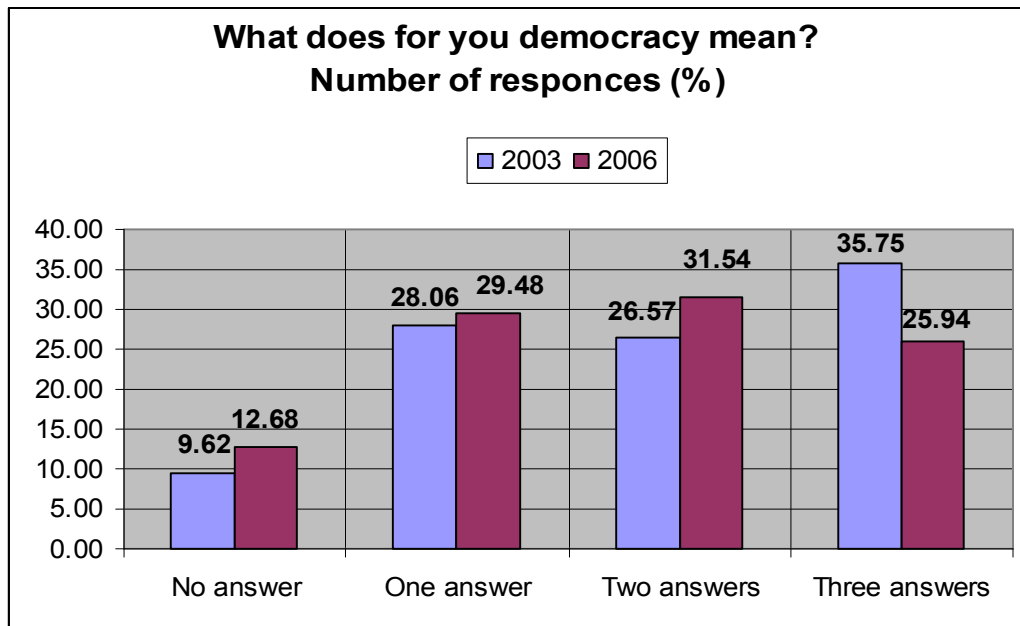


Conceptions of Democracy

To assess the cognitive capacity of Mongolians with regard to the notion of democracy, the East Asian Barometer-2003/Asian Barometer-2006 surveys asked respondents to offer a definition or meaning of democracy. Thus, an attempt was made to determine whether Mongolians have a minimalist (procedural) or maximalist (substantive) understanding of what democracy constitutes. A procedural understanding of democracy normally constitutes a basic institutional understanding of democracy, which includes the right to suffrage, majority rule, or political freedom in general. A substantive understanding goes beyond a procedural definition and deals with social justice, socio-economic equity, civil liberties, and quality of life.

Specifically, the Surveys asked Mongolian respondents the question “To you, what does democracy mean?” This question prompted respondents to name up to three specific properties that are definitive of their own subjective interpretation of democracy. Figure below shows the distribution of the results concerning the general awareness of democracy among Mongols.



The Surveys shows that 23.14% of Mongols associate democracy with a definition of freedom in general, which represents a basic, rudimentary cognitive knowledge of democracy that lacks substantive depth. Far fewer offered definitions indicative of a more complete understanding. 12.06 % described democracy as promoting a social equality and justice. Do Mongolians understand democracy procedurally or substantively? If one is to use Dahl's (1971) procedural definition of periodic elections and institutional factors that promote political rights, 86 percent of Mongolians equate democracy with a procedural definition. Surprisingly, substantive interpretations of democracy among Mongolians are minimal at best. The Survey in 2006 shows that the situation is not changed a lot in compare with 2003. This confirms that Mongolians as a whole tend to identify democracy with a minimalist definition of basic freedoms. In general, Mongolians lack cognitive sophistication in

terms of equating democratic precepts with deeper substantive interpretations such as social justice, economic and gender equality, and promoting the virtues of capitalism.

