

**THE EFFECT OF ELECTIONS ON PUBLIC OPINION TOWARD DEMOCRACY:  
EVIDENCE FROM LONGITUDINAL SURVEY RESEARCH IN ALGERIA**

Keywords: Elections, Democratization, Public Opinion, North Africa

By

Michael D. H. Robbins  
Department of Political Science  
University of Michigan  
[robbinmd@umich.edu](mailto:robbinmd@umich.edu)

Mark Tessler  
Department of Political Science  
University of Michigan  
[tessler@umich.edu](mailto:tessler@umich.edu)

---

Abstract

Given the importance of developing a democratic culture for the long-term survival of democracy, it is crucial to understand whether and how public support for democracy changes over time in response to different events, particularly those that may contribute to democratization. Elections are a key institution associated with democracy; but elections are also found in most non-democratic regimes, raising questions about whether electoral experiences affect the way that ordinary citizens think about democracy. The present article uses original survey data collected in Algeria in 2002, 2004 and 2006 to investigate this question. It finds that individuals who favor platforms, ideological orientations or candidates that are excluded from participation in an election and/or believe that an election has not been free and fair have lower levels of support for democracy after the election than other members of society.

## **Introduction**

Public support for democracy is necessary for the long-term success of a democratic political system. As expressed by Diamond (1999, p. 65), democratic survival requires that “all significant political actors, at both the elite and mass levels, believe that the democratic regime is the most right and appropriate for their society, better than any other realistic alternative they can imagine”. This support is particularly critical when there is significant disagreement pertaining to policy or leadership. For democracy to survive, most individuals in a society must agree to abide by the rules of the game and accept that their policy or leadership preferences will not always prevail.

Proper institutions are also critical for the success of democracy. As expected, empirical research reports a strong correlation between the development of the appropriate institutions and institutional arrangements, on the one hand, and, on the other, the success or failure of democratic transitions around the globe (Stepan & Skach, 1993). But proper institutions, while necessary, are not sufficient for successful democratization. Rose, Mishler, and Haerpfer (1998) suggest in this connection that the relationship between institutional arrangements and citizen attitudes is comparable to the relationship between hardware and software in the working of a computer, democratic institutions being the hardware and public support for democracy being the software. Thus, again, though also not sufficient, public support for democratic governance is essential for the functioning and long-term survival of a democratic political system.

While public support for democracy tends to be reasonably stable in consolidated democracies, the stability of attitudes toward democracy in non-democratic or transitioning societies is less well understood. In cases where citizens are experiencing elements of the democratic process for the first time, attitudes toward democracy are likely to vary as a function

of the perception of these experiences; and this is particularly important since building or maintaining support for democratic governance is necessary if democratic transitions are ultimately to succeed and be consolidated. Yet the extent to which experiences and perceptions contribute to this variation, either increasing or diminishing the belief among ordinary citizens that democracy, despite its flaws, is the best form of government, remains largely unexplored with individual-level data from non-democratic countries.

The present article addresses this gap in our understanding of variation over time in support for democracy among citizens in countries that are not consolidated democracies. It uses data from original and nationally representative political attitude surveys carried out in Algeria in 2002, 2004 and 2006 to test hypotheses about the explanatory power of experiences associated with democratization. More specifically, it investigates whether and how the attitudes toward democracy held by ordinary Algerians are affected by perceptions of a national election, the most basic institution associated with democracy.<sup>1</sup>

### **Support for Democracy and the Democratic Transition**

While the existence of democratic attitudes and values is important for democratic consolidation, there is disagreement about the process and timing according to which these are produced. It has long been argued that democratization tends to be elite-driven (Rustow, 1970); it is among elites that democratic norms are first likely to take hold and on whom the initiation of a democratic transition is likely to depend. Among non-elites, by contrast, democratic attitudes and values are said to develop in response to the events and experiences of this transition. Therefore, a democratic culture is not a pre-condition for a democratic transition, as some have suggested (Huntington, 1993, p. 13). Rather, according to this argument, an elite-led transition

involving the reform of political institutions and the gradual introduction of democratic procedures are themselves important determinants of the normative orientations required for consolidation and survival (Rose, 1997, p. 98; Schmitter & Karl, 1993, p. 47).

The assertion that pro-democracy attitudes lag among non-elites and for the most part emerge *during* a democratic transition is not supported by empirical evidence, however. Data from the World Values Survey indicate that stated support for democracy is widespread and remains high in non-democratic countries among almost all segments of society. Indeed, this support is often higher than in consolidated democracies (Inglehart, 2003). Widespread popular support for democracy is also reported in studies based on surveys in the Arab world (Tessler & Gao, 2005). Even though there is some variation and imprecision in the way that democracy is understood by ordinary citizens (Jamal & Tessler, 2008), there is broad public in support for democracy in countries where there has not been significant democratization or political reform.

Support for democracy in undemocratic or quasi-democratic countries probably reflects discontent with the status quo and a desire for a system of government that provides for greater political accountability and responsiveness to ordinary citizens. This support may be somewhat tenuous, however. If this is indeed the case, and if actions and experiences that purport to promote or represent progress toward democracy do not lead to a perceived improvement in the political or economic situation, citizens may begin to question the belief that they and their country would be well-served by a democratic political system.

Research in post-Communist Eastern Europe provides support for this proposition. Rose et al. (1998) report that evaluations of the former Communist regime are heavily influenced by demographic factors and personal circumstances, such as education, urbanization, economic status, and income. Assessments of performance are relatively unimportant. Evaluations of the

new regime, by contrast, are highly dependent on perceived performance in both political and economic realms. Individuals who have favorable opinions about economic policy and the political situation are disproportionately likely to prefer the new democratic regime to the previous, undemocratic alternative. Level of support for democracy is thus determined to a significant degree by judgments about whether democracy is meeting expectations. Chang, Chu, and Park (2007) reach similar findings in transitioning East Asian countries.

These theoretical and empirical observations suggest that individual-level support for democracy in non-democratic countries is a dynamic phenomenon and that it increases or decreases as a function of experiences and perceptions relating the workings of democratic institutions and procedures. If a democratic political system is well-established, support for democracy may be relatively stable. On the other hand, in cases where citizens have had little direct experience with democracy, or in which democratic institutions are new and only beginning to take form, attitudes toward democracy may be less stable and may vary in response to important events.

### **Elections and Support for Democracy**

Elections are generally considered to be one of the most basic and important institutions of democratic governance. In fact, Schumpeter's (1962) minimalist definition of democracy focuses solely on the existence of competitive elections. However, free and fair elections are often a new experience for the citizens of non-democratic countries. While they may have experienced elections previously, elections in authoritarian systems are almost always controlled, manipulated or otherwise not genuinely competitive (Brooker, 2000). Thus, in the context of a democratic transition, in which a supposedly free and fair election is often the first institution of

democratic governance that the public experiences (Huntington, 1993), the judgments that people make about this election may have a significant effect on levels of support for democracy.

Additionally, elections in new or emerging democracies are likely to be particularly critical. Bratton, Mattes, and Gyimah-Boadi (2005) argue, for example, that in transitioning systems elections help determine which party is able to create formal institutions and determine the way these institutions function. These decisions greatly affect the nature of the political system, meaning that the first few elections have higher stakes than those that take place after democracy has become institutionalized (see also Benoit 2004; O'Donnell & Schmitter, 1986; Oates, Miller, & Gordeland, 2001). Further, patronage is more common in non-democratic or transitioning countries, and the outcome of elections can thus heavily skew the distribution of state resources (see also Lust-Okar, 2009). As such, Bratton et al. (2005) conclude that elections may be polarizing in new democracies or transitioning countries, particularly if they are not judged to be genuinely free and fair.

While the preceding suggests that the electoral *outcomes* are the key element of elections, others argue that the election *process* may be as important, if not more so. As explained by Sisk and Reynolds (1998, pp. 13-4):

The election process is often misperceived as a rather simple, single-moment, horse race-type event—the actual balloting and the intriguing issue of who ‘wins’ and who ‘loses’—rather than as a varied set of events and decisions leading up to elections that have long-lasting consequences once the proverbial dust has settled.

While the election may help define which party or faction assumes power, the election process defines the arena of political contestation and establishes the rules of the political game, and it thus has important implications beyond the final vote count. If a group finds that it has been

excluded from participating in a political process that is said to be “democratic,” or at least believes it has been unfairly disadvantaged in comparison to others, then support for democracy is likely to diminish among its adherents. Accordingly, quite apart from the outcome of an election, the way that individuals or groups experience and assess the electoral process is likely to have an important impact on support for democracy in a transitioning country.

The limited empirical evidence that exists about the importance of the electoral process in transitioning countries offers some support to this assessment. In a paper using data from the Afrobarometer, Moehler (2005) finds that the quality of the electoral process is a critical determinant of the way that supporters of the losing party evaluate the legitimacy of the election. When the process is viewed as free and fair, she reports, there is a smaller gap in the perceived legitimacy of the outcome of the election between those supporting the winning and losing parties.

In sum, the existing literature suggests that judgments about the electoral process, as well as and perhaps even more than electoral outcomes, are an important factor in determining the legitimacy of an election and of the regime. However, there remains no empirical evidence bearing directly on the relationship between electoral experience and an individual’s level of support for democracy. If this additional link could be demonstrated it would imply that there is a greater and longer-term effect on individuals than the existing literature has found to date. Examining this possible link thus represents an important area for investigation. In particular, it is important to determine whether the substantial support for democracy that exists in many undemocratic countries either persists or diminishes as a result of the way that citizens experience and evaluate elections that the country’s leaders associate with movement toward democracy. Toward this end, the analysis to be presented will test the following hypothesis:

In a non-consolidated democracy, support for democracy will decrease among individuals who perceive an election to be less free and fair.

### **The Algerian Case**

We examine the case of Algeria in order to evaluate the effect of the perceived quality of an election on support for democracy. While Algeria is not generally considered a democracy (Freedom House, 2006), by all accounts the 2004 presidential election was considered to be more competitive than previous elections (Holm, 2005; McGee, 2004; Szmolka, 2006).<sup>2</sup> Unlike in the past, the armed forces stated their neutrality rather than supporting a presidential candidate. As such, when the election was first announced, it appeared to most Algerians that this process would be the most open election they had ever experienced. While the election process proved to have significant shortcomings, this change still represented a major break from past elections in Algeria. Moreover, it is also one of the few cases for which there exist survey data collected both before and after an election of this nature. Thus, these data provide an unusual opportunity to test the effect of an election on support for democracy in a non-democratic setting.

In this election the incumbent candidate, President Abdelaziz Bouteflika, was seeking reelection. During his first term from 1999 to 2004, Bouteflika had proved to be a capable and popular leader (Bouandel, 2002 ; Martín 2003). He brought Algeria's prolonged civil war to an official end and was given credit for creating an amnesty program for all but the worst offenders in the conflict. In addition, the rising price of hydrocarbons on the world market during this period stabilized Algeria's previously weak economy. On the other hand, Bouteflika's presidency was marked by strains with certain elements of the military establishment, largely

because he had governed more independently than military leaders expected when they gave their blessing to his candidacy in the elections of 1999.

Partially as a result, as noted above, the military announced not only that it was not endorsing Bouteflika's bid for reelection in 2004, but also that it would also not support any other candidate. Even more important, military leaders stated they would accept the election of any candidate, even an Islamist. Given the military's involvement in the political realm since independence, this announcement led to hope in Algeria that this election would be the most free and fair in the country's history (Bouandel, 2004).

Nine candidates declared their intention to enter the 2004 race, representing a wide variety of parties and ideologies. One of these, Ahmed Taleb Ibrahimi, was believed to be the strongest potential challenger to Bouteflika. Ibrahimi, generally considered to be a moderate Islamist, commanded widespread popularity throughout many segments of Algerian society. In fact, despite having withdrawn from the 1999 presidential election, he still received 1.2 million votes (12.5% of the valid vote) and finished second in the balloting of that year. Thus, in light of Bouteflika's general popularity and the relative weakness of the other candidates running in 2004, many observers believed that Ibrahimi was the only candidate who could garner enough support to at least force a second round of elections (Cook, 2004).

Ibrahimi was prevented from running, however, as were two other candidates who had submitted the necessary documentation to the Constitutions Commission. In the case of Ibrahimi, the Commission claimed that he had not collected the required 75,000 signatures because many of the approximately 90,000 signatures presented by his supporters were invalid. Given his popularity, this seemed implausible and it was widely suggested that the actual reason for the Commission's action was Ibrahimi's alleged links to the banned Islamic Salvation Front

(FIS), the group that had won the first round of balloting in the 1991 elections. Ibrahimi's exclusion on these grounds led many to conclude that there had been interference from Bouteflika, who was responsible for appointing the Constitutional Commission. Further, the perception of bias increased after the election when it turned out that one candidate had received less than 64,000 votes, more than 10,000 fewer than the number of signatures his supporters had submitted to the Constitutional Commission to have him placed on the ballot (Bouandel 2004).

One Islamist candidate, Abdallah Djaballah of the Movement for National Reform, was permitted to run. He was not considered a serious contender for the presidency, however. In the absence of Ibrahimi, Bouteflika's main challenger was Ali Benflis, a former Prime Minister and a close ally of Bouteflika prior to their falling out in 2003. Although Benflis heavily criticized Bouteflika and his policies throughout the campaign, these attacks were seen as empty given that the two had been close allies until only a year before the election. As such, some observers suggest that many Algerians came to view Benflis as a traitor and not a viable alternative for president (Bouandel, 2004).

Overall, the campaign period was generally quite lively, despite the existence of significant advantages in media coverage for Bouteflika. Although opposition candidates refused their allotted airtime on government television, citing bias, many bought airtime on popular satellite stations. Additionally, while government newspapers endorsed Bouteflika, many private newspapers were highly critical of the President and openly endorsed opposition candidates and covered their activities. Thus, there was a clear division within the press and information about each major candidate was readily available to the public (Pierre-Louveaux, 2004).

The election took place on April 8, 2004 with an official participation rate of 58.1% of the electorate. Approximately 130 international observers were present, and most concluded that no significant irregularities took place on election day. As was expected, Bouteflika won election in the first round; however, the margin of his victory surprised most observers: Bouteflika won 84.99% of the valid vote, a significantly higher percentage than had been expected. Benflis finished in second place with only 6.4% of the vote and Djaballah finished third with 5.0% of the vote. No other candidate won more than 2% of the valid vote. Bouteflika also won an outright majority in all provinces except for the two with a Berber majority.

In spite of the overwhelming margin of victory and claims to the contrary by losing candidates, it was generally accepted by local and international observers that the process on the election day itself had been largely free and fair, and that any minor irregularities that did exist would certainly not have altered the outcome (Bouandel, 2004; Dillman, 2005 ; Pierre-Louveau, 2004). This fact, combined with the neutrality of the armed forces, the inclusion of all but one major opposition candidates, and the lively campaign period, makes it reasonable to conclude that for Algerians, the 2004 election represented the most competitive complete election in history.

However, despite this improvement over previous elections, the nature of the electoral process was well short of being fully free and fair. Most notably, the exclusion of Ibrahimi, one of the most important candidates, meant that the election was not fully competitive. Thus, while some ordinary Algerians may have believed that the election was reasonably free and fair, particularly in light of the positive statements by internal and external observers, it is likely that Ibrahimi's supporters would view the election as being less free and fair than would other members of society.

## **Data and Measures**

As discussed above, the analysis to follow will examine the following hypothesis:

H<sub>1</sub>: In a non-consolidated democracy, support for democracy will decrease among individuals who perceive an election to be less free and fair.

**Data.** The first test of this hypothesis employs data from original public opinion surveys conducted in Algeria 2002 and 2004. With guidance from one of the present authors, both surveys involved face-to-face interviews with representative national samples of adults over the age of 18. The 2002 survey was conducted by a team of scholars at the University of Algiers as part of the World Values Survey. It used the standard WVS interview schedule but also added a number of country-specific items. The second survey was conducted by the same team and was funded by a grant from the National Science Foundation (NSF). This survey used an instrument that was more narrowly focused on issues related to democracy and governance. Many of the same items appeared in both surveys, however, although in some cases the 2004 survey modified slightly the wording of items from the 2002 survey. In both surveys, stratified random sampling was used to select *communes*, the equivalent of counties in the U.S. Quotas based on age and sex, informed by the 1998 national census, were employed to select respondents at the *commune* level. The first survey was conducted in late spring 2002 and a total of 1,282 men and women were interviewed. The second survey was conducted in the summer of 2004 and a total of 1,446 men and women were interviewed.

**Dependent Variable.** To measure the dependent variable, support for democracy, a two item scale was created from the following items which were highly correlated for each year:

To what extent do you agree/disagree with the following statements?

Democracy may have its problems but is better than any other form of government. (Strongly agree, agree, disagree, strongly disagree)

I'm going to describe various types of political systems and ask what you think about each as a way of governing Algeria. For each one, would you say it is a very good, fairly good, fairly bad or very bad way of governing Algeria?

Democratic political system. (Very good, good, bad, very bad)

These items were combined into a dichotomous measure with one (1) representing a higher level of support for democracy and zero (0) a lower level of support for democracy. Since the two items are strongly correlated in both surveys (2002:  $r=.511$ ; 2004:  $r=.444$ ), there are relatively few individuals who strongly agree or agree with one item and strongly disagree or disagree with the other. Nevertheless, the measure was constructed such that individuals who answered agree or strongly agree to both items were coded as having a higher level of support for democracy and individuals who said disagree or strongly disagree to one or both items were coded as having a lower support for democracy. This coding was used to ensure that individuals who responded inconsistently about their support for democracy were not included as being more highly supportive of this system of governance. The distributions for this dependent variable are presented in Table 1.

(Table 1 about here)

***Hypothesis 1.*** While it would be possible to try to test of  $H_1$  by evaluating whether an individual's rating of the fairness of the election was correlated with a lower level of support for democracy in a post-election survey, in reality this test would not be sufficient to determine whether a less favorable evaluation of the election led to a decrease in support for democracy. Rather, it might be that individuals who were less supportive of democracy *before* the election were predisposed to believe that the election was not free and fair. As a result, although a variable measuring the perceived quality of the election might be correlated with support for democracy, this finding would not be logically sufficient to conclude that perceptions about the election had independent explanatory power and represented a causal factor in this relationship.

Properly evaluating this hypothesis would ideally require a comparison of attitudes about democracy measured both before and after the election among the same set of respondents in order to see whether there was a change, presumably due to the perceived nature of the election. However, given that panel data do not exist for Algeria, it is not possible to compare each respondent's level of support for democracy in 2002 to his or her level in 2004 and then evaluate whether any change was due to his or her perception about the fairness of the election. An alternative procedure has thus been employed to see whether level of support for democracy changed because of the way the election was perceived.

To test  $H_1$ , we compare the level of support for democracy, both before and after the election, of those who would and those who would not be likely to have a less favorable view of the election as it actually turned out. If it can be shown that those who support candidates or policies that were excluded from the election, and thus may be presumed to have a less favorable

view of the election, were *not* less supportive of democracy than others before the election but *were* less supportive than others after the election, such a finding would lend substantial support to H<sub>1</sub>. Given the nature of the 2004 Algerian election, our analysis thus compares the views of Algerians who did and Algerians who did not favor Ahmed Taleb Ibrahimi and his Islamist platform, which were excluded from the electoral process.

Individuals who are supportive of political Islam were almost certainly inclined to favor Ibrahimi over other candidates, or at least to favor him much more frequently than other respondents; and given his unfair exclusion from the election, Algerians who support political Islam would be less likely than others to view the 2004 election as free and fair. Accordingly, although no item asking about candidate preference was included in either the 2002 or the 2004 survey, support for political Islam may be employed as a credible proxy measure of a preference for Ibrahimi and, in turn, of a less favorable view of the 2004 election. The following item, present in both the 2002 and 2004 interview schedules, is used to operationalize support for political Islam:

How much do you agree or disagree with each of the following statement?

Religious leaders should have no influence over the decisions of the government. (strongly agree, agree, neither agree nor disagree, disagree, strongly disagree)

Although the interview schedules contained other items pertaining to political Islam, this item was selected because it has high face validity and because it captures the significant variation that exists in respondent attitudes toward political Islam. It was not combined with other items to form an index in order to minimize missing data, although it does correlate very strongly with other items asking about the role of Islam in political affairs, thereby offering additional evidence of validity and reliability.

*Control Variables.* Standard demographic attributes—education, income, sex, and age—are included as control variables. In addition, however, given the temporal dimension of the research design, variables pertaining to events that could also account for any differences between 2002 and 2004 must be included as controls. After all, by examining whether there is a change over time in the relationship between support for democracy and support for political Islam, our proxy measure of dissatisfaction with the election, we are assuming that the event most likely to account for any difference in findings from the two points in time is in fact the election. But it is possible that differences, if any, are the result of some other event or events that took place between 2002 and 2004.

Considering the short time between surveys—two years—it is unlikely that this relationship would change significantly without some external impetus. But there is an external event that could possibly have had an impact on Algerian attitudes toward democracy during the 2002-2004 period: the US invasion of Iraq in spring 2003. This possibility is due to the fact that the Administration of U.S. President George W. Bush asserted that its invasion and occupation of Iraq was as part of a campaign to advance democracy in the Middle East. The war in Iraq has for the most part been extremely unpopular in the Arab world, as is U.S. foreign policy more generally; and some analysts have therefore suggested that U.S. actions have spawned a backlash that is leading many ordinary citizens to question whether democracy is appropriate for their country (Carothers, 2006). Since it is possible that attitudes toward democracy among men and women in the Arab world, including Algeria, will be influenced by the judgments they make about this U.S. campaign, and more specifically since there is a chance that disillusionment with

the Iraq war and the US policy reduced support for democracy among ordinary citizens between 2002 and 2004, it is necessary to control for this possibility.

The following item will be used to measure attitudes toward U.S. actions in the region:  
Now, would you please tell me whether you agree or disagree with each of the following statements about the United States and other countries?

U.S policies toward other countries are good and some U.S policies toward other countries are bad. (Agree, disagree: almost all U.S. foreign policies are good, disagree: almost all U.S. foreign policies are bad)

This item was chosen in part because there was very little variation in response to questions asking specifically about the U.S.-led war in Iraq. By contrast, there is reasonable variation in responses to the question asking about U.S. foreign policy in general, with a significant number of respondents in both the “some are good and some are bad” and the “almost all are bad” categories. Equally important, a question that asks about U.S. foreign policy in general may actually be more valid given the American emphasis on democracy promotion not only as a justification for the war in Iraq but also as a major objective of U.S. policies and actions in the Middle East more broadly. For purposes of the present analysis, the item was recoded to create an ordinal measure: (1) Disagree: almost all U.S. foreign policies are good; (2) Agree; (3) Disagree: almost all U.S. foreign policies are bad.

### **Multiple Regression Analysis**

Given the dichotomous nature of the dependent variable, a logistic regression technique is used to estimate the model by which  $H_1$  is tested. The results of this model, with all variables standardized, are presented in Table 2.

(Table 2 about here)

The results for 2002 indicate that democracy is equally supported among all the groups included in the model. In the case of support for political Islam, while the sign of the coefficient suggests that these individuals are somewhat less likely to be supportive of democracy, this finding is not significant at standard levels. Thus, it is not possible to reject the null hypothesis that support for political Islam has no effect on support for democracy. Similarly, the coefficients for the five control variables are not significant. Accordingly, using 2002 as a baseline point prior to the 2004 election, it is evident that support for democracy was generally equal (and high) across the diverse strata of Algerian society. This finding is not unexpected given that prior research has reported widespread support for democracy in non-democratic countries.

Comparing the results from 2002 to those from 2004 reveals an important difference. In 2004, individuals who are more supportive of political Islam are less likely to support democracy at the standard 0.01 level of significance. This finding offers support for  $H_1$ , as it is a dramatic change from the relationship observed in 2002. Considering the short time between the two surveys, these findings strongly suggest that the robust inverse relationship observed in 2004, in contrast to the absence of a significant relationship in 2002, is the result of disillusion among those who support political Islam caused by the exclusion of their preferred candidate from the 2004 balloting. While indirect, this finding offers evidence for the proposition that support for democracy in a non-democratic setting will decline among the adherents of a group or movement who believe their candidates or platform have been treated unfairly by institutions or procedures associated with democratization.

Among the control variables only one, sex, is significant in 2004. In that year, women were significantly more likely than men to be supportive of democracy. This finding is largely unexpected, although a closer examination of events in Algeria suggests a plausible and instructive explanation. Changes to the 1984 Family Code were proposed during this period. Under the 1984 law, women were given a legal status similar to minors, placing them under the legal guardianship of a husband or male relative (Salhi, 2003). Many women's groups sought to change this law and were undertaking a campaign for this purpose at the time of the 2002 and 2004 surveys; and during the 2004 election campaign President Bouteflika pledged to amend the law during his next term in office (Rachidi, 2007). These developments may have led women, to a greater degree than men, to believe that democratization was making the political system more responsive to their concerns. In other words, just as support for democracy declined disproportionately among supporters of political Islam because these individuals were less satisfied with the results of democratization, support for democracy increased disproportionately among women because this category of the population was more satisfied with the results of perceived democratization. The finding about sex is thus consistent with  $H_1$  and increases our confidence in concluding from Table 2 that judgments about an election in a country that is not democratic have a significant impact on the attitudes toward democracy held by the citizens of that country.

### **An Additional Test**

Although comparing findings from the 2004 to those from 2002 survey provides support for  $H_1$ , the test was indirect since it was necessary to use a proxy measure for the independent variable. This limitation can be addressed by using data from a representative national survey

conducted in Algeria in 2006 as part of the Arab Barometer project. The survey was carried out by the same team at the University of Algiers that conducted the 2002 and 2004 surveys, and the same sampling method was employed as well. The 2006 interview schedule included the same items used in earlier surveys to measure support for democracy and support for political Islam.<sup>3</sup> In addition, however, it also included the following item asking about the quality of the 2004 election:

On the whole, how would you rate the freeness and fairness of the last national election, held in April 2004? Was it: completely free and fair, free and fair but with minor problems, free and fair with major problems, not free or fair.

In order to evaluate  $H_1$  more rigorously, it is necessary to conduct a direct test. This can be done by generating two separate models using the data from 2006. The first of these models replicates the model from 2002 and 2004. If support for political Islam is negatively correlated with support for democracy at a significant level in 2006, then this finding would mirror the results from the 2004 survey and increase our confidence in these results.

More importantly, however, it would allow for a direct test of the hypothesis by examining the results of revised model that includes not only the same variables but also an item that asks directly about the perceived quality of the election. If the hypothesis is correct, and if support for political Islam is indeed a valid proxy for a belief that the 2004 election was unfair, then two results are expected. First, the variable for electoral quality should be inversely related to the dependent variable at a significant level. Second, because this variable captures the variation on the dependent variable better than the proxy variable, the proxy variable should no longer be statistically significant. If this is in fact the case, then we can conclude that support for

political Islam was a valid proxy for perceived electoral quality. More importantly, this finding would demonstrate the changes in the relationship between support for democracy and support for political Islam before and after the election are in reality due to differences in perception of the quality of the election.

While it is possible to replicate the previous model using the 2006 survey, one difference should be noted regarding the survey instrument. Although the same items were used for six of the seven variables included in Table 2, the 2006 survey instrument did not contain the item that was used to measure attitudes toward U.S. foreign policy in 2002 and 2004. Accordingly, the following item was used in the analysis of the 2006 data:

Do you agree with the following statement: US democracy promotion in the region has been successful (Strongly agree, agree, disagree, strongly disagree)

Although different than the item used previously, this question captures views about U.S. foreign policy toward the Arab world and represents a similar control for the possibility that U.S. democracy promotion efforts could have affected support for democracy in Algeria, especially among supporters of political Islam.

Two logistic regression models are estimated in order to perform the test described above. The first model, 2006a, replicates the 2002 and 2004 analyses with data from 2006. The second model, 2006b, is a re-estimation with the item measuring electoral quality added to the analysis. The results of both models are presented in Table 3.

(Table 3 about here)

The results from model 2006a offer confirmation of the relationships found in 2004. Once again, there is a significant and inverse relationship between support for political Islam and support for democracy and again attitudes toward U.S. foreign policy are unrelated to support for democracy. Importantly, this replication increases confidence that  $H_1$  should be accepted—that support for democracy in undemocratic or transitioning countries will decline among individuals who believe the candidates or platforms they favor have been treated unfairly in an election.

In model 2006b, the independent variable pertaining to the quality of the election is significant at the 0.01 level, while support for political Islam is no longer statistically significant. Most relationships involving other variables remain unchanged. Model 2006b represents a direct test of  $H_1$ , rather than one in which a proxy measure of dissatisfaction with the electoral process is employed. The findings demonstrate that perceived electoral quality is inversely related to support for democracy and significant at the 0.01 level. This result offers strong confirmation of the hypothesis that views about the quality of an election have a significant impact on support for democracy in a country like Algeria. Moreover, support for political Islam loses its explanatory power in model 2006b since its function as a proxy measure is no longer necessary given the presence of a direct measure of perceived electoral quality. This finding indicates that support for political Islam was an appropriate proxy for views regarding the quality of the election and further implies that its relationship to support for democracy in the 2004 model did indeed reflect discontent with the conduct of the election that year among this group of respondents.

There are two additional items of interest. First, it should be noted that female sex is no longer significantly related to support for democracy, as it was in 2004. Although the Family Code was amended in 2005, as Bouteflika had promised during the 2004 election campaign, major women's groups claim the amendment introduced only minor changes. For example,

rather than needing the approval of a specific male relative to marry, a woman may now choose the required male guardian. Thus, as one leading women's rights advocate stated, "This amendment is throwing dust into people's eyes in order to say that President Bouteflika has done something" (Rachidi, 2007). For this reason, women in 2006 may no longer have viewed the electoral process as an effective vehicle for advancing their agenda and, accordingly, be more likely than men to express support for democracy.

Second, despite using an item that more directly measures views about U.S. democracy promotion in the region, this variable remained insignificant at standard levels of significance. However, the sign on the coefficient estimate indicates that individuals who are more supportive of U.S. democracy promotion efforts are at least somewhat more likely to be supportive of democracy as well. This result casts some doubt on the claim that U.S. efforts negatively affect support for democracy.

### **Conclusion and Suggestions for Further Research**

Taken together, these findings clearly demonstrate that in non-democratic or transitioning countries the way an individual evaluates an election, a key institution of democracy, affects his or her general attitude towards democracy. Citizens who believe the electoral process to be free and fair are more likely to continue to be more supportive of democracy, while those who believe the process to be fraudulent become less supportive. Thus, the present study strongly suggests that experience with institutions and procedures associated with a democratic transition directly affects support for democracy in non-consolidated democracies.

More specifically, the present study suggests that the importance of elections in non-democratic countries lies less in the role they play in building popular support for democracy

than in their ability to undermine support for democracy if they are not perceived to be free and fair. International actors, including the U.S., as well as many NGOs, have pressed for elections in the Arab world and elsewhere. If these elections are controlled or manipulated, however, or at least are thus perceived, they have the potential to hinder rather than advance democratization. For this reason, groups pressing for elections in undemocratic or quasi-democratic countries should understand that a seriously flawed election may in some cases be worse than no election at all.

Our findings also suggest three additional insights, one pertaining to the stability of attitudes toward democracy, one pertaining to the relationship between democracy and political Islam, and one pertaining to the role of domestic and international factors in shaping attitudes toward democracy. With respect to the former, the present study suggests that support for democracy in authoritarian systems is widespread but shallow, which is consistent with findings from sub-Saharan Africa (see Bratton, 2002; Bratton & Mattes, 2001). While support for democracy was high among all categories of respondents in Algeria in 2002, this was less so in 2004 and 2006, indicating that attitudes toward democracy are not entirely stable and can in fact change over a short period of time in response to specific events.

With respect to the relationship between political Islam and democracy, our findings are consistent with previous research showing that attitudes toward Islam have little impact on attitudes toward democracy (Jamal & Tessler, 2008; Tessler, 2002). Although some have argued that Islam impedes democratic development, empirical investigations at the individual level of analysis have consistently reported that religious orientations are not important determinants of attitudes toward governance in Muslim-majority countries. The present study shows that if citizens who favor political Islam believe their candidates and platform are not treated fairly by institutions associated with democracy, a decline in support for democracy among this

significant and often quite large category of the population is the likely result. But it is the perceived unfairness of the electoral process, not the attachment to political Islam, that carries the explanatory power. Thus, as our analysis strongly suggests, there is no reason to think that those who support political Islam will be unsupportive of democracy, or unwilling to respect the rules of the game, if they believe that all are treated fairly by democratic institutions.

A final insight suggested by our findings is that domestic politics has a much greater effect on support for democracy than events of an international or regional nature. For each of the three years for which data were available, representing a period during which United States was deeply involved in the Middle East, assessments of American foreign policy were unrelated to support for democracy. Accordingly, although some analysts have suggested that U.S. policy has contaminated the notion of democracy and reduced support for democratic governance, it appears, at least in the case of Algeria, that this argument is not correct. Whether regional and international developments of a different character would have more of an impact is a subject for future research. Nonetheless, the present study lends strong support to the view that events in the domestic political arena play a much more important role in building or diminishing the popular support for democracy that is necessary for the consolidation and survival of a democratic transition.

Future research should continue to trace the electoral process in Algeria, not only for purposes of replication but also to determine whether the impact of one election is reinforced or modified by subsequent elections and whether different kinds of elections have a similar or different impact on political attitudes about governance and democracy. Equally important, future studies should also investigate whether and how elections affect support for democracy in other political settings. This will shed light on the generalizeability of the findings from Algeria.

It will also offer insights about whether the connection between electoral experience and citizen attitudes varies as a function of degree of democracy, the partisan map, the electoral system, or other factors that may condition the way that elections and other events associated with democratization either strengthen or weaken the popular support for democracy that is necessary for democratic consolidation and survival.

## References

- Benoit, K. (2004). Models of electoral system change. *Electoral Studies*, 23, 363-389.
- Bouandel, Y. (2002). Algeria: A controversial election. *Mediterranean Politics*, 7, 96-104.
- Bouandel, Y. (2003). Political parties and the transition from authoritarianism:  
The case of Algeria. *Journal of Modern African Studies*, 41, 1-22.
- Bouandel, Y. (2004). Algeria's presidential election of 2004. *Third World Quarterly*, 25, 1525-40.
- Bouandel, Y. (2005). Reforming the Algerian electoral system. *Journal of Modern African Studies*, 43, 393-415.
- Bratton, M. (2002). Wide but shallow: Popular support for democracy in Africa. Afrobarometer Working Paper No. 19 (August). Retrieved from <http://www.afrobarometer.org/papers/AfropaperNo19.pdf>
- Bratton, M., & Mattes, R. (2001). Support for democracy in Africa: Intrinsic or instrumental. *British Journal of Political Science*, 31, 447-74.
- Bratton, M., Mattes, R., & Gyimah-Boadi, E. (2005). *Public opinion, democracy, and market reform in Africa*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Brooker, P. (2000). *Non-democratic regimes: Theory, government and politics*. New York: St. Martin's Press.
- Carothers, T. (2006). Responding to the democracy promotion backlash. Testimony before Senate Foreign Relations Committee Hearing, June 8, 2006. Retrieved from <http://www.carnegieendowment.org/publications/index.cfm?fa=view&id=18416>

- Chang, Y.T., Chu, Y.H., & Park, C.M. (2007). Authoritarian nostalgia in Asia. *Journal of Democracy*, 18:3, 66-80.
- Cook, S. A. (2004). Algeria's elections: No democratic turning point. *Arab Reform Bulletin*, 2:4. Retrieved from <http://www.carnegieendowment.org/arb/?fa=downloadArticlePDF&article=21293>
- Diamond, L. (1999). *Developing democracy: Toward consolidation*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Dillman, B. (2005). Algeria. In *Countries at the crossroads 2005: A Survey of Democratic Governance*. Washington, DC and Lanham, MD: Freedom House and Rowman & Littlefield Publishers.
- Freedom House. (2006). *Freedom in the world: The annual review of political rights and civil liberties*. Retrieved from <http://www.freedomhouse.org/ratings/index.htm>
- Holm, U. (2005). Algeria: President Bouteflika's second term. *Mediterranean Politics*, 10, 117-22.
- Huntington, S.P. (1993). *The third wave*. Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press.
- Inglehart, R. (2003). How solid is support for democracy and how can we measure it? *PS: Political Science and Politics*, 36, 51-7.
- Lust-Okar, E. (2009). Competitive clientalism in the Middle East. *Journal of Democracy*, 20:3, 122-135.
- McGee, A. (2004). Algeria. In B. George (Ed.), *Security in the Mediterranean and Beyond: A Collection of Essays*. Retrieved from <http://www.rthonbrucegeorgemp.co.uk>

- Martín, I. (2003). Algeria's political economy (1999-2002). *The Journal of North African Studies*, 8, 34-74.
- Moehler, D. (2005). Free and fair or fraudulent and forged: Elections and legitimacy in Africa. Afrobarometer Working Paper No. 55 (December). Retrieved from <http://www.afrobarometer.org/papers/Afropaper55.pdf>
- Oates, S., Miller, W.L., & Gordeland, A. (2001). Towards a soviet past or a socialist future? In P.G. Lewis (Ed.), *Party development and democratic change in post-communist Europe*. Portland, OR: Frank Cass, 16-31.
- O'Donnell, G. & Schmitter, P.C. (Eds.). (1986). *Transitions from authoritarian rule*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Pierre-Louveaux, O. (2004). The presidential elections of the 8th April 2004 in Algeria. In B. George (Ed.), *Security in the Mediterranean and Beyond: A Collection of Essays*, Retrieved from <http://www.rthonbrucegeorgemp.co.uk>
- Rachidi, I. (2007). New law leaves divorced Algerian women homeless. *Women's News Online Edition*, March 4. Retrieved from [www.womensenews.org/article.cfm?aid=3087](http://www.womensenews.org/article.cfm?aid=3087)
- Rose, R. (1997). Where are postcommunist countries going? *Journal of Democracy*, 8:3, 92-108.
- Rose, R., Mishler, W., & Haerpfer, C. (1998). *Democracy and its alternatives: Understanding post-communist regimes*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Rustow, D. (1970). Transitions to democracy: toward a dynamic model. *Comparative Politics*, 2, 337-63.
- Salhi, Z.S. (2003). Algerian women, citizenship, and the 'family code.'" *Gender and Development*, 11, 27-35.

- Schumpeter, J. (1962). *Capitalism, socialism and democracy*. New York: Harper Perennial, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition.
- Schmitter, P., & Karl, T.L. (1993). What democracy is... and is not. In M.F. Plattner and L. Diamond (Eds.), *The global resurgence of democracy*. Washington, DC: Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Sisk, T., & Reynolds, A. (1998). *Elections and conflict management in Africa*. Washington, DC: United States Institute of Peace.
- Stepan, A., & Skach, C. (1993). Constitutional frameworks and democratic consolidation: Parliamentarianism versus presidentialism. *World Politics*, 46, 1-22.
- Szomolka, I. (2006). The Algerian presidential elections of 2004. *Mediterranean Politics*, 11, 39-57.

Table 1:

Distribution of the dependent variable

	<b>2002</b>		<b>2004</b>	
	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent</b>
<b>Low or no support</b>	137	13.4	219	19.0
<b>High or very high support</b>	885	86.6	936	81.0

Table 2  
Logistic Regression with Support for Democracy as Dependent Variable

<i>Variable</i>	<i>2002</i>	<i>2004</i>
Lower Support for Political Islam	.362 (.427)	.926 (.297)***
Lower Support for U.S. Foreign Policy	.116 (.372)	.388 (.311)
Higher Education	-.320 (.510)	-.238 (.404)
Higher Income	.046 (.595)	.650 (.484)
Female Sex	.288 (.241)	.521 (.180)***
Older Age	.362 (.432)	.202 (.300)

Note: Table presents coefficient ( $\beta$ ) estimates with standard errors in parentheses.  
 \*Statistically significant at .1 level. \*\*Statistically significant at .05 level. \*\*\* Statistically significant at .01 level.

Table 3  
Logistic Regression with Support for Democracy as Dependent Variable

<i>Variable</i>	<i>2006a</i>	<i>2006b</i>
Lower Support for Political Islam	.965 (.387)***	.572 (.432)
Higher Rating of Elections		1.021 (.357)***
Lower Support for U.S. Foreign Policy	-.518 (.402)	-.406 (.456)
Higher Education	-.102 (.518)	-.188 (.563)
Higher Income	.536 (.909)	.290 (.963)
Female Sex	.016 (.242)	-.006 (.267)
Older Age	-.980 (.708)	-.788 (.792)

Note: Table presents coefficient ( $\beta$ ) estimates with standard errors in parentheses.

\*Statistically significant at .1 level. \*\*Statistically significant at .05 level. \*\*\* Statistically significant at .01 level.

---

<sup>1</sup> This is not meant to imply that holding elections makes a country democratic, simply that elections are a necessary condition for the establishment of representative democracy.

<sup>2</sup> It should be noted that the initial stage of the 1991 election process was largely free and fair but that its results were nullified and its subsequent rounds were cancelled.

<sup>3</sup> The item used to measure support for political Islam was slightly different in 2006 in that it asked respondents whether or not they agree that religious leaders “should,” as opposed to “should not,” have influence over the decisions of the government. While it is possible that this would have some effect on the univariate response distribution, it should not influence variable relationships involving this item.