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South Asia: An Arm's-Length Embrace of Democracy

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In the 60 years since their independence, each of the nations of South Asia has had mixed experiences with democratic rule. While some of the nations in the region have had reasonable success with establishing democratic norms and institutions, in other cases the newly won democratic freedoms have been undermined or imperiled. Still others have failed altogether to make the transition to democracy from military dictatorship. Not surprisingly, Western organizations that monitor the practice of democracy, such as Freedom House, provide mixed assessments for the five nations of South Asia. As of 2005, Freedom House classified India as “free” with a combined rating of political rights and civil liberties of 2.5 (on a scale of 1 to 7 where 1 is the highest level of freedom and 7 the worst). However, Sri Lanka (3.0), Bangladesh (4.0), and Nepal (5.0) were coded as “partly free,” and Pakistan (5.5) as “not free” (Freedom House 2005). Thus, any assessment of the “State of Democracy” in the region must emphasize the “bewildering” diversity of its social and political systems, as well as take into account its “multiple and overlapping structures of social hierarchy, widespread poverty and inequality and intolerably high levels of illiteracy” (Sethi 2008: 3). These realities need to be considered in any analysis of democracy building in all five of these nations. A South Asia-based study has asserted that, though faced with daunting hurdles, “democracy continues to be the reigning ideology and aspiration of the people of the region, by far the most preferred political arrangement” (Sethi 2008: 3). As South Asia moves forward, growing proportions of the region’s population have been to school, are literate,

and are raised in countries that are increasingly urbanized and characterized by expanding middle classes—factors that have been shown to promote support for democratic governance around the world.

Despite these optimistic signs and ideological affirmations, the people of South Asia appear to be lukewarm about the desirability of democratic rule. In some countries, approximately half of the adult citizens support democracy, while in others the proportion is considerably smaller. In part this seems likely to be a reflection of fractious transitions to democracy or the inability of democracy to take deep roots and become a universally accepted part of the sociopolitical culture (Sethi 2008; Ahmar 2004; Ahmed 2004; Baral 2005; De and Samaddar 1997; Brass and Vanaik 2002; Dreze and Sen 1995; Jaffrelot 2003; Jaffrelot and Kumar 2009; Kapur and Mehta 2005; Uyangoda and Perera 2003; Waseem 2006). In this chapter, we explore whether attitudes about regime type are a product of the apparently less-than-fully democratic political regimes under which many South Asians grew up, and whether those who are supportive of democracy are concentrated among the region's younger and more educated cohorts. Answers to these questions are important because the region is increasingly adopting democracy as a mechanism for making decisions, while more and more areas of life are becoming democratized, resulting in ever-larger proportions of people growing up socialized within the practices of democratic government.

An important element in the backdrop for these dynamics is the fact that each of the nations in South Asia faces critical socioeconomic challenges and must contend with different forms of political adversity. These crises have challenged reformers' attempts to create self-sustaining, legitimate governance because democratic rule is premised in no small part on meeting popular expectations that government should "deliver" for the people. Though each nation has seen progress in terms of economic growth, modernization, and education, ongoing economic troubles and, in several nations, political uncertainty have made this progress tenuous, often undermining the attempt for many to paint a neat, linear progression toward support for democracy. In this sense, as we will see, the young of South Asia no doubt live in more modern, urbanized, literate, and outward-focused societies, yet, as these improvements and the consolidation of political freedoms have been fragmented and uneven, it is still not clear that the youngest generation in the region can be expected to be the predominant repository of democratic engagement. Overall, this chapter explores whether there are generational patterns in South Asians' attitudes toward democracy and autocratic alternatives and the factors that underlie the differences observed.

South Asia in Context

The first factor that needs to be considered in any analysis of democracy and generational change in South Asia is that four of the countries studied in this chapter (India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Sri Lanka) experienced British colonial rule until the middle of the twentieth century. At best, colonial regimes signal to their subjects a sense of inferiority and a need to be "guided" by a superior, foreign civilization—any order and progress realized having been imposed from without. At worst, colonized people are subject to the most egregious aspects of autocracy and oppression (see Barlas 1995; Diamond 1996, 2005; Mitra and Rothermund 1997; Stephan, Linz, and Yadav 2011). Yet, in the case of South Asia, democratic traditions have roots in the colonial period in several different and important ways. First, colonial rule and British education spawned a process of modernization and gave rise to an indigenous English-speaking elite who subsequently attempted to "reform" the traditional societies in which they lived (Cohen 2006; Desai 1976; Hasanuzzaman 1988; Jayawardena 2002). This, in turn, produced contestation over normative societal values and nascent claims to public power on the part of those sections of society suppressed by tradition. Second, a restricted franchise and a form of truncated political representation were instituted in British India and Sri Lanka as early as the 1930s (Jayawardena 2002; Sethi 2008). This gave subsequent democrats important bases on which to build democratic self-government after independence. Third, the popular struggle against colonialism was aimed not only at throwing off the yoke of foreign domination but also at bringing about democratic rule (Brass and Vanaik 2002). Last, the anticolonial struggle also initiated the process of building the national identity (Rustow 1970) and traditions of large-scale mass participation that are necessary to democratic politics.

Thus, even before India or Sri Lanka (or later Pakistan) became formal democracies, they had experienced a number of different features or elements of democracy. While Pakistan did not carry out national elections until 1970, it was not entirely immune from these influences and ideas. If anything, failure to democratize formally the process of political competition served to produce a sharper contestation over political power among linguistic and religious identity groups and between its eastern and western halves (Ahmar 2004; Islam 2003; Mirza 1997). In Nepal, too, a mass movement supporting representative government and popular efforts to limit monarchical power and promote a more enlightened role for the monarchy helped to initiate citizens' experience with democratic politics (Baral 2005; Dahal 2001; Dixit and Ramachandran 2003).

Thus, the early twentieth century (perhaps even more than the mid-twentieth century) constitutes an important formative period in this region as far as the emergence of a new democratic public ethic is concerned. These developments suggest that even before democratic governments became the order of the day in South Asia, democracy had already arrived in the region, both as an idea and as an aspiration.¹ The evolution of modern democracy was neither a rupture nor a full-fledged adoption of a democratic import from foreign lands.

Specifying Politically Relevant Generations in South Asia

Given the differing experiences of South Asian countries, one might expect both national and generational differences in how South Asians view democracy. In order to unpack support for democracy in South Asia we must begin with a consideration of their political histories and experiences (Barlas 1995; Brass and Vanaik 2002). India and Sri Lanka have had a relatively smooth history of democratic government for over five decades (Stephan, Linz, and Yadav 2011; Uyangoda and Perera 2003). In contrast, Bangladesh and Pakistan have both experienced bumpy rides to democracy, punctuated by military interventions and military rule (Ahmar 2004; Cohen 2006; Mirza 1997). Nepal has wrestled against monarchy and still struggles to institutionalize democratic constitutionalism (Baral 2005; Dahal 2001). Thus, we begin by briefly exploring how these distinctive national pathways shape support for democracy.

We then turn to our primary goal—determining the extent to which age, socialization, and intergenerational variation shape citizens' attitudes to democracy (deSouza, Palshikar, and Yadav 2008; deSouza, Shastri, and Kumar 2009). We are especially interested in exploring whether there is an emerging youth cohort with attitudes toward democracy and politics that differ from those of older citizens (Kumar 2012). Previous research based on the Indian National Election Study has uncovered only limited age differences in vote choice (Yadav and Palshikar 2009; Shastri, Suri, and Yadav 2009; Palshikar, Suri, and Yadav 2014). In this study, however, we will focus on preferences for type of regime rather than on partisan choices. And we focus not on age *per se* but on political generations and their specific socializing experiences of different types of political regimes during what this book contends are individuals' formative years: 14–22.

In general, we employ five broad types of generational cohorts for our analysis of South Asian political attitudes.² The first generation consists of individuals who spent their formative years under *colonial rule*.

The second comprises those socialized under *military rule*. The last three generations consist of people who spent their adolescence under some form of election system but who are differentiated by the quality of democracy they experienced. The *multiparty elections* generation refers to those coming of age under regimes in which governments were chosen through popular competitive elections but whose freeness or fairness were in doubt, or where civil liberties and political rights were sufficiently violated that Freedom House rated the society as “not free.”³ The *electoral democracy* generation refers to those growing up under regimes where governments were chosen through regular, free, and fair elections but where rights and liberties were sufficiently compromised that Freedom House rated the society as “partly free.” Finally, the *liberal democracy* generation is composed of those who grew up under the coexistence of both regular, free, and fair elections and a robust matrix of political and civil freedom.⁴

It should be stressed that not all these distinct generations were observed in every country. Nor was there always unidirectional movement from colonial rule to democracy, as backsliding occurred in certain instances. In the next section, we provide details on how each generation was constructed by linking survey respondents' birthdates with the political realities they experienced during adolescence in their country. The generations are summarized in Table 5.1.

India

As India became independent in 1947, just 2 percent of the sample interviewed in 2005 grew up under colonial rule and thus can be placed in the colonial rule generation. However, because of the unusually large sample size in the Indian South Asia Barometer survey ($n = 5,202$), this translates into a sizable number of respondents for statistical analysis. Throughout the next period, from independence to 1976, the Indian political system was clearly an electoral democracy—and stood out as a major exception to the vast number of developing postindependence societies that moved from democracy to autocracy in the post–World War II era. However, while India held repeated free elections during this period, the Indian National Congress won every single national contest and most of the state-level elections (though it began to lose control in a majority of states in 1967).⁵ Hence, we term this a one-party dominant democracy, or electoral democracy 1. Twenty-eight percent of all respondents were socialized during this period.

While the period of emergency rule from 1975 to 1977, during which Prime Minister Indira Gandhi suspended the constitution, constitutes a

Table 5.1 Generational Cohorts by Regime Type in South Asia

	Years	Birth year	Age at survey	% Survey
Bangladesh				
Colonial rule	Before 1947	Before 1929	77–99 years	1.8
Multiparty elections 1	1947–1957	1929–1939	66–76 years	4.0
Military rule ^a	1958–1982	1940–1964	41–65 years	28.8
Multiparty elections 2	1983–1990	1965–1972	33–40 years	24.0
Electoral democracy	1991 and beyond	1973 and after	18–32 years	41.4
India				
Colonial rule	Until 1947	Before 1929	77–99 years	1.2
Electoral democracy 1 (dominant party democracy)	1947–1976	1929–1958	47–76 years	27.5
Liberal democracy 1	1977–1991	1959–1973	32–46 years	35.9
Electoral democracy 2	1992–1998	1974–1980	25–31 years	22.3
Liberal democracy 2	1999 and beyond	1981 and after	18–24 years	13.0
Nepal				
Monarchy	Until 1981	Before 1962	43–99 years	41.3
Liberalized monarchy	1981–1989	1962–1971	34–42 years	21.5
Multiparty elections	1990 and beyond	1972 and after	18–33 years	37.2
Pakistan				
Colonial rule	Until 1947	Before 1929	77–99 years	1.3
Multiparty elections 1	1947–1957	1929–1939	66–76 years	3.5
Military rule ^a	1958–1988	1940–1970	35–65 years	40.5
Multiparty elections 2	1989–1999	1971–1981	24–34 years	29.4
Military rule 2	2000–2005	1982 and after	18–23 years	25.3
Sri Lanka				
Colonial rule	Until 1948	Before 1930	76–99 years	2.9
Multiparty elections	1948–1970	1930–1952	53–75 Years	24.7
Electoral democracy/strife 1	1971–1977	1953–1959	46–52 years	13.6
Electoral democracy	1978–1983	1960–1965	40–45 years	13.6
Electoral democracy/strife 2	1984–2005	1966 and after	18–39 years	45.3

^aBetween 1972 and 1975, both Bangladesh and Pakistan held multiparty elections, but the time period is too short to have created a generational effect (as argued in Chapter 1). Thus, the earlier and latter periods of military rule are merged into a single era.

major rupture in India's democratic development, it is too short—by the logic laid out in Chapter 1—to have produced a politically relevant generation. Thus, the third relevant period was characterized by the full restoration of political rights, civil liberties, and electoral alternation, hence liberal democracy 1. However the increasing frequency of deep social conflicts caused by religious and social sectarianism, protest, and the resulting resort to state coercion meant that India slid backward from 1992 to 1998 to a period of electoral democracy 2 (22 percent of the sample spent their formative years in this era). The youngest 13 percent of the Indian electorate have grown up since 1999, the year in which India—according to Freedom House—returned to liberal democracy 2.

Pakistan

As with India, Pakistan—after partition from British India—also received independence in 1947. Thus, just 1 percent of the 2005 South Asia Pakistan survey belong to the colonial rule generation. And just 4 percent spent their formative years during Pakistan's first experience with multiparty elections 1, 1947–1957. During this period, elections were held at the provincial level in East Pakistan (later Bangladesh) and four provinces in West Pakistan, but not nationally. Following a coup in 1958, Pakistan endured three decades of military rule 1 (while the country was governed by an elected government between 1972 and 1975, the period is too short to have created a generational effect). A second military coup in 1977 pulled the country back under direct military rule. Forty-one percent of all Pakistani respondents spent their formative years during this period. Pakistan then returned to rule by a government elected through multiparty elections 2 from 1988 to 1999. However, rights and liberties remained restricted throughout this period. And, following yet another coup in 1999, the youngest 25 percent of the 2005 Pakistani sample grew up in the country's second prolonged period of military rule 2.

Bangladesh

As Bangladesh was part of Pakistan until the early 1970s, older Bangladeshis fall into the same generational divisions we have seen for Pakistan: colonial rule (2 percent), multiparty elections 1 (4 percent), and military rule generations (29 percent). Like Pakistan, the newly independent Bangladesh enjoyed a brief democratic spring from 1972 to 1975 but then returned to military rule. Unlike Pakistan, however, it lasted only until 1982. Bangladesh then returned to a period of multiparty elections 2 from 1983 to 1990, after which it evolved—according to Freedom House—into an electoral democracy, something that Pakistan has never been able to achieve (a period during which fully 44 percent of all Bangladeshis came of age).

Sri Lanka

Sri Lanka received independence in 1948, a year later than India and Pakistan, and 3 percent of its 2005 sample grew up under colonial rule. Unlike Pakistan and Bangladesh, it has never experienced military rule. Indeed, 25 percent of the sample spent their adolescence during an initial, two-decade-long period of multiparty elections, covering the period 1948 to 1970. However, Sri Lanka's most crucial challenge has been to balance the aspirations of the majority Sinhala community with the demands of

the Tamil minority. While Sri Lanka has been rated as “partly free” and an electoral democracy since 1971, the period from 1971 to 1977 was accompanied by Tamil attempts to secede and prolonged communal strife, despite coexisting alongside free and fair elections during this time; hence we label this period electoral democracy/strife¹. The country enjoyed a period of peaceful electoral democracy from 1978 to 1983. However, the beginning of armed Tamil insurgency in 1983 led to a period of prolonged civil war, which existed alongside regular competitive elections; we label this electoral democracy/strife², lasting right up to the point of the 2005 South Asia Barometer survey in that country.

Nepal

In contrast with the other four countries, we argue that there are likely to be just three distinctive, politically relevant generations in Nepal. Unlike the other countries, Nepal was never formally colonized. Until 1980, Nepalese lived under various forms of monarchy. In 1981, public protest led to a constitutional referendum in which, by a slight plurality, the monarchy was retained along with a new directly elected though nonpartisan National Assembly. This period of liberalized monarchy lasted until 1990 when, after a period of prodemocratic protest, the monarchy agreed to a new constitution. In 1991, multiparty elections resulted in the country’s first democratically elected government and prime minister. However, Nepal has experienced prolonged instability, including frequent government change, a Maoist rebellion, the murder of the king and queen, and periods of emergency rule.

Support for Democracy in South Asia Across Generations

To assess popular attitudes toward democracy, we utilize the South Asia Barometer—conducted in all five countries in 2005—which asked four relevant questions. Respondents were asked, on the “demand” side, (1) whether they preferred democracy to a dictatorial government, and whether they would prefer nondemocratic alternatives of (2) a strong leader who does not have to bother about elections, and (3) military rule. On the “supply” side, respondents were also asked (4) how satisfied they were with the way democracy was working in their country (see Online Appendix Table A5.1 for the actual wording).

The most notable finding, across all countries, is the lukewarm degree of support for democracy—even for the principle of democracy in the abstract (see Online Appendix Table A5.2). Clearly, respondents do

not support dictatorship: no more than 9 percent in any country say that a dictatorial government can be preferable to a democratic one, and even then only “in certain situations.” Apathy toward the form of regime, however, is widespread. Large numbers say it “doesn’t matter to people like me” whether their government is democratic or nondemocratic. Indeed, this is the majority response in Nepal (52 percent), Bangladesh (53 percent) and Pakistan (a substantial 67 percent). Only in Sri Lanka does a majority (54 percent) say they always prefer democracy to dictatorship, and then only by a small margin. Pakistan stands out as the nation most distinctively skeptical about democracy, as only a quarter say they always prefer democracy. This reflects a deficit between excessive expectations and people’s actual experience with the performance of democracy and its inability to deliver on its promises, a problem that afflicts many countries of this region.

When we turn to questions on authoritarian alternatives to democracy, indifference is less frequent, but explicit endorsement of autocracy is significantly higher. Attitudinal differences across countries are also much greater.

Consider first the question asking about a strong unelected leader—a form of regime that each country except Sri Lanka has experienced in its postindependence period. At least one-third of respondents in each country, and almost two-thirds in Sri Lanka and Nepal, say they would approve of a dictatorial strongman. The Sri Lankan responses need to be seen in the ethnic context in the country at the time of the study, since we have already seen that they were the most likely to say that “democracy is always preferable.” In all likelihood, the term *strong leader* in South Asia is associated with someone who is able to make quick and bold decisions, and respondents therefore may not have internalized (or may put less value on) the phrase *does not have to bother about elections*. Nevertheless, this combination of responses calls into question exactly what Sri Lankans have in mind when they say they always prefer democracy. Though indifference is much less evident than in responses to the more abstract question that uses the term *democracy*, one in four respondents in all countries except Sri Lanka have no clear opinion about regime type.

Larger proportions of respondents reject military rule. Just under two-thirds of respondents reject this option in Sri Lanka (64 percent) and India (63 percent). And yet, pluralities approve of it in both countries that have a history of military coups: Pakistan (49 percent) and Bangladesh (45 percent). In fact, Pakistani support for army rule is 10 points *higher* than generalized support for a strong leader.

In general, it appears that there is a moderate correlation between the degree of experience with actual democracy, on the one hand, and popular

support for democracy and rejection of autocracy, on the other. India, with six decades of democratic experience and the only country to achieve liberal democracy, exhibits the highest levels of support for democracy, followed by Sri Lanka. Nepal and Pakistan, on the other hand, have the lowest levels. But in general, the more important descriptive finding is that South Asians offer a hesitant and qualified acceptance of democracy.

This lukewarm embrace of democracy may well be rooted in skepticism about current and past regime performance. Majorities of Indians (57 percent) and Bangladeshis (53 percent) said they were satisfied with democratic performance, but only 44 percent of Sri Lankans were. In Nepal and Pakistan, most people said they were either dissatisfied or undecided.

Overall, then, support for democracy in South Asia can only be described as moderate. This needs to be contextualized in terms of both expectations and perceptions. As discussed earlier, people in this region grew up under a dizzying array of regime types, both within and across countries. If people's perspectives about governmental form depend at all on the kind of government they experienced in the formative years of their youth, we should expect to see a correspondingly wide variety of views of democracy among older and younger respondents. Thus, we turn to our main concern: does appreciation for a democratic form of government reflect the kind of government in place when people were developing their core sociopolitical values in their adolescent and early adult years?

Generational Variation in Attitudes Toward Democracy?

An initial look at South Asians' attitudes toward democracy across generations suggests a striking pattern of generational variation. However, even at a bivariate level it is immediately apparent that much more is at work than the generation in which individuals came of age. In Table 5.2, we show responses supportive of democracy for the four questions reviewed above. For each country, respondents are grouped according to the generations described earlier. What is noteworthy is the nearly uniform and steady rise in support for democracy as one moves from the oldest generation to the youngest.⁶ Yet we have seen that the actual political regimes under which South Asians have lived did not resemble a steady march from autocracy toward democracy. Thus, at least at first glance, these patterns suggest that age—and likely with it the education and outward orientation of those living in times of higher levels of access to information and globalism—also play an important role in the increasing support for democracy among the younger generations.

Table 5.2 Support for Democracy Across Generations in South Asia (percent)

	Always prefer democracy ^a	Disapprove strong leader ^b	Reject army rule ^b	Satisfied with democracy ^c
Bangladesh				
Colonial rule	36	11	30	38
Multiparty elections 1	34	10	39	46
Military rule	42	16	44	54
Multiparty elections 2	44	18	42	57
Electoral democracy	45	19	42	53
India				
Colonial rule	28	28	49	30
Electoral democracy 1	46	35	60	52
Liberal democracy 1	49	39	63	56
Electoral democracy 2	50	40	63	60
Liberal democracy 2	53	44	66	65
Nepal				
Monarchy	36	8	39	30
Liberalized monarchy	43	10	48	29
Multiparty elections	47	12	50	33
Pakistan				
Colonial rule	19	25	40	27
Multiparty elections 1	24	30	37	30
Military rule 1	24	32	35	33
Multiparty elections 2	24	33	37	34
Military rule 2	25	36	38	29
Sri Lanka				
Colonial rule	34	13	46	26
Multiparty elections	50	19	59	37
Electoral democracy/strife 1	56	23	67	43
Electoral democracy	52	24	64	45
Electoral democracy/strife 2	58	26	67	48

Source: South Asia Barometer 2005.

^aDemocracy preferable (to doesn't matter or dictatorship may be preferable).

^bStrongly disapprove or disapprove.

^cVery or fairly satisfied.

Pakistan, for example, experienced a degree of multiparty competition for a decade after achieving independence. Citizens growing up during this period have uniformly more democratic attitudes than the earliest (colonial) generation. Though Bangladesh also experienced multiparty competition early on, people growing up in this era displayed more democratic attitudes on only two of the four items (satisfaction with the way democracy works and rejection of military rule). More tellingly, while both countries then came under military control, the cohorts growing up under this type of regime exhibited still more favorable attitudes toward

democracy on all items in Bangladesh and three of the four in Pakistan. Finally, when Bangladesh swung back to multiparty/democratic rule, the level of support expressed for democracy generally rose. Prodemocratic responses rose too, when Pakistan for a time reestablished democratic governance. However, favorable responses rose yet again on three of the four items when the military once more took control.

In India and Sri Lanka, a competitive electoral system of one form or another characterized the entire postcolonial period, with prodemocratic responses growing steadily despite periods of more or less liberal governance and times of internal strife. Nepal had a monarchy for much of the period under study, but when it is divided into early and later periods, support for democracy rose in the later period, matching the kind of later-period growth observed elsewhere.

In short, South Asian attitudes toward democracy are mixed with respect to possible effects of regime type during one's formative years. If there is a generational effect, it seems to be intertwined with other factors. Indeed, as the bivariate results for all five countries make clear, younger cohorts are steadily more inclined to support democratic values, perhaps as a result of their higher levels of education, greater access to information, and possibly their own or their nation's economic situation. To sort out possible cohort effects and to identify other relevant factors, we turn to multivariate analysis.

Multivariate Models

In specifying the regression models, we employ a common set of independent variables for all countries, aside from the generations, which are specific to each country. In addition to generation, the independent variables include formal education, the respondents' perceptions of the current national economic situation, and several variables measuring respondents' cognitive political engagement (frequency of discussing politics and of using newspaper, radio, and television for news). We expect prodemocratic views to be associated with greater education and with more positive assessments of the state of the economy and possibly with greater media usage. We also control for gender, though with the substantial improvement in the status of women in South Asian societies, it may or may not be associated with views of democracy. We use dummy variables to represent the generations, with one generation excluded as the reference category. All other variables (aside from gender) are coded from the lowest (or worst) to the highest (or best).

The resulting regressions are shown in Table 5.3. Looking across all five nations, one must conclude there is a tenuous connection at best

Table 5.3 Attitudes Toward Democracy in South Asian Countries

	Always prefer democracy	Disapprove strong leader	Reject military rule	Satisfied with democracy
Bangladesh				
Constant	.30*** (.08)	1.54*** (.11)	1.17*** (.14)	2.17*** (.10)
Colonial rule	.14 (.18)	-.15 (.25)	.02 (.30)	-.05 (.21)
Multiparty elections 1	-.21 (.13)	.19 (.17)	.07 (.21)	-.24* (.15)
Military rule	-.01 (.06)	-.07 (.08)	.02 (.10)	-.02 (.07)
Multiparty elections 2	.06 (.06)	-.08 (.09)	.09 (.10)	.01 (.07)
Education	.16*** (.02)	.08*** (.03)	.22*** (.03)	.01 (.02)
National economic situation	.12*** (.02)	-.11*** (.03)	-.02 (.04)	.23*** (.03)
Newspaper use	.04 (.04)	-.02 (.06)	.05 (.07)	-.14*** (.05)
Radio news use	.08*** (.03)	-.01 (.04)	-.07 (.05)	.07** (.03)
TV news use	.02 (.02)	.06** (.03)	.08** (.03)	.03 (.02)
Discuss politics	.18*** (.05)	-.19*** (.06)	.07 (.07)	-.03 (.05)
Female	-.27*** (.05)	.12 (.07)	.10 (.09)	-.26*** (.06)
R ²	.25	.04	.08	.09
N = 1,240				
India				
Constant	.19** (.08)	2.15*** (.13)	2.14*** (.12)	1.60*** (.10)
Colonial rule	-.03 (.17)	-.01 (.27)	-.29 (.24)	-.56** (.20)
Electoral democracy 1	.12* (.07)	-.05 (.10)	.01 (.10)	-.12 (.08)
Liberal democracy 1	.11* (.06)	-.02 (.10)	-.04 (.10)	-.14* (.07)
Electoral democracy 2	.05 (.07)	-.10 (.10)	-.25*** (.10)	-.13* (.08)
Education	.06*** (.01)	.05** (.02)	-.02 (.02)	.00 (.02)
National economic situation	.15*** (.02)	-.05 (.03)	.16*** (.03)	.37*** (.03)
Newspaper use	.11*** (.02)	.12*** (.04)	.16*** (.03)	.07** (.03)
Radio news use	.03 (.02)	-.03 (.03)	.06** (.03)	-.01 (.02)
TV news use	.09*** (.02)	.03 (.03)	.06** (.02)	.05*** (.02)

(continues)

Table 5.3 Cont.

	Always prefer democracy	Disapprove strong leader	Reject military rule	Satisfied with democracy
Discuss politics	.19*** (.03)	.06 (.05)	.13*** (.05)	.11*** (.04)
Female	-.03 (.04)	.00 (.07)	.04 (.06)	.04 (.05)
R^2	.22	.03	.07	.14
$N = 2,055$				
Nepal				
Constant	.61*** (.08)	1.22*** (.10)	2.47*** (.10)	1.56*** (.09)
Monarchy	.05 (.05)	-.02 (.07)	-.04 (.07)	-.14** (.06)
Liberalized monarchy	.03 (.06)	-.02 (.07)	.02 (.08)	-.09 (.07)
Education	.15*** (.02)	-.10*** (.03)	.16*** (.03)	-.08*** (.02)
National economic situation	-.01 (.02)	-.01 (.03)	-.19*** (.03)	.30*** (.03)
Newspaper use	.12*** (.04)	.06 (.05)	.03 (.06)	-.13** (.05)
Radio news use	.04* (.02)	-.11*** (.03)	-.03 (.03)	.02 (.03)
TV news use	.08*** (.02)	-.01 (.02)	-.01 (.02)	-.04* (.02)
Discuss politics	.15*** (.05)	.18*** (.06)	.28*** (.06)	.02 (.05)
Female	-.26*** (.05)	.25*** (.06)	-.14** (.06)	-.10 (.06)
R^2	.24	.05	.15	.12
$N = 1,240$				
Pakistan				
Constant	.15* (.07)	1.87*** (.12)	2.20*** (.13)	1.53*** (.10)
Colonial rule	.19 (.18)	-.07 (.28)	.04 (.31)	-.00 (.24)
Multiparty elections 1	.21* (.12)	-.05 (.19)	-.17 (.20)	.27* (.16)
Military rule 1	.13** (.05)	.06 (.09)	-.08 (.10)	.00 (.07)
Multiparty elections 2	.05 (.06)	-.13 (.09)	-.11 (.10)	.20*** (.08)
Education	.12*** (.01)	.03 (.02)	.07*** (.02)	-.01 (.02)
National economic situation	.02 (.02)	-.04 (.03)	-.17*** (.03)	.24*** (.02)
Newspaper use	.00 (.03)	.05 (.05)	.11** (.05)	-.07* (.04)

(continues)

Table 5.3 Cont.

	Always prefer democracy	Disapprove strong leader	Reject military rule	Satisfied with democracy
Radio news use	.07*** (.03)	-.03 (.04)	.07 (.05)	.10*** (.02)
TV news use	.05*** (.02)	-.01 (.03)	-.02 (.03)	-.04* (.02)
Discuss politics	.13*** (.03)	.53 (.05)	.10* (.06)	-.07 (.05)
Female	-.18*** (.05)	.18** (.07)	-.39*** (.08)	.03 (.06)
R^2	.17	.02	.09	.09
$N = 1,412$				
Sri Lanka				
Constant	.55*** (.09)	1.56*** (.13)	2.29*** (.12)	1.65*** (.11)
Colonial	-.20* (.11)	.05 (.16)	.02 (.15)	-.30** (.15)
Multiparty elections	-.03 (.05)	-.04 (.07)	.13** (.07)	-.14** (.06)
Electoral democracy/strife 1	.08 (.06)	-.06 (.08)	.11 (.08)	-.08 (.08)
Electoral democracy	-.06 (.06)	-.04 (.08)	.04 (.08)	.06 (.07)
Education	.18*** (.02)	-.07*** (.03)	.10*** (.03)	-.06*** (.02)
National economic situation	.01 (.02)	-.07** (.03)	.00 (.03)	.27*** (.03)
Newspaper use	.15*** (.02)	-.03 (.03)	.12*** (.03)	-.10*** (.03)
Radio news use	.03 (.02)	.05* (.03)	-.11*** (.03)	.08*** (.03)
TV news use	.01 (.02)	-.03 (.03)	.05* (.03)	.01 (.03)
Discuss politics	.09*** (.03)	.05 (.04)	.07* (.04)	-.04 (.04)
Female	-.21*** (.04)	.15*** (.06)	.04 (.05)	.07 (.05)
R^2	.17	.01	.03	.06
$N = 2,205$				

Source: South Asia Barometer (2005).

* $p < .01$ ** $p < .05$ *** $p < .001$

Note: Cell entries are OLS unstandardized regression coefficients (standard errors in parentheses). Generations are dummy variables denoted by categories shown in Table 5.1. The reference category throughout the table is the youngest category: Bangladesh (electoral democracy; India (liberal democracy 2); Nepal (multiparty elections); Pakistan (multiparty elections 2); Sri Lanka (electoral democracy/strife 2).

between the generational variables and views of democracy. Of 72 coefficients for the generational variables, only 8 (11.1%) are significant at the .05 level. Moreover, these few significant coefficients are scattered across countries, dependent variables, and earlier versus later cohorts and do not suggest a country-specific or variable-specific pattern or a time-related effect. In short, South Asians growing up amid multiparty elections, for example, are no more or less likely to be supportive of democratic governance than those socialized amid military regimes or colonial governments.

So why did we see such consistent differences across the generational categories in Table 5.2? The most important reason seems to be that younger generations have higher levels of education and are more likely to make use of news media. In general, respondents with higher levels of education are more likely to support democracy in the abstract and oppose military rule (though Indians stand out as a notable exception). The pattern of the relationship of education with support for a strong, unelected leader is inconsistent, and in Sri Lanka and Nepal, more educated respondents favor a strong leader (giving greater weight to the possibility that this item was not well understood by South Asian respondents).

News media use, especially reading newspapers, also plays a generally positive role in support for democracy. In India, it leads to more democratic support across all three dependent variables, and in Sri Lanka, Pakistan, and Nepal it plays a positive role in at least one of these responses. Only in Bangladesh does greater newspaper usage not lead to more democratic support. Exposure to radio and television news has more sporadic effects. One reason is that radio and television stations in South Asia are much more likely to be owned and run by the state. Another reason is that while reading newspapers requires more active mental engagement that enables readers to counterargue with what they read, radio listeners and television viewers receive information in a much more passive way that enables electronic news programmers to shape attitudes much more effectively by setting the news agenda (Iyengar and Kinder 1989). The final variable related to cognitive skills is political discussion. Across all countries, respondents who are more engaged in political discussion with family, friends, and colleagues are substantially more likely to support democracy and reject authoritarian alternatives.

While a fuller set of measures of both economic and political performance evaluations would be needed to offer a conclusive assessment, the evidence here suggests that economic satisfaction is only weakly connected to support for democracy or authoritarianism; importantly, however, in four of the five countries, those who are satisfied with the current economy have greater authoritarian nostalgia. Only in India do we see some evidence of instrumentalism, evidenced by positive associations

between economic satisfaction and both support for democracy and rejection of authoritarianism (in the case of military rule).

The picture looks very different, however, once we move from the demand side of democracy to the supply side: that is, respondents across South Asia are indeed far more likely to provide democracy with positive performance evaluations if they think current economic conditions are favorable. Positive assessments of the national economy are uniformly strongly related to greater satisfaction with how democratic government works in one's country. It seems likely, given the importance of performance-related attitudes toward government we have seen thus far, that citizens judge governance at least in part on how well it "delivers," especially in terms of economic benefits. This no doubt helps to account for the relatively high rates at which South Asians approve (or fail to disapprove) of the idea of having strong leaders who don't bother about elections or even military rule.

Educated respondents tend to be more critical of the performance of democracy in Nepal and Sri Lanka. In Bangladesh, India, and Pakistan, respondents with high and low levels of education reach the same conclusions about the performance of democracy. Educated respondents no doubt draw upon a wider set of considerations and factual data drawn from news media coverage, whereas uneducated respondents generally use "low information reasoning" to reach the same judgments based on inferences drawn from everyday life, such as prices, joblessness, and interpersonal conversation (Popkin 1994). Consistent with this observation and our interpretation above of the differences between print and electronic news media, frequent newspaper readers are more critical of democratic performance in every country except India (where they are more positive), whereas radio listeners tend to be more favorable.

Finally, women in all five countries are less likely than men to say they prefer democracy (though not significantly so in India). However, in three of the countries they are also more inclined to reject strong leaders (but not necessarily military rule).

Conclusion

It is to be expected that different generations of citizens hold varying orientations to democracy. However, in South Asia as a whole and in the countries of the region separately, there does not seem to be much support for the hypothesis that generations are divided in their attitudes toward democracy on the basis of their early socialization. What does make a difference is level of education, which is evident in two ways. In

the first place, among the more educated groups the proportion of “No Opinion” responses is low. Thus, a first difference correlated with generation but likely due to education is that more young respondents hold opinions on issues pertaining to democracy. A second difference is that education also strengthens support for democracy rather than adding to skepticism about its value.

Are we then saying that in the case of South Asia, socialization is not effective at all? Our data may in fact suggest that South Asia has had—for at least the last three to five decades—a trend of prodemocracy socialization. This argument would of course go against the more prevalent understanding about the structure of socialization in democracies in less developed and excolonial societies. It is commonly understood that postcolonial societies are traditional and therefore less supportive of democracy. As discussed in the first section, however, our argument is predicated on the reasoning that South Asian societies are not, strictly speaking, postauthoritarian given the introduction of important democratic institutions and processes by colonial governments.

The conclusion that attitudes in South Asia reflect a less assertive rejection of authoritarianism and at best lukewarm support for democracy needs to be contextualized. The not-so-intensive rejection of authoritarianism exhibited by South Asians needs to be viewed, first, against the presumption of the presence of authoritarian/military regimes in countries of the region during a large period of the lifetime of those interviewed. Traditional societies like those in South Asia, where many citizens adopted and followed certain indigenous traditions and where citizens have practiced faith in indigenous systems of religion and worship, do not have a wholly authoritarian past. Even if governments were often authoritarian, civil society along with religious institutions tended to soften the degree of perceived autocracy.

Second, the apparently less-than-enthusiastic support for democracy can be seen as a referendum on expectations of democratic regimes and apparent unhappiness with the performance of democratic regimes and their inability to deliver on their promises. Every nation in South Asia continues to be subsumed in economic instability and political uncertainty. If democratic governance can be said to be judged by its citizens for its ability to provide predictable government, security, and progress, South Asia’s realities have routinely contradicted those expectations. To the extent that these failings have become regularized for the citizenries of South Asia, they may reflect what past studies in South Asia have found: that citizens in their response to specific conditions in their society have a tendency to adopt a measured response rather than swinging to either extreme (Sethi 2008; Shastri, Suri, and Yadav 2009; Palshikar, Suri, and Yadav 2014).

In short, politics in South Asia has often witnessed a slippage between expectation and reality. It has rightly been argued that the “idea” of democracy has narrowed from a “deep moral idea to a narrow institutional checklist” (Yadav 2011). The clear performance deficit is visible in terms of a possible “expectation overload” and an “underperformance on the ground.” This has caused frustration and less-than-enthusiastic support for democracy in the region.

As we discussed in the earlier segments of this chapter, societies in South Asia manifest a complex pattern of socialization and political experience. In the first place, for almost three-quarters of a century to a full century, they have witnessed popular mobilizations, protests, social conflicts, and competition for power among contending sections of society. In this sense, democracy is not only a matter of proclaiming the “D” word as an import from outside but something that is experienced and practiced in multiple ways in these societies, even including in Nepal, which had an autocratic government and a recalcitrant monarchy. In Pakistan, as well, where military rule has existed for a longer time than fledgling democratic politics, democracy and democratic contestation have always remained an important ingredient of public competition for power. Therefore, a long-term existence of some democratic politics may well result in moderating the influence of generation as a variable. The supposed disjuncture or gap between an authoritarian and postauthoritarian society does not apply equally in the case of South Asia.

Second, the traditional norms that sometimes clash with the ethic of democracy coexist with support for democracy mainly because they do not disallow or reject democracy as a form of public contestation and decisionmaking. In all five countries there exist, in the private realm and in family life, elements of less democratic standards and norms. However, the democratic and the nondemocratic intermingle rather than exist in separation from one another, and the idea that the public sphere is mainly the sphere of open and democratic contestation is generally agreed upon. This allows public attachments to democracy in these societies to evolve in spite of their less than democratic pasts and less than democratic experiences in the present.

Notes

1. A chronological account of the transition to democracy in each of the countries is detailed in Sethi (2008: 158–174).

2. The age band of the key period of socialization has been taken as 14 to 22 across all countries. Respondents who spent the majority of their formative years during a particular era have been classified as being socialized during that period. See the discussion in Chapter 1.

3. This type of regime has been variously referred to as pseudodemocracy (Diamond 1996), semiauthoritarianism (Ottaway 2003), semidemocracy (Norris 2002), hybrid (Diamond 2005), or competitive authoritarianism (Levitsky and Way 2010). The Freedom House categorization is the most widely quoted globally and is thus used. Many in South Asia have reservations about the methodology underlying the Freedom House measure, believing that aspects of the South Asian context are not fully incorporated into the analysis.

4. For more on the Freedom House ratings, see Puddington (2013). For the electoral and liberal distinctions, see Diamond (2005).

5. Rajni Kothari referred to it as the Congress System (Kothari 1970).

6. The differences between individual generations are often small and not necessarily statistically significant, but the relative uniformity of the patterns speaks to their reliability as well as their meaningfulness.