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Changes in the socioeconomic structure and the attitude of citizens toward democracy in the Nepali civil war

Yuichi Kubota[1]* and Shinya Sasaoka[2]

[1]*Policy Research Center, University of Niigata Prefecture, Niigata, Japan; and* [2]*Faculty of Law, Hiroshima Shudo University, Hiroshima, Japan*
**E-mail: kubota@unii.ac.jp*

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Abstract

Why do citizens support democracy under an authoritarian regime that has been waging a protracted civil war? This paper explores the attitude toward democracy expressed by urbanites who were protected by the incumbent, by employing the AsiaBarometer survey data collected during the Nepali civil war. Our empirical finding is that citizens' favorable attitude toward democracy is fostered by economic downturn and deterioration in security. In Nepal, civil war weakened relations between the capital's residents and rural peasants as the rebels extended their influence in the countryside and shrank the urban economic sectors. Rebel infiltration into Kathmandu furthermore posed a great threat to the residents.

1 Introduction

Why do citizens support democracy under an authoritarian regime that has been waging a protracted civil war? Civil war is an armed conflict between those who benefit from the status quo and those who do not. What is puzzling is that the former may favor a democratic regime that in fact has the potential to harm their vested interests. To respond to this question, this paper explores the attitude toward democracy expressed by citizens under the protection of the incumbent by employing survey data collected during a stalemated civil war.

Individuals' opinions about the advantages of democratic institutions over armed conflict provide a key to exploring their attitude toward the political system in a civil conflict. Democratic settlement is often the product of a prolonged and inconclusive conflict that leads political leaders to accept a decisive agreement to institutionalize democratic procedures based on the existence of diversity in unity (Rustow, 1970; see also Roberts, 1998; McCoy, 2000; Garretón, 2003; Tsunekawa and Washida, 2007). Both the incumbent and rebels are likely to compromise due to exhaustion from a long and fearful struggle and make use of elaborative rules of democratic institutions for the sake of a conflict resolution.

However, these arguments are not free from flaws. First, given the predatory nature of economic activities in civil war, all leaders would not necessarily be disgusted with a protracted conflict; rather, some may see a benefit in its continuation. Civil wars in the post-Cold War era are, in particular, characterized by self-financing, with income generated by access to natural resources and illegal transnational trade, or by support through external channels such as diasporas (Kaldor, 1999). Those who benefit through these channels stand to lose much if the conflict comes to an end. Moreover, armed soldiers and militiamen often have an imbalance of power over unarmed citizens; economic opportunism deriving from wartime privilege is often granted to armed men who can then benefit from looting and extortion. Given these actors who would prefer the continuation of war, a theory of post-civil war democratization has to be able to answer to the question of who then concedes to a compromise for future democracy.

Second, the attitude of citizens toward democracy is not an insignificant factor. It is, of course, the leaders who play the main role in furthering the transition to democracy (see O'Donnell and Schmitter, 1986), yet political

leaders are not independent from their supporters; rather, both are interdependent in democratization. While transitional regimes tend to be 'incomplete democracies' that may revert to authoritarianism (Rose and Shin, 2001, p. 349–50), higher levels of democratic legitimacy granted by citizens can encourage political stability by ensuring that leaders will attempt to resolve conflicts through legislative and electoral channels (Diamond, 1999).

We argue that citizens are likely to support democratic principles when they are apprehensive about the potential outcome of the war. Civil war not only causes enormous damage to the economy, infrastructure, and human resources but also may change the socioeconomic system. For those who benefit from the current system, it is natural to favor a democratic settlement of the conflict in the expectation that it will prevent the further destruction of economic resources and a radical transformation in society. In this sense, democracy may not be the only alternative to the war regime; governance by a powerful leader without the legislative restriction would be more militarily efficient for suppressing the rebellion. However, if it is difficult for the incumbents to annihilate the rebels in a stalemated war, their commitment to adopting a postwar system that regulates democratic procedures would be necessary to bring the rebels to the negotiation table.

Our setting is Nepal. Nepal is a case of democratization that occurred following civil war in which state–society relations were highly exploitative and without an equitable distribution of wealth and resources (Joshi and Mason, 2010, p. 990). Both the incumbent and rebels who agreed on democratization worked together to end the war because they had an 'immediate common interest' to do so, for not a long-term but a short-term vision (Gobyn, 2009, p. 434). Many of the residents in Kathmandu were beneficiaries of the status quo prior to the civil war. Although this does not mean that all of them shared the same interest in the existing system, our empirical analysis of the survey data interestingly suggests that the residents largely favored a democratic political system. This is puzzling, given the possibility that the introduction of a coalition government would have significantly distributed power to their opponent and that the inclusion of those former enemies in the government would have also damaged their original benefits. In addition, urban residents in both Kathmandu and the smaller cities had distrusted the Maoist rebels (Gobyn, 2009, p. 427), and those rebels indeed continued to employ violence against the supporters of

the incumbent even after the peace agreement in 2006 (Joshi, 2010, p. 829).

In Nepal, the threat of devastation and radical change was foreshadowed by the deterioration of economic and security conditions through the protracted war. The civil war weakened relations between the capital residents and rural peasants, as the rebels extended their influence in the countryside and shrank the economic sectors, affecting commerce, manufacturing, and services in the urban areas. Moreover, the rebels' infiltration of Kathmandu posed a threat to the residents. Along with the incumbent's optimistic prospect of post-civil war elections, all of these factors led urban citizens to favor democracy under the decade-long civil war.

The contributions of this paper are twofold. First, it aims to explore the popular support for democratic principles under authoritarian regimes. A high level of democratic commitment is found in the empirical analysis of authoritarian regimes as in preceding cross-country analyses,[1] but researchers should ask who favors democracy more than others. This issue is particularly onerous for political scientists, given the high level of satisfaction with and support for authoritarian regimes in many developing countries (Kennedy, 2009, p. 519). Democratic commitment in authoritarian regimes has rarely been examined by previous studies due to difficulties in data collection (Chen and Lu, 2011) and measurement (Tezcür *et al.*, 2012).We seek to fill this gap between theoretical curiosity and empirical research. Second, this paper reveals conditions in which citizens favor democracy in the civil-war context. The war-torn society is considered an unfavorable environment for democracy. It is hard to expect groups of people who have been killing each to readily and willingly come together to form a common government (Licklider, 1995, p. 681). The political stakes are also very high in such a situation because whoever holds the power at the center typically has control over the country's economic assets and security forces (Höglund *et al.*, 2009). Moreover, the context in which citizens find themselves when in the midst of conflict can heighten their intolerance for their opponents. All of these components of a conflict mode prevent public criticism through legitimate procedures (Söderström, 2011, p. 1159).

In the following section, we review previous studies on democratic commitment in both democracies and non-democracies. The logic of popular

1 For instance, Huang *et al.* (2008) find that nearly nine out of ten citizens across their sample countries prefer democracy to other forms of government (p. 58).

support for democracy in existing democracies differs from that in non-democracies. As civil war often harms liberal-democratic principles, coercion dominates civic life and the state–society relation tends to be authoritarian. In such a context, citizens' support for democracy is more like a performance-based evaluation of the authoritarian government. In an oligarchic society[2] like Nepal, citizens who are given preferential treatment in the political and economic spheres are particularly worth examining, because their preference for a full democracy has a large influence over the course of the war.

We draw four hypotheses followed by a brief description of Nepal's context during the civil war of 1996–2006. The hypotheses are tested by the AsiaBarometer survey (ABS) data collected in 2005.

2 Commitment to democracy during civil war

Started by Almond and Verba (1963), who explore the political culture of citizens, previous studies on democratic commitment have largely been conducted by examining stable democracies and emerging democracies such as in post-communist countries (e.g. Evans and Whitefield, 1995; Anderson and Guillory, 1997; Shin, 1999; Lagos, 2003). According to studies that consider political factors important in determining citizens' support for democracy, people value democracy for the delivery of political goods that it supposedly guarantees such as freedom, human rights, rule of law, fair treatment and popular accountability (Gibson *et al.*, 1992; Evans and Whitefield, 1995; Morlino and Montero, 1995; Rose *et al.*, 1998; Whitefield and Evans, 1999; Bishin *et al.*, 2006; Bratton and Chang, 2006). From a neo-institutionalist view, the learning experiences under a democratic regime grow the positive belief in its principles (Fails and Pierce, 2010; Huang *et al.*, 2008).

Citizens will support democracy rather than another form of regime when it can provide them with satisfactory outcomes. However, this performance-based support for democracy is not automatically applicable to Nepali citizens under the protracted civil war. After party politics was replaced by the royal dictatorship in 2005, the citizens were under

2 An oligarchic society refers to a system where political power is dominated by major producers. The system protects their property rights and tends to reject the entry of new entrepreneurs (Acemoglu, 2008, p. 1).

authoritarian regime and lacked a *current* reference of democratic governance by which to evaluate the incumbent. Additionally, civil war itself is linked to the absence of competitive political participation, political rights and civil liberties because it often violates rule of law and human rights (Vreeland, 2008).

Literature on democratic commitment in authoritarian regimes finds that citizens tend to support their government when the economy is doing well (O'Donnell, 1986; Skidmore, 1988; Geddes and Zaller, 1989). If economic progress and prosperity play a strong role in the support for the status quo, people do not necessarily demand an institutional shift from an authoritarian to a democratic regime (Kotzian, 2011, p. 36). Citizens will also favor not democratic principles but an authoritarian regime if the government is able to deal with internal and external menaces to the population, such as insurgencies or terrorism (Stokes, 2001).

Authoritarian regimes, however, operate without consent from the governed (McDonough *et al.*, 1986). Without popular belief in the rule of governance, citizens' support for the regime will decline when the economy deteriorates and the threat of the enemy disappears, or if the government is unable to deal with a deterioration in security (Roudakova, 2012). Dissatisfaction with the regime, furthermore, increases popular demand for democratization in an authoritarian setting (Tezcür *et al.*, 2012, p. 235).

3 Incumbents' adherence to democracy in Kathmandu

In an oligarchic society that experiences civil war, the process of democratization can be captured by the interaction between the major parties involved in the conflict, the incumbents and the rebels. Their ultimate goals conflict when the incumbents want to maintain power under the existing regime and the rebels seek to secure political leverage in the government. In this situation, there are two possible ways for the rebels to fulfill their purpose; they can either forcibly replace the incumbents or concede to power-sharing. Whether the rebels stick to the goal of military victory or seek a negotiated settlement depends on their strategic consideration, but the former is often more costly and time-consuming than the latter as the conflict becomes stalemated. Similarly, when there is a great threat of subversion or devastation through the war, it is a better strategy for the incumbents to

make a commitment to power-sharing before being overthrown.[3] Their preferences thus converge when a continuation of the conflict would be costly for both sides.

During the civil war between 1996 and 2006, the decline in economic activity negatively affected the gains of the urban citizenry from the existing systems. In economies characterized by labor-repressive institutions, a stalemated rebellion serves to reshape the interests and opportunities of the economically privileged in such a way that they judge the foreseeable return to a continued war as less desirable than a compromise with the rebels (Wood, 2000, 2001). The exploitative productive system no longer functions once subordinates (e.g. tenants and laborers) have deserted their work and joined the rebellion. Given the economic interdependence between the privileged and subordinates, the rebellion shifts the former's interests from reliance on coercive institutions to the resolution of conflict so that they can regain income from the benefit of joint production.

This threat of economic losses was the reason for Nepali's urban citizens to favor democracy, even though the introduction of democratic institutions would mean that rebels would then have a share in the power. Those who had concerns about the socioeconomic conditions weighed the possibility of Maoist dominancy or even dictatorship against the moderate replacement of political leaders and preferred the latter so as to prevent the rebels from revolutionizing the sociopolitical system. Because such an upheaval in society would lead to the reorganization of existing interests, the threat is perceived as more serious by citizens who are benefiting from the current system than by those who stand to lose nothing in the transition. In other words, the change in the economic structure provides members of the current high-income bracket, who have favorably benefited from the oligarchic socioeconomic system, with a sufficient incentive to abandon the existing regime and support the democratic transformation.

H1: Kathmandu residents whose household income is high are more likely to favor democracy.

The infiltration of Maoist guerrillas also created a great disturbance among the residents of Kathmandu. When civil war became stalemated, both government and rebels came to consider military victory infeasible.

3 They may furthermore institutionalize democratic rules if the rebels demand more credible commitments (Acemoglu and Robinson, 2006).

In the fluctuation of military balance, although the government repulsed the rebels, the rebels also caused losses to the incumbent by assaulting not only government forces but also the supporters of government forces in Kathmandu. The persistence of potential insurgencies was a continual threat to the daily lives of urban residents (Joshi, 2010). To survive and to protect their properties, those citizens would demand that the state elites accommodate the rebels in a democratic settlement.

H2: Kathmandu residents who demand that the national government maintains domestic order are more likely to favor democracy.

The continuation and intensification of civil war thus made it no longer possible for urban residents to benefit from their routine work. The war, in particular, caused economic activity to stagnate by destroying infrastructure and decreasing the workforce. Those who were worried about economic decline, therefore, came to favor democracy rather than the continuation of civil war.

H3: Kathmandu residents who are concerned about economic situation are more likely to favor democracy.

Democratic legitimacy is observable in both practice and principle. These two types of democratic legitimacies are intertwined. For instance, satisfaction with how democracy works strengthens the belief in the superiority of democracy (Huang *et al.*, 2008). Under authoritarian regimes, citizens' support for democratic principles is based on their negative evaluation of the current form of government. A problem of gauging democratic legitimacy in non-democracies, however, is that citizens do not have a performance-based criterion of democracy from which to make an informed decision. Instead, they judge the political option based on how well their current government has dealt with various issues and from that decide whether or not the country should expel the authoritarian rulers in favor of democratic institutions. In this sense, citizens' evaluation of their trust in the government is closely related to their attitude toward democracy.

H4: Kathmandu residents who distrust the government are more likely to favor democracy.

The focus on Kathmandu has a significant meaning for the purpose of this paper. Beyond their symbolic representation (Paquet, 1993), capital

cities enjoy a concentration of political and socioeconomic power (e.g. commercial, financial, and demographic) (Hall, 1993; Rappoport, 1993; Glassner and Fahrer, 2004) and productive assets based on their physical and human infrastructure (e.g. bridges, ports, airstrips, lines of communication, and buildings) (Landau-Wells, 2008). This bias in urban power and assets is salient especially under an authoritarian regime because the government seeks to accommodate capital residents to prevent them from rebelling (Bates, 1981). Urban insurgency is a great threat for the government lacking democratic legitimacy in that the stable control of the capital is crucial for the incumbent's maintenance of power.

In the context of civil war, because an understanding of victory in the war equates conquering the state with conquering its symbolic and functional center, the seizure of the capital leads to the representation as a territorial political entity. In this sense, the capital *is* the government. In the Nepali civil war, Kathmandu had been controlled by the incumbent, although cabinet members were expelled by King Gyanendra at the midpoint of the war. In contrast, the Maoist rebels could never seize exclusive control of the city. Nevertheless, the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist), CPN (M), did succeed in gaining seats in the government following the civil war. Given the association of the government with its capital city and that the government's existence is based on the residents' support or tolerance, it is important to explore the attitude of residents toward the inclusion of former enemies in the regime. The following section contextualizes the political and economic conditions of the Nepali civil war.

4 The Political Economy of the Nepali civil war

4.1 Overview

Democratic institutionalization in Nepal began in 1990, when a new constitution established a multiparty parliamentary system and permitted competitive elections. However, this process was impeded by an armed revolt by the CPN (M).[4] Dissatisfied with the compromise between the mainstream political parties and the royal family on a constitutional

4 The founding of the Communist Party of Nepal dates back to 1949. The CPN (M) was not the only faction of the party, and, according to ideological and strategic differences, some other groups pursued their goals as legalized political parties (e.g., the Communist Party of Nepal-United Marxist Leninists, CPN-UML).

monarchy, the CPN (M) called for a people's governance with an end to social and political inequalities against minorities and disadvantaged groups (Thapa and Sharma, 2009, p. 209).

After the incident in which King Birendra was killed by his son, Gyanendra acceded to the throne in 2001. The incumbent parties were unable to reach an agreement with this new king on how to deal with the rebellion (Ishiyama and Batta, 2011, p. 374). In 2002, the king consequently dissolved parliament, dismissed the prime minister, and, in February 2005, imposed a 'royalist military dictatorship' (Skar, 2007, p. 359), claiming that the government had not been able to subdue the rebellion and that the country under crisis was in need of peace and security rather than democracy.

The civil war went on favorably for the CPN (M). The group claimed 80% of the domestic territory to be under its control by 2001 (Ogura, 2008, p. 7) and reportedly had 5,500 active combatants, another 8,000 militiamen, 4,500 full-time cadres, 33,000 hardcore followers, and 200,000 sympathizers (Sharma, 2004). To oppose the monarchy, major political parties formed an alliance with the CPN (M) in November 2005, after Gyanendra began direct rule. In this alliance, the rebels agreed to end their violence and the party leaders admitted the CPN (M) to the political mainstream. A massive anti-royal demonstration sided with this alliance, and this led to the king's stepping down on 24 April 2006.[5] Although the demonstration was manned by many poor peasants either living in the periphery of Kathmandu or coming from remote rural areas under the leadership of the CPN (M), the agitations persisted and put pressure on political leaders for a democratic settlement of the war. Ascertaining the end of monarchical rule, the leaders of both major political parties and the CPN (M) reconfirmed the need to open negotiations and hold assembly elections (Nayak, 2008, p. 468). Even before this final settlement of the war, the Maoist leaders had shown a willingness to accept an open economic system and foreign investments and concluded that democracy was necessary to prevent other political parties from proscribing former rebels (Gobyn, 2009, pp. 429, 433).

The aftermath of the Nepali civil war was favorable for democratization because the rebels had changed their tactics and goals, opening up space

5 The army also played a key role in the close of the royal dictatorship when it conveyed to the king that it would not be possible to disperse the demonstrators.

for compromise with the mainstream political parties (Gobyn, 2009, p. 421). In contrast to the rebels' incentive to compromise with the government, the exploitative socioeconomic structure in Nepal had provided urban citizens with reason to reject a democratic settlement of the war. The wartime decline in this structure had eased the mobilization of Maoist rebels, and it was not until the socioeconomic conditions changed that a negotiated settlement came to be likely.

4.2 Decline of the patron–client relations in agriculture

When they launched their armed struggle, the Maoist rebels called for the nationalization of private property and a redistribution of land (Thapa and Sharma, 2009, p. 209).[6] In Nepal, minority landlords had traditionally not only had great control over the majority of landless farmers but also served as local agents for the state's elites. Given that land taxes on peasants were an important source of state revenue, landlords had played a significant role as tax collectors; this role was necessary for state elites to not only finance the national government but also to maintain order in the countryside (Joshi and Mason, 2010, pp. 990–1). The influence of these elites, based on economic power, remained intact in the early 1990s and extended to the political sphere; 'political parties nominated landed elites for seats in the parliament because those elites could be counted on to deliver the votes of those peasant households that were dependent on them for land, credit, employment, and other services' (Joshi and Mason, 2010, p. 987). Landlords also made use of their ability to gain the support of the peasants as a bargaining chip in dealing with the state's elites and leaders of political parties (Joshi and Mason, 2008, p. 768).

Because landlord representation was based on the peasants' reliance on these landlords, elected representatives did not have to be sensitive to their dependants' needs. In a country like Nepal, where large portions of the population were engaged in agricultural cultivation, the patron–client relationship constrained the autonomy of the peasants (Joshi and Mason, 2008, p. 768). Peasants received access to land, subsistence security, and

6 Battles with government forces were intensified in locations with great horizontal inequality (Murshed and Gates, 2005) as well as poor political representation of the locals (Bohara, *et al.*, 2006).

other services at the expense of rent, crop shares, free labor, and other services they provided for their landlords (see Scott, 1976).[7]

However, when expanding to the countryside, the Maoist rebellion eroded the patron–client relationship between the landlords and peasants. Seizing control over a large extent of domestic territory, the Maoist rebels eliminated the landlords and nullified their control over the peasants by redistributing land, destroying bondage papers, and canceling debts (Joshi and Mason, 2007, p. 411). Because the position of the politically and economically privileged was based on productive activities carried out by the peasants, the decline in patron–client relations was one of the major repercussions of the war felt by the privileged.

4.3 Shrinkage in the urban sectors

Apart from the landlords, people in the non-agriculture sectors had also been beneficiaries of economic opportunity since the country embarked on import substitution in the 1950s. During the period of democratic reform in the 1990s, the government's development policies promoted growth in the urban sectors of commerce, manufacturing, and services, which contributed about 62% to the gross domestic product (GDP) and 24% to employment in 1999 (Sharma, 2006b, pp. 1237, 1241). Furthermore, this was also a period in which those in non-agriculture sectors were largely granted political representation.

In Nepal, the commerce, manufacturing, and service sectors were concentrated in urban areas, while agriculture was spread throughout the countryside. Because the government had greater control over urban areas, people of the former sectors were more or less affiliated with the government. They were commonly protected by the government and enjoyed the full benefit of their economic activity (see Wantchekon, 2004).

Although Nepal's GDP and per capita income had increased between 1990 and 2001, the subsequent intensification of the civil war led to the shrinkage in those industries. This caused a shortfall in government revenue and, along with growing defense expenditures, led to a 20% cut in government spending on development programs and real investment

7 In this sense, Nepal was a society in which the economically privileged relied on the coercion of labor imposed by the state to guarantee extra incomes that could not be generated under a liberal and market-based system (see Wood, 2000).

(Pradhan, 2009). Both political instability and the increasing expenditure on defense during the war, which caused lower investment and reduced nonmilitary expenditure, were expected to lead to a slower growth rate in economic production and lower living standards even for those who were engaged in the non-agriculture sectors. Table 1 represents the growth rate in agriculture and non-agriculture GDP between the pre-war period (seven-year average) and the war period (seven-year average). It shows that while agriculture GDP growth was unchanged at 3.2% between the two periods, non-agriculture GDP growth sharply decreased from 6.6 to 3.9%. The decline of the nonagricultural sector was caused by a fall in transport, commerce, hotel services, and manufacturing (Sharma, 2006a, p. 562).

The shrinkage of the nonagricultural sector was also fostered by weakening security in urban areas. After the failed negotiation between the government and the rebels, armed conflict not only resumed but also expanded into urban areas by the latter half of 2003. The Maoists increased their activities in those areas, including Kathmandu, and, as a result, the number of urban casualties began to increase (Do and Iyer, 2010, p. 737).

As the civil war continued, the government came to realize that it could not defeat the rebels by military means (Thapa and Sharma, 2009, pp. 209–210). However, the incumbent and the citizens were confident that they could overwhelm the Maoists in the following elections because of the poor performance of communist parties in previous elections

Table 1 Growth in real GDP, agriculture and non-agriculture GDP (%), and per capita income before and during war periods

	Pre-war period (1987/1988–1994/1995)	War period (1995/1996–2001/2002)
Growth in real GDP	5.1	3.8
Growth in real agriculture GDP	3.2	3.2
Growth in real non-agriculture GDP	6.6	3.9
Real per capita income (US$)	232[a]	162[b]

[a]1991 figure.
[b]2001 figure.
Source: Sharma (2006a).

(Thapa and Sharma, 2009, p. 213; see also Joshi and Mason, 2007, 2008).[8] Therefore, the victory of the Maoists in the assembly elections in April of 2008, despite the fact that the support base of the existing political parties had been limited to Kathmandu and that the Maoists' electoral performance had been favored by several factors, including the state officials' resentment against the parties in accepting the rebels' demands, was surprising (Whelpton, 2009, p. 54; Ishiyama and Batta, 2011, p. 374).[9]

Given that belligerents in civil war choose to agree on democracy as long as each side can estimate a high enough chance of winning the elections (Wantchekon, 2004, p. 31), those who were protected by the government in the Nepali civil war must have had a favorable attitude toward democratic transition. Although the post-civil war elections resulted in an unexpected victory by the Maoists, urban citizens had believed that the existing political parties were in a position to defeat the communists as usual.

5 Data

5.1 AsiaBarometer survey

We explore opinions on democracy as expressed by Kathmandu citizens who were not likely to favor it to address the puzzling question of why they dared to abandon their vested interests in exchange for the termination of war. In Nepal, state and bureaucratic power had been virtually monopolized by a small elite composed mainly of Newars, Brahmins, and Chetris (Vanaik, 2008, p. 52; Thapa and Sharma, 2009, p. 208). These caste/ethnic groups were concentrated in Kathmandu and made up about 70% of the population in the city (Central Bureau of Statistics of Nepal, 2002, p. 97). Even if they did not have control of the political center, the citizens who belonged to these groups were affiliated with or were under the patronage of the state elites. For these contextual reasons, the residents in Kathmandu had a great influence over their leaders because, being a

8 For instance, the Local Development minister of the royalist government, Tanka Dhakal, had doubt of the Maoists' victory in a future election of constituent assembly that was demanded by the rebels ('Seven parties entrapped', 2005).

9 The CPN (M) won 30% of the popular vote (100 proportional-representation seats) and half of the first-past-the-post seats out of 240.

majority and of the same caste/ethnic groups, they comprised the leaders' support base.

The ABS conducted in Nepal is a perfect match for the exploration of these citizens' attitude toward democracy. The ABS carried out a survey in Kathmandu between September and October 2005, during which the civil war was growing stalemated, and collected 800 samples comprising both males and females aged from their twenties to their sixties and older. Because the residents in Kathmandu were mostly members of the major caste/ethnic groups, the survey reflects the public opinion of citizens who were politically and economically privileged (Hachhethu, 2008, pp. 125–7).[10]

5.2 Variables

Popular support for democracy constitutes a dependent variable. In the survey, respondents were asked the following about how they would evaluate democracy: *I am going to describe various types of political systems. Please indicate for each system whether you think it would be very good, fairly good or bad for this country – A democratic political system*. We recoded the respondents' scores in the original data so that a higher score would represent a favorable attitude toward democracy (i.e. very good = 3, fairly good = 2, and bad = 1).

Our models include four primary independent variables. First, in Nepal's exploitative economic system, the unequally distributed economic opportunities granted specific groups of people a greater chance to increase their wealth. We employ *Income* to measure the economic status of individuals. The respondents were asked: *What was the total gross annual income of your household last year?* This variable has 11 ordered values ranging from less than 2,500 rupees (=1) to more than 25,001 rupees (=11).

Second, to estimate individuals' demand for *Order*, we use a dummy variable indicating whether respondents would agree that maintaining order in the country is the policy priority: *If you have to choose, which one*

10 This does not deny that there was a sizable underclass in the city that neither belonged to the upper castes nor was privileged. Because the survey did not conduct a sampling based on the difference in caste/ethnicity and class, it is possible that some of the disadvantaged were interviewed by survey enumerators. In the following analysis, we control respondents' socioeconomic status such as income level, English skills, and educational level as these variables are highly associated with individuals' caste and privilege in the Nepali society (Cox, 1994, pp. 98–100).

of the things on this card would you say is most important? If they give first choice to 'Maintaining order in nation,' we assume that their priority is keeping domestic order, giving the variable 1, otherwise 0.[11]

Third, economic stagnation caused individuals to demand an end to the civil war that had damaged the sources of their benefit. Although the inclusion of former rebels in post-civil war administration might reduce their vested interests, the continuation of war understandably would pay less than the establishment of democratic institutions followed by the settlement of the conflict. We employ a question item that asks respondents about their concerns about economic problems in the country (*Economic problems*): *Which, if any, of the following issues cause you great worry? Please choose all issues that cause you serious worry – Economic problems in your country.* This is a dummy variable that is coded 1 if the respondents raise economic problems as a great worry and otherwise 0.

Fourth, we use a variable measuring how much respondents would trust the current government. When the survey was conducted, the country was under royal dictatorship. This restriction on the political process may sharply contrast with the atmosphere in other cases of stalemated civil war and may have in fact encouraged the reconciliation between the coalition of parliament members and the Maoist rebels in December 2005. Not only politicians but also citizens had been under the restriction through martial law. Given these contexts, it is possible that Nepali citizens supported a democratic political system because of antipathy for the king's dictatorship.[12] Thus, *Distrust in government* represents the extent to which citizens unfavorably perceived not only the central government but also its manner of administration at the point the survey was conducted: *Please indicate to what extent you trust the following institutions to operate in the best interests of society. If you don't know what to reply or have no particular opinion, please say so.* It asked respondents the extent to which they trusted 'the central government' (i.e. don't trust at all = 4, don't really trust = 3, trust to a degree = 2, and trust a lot = 1).[13]

11 The other choices are 'Giving people more say in important government decisions', 'Fighting rising prices', 'Protecting freedom of speech', and 'Don't know'.

12 In contrast, political parties were expected to provide both peace and democracy (Dixit, 2005).

13 'Don't know' answers are treated as missing values.

For a control variable, we employ a question about the economic inequality in Nepali society to measure the respondents' perceptions about the appropriateness of the unequal distribution of wealth in the country (*Inequality*). Those Kathmandu residents who acknowledged the unequal economic system in the country may have preferred an authoritarian regime, which would protect their property, to democracy, in which case 'median voter' tends to be adopted (Black, 1948). The political representation of a less wealthy majority may result in the introduction of taxation on wealth monopolized by the privileged minority. However, even if they are averse to democracy, they may think that this type of ruling system is preferable to a protracted civil war. Furthermore, it is even less of a surprise if democracy is looked at as an indispensable prerequisite for an end to civil war. In the case that the respondents disagree with the idea that economic equality is preferable to inequality no matter how stagnant the economy, we assume that they give their endorsement to economic inequality. The ABS asks respondents to give higher scores if they disagree with equality: *I am going to read out some statements about economy. Please indicate how much you agree or disagree with each statement – It is desirable that the people are equal, even if the economy is stagnant, rather than unequal but developing fast* (strongly disagree = 5, disagree = 4, neither agree nor disagree = 3, agree = 2, and strongly agree = 1).

In addition, to estimate the effects of socioeconomic privilege, the models have two more control variables. The ABS 2005 asked respondents: *How well do you speak English?* and *What is the highest level of education you have completed?* As for *English skills*, well-off persons in the capital are likely to have had more opportunity to learn English than deprived peasants. This variable is on a four-point scale (I can speak English fluently = 4, to not at all = 1). In terms of *Education*, we operationalize the status of urbanites who received preferable treatment in pre-war conditions as the completion of higher education (university/graduate school = 6, to no formal education = 1).

Our models contain two demographic variables: *Gender* and *Age*. The degree of support for democracy may differ between male and female, and between the youth and senior respondents. Male is given 0 and female 1. Moreover, the respondents' ages range from 20 to 69. Table 2 and Appendix summarize the variables and the question items used in the analysis, respectively.

Table 2 Descriptive statistics

Variable	Observations	Mean	Standard deviation	Minimum	Maximum
Support for democracy	736	2.257	0.719	1	3
Income	781	4.924	2.749	1	11
Order	761	0.758	0.428	0	1
Economic problems	800	0.765	0.424	0	1
Distrust in government	743	2.677	0.831	1	4
Inequality	728	1.562	0.779	1	5
English skills	800	2.404	0.993	1	4
Education	758	3.442	1.707	1	6
Gender	800	0.496	0.500	0	1
Age	800	35.749	11.427	20	69

6 Empirical findings

6.1 Political options

Was democracy the sole alternative political system to the existing regime or were there other options available to the Kathmandu citizens? The ABS asks respondents their opinions about the various types of political systems other than democracy, including governance by a powerful leader without the restriction of parliament or elections, a system whereby decisions affecting the country are made by experts (such as bureaucrats with expertise in a particular field), and military government. Figure 1 shows the attitude of the citizens toward these political systems.

Democracy was largely preferred by Kathmandu residents. The positive view on democracy exceeds the negative view; while 'fairly good' and 'very good' account for 41.7 and 42.0%, respectively, 'bad' is 16.3%. For military government, the negative view is much higher than the positive view. Although leadership without legislative restriction ('Governance by a powerful leader') may be recognized as an acceptable regime, the negative view ('bad') accounts for more than 40%. Citizens' attitude toward these undemocratic systems may reflect the discredit to Gyanendra's direct rule as the survey was conducted half a year after the initiation of his dictatorship. Seen from the negative views, a political system led by experts is less supported by respondents than is democracy. These two political systems are not mutually exclusive, but democracy is more

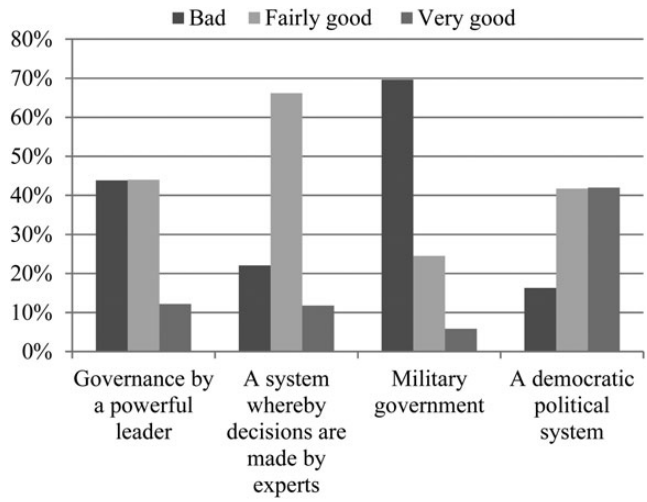

Figure 1 Attitude toward political systems. *Note*: 'Don't know' responses are excluded.

valued for the prospect of the conflict resolution it could bring as the rebels' political demand was 'people-centered governance' (Gobyn, 2009, p. 421).

6.2 Ordered logit analysis

To examine the effects of the Kathmandu citizens' economic status, concerns about domestic order and economic situations and distrust in the government, the ordered logit model is estimated in the analysis because the dependent variable is measured on an ordinal scale. Tables 3 and 4 present the correlation matrix between variables and the results of the regression analysis, respectively. As will be noted from Table 3, the correlation between *English skills* and *Education* is very high ($r = 0.701$). To avoid the problem of multicollinearity, these variables are added separately to the different models. Model 1 estimates the effect of a primary independent variable (*Income*) on the attitude of individuals toward democracy, controlling for gender and age. The other independent variables are added to Model 2 (*Order*), Model 3 (*Order* and *Economic problems*), and Model 4 (*Order*, *Economic problems*, and *Distrust in government*). *Inequality* is added to the last two models; in addition, Model 5 includes *English skills*, and Model 6 instead includes *Education*.

Table 3 Correlation Matrix

	Income	Order	Economic problems	Distrust in government	Inequality	English skills	Education	Gender	Age
Income	1.000								
Order	0.099	1.000							
Economic problems	0.262	0.194	1.000						
Distrust in government	0.069	0.051	0.024	1.000					
Inequality	−0.160	−0.180	−0.312	−0.118	1.000				
English skills	0.260	0.038	0.138	0.130	−0.129	1.000			
Education	0.246	0.037	0.050	0.104	0.006	0.701	1.000		
Gender	0.044	0.053	−0.027	0.074	−0.031	−0.169	−0.133	1.000	
Age	−0.028	0.008	−0.019	−0.076	0.048	−0.257	−0.184	−0.103	1.000

Table 4 Ordered logit analysis of support for democracy

	1	2	3	4	5	6
Income	0.136 (0.026)***	0.108 (0.027)***	0.099 (0.027)***	0.101 (0.028)***	0.068 (0.031)**	0.073 (0.032)**
Order		0.718 (0.175)***	0.670 (0.178)***	0.689 (0.184)***	0.802 (0.197)***	0.724 (0.202)***
Economic problems			0.332 (0.192)*	0.271 (0.196)	0.583 (0.223)***	0.630 (0.230)***
Distrust in government				0.150 (0.092)	0.173 (0.099)*	0.138 (0.102)
Inequality					0.557 (0.119)***	0.415 (0.121)***
English skills					0.449 (0.092)***	
Education						0.265 (0.053)***
Gender	−0.083 (0.142)	−0.022 (0.146)	−0.027 (0.147)	−0.024 (0.150)	0.208 (0.164)	0.173 (0.165)
Age	−0.002 (0.006)	−0.004 (0.007)	−0.004 (0.007)	−0.001 (0.007)	0.008 (0.007)	0.007 (0.008)
Cut 1	−1.088 (0.288)	−0.829 (0.312)	−0.645 (0.330)	−0.183 (0.411)	2.341 (0.577)	1.830 (0.568)
Cut 2	0.953 (0.286)	1.282 (0.314)	1.474 (0.334)	1.959 (0.418)	4.631 (0.601)	4.142 (0.590)
Observations	718	693	693	666	632	591
Pseudo R-squared	0.019	0.027	0.029	0.032	0.067	0.065
Log likelihood	−723.307	−684.519	−683.023	−651.524	−593.937	−559.149

Standard errors in parentheses.
*Significant at 10% in a two-tailed *t*-test; **significant at 5%; ***significant at 1%.

To summarize, the independent variables have significant and positive effects on support for democracy across the models. It is obvious from the results that, in Nepal, those residents in the capital who belonged to the wealthy group and those who sought social order, worried about economic problems, and distrusted the government tended to express a preference for democracy. These findings are consistent with our hypotheses.

The baseline model (Model 1) shows that *Income* has a positive and significant effect on a pro-democracy attitude. Model 2 includes *Income* and *Order*, both of which have positive and significant effects on the support for democracy. The variable of *Economic problems* is added to Model 3, suggesting that the well-to-do who are concerned about domestic order and economic situations tend to favor democracy. These results offer evidence for the argument that support for democracy was salient among Kathmandu residents who were most likely affected by the protracted civil war. After *Order* and *Economic problems* are controlled, however, the effect of *Income* declines (Models 2 and 3).

Model 4 includes the variable of *Distrust in government*. It shows that citizens' income level and demand for order are positively associated with support for democracy. This finding is consistent with the results from Models 2 and 3. However, the variable of *Economic problems* turns insignificant. The newly added variable, *Distrust in government*, is not statistically significant, either. Therefore, the model at least suggests that those Kathmandu residents who have higher incomes and strongly desired domestic order tend to favor democracy.

Models 5 and 6 consider socioeconomic attitude and status (based on the criteria of inequality, English skills, and education). In Model 5, all the variables, except for *Gender* and *Age*, are positive and significant at the 10% level at least. The result that the variable of *Inequality* is positive and significant suggests that citizens who accepted the unequal economic system tended to support a democratic political system as well. This finding is also robust in Model 6, although the effect is smaller. This is interesting because it contrasts with the common understanding that the privileged are a major counterforce to democratization. The privileged should in theory be unsupportive of a democratic political system because it can prove to be a governing system by which their wealth is taken from them and redistributed to the population. However, Kathmandu residents with attributes formulated in the models tended to support both an unequal economic system and democracy.

One of the major differences between these models is that *Distrust in government* is not significant in Model 6. As in Model 5, the sign of the coefficient suggests that individuals who distrust the current government are likely to be supportive of democracy. However, this variable is not significant at standard levels in Model 6. Thus, as long as we rely on this model as well as Model 4, it is not possible to reject the null hypothesis that distrust in government has no effect on support for democracy.

Looking at control variables, each of the intellectual attributes is positive and statistically significant. Put simply, those who have higher English skills or educational level are likely to favor democracy. Given that level of income is also positively associated with support for democracy, it is evident that the upper-class citizens favored democracy.

The empirical findings have generally supported our hypotheses. Hypothesis 1 states that wealthier citizens tend to have a favorable view of a democratic political system. In addition to the first hypothesis, Hypotheses 2 and 3 imply that if citizens lose much during civil war, they may demand a negotiated settlement of war that possibly will lead to future democracy. The termination of the war pays off for them even if the introduction of democratic institutions damages their vested interests. Hypothesis 4 suggests that distrust in the existing government is associated with support for democracy. Although the explanatory power of this variable is not strong, the results are supportive of the argument that citizens' intolerance for the regime leads to their expectation for democracy.

6.3 Predicted probabilities

Given that the economic status of citizens has an effect on their attitude toward democracy, it is important to know how the former variable changes the latter. Figure 2 suggests how the attitude of residents toward democracy changes across different levels of annual household income.[14] The predicted probability of a negative view on democracy (i.e. 'bad') is higher at the lowest level of income (0.169 at less than 2,500 rupees), if the control variables are held at their modes. The probability of 'fairly good' is 0.494 at the lowest income level but decreases as the income level increases. It is replaced with 'very good' at a mid-level of income (17,501–20,000

14 All the estimations of predicted probabilities are based on Model 5.

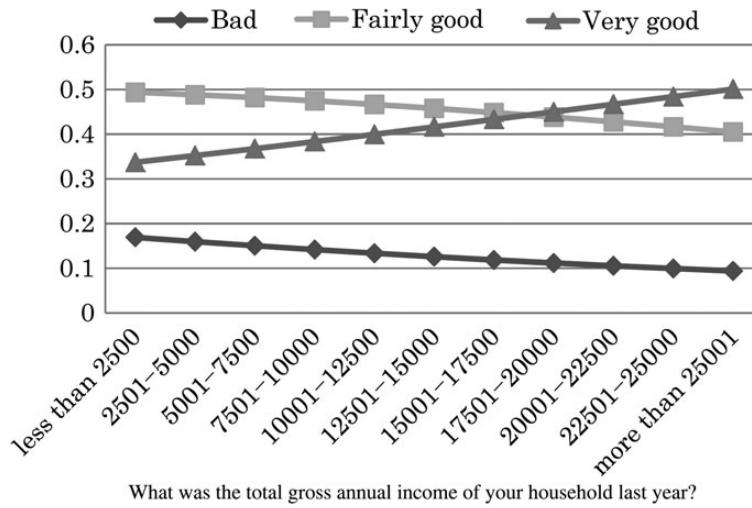

Figure 2 Changes in predicted probabilities for attitude toward democracy according to annual household income (rupees).

rupees). The probability of 'very good' exceeds 50% when income level reaches the 'more than 25,001' level.

Figure 3 similarly shows changes in the predicted probabilities for democratic attitude when citizens come to attach importance to domestic order. As Hypothesis 2 argues that citizens who consider domestic order as the first priority tend to favor democracy, the figure suggests that the probability of 'very good' increases from 0.209 to 0.368, although it is the lowest when they do not attach great importance to domestic order. In contrast, the probabilities of 'bad' and 'fairly good' decline if citizens consider that maintaining domestic order is the first policy priority.

Figure 4 presents changes in predicted probabilities according to the concern of citizens about economic problems in the country. As the figure suggests, the probabilities that respondents consider democracy 'bad' or 'fairly good' decline if they have a concern about economic problems. Instead, the probability of appearing 'very good' increases from 0.247 to 0.368; as in Figure 3, although the item of 'fairly good' retains the highest probability among the three choices, the probability of attitude that democracy is 'very good' solely increases when citizens worry about the economy. It is evident from the figure that the predicted probability of a negative view on democracy decreases when economic problems cause great worry among citizens.

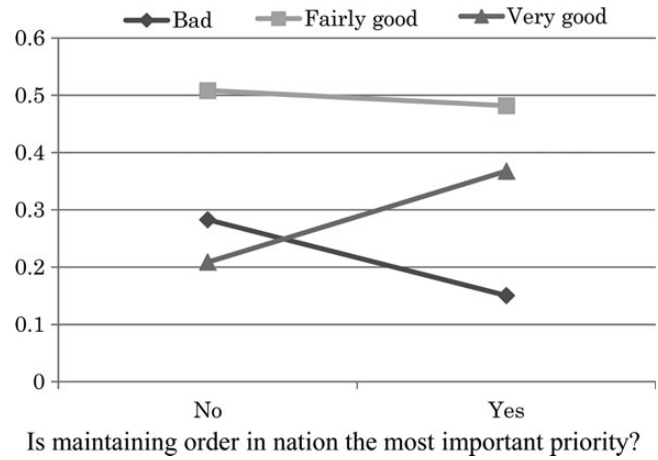

Figure 3 Changes in predicted probabilities for attitude toward democracy according to policy priority (order).

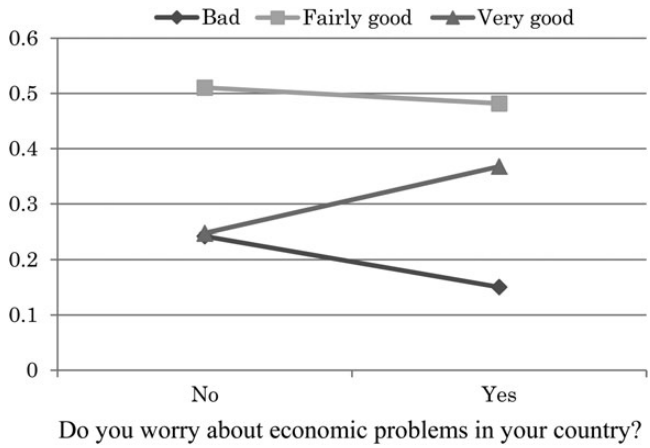

Figure 4 Changes in predicted probabilities for attitude toward democracy according to concern about economic problems.

The predicted probabilities for democratic attitude according to distrust in government are shown in Figure 5. As in the other figures, the probability of the item, 'very good,' increases as distrust in government strengthens. The probability of 'fairly good' is highest if citizens' trust in the central government is greater. However, it is replaced by 'very good' when the distrust reaches the maximum level; when citizens 'don't trust the government at all,'

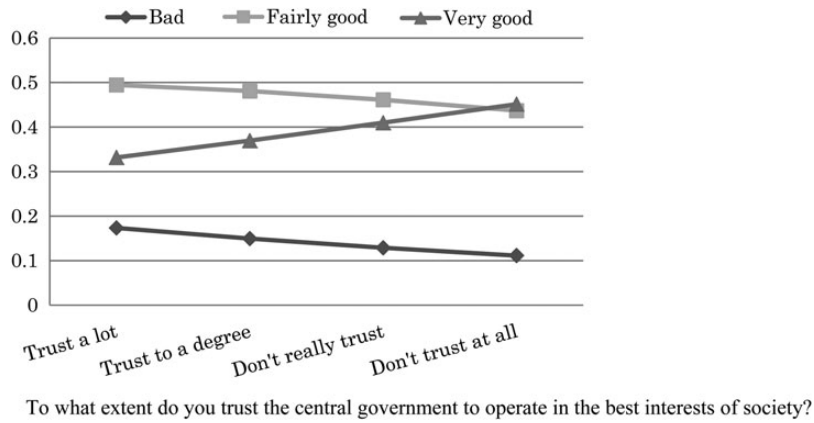

Figure 5 Changes in predicted probabilities for attitude toward democracy according to distrust in government.

the probability of 'very good' becomes 0.451 and 'fairly good,' 0.436. The probability that Kathmandu residents consider democracy 'bad' ranges from 0.173 to 0.111 and decreases as distrust in government increases.

7 Conclusion

This paper has shown that the specific group of Nepali citizens who were likely to benefit from the pre-civil war socioeconomic system favored democratic rule when the civil war had grown stalemated. The war largely changed economic conditions by overriding the patron–client relations in the countryside and shrinking the sectors of commerce, manufacturing, and services in urban areas. This structural change stunted the expected gains of urban citizens during the continuation of the civil war and made their gains greater under the post-civil war order. Therefore, even if the existing economic system had been a matter of vital importance for those citizens, they came to attach more importance to the recovery of their interests in the postwar reconstruction through democratic settlement. Furthermore, the expansion of battle into Kathmandu had posed a threat to the residents that caused their support for democracy.

Our primary focus is not on the people who played a central role in forcing Gyanendra out of the throne by agitations at the end of his dictatorship, but rather on citizens who resided in Kathmandu when the opinion survey was conducted. The empirical findings of this paper

suggest that the well-to-do and those who had demanded that the government maintain domestic order and had had concerns about the country's economic situations tended to favor democracy. A democratic settlement accompanied by the accommodation of Maoist rebels was highly likely to undermine the socioeconomic privilege of the urbanites. Nevertheless, because the Kathmandu residents feared the communist revolution, many of them favored democratic rule with the expectation of their representatives' victory in subsequent elections.

This paper owes its empirical analysis to survey data collected at the best time and place for our purposes. The data allowed us to focus on opinions about democracy during the stalemated civil war, as expressed by Kathmandu residents who had benefited from the exploitative and unequal socioeconomic system. While the civil-war repercussions are neither measured nor used as variables in the analysis, they offer the structural context that connects individuals' socioeconomic attitude and status to their democratic commitment. In this sense, the impact of the civil war is not negligible in theorizing how the independent variables co-vary with the dependent variable.

Kathmandu had been under a state of emergency since the city was alienated by the Gyanendra's 2005 take-over and threatened by the contagion of rebellion. The political attitude of the citizens significantly reflected these particular conditions. Beyond the context of Nepal, however, the findings of this paper have broader implications as to democratic commitment in authoritarian regimes that wage domestic armed conflicts. Furthermore, considering that conditions for democratization in post-conflict Nepal did not meet the prerequisites outlined by literature on democratization (e.g. significant level of economic development and equal distribution of wealth), the analytical framework of this paper provides a useful perspective for researchers not only on post-civil war democratization but also on democratization itself.

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Appendix

Table A1 Question items of the AsiaBarometer 2005

Support for democracy (Q34a)

Q: I'm going to describe various types of political systems. Please indicate for each system whether you think it would be very good, fairly good, or bad for this country.
A democratic political system

A: Very good/Fairly good/Bad/Don't know

Income (F8)

Q: What was the total gross annual income of your household last year (rupees)?

A: Up to 2500/2501–5000/5001–7500/7501–10000/10001–12500/12501–15000/15001–17500/17501–20000/20001–22500/22501–25000/25001 above/Refused/Don't know

Order (Q41-1)

Q: If you have to choose, which one of things on this card would you say is most important?

A: Maintaining order in nation.

Economic problems (Q25-10)

Q: Which, if any, of the following issues cause you great worry? Please choose all issues that cause you serious worry.

A: Economic problems in your country.

Distrust in government (Q27a)

Q: Please indicate to what extent you trust the following institutions to operate in the best interests of society. If you don't know what to reply or have no particular opinion, please say so.

–The central government.

A: Trust a lot/Trust to a degree/Don't really trust/Don't trust at all/Don't know

Inequality (Q32c)

Q: I am going to read out some statements about economy. Please indicate how much you agree or disagree with each statement.

–It is desirable that the people are equal, even if the economy is stagnant, rather than unequal but developing fast.

A: Strongly agree/Agree/Neither agree nor disagree/Disagree/Strongly disagree/Don't know

English skills (F4)

Q: How well do you speak English?

A: Not at all/Very little/I can speak it well enough to get by in daily life/I can speak English fluently/Don't know

Education (F3)

Q: What is the highest level of education you have completed?

A: No formal education/Elementary school/junior high school/middle school/High school/High-school-level vocational-technical school/Professional school/technical school/University/graduate school/Don't know

Gender (F1)

Q: Please indicate your gender.

A: Male/Female

Age (F2)

Q: What is your age?

ID numbers in the parentheses correspond to question items of the AsiaBarometer 2005 questionnaire.

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