The Effect of Elections on Public Opinion towards Democracy: Evidence from Longitudinal Survey Research in Algeria

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Abstract: Given the importance of developing a democratic culture for the long-term survival of democracy, it is crucial to understand how support for democracy changes over time in response to different events. Although democratic transitions vary greatly by case, one common element to each transition, and often the first major event signaling a transition, is the holding of a reasonably free and fair election. Yet, while there is a significant literature on the effect of elections on public opinion in developed democracies, this topic has received far less attention in transitioning and authoritarian countries. This paper addresses this hole in the literature by examining the effects of the first relatively free and fair election in a country’s history on support for democracy among ordinary citizens. It finds that groups that are excluded from participation in the election and individuals who believe that an election was not free and fair also lose support for democracy.
Introduction

Public support for democracy is necessary for the long-term success of a democratic political system. As expressed by Diamond, 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” (1999, 65). 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 and Skach 1993). But proper institutions, while necessary, are not sufficient for successful democratization. Rose et al. (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 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 democratic governance
for the first time, support for democracy is likely to vary as a function of the perception of these experiences. Yet the extent to which experiences and perceptions contribute to this variation remains largely untested with individual-level data. 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 survey data from Algeria collected in 2002, 2004 and 2006 to test hypotheses about the explanatory power of both domestic and regional experiences. More specifically, it investigates the degree to which attitudes toward democracy are affected by perceptions of (1) a national election and (2) United States efforts to promote democracy in the Arab world.

**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. Rustow (1970) argues that democratization tends to be elite-driven; 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, 13). Rather, according to this argument, an elite-led transition involving the reform of political institutions and procedures is itself an important determinant of the normative orientations required for consolidation and survival (Rose 1997, 98; Schmitter and Karl 1993, 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 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 and Gao 2005). Even though there is some variation and imprecision in the way that democracy is understood by ordinary citizens (Jamal and 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. Accordingly, if this is indeed the case, and if progress toward democracy does 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, deprivation, 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 realm. Individuals who have favorable opinions about economic policy and the
political situation are disproportionally 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.

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, then 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 or only beginning
to take form, attitudes toward democracy may be much 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 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, 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 et al. (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. Further, patronage is more common in transitioning countries, and the outcome of elections can thus heavily skew the distribution of state resources. As such, Bratton et al. 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):

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.

(13-4)

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 electoral outcomes, are an important factor in determining the legitimacy of an election and of the regime. However, there remains no evidence bearing directly on the relationship between electoral experience and support for democracy despite the fact that this is clearly an important area for empirical 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:

$H_1$: In a non-consolidated democracy, support for democracy will decrease among individuals who perceive an election to be less free and fair.
External Factors

Events beyond the domestic political arena may also have an impact on the way that citizens think about governance. In Algeria and other Arab countries, developments associated with U.S. foreign policy have been particularly prominent during the early years of the 21st century and offer an opportunity to examine the relationship between perceptions of international and regional events and support for democracy. On the one hand, the United States has launched a major initiative, in part through the Department of State’s Middle East Partnership Initiative, dedicated to democracy promotion in the Arab world. On the other, the Administration of U.S. President George W. Bush defended its invasion and occupation of Iraq as part of its campaign to advance democracy in the Middle East. Thus, it is possible that attitudes toward democracy among men and women in the Arab world will be influenced by the judgments they make about the actions and policies of the U.S. that are affecting their region.

Given that the war in Iraq has for the most part been unpopular in the Arab world, as is U.S. foreign policy more generally, some analysts have suggested that U.S. actions have spawned a backlash that is leading many ordinary citizens to question whether democracy is appropriate for their country. This view is expressed by Thomas Carothers of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace in the following terms:

Bush's policy has done serious damage to the legitimacy of democracy promotion in the eyes of the world and the U.S. public. The constant identification of democracy promotion with the war in Iraq, a war on terrorism that seems to involve serious abuses by the U.S. of the rule of law, has contaminated the whole domain (Kuhar 2007).
And more specifically, as Carothers told the Senate Foreign Relations Committee in June 2006:

> The Bush administration’s emphasis on the Iraq war as the leading wedge of its democracy promotion policy in the Middle East has closely associated democracy promotion with the assertion of American military power and security interests. With the U.S. intervention in Iraq viewed as illegitimate in most parts of the world, the legitimacy of the general concept of democracy promotion has suffered accordingly (Carothers 2006b; see also Carothers 2006a).

Not all analysts agree with this thesis. Some argue that U.S. policies have advanced the cause of democracy in the Arab world and elsewhere and that many ordinary citizens, even if they oppose the war in Iraq, understand that American efforts at democracy promotion have helped to bring about political reform and make governments in a number of Middle Eastern countries more responsive to their citizens. Arguments along these lines have been put forward by Vin Weber, head of the National Endowment for Democracy, Frances Fukuyama, and other foreign policy specialists who are generally supportive of U.S. foreign policy (Kuhar 2007). In the view of these observers, the concept of democracy has not been “contaminated” by U.S. action, meaning that there is no reason to believe that disapproval of U.S. policies and actions relating to the Middle East and North Africa is likely to diminish support for democracy among people in the region.
To test these competing assessments, and to shed light more generally on the possibility that judgments about important international and regional developments have an impact on views about governance and democracy, the analysis to be presented will test the following hypothesis:

H₂: In a country affected by U.S. democracy promotion efforts and the war in Iraq, support for democracy will decrease among individuals who have a more unfavorable view of U.S. foreign policy.

The Algerian Case

In order to evaluate the effect of the quality of an election on support for democracy, we examine the case of Algeria. 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 elections¹ (Bouandel 2002; McGee 2004; Holm 2005; Szmolka 2006). Unlike in the past, the armed forces stated their neutrality rather than supporting a presidential candidate as they had in the past. 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 the nature of past elections in Algeria.

Moreover, it is also one of the few cases where survey data currently exist both before and after an election of this nature. Given that it is not usually considered a democratic country, it is possible to observe if and how this more open election changed the nature of support for

¹ It should be noted that the initial stage of the 1991 election process was competitive but that its results were nullified and its subsequent rounds were cancelled.
democracy in Algeria. As such, it provides a strong case with which to test the effect of an election on support for democracy in a non-democratic setting.

In the election, the incumbent candidate, President Abdelaziz Bouteflika was seeking reelection. During his first term from 1999 to 2004, Bouteflika proved to be a capable and popular leader (Martín 2003; Bouandel 2002). He was able to end the civil war by creating an amnesty program for all but the worst offenders in the conflict. On other fronts, the rising price of hydrocarbons on the world market stabilized Algeria’s previously weak economy. However, Bouteflika’s relationship with the military establishment became strained during his presidency. Military leaders were largely unsupportive of Bouteflika’s amnesty program for acts committed during the decade-long civil war, especially since it feared that military abuses committed during the conflict would come to light. Moreover, Bouteflika governed largely independently of military leaders, contrary to expectations when he was given their blessing for the office of the presidency.

Largely as a result, as noted above, the military announced not only that it was not endorsing Bouteflika’s bid for reelection in 2004, and that it would also not support any other candidate. Even more important, the military stated that it 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 election in the country’s history (Bouandel 2004).

Numerous candidates declared their intention to enter the race representing a wide variety of parties and ideologies. Of these candidates, all but three of the individuals who announced their candidacy met the qualifications to run. Although two of these individuals were considered
minor candidates, the third, Ahmed Taleb Ibrahimi, was believed to be the strongest potential challenger to Bouteflika. Ibrahimi was generally considered to be a moderate Islamist who commanded widespread popularity throughout many segments of Algerian society. In fact, despite withdrawing from the 1999 presidential election he still received 1.2 million votes (12.5% of the valid vote). In light of Bouteflika’s general popularity and the weakness of the other candidates, it was believed that Ibrahimi was the only candidate who could garner enough support to at least force a second round of elections (Bouandel 2004).

Ibrahimi was prevented from running on the basis that he did not collect the required 90,000 signatures as the Constitutional Commission claimed that many of the signatures his supporters presented were invalid. Given his popularity, this logic seemed implausible and it was widely suggested that the actual reason was his alleged links to the banned Islamic Salvation Front (FIS), the group which had won the first round of balloting in the 1991 elections. Given Ibrahimi’s popularity, his exclusion on these grounds was particularly striking and strongly suggested political interference from Bouteflika who was responsible for appointing the Constitutional Commission. This perceived bias was only increased on Election Day when another candidate who had been allowed to run received 20,000 fewer than the signatures she had officially collected in order to stand in the election.

In the absence of Ibrahimi, Bouteflika’s main challenger was Ali Benflis, a former Prime Minister and close ally of Bouteflika prior to a 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). Although Ibrahimi was excluded, other Islamists candidates, most notably Abdallah Djaballah of the Movement for National Reform, were permitted to run. However, neither he nor any of the other Islamist candidates were considered serious contenders for the presidency.

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, while there was a clear division within the press, 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 vote itself was
largely free and fair, and that any minor irregularities that did exist would certainly not have altered the outcome (Bouandel 2004; Pierre-Louveaux 2004; Dillman 2005). 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 their 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 from the election meant that the election was not fully competitive as one of the most important candidates was excluded. Nevertheless, the statements made by internal and external observers argued that the election was generally free and fair, at least on election day itself. As a result, while some ordinary Algerians may have believed that the election was reasonably free and fair, or at least an improvement from past elections, it is likely that Ibrahimi’s supporters would view the election as being less free and fair than other members of society.

**Data and Measures**

As discussed above, the analysis to follow will examine two hypotheses:

H₁: In a non-consolidated democracy, support for democracy will decrease among individuals who perceive an election to be less free and fair.

H₂: In a country affected by U.S. democracy promotion efforts and the war in Iraq, support for democracy will decrease among individuals who have a more unfavorable view of U.S. foreign policy.
Data used to test these hypotheses come from public opinion surveys conducted in Algeria in 2002 and 2004. 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 using the standard WVS interview schedule in addition to some country-specific items. The second survey was conducted by the same team and was funded by a grant from the National Science Foundation (NSF). A separate survey instrument was used that was more narrowly focused on issues related to democracy and governance. However, in many cases the same items appeared in both surveys, although in some cases the 2004 survey used slight modifications 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.

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 representing a higher level of support for democracy and zero a lower level of support for democracy. 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)

While it would be possible to try to test of H₁ 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 claim that a lower rating of the election led to a decrease in support for democracy. Rather, it may be that individuals who were less supportive of democracy before the election would be 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 sufficient to conclude that the election was the primary cause of this relationship.
Rather, properly evaluating this hypothesis requires a comparison between attitudes both before and after the election to see if there was a change in relationships surrounding the election. Given that panel data does not exist for Algeria, it is impossible to precisely identify the group of individuals who would later vote in the election as not being free and fair in the survey taken prior to the election. As such, an alternative manner must be employed to see if and how this relationship changed because of the election.

One such way is to identify a category of respondents that is likely to have a less (or more) positive evaluation of the 2004 election than other groups. If it can be shown that this group was no less supportive of democracy before the election than other groups, but was less supportive after the election, then this would be lend support of H1. Given the nature of the 2004 Algerian election, supporters of political Islam can serve as this group since the candidate these individuals would most likely have favored, Ahmed Taleb Ibrahimi, was excluded from the electoral process.

Unfortunately, no item asking about support for a candidate was included in either of the two surveys. However, individuals who are supportive of political Islam generally are more likely to have supported Ibrahimi than other candidates. As such, the following item, present in both the 2002 and 2004 interview schedules, will be 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.
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 to minimize missing data.

Testing H₂ can be done in a more direct manner. In this case, it is necessary to determine if and how perceptions of actions undertaken by the U.S. in Algeria and the region at large affected support for democracy between these two years. If there proves to be difference in the relationship between attitudes toward U.S. actions and support for democracy during this time period, then this will provide evidence in favor of H₂. In order to operationalize support for U.S. actions in the region the following item will be used:

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 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.

This item was chosen in part because there was very little variation in responses to questions asking specifically about the 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. In addition, however, a question that asks about U.S. foreign policy in general
appears to be more relevant 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.

**Multiple Regression Analysis**

Given the dichotomous nature of the dependent variable, a logistic regression technique is used to estimate the model by which hypotheses are tested. In addition to the items used to operationalize support for political Islam and judgments about U.S. foreign policy, education, income, sex, and age are included as control variables. 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 confidence levels. Thus, it is not possible to reject the null hypothesis that support for political Islam has no effect on support for democracy. With respect to H2, the sign of the coefficient estimate actually suggests that individuals who are less supportive of U.S. foreign policy tended to be more supportive of democracy in 2002, although this relationship again is not significant. Thus, it is not possible to reject the null in this case either. Additionally, the coefficients for the four 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 dissimilar support for the two hypotheses being tested. 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 H₁, 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.

Unlike H₁, there is no evidence in support H₂. In both 2002 and 2004, the relationship between attitudes toward U.S. foreign policy and support for democracy was not significant. In 2004, this relationship did begin to approach standard levels of significance, however, and even more interestingly, the sign did not change, indicating that individuals who were less supportive of U.S. foreign policy continued to be more supportive of democracy. This suggests that while only a handful of the Algerians surveyed believed the U.S. to be doing the “right thing” in Iraq, this negative view did not necessarily give rise to a wholesale condemnation of U.S. foreign policy or produce a “contamination effect” that reduced support for democracy.
Also of interest is the significant relationship involving the control variable sex 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 democratization.

Overall, these findings provide support for the first of the two hypotheses being tested. The evidence suggests that support for democracy declines among individuals whose viewpoints and preferences are excluded from the democratic process, and who thus see flaws in the institutions and procedures associated with democratization. Alternatively, the evidence does not support the hypothesis that discontent with U.S. foreign policy undermines support for democracy. The specific situation of the war in Iraq and American efforts at democracy promotion mean that findings about $H_2$ should be generalized with caution. Nevertheless, the
present analysis does call into question the proposition that support for democracy is affected by international and regional as well as domestic developments.

**An Additional Test**

While comparing the 2004 results to the 2002 results in support for $H_1$, it remains an indirect test of the hypothesis. While it allows us to infer that the change in support among supporters of political Islam was the result of perceptions of the election, based on this test alone we cannot definitively conclude that this change did not occur for another reason.

However, this limitation can be addressed by using further data from a representative national survey conducted in Algeria in 2006 as part of the Arab Democracy 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. 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.

If it can be shown that support for political Islam is negatively correlated with support for democracy in 2006, then this result will increase our confidence as it mirrors the results from the

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2 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.
2004 survey. Thus, it would represent an additional indirect test of the relationship. If, however, another model were run including the same variables as before in addition to the variable measuring the perception of the election, the theory underlying H1 would imply that political Islam should have limited explanatory power as the variable for which it is serving as a proxy is now included. In other words, theory predicts that the variance being explained by political Islam in the prior 2004 and 2006 models is in fact now captured by the variable measuring perceptions of the quality of the election given that this is a more direct measure.

While there are advantages for testing H1 using the 2006 survey, this survey instrument did not include the item that was used to measure attitudes to 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 is appropriate for a test of the relationship between support for democracy and judgments about American actions and policies directed toward the Middle East.

Two logistic regression models are estimated in order to assess these two hypotheses. 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. It also increases confidence that $H_2$ should be rejected.

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 model thus offers particularly 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. 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. Importantly, this finding also 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.

Finally, it may 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 hence be more likely than men to express 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 attitude towards democracy. When an election is deemed as being generally free and fair by internal and external observers, 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 likely to be supportive. Thus, the present study strongly suggests that experience with democratic institutions and procedures directly affects support for democracy in non-consolidated democracies.

Viewed more broadly, these findings also suggest a number of additional insights. First, 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 and 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 highly stable but can in fact change over a short period of time in response to specific events.
Second, domestic politics appears to have 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.

Third, 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 perceived to not 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 retard rather 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.

A final observation pertains to the relationship between political Islam and democracy. Findings from the 2002 survey are consistent with previous research showing that attitudes
toward Islam have little impact on attitudes toward democracy. Although some have argued that Islam retards 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. At the same time, 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. Alternatively, 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.

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.
Table 1

<table>
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<th>2002</th>
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<th>2004</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Frequency</td>
<td>Percent</td>
<td>Frequency</td>
<td>Percent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low or no support</td>
<td>137</td>
<td>13.4</td>
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<tr>
<td>High or very high support</td>
<td>885</td>
<td>86.6</td>
<td>936</td>
<td>81.0</td>
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<td>2004</td>
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<tr>
<td>----------------------------------</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lower Support for Political Islam</td>
<td>0.362</td>
<td>0.926</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.427)</td>
<td>(0.297)***</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lower Support for U.S. Foreign Policy</td>
<td>0.116</td>
<td>0.388</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.372)</td>
<td>(0.311)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Higher Education</td>
<td>-0.320</td>
<td>-0.238</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.510)</td>
<td>(0.404)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Higher Income</td>
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<td>0.650</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.595)</td>
<td>(0.484)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Female Sex</td>
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<td>0.521</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.241)</td>
<td>(0.180)***</td>
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<tr>
<td>Older Age</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.432)</td>
<td>(0.300)</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Note: Table presents coefficient ($\beta$) estimates with standard errors in parentheses. *** Statistically significant at .01 level. All other variables not significant at 0.1 level.
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<td>.572</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
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<td>(.432)</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>(.563)</td>
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<td>Higher Income</td>
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<td>.290</td>
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<td>(.963)</td>
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<td>(.708)</td>
<td>(.792)</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Note: Table presents coefficient (β) estimates with standard errors in parentheses.

*** Statistically significant at .01 level. All other variables not significant at 0.1 level.
References


