

# **Does Knowing Democracy Affect Answers to Democratic Support Questions?**

## **A Survey Experiment in Indonesia**

### **Abstract**

The validity of democratic support survey questions has been questioned due to wide variations of democratic understanding levels among respondents, especially in new democracies. Citizens with poor knowledge of the concept tend to offer less informed answers and preferences. We conducted an original survey experiment in Indonesia where we exposed respondents to a short list of characteristics of democracy before asking them to rate their own democratic support levels. We found that the treatment lowers democratic support and satisfaction levels, but only among low-education respondents. Our contribution is twofold: first, we offer an important nuance to critiques on the non-validity of democratic support questions; second, contrasting with observational studies, we show that knowing democracy does not necessarily imply loving it.

Keywords: Democratic support; Survey validity; Democratic understanding; Survey experiment; Southeast Asia; Indonesia

Democratic support surveys are a staple of comparative politics. Yet, scepticism shrouds their validity. Poor public understanding of the concept of democracy has been singled out as a potential issue: because the concept is neither understood nor experienced uniformly by everyone, the benchmark used to report levels of democratic support is often inconsistent or inaccurate (Dalton et al 2007; Kiewiet de Jonge 2016). The issue is particularly acute in developing democracies, in which the application of democratic rules is often partial, with unequal scope and reach of its socialization (Mattes and Bratton 2007; Fuchs and Roller 2006; Kirsch and Welzel 2018; Schedler and Sarsfield 2007). In this paper, we follow Dahl (1971) and consider that an accurate definition is at minimum procedural in the sense that it includes the organization of competitive, free and fair elections and the presence of independent media sources. Yet, we acknowledge that some like to add civil rights or outcomes like peace or economic prosperity into the definition (Freedom House 2018).

Given the absence of a uniform understanding of the core concept of these questions, one can legitimately question the meaning of the positive association between democratic understanding and democratic support that has been found in crossnational surveys (Canache 2012; Cho 2014). It is often assumed that individuals who know what democracy is support it because it is the best system of government, or at least one that is superior to other non-democratic alternatives. Yet, it may well be that other factors, such as socioeconomic status, are confounding the association between democratic understanding and democratic support. Alternatively, it may also be that the causal link between the two is reversed.

To provide further insight, we conducted a survey experiment in Indonesia, a developing democracy with a strong blend of authoritarian history and democratic experience. Like other studies conducted in geographically dispersed countries and with hard-to-reach populations (Samuels and Zucco 2014; Boas et al 2018), we recruited respondents via Facebook and corrected for sample non-representativeness using a weighting strategy. For the

experiment itself, we exposed at random half of the respondents to a short definition of democracy (treatment group), while the other half did not receive anything (control group). The aim was to induce democratic understanding among treated individuals, before asking democratic support questions. Our results indicate a substantial treatment effect, but only among respondents with low education. Furthermore, in contrast with observational studies, we find that, in this group, exposure to a definition *lowered* support for and satisfaction with democracy.

### **Survey Research on Democratic Support and Understanding**

Democratic support is usually measured via closed-ended survey questions, intended to measure support for the principles of democratic governance. At the aggregate level, high public support is critical for the survival of democratic regimes (e.g., Claassen 2019). A common question asks respondents whether democracy is preferable to other kinds of government; another equally common one asks respondents to rate their satisfaction with the way democracy works in the country (Canache et al 2001). In the paper, we study both questions.

Are democratic support surveys valid? Validity refers to the correspondence of the measure to the underlying concept (Harckness et al 2003). Threats to the validity of democratic support surveys include the difficulty in translating the questions across languages and cultures (Ariely and Davidov 2011), and social desirability bias in answers (Panel 2019). Yet, a key issue has to do with how respondents understand the word ‘democracy’ that often appears in the questions (Kiewiet de Jonge 2016). Not everybody has the same understanding of the concept or what it entails. Furthermore, there are variations between and within countries (Dalton et al 2007). Some define it in procedural terms, while others refer to outcomes; other

still, are unsure of how to answer and choose to answer with 'don't know' instead (Canache 2012). Consequently, not everybody uses the same benchmark when responding to these questions. The absence of a uniform understanding of the concept of democracy is thus a threat to validity of democratic support surveys.

The literature on democratic understanding defines it as capacity to conceptualize fundamental democratic principles by correct identification of its characteristics, complemented by the discrimination of such characteristics from those that are authoritarian in nature (Cho 2014). In surveys, this capacity is typically measured via open-ended meaning of democracy questions, where respondents can freely articulate personal associations of democracy (e.g., Canache 2012; Dalton et al 2007). These studies reveal that democratic awareness is greater among individuals living in democracies (Dalton et al 2007; Zagrebina 2019). In countries in which the democratic rule of law still competes with elements of authoritarian governance, there are important pockets of populations that are unable to define the concept (Canache 2012; Fuchs and Roller 2006; Schedler and Sarsfield 2007). A key reason for this pattern is that the way democracy is understood evolves through greater exposure to the democratic process and principles. It also depends on how the concept has been defined by political leaders (Kirsch and Welzel 2018).

What is the relationship between democratic understanding and democratic support? Poor understanding is often accompanied by high rates of democratic satisfaction, which suggests that in developing democracies low expectations align with authoritarian principles of governance (Norris 2011). Furthermore, individuals with poor understanding can hardly discriminate the elements of a democratic system of governance from those that belong to a non-democratic system. Subsequently, they also show lower support for democratic principles (Canache 2012; Cho 2014). A common interpretation of this finding is that if people knew what democracy was, they would be more supportive of it and be more critical of the ruling

elites primarily because democracy would be perceived as superior to the system in place in their country.<sup>1</sup>

With our survey experiment, we seek to test the validity of democratic support questions by comparing the answers of respondents exposed to a definition of democracy—who thus would have a uniform understanding of the concept—to those not exposed to it, which is a similar condition found in most crossnational surveys on the topic.

## The Study

### Case-Selection: Indonesia

In 1999, Indonesia held its first democratic election since 1955. The elections were preceded by a transition period called *Reformasi* (reformation) that ended with the deposition of Suharto's autocratic New Order regime. Two decades on, the country sees its rapid albeit unequal democratization efforts stagnate and even decline (Davidson 2018). In 2013, the country fell from 'free' to 'partly free' on the Freedom House index due to lowered ratings in protection of ethnic minorities, LGBT communities, as well as religious freedom (Freedom House 2018). The country also inherited systemic issues from the previous regime, such as deep-rooted corruptions, clientelist political mechanisms, and non-independent media sources (Davidson 2018).

Despite setbacks, support for democracy in Indonesia remains relatively strong and stable since democratization (Pietsch and Clark 2015). At the same time, only half of Indonesians are able to correctly recognize pre-*Reformasi* Indonesia as authoritarian and their

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<sup>1</sup> Note that support for democracy can also be instrumental in the sense that individuals can support democracy because they believe they will benefit indirectly from the system, for example because this is a system that will bring prosperity to people like them.

current system as democratic (Shin and Kim 2018), and a large proportion of the population still express support for some authoritarian elements (Lussier and Fish 2012).

## **Survey Data**

To recruit respondents for our survey experiment, we used a Facebook advertisement that redirected participants to a web-based survey. Facebook is an increasingly common tool and method of recruitment, especially in geographically dispersed countries like Brazil (Samuels and Zucco 2014) or India (Boas et al 2018). In our case, Facebook was also chosen because the latest figures show that around 61% of Indonesia's 130 million are active users (Hootsuite 2019). However, recruitment via Facebook can obviously lead to sample bias, as Facebook users are younger and better educated than the rest of the population. Despite this, a study does show that the sample bias can be corrected by using socio-demographic weights (Mellon and Prosser 2017).

Our survey experiment was conducted between 15–25 March 2019. The advertisement was set to target Indonesian citizens over the age of 17 (voting age) residing in five most populated Indonesian cities: Jakarta, Bandung, Surabaya, Bekasi, and Medan.<sup>2</sup> Together, the cities represented about 15% of the country's total population. In total, 3,836 unique respondents completed the survey.<sup>3</sup>

In appendix A, we show the distribution of key sociodemographic characteristics of the respondents compared to official population statistics of the targeted cities. We observed slight discrepancies in terms of age distribution and more substantially for education. Most importantly for the purpose of this study, we obtained a reasonably diverse sample for each

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<sup>2</sup> We included screening questions at the beginning of the survey to exclude respondents who do not meet to these criteria. The questions are important because the Facebook targeting algorithm is not flawless. For example, uploading the new location of a user who moved from a city to another may take some time.

<sup>3</sup> To minimize attrition, which could have resulted in larger sample bias, we made sure that they survey was short. It took an average of 5.5 minutes to complete it.

sociodemographic category. We can thus correct the sample bias by adopting a weighting strategy explained in Appendix A.

### **Experimental Design and Manipulation Check<sup>4</sup>**

Respondents were randomly split into two groups to perform an A/B test: half were exposed to a short definition of democracy (treatment, N=1,284), while the other half received no definition (control, N=1,261). The definition was taken from a summary of Dahl's (1971) maximalist definition of democracy (Diamond and Morlino 2004):

“At a minimum, democracy requires: 1) universal adult suffrage; 2) recurring, free, competitive, and fair elections; 3) more than one serious political party; and 4) alternative sources of information.”

We followed this treatment with democratic support questions.<sup>5</sup> We used three of the most commonly used questions in crossnational surveys. In the first one (‘democracy vs. autocracy’), respondents were asked to report with which of the following statements they most agree: “1) Under certain circumstances, an authoritarian government may be better, 2) Democracy is always preferable to any other kind of government, or 3) For people like me, it does not matter the system of government.” Second, we asked respondents to rate their satisfaction level with the way democracy works in their country on a 1-10 scale (‘satisfaction

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<sup>4</sup> The survey experiment was approved by the Research Ethics Board of [Redacted]. Among other ethical precautions, we did not collect any information that would allow us or anyone to personally identify respondents in the dataset, made them sign a consent form presenting the topic of the study prior participation, and gave them the possibility to leave the study at any time. Note also that we did not deceive the respondents in the sense that the treatment consists in exposing them to a real academic definition of democracy.

<sup>5</sup> For the English translation of the treatment and democratic support questions, as well as descriptive statistics of the democratic support questions, see Appendix B.

with democracy’). Third, we asked them how important it is for respondents to live in a democracy on the same 1-10 scaling (‘living in democracy important’).

Before testing the hypotheses, we perform two tests to evaluate the rigor of our experimental design. Because the variable education is central to our analysis (see hypotheses below), we conduct the balance test on the entire sample, as well as on each education level separately. Results show that the assignment of the treatment is indeed random, and not associated to any socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents even within education levels.

Second, we conduct a manipulation check to see whether the treatment induced democratic understanding among respondents. Right after the treatment (and before asking the support for democracy questions), we asked respondents to answer an open-ended meaning of democracy question. We find that low-education respondents were about 11.3 percentage points less likely to respond ‘don’t know’ when treated, and 5.2 points more likely to provide a meaningless definition of democracy. This means that once treated, low-education respondents provided (meaningful) definitions of democracy at the same rate as other respondents. By contrast, the probability of providing an answer or a meaningful answer did not increase with the treatment for mid- and high-education respondents because they already had a clear idea of democracy prior to being treated. Details of the coding and test can be found in Appendix D.

## **Hypotheses**

In line with the theoretical framework discussed in the literature review above, we expect that the exposure to a definition of democracy increases respondents’ democratic



understanding, and subsequently, their democratic support. Our first hypothesis is thus the following:<sup>6</sup>

*H<sub>1</sub>. An exposure to a definition of democracy increases support for democracy.*

However, we acknowledge that individuals with a good understanding make up a significant portion of the population even in new democracies. Not only is democratic knowledge more common after democratization (Dalton et al 2007), greater degree of modernization also gives rise to higher proportion of well-educated individuals—a strong predictor of democratic understanding (Canache 2012). We thus hypothesize that the treatment is less likely to have a sizable effect among higher educated individuals, because they already hold a clear idea of democracy. This leads to the second hypothesis:

*H<sub>2</sub>. An exposure to a definition of democracy increases support for democracy, especially among citizens of low-education background.*

## **Test**

To test H<sub>1</sub>, we estimate a series of regressions in which the treatment predicts democratic support. To analyse the treatment effect on the variable ‘democracy vs. autocracy’, we estimate two logit regressions predicting the probability of providing: 1) a stated preference for either democracy or autocracy vs. ‘doesn’t matter’; and 2) a stated preference for democracy or autocracy (excluding ‘doesn’t matter’).<sup>7</sup> The aim is to grasp the full complexity of the

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<sup>6</sup> Note that although we did not formally pre-register the study, we defined the hypotheses in grant proposals sent to both funding bodies. Upon request, the approved proposal can be provided.

<sup>7</sup> Note that it was possible to answer ‘don’t know’ to this question. We also estimate logit regressions predicting the probability of providing an answer vs. a ‘don’t know’ (results are in Appendix E). There is a small treatment effect. Yet, we decided not to emphasize this finding in the main text as it seems almost tautological.

treatment effect. However, we also reproduce the analysis with a multinomial logit regression in Appendix F. The results are essentially similar. We use OLS regressions on the other two continuous democratic support variables.

Table 1 reports the treatment effects as estimated by these regressions with and without socio-demographic control variables (full results in Appendix E). We find that inducing democratic understanding by exposing respondents to a definition of democracy *decreased* the probability of preferring democracy over autocracy. The effect size is large: between 8 and 12 percentage points. Second, we also find that once treated, respondents were less satisfied with the way democracy works in Indonesia. Both effects are statistically significant at  $p < 0.001$ .<sup>8</sup>

We then tested  $H_2$  by repeating the regressions for  $H_1$  and adding an interaction term between treatment and education, along with control variables (full results in Appendix G).<sup>9</sup> The interaction is statistically significant at a level of  $p < 0.001$  for all of the outcome variables except for ‘living in democracy important’.

To offer an easy interpretation for the results, we plot the value of the treatment effect as education level varies for each of the outcome variable. Figure 1 reports the results for the variable ‘democracy vs. autocracy’. It shows that the treatment effect is substantial and statistically significant at a level of  $p < 0.05$  for low-education respondents, and small and not statistically significant at a similar level for mid- and high-education respondents. Firstly, low-education respondents were slightly more likely to state a preference when treated (by about 7.5 percentage points). Secondly, they were less likely to prefer democracy over autocracy in

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Note that respondents were not given the possibility to respond ‘don’t know’ for the two other democratic support questions (‘living in democracy important’ and ‘satisfaction with democracy’).

<sup>8</sup> When the sample is not weighted, the treatment effects are very small and not statistically significant. This is most likely due to the over-representation of mid- and high-education respondents in the sample. All results can be found in Appendix E.

<sup>9</sup> For the regressions presented in the main text, we consider education as a continuous variable ranging from 1=low education to 3=high education. In Appendix G, we also replicate the analysis in considering it as a categorial variable. The results are essentially similar: the treatment has no effect for individuals with a high-education background, but it has one (in the expected direction) for individuals with a mid- or low-education backgrounds.

this situation by about 20% points. This last finding is important, as it is in stark contrast with observational studies that find a positive association between democratic understanding and democratic support.<sup>10</sup>

Figure 2 reveals the same pattern for ‘satisfaction with democracy’, and to some extent, ‘living in democracy important’ (interaction effect is not statistically significant for the latter). The treatment effect is greater and statistically significant at a level of  $p < 0.05$  among low-education respondents compared to mid- and high-education respondents. At the lowest level of education, exposure to a definition of democracy reduced the importance of living in a democracy by 0.5 points, and reduced satisfaction rates by a full point. This last effect is substantial, as it corresponds to 40% of the standard deviation of the variable in the raw sample (see descriptive statistics in Appendix B).

## **Discussion and Conclusion**

Public support for democracy is a key factor in maintaining the stability of democratic regimes. Yet, individual-level answers to democratic support surveys are wrought with a key issue that threatens their validity, particularly in new and developing democracies: not all respondents are familiar with democracy. To offer new insights on the topic, we conducted a survey experiment in Indonesia, in which we exposed the treatment group with a short list of characteristics that define democracy and then asked all respondents to answer three democratic support questions. The aim was to test if having a uniform definition of democratic changes respondents’ support for it.

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<sup>10</sup> Note that the last panel of Figure 1 also shows that the treatment has a small positive effect on democratic support for high-education respondents ( $p < 0.05$ ). Since the manipulation check presented above show that the treatment does not induce greater levels of democratic understanding among high-education respondents, we interpret this as a priming effect of the treatment that makes this group of respondents even more favorable to democracy (Zaller and Feldman 1992).

Our results both confirm and contrast some previous findings. First, we find that greater democratic understanding altered democratic support only for individuals with low-education background, while those with higher education levels were not affected by the treatment. This is an important finding as it shows that even in flawed democracies like Indonesia, there is still a sizeable portion of 40% to 50% of citizens who have sufficient understanding of democracy to provide informed responses to democratic support questions. Second, we find that inducing democratic understanding did not necessarily lead to greater support for democracy. Instead, it *decreased* the probability of reporting a preference for democracy over autocracy. Knowing democracy does not necessarily imply loving it. Our results also challenge the assumption that individuals with low democratic understanding report higher satisfaction rates: the treatment instead *decreased* satisfaction with democracy in our sample.

Future research could benefit from larger studies covering more countries, and therefore, greater diversity in democratic understanding as well as socioeconomic composition. Furthermore, this study pursued the most cost-efficient strategy, with the use of Facebook as a recruitment strategy. It is thus limited in scope, as a large portion of Indonesians are without access to internet. Yet, we believe that, if anything, our treatment effect is underestimated—the effect would have been larger if the sample were representative of the population. Without internet access, many have no access to online media and international news coverage. That said, we encourage comparative studies using more representative samples could further enrich the literature on democratic understanding and support in developing democracies beyond the case of Indonesia.

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Table 1

*Treatment effects*

	Democracy vs. autocracy				Living in democracy important	Satisfaction with democracy		
	Provide a preference		Prefer democracy			No	Yes	Yes
Treatment	0.03 (0.02)	0.02 (0.02)	-0.12*** (0.02)	-0.08*** (0.02)	0.00 (0.10)	-0.15 (0.12)	-0.47*** (0.13)	-0.40** (0.15)
Controls	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes
City FE	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes
Obs.	2,161	1,622	1,838	1,388	2,545	1,879	2,545	1,879

*Note.* Entries are marginal effects estimated with logit regressions (provide a preference, prefer democracy) and coefficients estimated with OLS regressions (satisfaction with democracy, living in democracy important). Treatment effects are calculated with sample weight. Standard errors in parentheses. \*\*\* $p < 0.001$ , \*\* $p < 0.01$ , \* $p < 0.05$ .



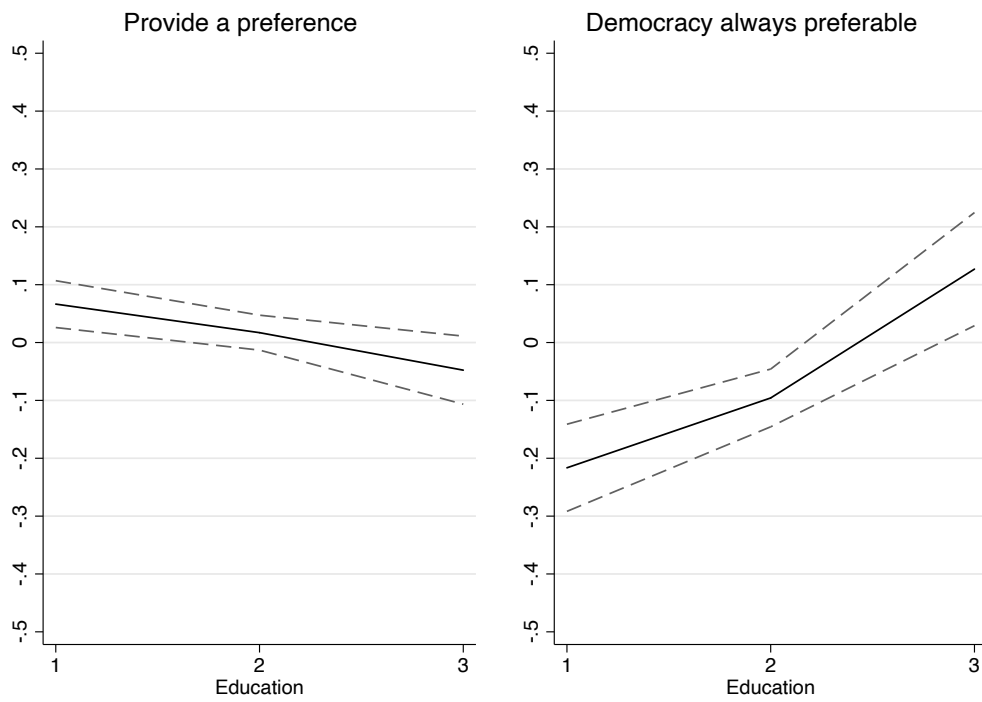


FIGURE 1. Treatment effect as education varies ('democracy vs. autocracy'). Solid lines are the marginal treatment effect estimate from regressions presented in Table 4. Dashed lines are 95% confidence interval. Education: 1= low, 2=mid, and 3=high.

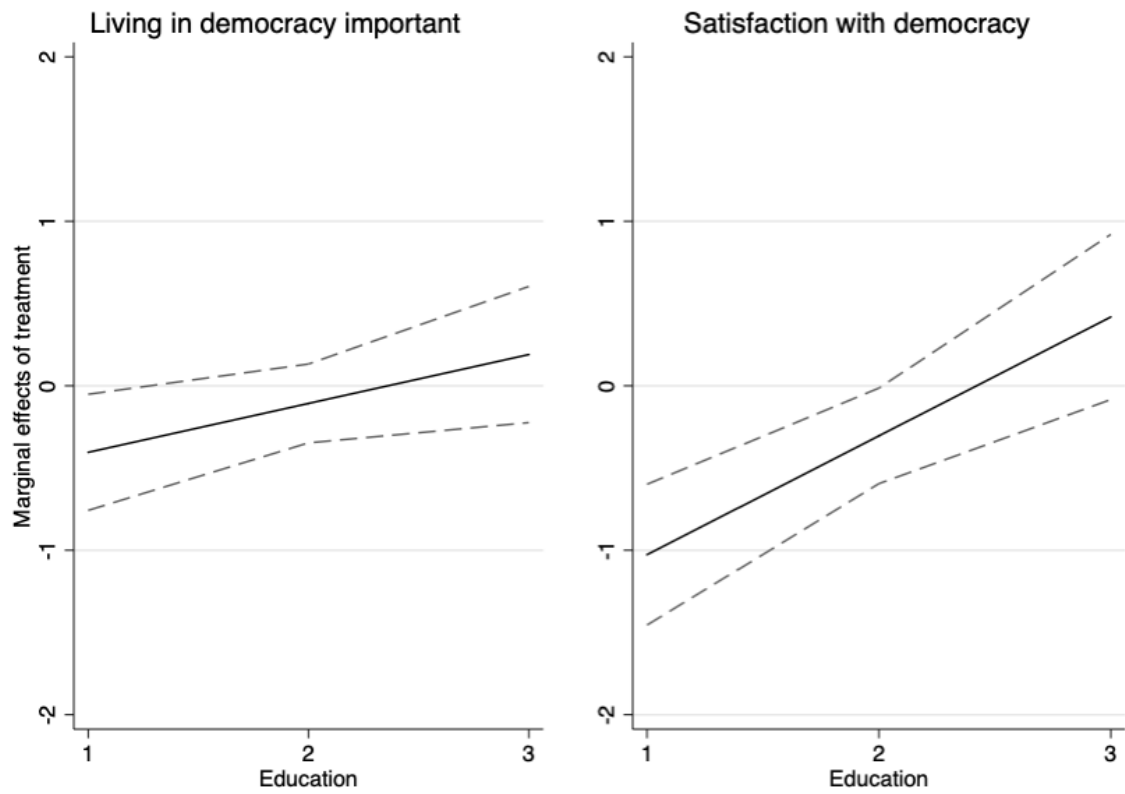


FIGURE 2. Treatment effect as education varies ('living in democracy important' and 'satisfaction with democracy'). Solid lines are the marginal treatment effect estimate from regressions presented in Appendix. Dashed lines are 95% confidence interval. Education: 1= low, 2=mid, and 3=high.

# Does Knowing Democracy Affect Answers to Democratic Support Questions? A Survey Experiment in Indonesia

## Online Appendix

### Appendix A. Description of sample and weighting strategy

	Jakarta		Bandung		Surabaya		Bekasi		Medan	
	Sample	Pop.	Sample	Pop.	Sample	Pop.	Sample	Pop.	Sample	Pop.
Female	48.5	49.7	49.3	48.5	50.5	50.6	50.8	49.0	44.4	50.6
17-24	48.2	20.8	55.1	25.4	48.9	22.9	53.6	25.4	61.46	29.2
25-34	32.5	27.4	27.6	23.1	26.6	23.2	28.2	28.2	29.11	23.7
35-44	10.5	22.3	9.6	19.8	13.5	20.0	12.5	22.1	6.47	19.4
45-54	6.0	15.6	4.9	15.7	6.6	16.6	3.6	14.7	2.70	14.4
55-64	1.9	9.1	2.2	9.7	3.3	11.0	0.9	6.3	0.00	8.5
65+	0.9	4.9	0.7	6.3	1.1	6.4	1.1	3.2	0.27	4.8
No education	0.3	11.3	0.00	7.3	0.3	14.8	0.0	5.8	0.5	1.7
Primary	0.4	17.6	0.37	20.7	1.5	18.6	0.3	9.8	0.5	31.4
Lower Secondary	4.1	19.1	2.4	21.6	2.2	19.9	1.45	13.7	0.8	22.2
Higher Secondary	42.5	37.0	41.9	35.6	38.2	33.1	52.9	45.6	34.3	35.5
University	52.7	15.0	55.4	14.8	57.7	13.6	45.6	25.1	63.8	9.3
Pop > 17y (on 5 cities)	43.9	49.6	20.0	12.5	9.9	14.7	12.7	13.0	13.6	10.2

Note: Entries are % of observations falling in each category in the sample and in the corresponding population (pop.). Population data are official statistics from *Badan Pusat Statistik* DKI Jakarta, West Java, East Java, Bekasi Kota, and North Sumatra.

To construct our weight, we first collapse the five education categories into three groups: low (no education, primary, or lower secondary), mid (higher secondary), and high education (university and above). We decided to rely on these three education categories because we believe they reflect the main lines of differentiation in terms of education that exist in the Indonesian population. This choice is also pragmatic as these categories split the sample in groups populated with enough respondents to draw reasonable inferences. We also collapse six age categories into five (original categories presented in Table 1, with 55-64 and 65+ collapsed into one category). The rationale behind this was the need to maintain enough observations in each stratum. We then calculated a joint weight for gender, age, and education in each city using official statistics presented in the table above.

## Appendix B. Treatment, democratic support questions, and descriptive statistics

### Treatment

At a minimum, democracy requires: 1) universal adult suffrage; 2) recurring, free, competitive, and fair elections; 3) more than one serious political party; and 4) alternative sources of information.

### Democracy v/s autocracy question

Please choose the statement with which you most agree:

- Under certain circumstances, an authoritarian government may be better
- Democracy is always preferable to any other kind of government
- For people like me, it does not matter the system of government

### Satisfaction with democracy

How satisfied are you with the way democracy works in Indonesia? (1 not satisfied at all – 10 very satisfied)

### Living in democracy important

How important it is for you to live in a democracy? (1 not important at all – 10 very important)

### Descriptive statistics

	<b>Obs.</b>	<b>Freq (%)</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Std. Dev.</b>
<i>Democracy vs. autocracy</i>	2,545			
Don't know (DK)	384	15.09		
Prefer autocracy	467	18.35		
Prefer democracy	1,371	53.87		
It does not matter	323	12.69		
<i>Satisfaction with democracy</i>	2,545		4.02	2.72
<i>Living in democracy important</i>	2,545		8.06	2.43

## Appendix C. Balance test

	All respondents	Low-education respondents	Mid-education respondents	Upper-education respondents
Gender	0.03 (0.02)	-0.04 (0.14)	0.03 (0.04)	0.04 (0.03)
Age (in group)	-0.01 (0.01)	-0.12 (0.09)	0.03 (0.02)	-0.02 (0.02)
Education	0.00 (0.02)			
Income	-0.01 (0.01)	0.08 (0.06)	-0.02 (0.02)	-0.00 (0.01)
City (Jakarta as ref)				
Bandung	-0.01 (0.03)	-0.01 (0.20)	-0.02 (0.05)	0.00 (0.04)
Surabaya	-0.02 (0.04)		-0.13 (0.06)	0.06 (0.05)
Bekasi	-0.04 (0.04)	0.07 (0.38)	0.01 (0.05)	-0.10 (0.05)
Medan	-0.04 (0.04)	-0.27 (0.25)	-0.05 (0.07)	-0.03 (0.05)
N	1,879	53	725	1,096

Note: Entries marginal effects estimated from logit regressions predicting the experimental group of the respondent (treatment v/s control). There is no estimate for the city of Surabaya in the second column, because there are not enough low-education respondents in this city. Standard errors in parentheses. \*\*\* p<0.01, \*\* p<0.05, \* p<0.1.

## Appendix D. Manipulation check

	All respondents		Low education		Mid education		High education	
	Control	Treatment	Control	Treatment	Control	Treatment	Control	Treatment
Not provide any answer (poor understanding)	23.7	23.2	38.3	27.0	25.7	27.0	19.1	19.2
Non-meaningful answer (poor understanding)	5.1	6.7	10.6	5.4	4.9	7.4	4.6	6.0
Procedural answer	23.5	21.7	19.2	27.0	24.8	22.3	23.4	20.5
Freedom/equality	42.2	45.0	29.8	32.4	38.6	39.6	47.5	50.7
Outcomes	5.5	3.7	2.13	8.1	6.0	3.7	5.4	3.6
N	2,545		84		1,028		1,352	
P-value	0.06		0.5		0.2		0.2	

Note: Entries are % of respondents falling in each category of the open-ended meaning of democracy question. P-values are calculated from Chi<sup>2</sup>. The 81 respondents who did not report their education level are included in the group ‘all respondents’ and excluded from other groups.

Respondents were asked: “To you personally, what is the meaning of democracy?” We manually coded the responses to this open-ended question into five categories: (1) references to procedural aspect of democracy (e.g. elections, parliament, checks and balances); (2) references to liberal aspects of democracy (e.g. rights, freedom, equality); and (3) references to perceived outcomes of the system (e.g. economic prosperity, peace, welfare provisions). We then coded those who did not provide any answer (e.g. don’t know, missing), as well as definitions that are not related to democracy (non-meaningful answers) separately. These last two categories are the most important for the purpose of our study, as they indicate poor democratic understanding. We manually coded the responses to these questions ourselves. Then, we asked a researcher who is also a native Indonesian speaker to code the same responses completely independently. The two coding efforts are extremely similar. An intercoder reliability test reveals the agreement rate is of 93.61%, kappa statistics = 0.89, p-value < 0.001.

The first columns show that the proportion of respondents who did not provide any definition of democracy decreases only by 0.5 percentage points when exposed to the treatment (23.7% in the control group, 23.2% for the treatment group). To better understand this result, we split the sample between low (no education, primary, or lower secondary), mid (higher secondary), and high education (university and above). Unsurprisingly, the probabilities for providing an answer and a meaningful answer increase with education level. More importantly, the table shows that respondents reacted differently to the treatment depending on their education level. Those with low education levels were about 11.3 percentage points less likely to respond with ‘don’t know’ and 5.2 points more likely to provide a meaningless definition of democracy when treated. Although the p-value corresponding to a chi-square test is not statistically significant (due to the low number of respondents in this category), the treatment effect is substantial. As a matter of comparison, once treated, low education respondents provided (meaningful) definitions of democracy at the same rate as mid-education respondents. This suggests that the treatment indeed induced democratic respondent understanding among low-education respondents.

The probability of providing an answer or a meaningful answer did not increase with the treatment for mid- and high-education respondents, probably because they already had a clear idea of democracy prior being exposed to the treatment. The table indicates that about 20-25% did not provide any answer to the open-ended question, but these may be individuals who did not bother answering rather than individuals who did not know the answer. Yet, it does not

mean that highly educated respondents did not notice the treatment. They provided fewer procedural definitions (by about 3 points), and offer 'alternative' definitions, such as definitions referring to freedom/equality or outcomes once treated. We interpret this as reluctance to repeat the procedural-heavy characteristics to which they were exposed.

## Appendix E. Full regression results (treatment effects)

### Democracy vs autocracy

	<b>Provide an answer</b>	<b>Provide an answer</b>	<b>Provide an answer (weighted)</b>	<b>Provide an answer (weighted)</b>
Treatment	0.00 (0.01)	-0.00 (0.02)	-0.03 (0.02)	-0.08*** (0.02)
Gender		-0.00 (0.02)		-0.07*** (0.02)
Education		0.03* (0.02)		0.09*** (0.01)
Age		0.01 (0.01)		0.02 (0.01)
Income		-0.00 (0.01)		0.01 (0.01)
Observations	2,545	1,879	2,440	1,879
City FE	No	Yes	No	Yes

Note: Entries are marginal effects estimated with logit regression. Standard errors in parentheses. \*\*\*p<0.001, \*\*p<0.01, \*p<0.05.

	<b>Provide a preference</b>	<b>Provide a preference</b>	<b>Provide a preference (weighted)</b>	<b>Provide a preference (weighted)</b>
Treatment	-0.01 (0.02)	0.01 (0.02)	0.03 (0.02)	0.02 (0.02)
Gender		-0.02 (0.02)		0.01 (0.02)
Education		0.01 (0.02)		-0.01 (0.01)
Age		0.02* (0.01)		0.03*** (0.01)
Income		0.01 (0.01)		-0.00 (0.01)
Observations	2,161	1,622	2,089	1,622
City FE	No	Yes	No	Yes

Note: Entries are marginal effects estimated with logit regression. Standard errors in parentheses. \*\*\*p<0.001, \*\*p<0.01, \*p<0.05.

	<b>Prefer democracy</b>	<b>Prefer democracy</b>	<b>Prefer democracy (weighted)</b>	<b>Prefer democracy (weighted)</b>
Treatment	-0.01 (0.02)	0.01 (0.02)	-0.12*** (0.02)	-0.08*** (0.02)
Gender		-0.01 (0.02)		0.02 (0.02)



Education	-0.01 (0.02)	-0.07*** (0.02)
Age	0.02 (0.01)	0.05*** (0.01)
Income	-0.02* (0.01)	0.01 (0.01)

Observations	1,838	1,388	1,782	1,388
City FE	No	Yes	No	Yes

Note: Entries are marginal effects estimated with logit regression. Standard errors in parentheses. \*\*\*p<0.001, \*\*p<0.01, \*p<0.05.

#### Living in democracy important

	<b>Living in democracy important</b>	<b>Living in democracy important</b>	<b>Living in democracy important (weighted)</b>	<b>Living in democracy important (weighted)</b>
Treatment	0.03 (0.10)	0.07 (0.11)	0.00 (0.10)	-0.15 (0.12)
Gender		-0.01 (0.11)		-0.03 (0.12)
Education		-0.16 (0.11)		0.13 (0.08)
Age		0.10 (0.06)		0.11* (0.05)
Income		0.05 (0.05)		0.02 (0.05)
Constant	8.04*** (0.07)	8.09*** (0.28)	8.07*** (0.07)	7.48*** (0.21)
Observations	2,545	1,879	2,176	1,692
City FE	No	Yes	No	Yes

Note: entries are marginal effects estimated with OLS regression. Standard errors in parentheses. \*\*\*p<0.001, \*\*p<0.01, \*p<0.05.

#### Satisfaction with democracy

	<b>Satisfaction with democracy</b>	<b>Satisfaction with democracy</b>	<b>Satisfaction with democracy (weighted)</b>	<b>Satisfaction with democracy (weighted)</b>
Treatment	0.08 (0.11)	0.15 (0.13)	-0.47*** (0.13)	-0.40** (0.15)
Gender		-0.17 (0.13)		-0.56*** (0.14)
Education		-0.31* (0.12)		-0.46*** (0.10)
Age		0.11		0.55***

		(0.07)		(0.06)
Income		-0.06		-0.06
		(0.05)		(0.06)
Constant	3.98***	4.72***	4.70***	4.56***
	(0.08)	(0.32)	(0.08)	(0.25)
Observations	2,545	1,879	2,176	1,692
City FE	No	Yes	No	Yes

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Note: Entries are marginal effects estimated with OLS regression. Standard errors in parentheses. \*\*\* $p < 0.001$ , \*\* $p < 0.01$ , \* $p < 0.05$ .

## Appendix F. Multinomial logit regression results

	<b>Don't Know</b>	<b>Prefer autocracy</b>	<b>Doesn't make a difference</b>	<b>Don't know</b>	<b>Prefer autocracy</b>	<b>Doesn't make a difference</b>
Treatment	0.33** (0.11)	0.75*** (0.13)	-0.11 (0.15)	0.63*** (0.15)	0.57*** (0.15)	-0.07 (0.18)
Gender				0.49*** (0.14)	-0.11 (0.15)	-0.12 (0.18)
Education				- 0.58*** (0.10)	0.43*** (0.11)	0.17 (0.13)
Age				-0.21** (0.06)	-0.35*** (0.07)	-0.42*** (0.08)
Income				-0.07 (0.06)	-0.03 (0.07)	0.02 (0.08)
Observations	2,440	2,440	2,440	1,879	1,879	1,879
City FE	No	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes

Note: Entries are coefficients estimated with multinomial logistic regression. Reference category in outcome variable: prefer democracy. Standard errors in parentheses. \*\*\*p<0.001, \*\*p<0.01, \*p<0.05.

**DOES KNOWING DEMOCRACY AFFECT ANSWERS TO DEMOCRATIC  
SUPPORT QUESTIONS?**

**Appendix G. Full regression results (interaction effects)**

	Democracy vs autocracy		Living in democracy important	Satisfaction with democracy
	Provide a preference	Prefer democracy		
Treatment	x -0.07**	0.18***	0.30	0.72***
Education	(0.02)	(0.03)	(0.15)	(0.19)
Treatment	0.15**	-0.45***	-0.70*	-1.75***
Education	(0.05)	(0.07)	(0.31)	(0.38)
Education	0.02	-0.16***	-0.00	-0.78***
Gender	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.11)	(0.13)
Gender	0.01	0.01	-0.05	-0.58***
Age	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.12)	(0.14)
Age	0.04***	0.04***	0.10	0.52***
Income	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.05)	(0.06)
Income	-0.00	0.01	0.04	-0.03
	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.05)	(0.06)
Observations	1,622	1,388	1,879	1,879
City FE	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

Note: Entries are marginal effects estimated with logit regression (provide a preference, prefer democracy) and coefficients estimated with OLS regressions (satisfaction with democracy, living in democracy important). Treatment effects are calculated with weights. Standard errors in parentheses. \*\*\*p<0.001, \*\*p<0.01, \*p<0.05.

## SUPPORT QUESTIONS?

## Appendix F. Interaction effects with education as categorical variable

	Democracy vs autocracy		Living in	Satisfaction with
	Provide a	Prefer	democracy	democracy
	preference	democracy	important	
Treatment x Low education	0.15** (0.05)	-0.38*** (0.06)	-0.50 (0.31)	-1.09** (0.37)
Treatment x Mid education	0.08 (0.04)	-0.06 (0.05)	0.56 (0.31)	1.51*** (0.37)
Treatment	-0.06 (0.04)	0.04 (0.04)	-0.21 (0.24)	-0.53 (0.29)
Low education	-0.04 (0.03)	0.29*** (0.04)	0.05 (0.22)	1.27*** (0.26)
Med education	-0.06* (0.03)	0.09 (0.05)	-0.03 (0.23)	-0.60* (0.27)
Gender	0.01 (0.02)	0.01 (0.02)	-0.05 (0.12)	-0.62*** (0.14)
Age	0.03*** (0.01)	0.04*** (0.01)	0.08 (0.05)	0.45*** (0.06)
Income	-0.01 (0.01)	0.01 (0.01)	0.07 (0.05)	-0.02 (0.06)
Observations	1,622	1,388	1,879	1,879
City FE	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

Note: Entries are marginal effects estimated with logit regression (provide an answer, provide a preference, prefer democracy) and coefficients estimated with OLS regressions (satisfaction with democracy, living in democracy important). The reference category in the variable education is 'high education'. Treatment effects are calculated with weights. Standard errors in parentheses. \*\*\* $p < 0.001$ , \*\* $p < 0.01$ , \* $p < 0.05$ .