FREEDOM HOUSE IN THE PACIFIC: DEMOCRATIC ADVANCEMENT IN FOURTEEN ISLAND STATES

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The Freedom House surveys of political rights and civil liberties in the countries of the world show that the small Pacific island states perform remarkably well as democratic units. A further analysis of the surveys identifies two characteristic traits of democracy Pacific style. First, the general trend over time is one of improvement and advancement. Second, this fortunate development is promoted by betterments in political rights rather than civil liberties. This probably reflects efforts in the region to introduce concessions to traditional authority. However, the Freedom House conception of democracy does not include considerations of policy. Less than prosperous and in many cases quite dependent on aid and subsidies, the islands bear witness to the fact that frameworks that emphasize democracy as process and procedure may easily come into collision with frameworks that emphasize democracy as output and achievement.

BELIEFS ABOUT democracy abound. They may, according to one rather colorful listing (May 1978:3), be exemplified by declarations identifying democracy as or with inorganic fraternity (Proudhon), despotic rule (Bonald), the idea of community life itself (Dewey), a petit-bourgeois counterrevolutionary ideology (Marx), mediocrity (J. S. Mill, Sorel), equality of fortunes and intellects (Tocqueville, Stephen), shared power (Carlyle), the absence of a state apparatus (Marx, Bakunin, Lenin), the political system in which society achieves consciousness of itself (Durkheim), the most political and complicated of systems (Mayo), institutionalized opposition (Lipset), the good society itself in operation (Lipset), maximal opportunities for self-development (Macpherson), and the worship of jackals by jackasses (Mencken). It has in fact been argued that the term "democracy" is used to convey

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so many differing meanings that a statement that the good society is good is no more a tautology than a statement that the good society is democratic (Westholm 1976:184); a pessimistic view is that there is little hope that there can ever be a generally agreed on definition of democracy (Kimber 1989:199–200).

Still, most definitions and conceptions of democracy today consider two essential aspects: political rights and civil liberties. Defining democracy in a minimal fashion, as a system where multiple political parties compete through free elections for control of government, no longer appears adequate. An emphasis on individual rights and the rule of law has been added and is present in a number of barometers used to measure democratic performance (Foweraker and Krznaric, 2000:759–760). In any inspection of these barometers, two global trends are discernible. On the one hand, there has been during recent decades a dramatic progress in the expansion of freedom and democratic governance in the world. On the other hand, the progress is anything but even and steady. Between different regions, great differences still prevail in terms of democratic opening. The Freedom House surveys of political rights and civil liberties in the countries of the world, which will find extensive use in this essay, provide an instructive illustration of this state of affairs (Karatnycky 2003:101–102). Whereas in terms of Freedom House standards almost all countries in Western Europe (24 out of 25) are democracies in the year 2002, and the region of the Americas and the Caribbean also performs reasonably well, 23 countries out of 35 being democracies, the situation is much worse in other areas of the globe. In Central and Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union, 12 countries are today democratic as against 15 nondemocracies, and in Sub-Saharan Africa 11 countries are democracies as against 37 nondemocracies. In the Middle East and North Africa only one democracy can be found (Israel), whereas the remaining 17 countries are all nondemocracies. Concerning, finally, the Asia-Pacific region, the score is again rather satisfactory, 18 countries being democratic as against 21 nondemocracies.

Much overlooked in the literature on democratization is the fact that the good figure for the Asia-Pacific region is to a large extent due to the excellent performance of a group of small island states that attained independence during a thirty-year span, starting in the early 1960s and ending in the early 1990s. The intriguing relationship between small size and democracy, small entities being in general more prone to democratic government than larger ones, is certainly recognized in the democracy literature (e.g., Dahl and Tufte 1973; Hadenius 1992:122–127; C. Anckar 2000; Ott 2000), but the evident manifestation of this relation in the Pacific context is seldom explicitly recognized (D. Anckar 2001, 2002a, 2002b). It is the aim of this essay to

showcase this Pacific context and to elucidate patterns as well as variations of democratic conduct. The time span of the investigation is between the years of 1972 and 1999, this period being determined partly by considerations that pertain to data supply.

Data and Countries

This essay makes systematic use of freedom ratings provided by the Freedom House organization. Based on surveys by regional experts, consultants, and human rights specialists as well as fact-finding missions and published sources, Freedom House has monitored since 1972 the progress and decline of political rights and civil liberties in all the nations of the world and in related territories. Since 1978 these efforts have been published in a yearbook called *Freedom in the World*. In essence, on the basis of multi-itemized checklists, the units are rated on seven-category scales for political rights as well as civil liberties. Political rights designate the right of all adults to vote and compete for public office, and for elected representatives to have a decisive vote on public policies. Civil liberties designate the freedoms to develop views, institutions, and personal autonomy apart from the state.

In more operational terms (see, for example, *Freedom in the World*: 593–596), a country grants its citizens political rights when it permits them to form political parties that represent a significant range of voter choice and whose leaders can openly compete for and be elected to positions of power in government. On the one hand, the political rights checklist that is used by Freedom House includes items like the existence of free and fair elections, fair electoral laws, equal campaigning opportunities, endowment of freely elected representatives with real power, the right of people to organize in competitive political groupings, significant opposition vote, and reasonable self-determination of minority groups. On the other hand, a country upholds its citizens' civil liberties when it respects and protects their religious, ethnic, economic, linguistic, and other rights, including gender and family rights, personal freedoms, and freedoms of the press, belief, and association. Accordingly, the civil liberties checklist includes items like the existence of free and independent media, open public discussion, freedom of assembly, demonstration and political organization, the rule of law, protection from political terror, free religious expression, personal social freedoms, and equality of opportunity. To give one example, in the year of 1997, the score for Papua New Guinea was a satisfying 2 for political rights and a less impressive 4 for civil liberties. While recognizing the existence of democratic elections, a free private press, balanced news coverage, and active and outspoken nongovernmental organizations, the survey of that country also called attention to elections being marred by ir-

TABLE 1. **Democracy Scores and Ratings: Individual Pacific States, 1972–1999.**

Country	Rating Years	Political Rights	Civil Liberties	Combined Score	Democracy Rating (Annual Average Score)
Belau	1994–1999	6	12	18	3.0
Cook Islands	1974–1999	51	52	103	4.0
Fiji	1972–1999	89	75	164	5.9
Kiribati	1979–1999	25	35	60	2.9
Marshall Islands	1991–1999	9	9	18	2.0
Micronesia	1991–1999	9	12	21	2.3
Nauru	1972–1999	52	63	115	4.1
Niue	1974–1994	42	42	84	4.0
Papua New Guinea	1975–1999	51	66	117	4.7
Samoa	1972–1999	90	66	156	5.6
Solomon Islands	1978–1999	33	42	75	3.4
Tonga	1972–1999	132	83	215	7.7
Tuvalu	1978–1999	26	30	56	2.5
Vanuatu	1980–1999	33	64	97	4.9

Source: Freedom in the World, Annual Volumes 1972–1999.

regularities and violence, and security forces having poor discipline and low morale. Furthermore, there was in that country a law and order crisis and social discrimination of women (*Freedom in the World*: 409).

On the basis of these ratings, for each year, each unit of study is placed by Freedom House into one of the categories of Free, Partly Free, and Not Free. On a scale of 1 to 7, where 1 represents the most free and 7 the least free for the combined ratings, generally countries whose ratings average 1 to 2.5 are considered Free, whereas countries whose ratings average 3 to 5.5 are considered Partly Free, and countries whose ratings average 5.5 to 7 are considered Not Free. The labels are simplified terms that each covers a broad third of the available raw points (*Freedom in the World*: 597–598). Although at times criticized for treating some regions in the world harshly and other regions generously in terms of classification (Lane and Ersson 1994:144; Bollen 1993:1221–1223), the Freedom House data are widely used by social scientists and political scientists (e.g., Burkhart and Lewis-Beck 1994; Helliwell 1994; Lijphart 1984,1999), and they have been found generally to possess a high degree of validity and reliability (Bollen 1993:1207–1230). They have also been found to correlate significantly with other prominent measures of the level of democracy in various countries (C. Anckar 1997:22–29). It should be emphasized that the Freedom House surveys do not score countries based on governmental intentions or constitutions but rather on real world situations caused by governmental and nongovernmental factors alike (*Freedom in the World 1997–1998*:592). The classifications, therefore, are outcomes of systematic and empirical comparisons that go beyond the observation of formal procedures and have a local empirical grounding.

The islands that are investigated in this research are, in alphabetical order; Belau (Palau), the Cook Islands, Fiji, Kiribati, the Marshall Islands, Micronesia, Nauru, Niue, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, the Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu, and Vanuatu. With two exceptions, these islands were independent states or gained independence during the time span of the research period. The exceptions are the Cook Islands and Niue. The Cook Islands became internally self-governing in free association and with common citizenship with New Zealand in 1965, and now enjoys a position that effectively allows it to operate as an independent state (Henderson 1994:99). Niue received in 1974 the same status (Derbyshire and Derbyshire 1999:843–845), and it is said to have a population of people who have "become hopelessly addicted to New Zealand and her influences" (Douglas 1987:188). The fact that these two territories are free to conduct a policy of their own and have their own democratic institutions as well as the fact that they receive independent ratings in the Freedom House materials makes it possible to include them as cases in this research.

TABLE 2. **Pacific Democracy: A Typology of States**

	Political Rights Performance			
Civil Liberties Performance	Excellent	Good	Modest	Bad
Excellent	Belau 100–100 Kiribati 100–100 Marshall Islands 100–100 Micronesia 100–100 Niue 95–100 Solomon Islands 100–91 Tuvalu 100–100	Cook Islands 77–100		
Good	Nauru 100–75			
Modest	Papua New Guinea 96–56		Fiji 57–54	Samoa 39–64
Bad	Vanuatu 100–10			Tonga 0–4

As the period starts in 1972, annual ratings are available for Fiji (independent in 1970), Nauru (1968), Samoa (1962), and Tonga (never formally colonized, see, for example, Campbell 1992:112–113). Later on during the 1970s, as more islands gain independence, annual ratings become available since 1975 for Papua New Guinea, since 1978 for the Solomon Islands and Tuvalu, and since 1979 for Kiribati. The self-governing territories of the Cook Islands and Niue both appear in the Freedom House ratings from the year 1974. The only change during the 1980s is that Vanuatu, independent in 1980, from that year joins the group of countries that are rated by Freedom House. More changes occur in the 1990s as the Marshall Islands and Micronesia both receive ratings from 1991 onward and Belau joins the group in 1994. Figures are available for Niue up to the year 1994 only. For later years, this island is classified by Freedom House as a "Free" entity, but no actual figures are reported.

Democratic Varieties

This third section focuses on the performance of individual island countries. Points of departure for analysis are given in Tables 1 and 2, which have similar objectives although they differ in structure and composition. Table 1 summarizes some aspects of data availability but also reports observations on similarities and differences between countries. The logic of the table is

perhaps best explained by means of a pair of examples. The data concerning Fiji tell us that ratings for this country are available for all twenty-eight years in the time span 1972–1999. The points received by Fiji for political rights during these years add up to 89, whereas the corresponding sum for civil liberties adds up to 75, the total therefore being 164, and the average annual score for Fiji thus being 5.9. This score, then, crosses the Freedom House border between the Free and Partly Free categories and expels Fiji from the democracy group. Tuvalu, in contrast, with ratings available for the time span 1978–1999, has a clearly more favorable record, the average annual score being 2.5, which places Tuvalu among the model democracies.

Table 2 uses the political rights and civil liberties categories as two analytical dimensions. On each dimension, the individual countries are classified in one of four categories according to performance. In the first category are countries with an excellent record, "excellent" meaning that the country has received a rating of 1 or 2 on at least 90 percent of the ratings of the country in question. In a second category are placed countries that have a "good" record, the operational measure being the rating of 1 or 2 on at least 75 percent and less than 90 percent of the rating points. The third category covers cases that have a "modest" performance, meaning that the countries have a rating of 1 or 2 on at least 50 percent and less than 75 percent of the rating points. Finally, in the fourth category are cases that have performed "badly," meaning that they have been rated as "free" on less than half of the classifications that have concerned the country in question. The results are presented in a table of sixteen cells of which several remain empty. The table crosses the dimensions of political rights performance and civil liberties performances, and also gives the exact individual scores for each country. For example, the score of 100–100 for Tuvalu means that this country has received a rating of 1 or 2 for both political rights and civil liberties on each and every rating that Freedom House has made of Tuvalu.

Inspection of the two tables reveals that the countries can be divided into three groups. The first group includes cases that have an excellent or near excellent performance and is by far the largest. In fact, no fewer than nine out of the fourteen fall into this group. There are, however, internal differences within the group, as three subgroups emerge. First, five countries score maximum points on both dimensions; these countries are Belau, Kiribati, the Marshall Islands, Micronesia, and Tuvalu. Second, the figures for Niue and the Solomon Islands are somewhat weaker but still close to perfect. Third, the Cook Islands and Nauru are still weaker, as they combine excellent ratings on one dimension with less convincing ratings on the other dimension. The deviations differ, however, in nature. Whereas the Cook Islands have a less impressive rating on political rights, the same is true of Nauru on civil

liberties. An inspection of the raw data also suggests a difference in terms of time. Whereas the Cook Islands has improved its political rights rating over the years, scoring an optimal 1 for the last seven years of classification, the rating of Nauru on civil liberties has declined from 2 to 3 from 1993 onward. In other words, democracy has been making headway in the Cook Islands but is declining in Nauru.

In a second group are two countries, namely, Papua New Guinea and Vanuatu. They share a profile that combines an appreciation of political rights and a neglect of civil liberties. They can therefore, to use a common term though illogical be called "electoral democracies." (If democracy is defined to allude to more than elections, then a system that satisfies the election criteria only is simply not a democracy; if the election criterion is sufficient, then all countries that satisfy this criterion are democracies, and the prefix "electoral" is redundant.) However, the profiles of the two countries are not identical over time. During earlier stages of PNG independence, democratic performance was satisfactory and there was some truth to the saying that the country possessed a model of democracy that many developing countries would envy (Deklin 1992:35). Only toward the end of the 1980s, in the wake of constitutional crises and emerging threats of political violence (Saffu 1998), did the country fail to secure a Free ranking in terms of civil liberties. Vanuatu, in contrast, has throughout its independence maintained a tradition of limiting freedom of expression and access to the media (Manua 1995:423). Only twice (1982, 1993) during the time span between 1980 and 1999 has the country been classified as Free in terms of civil liberties. The third group, finally, comprises three countries that clearly deviate from the general pattern and have an inferior performance compared to the other countries. Again, however, there are within-group differences. Whereas Fiji and to a lesser extent Samoa have at least modest performances, Tonga is the definite Pacific outlier, being rated over the years with figures that resemble those given recently by Freedom House to, say, Gabon, Kenya, or Ukraine.

The differences between countries and groups of countries are often case-specific and are therefore difficult to systematize. For instance, the somewhat harsh treatment given by Freedom House to Samoa is to a large extent a consequence of the franchise being restricted in that country until 1990 to holders of chiefly *matai* titles (Hadenius 1992:40), eligibility for candidature in fact still remains confined to the *matai*. Two general features are suggestive, though. One is the impact of size. True, all units, with the exception of Papua New Guinea, are small-sized and in fact microstates. Within the limits of smallness, however, here as in other studies (e.g., D. Anckar 1997), size thresholds apparently play a role. All five countries that have less than excellent or very good records are among the seven largest units in the

TABLE 3. **Average Democracy Ratings for the Pacific Island States, 1972–1999.**

	Democracy	Political Rights Component	Civil Liberties Component
1972	5.0	3.0	2.0
1973	5.5	3.3	2.3
1974	5.5	3.3	2.2
1975	5.1	3.0	2.1
1976	5.0	2.9	2.1
1977	4.9	2.7	2.1
1978	4.8	2.7	2.1
1979	4.7	2.6	2.1
1980	4.7	2.5	2.3
1981	4.7	2.5	2.3
1982	4.5	2.4	2.2
1983	4.7	2.4	2.4
1984	4.7	2.3	2.5
1985	4.7	2.3	2.5
1986	4.5	2.3	2.3
1987	5.2	2.6	2.5
1988	5.1	2.5	2.5
1989	4.5	2.3	2.2
1990	4.4	2.1	2.3
1991	4.0	1.9	2.1
1992	3.8	1.8	2.0
1993	3.8	1.8	2.0
1994	3.9	1.7	2.2
1995	3.9	1.8	2.1
1996	3.9	1.8	2.1
1997	4.0	1.8	2.2
1998	4.0	1.8	2.2
1999	3.8	1.6	2.1
1970s	5.1	2.9	2.1
1980s	4.7	2.4	2.3
1990s	4.0	1.8	2.1
1972–1999	4.6	2.4	2.2

research population, whereas all truly small units are in the group with high standards. Diminutive size, therefore — no exceptions being found — stands out as a sufficient condition for a high democratic standard, whereas larger size — two exceptions being found (Micronesia and the Solomon Islands) — is as a rule linked to a somewhat less satisfactory democratic performance.

Recent developments have strengthened this rule, as the Solomon Islands, in consequence of the severe internal upheavals in that country (see, for example, Ingram 2002:306), no longer can be regarded as an exception.

The other feature is the impact of ethnicity. Political scientists are not in agreement on the political implications of cultural diversity (e.g. Rabushka and Shepsle 1972:18–20; Lijphart 1977); the Pacific experience is, however, that the implications are in the direction of weakened prospects for democracy. This is obvious in the case of Fiji, where the weak democracy performance of that country followed from the racially defined coups in the late 1980s that bred the ill-famed 1990 constitution, defiled with discriminatory and nondemocratic provisions (Lawson 1991, 1996). The case of Fiji is, however, not an isolated one. As evident from mappings of the extent of ethnic heterogeneity in the countries of the world (Anckar, Eriksson, and Leskinen 2002), of the six Pacific islands that have less satisfying democracy performances than the others (Fiji, Nauru, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Tonga, and Vanuatu), all with the exception of Tonga are among the most heterogeneous islands. A comparison with other countries of the globe also shows that the heterogeneity of these Pacific islands reaches a notable international level (ibid). Although diversity is not necessarily an obstacle to democracy, the Pacific pattern suggests that the relation between the two components is strained and uneasy.

Pacific Democracy: A Bird's-Eye View

Table 3 provides average ratings for the island region for each of the years from 1972 to 1999 and thereby gives an overall numerical description of the development of democracy. The method that is used is one of simple arithmetic. For each year, the ratings of the states for that year have been added, and the result has been divided by the number of states for which ratings have been available during that particular year. For instance, for the year 1993 a total of thirteen states received ratings, the sum of these ratings being 23 for political rights and 27 for civil liberties. These figures as well as the total figure of 50 (23 + 27) have then been divided by 13, these calculations giving the average values of 3.8 for total performance, 1.8 for political rights, and 2.0 for civil liberties. In a similar vein, average ratings for the three decades of the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s as well as for the whole period of 1972–1999 are included in the table.

As already mentioned, countries whose annual ratings average 1 to 2.5 are generally considered Free by Freedom House, whereas countries with ratings that average 3 to 5.5 are Partly Free. The overall figure for the region is clearly within the Free category, and this outcome is robust. Thus, the

ratings of the region are consistently lower than the Partly Free threshold, and only at five measuring points out of twenty-eight are the ratings slightly over the 5.0 ceiling. This must be regarded as a remarkable achievement that indeed goes a long way to explaining the good overall performance of the Asia-Pacific region. There is a tendency among Pacific authors to question the feasibility of Western models for developing countries and to advocate the need for models that facilitate the incorporation of culture-specific traits in the democracy concept (e.g., Crocombe et al. 1992; Helu 1994). As is evident from Tables 1 through 3, however, no such artificial expansions of the democracy concept are called for to demonstrate the high democratic performance of the Pacific islands. They obviously manage very well on a comparative basis. True, no corresponding data sets are available for other regions or parts of the world. The observations in the introduction to this essay on the spreading of democracy serve, however, to substantiate the notion of a Pacific superiority.

As is also evident from table 3, there are two characteristic traits of democracy Pacific style. On the one hand, the general trend is one of improvement and advancement. The overall figure for the 1980s is better than the corresponding figure for the 1970s, and the overall figure for the 1990s is better still than the corresponding figure for the 1980s. Whereas the island region was balancing the thin border between Free and Partly Free during the 1970s, it has during the 1990s secured a firm position within the Free category. Second, however, this fortunate development is brought about by improvement in terms of political rights rather than civil liberties. Concerning political rights, the figures for the region average three points or more during the first years of the period and fall below two points during the last decade of the period. In contrast, the figures for civil liberties have remained remarkably stable during the whole period, the sum average for the first five years (1972–1976) in fact being exactly the same as for the last five years (1995–1999). Also, the score for the very first year (1972) is in fact slightly better than the score for the very last year (1999). In other words, whereas the observance of political rights has advanced from good to excellent, the observance of civil liberties has always been very good, without, however, quite reaching a level of excellence.

This pattern calls for two general comments. One is that the pattern probably reflects the well-known fact that the Pacific islands have long-standing indigenous cultures and traditions that permeate many facets of life, are a source of national pride, and are not easily reconciled with democratic ideals. In his introductory chapter to the important volume *Law, Politics, and Government in the Pacific Island States*, Yash Ghai emphasizes that in the making of constitutions for the newly independent countries in the region,

"the incorporation of customary values and practices and the accommodation of traditional authorities in the constitution was the most difficult and complex intellectual and technical problem in the whole exercise" (1988:39). The problem has received many solutions, which are discussed at length by Ghai (1988) and other authors (e.g., Thakur 1991; Lawson 1996; White and Lindstrom 1997). It is clear from these discussions that the accommodations of traditional authority have implied encroachments on liberties rather than rights and that the relative neglect over time of liberties therefore reflects a lingering effect from the efforts in the region to introduce concessions to traditional authority.

The second comment is about a sequential argument in the democracy literature. By the end of the year 2002, the Freedom House survey found 121 electoral democracies among 192 states; yet, according to the same survey, only 89 of these electoral democracies had fostered respect for human rights or fostered the stable rule of law (Karatnycky 2003:105). Many potential democracies therefore appear to follow a path toward democracy where free elections precede a possible expansion of constitutionalism. The adequacy of this sequence for the establishment and maintenance of democratic stability has, however, been questioned. The leading question is: In order for democratic stability to result, should basic human and citizens rights be firmly in place before free elections and political competition are achieved? Or, rather, should free politics be the very engine behind the attainment and establishment of such rights? On the basis of theoretical extrapolation, some authors like Guillermo O'Donnell and Philippe Schmitter (1986) and also Robert Dahl (1992) and Larry Diamond (1999:46) have advocated the view that democracy is best served when and if the introduction of rights precedes the introduction of competition. Given that democratic stability, as evident from Table 3, is one distinguishing characteristic of the Pacific region, the region is certainly an adequate and fitting case when pondering the disputed relationship between the political rights and civil liberties components in the emergence of democracy. However, the findings are somewhat contradictory and come in fact closer to repudiation than to confirmation.

On the one hand, as noted above, the Pacific states were marked by a somewhat higher appreciation of liberties than of rights, which is in accordance with theory. In all, the average score for civil liberties has been better than the score for political rights in thirteen out of twenty-eight years, these thirteen years comprising the first eleven years of the period. On the other hand, this general pattern notwithstanding, one has great difficulties in finding individual cases that support the sequence hypothesis. Admittedly, the Cook Islands started out stronger in liberty than in rights and became a stable democracy, as predicted by the theory. However, Belau, equally stable, has been over the

years stronger in rights than in liberties, thus proving the theory wrong. Other cases add to confusion rather than to clarity. Samoa has the same sequence as the Cook Islands but is clearly weaker in overall stability, and Vanuatu has the same sequence as Belau but is clearly weaker in overall stability. The great majority of the cases are indeed stable democracies, but they do not systematically represent one sequence to the disadvantage of the other. In fact, most states have a past that is marked by an equally strong appreciation of rights and liberties. On the whole, therefore, the sequence theory does not survive a confrontation with the realities of politics in the Pacific. Democratic stability is not a consequence of one democratic component being temporally subordinated to another. This finding is very much in line with the results from a recent study of democratic dynamics in sixty-six states (Lampi 2003:316–321). It would appear from this study that the sequence theory lacks the potential to explain differences in democratic stability between states. One possible explanation is that the theory builds upon observations that are specific in time and space and lose force in other contexts (ibid:321). The findings from this essay certainly support this explanation.

Democracy as Policy Content

Still, the excellent democracy record of the Pacific states must be put into context. This context is one of selectivity, the excellent record being a consequence of one conception of democracy rather than others being used and applied. In an attempt to bring order to chaos, Michael Bratton and Nicholas van de Walle argue in their study of democratic experiments in Africa that debates over the meaning of democracy in fact boil down to two core definitional issues (1997:12–13). One concerns whether the nature of democracy is best distinguished according to the form of its procedures or the substance of its results. The second concerns whether if a formalistic definition of democracy should embody a minimal set of essential requirements or rather provide a comprehensive characterization. The Freedom House conception of democracy requires representative elections but also recognizes that elections must be conducted within a matrix of civil liberties; the Freedom House notion therefore provides a comprehensive characterization. However, the notion does not include consideration of the substance of policy, and this omission is favorable to the islands. In fact, if the substantial content of policy were a criterion, a case could be made for calling the democratic nature of the Pacific islands into question.

"Neither Paradise nor Paradise Lost," Evelyn Colbert writes in her introduction to the Pacific island polities, the Pacific island countries face a series of problems of governance: "Their governments, like many, are challenged

by poverty, crime, corruption, youth anomie, drug abuse, population pressure, slow growth rates, resource depletion, environmental degradation, and intermittent natural catastrophes" (Colbert 1997:63). The challenges are so many and so grave that they seriously undermine the efficiency and the political productivity of the states. A small domestic market, a limited resource base, and high costs of social and economic infrastructure are constraints inherent in almost all small island states; the Pacific cases certainly face these constraints and others. As evident from applications of the Commonwealth Vulnerability Index, which has been developed to measure the exposure of states to economic, environmental, political, and social shocks, to the many vulnerabilities of the Pacific islands should be added a liability of climatic catastrophes (Easter 1999:417–418). In an authoritative statement on political life in the islands, it is said that while Kiribati and Tuvalu must be among the world's most democratic states, they are also among the Pacific's poorest (Crocombe et al. 1992:243). In moderation, the same is true of most if not all of the democratic Pacific islands. Although there are differences in wealth and faculties between the islands, on the whole, they are all less than prosperous and quite dependent on aid and subsidies. Indeed, in the Pacific sphere frameworks that emphasise democracy as process and procedure come easily into collision with frameworks that emphasise democracy as output and achievement.

Are, then, the Pacific island nations democracies and nondemocracies at one and the same time? Apparently, the rather confusing answer would be yes, given that the two aspects of democracy are both honored as relevant criteria. The potential for noncorrespondence between democracy as form and democracy as policy has not received much attention in the democracy discourse, democratic form being in most cases accompanied by democratic policy in the much-researched Western European countries. Underachievers in terms of policy, the much less researched Pacific islands, however, upset this harmony between form and content, and bring essential definitional matters in the democracy discourse to a head. In other words, by their failure in terms of policy, the Pacific islands may simplify the construction of a connected democratic theory.

In particular, democracy Pacific style challenges in two important respects the general rationality of the policy orientation: First, definitions that conceptualize democracy in terms of outcomes regard as an empirical question what formal arrangements are better suited than others to produce a democratic outcome (e.g., May 1978). Being underachievers in terms of policy, the Pacific island cases would seem to suggest that the institutions and procedures that they represent are flawed and unsuitable for the promotion of democracy. Precisely this suggestion, however, appears odd and inconsis-

tent with any sensible mode of thinking about democracy. The islands honor political rights and civil liberties, and they thereby represent a democratic form that is much valued and respected. It would seem that conceptualizations that dismiss this form are guilty of importing alien elements into the democracy discourse and that they are in danger of missing essentials in efforts to distinguish between democratic and nondemocratic entities. Although matters of definition always appear to some extent controversial and difficult, the primary purpose of defining is still drawing borders, finding out the distinctive feature of the specimen at hand (Sartori 1994:131, 135). Given this purpose, efforts at establishing defining characteristics of democracy that bypass notions of political rights and civil liberties seem ill-advised and unwarranted. Bratton and Walle put this very nicely: "The distinctive feature of democracy is not that it is better than authoritarian rule at raising or equalising living standards but that it provides political access to decision making for ordinary citizens" (1997:12).

Second, being strong in democratic conduct and weak in policy, the Pacific islands bear witness to the fact that there is no straightforward and one-to-one relation between form and policy, and that political output is influenced partly by factors and circumstances that remain outside the spheres of politics and democracy. Many democracies are praised for a high level of economic affluence; however, as indicated by the lack of affluence in the Pacific democracies, a high level of security and wealth need not follow from democratic government but simply mirrors a higher stage of economic development (Schmidt 1999:287). By making this relationship evident, the Pacific islands again contribute to an appreciation of a more uniform and integrated set of democracy definitions. Namely, if policy outcomes are consequences to a significant extent of other factors than democratic form and democratic procedure, one is surely justified in entertaining doubts about conceptualizations of democracy that build on policy alone. In much the same vein, the Pacific islands are instrumental also in indicating that similar democratic performances by similar democratic actors may still produce differing policy outcomes. This becomes evident from a comparison of the Pacific and the Caribbean small island states. Although there are some differences between these communities in terms of democratic form, Pacific communities being more oriented toward a consensus mode of democracy (D. Anckar 2001), the communities are very similar in terms of democracy level. Still, the similarity notwithstanding, the Caribbean islands are more economically developed (Fairbairn and Worrell 1996:98–102), and this is for a variety of reasons that are external to political and institutional settings and thereby to political form and procedure. For instance, the Caribbean had an earlier start than did the South Pacific in human resource development and the building of industrial

organization; the Caribbean also has a longer history of self-government and external contact. Furthermore, the South Pacific is more remote and the islands more dispersed, which increases the cost of delivery of public utilities, public services, and transport (ibid.:1998). In short, considerations on democratic conduct are less than helpful in efforts to understand productivity differences in the Caribbean and the Pacific. Instead, factors related to history and geography must be considered.

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