7

JAPANESE ATTITUDES AND VALUES TOWARD DEMOCRACY

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JAPAN OFFERS AN INTRIGUING CASE for comparing the experiences of democracy and value change across East Asia. Japan has a longer history of sovereign independence than most other countries in the region. The roots of its democracy are deeper because even before World War II, Japan enjoyed a period of democratic experiment known as Taishō-era democracy. And Japan began its industrialization earlier than other Asian nations. Consequently, changes in values and attitudes in Japanese society associated with economic growth, urbanization, and the introduction of Western lifestyles are likely to be more complex and widespread. Findings from the Japanese case can serve as a benchmark against which findings from newer democracies in Asia can be compared.

The findings reported in this chapter come from a nationwide sample of eligible voters conducted in January and February 2003. We found that the Japanese people almost universally recognize the fundamental transition of political regime that occurred after World War II and see the present regime as democratic. There are, nevertheless, some variations, especially across age groups, in conceptions of democracy as well as in perceptions of the current regime's performance. Trust in democratic institutions is low and seems to be in decline.

The Japanese public is among the most dissatisfied with the government's performance of all the publics surveyed by the East Asian Barometer. Yet the Japanese support democracy as a system and show little interest in authoritarian alternatives. Democracy is consolidated in Japan, not because it is perceived as doing well, but because it is the default position for most Japanese citizens.

1. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF JAPANESE DEMOCRACY

It is customary to view the development of postwar Japanese politics as having gone through three stages: 1945 to 1955, 1955 to 1993, and 1993 to the present. In the first stage, Japan's parliamentary democracy was a typical multiparty system under which several major parties, from both conservative and progressive camps, competed for legislative seats and took turns forming the government. Most of the governments formed during this period were either coalition or minority governments, and only one out of a total of nine was based on a single-party legislative majority. This early period also witnessed constant party switching by individual politicians and a series of mergers and breakups of political parties, and was generally characterized by fluid partisan alignment.

A new party system emerged in 1955, when the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) was established following the amalgamation of the conservative forces. For the next thirty-eight years, the LDP held uninterrupted power. The Japan Socialist Party (JSP), also created in 1955, never became a viable alternative to the LDP. The LDP suffered a long-term decline in its vote share during the 1960s, when two centrist parties—namely the Democratic Socialist Party (DSP) and the Komei Party—entered the race for the House of Representatives, the more important lower house of the Diet. From 1983 to 1986 the LDP was in coalition with the New Liberal Club (NLC), a small conservative group that had broken away from the LDP in 1976. But for this exception, the LDP was able to maintain a series of single-party governments throughout these years.

The third and current phase began in the early 1990s, when the LDP's grip on power weakened because of increasing public discontent born of a series of political scandals. In 1993, the largest LDP faction broke into two groups, one of which eventually joined the opposition in passing a no-confidence bill against the LDP government. In the next election, the LDP failed to obtain a majority and was forced to hand over power to a non-LDP

coalition government. The non-LDP government collapsed in less than a year, and the LDP returned to power in coalition with its long-time rival, the former JSP. The LDP survived the next three general elections as the plurality party and remained in power by alternating coalition partners. The non-LDP camp, meanwhile, proved unable to consolidate and remained in opposition up to the time of our survey in 2003.

The dominance of a single conservative party over such a long period is remarkable, considering that over this period Japan underwent radical and continuous transformations in its social and economic conditions, including its industrial structures, occupational distribution, and living standards. The LDP has often been compared to other dominant parties, such as the Social Democrats in Sweden and the Christian Democrats in Italy, but its record is truly exceptional in terms of both longevity and the degree of its dominance. The LDP's monopoly of power has also provoked much criticism, especially in the late 1980s and early 1990s.

Many observers argued that the LDP's problems—chronic factionalism, preoccupation with money politics, and lack of policy innovations—could be traced to the peculiar electoral system that had been used for the House of Representatives since 1947, a system of single nontransferable votes coupled with multimember districts. The non-LDP coalition government that came to power in 1993 made revisions of the electoral law a priority. With the introduction of some single-member districts into the system, there was hope that a viable two-party system would finally emerge. The consolidation of the anti-LDP camp into the New Frontier Party (NFP) in December 1994 encouraged such hopes. But the new party proved to be short lived. At the time of our survey, the only serious challenge to the LDP came from the newly-formed Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ). Although the DPJ came close to besting the LDP in the general elections of 2003 and maintained its vote strength in the 2005 election, the LDP managed to win back many seats in the 2005 election by increasing the turnout rate of its voter base. Thus it was unclear whether or when a two-party system would emerge as the designers of the electoral system reform had anticipated.

2. CONCEPTIONS OF DEMOCRACY

Japan returned the highest number of don't know/no answer (DK/NA) responses to the question, "What does democracy mean to you?" in the EAB

survey. This is not unusual for surveys in Japan, where respondents often have difficulty responding to open-ended questions related to politics. It may also reflect the fact that democracy has been so long established in Japan that many people do not think very specifically about what it is.

Roughly two-thirds of Japanese respondents gave at least one interpretation. One-third gave two answers, and one-ninth gave three answers. The responses are displayed in chapter 1, table 1.3.

As the table shows, Japanese respondents who gave valid answers (N = 933) offered a range of fairly evenly divided understandings of the term rather than focusing on one or two concepts as in some other countries in the EAB survey. Almost half understood democracy in terms of freedom and liberty (30%), particularly in terms of freedom in general and freedom of expression. The next-largest group (18%) understood democracy in general positive terms, including answers such as "taking into account all parties concerned," "fair treatment," or "self-responsibility." The third-largest group understood democracy in terms of social equality and justice, numbering 17.5% of the sample, with five out of six responses in this category being related to equality rather than justice. The fourth-largest category (9%) understood democracy in terms of political rights, institutions, and processes. In this category, the typical response was "majority rule." Only 3.4% of the respondents who answered the question thought of democracy in negative terms, such as "focusing too much on individual interests."

Within the EAB survey, the Japanese pattern of responses most closely resembled that of the Koreans, who identified the same top four categories of meanings of democracy, and did so in close to the same order. Where Japanese differed from Koreans was, first, in the greater percentage of DK/NA answers, and second, in the smaller emphasis given by Japanese respondents to the relationship of democracy to the market economy.

The relatively small proportion of answers mentioning institutions and processes suggests that Japanese citizens tend to conceptualize democracy statically rather than dynamically as a regime to be attained through the assertion of citizenship rights. This may reflect the historical character of Japanese democracy as a system imposed after defeat in war rather than the product of indigenous political movements with broad grassroots involvement. Arguably, such an interpretation is consistent with findings reported elsewhere regarding low levels of active and challenging political participation in Japan, such as demonstrations, boycotts, strikes, and other unconventional forms of protest (Dalton 2002:62–63).

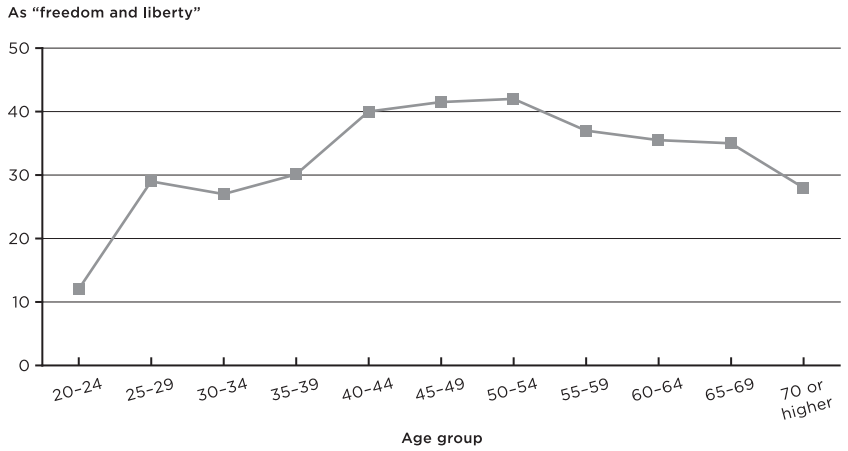

FIGURE 7.1 Meaning of Democracy by Age Group

As shown in figure 7.1, people above the age of forty—those most affected by the early stages of Japan's postwar political development—were most likely to define democracy in terms of freedom and liberty. Younger respondents were more like to define democracy in general positive terms, offering few specific ideas. This suggests that democracy has become a background condition of life in the course of sixty years of practice since World War II. Since it is no longer the subject of debate or aspiration, younger people do not think carefully about what it is.

3. EVALUATING DEMOCRATIC PROGRESS AND ITS CONSEQUENCES

In this section, we explore the extent of Japan's democratic consolidation by examining public perceptions of the current regime in comparison to the prewar military regime. We found that the overwhelming majority of Japanese perceived a fundamental regime change to have taken place at the end of World War II, and considered the new regime vastly more democratic than the military dictatorship of the prewar era. We also find that while the democratic performance of the current regime is evaluated highly, many Japanese have reservations about its performance, especially in promoting social and economic equality.

3.1. PERCEPTIONS OF REGIME CHANGE

The EAB survey asked respondents to rate their current and past regimes on a 10-point scale of democracy. The results for Japan are reported in table 7.1. Less than one-sixth of respondents had difficulty evaluating the prewar regime. The perceived contrast between the prewar and postwar regimes was stark. More than three-quarters of Japanese (77%) rated the current regime as democratic by placing it at 6 or above on the scale, while an almost equal proportion (75.4%) rated the prewar regime as dictatorial by placing it at 5 or below. While the current regime received a mean rating of 7.0, the prewar regime received a 3.1. However, it should also be noted that even after more than five decades of democratic rule, the rating of 7 out of a possible 10 means that Japan remains a partial or limited democracy in the eyes of its citizens.

The perception of regime change was somewhat affected by age. As the wartime regime fades further into the past, younger generations have less strong feelings that there is something historically special about the current political system. Views of "equally dictatorial" and "less dictatorial" were more frequently found among younger people (the average age for

TABLE 7.1 PERCEPTIONS OF PAST AND CURRENT REGIMES: JAPAN

(Percent of respondents)

REGIME TYPES	PAST REGIME	CURRENT REGIME
Very dictatorial (1–2)	35.0	0.5
Somewhat dictatorial (3–5)	40.4	13.5
Somewhat democratic (6–8)	7.6	65.6
Very democratic (9–10)	0.6	11.3
DK/NA	16.4	9.1
Total	100.0	100.0
Mean on the 10-point scale	3.1	7.0

Notes: Regime types are based on the respondent's ranking of the regime on a scale from 1, "complete dictatorship," to 10, "complete democracy." Scores of 5 and below are degrees of dictatorship and scores of 6 and above are degrees of democracy.

N = 1419.

DK/NA = Don't know/no answer.

respondents holding these views were forty-six and forty-three respectively), whereas views of moderate or dramatic democratic transition were more likely to be held by older people (the average age was fifty-two and fifty-three respectively). Those under the age of thirty-five were least likely to perceive regime change. Nonetheless, most Japanese still have enough indirect knowledge of the prewar regime to recognize the dramatic democratization of the country's political system in the postwar era, and except for age these assessments vary little with demographic categories.

Based on the ratings of past and current regimes we identified six patterns of perceived regime change (see chapter 1, table 1.7). Consistent with the Japanese respondents' reserved assessment of their current regime, the majority of those able to answer these two questions (64%) assessed the regime change as a shift from dictatorship to a moderate level of democracy. In the eight countries surveyed by the EAB, Japan recorded the highest percentage who selected this pattern. A much smaller proportion (12%) saw a dramatic democratic transition, while another 11% only considered the current regime to be less dictatorial than the prewar regime rather than truly democratic. Interestingly, nearly 9% of respondents considered the current regime to be a continuation of prewar democracy, perhaps referring to the brief democratic experiment of the Taishō era. Overall, an overwhelming majority (84.5%) of the Japanese public perceived at least some progress toward greater democracy since the end of World War II.

Individual perceptions of the regime change are affected by demographic factors. We found that male respondents were 5% more likely than females to perceive a regime change and that university graduates were more likely than those with lower degrees to perceive a regime change (72% versus 58%). These differences suggest that groups who participate relatively actively in politics in Japan are more cognizant than other groups of the differences between the former and the new regimes.

3.2. COMPARING PAST AND PRESENT REGIMES

The EAB survey asked respondents to rate each of nine major government performance domains on a 5-point scale. The findings for Japan are presented in table 7.2. Japanese citizens perceived significant improvements in their political and personal freedoms. The greatest improvements were felt in the areas of freedom of speech (+93%) and freedom of association

TABLE 7.2 **PERCEIVED PERFORMANCE OF CURRENT AND PAST REGIMES: JAPAN**

	MEAN[a]	SD[a]	NEGATIVE CHANGE[b]	POSITIVE CHANGE[b]	NO CHANGE[b]	PDI[c]	VALID %[d]
Democratic performance							
Freedom of speech	1.45	0.67	1.7	94.3	4.0	92.6	95.5
Freedom of association	1.22	0.71	2.1	88.1	9.8	86.0	89.3
Equal treatment	0.54	1.03	18.9	63.3	17.8	44.4	91.7
Popular influence	0.38	0.95	14.9	48.1	37.0	33.2	88.5
Independent judiciary	0.64	1.00	14.5	62.4	23.1	47.9	76.7
Average	0.84	0.87	10.4	71.2	18.3	60.8	9.0
Policy performance							
Anticorruption	–0.33	1.17	45.7	28.1	26.3	–17.6	89.3
Law and order	0.10	1.12	34.3	46.2	19.6	11.9	92.4
Economic development	0.57	1.23	23.6	66.4	10.0	42.8	94.3
Economic equality	0.25	1.10	26.0	49.9	24.2	23.9	92.3
Average	0.15	1.15	32.4	47.6	20.0	15.2	92.1

Notes: N = 1418.

Past regime is defined as pre-1945.

[a] Scale ranges from –2 (much worse) to +2 (much better).
[b] Percent of valid sample.
[c] PDI (percentage difference index) = percent seeing positive change minus percent seeing negative change.
[d] Percent of sample giving a valid answer to this question.

(+86%), although significant improvements were also registered in the other three areas of democratic performance. The PDI scores for the five democratic performance areas averaged +60.8, second only to Thailand among the countries surveyed. Japan registered the greatest improvements in the freedom of speech and freedom of association of all countries in the survey, as befits its status as the oldest liberal democracy in East Asia. This suggests that the regime has what Tanaka (2002, 2003) calls "system support," and is well consolidated.

However, at the level of policy performance, there has been a persistent sense of crisis over many years which is reflected in our EAB data. A substantial number of our respondents evaluated the policy performance of the democratic regime negatively or as unchanged, and the PDI scores in the policy areas are unimpressive. In the dimension of corruption control, for instance, almost half (46%) of respondents evaluated the current regime's performance negatively, and the PDI score is nearly -18. While this particular area may be heavily affected by the media's persistent focus on political corruption in Japan's postwar history (Pharr 2000), the current regime did not fare as well as one may expect even in the economic areas, despite the remarkable successes of the Japanese economy from the 1950s to the 1980s.

Although more respondents approved of the present regime's performance in economic development, almost a quarter (24%) evaluated the same area negatively, despite the fact that Japan's GNP multiplied more than twenty thousand times between 1935 and the early 2000s. In the area of economic equality, a quarter of the respondents perceived negative changes, and the PDI score is only 23.9. This is despite the fact that, although there was a slight increase in inequality between 1970 and the late 1990s, Japan's performance in this area is relatively stable compared to other OECD (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development) countries (OECD 1997). The lack of reliable data going back to the 1930s makes it impossible to offer any conclusive analysis, but there are some indications that inequality was more pronounced before the war. Japan's Gini coefficient stood at 0.451 in 1930 and 0.641 in 1940, suggesting far higher levels of inequality than, for instance, in 1980 when the coefficient was 0.334 (Tachibanaki 1998). Many of the postwar reforms undertaken by the occupation forces were targeted to address distributional problems, including land, tax, and administrative reforms. In light of these facts, the reservations expressed by many respondents about the economic performance of the postwar regime may be puzzling, but perhaps that is because

few have specific knowledge of the previous regime and most evaluate the current system on its recent performance.

In any case, the overall ratings remain positive except for anticorruption, suggesting that even on the policy side, public dissatisfaction is not strong enough to lead to disillusionment with democracy as a type of regime,

We investigated the relationship between perceptions of regime performance and several standard demographic variables. The only significant factor was age. Respondents over the age of forty-five tended to evaluate the democratic performance of the current regime more highly than those in younger age groups, further supporting the idea that those whose life experience was closer to the era of military rule are more sensitive to the distinctive aspects of democratic governance. Other than this, demographic subgroups of the population differed little in their evaluations of regime performance, suggesting a broad national consensus on what citizens want from government and on what they perceive it as delivering.

4. APPRAISING DEMOCRATIC INSTITUTIONS

Not only were Japanese citizens dissatisfied with the policy performance of the regime, but as we will explain in this section, they also exhibited low levels of confidence in their participatory capacity, and compared with the publics in younger democracies in the region, were exceptionally distrustful of the key institutions of representative democracy. Yet we will argue that these findings do not mean that Japanese democracy is not consolidated—it remains the only thinkable form of regime, with no authoritarian alternative drawing significant public support.

4.1. OVERALL SATISFACTION WITH DEMOCRACY AND THE CURRENT GOVERNMENT

The EAB survey assessed satisfaction with the current regime by asking, "On the whole, how satisfied or dissatisfied are you with the way democracy works in our country?" On this question the public appeared evenly divided. Only 4% were "very satisfied," but likewise only 7% were "not at all satisfied." Forty-two percent were "fairly satisfied," while 39% were "not very satisfied." Demographic analyses showed that males were slightly more dissatisfied than females and people over sixty were more

TABLE 7.3 TIME-SERIES DATA ON CABINET EVALUATION: 1979–2003

	FROM	TO	AVERAGE SUPPORT (%)	AVERAGE NONSUPPORT (%)
Ōhira	Jan 79	Apr 80	34.2	42.8
Suzuki	Aug 80	Sep 82	38.5	38.3
Nakasone	Dec 82	Oct 87	47.5	34.1
Takeshita	Nov 87	Apr 89	39.1	40.1
Uno	Jun 89	—	22.8	56.5
Kaifu	Aug 89	Sep 91	50.2	33.5
Miyazawa	Nov 91	Jun 93	30.4	55.3
Hosokawa	Sep 93	Mar 94	67.2	20.9
Hata	Apr 94	Jun 94	49.9	35.6
Murayama	Jul 94	Dec 95	39.1	44.8
Hashimoto	Jan 96	Jun 98	45.1	41.0
Obuchi	Sep 98	Mar 00	40.4	44.6
Mori	Apr 00	Sep 01	24.9	62.2
Koizumi	May 01	Dec 03	60.1	29.7

Source: Yomiuri newspaper, ed., *Nidai-seitō jidai no akebono* [The dawn of the two-party system in Japan] (Tokyo: Bokutaku-sha, 2004).

dissatisfied than the younger generations. No clear variations existed for level of education.

In a related question, respondents were asked about their general satisfaction with the then current government (the Junichirō Koizumi cabinet) based on a 4-point scale ranging from 1 (very satisfied) to 4 (very dissatisfied). Only 3% indicated that they were "very satisfied" and another 32% "somewhat satisfied," whereas 41% were "somewhat dissatisfied" and 19% "very dissatisfied." The mean score was 2.8 (SD = .79), indicating that the majority of respondents were not satisfied. Less than two years earlier, however, this cabinet had enjoyed an exceptional level of popularity at its inauguration. In its first year, it enjoyed a 63.8% average approval rating.

These low levels of satisfaction are not exceptional in the recent history of Japan. We can compare them to a quarter-century's worth of monthly approval ratings in which respondents were asked whether they supported the current cabinet, as shown in table 7.3. It is evident that in the past twenty-five

years, only half of the cabinets enjoyed more support than nonsupport. Such low evaluations of incumbents' performance no doubt had an impact on citizens' satisfaction with the democratic system as a whole, yet, as we will show later, did not lead to support for authoritarian alternatives to democracy.

4.2. PERCEPTIONS OF CORRUPTION

The EAB included a pair of items probing whether corruption is perceived to be more serious at the national or local level of government. The results are presented in table 7.4. Over half (51.8%) of the respondents believed that almost all or most officials in the national government were corrupt. Corruption at the local level was perceived to be less widespread, with 37.7% believing that almost all or most officials were corrupt. Considered together, less than one-third (31%) of respondents believed that most officials at both national and local levels were honest, whereas a slightly larger number (32%) believed most officials at both levels to be corrupt.

These results may reflect the extensive and lengthy media coverage of corruption among national politicians (Pharr 2000). As revealed in the results to a follow-up question, few of those who perceived widespread corruption had actually witnessed it either directly or indirectly (1% and 4% respectively).

4.3. INSTITUTIONAL TRUST

Trust in public institutions is an important aspect of social capital and hence an important ingredient of effective democratic governance (Putnam et al. 1993). In the EAB survey, respondents were asked to indicate their levels of trust in twelve state and societal institutions. The results are presented in figure 7.2. Among the countries we surveyed, trust in public institutions is relatively low in Japan. Five of the twelve institutions listed were trusted by fewer than half of our respondents, and these included the key institutions of Japanese democracy such as the parliament, national and local governments, and political parties. Although parliaments and political parties are rarely popular among the countries in our survey, the Japanese figures are by far the lowest, with roughly nine out of ten respondents expressing distrust. Trust in the national government is the lowest as well, with some 76% of the public expressing distrust.

TABLE 7.4 PERCEPTION OF POLITICAL CORRUPTION AT NATIONAL AND LOCAL LEVELS: JAPAN

(Percent of total sample)

	NATIONAL GOVERNMENT					
LOCAL GOVERNMENT	Hardly anyone is involved	Not a lot of officials are involved	Most officials are corrupt	Almost everyone is corrupt	DK/NA	Total
Hardly anyone is involved	0.8	2.0	0.5	0.2	0.5	3.9
Not a lot of officials are involved	0.3	**28.3**	**15.4**	2.0	1.3	**47.2**
Most officials are corrupt	0.2	3.9	**19.3**	3.9	0.6	**28.0**
Almost everyone is corrupt	0.1	0.5	1.6	7.5	-	9.7
DK/NA	-	1.3	1.0	0.4	8.5	**11.1**
Total	1.3	**36.0**	**37.8**	**14.0**	**10.9**	**100.0**

Notes: N = 1418.

Blank cell means no cases.

Percentages above 10 are in boldface.

By comparison, the administrative organs of the state enjoyed higher levels of public confidence. The military and the police were trusted by roughly half of our respondents, while the courts (68%) and the electoral commission (65%) enjoyed even higher levels of trust, perhaps because of their perceived political neutrality (although some scandals have recently been revealed in these sectors as well). The one notable exception is the civil service, which, along with political parties, is one of the least-trusted institutions in Japan, a pattern contrary to most expectations. Perhaps this is due to the extraordinary amounts of power wielded by the bureaucracy in the Japanese system. In the eyes of the public, since the bureaucrats actually make policies, they are deeply enmeshed in the political process and must therefore shoulder responsibility for the troubles, economic and otherwise, that beset the country in recent years.

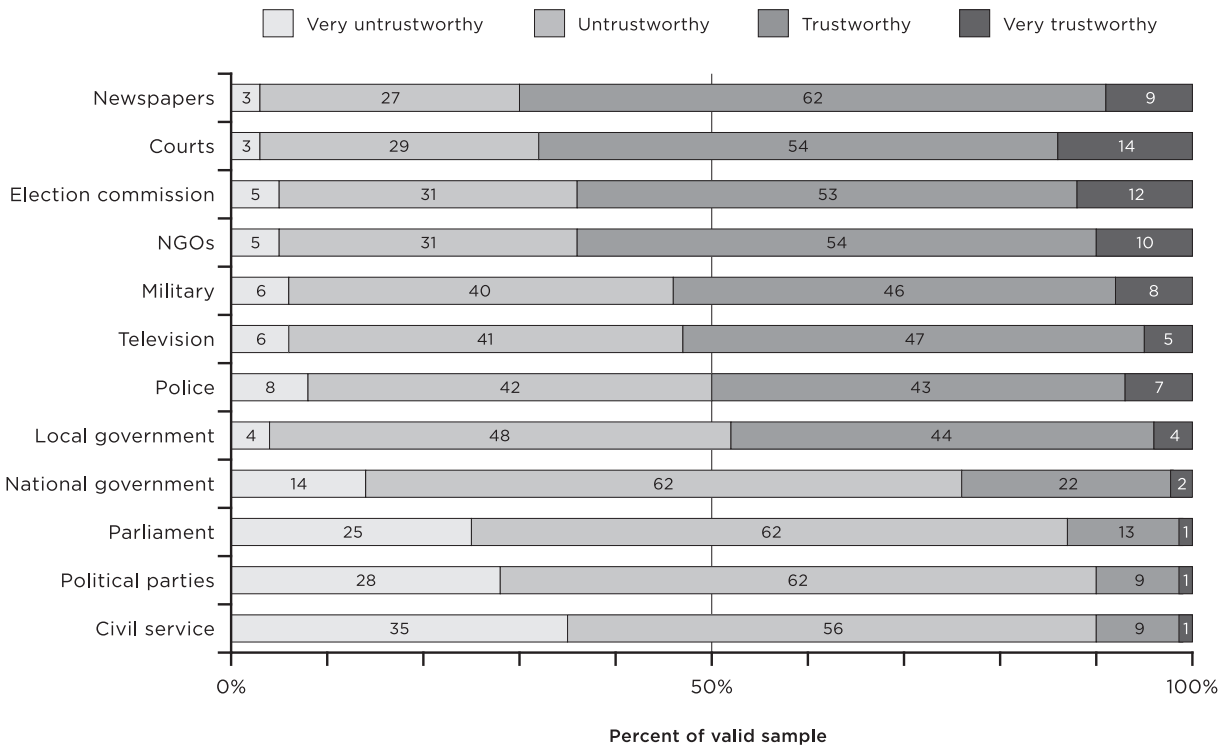

FIGURE 7.2 **Trust in Institutions: Japan**

The most-trusted institutions were those of a societal nature. The mass media were well trusted, with newspapers judged to be the most trustworthy among all the institutions listed in the survey. Television was likewise highly regarded.[1] Although nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) have a relatively brief history in Japan, they were also thought to be highly trustworthy precisely because of their nongovernmental nature.

Trust in institutions seems to be correlated with the perceived distance from political corruption. The pattern is consistent across multiple surveys from 1990 to our survey in 2003 (see table 7.5). Newspapers, television, and the courts scored high in trust; political parties and parliament low. This is probably as a result of the stream of corruption scandals as well as the perceived responsibility of these institutions for the stagnation of Japanese society.

TABLE 7.5 TIME-SERIES DATA ON TRUST IN INSTITUTIONS, 1990–2003

(Percentage of respondents expressing trust)

	WORLD VALUES SURVEY[a]	WORLD VALUES SURVEY[a]	JGSS[b]	EAB SURVEY
	1990	**1995**	**2000**	**2003**
Courts	61.4	74.1	69.0	68
The national government	—	30.0	—	24
Political parties	—	17.2	—	10
Parliament	28.3	24.2	28.8	14
Civil service	33.0	35.0	43.1	10
The military	24.0	59.5	61.6	54
The police	57.8	76.3	67.3	50
Newspapers	54.6	71.6	89.4	71
Television	—	68.1	76.9	52
N=	1011	1054	2893	1418
Scale	4-point scale	4-point scale	3-point scale	4-point scale

[a] World Values Survey data are from http://www.worldvaluessurvey.org.

[b] The Japanese General Social Survey; see http://jgss.daishodai.ac.jp/english/eframe/englishtop.html.

TABLE 7.6 "POLITICS ARE TOO COMPLICATED TO UNDERSTAND"

(Percent of total sample)

	AGREE	CAN'T SAY	DISAGREE	DK/NA	TOTAL
1976[a]	56.8	17.3	12.6	13.3	100.0
1983[b]	62.7	14.7	18.3	4.3	100.0
1993[c]	66.8	9.7	20.8	2.7	100.0
1995[c]	70.6	10.0	17.3	2.1	100.0
1996[c]	68.2	10.6	18.5	2.8	100.0
Average	65.6	12.0	17.8	4.5	100.0

Sources: Japanese Election Studies (JABISS 1976, JES 1983, JES2 1993–1996).

[a] 1976 data are from the JABISS study (Flanagan et al. 1991); N = 1921.

[b] 1983 data are from the JES study (Watanuki et al. 1986); N = 1769.

[c] 1993 to 1996 data are from the JES2 study (Kabashima et al. 1998); N = 2320, 2076, 2299 respectively.

4.4. POLITICAL EFFICACY

We asked respondents about their self-perceived political empowerment, as defined by the ability to understand politics and the capacity to participate in politics (sometimes referred to as "internal efficacy"; see chapter 1, table 1.4). Only 16.9% of our respondents believed they could understand politics, and an even smaller number (13.8%) felt capable of active engagement. Overall, more than half (59.2%) of respondents believed they could neither understand nor participate in politics, while those who felt capable of both amounted to only 10.2%.

A lengthy set of time-series data is available on the perceived ability to understand politics from the Japanese election studies between 1976 and 1996 (see table 7.6). It is surprising to find that, on this item, there has been virtually no change over the past twenty-five years.[2]

With regard to the perceived responsiveness of the political system to citizens' participation (sometimes called "external efficacy"), we turn to another pair of items in the EAB survey. When asked to evaluate the statement, "The nation is run by a powerful few and ordinary citizens cannot do much about it," only 36% disagreed, suggesting a deep cleavage between the governing elite and the overwhelming majority of the citizenry. Only 46%

disagreed with the statement, "People like me don't have any influence over what the government does."

For this item, too, we are fortunate to have a good set of time-series data (table 7.7), which again shows no significant changes over the years.[3]

We investigated the relationship between respondents' demographic characteristics and their evaluations of their own political empowerment and the system's responsiveness. The following findings are salient. First, as is true in most political systems, the level of education is positively correlated with the perception of both empowerment and system responsiveness (for empowerment, $r = .187$, $p < .001$; and for responsiveness, $r = .112$, $p < .001$)—the more highly educated are more involved and less alienated from the regime. Second, age is related to perceived system responsiveness (one-way variance; $p < .01$), but the relationship is not linear. It is a bell-shaped relationship peaking around the late fifties, defining the baby boomer generation born shortly after World War II who experienced the dramatic student movements of the late 1960s. As this student activist generation passes from the scene, we would expect a reversion toward the mean in overall levels of internal and external efficacy in the Japanese population.

We also looked at the interrelationships of several sets of attitudes. First, perceptions of citizen empowerment and system responsiveness are both

TABLE 7.7 "I HAVE NO SAY IN WHAT THE GOVERNMENT DOES"

(Percent of respondents)

	AGREE	CAN'T SAY	DISAGREE	DK/NA	TOTAL
1976[a]	56.8	17.3	12.6	13.3	100.0
1983[b]	58.6	13.6	21.9	5.9	100.0
1993[c]	58.8	9.7	28.5	3.0	100.0
1995[c]	59.4	14.8	23.9	1.8	100.0
1996[c]	58.4	11.5	27.4	2.7	100.0
Average	57.4	13.0	24.6	5.0	100.0

Sources: Japanese Election Studies (JABISS 1976, JES 1983, JES2 1993–1996).

[a] 1976 data are from JABISS study (Flanagan et al., 1991); N = 1921.

[b] 1983 data are from JES study (Watanuki at al., 1986); N = 1769.

[c] 1993 to 1996 data are from JES2 study (Kabashima at al., 1998); N = 2320, 2076, 2299 respectively.

positively correlated with the perception that the postwar regime is more democratic than the prewar regime ($r = .119$ and $.187$ respectively; $p < .001$ in both cases). This suggests that feelings of political efficacy strengthen support for and the perceived legitimacy of the current regime. Second, trust in democratic institutions is positively correlated with both perceived empowerment ($r = .150$, $p < .001$) and perceived system responsiveness ($r = .166$, $p < .001$). Though the correlation is not strong, the result reminds us of the power of trust in producing social capital (Putnam et al. 1993; Putnam 2000). If Japanese institutions were more highly trusted, perceptions of empowerment and system responsiveness might increase as well. Instead, however, Japan is caught in a vicious circle of mutually reinforcing negative attitudes; distrust lessens interactions between citizens and institutions, which in turn decreases political efficacy.

By cross-tabulating the two summary measures of efficacy, we produced table 7.8. Nearly six of ten respondents are situated in those cells where both citizen empowerment and system responsiveness are low or very low. In this sense, a majority of the Japanese public can be characterized as alienated from the political system. The second-largest group had a low sense of empowerment but a high sense of system responsiveness. For this category of people, the political system is perhaps perceived to be paternalistic. Only 9% were characterized by high or very high levels of citizen empowerment as well as perceived system responsiveness, representing an ideal type of democratic citizenship.

TABLE 7.8 SYSTEM RESPONSIVENESS AND CITIZEN EMPOWERMENT

(Percent of respondents)

	PERCEIVED SYSTEM RESPONSIVENESS				
PERCEIVED CITIZEN EMPOWERMENT	Very low	Low	High	Very high	Total
Very low	8.1	13.8	3.9	1.9	27.7
Low	4.7	33.4	12.4	5.6	56.1
High	0.8	4.9	3.9	2.8	12.4
Very high	0.2	1.2	0.4	2.0	3.8
Total	13.8	53.3	20.6	12.3	100.0

Note: N = 1418.

In conclusion, despite the venerability and stability of their democratic system, the Japanese are among the most dissatisfied citizens in Asia. They display—and have long displayed—lower trust in their political institutions and lower regard for their own capabilities as citizens than the citizens of most of Asia's newer democracies. Available trend data sets confirm that the public's low evaluations of various aspects of democratic governance have been consistent over the years. To what extent do these attitudes carry over into a lack of commitment to democracy as a regime?

5. COMMITMENT TO DEMOCRACY

The superiority of democracy over other political systems cannot be taken for granted. Rather, democratic consolidation is a product of constant choice making by those who actively desire, prefer, and support democracy over other political systems. Ultimately democratic legitimacy is established when no other system of governance is perceived as a viable alternative (Linz 1990; Linz and Stepan 1996b).

To assess democratic legitimacy, we turned to two clusters of questions from the EAB survey. The first cluster deals with values associated with democratic attachment; the second addresses detachment from authoritarian alternatives. We found a high level of commitment to democracy in Japan. Although the economy usually came first when respondents were forced to choose between the two, there was still widespread support for democracy except among those over the age of seventy. Despite relatively low levels of perceived political efficacy and pervasive distrust of key political institutions, the democratic regime of the postwar era was judged to be a positive experience after all.

5.1. ATTACHMENT TO DEMOCRATIC POLITICS

Even though the Japanese have long been dissatisfied with the incumbent authorities, they nonetheless remain relatively highly committed to democracy as an ideal or principle. Democracy is less an active choice than a habit; it has become the default position of Japanese citizens.

When asked to indicate on a 10-point scale how democratic they would like their political system to be, a convincing majority (87%) of Japanese respondents expressed a desire for democracy by choosing a score of 6 or

above. A somewhat smaller number confirmed the suitability of democracy by selecting a score of 6 or above. The difference between desirability and suitability, of course, reflects the gap between the ideal and the reality, as enthusiasm for democracy is inevitably dampened by problems like corruption, political polarization, and inefficient public institutions, which the Japanese people have to face on a daily basis.

The desirability and suitability variables are correlated with some demographic variables, although the relationships are weak. Democratic desirability is positively correlated with education and income ($r = .058$ and $.064$ respectively), and suitability is positively correlated with age ($r = .080$). Otherwise, support for democracy is widely and evenly distributed in Japan.

Consistent with these findings, over two-thirds (67%) of our respondents agreed that democratic government is "preferable to all other kinds of government." With regard to efficacy, 61% believed that democracy is "capable of solving the problems facing society." Cross-tabulation of the preference and efficacy results revealed that 53% of our respondents considered democracy to be both preferable and also efficacious in solving societal problems. In this sense a majority of Japanese citizens can be considered core supporters of the democratic regime.

Finally, respondents were asked to prioritize between democracy and economic development. Nearly half (44%) believed that democracy is equally or more important than development, the third-highest percentage among countries surveyed. As Japan has the second-largest GDP in the world (at the time of publication), this finding is consistent with the prediction of postmaterialist theories that the citizens of wealthier countries will place greater priority on nonmaterial values (e.g., Inglehart 1997), although the same theory hardly explains the even higher priority accorded democracy in Thailand and Mongolia. Further supporting the postmaterialist thesis, the younger generations who have lived all their lives in prosperity were the most likely to value democracy over economic development.

As an overall measure of the depth of democratic attachment, we constructed a 6-point index ranging from 0 to 5 aggregating the responses regarding desirability, suitability, efficacy, preference, and priority. On this index, the Japanese average 4.0, indicating a level of attachment roughly comparable to those found in other East Asian democracies. Figure 7.3 shows that only about one in five Japanese (23.4%) provided prodemocratic responses to all five items, and only about a third (32.1%) supported four. Although Japan is the most mature democracy among the countries sur-

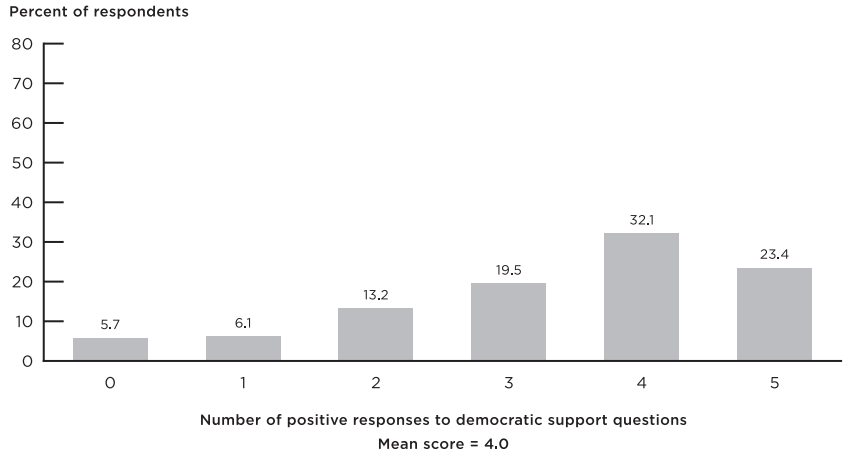

FIGURE 7.3 Democratic Support: Japan

veyed, skepticism of democratic politics remains prevalent and the public's level of democratic attachment is only average. Yet, as we will see in the next section, authoritarian alternatives do not command sufficient support to challenge the public's acceptance of democracy.

5.2. DETACHMENT FROM AUTHORITARIANISM

We asked respondents whether they would support various types of authoritarian regimes. The results are given in chapter 1, table 1.9. A compelling majority (79%) opposed the dictatorship of a strong leader, and an even larger majority (94%) rejected the return to military rule. Nearly as many (85%) rejected the option of rule by technocratic experts, but only about two-thirds (67%) opposed the banning of opposition parties. Compared to their neighbors across East Asia, Japanese citizens exhibited the highest levels of detachment from both military and technocratic rule, suggesting that Japan's wartime experiences and recent economic difficulties have thoroughly discredited these types of regimes. However, it is interesting to note that they were also among the most receptive of a single-party dictatorship, perhaps reflective of the public's profound mistrust of party politics and their prolonged experience with a dominant ruling party.

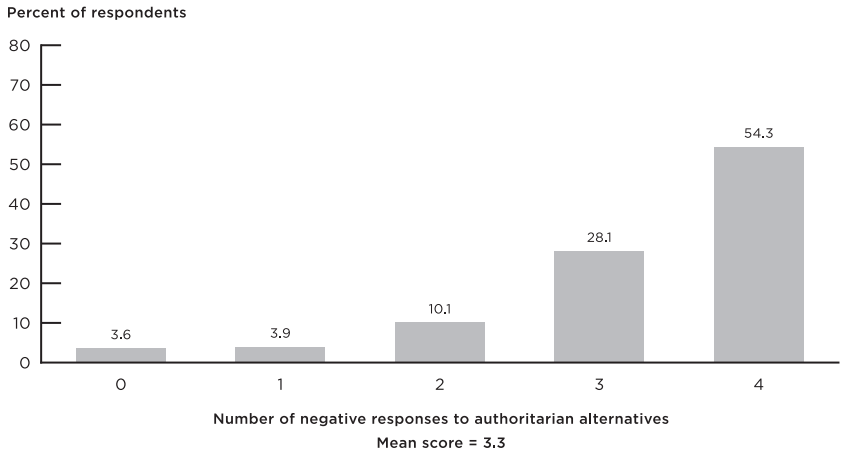

FIGURE 7.4 Authoritarian Detachment: Japan

Together, responses to these questions measure the general level of detachment from authoritarian politics. We constructed a 5-point index ranging from 0 to 4 by counting the number of authoritarian alternatives rejected by the respondent (see figure 7.4). On this index, Japan averaged a score of 3.3, one of the highest levels of authoritarian detachment in the EAB surveys. More than half (54%) of our respondents were fully detached, rejecting all four types of dictatorial rule. An additional 28% rejected three out of four options. It appears that more than five decades of democratic experience has discredited authoritarian politics in the eyes of the majority of Japanese citizens.

Cross-tabulation with several demographic variables showed two distinct results. Age is clearly related to authoritarian detachment. People over the age of seventy, who have direct experience of life under an authoritarian regime, exhibited the lowest level of detachment, perhaps reflecting a sense of nostalgia. Also notable is the effect of education. The higher the level of one's education, the more one rejects the authoritarian way of governing ($r = .205$, $p < .001$).

Although the Japanese are not happy with their government, they see no alternative type of regime that they can accept. The greater opposition to authoritarianism among the more highly educated is important for democratic consolidation, because this group is likely to have more political influence and thus be more able to resist a reversion to authoritarianism.

5.3. OVERALL COMMITMENT TO DEMOCRACY

To obtain an overall measure of popular commitment to democracy, we took into account levels of both democratic attachment and authoritarian detachment and identified seven patterns of regime orientation (see figure 7.5; the categories are explained in the notes to table 1.11, chapter 1). Nearly 10% of the public could be classified as opponents of democracy; another 15% were either ambivalent about democracy or offered only skeptical support. Most importantly, by this measure a majority (75.5%) of the Japanese people were moderate to strong supporters of democracy. Compared with other countries in the survey, Japan's long experience with democracy has created one of the widest bases of democratic support.

6. EXPECTATIONS OF JAPANESE DEMOCRACY

Respondents were asked to indicate their expectations about the state of Japanese democracy in five years' time. On a 10-point scale, they expected their system to progress toward greater democracy from 7.0 to 7.3 in the next five years (see table 7.9). Compared with their East Asian neighbors, Japanese respondents not only assigned a middling level of democracy to their current regime but were also less optimistic for the future. In fact, their expected

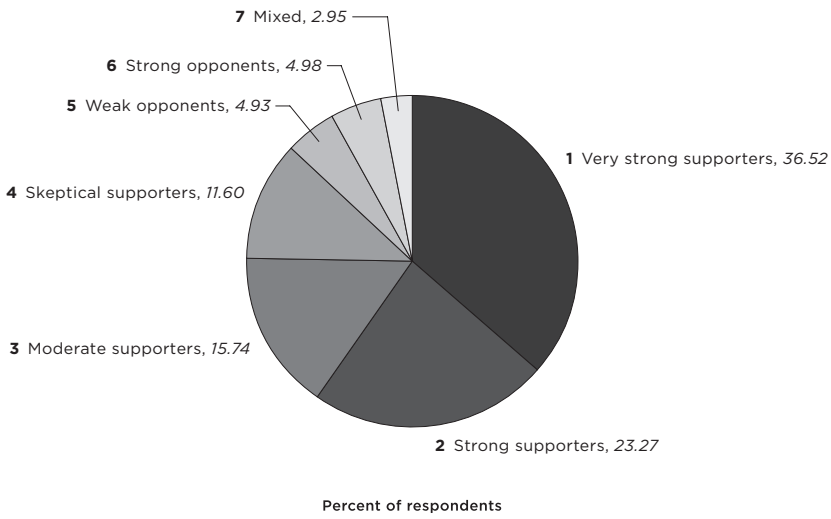

FIGURE 7.5 **Patterns of Commitment to Democracy: Japan**

TABLE 7.9 CURRENT AND EXPECTED FUTURE REGIME TYPE: JAPAN

(Percent of respondents)

RATING	CURRENT REGIME	FUTURE REGIME	CHANGE[a]
Very dictatorial (1–2)	0.5	0.4	0.0
Somewhat dictatorial (3–5)	13.5	11.8	-1.7
Somewhat democratic (6–8)	65.6	50.3	-15.4
Very democratic (9–10)	11.3	18.5	7.3
DK/NA	9.1	19.0	9.9
Total	100.0	100.0	
Mean on the 10-point scale	7.0	7.3	0.3

Notes: N = 1418.

Scale runs from 1, "complete dictatorship," to 10, "complete democracy."

Future regime is five years from time of survey.

[a] Change in percent of respondents rating the regime at the given level when the object of evaluation shifts from the current to the future regime.

level of democracy was the lowest among the countries surveyed. Although nearly 69% believed that five years into the future their government would be at least somewhat democratic, that percentage actually represents a decrease from the 77% who placed the current regime in the same category, as nearly 20% did not know what to expect for the future.

Based on respondents' current regime ratings and expected future ratings, we identified seven patterns of expected regime transformation (see chapter 1, table 1.12). The predominant expectation in Japan was for continuity. Nearly 58% expected the persistence of a limited democracy, while another 10% who considered the current regime an advanced democracy also expected continuing regime stability. Among the handful (15%) who considered the current regime to be somewhat dictatorial, the majority foresaw little democratic progress. Eleven percent expected authoritarian stagnation, while only 4.4% expected transition to a limited democracy. Those who predicted an advanced democratic transition amounted to a miniscule 0.2%. Cross-tabulation between expected regime ratings and demographic variables reveals that age is the only factor impacting expectations. Specifi-

cally, we found that expected regime change toward democracy increased with age ($r = .166$, $p < .001$).

7. CONCLUSION

Our findings confirm that the Japanese people regard their current political regime as a democracy. This may be at odds with some claims of Japanese "abnormality" that emphasize the conservative stranglehold on power and bureaucratic dominance in policymaking. But it is clear that Japan's democracy is firmly grounded in the Japanese people's perceptions and values, and that the Japanese people evaluate their democracy in a positive fashion.

To be sure, the Japanese understanding of democracy appears to be primarily static and system-oriented rather than dynamic and process-oriented. The origins of this static conception may be traced to the historical background of the current regime as a system created under the American occupation after World War II, a system for the Japanese citizen to adjust to with little participation and thus little sense of empowerment.

Age or generation emerged consistently throughout our analysis as a factor influencing popular values and perceptions of democracy. It is probably safe to posit that the salience of this factor also originates from the historical context in which the current regime evolved. For those with direct personal knowledge of the wartime regime, and for those who witnessed poverty and hardship in the immediate aftermath of the war, comparisons of the current democratic regime with the previous authoritarian one are inevitable in the conceptual formulation of democracy. Younger generations who only have direct experiences of the postwar period are more likely to gain their understanding of democracy through cross-national (and cross-cultural) comparisons between Japan and other countries.

Younger generations do not show positive leanings toward authoritarian alternatives. If anything, the threat they represent to the vitality of Japanese democracy is found in their tendency to be detached from public life—to show less interest, to participate less, and thus weaken the legitimacy of democratic governance. But as long as the country faces no threat from external powers and remains economically healthy, these trends need not portend any change in the prevailing Japanese commitment to a democratic form of government.

Our most striking comparative finding is that the citizens of Asia's oldest and apparently most-consolidated democracy are also the most negative

about their system's performance and the most pessimistic about its future. It is possible that the Japanese numbers reflect a propensity to express oneself in a low-key or unassertive manner—a propensity that is built into the Japanese language—just as the high Thai numbers reflect an ebullient, assertive style of self-expression. It is also possible that the levels of support and optimism expressed by citizens in long-lived democracies are generally lower than those expressed in new democracies. We should not, however, use either of these speculations to dismiss the Japanese public's dissatisfaction with their political system. The time-series data we consulted show that the alienation is of long standing. It would be rash to argue that it is not real. While we do not think that Japanese democracy is unconsolidated or becoming deconsolidated—the rejection of all authoritarian alternatives is too strong for that—the troubles that the system faces are real, and the country's citizens are aware of them.

NOTES

The authors express their thanks to Taiwan National University, especially professors Fu Hu and Yun-han Chu, for arranging financial support for the face-to-face interviews in Japan.

1. In Japan, television stations are not seen as a homogeneous group. We can illustrate this with data from the Japanese Election and Democracy Study (JEDS) done in 2000. (This national sample survey conducted face-to-face interviews in April 2000, when there was no election going on. The response rate was 64.7% with N = 1,618. The data are available at http://ssjda.iss.u-tokyo.ac.jp/pages/ssjda-e/.) The data show that NHK (a semigovernmental organization) and private TV stations are perceived differently. The former enjoys a level of trust above that of the newspapers and the latter lags far behind both. On an 11-point scale of trust, 68% of respondents gave NHK a score of 6 or above, compared with 34% for commercial broadcasting stations and 67% for newspapers. Although NHK is not completely politically neutral, as shown in Krauss (2000), generally it is taken to be neutral and unaffected by the upheavals of politics and corruption, as are the national newspapers. Private TV stations are evaluated from a somewhat different perspective and are regarded as entertainment oriented.
2. Note that the choice of categories in our data is slightly different from these previous data sets in that we have excluded a neutral choice, "can't say."
3. In 1976, the number of DK/NA answers was particularly large. In both the "agree" and "disagree" categories, the percentages were smaller than in later years.