Working Paper No. 67

PUBLIC OPINION RESEARCH IN EMERGING DEMOCRACIES: ARE THE PROCESSES DIFFERENT?

by Robert Mattes

A comparative series of national public attitude surveys on democracy, markets and civil society in Africa.

AFROBAROMETER WORKING PAPERS

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Public opinion research in emerging democracies: Are the processes different?

Abstract

The widespread collapse of authoritarian and totalitarian political systems that followed the fall of the Berlin Wall opened the possibility for the wider application of survey research in many countries in the developing world. At the same time, rapidly changing priorities of scientific funders, along with the newfound missions of aid agencies in democratic strengthening, led to an unprecedented proliferation of comparative survey research. The extension of survey research to the developing, democratizing world portends important shifts in the way we study public opinion, democracy, and comparative politics. While the actual tool of the survey appears the same in form, social conditions often mean that its application differs from the Western standard in important ways and may produce some important alternatives to the normal Western textbook methods. In particular, contextual factors in emerging democracies often entail a wide range of potential methodological dilemmas for comparative public opinion researchers, with especially important implications for approaches to fieldwork, sampling and questionnaire design. Moreover, the political and social context of transition means that the *content* of questionnaires as well as the *purpose* of systematic public opinion research also differs quite substantially from the standard academic survey research paradigm in Western democracies, producing as many political impacts as scientific. But rather than simply seeing these differences as blemishes that need to be gradually ameliorated, we may have much more to learn from the globalization of public opinion research than the simple accumulation of more data from exotic settings.

INTRODUCTION

As late as the 1878 Berlin Conference, Western geographers knew more about the topography of the moon than the interior of Africa (Pakenham, 1991). Yet as late as the 1989 fall of the Berlin Wall, much the same thing could be said about social scientists' knowledge of ordinary Africans. As scholars of political behavior scrutinized virtually every aspect of the opinions and behaviors of American and European voters, we knew virtually nothing about the values, preferences or knowledge of the mass of humanity living in Africa—and indeed throughout the developing post colonial world—even though much of this world stood on the precipice of breaking its authoritarian chains and embarking on a wide range of democratic experiments.

One would not have necessarily predicted such a continuing dearth of knowledge just thirty years earlier. In the middle of the 1960s, there were reasons to hope that this deficit would be cut rapidly through pioneering surveys in Latin America, Asia and Africa conducted by scholars like Gabriel Almond, Sydney Verba, Norman Nie, Jae-On Kim, Lucian Pye, Alex Inkeles, Daniel Lerner and Joel Barkan. But a second generation of empirical scholars never emerged to build on this formative work as evolving trends in both politics and social science fashion set back the exploration, mapping and explanation of public opinion in the developing world for another three decades (Almond, 1990).

Fortunately, the widespread collapse of authoritarian and totalitarian political systems that followed the fall of the Berlin Wall eclipsed both those social systems and social science paradigms that had prevented the widespread application of survey research, and the comparative cross-national exploration of public opinion in the developing world finally took off. Dozens of transitions away from authoritarian rule toward open, competitive, multi-party politics led scholars either to dust off unfashionable theories of political legitimacy and civic culture, or develop new applications of theories from other fields—like social capital—to the study of democratization. At the same time, rapidly changing priorities of scientific funders, international agencies and bilateral aid agencies with newfound missions in democratic strengthening led to a unique fusion of analytical interest, normative commitment, and political need that supported an unprecedented proliferation of comparative survey research.

This proliferation represents more than the simple spread of Western social science paradigms and technologies to new areas and the accumulation of new knowledge about heretofore understudied subjects. Rather, the extension of survey research to the developing, democratizing world portends important shifts in the way we study public opinion, democracy, and comparative politics. While the actual *tool* of the survey appears the same in form, social conditions often mean that its *application* differs from the Western standard in important ways and may produce some important alternatives to the normal Western textbook methods. Moreover, the political and social context of transition means that the *content* of questionnaires as well as the *purpose* of systematic public opinion research also differs quite substantially from the standard academic survey research paradigm in Western democracies, producing as many political impacts as scientific.

COMMON CHALLENGES

In order to understand how the new comparative survey research in emerging democracies differs from its older sister in the West, one must begin from the basic fact that this work is conducted largely in poor, post-colonial states. This entails a range of important consequences. First, a large proportion of these societies were created by colonial map-makers who often divided groups of people with common ethnic backgrounds (in terms of language, religion, tribe, clan), forced dissimilar groups together within the same borders, or left behind significant proportions of settlers. Thus, compared to the Western societies in which public opinion research originally

developed, the relative social heterogeneity of these societies creates a range of challenges to drawing representative samples. Second, without resorting to either imperialist or underdevelopment theories of colonialism, it is clear that these societies are characterized by relatively high levels of poverty and inequality, and that this is connected in some way to the legacies of their colonial experience. Economic inequality not only creates yet another social cleavage that must be factored into sampling designs and data analysis, but low levels of infrastructural development and high levels of poverty mean that these societies often have limited bases of social data that can be used as a sampling frame.

Third, the ideologies of anti-colonial movements and ensuing post independence governments of both the left and the right have left a range of bitter political legacies that to this day question the role of, and shrink the space for independent and open intellectual inquiry, whether conducted by universities or civil society organizations. Fourth, these same ideologies have bequeathed a great deal of skepticism and suspicion toward the positivist systematic empirical methodology of behavioral social science. Yogendra Yadav (2005, p. 1), co-director of the Asia Barometer, recalls that as a graduate student at Jawaharlal Nehru University:

> The worst thing you could say about any political scientist was that he or she "did survey research." The label "survey research" stood for what was considered to be most inappropriate in the third world imitations of the American science of politics: it was methodologically naïve, politically conservative and culturally inauthentic.

The combination of political hostility to independent inquiry and anti-positivist hostility to empirical research has had important impacts on both the demand for and supply of survey research in the developing world. On the supply side, it has severely reduced the stock of scholars trained in systematic empirical research and quantitative methods in general, let alone survey research. On the demand side, it has produced a relatively innumerate and skeptical political class of elected leaders, policy-makers, civil society leaders and news journalists.

A final important factor is the considerable interest that international organizations and Western governments now take in comparative multi-country studies and the substantial funds they invest in them. While certainly welcome, one clear consequence is that comparative cross-national survey research can not now, if it ever could, be seen as a purely social scientific enterprise. The rest of this chapter will trace the implications of these factors for the purpose, design and execution of both national and cross-national survey research in the democratizing world.[1]

METHODOLOGICAL IMPLICATIONS
These factors entail a wide range of potential methodological dilemmas for comparative public opinion researchers ranging from relatively simple issues like collaboration with local partners to more complex issues such as fieldwork, sampling and questionnaire design. Many of these dilemmas involve trade-offs between strict adherence to standard survey methodologies and incurring greatly increased project costs.

Local Collaboration
Given the sheer scope of conducting fieldwork in and across these societies, comparative surveys are almost always collaborative, involving varying forms of partnerships between international

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[1] While I refer to the democratizing world in general, my remarks apply more directly to survey research in Africa and Asia and to a lesser extent Latin America. I illustrate this argument primarily with examples from Africa, the region most widely thought to be inhospitable to systematic survey research, though I tap examples from Asia and Latin America wherever possible.

(usually European or North American based) and national researchers with survey expertise in the countries of interest. Collaborative partnerships are also a realistic way to establish the local legitimacy of the project. Local legitimacy is important where the formal approval of cabinet ministers or security officials, or the informal consent of local leaders, is necessary to conduct fieldwork, but also where the intended political impact of the project is premised on national leaders' acceptance of the survey results.

But legitimacy usually requires local researchers do more than simply contribute their knowledge to sampling, fieldwork and questionnaire design. They must also be involved in the analysis and dissemination of survey data, avoiding the simple replication of colonial patterns whereby local researchers "mine" raw data but "export" it to European and North American researchers who "refine" it and receive the scholarly credit and recognition. Yet in this pursuit, opinion researchers soon confront the paucity of local social science quantitative research capacity. On one hand, those local survey researchers with the requisite skills to draw samples and conduct systematic fieldwork usually draw their experience from demographic and econometric household surveys, but are often unfamiliar with the substantive political science or sociological literatures that underpin the questionnaire. On the other hand, local sociologists and political scientists who might be conversant with key concepts and literatures often have little or no training in research design, survey research, or data analysis. Thus, comparative researchers interested in more than simple data mining should be prepared to devote significant time to building basic capacity in survey research and data analysis. As Seligson (2005, p. 55) has observed, "without local collaboration, the standards established might be rejected as 'gringo imposed.'"

Fieldwork
Social heterogeneity and low levels of development pose a range of challenges to contacting and interviewing representative samples of respondents. Because all respondents should be able to hear the survey in the language of their choice, researchers must select fieldworkers, (or firms who hire fieldworkers who are fluent in all languages likely to be needed to interview any particular sample as well as conversant with local norms of interaction and dress. Questionnaires must also be translated into all relevant languages to avoid forcing interviewers to produce on the spot translations. This in turn necessitates identifying and hiring the services of trained linguists for each of as many as a dozen different languages in places like Nigeria, Kenya or South Africa. This is just the first of many factors that drive up survey costs in developing societies.

Outside of a handful of countries, low and/or extremely uneven rates of telephone ownership (let alone access to telephone service) mean that telephone interviews are simply not an option.[2] Yet the combination of heterogeneous, relatively rural and dispersed populations with poor road networks means that contacting and conducting personal interviews with a random, nationally representative sample of 1,200 or 2,400 respondents can be an extremely demanding and expensive proposition (though Latin America, which is relatively urbanized, seems to be an exception: see Seligson, 2005, p. 51).

In some places, fieldwork teams have absolutely no roads to use to reach selected sampling areas. In mountainous Lesotho, for example, Afrobarometer researchers ride horseback to conduct interviews in selected villages. In many cases, fieldwork teams have to traverse tortuous dirt or gravel roads which require renting expensive four wheel drive vehicles. In Mozambique, most good roads run from mining towns to the closest coastal port, and few if any connect these towns

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[2] On the other hand, this could be an advantage given the rising levels of non-response in developed countries created by refusals, answering machines and call-blocking, let alone the problems created by mobile phones.

with each other, posing significant challenges to devising cost effective ways to move fieldwork teams around the country.

Low levels of infrastructural development pose other significant burdens. There may be no appropriate sources of lodging or even food near selected interview areas. And vague maps and poor signposting make it difficult for interview teams to determine when they have entered (or exited) a selected sampling area and may necessitate the use of GPS instruments. In sum, a week of interviews in rural areas often turns into an exotic and challenging camping expedition.

At the same time, one advantage of doing opinion research in new democracies is that respondents are far more willing to allow themselves to be interviewed and to give interviewers a significant amount of their time. Virtually all researchers I have spoken to working in the developing world agree that it is possible to conduct surveys lasting an average of at least 45 minutes. Some questionnaires, such as the World Values Survey, take far more time, though the impact on response quality is a real question. In general, respondents are engaged and genuinely interested, which is fortunate since prevailing customs or the need to overcome initial suspicions may require interviewers to engage in extended cordialities with the head of household or respondent, adding additional time over and above the actual interview. Indeed, fieldworkers often report difficulties ending interviews because respondents want to carry on their discussion.

But while most respondents are quite willing to be interviewed, the lack of familiarity with the entire idea of surveys as well as general innumeracy present a range of problems for simply applying the standard methods contained in Western textbooks. First of all, typical methods of random selection within a household, whether it be pre-selection from a register of citizens or voters, or other random devices like the Kish or Politz Grids or even a birthday rule, are not transparent and may confuse respondents and create unnecessary suspicion. This is especially true in patriarchal societies where male heads of households may be open to the idea, but object to being told that the interview has to be done with their wife or daughter. Such situations, however, present wonderful laboratories where we can use local knowledge to advance survey methodology. For example, dealing playing cards to either all eligible males, or all eligible females in the household, and then allowing the patriarch to pull the card of the sampled person, simultaneously respects local traditions yet retains randomness and allows researchers to introduce a gender stratification.

Sampling
Drawing samples of respondents that are representative of the typical developing society presents comparative survey researchers with a wide range of obstacles and trade-offs. To begin with, relatively high levels of social heterogeneity (featuring politically important cleavages along linguistic, religious, racial or class lines) means that researchers need to consider drawing relatively large samples (compared to the typical n = 1,200 survey sample in the West) to ensure that they represent socially and politically significant sub national groups or regions, and are thus able to test adequately for statistically significant differences across these cleavages. But besides the costs of the additional interviews, mapping these cleavages requires high quality demographic data, something which developing societies with weak census bureaus may not be able to provide. In a small number of countries, especially those marred by recent histories of civil war, census data is simply too old to be of any use. In other countries, the census may have once been reliable, but the information used to update it is often suspect.

Matters are even more difficult when it comes to the nature of the sampling frame. A large number of countries have no reliable lists of citizens, households or even registered voters. Census department maps often feature only the boundaries of enumerator areas and contain no

information about the location or density of households. And even where such lists or household maps exist, high levels of mobility mean that they quickly go out of date and research teams find that they bear little resemblance to the reality they confront in the field, especially in informal housing areas.

Thus, census enumerator areas are typically the smallest bit of reliable information that survey researchers have to create a sampling frame. If researchers want to calculate selection probabilities at second or third stages of household and respondent selection, they must map and enumerate the selected area themselves, which significantly increases the amount of time interview teams need to be present in selected areas and drastically increases fieldwork costs. The lack of good data at this level also raises the issue of substitution. Standard survey texts warn against substitution (generally because of the belief that it grants too much discretion to interviewers and precludes the possibility of calculating contact, refusal and response rates). Instead, they recommend that researchers draw larger than required samples that anticipate refusals, or draw additional, smaller sample "packages" that are only opened and contacted in their entirety if the realized sample falls short.

However, accurately anticipating refusal rates presumes that survey researchers have a firm idea of what that rate is likely to be across their country and within specific regions based on the track record of previous surveys. But such a reliable track record does not exist where survey research is in its infancy. And drawing packages of over-samples to be interviewed after the original sample requires interviewers to move back into the countryside, greatly increasing survey costs.

These costs also have to be set against other considerations. For example, clustering interviews within primary sampling units, and primary sampling units within secondary sampling units, might reduce travel costs significantly. But where a project's goal is not only to produce scientific data but also to have local policy impact, an overly-clustered sample may be counter-productive. Policy-makers unfamiliar with the logic of sampling may be far less convinced of the representativeness of a sample of even 2,400 interviews if that sample was clustered into 200 primary sampling units located within just 20 districts, compared to one dispersed across PSU's in 600 different districts across the width and breadth of the country (but which would mean far higher fieldwork costs).

It is true that few, if any, surveys in the developing world are anywhere near as expensive as something like the U.S. National Election Study (Seligson, 2005, p. 51). But a more appropriate comparison should take into consideration the fact that the most important projects in the democratizing world are multi-country, and multi-wave, and have no institutional base of predictable financial support like the U.S. National Science Foundation. Thus, while the cost considerations of any single factor mentioned above or below might be sustainable in a one-off, single country study, they become extremely important considerations when scholars want to generate donor support for a dozen or so such surveys and repeat the exercise in two or three years time.

Thus, comparative survey research in the democratizing world is unlikely to meet the "gold standard" of international survey research, if by that we mean full probability-based samples with no substitution (Heath, Fisher, & Smith, 2005, p. 319). However, there are reasonable alternative methodologies which, if strictly enforced and monitored, might constitute a "silver standard" of research in developing contexts. Reliable population lists of census enumerator areas can be stratified into socially and politically relevant sub-lists, along provincial, regional, or urban and rural lines, enabling researchers to draw a scientific, representative area probability sample with probability proportionate to population size. Within the primary sampling unit, researchers can

devise systematic, random methods of start point selection and walk patterns for household selection and respondent selection, with rules for household substitution that are strictly enforced by field supervisors to ensure that fieldworkers have no discretion over whom to interview. All household visits need to be rigorously documented to enable the calculation of contact, refusal and response rates. Fieldwork should also be done at times when respondents are most likely to be available and when fieldworkers are able to make multiple callbacks, minimizing the need for household substitution. The image of a "silver standard" might imply to some a "second-best method" yielding necessarily inferior, biased data. But this is ultimately an open question that needs to be tested through systematic comparison of results generated by alternative methods used on the same populations.[3]

Questionnaire Design
Low levels of formal education pose special challenges for questionnaire design. Innumeracy and/or a lack of familiarity with linear logic means that the numeric scales widely used in the West (like feeling thermometers running from 0 to 100) are often inappropriate. And attempting to convey the idea of a linear or symmetric response scale visually through show cards is often not an option because of high rates of illiteracy. In response, local investigators have developed some ingenious responses such as building a wire anchored on two ends and asking respondents to slide a bead back and forth along the wire to indicate where their opinions lie between the two designated endpoints. In other places, researchers have laid out mats with cards representing differing groups and then asked respondents to pick or rank liked and disliked groups, both in overall terms or in paired comparisons (Miles & Rochefort, 1991).

Many scholars who design questionnaires for use in developing societies also worry that typical Likert scales induce an acquiescence bias, especially where people have newly formed, or weakly held attitudes toward subjects such as democracy. Not only do such measures overestimate the apparent support for democracy or agreement with items measuring democratic values, they may also overestimate the validity and reliability of scales based on several such items. Scholars usually respond by reversing the valence of several scale items to keep respondents alert and avoid response set. Yet reversing item valence may serve only to confuse respondents by removing their ability to anchor their responses against some fixed referent (see Robinson, Shaver, & Wrightsman, 1999). Thus, it is often necessary to resort to ordinal items that force respondents to choose from a balanced or unbalanced set of statements.

A final challenge to questionnaire design in the democratizing world comes from social heterogeneity. Linguistic diversity not only drives up survey costs through the necessity of translating questionnaires into several local languages, but also raises serious issues of validity and reliability. Investigators need to ensure both that respondents understand a concept like "trust," "tolerance" or the "rule of law" in the intended way, but also that respondents across different language groups and countries understand it in the same way. This is usually accomplished through the process of "double-blind" translation, which adds significant costs in terms of both time and finances (but see Heath et al., 2005, p. 320, who recount several doubts as to what the double blind method actually accomplishes). But perhaps the best way to accomplish this is by writing short, simply structured questions that use broadly accessible language.

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[3] Heath et al. (2005, p. 328) conclude: "We consider it a priority…for methodologists to establish empirically whether findings from random-route samples, for example, show different patterns from those obtained by strict probability samples with high response rates."

THE PURPOSE OF OPINION SURVEYS IN THE DEMOCRATIZING WORLD

Another factor that distinguishes social scientific surveys in new democracies from standard large scale academic surveys in the West is their political purpose. Put simply, surveys of transitional societies are not purely social scientific instruments. While surveys like the American National Election Study or General Social Survey may produce conclusions that ultimately have important policy consequences, they are organized and funded primarily as scientific vehicles. But while political scientists and sociologists might initiate public opinion surveys in transitional societies as vehicles for scientific inquiry, the vast majority of cross-national research is supported by international foundations and bilateral aid agencies precisely because of their potential political and developmental impacts.

First, these surveys inform the larger process of institutional reform by offering a *feedback mechanism to decision makers*. Second, they enhance political accountability by *letting everyone else know what the government knows*.[4] The first function can be accomplished by communicating results directly to government officials in personal briefings and written reports. Yet survey researchers working in the developing world often express surprise at how little interest most government officials express in their data. Part of this is a product of official inexperience with the necessity of learning about voter opinions. Yet a major part of this also has to do with the innumeracy and/or skepticism toward survey research discussed above.

The second function can be achieved through the dissemination of results directly to key political actors like legislators and opposition party officials, but also more widely to the public in general through the news media. Elected officials can be persuaded to take more interest in survey results if they know that their political opponents have the same information, information that might be politically embarrassing or damaging. Yet in many places in the developing world, innumeracy means that the news media are surprisingly hesitant to engage with survey results. And where newspapers and television commonly join to commission and report surveys, such as in Latin America, media organizations are not independent from the government or from specific political parties. On other occasions, the media report uncritically the results of pre-cooked, partisan surveys as if they were fact (Seligson, 2005, p. 54). In both cases, the image of survey research may be undermined rather than strengthened.

Survey researchers in transitional societies are also political actors because public opinion data can constitute real political threats to the leaders of the often hybrid regimes that comprise the "new democracies." Survey results may threaten the claims of elected leaders to be the sole, authentic representative of their societies and challenge their attempts to overload the meaning of their electoral "mandate." But while survey researchers may locate receptive allies in smaller civil society organizations devoted to policy research and democracy advocacy, they find no automatic alliance with civil society in general. As Ginsberg (1986) has pointed out, survey research transforms our very concept of public opinion from a behavioral assertion and a property of interest groups who control the timing, framing and method of expression, to an attitudinal response that is constrained by researchers' decision about when to conduct surveys, which questions to ask, and how to frame and word questions and responses. Thus, survey research may pose a threat to the political power of mass organizations like trade unions, citizen movements, policy advocacy groups or political parties, groups that are often already suspicious of surveys because of ideology or innumeracy.

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[4] Bilateral aid agencies also support these surveys because they simultaneously provide a needs assessment, as well as program monitoring and evaluation.

Finally, the international financial support that underpins public opinion research in the democratizing world can be a double-edged sword. While it provides the resources that otherwise could not be found in the typical transitional society, foreign sponsorship may undercut the legitimacy of a survey and limit its local political impact. In rarer occasions, funders may even decline to release results that could be seen to show anti-democratic actors or processes in a favorable light and damage the local democratization process. In one innovative response, Indian survey researchers have created "national local funders," who provide small amounts of financial support but then publicize, use and defend the survey results (Yadav, 2005).

THE CONTENT OF PUBLIC OPINION SURVEYS IN DEMOCRATIZING COUNTRIES

Finally, the larger social, economic and political context of transition has profound implications for the content of public opinion surveys in democratizing societies. Until the fall of the Berlin Wall, the dominant paradigm of the relevance of public attitudes to democracy (based on Almond & Verba's, 1963, classic "The Civic Culture") assumed that democratic stability was predicated on the existence of a series of deeply held cultural values such as pragmatism, moderation, efficacy, tolerance, and a high degree of interpersonal trust balanced with a healthy skepticism of political leaders. A more recent variant has focused on a syndrome of "self-expression" values (Inglehart & Welzel, 2006). Rose, Mishler, and Haerpfer (1998, p. 84) have described surveys based in this paradigm as "destination studies" because they measure "how near or far countries are to a Western-style ideal" and whether they are becoming "'just like us' or 'enough like us.'"

But with the spread of cross national opinion research in the democratizing world, a second, quite different approach to surveying transitional societies emerged. Based on Linz and Stepan's (1996) argument that democracy can only be consolidated once it has been "legitimated," or seen by all significant political actors and an overwhelming majority of citizens as "the only game in town." This assumes that in new democracies, whether or not citizens hold norms, values or personality traits conducive to democracy is much less important than whether they see democracy as better than and prefer it to alternative political regimes. Rose et al. (1998) call this the "Churchill Hypothesis" stemming from Winston Churchill's famous dictum that "Democracy is the worst form of government, except for all the others that have been tried from time to time." Questionnaires anchored in this approach tap not how close societies are to an ideal, Western set of norms and values, but the direction in which they are going and why; Rose et al. (1998, p. 85) call this type of survey a "transformation model."

The transformation model informs the measurement strategy of the various Global Barometer surveys in Africa, Asia, Latin America and Eastern Europe (see Uno, 2005). While accepting that norms and values are undoubtedly important, they ultimately prefer to devote scarce questionnaire space to measuring how citizens of democratizing societies experience change, how they understand democracy, whether they are willing to choose democracy against its alternatives, and how they evaluate the performance of their new, reforming regimes and institutions compared to the old.

To be sure, both traditions are based on the *legitimation theory of democratic consolidation*: that is, regardless of how well-designed a country's political institutions and processes are a sustainable democracy requires people who are willing to support, defend and sustain democratic practices. At the same time, the transformation model questionnaire offers the additional advantage that the data it produces is simultaneously suitable to test *institutional explanations of consolidation*. Institutional theories argue that democratic citizens are the result of rather than the necessary condition for effectively functioning democratic institutions (e.g. DiPalma, 1990; Norris, 2004). In this case, the resulting data can be used to test the effectiveness of new political

institutions as well as the extent to which institutions actually do (re)shape public attitudes towards democracy and politics. The results of value-based surveys, in contrast, can not provide such a test because values—according to the theory's proponents—are deeply held and only evolve slowly, over generations rather than within a few years in response to specific institutional reforms. Thus, the discipline is well served by the existence of both the World Values Survey which measures broad change across an impressive range of societies at five to seven year intervals, and the Global Barometers which tap more immediate changes in regime preferences and institutional evaluations on a more regular basis.

In addition to measuring the extent of public support for democracy, researchers studying democratizing societies face the challenge of ascertaining precisely *what* citizens of new democracies understand democracy to be. This usually requires open-ended questions to get at least at surface understandings (see Bratton & Mattes, 2000; Chu, Diamond, & Shin, 2001; Lagos, 2001), or specially designed closed-ended probes that ask whether specific procedures or substantive outcomes are essential to democracy (McIntosh, McIver, & Abele, 1994; Bratton, Mattes, & Gyimah-Boadi, 2005).

An equally important issue for new democracies is *how much* people know about democracy and politics. Besides asking people to recall or recognize specific information about institutions, policies or incumbents, political knowledge can be effectively assessed by attaching to questions such as "How well or badly would you say the government is combating HIV/AIDS" a filter which adds "or haven't you had a chance to find out about this yet" (Bishop, Odendick, & Turfbacher, 1983). Because people who really don't have an opinion are given the space and encouragement to say so, this significantly increases the level of "don't know" response. However, while such filters provide civil society, the news media, policy makers and donors with crucial details about the contours and limits of public engagement, they also present data analysts with the thorny question of whether to treat "don't know" responses as missing data or as meaningful responses that should be re-assigned to a defensible place on the response scale.

CONCLUSIONS

While Western political scientists and sociologists have exported the tool of public opinion research to new settings, the different economic, social and political contexts of those settings often mean that social scientific surveys of public opinion are designed, executed, and received in very different ways than in the West. But rather than simply seeing these differences as blemishes that need to be gradually ameliorated, we may have much more to learn from the globalization of public opinion research than the simple accumulation of more data from exotic settings. As Heath et al. (2005) have recently observed: "Rather than a simple export of Western methods, assumptions and intellectual frameworks to non-Western societies, public opinion research might benefit from imports in the reverse direction" (p. 330).

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