in developing countries.

Thus, in terms of the third element of consolidating democracy – promoting institutions and procedures sanctioned by the new democratic process – the task remains one of engineering institutions that can help serve this objective within the *specific* contexts of different developing countries. National, as well as middle-level institutions, will need to be designed and installed.

Social democratic parties in Western Europe helped provide the institutional scaffolding for serving poor people’s aspirations while directing their demands along democratic avenues. It is likely that some similar and some different designs will emerge in different countries. Hagopian (2000: 902) observes that “countries are not on the path toward a single type of democracy, but an amazing plurality of forms [is emerging. We]... should expect to see appear in societies with similar productive structures and social influences diverse degrees of political centralization, patterns of state strength, and institutional design.”

Developing different institutional designs, better suited to securing the gains of democracy for poorer people in different countries, is a critical remaining task for analysts and policymakers alike. Social scientists and others have worried about making democracy more secure. But making democracy more democratic – with its protections and benefits more easily accessed by marginalized people – is as important a task, which needs more attention in the future. We speak to this concern in the concluding chapter of this volume.

Some things have changed from the past that enable greater confidence to be reposed in the prospects for democracy in poor countries. Increasing education has assisted in more widely spreading knowledge about and faith in democracy as a system of government. Authoritarians intending to take over must now contend with a huge mass of support for democracy within their countries, such as they did not face before. Externally, as well, they can less assuredly count on support.

Some other things need to change, however, in order to consolidate these gains. Making democracy more equal in practice for poorer citizens through institutional improvements is an important remaining task. Rather than protecting democracy from poor people, securing democracy *for* them is a more urgent issue.