

Chapter 7

The Causal Link between Democratic Values and Democratic Institutions: Theoretical Discussion

Introduction

Rising self-expression values transform modernization into a process of human development, giving rise to a different type of society that promotes human emancipation on many fronts. This has a number of important societal consequences, but this book focuses on the fact that it encourages the emergence and flourishing of democratic institutions. This chapter outlines this process, discussing the causal linkage between changing individual level values and democratic institutions at the societal level. Building on previous analyses by Welzel (2002), Chapter 8 will test the propositions and conclusions developed here, using quantitative empirical analyses.

From the perspective of human development, the crucial element of democratization is that it empowers people. Democracy provides civil and political rights, entitling people to freedom of choice in their private and public actions (see Dahl, 1973, 2003; Rose, 1995; Sen, 1999: 152-154). Human development is not linked with all forms of democracy to the same degree; it is most specifically linked with the liberal aspect of democracy that institutionalizes human choice.

The Third Wave gave birth to a large number of new democracies that were initially greeted with enthusiasm (Pye, 1990; Fukuyama, 1992). Subsequently however, a growing number of observers have noted that many of the new democracies show severe deficiencies in their actual practice of civil and political liberties (Ottaway, 2003). Widespread concern has been expressed about “low intensity democracies,” “electoral democracies,” “defective democracy” or “illiberal democracies” (Collier and Adcock, 1999; Bollen and Paxton, 2000; Merkel et al., 2003; O’Donnell, Vargas Culler and Iazzetta [eds.], 2004). Many writers emphasize the need to distinguish between merely formal democracy or electoral democracy, and genuinely effective liberal democracy (see, for example, Gills and Rocamora, 1992; O’Donnell, 1996; Bunce, 2000; Heller, 2000; Rose, 2001). This distinction emphasizes the central role of elites—for elite behavior determines whether democratic rules are genuinely applied, or whether democracy exists in name only. We will use measures of law-abiding elite behavior to differentiate between formal and effective versions of liberal democracy. In doing so, a crucial point becomes evident. Formal democracy can be imposed on almost any society—but whether it provides genuine autonomous choice to its citizens largely depends on mass values. And among the values linked with effective democracy, self-expression values prove to be the most crucial of all, as this and the following chapter will demonstrate.

The Centrality of Self-expression Values

The preceding chapters have shown that the polarization between emphasis on survival values and emphasis on self-expression values is a major dimension of cross-cultural variation. A society’s location on this dimension is closely linked with its socioeconomic and political characteristics. Tables 7-1 and 7-2 demonstrate this point, showing the

correlations between a percentage index indicating how widespread self-expression values are in a given societyⁱ, and various measures of socioeconomic development (Table 7-1) and democracy (Table 7-2).ⁱⁱ This measure of Self-expression values is strongly correlated with the factor scores used in Part 1 of this book ($r=.96$), but it is used here for two reasons: the percentage of a public scoring high on these values, has an intuitively clearer meaning than that of factor scores; and since we are not making comparisons over time in this section of the book, we are no longer constrained by the need to use only those variables that were included in all four waves of the survey, but can use the most effective measurement that is available.

(Tables 7-1 and 7-2: about here)

The proportion of people in a society who emphasize self-expression values correlates strongly with measures of both socioeconomic development and democratic institutions, suggesting that there is a common dimension underlying these three phenomena. In fact, they are three pieces of a puzzle in which the integrating theme is human development: socioeconomic development, self-expression values, and democratic institutions work together to broaden autonomous human choice.

How do these three components accomplish this? The process starts with socioeconomic development, which reduces constraints on autonomous human choice by increasing people's economic, cognitive and social resources. Economic resources include wealth and income (i.e., financial capital) that make people materially more independent. Cognitive resources derive from access to information and formal education (i.e., human capital), which make people intellectually more independent. Social resources (i.e., social capital) increase when social complexity involves people into increasingly diverse interactions, which make them socially more independent. Socioeconomic development increases all three types of resources by raising incomes and educational levels and diversifying human interaction. Together, economic, cognitive and social resources constitute "socioeconomic" resources. Increasing socioeconomic resources broaden the range of actions that people can perform, giving them the *objective capabilities* to act according to their own choices.

Because socioeconomic development tends to make people materially, intellectually, and socially more independent, it nurtures a sense of existential security and autonomy. A growing sense of existential autonomy leads people to give priority to humanistic self-expression values that emphasize human emancipation, giving liberty priority over discipline, diversity over conformity and autonomy over authority. As growing socioeconomic resources broaden the range of activities that people can choose, self-expression values broaden the range of activities to which they aspire. In short, objective capabilities of choice promote subjective aspirations for choice.

Rising self-expression values lead people to demand the institutions that allow them to act according to their own choices. Accordingly, self-expression values motivate people to seek the civil and political rights that define liberal democracy. For these rights legally entitle people to pursue their own choices in their private and public activities. In short, subjective aspirations for choice lead to demands for entitlements to choice.

Human development advances with the growth of three components: (1) objective capabilities, based on socioeconomic resources, that enable people to act according to their own choices; (2) subjective motivations, based on self-expression values, that emphasize acting according to one's autonomous choices; (3) and legal entitlements,

based on civil and political liberties, that allow people to act on the basis of their autonomous choices. These three components have a common focus on autonomous human choice. Table 1 in the Introduction summarized this concept of human development.

The preceding chapters have explored the first major linkage in the human development process, the linkage between socioeconomic development and self-expression values. The following chapters will examine the second major linkage of this humanistic process -- the linkage between self-expression values and democratic institutions. As Table 7-2 illustrates, self-expression values are strongly linked with all of the widely accepted measures of democracy. But the strength of the linkages varies—and it varies according to how directly a given indicator of democracy taps the core element of freedom: the degree to which people have genuine choice in their daily lives.

The Polity IV indicator measures “constitutional democracy” based on Eckstein’s and Gurr’s concept of “authority patterns” (1975). This indicator is based on institutional provisions for the competitiveness of political recruitment, constraints on executive power, and openness of political competition (Gurr and Jagers, 1995; Marshall and Jagers, 2000).ⁱⁱⁱ This index focuses on procedures regulating the formal operation of state institutions that direct societies. This top-down perspective certainly taps an important element of democracy, but it focuses on an aspect that is relatively distant from the extent to which ordinary people have effective freedom in their daily lives. Hence, constitutional democracy shows the weakest linkage with mass self-expression values of the various indicators: $r = .62$.

Vanhanen’s (1997; 2003) index of “electoral democracy” is a combined index of the inclusiveness and competitiveness of national parliamentary elections, with the index yielding higher scores as voter turnout becomes higher and the power concentration of parliamentary parties becomes lower.^{iv} This index comes closer to measuring people’s effective choices because it is not restricted to constitutional provisions but focuses on a real aspect of people’s choice, actual parliamentary elections. Hence, electoral democracy shows a stronger linkage with mass self-expression values than constitutional democracy: $r = .75$.

The measures published by Freedom House are more relevant to people’s effective choices than the Polity index of constitutional democracy, because Freedom House measures democracy bottom-up rather than top-down: it indicates the extent to which people are entitled to civil and political rights.^v Like “electoral democracy,” this measure of “liberal democracy” is more closely linked with mass self-expression values ($r = .75$) than is constitutional democracy.

Figure 7-1 shows the linkage between self-expression values and liberal democracy, as measured by the Freedom House scores-- the most widely used indicator of democratic freedom. The relationship is remarkably strong—especially when one considers the fact that the two variables are measured at different levels and by completely different means: self-expression values tap the values of individuals, as measured by independent surveys in each of scores of societies; while the Freedom House scores are expert ratings of the extent to which the institutions of given societies provide political rights and civil liberties. Despite these fundamental differences in their nature, the relationship between these variables is strong and highly significant. In one important respect, the relationship even seems to be deterministic: without exception, any

Figure 7-1 Self-expression values and formal democracy.

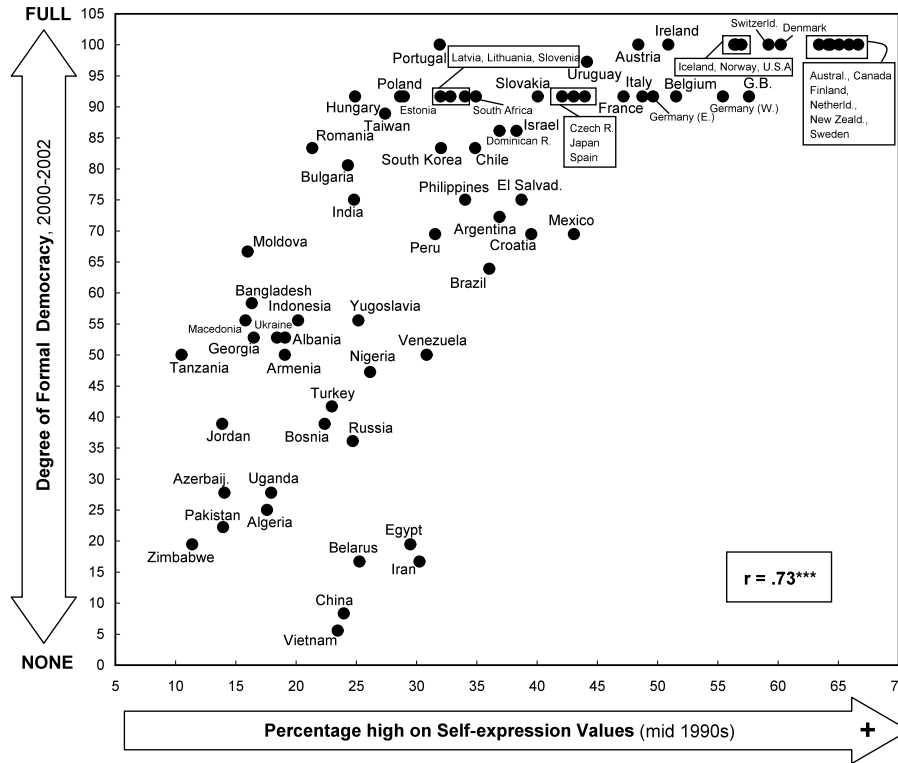
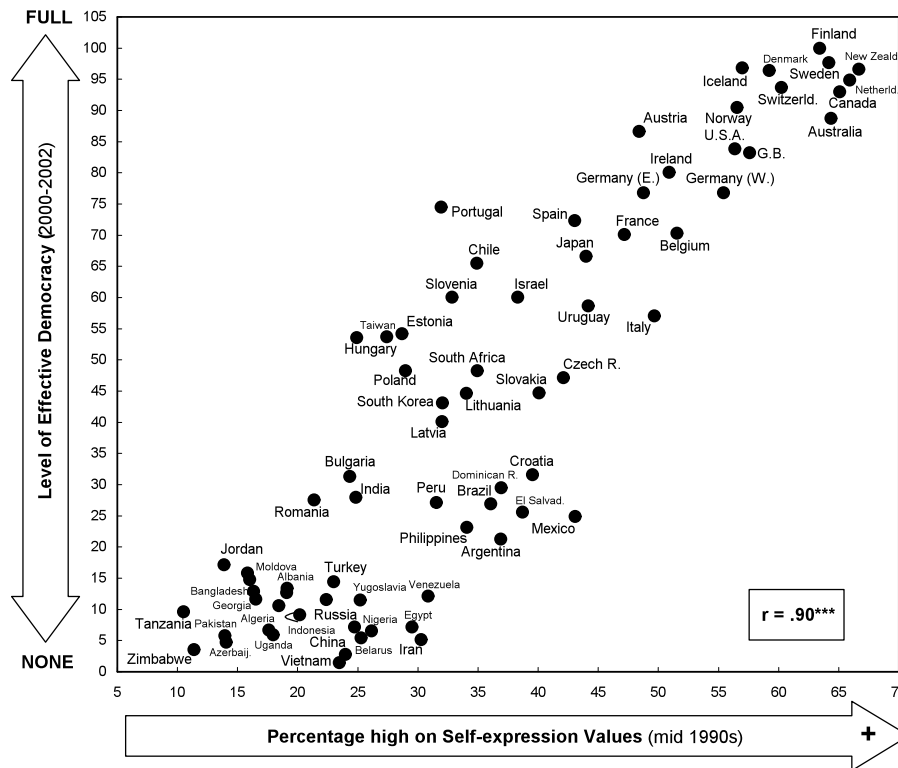


Figure 7-2. Self-expression values and Effective Democracy.



society in which more than half the population ranks high on self-expression values, scores at least 66 percent of the maximum score on liberal democracy.

(Figure 7-1: about here)

The measures of electoral democracy developed by Vanhanen and the measures of liberal democracy developed by Freedom House are unquestionably useful, but they both have significant limitations. The Vanhanen index narrowly ignores anything outside elections. And the Freedom House measures are limited by the fact that they only measure the extent to which civil and political liberties are institutionalized-- which does not necessarily reflect the extent to which these liberties are actually respected by political elites. Some very important recent literature has emphasized the importance of the distinction between formal democracy and genuine liberal democracy (Ottaway, 2003; O'Donnell, Vargas Culler and Iazzetta [eds.], 2004). In order to tap the latter, we need a measure of "effective democracy," which reflects not only the extent to which formal civil and political liberties are institutionalized, but also measures of the extent to which these liberties are actually *practiced*-- indicating how much free choice people really have in their lives. To construct such an index of effective democracy, we multiply the Freedom House measures of civil and political rights by the World Bank's anti-corruption scores (Kaufman, Kraay and Mastruzzi, 2003), which we see as an indicator of "elite integrity," or the extent to which state power actually follows legal norms (see Chapter 8 for a more detailed discussion of this index). When we examine the linkage between this measure of genuine democracy and mass self-expression values, we find an amazingly strong correlation of $r = .90$ across 73 nations. This reflects a powerful cross-level linkage, connecting mass values that emphasize free choice, and the extent to which societal institutions actually provide free choice.

Figure 7-2 depicts the relationship between this index of effective democracy and mass self-expression values. The extent to which self-expression values are present in a society, explains fully 80 percent of the cross-national variance in the extent to which liberal democracy is actually practiced. These findings suggest that the importance of the linkage between individual-level values and democratic institutions has been underestimated. Mass preferences play a crucial role in the emergence of genuine democracy (Welzel and Inglehart, 2004).

(Figure 7-2: about here)

The linkage between mass self-expression values and democratic institutions is remarkably strong and consistent, having only a few outliers, but these outliers are significant. China and Vietnam show considerably lower levels of democracy than their publics' values would predict. Both countries have authoritarian regimes that had greatly increased the latitude for individual choice in the economic realm, and are currently experimenting with local-level democracy—but their one-party regimes are extremely reluctant to allow competition at the national level. These regimes are under growing societal pressure to liberalize, and we predict that they will become liberal democracies within the next 15 to 20 years. The success of their economic reforms is giving rise to societal pressures that tend to erode their one-party regimes. Authoritarian rulers of some Asian societies have argued that the distinctive "Asian values" of these societies make them unsuitable for democracy (Lee and Zakaria, 1994; Thompson, 2000). In fact, the position of most Asian countries on Figures 7-1 and 7-2 is about where their level of socioeconomic development would predict. Japan ranks with the established Western

democracies, both on the self-expression values dimension, and on its level of democracy. And South Korea's position on both dimensions is similar to those of other relatively new democracies such as Chile and Uruguay. The publics of Confucian societies are more supportive of democracy than is generally believed.

On the other hand, less than 30 percent of the public ranks high on self-expression values in our sample of Islamic societies, which rank second lowest among the major cultural groups (slightly above the Orthodox ex-communist societies). The goal of democracy may be attractive to Islamic societies (and it actually *is* as Chapter 10 demonstrates), but their levels of tolerance and trust and the priority they give to self-expression fall short of what is found in all established democracies. But we do not find an unbridgeable chasm between Islamic societies and the rest of the world. The belief systems of these Islamic countries fall roughly where one would expect them to be located, on the basis of their level of socioeconomic development. The most developed of them, Turkey, is now in the transition zone along with other countries such as the Philippines, South Africa, Poland and Slovenia that have recently undergone transitions to democracy. Iran is a significant exception insofar as it has a lower level of democracy than the values of its public suggest. Among all Islamic countries, Iran shows the strongest liberalizing pressures from within its society. This tension leads us to expect that growing mass support will eventually help the liberalizing forces to overcome authoritarian theocratic rule, bringing the country on a path to liberal democracy.

Which comes first—a democratic political culture or democratic institutions? The extent to which people emphasize self-expression values is closely linked with the flourishing of democratic institutions. But what causes what? We suggest that democratic institutions have a relatively minor effect on self-expression values, which are primarily shaped by socioeconomic development. But rising self-expression values should have a major impact on democratic institutions, because these values are inherently relevant to the civil and political liberties that constitute democracy.

To demonstrate that these causal linkages hold true, requires a complex empirical analysis that will be presented in the following chapter. But previous research indicates that socioeconomic development leads to democracy, rather than the other way around (although this research does not demonstrate the intervening role of cultural change). Thus, the causal direction of the relationship between socioeconomic development and democracy has been analyzed by Burkhart and Lewis-Beck (1994), using empirical data from 131 countries. On the basis of Granger-causality tests, they conclude that socioeconomic development causes democracy, but that democracy does not cause socioeconomic development. Helliwell (1993) reaches similar conclusions. Moreover, Przeworski and Limongi's claim (1997) that socioeconomic development merely helps existing democracies to survive but does not help establish new democracies, has been refuted by Boix and Stokes (2003), who demonstrate that socioeconomic development helps both existing democracies to survive *and* new democracies to emerge. The analyses in Chapter 8 confirm that this is true and demonstrate that culture is the intervening variable, explaining *why* socioeconomic development leads to democracy: it does so mainly because it gives rise to mass self-expression values.

This causality is probabilistic, not deterministic. The social world is complex and rarely works through monocausality. For example, the relationship between smoking and lung cancer is an established stochastic relationship. There are many individual

exceptions but on average, smoking markedly increases the risk of cancer. Likewise, we argue that—other conditions being equal—rising self-expression values strongly increase the probability that a society will become democratic (if it not yet is) or will remain democratic (if it already is). Individual exceptions exist but they do not refute the fact that rising self-expression values are a major force in promoting democracy.

Culture and Institutions: What Determines What?

The question of causal primacy is central to one of the most controversial debates in the research on democratization: Does a culture that sustains democracy primarily result from well-designed democratic institutions? Or does a pro-democratic political culture spring from other causes and give rise to effective democratic institutions? These questions are still unresolved, as Dahl (1998: 35) recently noted:

“The exact nature of the relationship among socioeconomic modernization, democratization, and the creation of a democratic culture, is almost as puzzling today as it was a quarter century ago.”

Ever since Almond and Verba’s (1963) path breaking Civic Culture study, students of political culture have argued that mass values play an important role in strengthening democracy. Influential writers have claimed that trust, tolerance, and feelings of efficacy represent “civic virtues” that enable democratic institutions to function effectively (Lasswell, 1958; Sniderman, 1975; Putnam, 1993; Gibson, 1997; Inglehart, 1997; Pettigrew, 1998; Dalton, 2000; Newton, 2001; Norris, 2002). Likewise, Eckstein (1966) and Eckstein et al. (1996) argued that a democratic system will become stable only if people have internalized democratic norms, and practice them in their daily relationships (see also Nevitte, 1996; and for an overview of the literature see Sullivan and Transue, 1999).^{vi}

Thus, an illiberal authoritarian regime is unlikely to function effectively if it is under strong pressure from social forces that seek to institutionalize human autonomy, choice and self-expression. Citizens who strongly value human self-expression tend to withdraw support from a regime that restricts their freedom of expression, forcing such regimes to bear the costs of “aspiration suppression” (Kuran, 1992), which grow as the public comes to place increasing emphasis on self-expression values. Growing suppression costs tend to make authoritarian rule less and less effective, leading to intra-elite tensions and the growth of dissident groups and anti-regime movements (see Welzel, 1999: 105-13; Paxton, 2002: 256-7). Similarly, liberal democracy is unlikely to be consolidated or to operate effectively if it exists in a culture dominated by survival values, which subordinate human freedom to social conformity and state authority. Under such conditions, charismatic leaders find it easy to foment threat perceptions among the public, to nourish social group pressures, and to foster compliance with authoritarian rule—even to the point that people support the abolition of their own liberties.

The evidence shown in Figures 7-1 and 7-2 seems to confirm these propositions: the extent to which formal democracy is present-- and even more so the extent to which democracy is actually practiced-- largely depends on how much strongly the public emphasizes self-expression values. To be precise, across a sample of 73 societies from the second to fourth Values Surveys, cross-national variation in self-expression values explains 52 percent of the variation in formal democracy and 80 percent of the variation in effective democracy. Given the temporal order of the variables involved, with self-

expression values measured from two to twelve years *before* the two versions of democracy, one would need very strong additional evidence to interpret this linkage as reflecting the causal impact of democracy on values.

Confronted with the evidence in Figures 7-1 and 7-2, what arguments might a scholar who is convinced that democratic institutions cause pro-democratic values, invoke in order to defend this claim? One line of reasoning would be to argue that these two figures do not control for the fact that self-expression values are themselves shaped by prior levels of democracy-- so the effect that these values seem to have on subsequent democracy, simply reflects democracy's autocorrelation over time. Accordingly, if one controls for prior democracy, the impact of self-expression values on subsequent democracy would disappear (as the following chapter demonstrates, this does not happen).

We will test these and other alternative interpretations using quantitative techniques in Chapter 8. In this chapter we develop the substantive arguments concerning why it is more plausible that the dominant causal direction in the relation between human values and democratic institutions runs from values to institutions rather than the reverse.

One way to explain the strong linkage between mass self-expression values and democratic institutions would be to assume that pro-democratic values are *caused* by the presence of democracy, emerging through "habituation" or "institutional learning" from living under democratic institutions (Rustow, 1970; Muller and Seligson, 1994; Karl and Schmitter, 1993; Jackman and Miller, 1998). In other words, democracy makes people tolerant, trusting, and happy, and instills postmaterialist aspirations for civil and political liberty. This interpretation is appealing and suggests that we have a quick fix for most of the world's problems: adopt a democratic constitution and live happily ever after.

Unfortunately, the experience of most of the Soviet successor states does not support this interpretation. Since their dramatic move toward democracy in 1991, the people of most of these societies have *not* become more trusting, more tolerant, happier, or more postmaterialist (Inglehart and Baker, 2000). As Figures 7-1 and 7-2 demonstrate, Russia and the Eastern group of ex-communist countries (Albania, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Georgia, Macedonia, Moldova, Romania, Serbia-Montenegro, Ukraine) rank even lower on self-expression values than *any* of the Islamic countries for which we have data, and far lower than the more advanced Islamic societies such as Turkey or Iran. This is not uniformly true of ex-communist countries: some of the Western group ex-communist societies (especially East Germany, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Croatia and Slovenia) show relatively strong emphasis on self-expression values—indeed, slightly higher than the public of such earlier-established democracies as Portugal. These are prosperous societies in which the post-communist transition went relatively smoothly. But virtually all of the Soviet successor states show lower levels of emphasis on self-expression values than most Islamic societies—despite the fact that their publics are living under democratic institutions that are absent in all of the Islamic countries except Turkey. Whether or not democracy takes root seems to depend on the strength of self-expression values far more than on simple habituation through living under democratic institutions. Although the extent to which a pro-democratic culture is present varies greatly from one society to another, no cultural zone seems immune to pressures for democracy. Despite the presence of "Asian values," or an Islamic cultural

heritage, the emergence of postindustrial society is conducive to rising emphasis on self-expression, which in turn seems to bring rising mass demands for democracy.

Even the best-designed institutions need a compatible mass culture. Institutions cannot function well unless the public internalizes a set of norms consistent with these institutions. This is particularly true of democratic institutions, which depend on mass acceptance and support. Indeed, the democratic institutions of one of the world's most effective and stable democracies, Great Britain, exist *only* as a set of informal norms, without a written constitution. If one had to choose between a superbly written democratic constitution that did not have mass acceptance, and a set of democratic norms that had never been enacted as laws but were deeply-internalized by the people, the latter would clearly be preferable. Actual practices differ dramatically from institutional norms when a society's prevailing values contradict them—rendering them irrelevant. This is one of the most fundamental insights of the political culture approach: one cannot assume that making democracy work is simply a matter of having the right constitutional arrangements.

-
- i This percentage index is based on the average of the percentages of its five components: (1) postmaterialistic aspirations for civil and political liberty, (2) tolerance of others' liberty, as indicated by tolerance of homosexuality, (3) elite-challenging civic activity, as indicated by signing petitions, (4) generalized interpersonal trust, and (5) emphasis on subjective well-being measured by life satisfaction. For exactly how the percentage index is constructed see Internet appendix, #49 under Variables. The percentage scale gives an intuitive idea of how widespread self-expression values are in societies. This is important, if one considers self-expression as a social force that provides a source of collective actions.
- ii For measurement details on the remaining variables used in Tables 7-1 and 7-2, see under Variables in the Internet appendix, #04 (postindustrialization), #05 (GDP per capita), #06 (Human Development Index), #07 (Index of Social Progress), #08 (socioeconomic resources), #16 (constitutional democracy), #17 (electoral democracy), #18 (liberal democracy), #20 (elite integrity), #21 (effective democracy).
- iii For more details on variable definitions, coding procedures and data sources see the project's website: www.bsos.umd.edu/cidcm/inscr/polity.
- iv Since this index is solely based on electoral data, we classify it as an index of "electoral democracy," rather than of democracy itself. This does not mean that we consider elections unimportant, but one should be aware of the "electoral fallacy" (Linz and Stepan, 1996: 4), which all too easily equates democratic elections with democracy itself. Elections are one of the central aspects of democracy but they do not reflect whether or not the civil rights that are essential to liberal democracy, are present. For more details on measurement, see Internet appendix, #17 under Variables.
- v The concept of liberal democracy (see Berlin, 1969; Rose, 1995) includes both "negative" freedom from the state (civil liberties) as well as "positive" freedom over the state (political liberties). Hence, our measure of liberal democracy always uses the *combined* Freedom House scores for civil and political liberties. For measurement details, see <http://www.freedomhouse.org>.
- vi The basic assumptions of the political culture approach go back to Montesquieu (1989 [1748]) and to Aristotle, both of whom argued that a society's institutions reflect the specific "virtues" that prevail among its citizens. Tocqueville (1994 [1837]), in his study of early American democracy, reached a similar conclusion: the functioning of institutions in the U.S. reflected the "civic spirit" of its people. Herodotus and Thucydides established this idea

much earlier in their discussions of the cultural differences between the Greek and Persian peoples; and between the peoples of Athens and Sparta, arguing that the contrasting virtues that these societies emphasized, accounted for the distinctive characteristics of their polities. Thus, the insight that political systems reflect the prevailing values of their publics has been recognized since political analysis began; its relevance continued to be recognized by modern political scientists such as Almond and Verba (1963), who introduced it into empirical research. This insight's persistence over time reflects the fact that it is an enduring part of reality.