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Political Support for Incomplete Democracies:  
Realist vs. Idealist Theories and Measures

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**Abstract:**

Democratic regimes depend for their survival and effective functioning on the public's willing acquiescence and support; however, the measurement of support is problematic. The failure to appreciate the difference between established democracies and new regimes that may (or may not) be in the process of democratizing has prompted scholars to mismeasure support by relying on idealist measures. We propose a realist conception of political support and realist measures. We test these measures with data from the 1995-97 World Values Surveys, comparing their ability to describe and explain variations in support for both old and new regimes. Realist measures perform substantially better in all contexts and in ways that suggest the rationality of realist support.

**Introduction:**

A defining feature of democratic regimes is that they depend for their survival and effective functioning on the public's willing acquiescence and support (Easton, 1965, 1975). Given the importance that democratic theory ascribes to political support, it is not surprising that the current democratic wave has revived scholarly interest in the concept and its measurement. It is the thesis of this paper, however, that much of the recent work on political support is misconceived. Most recent work on support adopts an idealist approach, measuring support in terms of citizens' adherence to the principles or ideals of democracy. Although appropriate, perhaps, for established democratic regimes, where the choices are between a "good" system and making a good system better, an idealist approach cannot capture the realities facing citizens in new democracies or in transitional regimes moving from an undemocratic past to an uncertain future. The failure to appreciate the differences among regimes has led scholars to mismeasure political support in fundamental ways.

We propose a realist conception of political support and a different measure predicated upon the idea that citizens of new regimes have little understanding of democratic ideals but strong feelings about the performance of the new regime especially in comparison to the past. We assess the performance of realist and idealist measures with data from the 1995-97 World Values Surveys, comparing their ability to describe and explain variations in support both for democratic regimes and non-democratic regimes including both long established regimes and those in the process of transition.

**Popular Support for Incomplete Democracies**

Research on democratic processes traditionally has focused on the experiences of a few, long-established Western regimes. For citizens of established democracies, the fundamental structure and democratic character of the regime are well known and widely accepted. Citizens may not know or appreciate the details of the legislative process, but they do

have a basic understanding of political institutions and processes and accept without question the “fact” that the political system is democratic. Moreover, it is inconceivable to most citizens that the existing regime could be replaced by any other, nor is there any demand for that to happen. Citizens of established democracies can and often do distrust the government of the day, oppose its policies, or express dissatisfaction with particular political institutions, but few support fundamental changes in the regime, much less its replacement by an undemocratic alternative. (Pharr and Putnam, 2000; Norris, 1999; Hibbing and Theiss-Morse, 1995).

In democratizing regimes, by contrast, the identity and survival of the regime are very much in question. Indeed, the term democratization frequently is a misnomer. Regime transformation is a better description, since the outcome of the transformation process is unknown at the start and not everyone in society wants the process to culminate in democracy. The dynamics of the process are largely unknown, as well. There is no certainty regarding the direction the transformation will take, much less where it will end, whether in some form of democracy, a different type of undemocratic regime, or the re-emergence of something resembling the old undemocratic regime as in a number of states created after World War II (see Linz and Stepan, 1978). Thus, at any moment during the transformation, a new regime is properly viewed as “incomplete.” Even if there are competitive elections, there can be substantial violations of civil liberties, political accountability and the rule of law (Rose, Shin and Munro, 2000). It is problematic whether such regimes will ever become fully consolidated democracies; the transition may be reversed or progress toward democracy may simply stop resulting in a permanently incomplete or “broken back” democracy. Importantly, whether the process of regime transformation ends in the establishment of a complete democracy, a broken back democracy, or an undemocratic regime may depend less on popular support for democracy as an ideal and more on popular support for the incomplete regime that actually exists during the transition. For democratization to succeed, an incomplete regime must enjoy

sufficient support to survive and sustain a democratic course for the duration of the transition.

### **Measuring Support for Established Democracies**

In established democracies a variety of strategies exist for measuring regime support, most of which focus on citizens' commitment to democratic principles. The idealist approach assesses popular support by measuring citizens' commitment to democracy as an abstract ideal. For example, the World Values Survey frequently includes the question,

*I am going to describe various types of political systems and ask what you think about each as a way of governing this country. For each would you say it is a very good, fairly good, fairly bad or a very bad way of governing this country? Having a democratic system?*

Underlying this question is an assumption that citizens share an understanding of what democracy means and how it ought to work in practice. In fact, even in established democracies many citizens have only a rudimentary knowledge of democratic ideals and simply assume that their own regime epitomizes democratic principles. Americans do not love their government because they think it is democratic; they love democracy because they associate it with the American way of life. The problem is even more severe for citizens of incomplete regimes who have no direct experience with democracy and likely were socialized by the old regime into a distorted view of democratic principles. Citizens in incomplete democracies may answer questions posed to them about democracy, but their answers run a high risk of measuring what Converse (1964) calls, "non attitudes," expressions of opinions that people had not previously held or considered before being asked to voice an opinion by a survey.

Even if citizens in incomplete regimes have meaningful attitudes about democracy, their commitment to democratic ideals may be of little value for assessing the regime as it actually is. A citizen who embraces democracy as an ideal but who opposes the current regime because it falls short of this standard would be wrongly classified as supporting the current regime.

Conversely, someone who rejects democratic ideals and endorses the current regime precisely because it is not democratic would be coded as showing little regime support. In both cases the idealist measure incorrectly measures support for transitional regimes.

Partly as a result, idealist measures of political support do not discriminate well between established democracies and incomplete regimes. Klingemann (1999) uses the 1994-97 World Values Surveys to demonstrate that an average of 88 percent of citizens in long established regimes express support for democracy in the abstract. The same is true, however, for 83 percent of citizens in new or incomplete democracies including 80 percent of citizens in regimes scored by Freedom House as “partly free” or “not free.” Among more than forty countries in the study, support for democratic ideals fell below 71% only in Russia, and even there 51 percent of citizens support democracy as “a good way of governing this country.”

A variant of the idealist approach, the satisfaction approach, emphasizes popular assessments of democratic performance. For example, the World Values Surveys ask:

*On the whole are you very satisfied, fairly satisfied, not very satisfied, or not at all satisfied with the way democracy works in your country?*<sup>1</sup>

While the satisfaction approach calls attention to the actual performance of a regime, responses to this measure indicate that the meaning of the question remains ambiguous. In established democracies, Klingemann reports that an average of only 32 percent of citizens say they are “fairly” or “very satisfied” with the way democracy works in their country, although the figure varies from 12 percent in Japan to 46 percent in Switzerland and 70 percent in Norway. By comparison, 25 percent of citizens in incomplete democracies say they are satisfied with the way democracy is developing, including an average of 23 percent in countries that Freedom House rates as partly free or unfree. Taken at face value these results suggest that there is as much support for democracy in Serbia (where 26 percent are satisfied) as in the United States (where 25 percent are satisfied) and even more support for democracy in Azerbaijan (where 77

percent are satisfied). Clearly, the satisfaction measure lacks face validity. The problem with the measure is that it assumes both that the current regime is democratic and that it is viewed that way by citizens. Neither of these assumptions holds in incomplete democracies, however.<sup>2</sup>

Whereas the idealist and satisfaction approaches measure support for democracy directly, cultural approaches measure support indirectly. They begin with the assumption that democracy requires a civic culture in which citizens manifest such basic values as tolerance and trust. Citizens are surveyed to determine how widely those attributes are distributed across society. The assumption is that societies with low levels of trust and tolerance are poorly suited to the establishment of democratic institutions. Increasingly, however, there is disagreement over the causal direction of the relationship between democratic culture and institutions. The conventional wisdom that culture precedes and conditions institutions has been challenged by research suggesting that the development of effective democratic institutions is one way to cultivate a democratic culture. For established democracies, this poses few problems given the stability of institutions and culture, but in transitional societies the question of whether political attitudes are leading or lagging indicators of democracy raises serious problems.

### **Measuring Support for Incomplete Regimes**

Rather than evaluate incomplete democracies against abstract and ambiguous democratic ideals, an experiential or realist approach to political support assumes that citizens of transitional regimes are better able to assess the current regime against the performance of the other regimes with which they have first hand experience. While citizens may have little knowledge of democratic principles, they have a lifetime of experience with undemocratic regimes. At the start of a new regime the natural tendency is to evaluate the new regime by comparison with the regime it has replaced. Citizens may develop the capacity for more abstract and nuanced evaluations as they acquire experience with democracy, but at the start of the transition, the new regime must be judged as fundamentally better or worse than the

undemocratic past (Rose and Mishler 1994; Mishler and Rose, 1995).

Reflecting an experiential or realist approach, the 1995-97 World Values Surveys include a battery of questions initially developed in the New Democracies Barometers (Rose, 1992; Rose, Mishler and Haerpfer, 1998: chapter 5).

*People have different views about the system for governing this country. Here is a scale for rating how well things are going. 1 means very bad and 10 means very good. Where on this scale would you put the political system as it was in \_\_\_\_ (reference to previous regime)? Where on this scale would you put the political system as it is today? Where on this scale would you put the political system as you expect it tomorrow?*

The realist questions avoid abstract, ambiguous and idealistic labels such as democracy, asking citizens to evaluate regimes as they have personally experienced them. By measuring support for current and past regimes on a common metric, the questions facilitate assessments of relative support and the trajectory of support over time, and by avoiding country and institution specific references they also facilitate cross-national comparisons.

Another important feature of the realist measures is that they discriminate much better than ideal measures among democracies, non-democracies, and incomplete or transitional regimes. Amending slightly Klingemann's (1999) classification of countries, we divided the 38 countries in the 1995-97 World Values Survey for which data are available into four groups (Table 1). Stable Democracies are countries coded by Freedom House in 1995-96 as currently free (i.e., average Freedom House scores of 2.5 or lower) and which have not experienced a change in regimes for the past 20 years. New Democracies are those which Freedom House codes as free and which have experienced a major change in regimes over the past twenty years. Transitional Regimes also have experienced a major change in regimes, but are currently coded as only partly free or unfree. Stable Non-Democracies consist of countries coded as unfree or partly free but without significant regime change over the past twenty years.



[Table 1 about here]

In absolute terms, realist support for all regimes is low. Only 29 percent of citizens across the 38 countries give the current regime a score of six or higher on the ten-point scale.<sup>3</sup> The average score across is 4.3.<sup>4</sup> In relative terms, however, public support for the regime is substantially and consistently higher for stable democracies than for stable non-democracies by 37 vs. 22 percent (Table 2). New democracies and transitional regimes, predictably, fall in between, with new democracies being closer to their established counterparts while transitional regimes are closer to stable non democracies.

[Table 2 about here]

For comparative purposes, Table 2 also reports an idealist measure of support, the percentage of citizens who say that "Having a democratic political system is a very good or fairly good way of governing this country," and a culturalist measure, the percentage of citizens who say they have "a great deal or quite a lot of confidence" in five separate political institutions including the police, the national government, political parties, parliament and the civil service.<sup>5</sup> The differences between the realist and idealist measures are striking. In absolute terms, fully 88 percent of citizens across all types of regimes support democracy as a good way to run their country. Consistent with Klingemann's (1999) findings, this figure varies only very little across regimes. Predictably, citizens of stable democracies are more likely to express support for democratic ideals (91 percent), but only by one percentage point over citizens of new democracies and by only three points more than citizens of stable non-democracies.

There are even fewer differences in levels of political trust across the different regimes, and those differences are contrary to theory. Trust is lowest in the new democracies and transitional regimes where an average of 33 percent show positive trust. Trust is highest in long standing undemocratic regimes and stable democracies; in both, 40 percent of citizens trust political institutions. Clearly, the realist measures of support have greater face validity in

they distinguish much more clearly (and in ways more consistent with theory) among democratic, incomplete and undemocratic regimes.

### **Sources of Realist and Idealist Support**

Another test of the validity of different measures of democracy is to assess how well they fit existing theories of political support. In previous research on popular support for post-Communist regimes in Central and Eastern Europe, we advanced a "lifetime learning model of the sources of political support. According to this model political support initially is shaped by early life agents and experiences but, then, is periodically updated and adjusted throughout life as initial beliefs are tempered, reinforced or challenged by later life experiences (Rose and McAllister, 1990; Mishler and Rose, 1997).<sup>6</sup>

From a lifetime learning perspective, explanations of political support begin with the legacy of the old regime. In stable societies, democratic or not, where a regime persists fundamentally unchanged across an individual's lifetime, the legacy of past support should be strong and positive. The weight of past experience should insure that political support is highly viscous changing slowly and incrementally in response to contemporary performance. In a new democracy, however, the current regime is fundamentally different from the past. Therefore, the legacy of the old regime should have less impact and support for the new regime should vary inversely with current evaluations of the old regime. In time, memories of the old regime should fade, and current performance evaluations and the cumulative impact of the new regime should take precedence. But early in the transition, the negative legacy of the old regime should provide a measure of positive support for the new or transitional regime.

To capture the legacy of the past, we use two measures: individuals' current evaluations of the regime as it existed ten years ago (whether the same or different regime) and a dummy variable indicating simply whether there had been a fundamental change in regimes in the country over the previous twenty years. (Details on all variables are provided in Appendix A).

Because we hypothesize that the legacy of the past will have contradictory effects in new as compared to established regimes, we also include an interactive term (regime change x past regime support) to indicate the differential effect of past support for discarded regimes.<sup>7</sup>

To control for the possibility that the old regime was experienced differently by individuals in different social strata, five social background variables are included in the model: age, education, town size, and social class. The model also includes a dummy variable measuring whether or not the individual is a member of the dominant ethnic groups.<sup>8</sup> Reflecting Putnam's (1993) idea that the development of democratic attitudes depends on a citizen's embeddedness in a civic community, the model also includes the number of voluntary organizations in which individuals say they are active and a measure of interpersonal trust. Cultural theories of democratization stress the importance of basic social and political values, and the lifetime learning model includes several measures, including social tolerance, political interest and ideology, plus a battery of questions reflecting attitudes toward individual wealth, personal enterprise and the welfare state.

While cultural values and the legacy of the old regime may be important in shaping support for a new regime, a lifetime learning model implies that more contemporary experiences and the evaluation of a new regime's performance will assume relatively greater importance as the transition progresses. In established democracies performance typically is assessed in economic terms (see, e.g., Lewis-Beck and Paldam, 2000; Clarke *et al.*, 1992), and economic performance is likely to be critical for new and incomplete regimes as well, not least because economic dislocations during transitions can be profound. Nevertheless, although economic performance dominates discussions of political support, there is considerable evidence that political performance matters too (Clarke, Dutt and Komberg, 1993, Rose, Mishler and Haerpfer, 1998). For example, a regime's adherence to the rule-of-law and its success in avoiding corruption are widely hypothesized as necessary for establishing and maintaining the

public's confidence and support. The same is true with regard to the success of a regime in assuring its citizens a range of basic civil and political rights and liberties.

Two variables measure economic performance: personal income and individual perceptions of their family's financial situation. Because the World Values Study does not ask individuals their perceptions of the freedoms they enjoy, we use the aggregate Freedom House measure of the average level of civil and political freedom in each country as a measure of a country's political performance. Also included in the model is a measure of individual perceptions of the level of public corruption in the country plus a measure of individual satisfaction with the "way people now in national office are handling the government's affairs." Finally, to assess the impact of public hopes and expectations, the model includes a measure of the public's level of support for the regime as they expect it to be in ten years time.

To explore the determinants of idealist and realist support, we separately estimate a series of identical models using OLS procedures and different measures of support for a single data set pooling the answers of 57000 individual respondents from 38 countries with each country weighted as having 1,500 respondents. Unstandardized coefficients and standard errors are reported for all variables, and standardized coefficients are reported for the principal influences in each model (Table 3).<sup>9</sup> Consistent with the lifetime learning model, the analyses demonstrate that across regimes realist support is substantially influenced both by the legacy of the past and by public evaluations of recent political and economic performance. By contrast, the effects of social structure and individual values on political support are almost nil.

[Table 3 about here]

Predictably, the nature of a regime's political legacy depends substantially on its stability. Among stable regimes (democratic or not), where the current and past regimes are fundamentally the same, the legacy of the past is strong and positive (Beta= .11). Citizens with favorable assessments of the regime as it existed a decade ago (about 60 percent of citizens in

democratic regimes and about 45 percent of those in non-democracies), are substantially more likely to support the current regime as a result. Conversely, in countries that have experienced a fundamental change in regimes in the recent past, the average citizen is more supportive of the regime simply by virtue of there having been a change in regimes. This is true regardless of what citizens think about the old regime as is indicated by the strong, positive coefficient for the regime change variable (Beta=.20), which is coded one if the regime has changed fundamentally in the past twenty years and zero otherwise. It is especially true, however, for individuals in new regimes who remember the old regime disapprovingly (cf. Hofferbert and Klingemann, 1999). This is reflected in the strong, negative coefficient (Beta = -.15) for the interactive variable, regime change x past regime. Since the negative coefficient for the interactive term is larger than the positive coefficient for past regime support, the overall legacy of the old regime for current support is negative. This is encouraging news for new democracies, given that nearly 70 percent of citizens view the old regime disapprovingly. In transitional but only partly free regimes, by contrast, the fact that nearly half of respondents give positive evaluations to the old regime means that the legacy of the past is ambivalent, encouraging some to support the new regime but others to oppose it.

To the extent that social background variables are proxies for early-life socialization experiences (and the connection is disputed), differences in early socialization have little salience for later life political support. None of the social background variables has appreciable effects on realist support although the impact of ethnicity falls just short of our standard. Putnam's much debated thesis also fares poorly in the model as does the related, culturalist argument that support for the regime reflects deeply ingrained social and political values. Participation in voluntary organizations has relatively little effect on regime support, and the same is true of interpersonal trust. In both cases the signs of the coefficients are in the predicted direction, but neither variable has appreciable influence on support for the regime.

Similarly, none of the attitudinal or value measures have appreciable effects, except for political interest, and it is not clear whether interest is a cause or consequence of an individual's support for the regime.

By contrast to the minimal effects of social structure and values, economic and especially political performance variables have substantial effects on regime support. While individual pocketbook considerations can and do influence support for the regime, their effects typically are dwarfed by individual concerns with the macro-economy both past and future. Unfortunately, the World Values Survey does not include sociotropic evaluations and has only a single egocentric measure, satisfaction with personal finances. Personal income, however, has only a weak effect on regime support, which is consistent with previous research that subjective economic perceptions are much more salient for political support than "objective" measures of economic well-being. If sociotropic measures were available, we suspect they would have even stronger effects. (Rose, Mishler and Haerpfer, 1998).

While economic performance and the legacy of the old regime have substantial effects on realist support, political performance clearly dominates evaluations of the current regime. Predictably, regimes providing citizens with the highest levels of civil liberties and political rights enjoy the highest levels of political support. Similarly regimes perceived by citizens as adhering to the rule of law and avoiding corruption also have significantly higher levels of political support. Reinforcing arguments made elsewhere, individual satisfaction with the government of the day also has strong effects on regime support (Mishler and Rose, 1997).

The strongest influence on support for the current regime is the individual's evaluation of the regime ten years in the future. The impact is nearly twice that of any other variable (Beta = .38). Although realist support for the regime is substantially influenced by the legacy of the past and by the contemporary performance of the regime, it is determined to an even greater effect

by citizens' hopes for what the regime may become. While these hopes are themselves substantially influenced by the legacy of the past and by current performance (analyses not shown), they also are partly independent. They are remarkably durable as well; research on realist support for post-Communist regimes suggest that hope can survive only slightly diminished despite continuing dissatisfaction with the current regime (Mishler and Rose, 1999).

Although the lifetime learning model performs very well in explaining realist support for current regimes, accounting for 30 percent of the variance, it is much less effective in explaining idealist support for democracy, accounting for only 7 percent. Political trust falls in between; 17 percent of the variance in trust is explained by the lifetime learning model.

With few exceptions the influences contributing to realist political support are the same for idealist support and political trust. In all three models, political performance dominates while social structure and social influences are negligible, and the legacy of the old regime and current attitudes and values have intermediate effects. Although similar in their basic structures, the strength of the models varies considerably. The coefficients are consistently strongest in the realist model and weakest in the idealist model. The only exceptions are the stronger influence of political interest on both idealist support and political trust and the greater impact of perceived corruption and government satisfaction on political trust.

Two explanations for these patterns are possible. The first is that the weaker results achieved with the idealist measure are consequences of the use of a pooled data set comprised almost equally of democratic and non-democratic regimes. It is entirely possible that attitudes about democracy as a system of government vary systematically across the different types of regimes and have different if not contradictory determinants. The second possibility is that even citizens of stable democracies do not have clear and consistent attitudes about democracy in the abstract and therefore cannot apply abstract standards systematically. Thus, asking about

democracy in abstract or idealist terms can produce a very high level of "non-attitudes," which characteristically are unrelated to other attitudinal structures. According to both explanations, political trust should fall somewhere between the realist and idealist measures, since it asks about confidence in specific institutions such as parliament and civil servants with which citizens have at least limited experiences.

To test these hypotheses, we replicated the analyses for the three measures of political support for each of the four regime types previously identified -- stable democracies, new democracies, transitional (but still only partly free) regimes and stable non-democracies. The results in Table 4 support both explanations to varying degrees.

[Table 4 about here]

The hypothesis that idealist measures of political support are tapping high levels of non-attitudes is bolstered by the fact that the lifetime learning model consistently accounts for less of the variance in idealist support than for either realist support or political trust. In stable non-democracies, the lifetime learning model accounts for three times more variance in realist support than in idealist support (27 vs. 9%). This is not surprising, of course, since there is no reason why citizens who have never experienced democracy should understand its principles very well or use them as a standard for evaluating the undemocratic regime in which they live. What is surprising, however, is that the lifetime learning model accounts for three times more variance in realist than idealist support even in stable democratic regimes where citizens presumably better understand democratic principles. Although in relative terms the idealist measure performs somewhat better in stable democracies than in non-democracies, in absolute terms the measure is weak in all regimes. Even in stable democracies the ratio of systematic variation to 'noise' is much lower for the idealist measure than for the realist measure of regime support. A low ratio of 'signal to noise' is a classic indicator of non-attitudes.



Across all types of regimes the lifetime learning model accounts for more of the variation in trust than in democratic ideals but less of the variance than in realist support. Questions about institutional trust have a significant realist component since they ask individuals to evaluate political institutions with which most citizens have at least some experience. At the same time, however, concepts such as 'confidence' and 'trust' admit a certain idealist ambiguity in that they are susceptible to different interpretations and meanings across countries. Moreover, while political institutions such as parliament and parties may be clearly distinguished and well understood by citizens of stable regimes, they are likely to be much less clearly understood by citizens in transitional regimes where competitive parties and an elected parliament represent radical departures from past experience. Political trust measure appears to be a hybrid measure combining elements of both realist and idealist support.

Consistent with the hypothesis that the determinants of regime support vary by regime type, the lifetime learning model consistently explains substantially greater variance in support for stable democratic regimes than in incomplete or stable undemocratic regimes. For example, the model accounts for 38 percent of the variance in realist evaluations of stable democratic regimes, but only 28 percent of the variance in realist support for newly democratic, transitional or stable undemocratic regimes. Similar though weaker differences are with respect to political trust and idealist support across regime types.

Nevertheless, the regime difference hypothesis must be qualified. Although lifetime learning consistently accounts for more of the variance in support for stable democratic regimes, the determinants of regime support are fundamentally the same across different regime types. A comparison (not shown) of the most important influences in the several models demonstrates the consistent primary of three variable groups – current economic and political performance, the legacy of the past regime, and future expectations. Citizens everywhere

appreciate their regime in direct relationship to their personal financial situations, their satisfaction with the government of the day and to the extent that the regime supplies significant measures of freedom and the rule of law. The legacy of the past regime is consistently important as well, albeit in different ways in different regimes. That legacy is positive for stable regimes, both democratic and undemocratic, but it is negative for new democracies where the current regime is fundamentally different from the past. Interestingly, evaluations of the past have mixed effects in transitional regimes including both new democracies and incomplete regimes. For example, legacy effects on idealist support are negative in transitional regimes; those nostalgic for the old regime reject democratic ideals. Conversely legacy effects are strongly positive for political trust in transitional regimes suggesting that citizens perceive a high degree of continuity in many political institutions despite the change in regimes.

The strongest determinants of regime support are individual expectations about the future of the regime. This is true for all measures of support across all types of regimes. Although levels of hope vary by regime type, those with higher hopes for the future regime have higher levels of support for the current regime, no matter how support is measured.

### **The Bounded Rationality of Realist Support**

Although considerable progress toward democracy has been made over the past decade in a number of formerly authoritarian regimes, the transformation in most instances remains incomplete. The median country in the world today remains only partly free, and the majority of the world's population continues to live in undemocratic regimes. In this context, efforts to evaluate the extent of public support for new regimes by assessing citizens' commitments to democratic values or by asking citizens to apply those principles to new regimes are misplaced. The idealist strategy requires citizens to apply principles with which they have little direct experience, and which they do not clearly comprehend, to the assessment of

regimes whose transitions are incomplete and which may or may not develop into authentic democracies. The mis-measurement of support is the predictable result of such an effort.

The evidence reported here shows that even citizens of long established democracies find it difficult to employ idealist principles to evaluate their regimes. Even when citizens identify their regime as democratic and express support for democracy as an ideal, it does not follow that support for the regime is idealist based. Idealist principles may (or may not) contribute to citizens' support for democratic regimes and vice versa, but support for idealist principles and for existing regimes are conceptually different and empirically distinct.

A realist approach to regime support is less concerned with the extent to which citizens subscribe to democracy in the abstract and more concerned with the extent to which citizens embrace or reject their current regime, whether democratic or undemocratic, established or incomplete. All regimes require a measure of public support; transitional regimes arguably require even more than stable democracies, given the greater stress and competition they face from potential alternative regimes. A realist approach can be used not only to assess popular support for stable democratic regimes but also to compare levels of support for undemocratic regimes and regimes attempting the transition to democracy.

Realist measures of support are superior in several respects. First, realist measures tap 'real' attitudes. There is a consistency and predictability about them that is largely absent in idealist alternatives. Second, realist measures have greater face validity. Their results comport with what theory predicts; stable democracies enjoy substantially greater public support than do undemocratic regimes, and new democracies enjoy greater support than transitional regimes that remain only partly free. Finally, the realist measures have greater generality; they facilitate comparisons of diverse regimes over time, a point of special importance in societies where most citizens have lived under two very different types of regimes.

Substantively, the research confirms the superiority of institutional over cultural explanations of that support. The weakness of cultural explanations is demonstrated by the weakness of social structure, socialization, and values as determinants of regime support (however measured) and by the dominance of economic and political performance assessments. Of particular interest is the evidence that the process by which citizens evaluate the regime is largely the same regardless of regime type. Across all types of regimes, variations in regime support are most closely linked to current economic and political performance. Citizens may distinguish between the government and the regime, but when judging the regime the success of the government in providing economic prosperity, protecting liberty, and maintaining the rule-of-law have profound effects. Nevertheless, regimes may derive a measure of "diffuse support" from the public's assessment of the legacy of the past regime. They also derive an important measure of support from the public's optimism, sometimes bordering on faith, that the current regime will be much more worthy of support in the future.

In the end, public support for the regime is largely earned. As V.O. Key (1967) observed, the ordinary citizen is not a fool; citizens judge their regime based largely on their experiences with how it performs combined with future expectations. At the same time, the average citizen is not a political scientist; most citizens have only limited knowledge of the structure and operation of their political system and even less understanding of the political principles underlying it. Their rationality is bounded by the limits of their knowledge. Moreover, citizens everywhere are suspicious of politics and of political institutions of all types. As a result, while citizen support for the regime is realist in nature and rationally based on assessments of performance, the absolute level of support for even the most responsive democratic regimes is limited. Even the most democratic regimes must continually prove themselves in order to maintain their citizens' support.

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**Table 1: World Values Countries Classified according to Level of Freedom and Extent of Regime Change**

	Free (Freedom House $\leq$ 2.5)	Partly Free/Unfree (Freedom House $>$ 2.5)
No Regime Change	<p><b>STABLE DEMOCRACIES</b></p> <p>Australia Finland Japan Norway Sweden Switzerland United States West Germany</p>	<p><b>STABLE NON DEMOCRACIES</b></p> <p>India Mexico Taiwan Turkey Venezuela</p>
Regime Change	<p><b>NEW DEMOCRACIES</b></p> <p>Argentina Bulgaria Chile East Germany Estonia Latvia Lithuania Poland Slovenia South Africa Spain Uruguay</p>	<p><b>TRANSITIONAL REGIMES</b></p> <p>Armenia Belarus Brazil Croatia Georgia Macedonia Moldova Nigeria Peru Philippines Russia Serbia Ukraine</p>

Source: World Values Survey (1997); Freedom House, (1995-96)



**Table 2: Percentage of Citizens with high levels of Realist Support for the Current Regime, Idealist Support for Democracy, and Trust in Political Institutions by Type of Regime.**

	<u>% Realist Support for Current Regime</u>	<u>% Idealist Support for Abstract Democracy</u>	<u>% Positive Trust in Political Institutions</u>
All Regimes	29.2	87.9	35.1
Stable Democracies	36.8	90.9	39.8
New Democracies	33.0	89.4	33.5
Transitional Regimes	23.8	84.8	31.9
Stable Non- Democracies	21.9	87.6	39.9

Source: World Values Survey (1997)

**Table 3: OLS Estimates of Realist Support for the Current Regime, Idealist support for Democracy and Trust in Political Institutions**

VARIABLES:	Realist Support for Current Regime		Idealist Support for Democracy		Trust in Political Institutions	
	b (se)	BETA	b (se)	BETA	b (se)	BETA
<b>LEGACY:</b>						
Prior Regime Support	.09 (.01)	.11	-.007 (.002)		.02 (.001)	.08
Regime Change	.96 (.04)	.20	.13 (.02)	.09	-.03 (.01)	
Regime Change X Prior Support	-.11 (.01)	-.15	-.02 (.002)	-.09	-.001 (.002)	
<b>SOCIAL STRUCTURE</b>						
Age	-.001 (.0004)		.002 (.0002)		.001 (.009)	
Education	-.07 (.007)		.01 (.002)		-.04 (.002)	-.08
Social Class	.06 (.01)		.003 (.004)		.01 (.003)	
Ethnicity	.23 (.02)		-.02 (.008)		.09 (.006)	.06
Voluntary Organizations	-.03 (.007)		.01 (.002)		.02 (.002)	
Interpersonal Trust	.11 (.02)		.05 (.006)		.07 (.006)	
<b>VALUES</b>						
Tolerance	-.06 (.01)		-.007 (.005)		-.01 (.004)	
Political Interest	.15 (.008)	.07	.07 (.003)	.09	.08 (.002)	.12
Left Ideology	-.05 (.004)		.007 (.001)		-.01 (.001)	
Approve Wealth Differences	-.003 (.003)		.001 (.001)		.001 (.001)	
Approve Welfare State	-.01 (.004)		-.03 (.001)	-.08	-.003 (.001)	
Approve Individual Enterprise	.04 (.004)		.01 (.001)		-.005 (.001)	
<b>PERFORMANCE</b>						
Income Level	.004 (.003)		.02 (.001)	.05	-.004 (.001)	
Satisfaction with Personal Finances	.07 (.003)	.09	.002 (.001)		.01 (.001)	.06
Current Freedoms	-.26 (.005)	-.18	-.01 (.002)		.01 (.002)	
Increased Freedom 1986-1996	.07 (.005)	.07	.05 (.002)	.14	-.02 (.002)	-.08
Perceived Corruption	-.31 (.01)	-.11	-.04 (.005)	-.05	-.13 (.003)	-.17
Government Satisfaction	.27 (.006)	.14	.01 (.002)		.07 (.002)	.14
Regime Expectations in 10 years	.35 (.003)	.38	.03 (.001)	.09	.04 (.001)	.17
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	30.0%		7.1%		17.0%	

Source: World Values Survey (1997) and Freedom House (1999). N = ~ 55,000

**Table 4: Lifetime Learning Models of Three Measures of Political Support  
Disaggregated by Regime Type**

	Realist Support	Idealist Support	Political Trust
Stable Democracies	38.4%	12.9%	23.3%
New Democracies	28.1	8.8	19.3
Transitional Regimes	27.9	7.7	15.3
Stable Non Democracies	26.9	9.2	19.1

Source: World Values Survey (1997)

N = ~ 55,000

## Appendix A: Coding of Variables

VARIABLES:	Definitions and Coding
Realist Support	10-point scale (1=very bad, 10=very good) rating 'the political system as it is today'
Idealist Support	4-point scale (1=very bad, 4=very good) whether 'democratic political system' is good way of governing country.
Political Trust	Mean of confidence (4=great deal, 1=none) in police, government, political parties, parliament, & Civil Service. <sup>1</sup>
Prior Regime Support	10-point scale (1=very bad, 10=very good) rating 'political system as it was in communist times/ten years ago.'
Regime Change	Coded 1 for regimes undergoing fundamental change over last 20 years and 0 otherwise
Age	Age in Years
Education	1=Less than primary education; 2=primary education; 3=secondary education; 4=College education.
Social Class	Self-Identified: 1=lower/working class; 2=lower middle class; 3=upper middle class/upper class.
Ethnicity	coded 1 if respondent is a NOT a member of the dominant ethnic group and 0 otherwise.
Voluntary Organizations	Number of voluntary organizations in which respondent is active including: religious, recreational, art/educational, labor, political party, environmental, professional, charitable or other organizations.
Interpersonal Trust	Binary variable 1= 'most people can be trusted;' 0='can't be too careful dealing with people.'
Tolerance	Sum of 4-point scales whether 'most disliked group' be allowed to hold office, teach or hold public demonstrations.
Political Interest	4-point scale measuring 'interest in politics. 4=Very Interested, 1= Not at all Interested.
Left Ideology	10-point self-identified left/right scale where 10=left and 1=right.
Income Level	10-point scale measuring respondent's reported family income by decile
Satisfied w. Finances	10-point scale (10=satisfied, 1=dissatisfied) measuring satisfaction with 'household financial situation.'
Approve Wealth Differences	Mean of two 10-point scales: 'wealth can grow ... enough for everyone vs. people get rich at expense of others' and 'We need larger income difference vs. incomes should be more equal' <sup>2</sup>
Approve Welfare State	Mean of three 10-point scales: 'government ownership ... should be increased vs. private ownership...; competition is harmful ... vs. competition is good...; and hard work doesn't ... bring success vs. hard work brings a better life.'
Approve Individual Enterprise	Mean of three 10-point scales: 'you will never achieve much unless you act boldly vs. one should be cautious...;' 'people should take more responsibility... vs. government ...;' and 'new ideals are generally better vs. old ideas...'
Current Freedoms	Aggregate score of country on 1995-96 Freedom House civil and political liberties scales (1=High and 7=low)
Increased Freedom	Change in average Freedom House score from 1985-86 to 1995-96
Perceived Corruption	Perceptions of 'bribery and corruption in this country; 4=almost all public officials engage in it; 1=almost none'
Government Satisfaction	Satisfaction 'with the way people in national office are handling the country's affairs.' 4=Very Satisfied; 1=Very dissatisfied
Regime Expectations	10-point scale (1=very bad, 10=very good) rating 'the political system ... you expect in ten years.'

**Source:** All variables are from World Values Survey (1997) except for freedom variables which are from Freedom House (1999).

<sup>1</sup> Political trust was defined by a factor analysis of trust in 14 social and political institutions. The five political institutions defined the first and by far the strongest factor. All five institutions have loadings on the first factor greater than .70.

<sup>2</sup> The wealth, initiative and welfare variables were defined by a factor analysis of eight attitudinal measures which produced 3 factors.

**Notes:**

1. For new democracies, the question typically is amended to ask about "*the way democracy is developing in your country.*"

2. A better though less widely used alternative, developed by Doh Chull Shin in the New Korea Barometer, asks citizens, first, "On this scale [where] 1 means complete dictatorship and 10 means complete democracy ... where would you place the extent to which you personally desire democracy for our country" and then asks, "Where would you place our country at the present time?" (Shin and Rose, 1997). While distinguishing idealist and realist conceptions of democracy, this approach continues to rely upon citizens' abstract understanding of democratic ideals.

3. The New Democracies Barometer scale ranges from plus 100 to minus 100. It thus clearly differentiates positive and negative replies, and 0 represents both a psychological and arithmetic in between position. Unfortunately, the ten-point World Values variant of the realist measure does not offer a natural or meaningful mid-point. Indeed, the arithmetic mid-point (5.5) does not even exist on the scale. It is somewhat arbitrary, therefore, to assume that those giving the regime a rating of 6 or higher are supporters of the regime while those rating it 5 or below are not. The realist scale is therefore better for assessing relative levels of support but it is of more limited value in assessing absolute levels of support for the regime.

4. In a previous analysis of political trust we argue that such "middling" ratings reflect public scepticism rather than outright support or opposition for the regime (Mishler and Rose, 1997).

5. The 1995-97 World Values Survey includes a battery of questions asking citizens how much confidence they have in fourteen domestic institutions or groups. A factor analysis of these data produced four factors, the first, and by far the strongest of which can be identified as a dimension of political trust based on the high loadings of the government, police, political parties, parliament and the civil service on this factor. A composite measure of political trust was created simply by averaging individual trust across these five institutions.

6. Similar formulations are advanced by Hibbing and Theiss-Morse, 1995 and more recently by

Gibson, Caldeira and Baird, 1998.

7. On the use and interpretation of interactive terms, see Jaccard, et al. (1990).

8. In preliminary models, gender and a series of variables reflecting religious affiliation also were included. None of these variables added appreciably to any of the models and were excluded from the final analysis in the interest of parsimony.

9. Because of difference in the units of measure for the several independent variables in the model, the unstandardized coefficients cannot easily be compared across variables within a single year. The standardized coefficients provide for easier within year comparisons. For comparing the impact of a single variable over time, both the standardized and unstandardized coefficients are useful. Therefore both are reported in these tables. Regarding statistical significance tests, given a pooled sample of more than 55,000 cases, virtually every relationship in the analysis is statistically significant at the conventional .001 probability level. Therefore rather than rely on statistical tests to identify "significant" variables, we reasonably but arbitrarily decided to report standardized regression coefficients only for those variables whose standardized coefficients exceed a level of .05.