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# Power of a Democratic Education

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## **The Power of a Democratic Education**

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### **Abstract:**

Nearly one hundred years ago John Dewey published *Democracy and Education* (1916), arguing that a democratic education was invaluable for imparting democratic values and practices. Since its publication dozens of countries representing a myriad of ethnic communities, religious traditions, and historical experiences have now established democratic governments, allowing us to test Dewey's assertions. This article uses World Values Survey (WVS) data to test how educational experience in a democracy affects political values and behavior. It offers strong evidence that Dewey was correct. Using Hierarchical Linear Modeling the analyses show that education in a democracy has both individual and collective effects on democratic values and behavior, and that models including democratic education have better explanatory power than leading alternatives. Surprisingly, the analyses also reveal that experience in a democracy and a country's level of democracy are largely unable to explain individually-held democratic values and are negatively associated with democratic behavior.

Keywords: democracy, education, John Dewey, political behavior, values, World Values

Surveys

Nearly a century ago John Dewey published *Democracy and Education* (1916) in which he laid a foundation for a progressive philosophy where learning by doing could serve as a key method for the democratic transformation of society. His ideas were studied extensively both in the United States and abroad. Dewey did not believe that democracy was going to be a culturally exclusive product of the West and was active in spreading his philosophy to non-democratic, non-Christian countries, lecturing in Japan at the cusp of the Taishō democracy movement, in China during the May Fourth Movement, and visiting Turkey shortly after the formation of its republic (Dewey 1920; Dewey 1973; Keenan 1977; Wold-Gazo 1996).

While in-depth case studies can illuminate the nuanced role that education plays in the spread of democratic values and practices within a particular society,<sup>1</sup> cross-national datasets that extend over decades allow us to test some of Dewey's philosophical precepts for broader significance. This article uses the World Values Surveys (WVS) to test Dewey's assertion that education plays an important role in the transmission and development of democratic political values and practices within individuals and societies. While it cannot test Dewey's philosophy directly because it lacks sufficient details about particular educational systems and their changes over time, it is able to use WVS data to examine how educational experience within a democratic country affects individual and values and behavior.

Because of the limitations of the WVS dataset, "democratic education" in this article is not as robust a concept as it was for Dewey; it does not require that students be taught freedom of thought, individual expression, self-awareness and actualization, etc.

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<sup>1</sup> For this kind of examination of Japan, see (Haddad 2012)

As it is measured here, “democratic education” is merely educational experience in a democratic country. However, even this minimalist definition proves to be very useful in creating models that help us understand the spread of democratic political values and behavior.

The article begins with a brief overview of the literature on political socialization using survey data. It will then outline the methodology used for the statistical analysis. The bulk of the article will focus on a statistical analysis of WVS data to test how well democratic education explains democratic (a) values and (b) behavior. The discussion section will highlight some of the main findings to emerge from the statistical analyses. Finally, the conclusion will offer some avenues for future research.

### **Creating a Democratic Political Culture**

Political socialization has long been of interest to political scientists, and there exist several robust literatures related to the individual and social acquisition and transmission of political values and practices. One of the first statistical studies to examine the relationship between education and democracy was Seymour Lipset’s 1959 article about the “social requisites of democracy” in which he identified the strong correlation between economic development and democracy at the country level. He argued that education plays an important role in creating a middle class and endowing citizens with the skills they need to create and sustain democracies.

A few years later Gabriel Almond and Sidney Verba’s *The Civic Culture* (1963) claimed that while economic opportunities were important, the development of a civic culture that promoted interpersonal trust, commitment to public institutions, and

participatory attitude toward politics, among other characteristics, was critical to democratization. While they emphasized that civic culture emerges from a complex group of influences including family, school, work, etc., they explicitly studied the extent to which civic participation within schools (e.g., freedom to complain, opportunity to discuss and debate political and social issues, etc.) influenced beliefs and behavior. They found that American schools were much more participatory than other school systems, and that all five countries under study had a general trend toward more participation in schools over time (Almond and Verba 1963, 276). Almond and Verba argued in support of Dewey that these early experiences contributed to the more participatory political culture found in the United States.

Since the creation of the WVS and other similar cross-national surveys of individuals, there have been hundreds, perhaps thousands of research projects that have tested the relationships among demographic, social, and attitudinal factors on a wide variety of social and political values and behaviors. Four sets of factors rise to the top as having the greatest influence over the political values and behavior of interest here.<sup>2</sup>

To date, the first and second most explanatory factors for political values and behavior are the levels of education and income. Starting with Lipset's (1959) original findings, and since corroborated by numerous studies, education and income levels have strong relationships with democratic values and behavior for both individuals and societies. Individuals with higher levels of education and those with higher incomes tend to be more tolerant, to value individual freedom, and to participate in political activities

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<sup>2</sup> Please note that there are also extensive literatures that focus on the role of the family, formative political experiences, etc. which also illuminate important aspects of political socialization. However, since the WVS dataset does not include variables allowing us to test these hypotheses, those research agendas are not discussed here.

such as signing petitions at higher rates than those with lower education and income levels. Societies with higher income and education levels also tend to be more supportive of democratic political values and practices than societies with lower levels of education and income.<sup>3</sup>

A third factor that has been demonstrated to be related to democratic political values and behavior is social capital. Robert Putnam's *Making Democracy Work* (1993) used a careful comparison of the political values and behavior found in northern and southern Italy to show that social capital—the close connections that individuals have with their communities—had a strong relationship with democratic outcomes. Italians living in the south tended to join fewer groups and have looser connections to their communities than those in the north who participated more actively in social organizations in their communities. Putnam found that the higher rates of social joining in the north translated into higher rates of political participation and more democratic values than were found in the south, even in a context of nearly identical political institutions. His book launched a large and fruitful research program on the relationship between social capital, civil society, and democracy.<sup>4</sup>

A fourth set of variables that have been found to be significantly related to political values and participation are demographic characteristics such as urban vs. rural location, gender, and age, but the relationships between these variables and democratic values and practices are more complex. For example, some studies have found that people in large urban areas tend to feel disillusioned and have lower rates of civic

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<sup>3</sup> See (Inglehart 1997) for extensive statistical tests of these factors as well as an excellent review of other related works.

<sup>4</sup> For example (Norton 1995; Schwartz and Pharr 2003; Berman 1997; Bermeo and Nord 2000)

participation than those in smaller cities (Oliver 2000), but others have found that urban environments tend to foster higher levels of participation and often act as the epicenters of democratization movements (Wuthnow 1998; Geddes 1999). Other demographic characteristics such as age and gender have also been found to influence political values and behavior but in ways that are inconsistent; for example, young people are much more likely to participate politically online, but they do not vote as often as older people (Best and Krueger 2005). These demographic variables will be included in the analyses largely as controls.

The two strongest counter-arguments against the hypothesis that democratic education has a significant influence over political values and behavior are (a) that democratic experience rather than democratic education is the most significant factor, and (b) that democratic institutions rather than individual or collective experiences are the most significant. Even following Dewey's theoretical principles of "learning by doing", among the most valuable aspects of a democratic education is experiential—learning what democracy means, how to think and act democratic, by doing democratic things such as listening respectfully to differing opinions, engaging in joint decision-making, holding leaders accountable for actions, having citizens (students) take responsibility for their own futures, etc. Therefore, it is quite possible the most important factor influencing democratic values and behavior is experience in a democracy, not education in a democracy.

A second compelling counter-argument is that the most significant factor influencing political values and behavior in society are the political institutions governing

that society.<sup>5</sup> This hypothesis would expect political values and behavior to correspond very closely with a level of democracy within a country, and much less closely with how much democratic education an individual had received, the proportion of democratically educated people in society, or even the extent of democratic experience of the individual or among the population. These two alternative hypotheses will be tested against the democratic education model in order to discover which is a better fit for explaining individual democratic political values and behavior.

## **Methodology**

The World Values Surveys (WVS) are the most comprehensive cross-national surveys about individual values and behavior currently available. The dataset, which is available for free on their website ([worldvaluessurvey.org](http://worldvaluessurvey.org)), now spans nearly three decades; the surveys were carried out in five waves from 1981-2008. The data are representative national surveys conducted in 97 societies containing almost 90 percent of the world's population, and the aggregate data file contains information from more than 250,000 individual respondents.

The dataset codes a wide variety of political and social values, behaviors, and characteristics. The dataset now contains many "third wave" democracies, so it becomes possible to test the effect of "democracy" as distinct from "democratic education" at both the individual and country levels because in these countries the national institutions may be democratic, but most of the people in the country have no experience with democratic education. Similarly, since the data contain information about an individual's level of

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<sup>5</sup> See (Przeworski 1999) for a spirited defense of the benefits of utilizing a minimalist institutional definition of democracy for analytic purposes.

education, the influence of “democratic education” can be distinguished from overall amount or level of education.

In order to conduct the analyses that follow I created several new variables, which I added to the WVS dataset: 1) a “democratic education” variable which measures the number of years of education an individual has had in a democratic country; 2) an aggregated democratic education variable which was the mean years of democratic education in a given country-wave (wave 1: 1981-1984, wave 2: 1989-1993, wave 3: 1994-1999, wave 4: 1999-2004, wave 5: 2005-2008); 3) a “social capital” variable, which is an index that measures all of the respondent’s organizational membership. 4) An aggregated social capital variable measuring the mean social capital value for a given country-wave; and 5) a “civic engagement” variable that measured active participation and volunteering in civic organizations.

Counter-arguments will be tested using 6) a “democratic experience” variable that measures the years that an individual has lived in a democracy, and 7) an aggregated democratic experience variable that measures the mean democratic experience in a given country-wave. Finally, 8) a “democracy” variable was created to measure the level of democracy in a country in any given year.

Although there are now a number of datasets and ranked lists that measure democracy,<sup>6</sup> I chose to utilize the widely adopted Freedom House data<sup>7</sup> to determine a

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<sup>6</sup> For example, the Polity IV Dataset <http://www.systemicpeace.org/polity/polity4.htm> (accessed February 1, 2011); Democracy Barometer <http://www.democracybarometer.org/baroapp/public/static/index?lang=en> (accessed February 1, 2011); The Economist’s Democracy Index [http://graphics.eiu.com/PDF/Democracy\\_Index\\_2010\\_web.pdf](http://graphics.eiu.com/PDF/Democracy_Index_2010_web.pdf) (accessed February 1, 2011); Global Democracy Ranking <http://www.democracyranking.org/en/>

country's democratic status. Freedom House's methodology centers on political and civil freedom as experienced by individuals, and thus is a good match for the individual-level data gathered by the WVS. Furthermore, while many of the newer datasets do not include data for the entire period contained within the WVS data, Freedom House data go back to 1972, enabling full use of WVS data. From the Freedom House data I created a new variable, "country democracy," where each country-year was assigned a value equal to the combined score of political and civil freedom. After the analyses were run using the Freedom House scores, I ran them again using Polity IV's Autocracy and Democracy scores to test the models for robustness.

In order to code the democratic education of an individual I had to determine a "democratization year" for the country. I coded the year that a country shifted to a Freedom House ranking of "free" and stayed there as the year of democratization. If a country was ranked as "free" for the entire period of Freedom House dataset, then the year that the country established universal suffrage was coded as the year of democratization. Because the cumulative and collective effects of a democratic education are much less theoretically and analytically clear if democracy moves back and forth between democracy and non-democracy, countries that switched from "free" to "partly free" or "not free" in the Freedom House data were coded as "system-missing" for the "democratization year" variable, and thus were excluded from the analyses. For example, Brazil, which is coded by Freedom House as "free" between 1985-1992 and

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(accessed February 1, 2011); World Audit

<http://www.worldaudit.org/democracy.htm> (accessed February 1, 2011).

<sup>7</sup> Freedom House Data is available for free on their website:

<http://www.freedomhouse.org/images/File/FIW%20All%20Scores,%20Countries,%201973-2010.xls> (accessed February 1, 2011).

2002-present was coded as “system-missing” for the democratization year variable and excluded from the analyses.

Although countries that merge democratic and non-democratic countries (such as Germany) or switch back and forth between non-democracy and democracy (such as Brazil) are some of the most interesting locations to study the effect of a democratic education on political values and behavior, the complexities of the cases make them inappropriate for inclusion in a large-n statistical analysis such as this one. In any case, the total number of exclusions for this reason was quite small: of the 97 societies in the WVS, only 9 were excluded for reasons of democracy switching or mergers.<sup>8</sup>

For the purpose of creating the “democratic education” variable I assumed that a child enters formal education at age six. Therefore, for individuals whose entire education was in a democracy (birth year + 6 > year of democratization), DemEdu = age at which respondent finished their education – 6. For individuals who had part, but not all of their education in a democracy (birth year + 6 < year of democratization < birth year + age finished education), then DemEdu = birth year + age finished education – year of democratization. For individuals whose entire education was in a non-democratic country, DemEdu = 0. This democratic education variable was then aggregated by country-wave to capture the contextual effects of democratic education.

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<sup>8</sup> A total of 26 country-years that were present in the WVS dataset were excluded for reasons of missing Freedom House data or democracy-switching: Argentina 1991, 1995, 1999, 2006; Brazil 1991, 1997, 2006; Dominican Republic 1996; Germany 1990, 1997, 1999; Hong Kong 2005; Mali 2007; Malta 1983, 1991, 1999; Northern Ireland 1990; Puerto Rico 1995, 2001; Slovakia 1990, 1991, 1998, 1999; Trinidad and Tobago 2006; Venezuela 1996, 2000.

In order to test the importance of social capital I created a composite “social capital” variable that measured group membership. I included all of the groups for which there were related questions in the WVS.<sup>9</sup> Individuals received a score of 1 for each group to which they “belonged,” or were “active” or “inactive” members, and then I added the scores such that if a respondent belonged to no groups they would have a score of zero, if they belonged to four groups, they would have a score of 4, etc.<sup>10</sup> This variable was also aggregated (split along country-waves as before) to generate a country-level variable of social capital.

In addition to social capital, which is used as an independent variable, I created an index variable for civic engagement, which is used as a dependent variable offering an additional measure of democratic participation. Dewey believed that democratically educated citizens would be civically engaged citizens, so this variable is one measure of that engagement. Rather than including all forms of membership and participation, this variable focused only on active civic engagement. Individuals received a score of 1 for each group in which they were “active” members or for which they performed “volunteer work”, and then I added the scores. Therefore, if a respondent was not an active member

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<sup>9</sup> Social welfare for elderly, religious organization, education/arts/music/culture organization, labor union, political parties, local political actions, human rights organization, conservation/environment/ecology organization, animal rights group, professional associations, youth work, sports or recreation, women’s group, peace movement, organization concerned with health, consumer groups, charitable/humanitarian organization, and other groups.

<sup>10</sup> Scores of 1 (belong) in a064-a079, and scores of 1 or 2 (active or inactive member) for variables a098-a106 in the WVS dataset.

or volunteer in any groups they would have a score of zero, if they were active members or volunteered for four groups, they would have a score of 4, etc.<sup>11</sup>

Using these variables I used Hierarchical Linear Modeling (HLM) to distinguish among the effects of individual-level and country-level variables on individual political values and behavior. For these analyses I employed two levels: a first level consisted of individual respondents and a second level had country-wave as the unit of analysis. For control variables—income, education, town-size, age, and social capital—a country-specific, centered variable was used at the individual level, measuring the effects of individual variation from the country-wave mean.<sup>12</sup> At the country-level, an aggregated variable that generated the mean value of all the individual responses in a given country-wave was utilized. Because of abnormal distributions, the logged mean was used for the education, income, and town size variables. Country-wave was utilized rather than merely country in order to capture differences in the proportion of democratic education and experience in a society over time. Waves were used rather than survey years because they more appropriately represented the survey methodology: one would not expect significantly different proportions of democratic education in a given society between December 31 of one year and January 1 of the next year, but there should be measurable differences in the proportion of society with a democratic education between waves, which were usually conducted in five-year intervals, especially if democratization occurred between one wave and the next.

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<sup>11</sup> Scores of 1 (did voluntary work for) variables a081-a097, and scores of 1 (active member) for variables a098-a106 in the WVS dataset.

<sup>12</sup> For more information about the importance of using centered variables, see (Albright and Marinova, 2010) available online [www.indiana.edu/~statmath/stat/all/hlm/hlm.pdf](http://www.indiana.edu/~statmath/stat/all/hlm/hlm.pdf) (accessed 06/28/2012).

The biggest benefit of utilizing HLM is that it enables the researcher to test the significance of individual-level and country-level effects simultaneously within the same analysis. Additionally, it allows enables the testing of several models against each other, making it possible to discover whether models containing democratic education variables are a better fit than models containing alternative explanatory variables.

The two strongest counter-arguments against the power of democratic education are democratic experience, and democratic institutions. Therefore, all of the HLM models test a model that uses the democratic experience variables against (1) a model with democratic education variables and (2) a model that contains only the level of democracy variable to see which model has greater explanatory power.

### **Democratic Education and Individual Political Values**

This section tests the individual and collective effects of democratic education on individually held political values. Perhaps the most fundamental political value of democracy is that of popular sovereignty, the idea that citizens should be responsible for governing their own societies. Writing nearly a century before Dewey, Alexis DeTocqueville's *Democracy in America* (1832) explicitly discussed the role that education and schools play in inculcating Americans with the democratic value that citizens should do for themselves before relying on governmental authority. His chapter on political associations opens with:

The citizen of the United States is taught from infancy to rely upon his own exertions in order to resist the evils and the difficulties of life; he looks upon the social authority with an eye of mistrust and anxiety, and he claims its assistance

only when he is unable to do without it. This habit may be traced even in the schools, where the children in their games are wont to submit to rules which they have themselves established, and to punish misdemeanors with they have themselves defined.<sup>13</sup>

Dewey reiterates this point in his own writing, “a democratic society repudiates the principle of external authority, it must [therefore] find a substitute in voluntary disposition and interest; these can be created only by education.”<sup>14</sup> Capturing this idea, the WVS asks respondents to place their agreement with two values on a scale, 1 if they “agree completely with the statement on the left,” 2 if they agree with the statement on the right, and a number in between if their views fall in between the two statements. “People should take more responsibility to provide for themselves vs the government should take more responsibility to ensure that everyone is provided for.”

As Dewey (and DeTocqueville) would have expected, individuals with more democratic education favored greater responsibility for the people, and individuals living in countries where people around them had greater democratic education were similarly inclined. Surprisingly, none of the democratic experience variables, nor the level of democracy variable was statistically significant. Among all three models the democratic education model was by far the best fit. The Akaike Information Criterion (aic) statistic for that model was about half of that for the other models.

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<sup>13</sup> *Democracy in America*, Ch. 12 “Political Associations”. Full text can be found online: [http://xroads.virginia.edu/~HYPER/DETOC/1\\_ch12.htm](http://xroads.virginia.edu/~HYPER/DETOC/1_ch12.htm) (accessed July 14, 2012).

<sup>14</sup> *Democracy and Education*, Ch. 7 “The Democratic Conception of Education”. Full text can be found online: [http://www.ilt.columbia.edu/publications/Projects/digitexts/dewey/d\\_e/chapter07.html](http://www.ilt.columbia.edu/publications/Projects/digitexts/dewey/d_e/chapter07.html) (accessed July 14, 2012).

**Table 1: HLM: People vs Government Responsibility (1=people, 10=government)**

	<b>Model 1</b> Democratic Education	<b>Model 2</b> Democratic Experience	<b>Model3:</b> Level of Democracy
<b>DemEdu(centered)</b>	-.01759744**		
<b>CtyDemEdu</b>	-.03711104***		
Income(centered)	-.0200598	-.00941306	-.01994338
Education(centered)	-2278.8066	-3505.8626**	-3084.0352**
TownSize(centered)	-3972.1819*	.53933311***	.46816467***
SocialCap(centered)	-.05657624***	-.05711798***	-.05592893***
Age (centered)	-.00253081	-.00464716**	-.00343382*
Sex	.26921817***	.34769919***	.28725218***
Income (country)	.00521864	-.02016108	.01447285
Education(country)	.14503721*	.7752845	.13379089
TownSize(country)	(omitted)	(omitted)	(omitted)
SocialCap(country)	-.92868897***	-.74466051***	-.71642214***
Age (country)	-.08738702***	-.03588415	-.064435*
<b>DemExp(centered)</b>		.00937834	
<b>CtyDemExp</b>		-.00852581	
<b>Democracy Level</b>	-.06675432	-.07300511	-.05022946
Constant	10.319023***	-.83597135	8.5027944***
Ins1_1_1 _cons	-17.800786*	-2.1753579***	-1.6788403***
Insig_e _cons	1.0425182***	1.0201017***	1.0371617***
Statistics			
AIC	44554.83	57383.639	64524.315
LL	-22261.415	-28675.819	-32248.158

legend: \* p<0.05; \*\* p<0.01; \*\*\* p<0.001

For Dewey, a core component of democratic education is an emphasis on thinking. He scorned education that just taught specific skills or knowledge without teaching students to think, to reflect, to critically assess, to question their experiences. Such unquestioning acceptance of others' values and information "leaves a man at the mercy of his routine habits and of the authoritative control of others, who know what they

are about and who are not especially scrupulous as to the means of achievement. And information severed from thoughtful action is dead, a mind-crushing load.”<sup>15</sup>

While the value of thinking as such is not captured in the WVS, Ronald Inglehart and Christian Welzel have developed an index that captures how much respondents value rational thinking, in tension with how committed they are to traditional values. In *Modernization, Cultural Change and Democracy* (2005) they develop the Traditional/Rational Secular Values Index that measures the importance of values that support rationality, technology, and social equality versus those that support traditional gender and religious values.<sup>16</sup> As Dewey would have expected, the democratic education model does an excellent job predicting a high value placed on rational thinking, and the democratic education model is a better fit than the democratic experience or democratic institution models. Once again, democratic education, both individual and country-levels, have a statistically significant influence over an individual’s values. Democratic experience levels are not statistically significant. Surprisingly, the level of democracy is statistically significant, but has a negative relationship with the index of values: people living in countries with higher levels of democracy have a tendency to favor traditional values rather than rational/secular ones.

**Table 2: HLM—Traditional vs Secular Rational Values** (positive numbers indicate more secular and rational values)

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<sup>15</sup> (Dewey 1916), Chapter 12, [http://www.ilt.columbia.edu/publications/Projects/digitexts/dewey/d\\_e/chapter12.html](http://www.ilt.columbia.edu/publications/Projects/digitexts/dewey/d_e/chapter12.html) (accessed June 28, 2012).

<sup>16</sup> The cultural map of the world is available online: [http://www.worldvaluessurvey.org/wvs/articles/folder\\_published/article\\_base\\_54](http://www.worldvaluessurvey.org/wvs/articles/folder_published/article_base_54) (accessed February 8, 2011).

	<b>Model 1</b> Democratic Education	<b>Model 2</b> Democratic Experience	<b>Model3:</b> Level of Democracy
<b>DemEdu(centered)</b>	.01286248***		
<b>CtyDemEdu</b>	.03368696***		
Income(centered)	-.0019968	-.01104929*	-.00247017
Education(centered)	4948.8031***	6122.974***	5911.386***
TownSize(centered)	-1125.5224	-.830.04069	-1216.8628*
SocialCap(centered)	.03306419***	.02222786***	.02127698***
Age (centered)	-.00628479***	-.00651945***	-.00646024***
Sex	.05153721	.0449683	.04391714
Income (country)	.06514912***	.11072076***	.08661372***
Education(country)	-.08869585**	-.506584**	-.18837258*
TownSize(country)	(omitted)	(omitted)	(omitted)
SocialCap(country)	-.06108887	-.01598422	.00027759
Age (country)	.02359263	.05643472***	.04068166*
<b>DemExp(centered)</b>		-.0110569	
<b>CtyDemExp</b>		.01040796	
<b>Democracy Level</b>	-.13841148***	.06556732	-.10333081***
Constant	.38063089	3.7305462	.81513214
lns1_1_1 _cons	-19.952857**	-20.703044**	-2.2146143***
lnsig_e _cons	-.22662398***	-.20593309***	-.22997474***
Statistics			
AIC	8447.3561	10534.201	11203.708
LL	-4207.6781	-5251.1006	-5587.8539

legend: \* p<0.05; \*\* p<0.01; \*\*\* p<0.001

Although not examined in detail here due to lack of space, the democratic education model also helped explain a wide array of pro-democracy political values in addition to the ones reported in detail here. For example, the democratic education models above were also the best predictors of how much individuals thought that “tolerance and respect for other people” were important qualities to teach children and how much freedom of choice and control people thought they had over their lives.<sup>17</sup>

Additionally, the results given above do not change substantially if one tests the alternative explanations such as the amount of non-democratic education, or the Polity IV’s Democracy and Autocracy variables as opposed to the Freedom House measure of democracy. As John Dewey would have expected, democratic education is a very powerful predictor of individually held political values.

### **Democratic Education and Individual Political Behavior**

For Dewey, action was an essential element for democratic education and citizenship. “The theory of the method of knowing which is advanced in these pages may be termed pragmatic. Its essential feature is to maintain the continuity of knowing with an activity which purposely modifies the environment.”<sup>18</sup> A democratic school system was a place where children inculcated democratic values and then practiced them in a controlled setting. These children would then create the “habits of action” that would contribute to the development of democratic society. Do citizens educated in a

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<sup>17</sup> WVS variables a035 and a173 respectively.

<sup>18</sup> *Democracy and Education* ch. 25. “Theories of Knowledge” can be found online: [http://www.ilt.columbia.edu/publications/Projects/digitexts/dewey/d\\_e/chapter25.html](http://www.ilt.columbia.edu/publications/Projects/digitexts/dewey/d_e/chapter25.html) (accessed July 14, 2012).

democracy engage in democratic “action” more often than those without such educational experience? This section argues that the answer is an emphatic yes.

The WVS asks: “I’m going to read out some different forms of political action that people can take and I’d like you to tell me, for each one, whether you have actually done any of these things, whether you might do it or would never, under any circumstances, do it.” The pattern of responses is exactly what Dewey would expect: People educated in democracies have more often engaged in peaceful political activity and are more willing to engage in it than people without a democratic education, and overall participation and willingness rates rise as the proportion of democratically educated people in society rises. The following is a crosstab result for “signing a petition”, and the pattern is striking: while nearly half of the respondents in non-democratic countries “would never” sign a petition, in countries where a majority has experienced their entire education in a democratic educational system almost seventy percent of respondents have already done so.

In both newer democracies (those where only some respondents have educational experience in a democracy) as well as more mature ones (those where most respondents have had all of their education in a democracy) people with higher proportion of their education in a democracy participate at greater rates than those who have less educational experience in a democracy. This overall pattern of rising willingness and experience with political action is repeated with other peaceful political actions such as “joining in boycotts,” “attending lawful demonstrations,” and “joining unofficial strikes.”

**Table 3: Democratic Education and Signing a Petition Crosstabs<sup>19</sup>**

Proportion of Democratic Education in Country		Democratic Education of Individual			Total
		None	Some	All	
No Democratic Education (undemocratic country)	Have done	<b>16.5%</b>			16.5%
	Might do	35.7%			35.7%
	Would never do	<b>47.8%</b>			47.8%
Some Democratic Education (new democracy)	Have done	<b>23.3%</b>	<b>27.9%</b>	<b>31.6%</b>	24.7%
	Might do	34.4%	37.5%	39.1%	35.3%
	Would never do	42.3%	34.6%	29.4%	39.9%
Majority Has Exclusively Democratic Education (mature democracy)	Have done	<b>47.6%</b>	<b>56.2%</b>	<b>68.0%</b>	67.2%
	Might do	25.5%	28.3%	22.5%	22.7%
	Would never do	<b>26.9%</b>	<b>15.5%</b>	<b>9.5%</b>	10.1%

<sup>19</sup> Total valid cases = 185,971; Chi Square test significant to .000 level in all cases.

Examining petition signing in more detail, an individual's democratic educational experience is positively associated with petition signing: respondents with more democratic educational experience are more likely to have experience signing a petition and be more willing to sign one than those with less educational experience. Collective levels of democratic education are not statistically significant, so an individual's own experience in a democratic educational system seems to matter more than living in a context where he or she is surrounded by people who have a democratic education. As in the previous cases, the democratic education model is a better fit than the alternatives, with a much lower AIC value than the alternative models.

Surprisingly, especially given the crosstab results above, democratic experience and level of democracy do not behave as expected in the HLM models. The level of democracy has a statistically significant *negative* influence on petition signing in the democratic education model, a statistically significant *positive* influence on petition signing in the democratic experience model, and no statistical significance at all if democratic education and democratic experience are omitted from the model. Equally surprising, in the democratic experience model although individual democratic experience and level of democracy behave as expected (more individual experience in a democracy and a higher level of democracy associated with higher willingness and experience signing petitions), the country-level democratic experience has the opposite effect of what is expected—people living in countries where the people around them have higher levels of democratic experience are *less* likely to have signed or be willing to sign petitions. Additionally, in the model without democratic education or experience (Model

3), the level of democracy has no statistically significant effect on individual petition signing behavior.

**Table 4: HLM—Political Action: Signing a Petition** (1= have signed, 2= might sign, 3=would never sign)

	<b>Model 1</b> Democratic Education	<b>Model 2</b> Democratic Experience	<b>Model3:</b> Level of Democracy
<b>DemEdu(centered)</b>	-.00653041***		
<b>CtyDemEdu</b>	-.04099512		
Income(centered)	.01303196**	-.00957781***	.0099456**
Education(centered)	-4594.5897***	-5412.559***	-5424.9008***
TownSize(centered)	-653.16532	.07288831***	-.02053434
SocialCap(centered)	-.05491046***	-.03820766***	-.03757793***
Age (centered)	-.00214327***	.00016532	.00043285
Sex	.02099375	.0057283	.02276741
Income (country)	.03267874	-.00744076	-.06018682
Education(country)	.00385272	-.0395321	.16952976
TownSize(country)	(omitted)	(omitted)	(omitted)
SocialCap(country)	.0349915	-.12102647***	-.1457141
Age (country)	.08085368	-.12113164***	.01304634
<b>DemExp(centered)</b>		.02482773***	
<b>CtyDemExp</b>		-.02423334***	
<b>Democracy Level</b>	.16734601*	-.39721083***	.1009562
Constant	-2.2336558	8.8036198***	-.41059184
lns1_1_1 _cons	-1.3010744***	-20.284306*	-1.3635096***
lnsig_e _cons	-.34744976***	-.37491523***	-.38391612***
Statistics			
AIC	18599.439	23921.341	26354.818
LL	-9283.7193	-11944.671	-13163.409

legend: \* p<0.05; \*\* p<0.01; \*\*\* p<0.001

The WVS also collects information about civic participation that is less explicitly political such as volunteering and “active” participation in a variety of organizations. For Dewey, democratic education was not just supposed to prepare children to engage in directly political action but also become responsible citizens, which for him meant active civic participation. As described above I created a “civic engagement” index variable that measures an individual’s level of civic participation. As Dewey would expect, democratic education significantly influences levels of civic participation. Since the WVS responses used to generate the social capital variable largely overlap with those used to create the civic engagement variable, social capital is excluded from the analysis to avoid endogeneity.

**Table 5: HLM—Civic Engagement** (higher number indicates more civic engagement)

	<b>Model 1</b> Democratic Education	<b>Model 2</b> Democratic Experience	<b>Model3:</b> Level of Democracy
<b>DemEdu(</b> centered)	.0178582***		
<b>CtyDemEdu</b>	.11404441		
Income(centered)	.00961208	.06623716***	.01430968
Education(centered)	2847.8424*	3843.4588***	4211.7288***
TownSize(centered)	1981.6353	-.03258298	-.82016421
Age (centered)	.0007489	.00037357	-.00140203
Sex	-.13926702**	-.09815999**	-.13288448***
Income (country)	.66818955	-.21069172*	.87907267*
Education(country)	-1.8816658	1.9103778***	-2.3102674*
TownSize(country)	(omitted)	(omitted)	(omitted)
Age (country)	-1.1621056***	-.08793567	-1.069944***
<b>DemExp(</b> centered)		-.05729806***	
<b>CtyDemExp</b>		.06024807***	
<b>Democracy Level</b>	-1.7100024***	-.7338326***	-1.6375933***
Constant	74.948633***	-15.040838	75.533402***
lns1_1_1 _cons	.84608114**	-1.0580572**	.72678127**
lnsig_e	.71658669***	.56801078***	.64761441***

<u>cons</u>			
Statistics			
AIC	31872.04	35911.031	42305.183
LL	-15922.02	-17941.515	-21140.592

legend: \* p<0.05; \*\* p<0.01; \*\*\* p<0.001

Once again, the democratic education model is a better predictor of individual-levels of civic participation than either democratic experience or a model that only measures the level of democracy in a country. As expected, individual levels of civic engagements rise as an individual’s democratic education rises.

Unexpectedly, as with petition-signing responses above, collective effects of democratic education are not statistically significant. Additionally, while the overall level of democracy is statistically significant in all of the models, it is in the opposite direction of what would be expected—levels of civic engagement fall as levels of democracy rise. Finally, although country-level experience with democracy tends to encourage civic engagement, individual experience in a democracy tends to discourage it.

## Discussion

This section will discuss (a) the usefulness of the democratic education variable, (b) surprising findings that have emerged from the analyses. Derived from Dewey’s hypotheses concerning the relationship between education and democracy a very simple variable—the amount of education experienced in a democracy—has proven to be a highly robust in explaining a wide array of democracy-related political values and behaviors.

As Dewey would have expected, higher levels of democratic education are

associated with democratic values and behavior. Examined in detail here, democratic education promoted a greater value for citizen responsibility, rational and secular values, willingness to sign petitions, and more civic engagement. Although not examined in detail in this article because of space constraints, the same patterns were also found for other democratic values and behavior such as believing that children be taught tolerance and respect for other people, having high levels of individual freedom and choice in ones own life, and participating in peaceful actions such as joining lawful demonstrations, boycotts, and unofficial strikes.

The democratic education models had the lowest AIC values of all of the models tested, suggesting that the democratic education models were a better fit for explaining the variation in democratic values and practices than the democratic experience or level of democracy models. Additionally, of all of the variables tested, individual experience with democratic education had the most consistent explanatory power—it was statistically significant in the expected direction in all cases.

Dewey would also have expected there to be significant collective-level influences of democratic education. There was some support for this hypothesis, but the findings were less robust than individual-level effects. Country-level effects of democratic education were statistically significant for the democratic values variables but not for the democratic behavior variables. People surrounded by more democratically educated people were more likely to think that people (rather than the government) should take more responsibility to care for themselves, and they also had higher rational and secular values than those living in contexts with less democratically educated people. However, political action such as signing petitions or engaging in volunteering or active

membership in civic organizations was not statistically affected by living in contexts with more democratically educated people.

Surprisingly, democratic experience and levels of democracy were not very helpful in explaining democratic values or behavior. Democratic experience at neither the individual nor the country level had a statistical relationship with any of the democratic values tested. While it was statistically significant in explaining democratic behavior, such as signing petitions and civic engagement, the direction was the opposite of what would have expected—having greater democratic experience and living in contexts where people had greater democratic experience *decreased* the likelihood that the individual would sign petitions or be civically engaged.

Level of democracy in the country was also not very helpful in explaining variation in individual democratic values or behavior. For the models that did not include democratic education or experience, level of democracy was statistically significant for only two variables, and in both cases the relationship was the opposite of what would have been expected: people living in countries with higher levels of democracy were *less* likely to have rational and secular values and tended to be *less* civically engaged than counterparts living in countries with lower levels of democracy. Even in the models containing democratic education or experience, the level of democracy was either not statistically significant, or had the opposite influence from what was expected.

One might assume that this surprising finding was the fault of the Freedom House coding system. However, when the same models were run using the Polity IV's Democracy and Autocracy variables instead, there was no statistically significant relationship with any the measures of democratic values or behavior. So, while these

findings may be the result of Freedom House's coding system, the best leading alternative, Polity IV, did not perform any better.

In terms of the behavior of other variables in the models: education, income, town size, social capital, age, and sex, none proved to be more robust than democratic education for explaining democratic values and behavior. For the most part, the country-level effects of these demographic variables were not helpful in explaining individual values or behavior; they were statistically insignificant in most cases. The demographic variables did a slightly better job at the individual level, but even there the relationships were inconsistent; sometimes the factors were positively associated with democratic values and behavior, sometimes they were negatively related, and sometimes they were statistically insignificant.

In sum, individual-level democratic education performed well across all tests and the relationships were all in the expected direction—individuals with more democratic education tended to hold more democratic values and tended to behave in more democratic ways than counterparts with lower levels of democratic education. Country-level democratic education helped predict democratic values, but not democratic behavior—individuals living in contexts where the people around them had more democratic education tended to have more democratic values than counterparts living in contexts surrounded by lower levels of democratic education, but individual behavior was unaffected by the democratic education of the people around them.

Unexpectedly, although the democratic education model was quite robust, democratic experience and overall level of democracy were much less able to explain democratic values or behavior than expected. For the most part, those factors were

unrelated to individually held values, and while they were statistically related to behavior, their effects were the opposite of what was expected. These are puzzling findings that warrant further investigation. A likely explanation may lie in variation in political behavior among advanced democracies, which would, as a group, all have very high levels of democratic experience and overall level of democracy, but likely have significant variation in their political behavior such as signing petitions, participating in demonstrations, or joining civic organizations.<sup>20</sup> A closer study of the relationship among democratic education and experience among mature democracies and also among transitioning democracies would be helpful in sorting out these relationships. A large-n study such as this one that includes all countries—non-democracies, new democracies, as well as mature democracies—is ill suited to discovering and explaining variation within these sub groups. Although quite possible to do given the breadth and depth of the WVS database as well as the wealth of case study evidence, such an investigation lies outside the scope of this study.

## **Conclusion**

This article has one central argument: John Dewey was right. Nearly a century after he offered a vision of progressive education as a method for the democratic transformation of society, we find his philosophical beliefs confirmed with robust statistical evidence. Individual experience in a democracy positively influenced all measures democratic values and behavior tested. Living in a context where people have higher levels of democratic education was positively related with all democratic values

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<sup>20</sup> For a discussion of how to deal theoretically with a democracy that scores low on WVS “democracy” related variables, see (Haddad 2010, 2012)

tested. Models containing democratic education variables were better able to explain individual-level variation in democratic values and behaviors than models containing either democratic experience variables or just a country's level of democracy. These findings offer robust support for Dewey's assertion about the power of democratic education to influence individual values and behavior.

The power of a democratic education should be studied in more depth. The findings in this article suggest many important additional avenues for investigating the power of democratic education on political values and behavior. For example, how does democratic education affect those who were raised in non-democracies, receive a democratic education, and return to their country of origin? Dewey would argue that their experience in a democratic educational system should fundamentally alter their political values and behavior, and the results of the current study offer some support for this argument. Cheng Li's edited volume, *Bridging Minds Across the Pacific: U.S.-China Educational Exchanges, 1978-2003* (Lexington, 2005), which studies how Chinese that have studied in the United States have influenced social science research, teaching, and policy development after returning to China, offers an excellent example of how this kind of research could be done. In a similar vein, how can one design an educational system that can inculcate students with democratic values and behaviors? Careful studies of innovative efforts in nondemocratic and transitioning democracies can help gain us insight into this issue.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Many are already working in this area such as (United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs 2009; Alagappa 2004; O'Brien and Li 2000; Read and Pekkanen 2009; Tsai 2007; Mortenson and Relin 2006; Bruns, Filmer, and Patrinos 2011)

While the author expected that the democratic experience and level of democracy models would be less explanatory than the democratic education model, their general inability to account for democratic values and their negative association with many democratic behaviors was unexpected. These surprising findings deserve closer investigation. As mentioned in the discussion section above, the most likely explanation of these findings, from the perspective of the author, is that there is significant variation in the behavior among citizens and between countries within mature democracies. Mature democracies have similarly high levels of democratic experience among their populations and similarly high levels of democracy as measured by any kind of democracy rating system (Freedom House and Policy IV were used in this study), but it is likely that variation among them in terms of how actively their citizens engage in the kinds of behaviors captured by the WVS would reveal unexpected correlations.<sup>22</sup>

Thus far the varieties of capitalism research agenda pioneered by Peter Hall and David Soskice has tended to focus on the variation among mature capitalist democracies in the commercial or social-welfare policy arenas<sup>23</sup> and less on how the political values and behavior of individuals varies across these societies. A closer look at the variation in political values and behavior, and particularly how different educational systems may be influencing variation across societies, would help us gain a more nuanced understanding of the role that education is playing in inculcating democratic values and practices, and

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<sup>22</sup> For a discussion of the limits of the WVS and the introduction of a theoretical framework for understanding values and behavior in non-Western democracies see (Haddad 2010).

<sup>23</sup> For example, (Estevez-Abe 2006; Hall and Soskice 2001). (Inglehart 2008) discusses generational changes within Western societies, but not variation across mature democracies.

how that role, as well as the values and behaviors themselves, may be shifting over time within mature democracies.

Educational systems do more than teach basic skills needed to become productive members of society, they also create controlled environments in which children learn how to be good citizens. According to Dewey's progressive vision, being good democratic citizens means that one is not only able to manage successfully in today's society but that one also contributes meaningfully to the creation of a better society in the future. As his writings and lectures in Turkey, China, and Japan illustrate, he was sensitive to the fact that each society has a different requirements needed for successful citizenship within contemporary society as well as different visions of what its future should look like. Scholars should conduct more research to help us find ways to make sure that the future world that we are creating is one where we all want to live.

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