Various categorizations have emerged to describe the growing number of ineffective democracies in the hybrid zone between blatant autocracy and fully effective democracy.\textsuperscript{1} Despite differences in terminology, scholars agree that state failure in the enforcement of rule of law is the key factor separating effective from ineffective democracies.\textsuperscript{2} Applying this distinction, categorical approaches prevail that dichotomize effective against ineffective democracies.\textsuperscript{3} By contrast, only one attempt has been made with gradual data on state deficiencies to produce a continuous index of “effective democracy.”\textsuperscript{4} This index could be a useful tool for democracy assessment at a time when the phenomenon of ineffective democracy is gaining significance.\textsuperscript{5}

However, the conceptual rationales that inform the index of effective democracy have not been outlined in satisfactory detail.\textsuperscript{6} Nor has a systematic validity test been conducted to demonstrate the performance of the index in comparison to other established democracy indices. This article fills this gap by explicating the conceptual basis of the index of effective democracy and demonstrating the index’s empirical qualities.

### Conceptualizing Effective Democracy

#### People Power as the Root Meaning of Democracy

In its literal meaning, “government by the people,” democracy is inspired by the idea of empowering people to govern their lives.\textsuperscript{7} Against such a common understanding, one might object that democracy has been defined in too many different ways to be subsumed under one definition. Indeed, one cannot dispute variation when scholars define democracy at the level of its concrete institutional manifestations.\textsuperscript{8} Still, we hold that “people power” is the root meaning that provides the inspirational source of most understandings of democracy. One can substantiate this claim from four perspectives: (1) the views of democracy held by ordinary people around the world, (2) the views of democracy that are evident in the goals for which democracy movements of the past and today struggle, (3) the views of democracy that are manifest in constitutional priorities, and (4) the views of democracy championed by leading theorists of democracy.

As concerns the views of democracy held by ordinary people, there is broad evidence from the Global Barometer Surveys and the World Values Surveys that what
comes first to people’s minds when they think about democracy are the rights that give people choices in governing their personal lives, and a voice and vote to shape public life.\textsuperscript{9} When confronted with the word “democracy,” be it in Africa, Asia, Latin America, the Middle East, or Europe, people emphasize, before anything else, the rights that empower people.

Examining the goals for which democracy movements of the past and present struggle reveals the same meaning. Modern democracy originates in the liberal revolutions of the eighteenth century.\textsuperscript{10} These upheavals became significant through rights-setting acts of epochal importance, such as the U.S. Declaration of Independence in 1776 and the French Declaration des Droits de L’Homme et des Citoyens in 1789.\textsuperscript{11} These declarations entitled parts of the public to assert personal and political freedoms, empowering significant shares of the population to govern their private and public lives. This achievement established partial democracy, where a majority of the adult population remained excluded from suffrage. But even though partial democracy was intended by some to prevent full democracy, it actually paved the way to full democracy. For the empowerment of limited parts of the public encouraged further struggles by extant excluded groups to also push for empowerment, until universal suffrage established full democracies at the end of the nineteenth century.\textsuperscript{12} Since then, people’s struggles for democracy continue. Within established democracies, civil rights and equal opportunity movements fight to advance democracy’s empowering qualities.\textsuperscript{13} Beyond established democracies, people power movements pressure to replace autocracy with democracy.\textsuperscript{14}

Looking at the priorities that are evident in the order in which democratic constitutions are organized, it is obvious that model constitutions, like those of the United States, France, or the German Basic Law, start with the rights of the people.\textsuperscript{15} If this ordering is indicative of a priority, it means that the basis of democracy is the rights that empower ordinary people.

In political theory, conceptions of democracy vary from Schumpeter’s minimalist definition of “electoral democracy” to Barber’s maximalist definition of “strong democracy.”\textsuperscript{16} Yet, as much as definitions of democracy differ in scope, they all have one thing in common: in the democratic condition, people are more empowered than in the non-democratic condition.\textsuperscript{17} Different conceptions of democracy operate with widely different notions of what people power means; yet they all operate on a notion of people power as the core meaning of democracy.

In conclusion, the literal meaning of democracy, the dominant popular understanding of democracy, the goals of past and present democracy movements, the priorities of order in model democratic constitutions, and the notions of democracy in political theory are all based on people power as the root meaning of democracy.

**Popular Rights as First-Order Tools of Democracy**  The institutional feature most directly instrumental to the idea of people power is popular rights. It is the inherent purpose of rights to empower their beholders by entitling them to practice some form of freedom.\textsuperscript{18} To have the power to govern their lives, people need two forms of freedom: the freedom to follow their personal preferences in their private lives and the
freedom to make their political preferences count in public life. The first form of freedom is private and is granted by personal rights; the second form is public and is granted by political rights. In an empowerment perspective, personal rights and political rights are distinct but not contradictory. Instead, personal rights and political rights complement each other in granting people the power to govern themselves. Self-governance in state-societies always has a private life dimension and a public life dimension, so rights must be granted in both to empower people.

From the viewpoint of people empowerment, popular rights constitute the first-order tool of democracy. Other institutional features of democracy, such as political pluralism or an independent judiciary, are second-order. They exist to make a full set of popular rights work. For instance, the right to a free vote in elections can only work if candidates compete for votes with alternative policy programs. Thus, political competition is instrumental to a genuinely free vote. Likewise, the right to be protected from abuses of executive power can only work if an independent judiciary is accessible to litigate executive authorities. The major point, then, is clear. Institutional features of democracy that do not themselves stipulate rights are instrumental to the functioning of rights. Measuring popular rights is thus a proper way to operationalize democracy when people power is democracy’s root meaning.

**Democracy’s Gradual Nature** As long as one can list a substantial number of popular rights, democracy varies by degree. It varies by degree between the entire absence of people power when not a single right is granted and the full presence of people power when each known right is granted. These are endpoints on a continuum that can be scaled in percentages of the known maximum of popular rights. This percentage scale has a natural minimum at 0 when no popular right is granted and a natural maximum at 100 when all are granted. There are some natural cut-off points on this percentage scale, as depicted in Figure 1.
The 50 percent mark constitutes an intuitively meaningful cut-off point. Below this point, states ignore more rights than they enact, so they deny the people more power than they grant. This classifies all states below the 50 percent mark as “autocracies.” By contrast, all states above 50 points enact more rights than they deny, so they grant the people more power than they refuse. This classifies states above 50 percent as “democracies.” The 25 and 75 percent marks provide equally meaningful cut-off points. The 75 percent mark divides democracies into those closer to the democratic maximum and those closer to the neutral point. This classifies the former ones as “complete democracies” and the latter ones as “incomplete democracies.” Among autocracies, the 25 percent mark operates in similar fashion, separating “complete autocracies” from “incomplete autocracies.”

People power differentiates between autocracy and democracy as much as it differentiates within these categories, accounting for how completely autocratic and democratic a state is. The differences that separate autocracies from democracies and the differences that separate complete from incomplete versions of these regime categories are differences on the same underlying continuum—the scope of rights granted to the people.

**Rule of Law as the Effectiveness Factor of Popular Rights**

There are features that define democracy and features that make the defining features effective. Popular rights are the key defining feature of democracy and for that matter establish nominal democracy. But even if they are granted to their full extent, in real practice given rights may not be effectively respected. To be effectively respected, rights require the rule of law. Consequently, there is a difference between democracy in nominal terms and effective democracy. The codification of popular rights establishes nominal democracy but rule of law is necessary to translate nominal into effective democracy.

Rule of law can be defined as government bound to legal norms. Rule of law in this sense is not an exclusive attribute of democracies. Government does not have to be democratic in order to be bound to the law. Rule of law in this understanding does not separate democratic from autocratic government. It separates rational from despotic government.

Some accounts define rule of law in a specifically democratic sense by including the codification of popular rights into the notion of rule of law. The disadvantage of defining rule of law this way is that it cannot be used to distinguish rational from despotic versions of autocracy. Nor can it be used to differentiate ineffective from effective democracy when it is part of what defines democracy. For this reason, we define rule of law in the broader sense of rule bound to legal norms.

Although rule of law is not the same as popular rights, it is inherently relevant to them because rights are more effective, the more they are respected through law-bound practices. Thus, rule of law substantiates popular rights in producing effective democracy. Nominal democracy is the scope of granted popular rights. Effective democracy is that part of popular rights that is set into effect by rule of law; it is effective popular rights.
Rule of law protects people from arbitrary uses of power. This is true both among autocracies and democracies, though to different degrees. In autocracies, rule of law reduces despotism and in so doing ties autocracy’s disempowering nature to regular and thereby rational practice. Thus, we can distinguish “rational autocracy” when rule of law is strong from “despotic autocracy” when it is weak. In democracies, rule of law sets into effect their empowering purpose, separating “effective democracy” when rule of law is strong from “ineffective democracy” when it is weak.

Measuring Effective Democracy

The Logic of Substantiation  A state might have codified the full set of popular rights, in which case it is considered 100 percent democratic. Yet, if rule of law is completely absent, even a fully enacted set of rights is rendered entirely ineffective. In such a case, the score for effective democracy should be at zero or close to it, reflecting the absence of effective people power. Vice versa, power practices in a given state might be entirely governed by the law, in which case the state is considered as entirely law-bound. But the state might have enacted no popular rights, so no right can be effective, no matter how law-bound the state is. In this case, too, the score for effective democracy should be at zero or close to it, again reflecting the absence of effective people power.

Following these rationales, we operationalize rule of law as a substantiating factor, measured in fractions from 0 to 1.0, to weight a given scope of popular rights, measured in percentages of the known maximum of rights. Thus, a score in effective democracy is the percentage score in popular rights weighted for the presence of rule of law. In the best case (when the rule of law is at its maximum 1.0), the weighting procedure reproduces whatever percentage of popular rights is given. In the worst case (when rule of law is at its minimum 0), the weighting procedure nullifies whatever percentage of popular rights is given. In this logic, rule of law operates strictly within the limits of a given scope of popular rights, yet within these limits it can result in anything from the full reproduction to the entire nullification of a given percentage of popular rights.

Indicators and Their Combination  Searching for indicators of popular rights, the freedom ratings by Freedom House are an obvious choice. These ratings include two concepts. Freedom House’s “civil liberties,” which cover mostly private freedoms, are roughly equivalent to our concept of personal rights. The organization’s “political rights” cover public freedoms, coinciding with our notion of political rights. The two indicators correlate at $r = .94$ ($N = 190$) and, as they supplement each other in generating popular rights, we add them up to obtain an overall index of popular rights. The scale is transformed into a 0 to 100 range, yielding scores for nominal democracy, or nominal popular rights. A score of 0 is indicative of regimes that do not grant any popular right; a score of 100 is indicative of regimes that grant the complete set of popular rights.

The most encompassing measure of rule of law is the World Bank’s “rule of law index.” Using country risk assessments and population surveys, this index measures
how strictly government agents abide by the laws, based on the perceptions of country experts and the citizens. Strongly overlapping with rule of law is another indicator among the World Bank’s “good governance” data, labeled “control of corruption.” Corruption is a directly inverse indicator of rule of law, for it involves the rule of exploitative power practices that violate laws. The rule of law and control of corruption scores correlate at $r = .95$ ($N = 188$) and so we average them to obtain an overall index of rule of law. Since this index is meant to be used as a factor to weight given popular rights for how effectively they are respected in the practice of power, we transform the scale into a range from 0 for the country with the lowest known level of rule of law, to 1.0 for the highest known level of rule of law. Scores for countries between these two extremes can be any fraction of 1.0.

One might hold that the Freedom House ratings already include rule of law, and this makes our weighting of the ratings for rule of law superfluous. This assumption is mistaken for three reasons. First, only two points on Freedom House’s 28-point checklist refer to rule of law, giving this aspect the weight of a fourteenth in the index construction. This proportion is as minor as it is arbitrary. Second, the combinatory logic is flawed. Rule of law is treated as a supplementary quality that complements popular rights when in fact it is a substantiating quality that acts on popular rights to make them effective. The adequate way to specify this substantiation is to weight popular rights for rule of law. Third, and most important, empirical evidence proves that the freedom ratings do not absorb differences in rule of law.

If the Freedom House ratings indeed measured popular rights as they are effectively set into practice, these ratings must absorb most of the cross-national variation in rule of law, so that at each level of popular rights no or very little variation in rule of law is observed between countries. Obviously, as Figure 2 illustrates, this is not the case. Freedom House’s popular rights ratings and the World Bank’s rule of law scores have most of their variance (54 percent, to be precise) unshared. Thus, popular rights data and rule of law data are distinct enough to qualify popular rights by rule of law. To obtain a measure of popular rights that are set into effect by rule of law, we multiply the 0–100 scores for popular rights by the 0–1.0 scores for the rule of law, which yields weighted percentages for effective popular rights, or effective people power.

Rule of law’s influence on scores in effective popular rights is strictly bound within the range of nominal popular rights. But even in the autocratic zone, among countries at the same level of nominal popular rights, stronger rule of law yields a higher score in effective popular rights. This might be questioned because it is conceivable that stronger rule of law in the autocratic zone might worsen people’s situation. The reason is simple. Rule of law requires state capacities, and in autocracies, higher state capacities might mean more effective repression. In this case, the logic of our index construction would operate in the wrong direction where popular rights are largely absent. On the other hand, it is just as plausible that even in the absence of popular rights, stronger rule of law improves people’s situation because it saves them from the worst excesses of despotism.

We can sort this out by examining how rule of law relates to measures of state repression, especially in the zone where we observe the absence of popular rights. Using
Gibney’s “political terror scale” as a measure of state repression, the answer is straightforward. Among the sixty-eight states worldwide which fall into the autocratic zone of the popular rights scale, state repression correlates highly significantly and strongly negatively, at $r = -0.65$, with rule of law. Even among autocracies stronger rule of law means less, not more, state repression.

Two cases in point are North Korea and Singapore. North Korea is a repressive autocracy and so its political terror score is high, at 0.73 for the years 2000–2006. If rule of law in autocracies indicates high levels of state repression, North Korea’s rule of law score should be high. But it is very low, at 0.21 for 2000–2006. Singapore is an autocratic example in the opposite direction. Its rule of law score is favorable, indeed one of the highest in the world, 0.94. If such a high rule of law score in an autocracy is indicative of state repression,
Singapore’s score in political terror should be high. But it is low, at .23. This is far below some established democracies, including India whose political terror score is at .68.

Examining Effective Democracy

**Internal Validity**  At issue in internal validity is how consistently the empirical distribution of an index behaves to the logic behind the index construction. The logic behind the index of effective democracy is that, as distinct regime attributes, popular rights and rule of law combine into a new regime quality, effective people power, which creates larger differences among nominally democratic regimes than among nominally autocratic ones. Do these assumptions hold true?

If one cuts the rule of law and popular rights scales in half, one obtains the four quadrants shown in Figure 2. The split on the popular rights scale divides regimes into rather autocratic ones (below 50 points) and rather democratic ones (above 50 points). The split on the rule of law scale divides regimes into rather unlawful ones (below .5) and rather lawful ones (above .5).

In combination, unlawfulness and autocracy constitute “despotic autocracies” in the lower left quadrant of Figure 2. Most examples of this regime type are found in Sub-Saharan Africa and the Middle East as well as in South and Central Asia.

Lawfulness and autocracy generate “rational autocracies” in the upper left quadrant. Apart from Singapore, an outstanding example of this regime type, rational autocracies are mostly found among the oil-exporting monarchies of the Middle East.

Unlawfulness and democracy create “ineffective democracies” in the lower right quadrant. This is where many of the younger democracies are located, including most of the democracies in Latin America, Eastern Europe, and Africa. A few long established democracies are found here too, but only if their level of economic development is low. India is the most noteworthy example.

Lawfulness and democracy merge into “effective democracies” in the upper right quadrant. Here are found all of the long-established democracies in economically advanced societies. Young democracies are also found here, but only if they are economically advanced. Examples are Taiwan, South Korea, Chile, and Uruguay.

Figure 2 suggests that rule of law tends to improve as the scope of popular rights widens. But this tendency is far from unavoidable. Fifty-four percent of the variance in rule of law is unrelated to popular rights. To be sure, most autocracies are found in the lower half of the rule of law scale, making rational autocracy an exceptional regime type (covering thirteen of the seventy-one autocracies worldwide). But democracies are split by half on the rule of law scale, yielding an almost equal number of ineffective democracies (N=52) and effective democracies (N=59).

In the extreme case, lacking rule of law can render popular rights so ineffective that a nominally democratic country ends up at a similarly low level of effective people power as some milder version of autocracy. Two such extreme cases are Singapore and India. In terms of popular rights, India falls in the democratic zone of the scale,
scoring at 75 percent points. Singapore, by contrast, is on the upper edge of the autocratic zone in popular rights, scoring at 40 percent. At 40 percent of popular rights, Singapore is an “incomplete autocracy” according to the classification of Figure 1, and Freedom House considers it “partly free.” What makes Singapore exceptional in this regime category is its very high score in rule of law (.94). This high score makes Singapore’s 40 percent score in popular rights almost fully effective. The score for effective popular rights is 37 points. India, for its part, scores poor in rule of law (.46), rendering its 75 percent score in popular rights largely ineffective. The resulting score in effective popular rights is 35, two points below Singapore.

Indians have voted unpopular governments out of office while to Singaporeans this chance is denied. But India has a much worse record in protecting people from political violence, political imprisonment, torture, and discrimination. This is documented in a political terror score that is much higher for India than for Singapore—.68 compared to .23. Massive violations of popular rights and rampant corruption, including the systematic buying of votes, reduce the extent to which elections in India empower the people effectively.35 Thus, it seems that Singaporeans can use their fewer rights more effectively than the Indians can use their wider range of rights. In terms of effective rights, the two populations are equally disempowered. Different combinations of regime characteristics can have the same outcome in terms of effective people power.

The boxplot in Figure 3 shows to what extent the four regime types generated in Figure 2 differ in their scoring in effective popular rights. As one would expect, despotic autocracies score on the bottom of effective popular rights, at a mean of 8 percentage points within a standard-deviation range from 3 to 11 points. Rational autocracies follow nine points higher up, at a mean of 17 percentage points within a standard-deviation range from 13 to 21 points. Ineffective democracies follow another eleven points above, at a mean of 28 percentage points within a standard-deviation range from 21 to 32 points. But the real gap is to effective democracies which are placed more than another 40 points higher, at a mean of 70 percentage points within a standard-deviation range from 58 to 88 points.

The empirical distribution of the effective democracy index is consistent with the logic behind the index construction. Indeed, the combination of popular rights and rule of law produces a new quality, effective people power, that cannot be reduced to any of its components and which creates larger differences among nominally democratic than autocratic regimes, as expected. Thus, the index of effective democracy shows internal validity.

**External Validity** At issue in internal validity is consistency of an empirical index distribution with the logic of the index construction. At issue in external validity is how indicative an index is of external aspects of social reality—aspects that are not themselves part of the measurement but are conceptually linked to it.36

Democracy is about people power, so human empowerment is its conceptual link to other aspects of reality. In the logic of external validity, then, a democracy
index is a more valid measure of people power the more closely it is associated with other—noninstitutional—aspects of human empowerment. Accordingly, the external validity of various democracy indices can be assessed by examining how strongly they associate with noninstitutional aspects of human empowerment. The stronger an index associates, the better it represents the theme of human empowerment that connects democracy to its social context.

The human empowerment framework continues a tradition in political theory that sees democracy embedded in social conditions. Modernization theory emphasizes various socioeconomic aspects of life, most notably economic development and distributional equality, as embedding conditions. The civic culture approach, by contrast, emphasizes certain sociocultural aspects of life, including a widespread incidence of civic values and civic engagement.

The human empowerment framework integrates these conditions into a single scheme in which each condition constitutes a distinct empowering quality in the social context of democracy. Figure 4 illustrates this scheme, situating the four embedding conditions and their core, democracy, in a single framework that highlights human empowerment as the underlying theme.
Democracy is an empowering type of regime because it entitles people to exercise personal and political rights. But for rights to become a useful tool in the hands of the people, these people must be capable and motivated to exercise them. For this to be the case, certain socioeconomic and sociocultural conditions must be in place. Socioeconomic conditions, manifest in resources and their distribution, shape people’s capability to exercise rights. Sociocultural conditions, manifest in norms and practices, shape their motivation to exercise rights. As an empowering regime, democracy is embedded in an empowering socioeconomic and sociocultural context.

An empowering socioeconomic context is manifest in high levels of economic development. High levels of economic development increase people’s participatory resources, such as income and skills, making them more capable to practice popular rights. We measure economic development using World Bank data of a country’s per capita income (GDP/capita) in thousands of US-Dollars at purchasing power parities as of 1995. But we adjust these figures for oil and gas rents, using Michael Ross’s data to subtract a country’s per capita oil and gas rent (in thousands of US-Dollars) from its per capita income as measured in GDP.\(^{40}\) This is done to account for the fact that oil-generated incomes strengthen autocratic power structures and hence disempower the people.\(^{41}\)

Resource dispersion is another empowering feature in the socioeconomic realm. More widely dispersed resources empower a wider circle of people. Also, participatory resources not only rely on economic means, they also consist of intellectual skills and social opportunities. To capture the distributive aspect of resources, and to cover resources in an encompassing way that goes beyond mere economic means, we use Tatu Vanhanen’s index of “power resources” as of 1995. This index combines (1) indicators
of land distribution and the deconcentration of economic power to measure the dispersal of material means, (2) indicators of literacy and enrollment in tertiary education to measure the dispersal of intellectual skills, and (3) indicators of urbanization and the size of the nonagricultural work force to measure social opportunities. The index of power resources summarizes these three types of participatory resources into an index from 0 to 100.42

An empowering sociocultural context consists of values and habits that motivate people to exercise rights. “Emancipative” values have such a motivating effect.43 Emancipative values emphasize freedom, participation, and equality. Based on data from the World Values Surveys, we use a version of these values that combines beliefs in (1) people power (using questions on how important it is that ordinary people have a say in national and local government); (2) freedom of choice (using questions on the acceptance of divorce, abortion, and homosexuality); (3) women’s equality (using questions on women’s role in politics, work, and education); and (4) personal autonomy (using questions on independence and imagination as goals to teach children).44 Summarizing these beliefs yields an index of emancipative values that ranges from 0, for the case where no person in a country holds any of these four beliefs, to 100 for the case where every person holds all of these beliefs.45

To engage in actions that express what one considers right is an empowering habit. Thus, the spread of expressive forms of civic engagement indicates the radius of empowering habits in a society. To measure the spread of expressive civic engagement, we use Welzel’s collective action index, which uses World Values Survey data to measure per country the strength of people’s tendency to participate in petitions, boycotts, and demonstrations.46

How are the two conditions of an empowering socioeconomic context and the two conditions of an empowering sociocultural context related to each other? Across nations, aggregate measures of these four indicators correlate with each other in a range of $r = .80$ to $r = .90$ and are shown in any type of factor analysis to be almost perfectly unidimensional, with factor loadings above .90 on the underlying dimension for each of the four measures.47 Thus, human empowerment appears to be a unity of empowering capabilities and empowering mentalities. This finding justifies the summary of the four empowering conditions into various generic combinations. Accordingly, we summarize economic development and distributional equality into a factor scale to measure the strength of the “empowering socioeconomic context.”48 Likewise, we summarize emancipative values and civic engagement into another factor scale to measure the strength of the “empowering sociocultural context.” Finally, we summarize all four conditions into a factor scale for the strength of the “entire empowering context.”49

In the human empowerment perspective, the index of effective democracy can be considered the most valid measure of democracy, if this index is more closely associated with empowering contexts than are other democracy indices. To establish association, it is irrelevant whether the association exists because effective democracy is associated as a condition or as a consequence with empowering contexts. In either case, association
would be indicative of external validity in the sense that effective democracy represents empowering contexts.

However, the human empowerment framework assumes that empowering contexts condition democracy. This assumption implies that democracy associates with prior rather than subsequent context measures. To model this assumption, we measure democracy over the most recent period in time and relate it to context measures that predate it.

**Empowerment Linkages**  Table 1 shows zero-order correlations between the afore-mentioned measures of empowering social contexts, on one hand, and seven democracy indices, on the other hand. Apart from the index of effective democracy, the other six democracy measures include the Polity “autocracy-democracy” scores as of 2000–2004;\(^5\) the CIRI “empowerment and integrity rights” measure as of 2000–2006;\(^6\) the Freedom House “civil and political rights” ratings as of 2000–2006; the Vanhanen “index of democratization” as of 2001;\(^7\) the Economist intelligence unit’s “democracy index” as of 2006;\(^8\) and the World Bank’s “voice and accountability” measure as of 2000–2006.\(^9\) For each democracy index, data are averaged over the time period from 2000 to the most recent year for which data are available.

### Table 1  Correlations of Various Democracy Indices with Empowering Socioeconomic and Sociocultural Contexts

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Note: Entries are Person’s *r* correlations (number of nations in parentheses). All correlations are significant at the .001-level. Highest correlation in each row is in bold letters.

Note: Dataset with variable description downloadable at: http://www.worldvaluessurvey.org/publications.

Table 1 shows that all democracy indices are significantly and positively correlated with each aspect of empowering social contexts. Yet, the strength of the correlations varies consistently between the indices. Usually the World Bank voice and accountability measure and the Economist democracy index show very strong correlations.
with empowering social contexts. However, in the case of these two indices this is partly true because they stretch the concept of democracy into its social context. The Economist as well as the World Bank include data from the WVS and other surveys to create their democracy indices. This generates a semiautological correlation between these indices and the social context of democracy.

By contrast, the index of effective democracy remains within the limits of an institutional definition of democracy and thereby avoids a tautological correlation with democracy’s empowering contexts. And yet, the index of effective democracy shows the strongest correlation with each measure of an empowering context, among all seven measures of democracy.

This finding suggests that more than any other measure of democracy, the index of effective democracy is indicative of empowering qualities in democracy’s social context. From an empowerment perspective, then, the index of effective democracy appears to be the most valid measure of democracy.

One interpretation of this finding is that, more than other versions of democracy, effective democracy is conditioned by empowering social contexts. The regression analyses in Table 2 confirm this suggestion. Nominal democracy is explained to 40 percent by empowering qualities of the socioeconomic context, and to 58 percent by empowering qualities of the sociocultural context (see Models 1 and 3). By contrast, the respective proportions for effective democracy are 74 and 76 percent (see Models 5 and 7).

### Table 2  Modeling the Embeddedness of Popular Rights within Empowering Social Contexts

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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Socio-Economic Context 1995</td>
<td>19.42***</td>
<td>(10.04)</td>
<td>9.59**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Democracy Stock as of 1995</td>
<td>51.39***</td>
<td>(4.56)</td>
<td>3.71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adjusted $R^2$</td>
<td>.40</td>
<td>.46</td>
<td>.58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N (number of cases)</td>
<td>154</td>
<td>153</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes: Entries in upper panel are unstandardized regression coefficients with T-ratios in parentheses. Significance levels: * p<.05  ** p<.01 *** p<.001. Checking collinearity statistics (variance inflation factors), heteroskedasticity statistics (White test), and case influence statistics (dfits), there is no indication of biased estimates due to problems with either multicollinearity, heteroskedasticity or influential cases.
Clearly, these findings evidence that empowering qualities in the social context of democracy associate with democracy. But do they associate with democracy as its condition or as its consequence, or both? This question is of inherent interest and can be examined by including a prior measure of democracy that represents the prevalence of democracy in a country’s past. Doing so reduces the effect of the empowering context on subsequent democracy to the part that is free from the prior prevalence of democracy. Under a conservative assumption, this is the truly conditioning effect of empowering qualities in democracy’s context on democracy itself. For a measure of democracy’s prevalence in the past, we use John Gerring et al.’s “democracy stock” index, as of 1995. The index measures a country’s cumulative historical experience with democracy and is supposed to be the most impactive measure of democracy’s long-term effects.

Models 6 and 8 show that, when one reduces empowering social conditions to the part that is free from the prevalence of democracy in the past, they lose almost half of their explanatory power. Yet, they still explain a significant and considerable proportion of the variation in effective democracy, namely 44 percent in Model 6 and 45 percent in Model 8, which are conservative estimates of the net effect of empowering social conditions on effective democracy. With nominal democracy, the net effect of empowering contexts is much weaker, explaining only 7 (Model 2) and 36 percent (Model 4) of the variation. Again, more than nominal democracy, effective democracy is conditioned by empowering qualities in democracy’s social context.

Interestingly, the index of effective democracy has been criticized on the basis of the same two accounts from which we infer its quality: (1) effective democracy is less closely associated with other democracy indices than they are associated with each other; (2) effective democracy is more closely associated with economic development and other theoretical correlates of democracy than are all other democracy indices. Ironically, these two features simply reify the qualities of the effective democracy index. Effective democracy shows a loose tie to other democracy indices because it incorporates an institutional quality—rule of law—that the others do not capture. And the fact that effective democracy associates more closely than other democracy indices with factors that a large literature acknowledges as correlates of democracy, is an outright validity criterion.

Conclusion

The root idea that inspires democracy is people empowerment. From this premise, to measure democracy in ways that capture its empowering nature, one needs to take into account rule of law as a state quality that makes democracy effective. By itself, rule of law does not make a country democratic, but it does make nominal democracy effective. Following these rationales, we created an index of “effective democracy” where we depreciated scores for nominal democracy to the extent that rule of law is lacking. Sometimes this depreciation goes so far that a nominal democracy scores lower in effective people power than some milder versions of autocracy. Given democracy’s
purpose of empowering people, this is perfectly appropriate. Democracies that largely lack rule of law do as little to empower people effectively as do some milder versions of autocracy.

The internal logic of a measurement concept is one criterion of its quality. Another quality criterion is a concept’s external validity, that is, its relation to other aspects of reality—aspects that are theoretically linked to the concept but not a definitional part of it. Democracy is about people power, so empowerment is democracy’s theoretical link to other aspects of reality. Other such aspects of reality, which are not themselves part of democracy but still empower people, include socioeconomic conditions that make people capable of practicing democracy, and sociocultural conditions that encourage them to practice democracy. Evaluated in this human empowerment framework, the most valid index of democracy is the one that shows the closest association with empowering socioeconomic conditions and empowering sociocultural conditions.

In all statistical tests with seven different measures of democracy, the index of effective democracy always turned out to be the one that was most strongly associated with empowering qualities in the social context of democracy. Further tests of the direction of these associations suggest that empowering social conditions have indeed an independent effect on democracy that is free from the prevalence of democracy in the past.

As a regime designed to empower people, democracy should be intimately related to empowering qualities in the social context of democracy. This logic is most clearly represented by effective democracy. This measure shows that human empowerment is a unity of empowering social conditions and empowering regime characteristics.

NOTES

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5. As our analyses will show, almost half of the world’s contemporary democracies are ineffective in the sense that the state lacks rule of law and is hence incapable of making people’s rights truly effective.


23. Ibid.


31. The zero point in the rule of law scale is not an absolute minimum. Instead, it indicates the lowest ever observed level of rule of law.
33. Gibney et al. code country reports of Amnesty International and the U.S. State Department on violence, coercion, and repression used by state authorities against citizens. Countries receive a score of 1 for the lowest and 5 for the highest level of state repression. This is done twice based on Amnesty International and State Department information, so one can average the two scores for each country-year into a nine-point scale. Averaged over six years, as done here, this becomes a multi-point continuous scale, which we re-scaled into a range from 0 for the lowest to 1.0 for the highest repression level. Data and coding descriptions are for download at: www.politicalterrorscale.org. See Mark Gibney, R. Wood and L. Cornett, “The Political Terror Scale,” Online Manuscript (available at www.politicalterrorscale.org, 2008).
34. For democracies, of course, this holds true too: Among the 108 societies in the democratic zone of the popular rights scale the correlation is $r=-.61$
40. We are grateful to Michael L. Ross for providing to us his data on a country’s per capita oil and gas rent. See Michael L. Ross, “Oil, Islam, and Women,” *American Political Science Review*, 102 (February 2008), 107–24.
42. For a detailed index description, see Vanhanen, *Democratization*, 42–63.
44. This version of emancipative values is portrayed in Christian Welzel, “How Selfish are Self-Expression Values,” *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology*, 41 (March 2010).
47. Results of these analyses are available upon request.
48. Factor scales are built from normalized component data: component measures are standardized to a mean of 0 and standard deviation of 1.0. Factor scales are weighted averages of the normalized component measures.
49. Data can be inspected in the Internet-Appendix mentioned above.
52. Vanhanen, *Democratization*, ch. 2.
54. Kaufmann, Kraay, and Mastruzzi, “Governance Matters V.”
55. The assumption is conservative because it presumes that the prevalence of democracy in the past is not itself influenced by empowering contexts of the past, so all variation taken away in current
empowering contexts by democracy’s prevalence in the past can really be ascribed to democracy in the past and nothing else.

56. The measure adds up a country’s yearly scores on the Polity democracy index but depreciates the count by one percent for each year it fades to the past from the baseline of 1995. We are grateful to John Gerring for providing us the data on this index. See John Gerring, J. P. Bond, W.T. Barndt, and C. Moreno, “Democracy and Economic Growth,” World Politics, 57 (April 2005), 323–64.