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A Comparative Survey of

DEMOCRACY, GOVERNANCE AND DEVELOPMENT

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Developing Democracy under a New Constitution in Thailand

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Working Paper Series

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DEVELOPING DEMOCRACY UNDER A NEW CONSTITUTION IN THAILAND

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Introduction

Thailand now celebrates over 70 years of democracy, dating to the downfall of the absolute monarchy in 1932. In fact, only about six intervening years can be characterized as "democratic" prior to 1985. Regardless of the forms of government, however, a commitment to democracy – even an "ideology" of democracy – maintained itself through periods of one-party rule, autocracy, military despotism and true experiments with democratic governance. Consolidation of democratic government, beginning in the mid-1980s, fed upon this latent democratic commitment in the mass public, and established itself in the events of "bloody May," 1992, when mass demonstrations forced a military junta to recede from the temporary government, permit new elections, and institute what has proven to be an uninterrupted path of democracy for over a decade. This study documents and evaluates progress toward democracy by examining the evidence for democratic consolidation, as defined by mass opinion (Linz and Stepan, 2001), after the adoption of a new constitution that significantly revises the structures of electoral democracy in Thailand.

Hopes for the future of democracy in Thailand now rest largely with the effectiveness of the Constitution of 1997. Although democracy has been developing steadily, the new constitution represents a step-level shift in the movement toward full democratic governance. Not only does the new constitution radically revise previous systems of electoral democracy, it also creates new institutions for governance that parallel elections as major instruments of democratic authority.

Three institutions are of special relevance for understanding the new Thai political democracy. The first is the Constitutional Court, a body of 15 judges, appointed by the King, but expressly with the advice and selection by the Senate, which chooses from a list submitted by a

special committee composed primarily of academics in law and political science. These judges are elected, essentially, in voting by the Supreme Court of Justice from among its members (5), two members of the Supreme Administrative Court, five qualified lawyers, and (*mirabilis dictu*) three political scientists. These persons are, by qualification, far removed from any association with politics or government and are responsible for interpreting the Constitution as issues arise.

The second major institution of relevance is the Election Commission. The process of selection for this body is similar to that of choosing the Constitutional Court, including selection by the Senate of a five-member commission charged with the responsibility to oversee election activities. Persons appointed to the commission cannot hold political office and cannot have held membership in a political party for the previous five years. Organic laws implementing provisions of this institution provide for the national Election Commission to create regional and local election commissions to oversee elections in these areas.

As it turns out, the powers of the Election Commission are not inconsequential. Statutory authority giving the Commission power to certify election results authorizes the Commission to invalidate elections and either disqualify a candidate or require new elections when balloting is suspect. Assertion of this authority has led to microscopic examination of the integrity of election processes, leading to the most open, corruption-free elections in recent Thai history.[1]

The third institution that exerts influence over elections in Thailand is the National Counter Corruption Commission composed of nine members chosen in a manner similar to the Election Commission. This body has constitutional authority to "inquire and decide whether a State official has become *unusually wealthy* (italics ours) or has committed an offence of corruption.... to inspect the accuracy, actual existence as well as changes of assets and liabilities of persons holding positions.... and to carry on other acts as provided by law." These sweeping

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[1]News media reports of widespread corruption are often based on *charges* of corruption, which are often used as a political ploy to invalidate elections. In addition, reports of corruption are based largely on the heightened transparency afforded by the Election Commission and the new election laws, all to the good.

powers allow persons with a petition of 50,000 citizens to bring any government official before the Commission, which, as a result of implementing legislation, can ban a person from holding any political office for five years or initiate criminal proceedings.

These three institutions have come to have considerable power and influence over politics and elections in Thailand. As noted below, the exercise of constitutional authority in these areas has had far-reaching impacts on the current configuration of both politics and government. This reach has not been without controversy and the final adjudication of issues arising under these powers will be pending for some time to come. One cannot consider the system of Thai democracy and its impacts, however, without attention to effects of these novel (if not unique) structures of democratic governance taking place in the Thai context.

Historical Development of Democratic Governance in Thailand

A palace coup at dawn on July 24, 1932, brought the Thai absolute monarchy to an end. When he finally abdicated the throne, in 1935, King Prajadhipok (Rama VII) specifically criticized the regime that had replaced him and, in a brief, public message, transferred sovereignty to the people of Thailand. In his message of abdication, the King made an important distinction between turning power over to the people, rather than to the government: "I am willing to surrender the powers I formerly exercised to the people as a whole, but I am not willing to turn them over to any individual or any group to use in an autocratic manner without heeding the voice of the people" (Wyatt, 1982: 249). In these events, Thai democracy began.

It would be difficult to argue that what followed was a period of democratic governance. Government was exercised by elites in a one-party state (the People's Party) and full electoral democracy was not even contemplated until half the population had completed primary education or ten years had passed, whichever came first.

The first direct elections occurred in November 1937, when 26 percent of the electorate chose half of the National Assembly. Subsequent elections, in November 1938, continued the half-elected, half-appointed National Assembly, and the period of war extended the government until after the surrender of Japan. During this period, the Prime Minister, Phibunsongkram, undertook a program of economic and social nation-building that was pursued in a highly authoritarian manner. Following the end of WWII, the National Assembly ousted Phibun and elections were held in 1946. Up to this point, at least, Thailand had little tradition of electoral democracy or democratic government.

During the post-war period, prospects for democracy brightened with the creation of four political parties (at least in name), elections in January 1946 for the un-appointed seats in the Parliament, and a new constitution that provided for a fully elected House of Representatives and a Senate chosen by the House. By August, however, the Prime Minister, Pridi Banomyong, had lost support in the legislature as a result of by-elections, resigned, and went abroad. In November 1947, the military seized the government. At first, it allowed the civilian regime to continue, but when the 1948 elections resulted in a major defeat for the military, it moved to re-install Phibun as Prime Minister. At most, the period of electoral democracy extended for only slightly over 3 years.

Throughout the post-WWII era, however, the ideology of democracy persisted, reinforced, in part, by a growing consciousness, largely in the rural population, of oppression by the military, the police, and the bureaucracy. This disaffection from the authoritarian regimes served to support an equally anti-authoritarian sentiment among the educated middle-classes. By 1973, a coalition of workers, farmers, students and others in the middle class clashed with police. In order to prevent mass bloodshed, the King intervened to end the authoritarian regime.

The ensuing period was one of political and economic instability. Parties of the left, that had benefited from the revolution initially, not only lost power in the 1976 parliamentary

elections, there followed a period of organized atrocities by anti-government operatives against figures advocating radical democracy. This oppression culminated in an infamous event when protesting students at Thammasat University were shot, lynched, burned alive, or imprisoned, and the military re-asserted itself – with the support of the ruling establishment, including much of the middle class, bringing this experiment in democracy to an end.

By 1978, however, an underlying democratic ethos revived in the form of dissatisfaction with excesses of the authoritarian right. There followed a period of political stability and, arguably, a steady progression toward democratic governance under the leadership of Prem Tinsulanonda. In fact, modern Thai democracy can be dated to the parliamentary elections of 1983, consolidating Prem's power. In 1986, when economic conditions created considerable social unrest, the military urged an internal coup – not unknown in Thai history. Prem, however, not only refused to be associated with a military putsch, but stepped aside, holding new elections. By 1988, fully democratic elections were held and a full-fledged coalition government formed under Chatichai Choonhaven.

By 1990, support for democracy was strong and increasing, when, in 1991, a coup was staged against the government. This time, however, mass political opposition caused the junta to reassure the public by promising elections within a year and appointing a highly regarded bureaucrat, Anand Panyarachun, as Prime Minister. When the leader of the junta reneged on a promise not to seek the office of Prime Minister following elections in 1992, mass demonstrations again invoked intervention by the monarch, who tilted the balance in favor of the restoration of democracy. This episode, contrary to some analysts, represented an affirmation of democracy rather than a failure of democratic persistence. Continuation of authoritarian rule, even a benign one, was no longer compatible with sustained and growing support for democracy.

Concept of the Study

Celebration of the "era of democracy" or the "third wave" of democracy has become tempered by concerns about the ability of democracies to survive. Distinctions between "semi-democracies" and "democracies" - or even "polyarchies" - have become less significant than their consolidation or persistence (Diamond and Plattner, 2001). As with the concept of democracy, the concept of "consolidation" is trenchantly debated. Linz and Stepan define a "consolidated democracy" as one in which: 1) no national, social, economic, or institutional constituencies attempt to create a non-democratic regime or secede from the state; 2) a strong majority of public opinion believes that democratic institutions and procedures are the most appropriate way to govern, even in the face of major economic problems or dissatisfaction with incumbents; 3) governmental and nongovernmental groups accept the control of laws, procedures, and institutions created through democratic processes (2001, 95). Such a minimalist concept is a base point to begin deeper explorations of democratic survivability at the end of the "third wave" of democratic development.

Few emerging democracies offer a better laboratory for exploring democratic consolidation than Thailand. The evolution of democracy in Thailand has been so dramatic that even the most ardent proponents of Thailand as a "semidemocratic" state, now admit, grudgingly, that "Thailand has been shifting incrementally away from semi-democracy toward democracy" (Samudavanija, 1995, 340); and "By late 1992, Thailand's government met our criteria for democracy in citizen participation, electoral competition, and civil liberties" (Neher and Marlay, 1995, 49).

The establishment of truly democratic institutions and practices in Thailand, specifically a majority party in charge of governing, and a new set of institutions designed to place elections beyond reach of corruption, fraud, and abuse of the voting process, admittedly, has been a relatively recent phenomenon. There remains, then, room for an issue of the degree of "democratic consolidation" (Linz and Stepan, 2001; O'Donnell, 2001) in an evaluation of the

status of democracy in Thailand.

As Linz and Stepan indicate, one of the most significant measures of democratic consolidation is the level of public opinion holding the belief that democracy is the most appropriate system for governing collective life (2001). This analysis presents data from the Thai portion of the multi-national study of democratization and value change in East Asia, testing this measure of democratic consolidation in the Thai case. The larger study, using common survey instruments, offers a basis for comparison of national opinion over a variety of nations. Here, we provide an over-view of Thai political opinions based upon one of the first probability samples of opinion in the entire Thai nation as to support for democracy among citizens of Thailand. Because these opinions occur following major events in the Thai political process, as noted above, 1) adoption of a new constitution that radically restructured the system of elections and other democratic institutions, and 2) creation of new institutions for democratic governance, such as the Constitutional Court, a national Election Commission, and a National Counter Corruption Commission - all independent of the government, it is not clear how these events may or may not have influenced opinions measured in this study.

Data on Mass Support for Democracy

Where does democracy in Thailand stand today? What follows is a detailed analysis of mass attitudes toward democracy as they take shape at the beginning of the 21st century. The data for this analysis were obtained through a probability sample of eligible voters in the Thai nation during November-December, 2001.[2] The procedure for obtaining these data is a three-stage probability sample based upon clusters of legislative districts, then of voting units (precincts), followed by a systematic sampling of voters in the selected voting units. The sample included 50 of the 400 legislative districts, 100 voting units from across the 50 legislative districts, and 1500

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2 "Eligible voters" includes all Thai citizens 18 years of age and older.

respondents from the 100 voting units. Roughly 1500 respondents were drawn from a population of 54,894. Because the "skip interval" exceeded 36, a more conservative approach using 36 as the interval yielded 1546 respondents.

This process produced a true probability sample of the Thai eligible electorate. As noted above, it represents one of the few probability-based samples of the Thai population for political and social attitudes. Here, we present the data that characterize the Thai population across the kingdom in attitudes toward democracy, indicating the level of attitudinal consolidation of democratic values among the Thai people.

The Meaning of Democracy in the Thai Political Context

The ideology of democracy that began in 1932 and appears to have lasted throughout democratic, despotic, and authoritarian governments is sometimes considered to ascribe ambiguous meanings to the concept of democracy. Wyatt (1984) suggests that, during the early days of constitutional governance, enthusiasm for democracy was not dampened by the fact that people had no clear idea of the meaning of *constitution* and *democracy*.[3] In a more modern context, the debate over "Asian values" suggests that there are significant semantic differentials in understandings of democracy, between those who hold essentially procedural views of democracy and those who hold more substantive ones.

What does democracy mean, given these different perceptions and orientations? One possibility is that the distinction between subjective and objective indicators of democracy affects measures of democratic support. The "ideology" of democracy has its roots in Thailand from the 1932 downfall of the absolute Thai monarchy. More recently, the period of democratic government 1973-76, reinforced democratic values in a way that has persisted since that time. It is possible, therefore, to hold highly democratic values even under authoritarian regimes and the

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3 According to Wyatt (1984:250), some thought that the word for democracy (*prachathipatai)* referred to King

commitment to democracy has been sustained in periods of both democratic and authoritarian rule. It was precisely this mass commitment to democracy that proved the major obstacle to sustaining the military coup in 1991. Clearly, a military regime is no longer tolerated by a society with high commitments to democratic values.

Another possibility is that the meaning of democracy is quite different in Thailand from European and American meanings as a result of the difference between so-called "Asian values" that place a greater emphasis on communal values as opposed to individualistic ones. The expectation is that Thai respondents would express values that differ markedly from those of Europeans and Americans, if it were not for the fixed choice format of the questionnaire.

The data permit tests of these alternative views of the meanings of democracy in an open-ended answer to the question: "When you think of democracy, what is the first thing that comes to your mind?" When these meanings ascribed to "democracy" are examined, the Thai public shows consistent and unambiguous commitments to procedural democracy and the general rights and privileges for individuals afforded by democratic government. Only slightly over 70 percent of Thai respondents could formulate clear concepts of the meaning of "democracy" (Table 1), only 25 percent were able to give a second response, and about 7 percent, a third, but, among those who responded, understandings of democracy do not appear to differ substantially from European and American cohorts.[4] Table 1 indicates that over 50 percent perceive democracy in terms of traditional values of liberal democracy; 38.2 percent of the sample gave responses such as "freedom of speech, press, expression;" and another 15.1 percent gave responses indicating political equality – "one man one vote," "equality before the law." "Individualism" (11.9 percent) was a combination of values such as "respect for individual privacy," "self-reliance," "having one's own views," "independence."

Prajadhipok's brother and that the word for the constitution *(ratthathammanun)* was a relative of the Prime Minister.
4 Readers should be impressed with the fact that "democracy" is a highly sophisticated abstraction with which to confront an essentially rural population unaccustomed to conceptualizing in these terms. We understand the

Most surprising was the low response rate in terms of traditional "Asian values" as commonly understood – good governance, social equality, or duties to society. Only one respondent mentioned "openness or government transparency," and no one mentioned "solving employment," "providing social welfare," or "finding someone a job." No one suggested freedom from corruption.

(Table 1 about here)

These data do not necessarily conform to elite views of what uneducated populations believe about democracy. What is important is that the data represent a true probability sample of the Thai population one year after parliamentary elections. The data show clear perceptions of the meaning of democracy - even by comparison with international contexts - and suggest that Thai views of democracy are not alternatives to the general meanings of liberal democracy in international discourse. Furthermore, these views appear consistent throughout Thailand and are not the province of Bangkok residents or of an elite middle-class. The data indicate a consistent understanding of democracy as "liberal democracy."

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responses to be highly impressionistic reactions in terms of what the word means to respondents.

Figure 1

Procedural and Substantive Meanings of Democracy

0 = NA   1 = Procedural
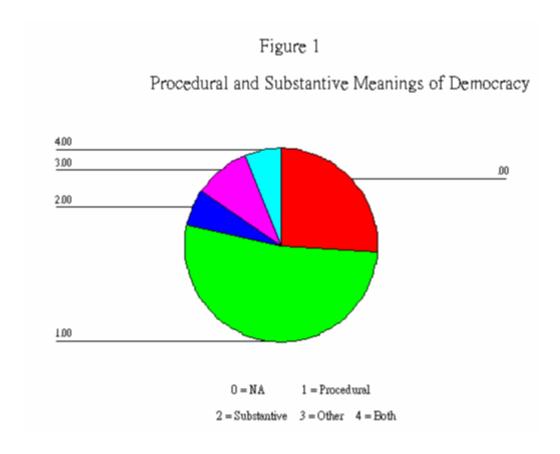2 = Substantive   3 = Other   4 = Both

Figure 1 shows the relative emphasis on procedural versus substantive criteria for understanding democracy. In this case, the data from Table 1 are aggregated into the appropriate categories including procedural concepts, substantive concepts, mentions of both, and "other" definitions of democracy. Although the second largest category is "no response," among those who did respond, there is an overwhelming preference for procedural, rather than substantive, criteria. When the three possible responses are combined, there is still dominance by respondents who suggested solely procedural criteria; only a small minority offered substantive interpretations, even when combined with procedural criteria indicated as "Both."

Figure 2

Procedural and Substantive Responses to the Meaning of Democr

Numbers of Respondents

BOTHPS

0 = NA   1 = Procedural

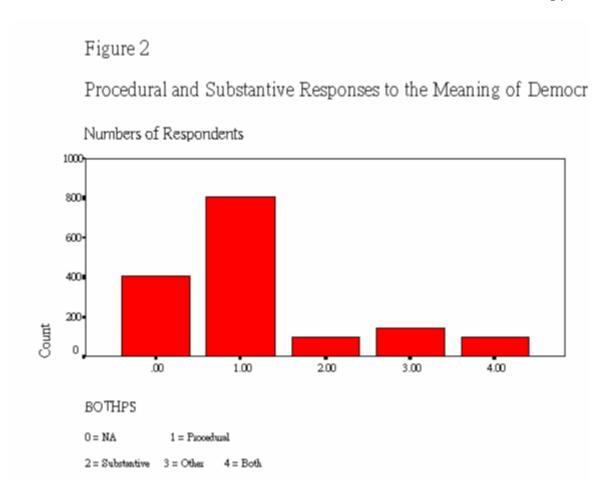2 = Substantive   3 = Other   4 = Both

Figure 2 shows the relative emphasis across all three responses in terms of the raw numbers of respondents in each category. In both illustrations, the responses conform to standards of liberal democracy. Even when multiple interpretations of democracy are provided by respondents, only a very small proportion of responses offer substantive meanings of democracy as an alternative. In evaluating the succeeding data on support for democracy, it should be established that the meaning of democracy held by respondents is consistent with increasingly universal standards for evaluating democratic governance.

Equally important is the fact that no significant number of respondents mentions development of traditional institutions associated with democratic governance. Given that respondents could indicate up to three "meanings of democracy," it is worth noting that there were no mentions of development of political parties or even parliaments as a component of democracy. For most Thais, in fact, political parties and parliaments seem to be part of the

problem, rather than part of the solution.

The picture of democracy painted by Thai responses leans toward majoritarian rather than strictly representative government. In the struggle to achieve popular democracy, Thais have not come to terms with "republican" or representative government. As will be noted below, the quest for a "people's democracy" does not necessarily encompass pluralist institutions. The Constitution of 1997 underlines this tendency by including provisions ruling out a role for political parties in constituting the Senate, the watchdog agencies, and the major judicial institutions. It seems that, if given a choice, Thais would prefer government by referendum. The Constitution even specifies that public participation is required at every level of government.[5] The evidence is that many Thais do not relish the idea of leaving government and policy to its institutions alone; there is clearly a desire for and understanding of the Constitution as creating popular governance.

Support for Democracy in Thailand

The data on support for democracy by the Thai electorate, nevertheless, show a very high level of respondents expressing support for democratic processes and institutions. Table 2 shows that over 90 percent of the electorate is satisfied with democracy and the way it works in Thailand. In addition, 84.3 percent say that democracy is always preferable to authoritarian forms of government and over 90 percent indicate confidence in the ability of democracy to solve problems of the nation (Table 2). Using a ten-point scale evaluating democracy in Thailand, less than 3 percent of the sample agrees that democracy is unsuitable for Thailand and over 90

(Table 2 about here)

percent want democracy now (Table 3). In a superficial way, perhaps, Thais are highly supportive of the "idea" of democracy in virtually every dimension. The fact that 39.3

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[5] What is meant by "public participation" is currently being negotiated in a legislative act before the Parliament.

(Table 3 about here)

percent of the sample rate the economy as "bad" or "very bad" and only 14.3 percent rate it as "good" or "very good," implies that the high level of commitment to democracy obtains in the midst of both objective and subjective economic difficulties, thereby reinforcing the significance of the high level of democratic adherents.[6]

Ambivalence in Support for Democracy

When forced to choose between democracy and economic development, however, the commitment to democracy appears somewhat ambivalent. 49.2 percent indicate a preference for economic development over democracy, while only 16.7 percent remain committed to democracy over economic development defined as "improving one's standard of living." The question, however, asks respondents to choose between an abstract concept (democracy) and a concrete improvement in one's personal livelihood; therefore, one should take these responses with a grain of caution.

An analysis even more sensitive to democratic orientations indicates a Thai public strongly supportive of democratic institutions. When asked about alternatives such as "replacing parliament with a strong leader," "abolishing opposition parties," "letting the military run things," or "having a nation governed by experts," respondents reject these alternatives by large margins (Table 4). Among these alternatives to an elected parliament, support for military governance is lowest, with over 80 percent rejecting this alternative.

(Table 4 about here)

Among respondents, however, only 44 percent reject all four alternatives to an elected parliament. As it turns out, 2/3 of those accepting only one alternative accept the abolition of

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What is clear, however, is that it extends far beyond public hearings in the minds of Thai citizens.
6 It is important to note that Thai optimism about the future is high. 53.1 percent of respondents believe that the economic situation of their family will be better in the near future; only 9.5 percent believe that it will be worse.

opposition parties. This finding reflects Thai aversion to political parties in general, not rejection of what Thais view as an institution fundamental to democracy.

The appropriate interpretation of these findings lies in evidence of Thai mistrust of political parties: banning candidates for the Senate from affiliation with political parties, excluding political party figures from serving on governmental watchdog commissions and courts, and the re-iteration of the constitutional provision that there must be public participation in virtually every dimension of government policy from its conception to its implementation. Party government for Thais has represented a system of corrupt government, that is, political parties, for many, are part of the problem, not a solution for constructing democratic government. Although no significant differences are evidenced between rural and urban populations in an overall index based upon support for these alternatives to democracy, there are significant differences ($p<.05$) between urban and rural populations when it comes to abolishing political parties. Reinforcing this finding is the fact that abolishing opposition parties has significantly higher support among the more highly educated and persons of higher socio-economic status, probably because parties are seen as instruments for mobilizing the masses against elite dominance of the political arena.

These findings thus reflect a fear of popular democracy by elites, who were largely responsible for writing the Constitution of 1997. Architects of Thai democracy, attempting to insure elite "guidance" (but not authoritarian dominance) of the political system, required elected members of the parliament to have bachelor's degrees. Such provisions failed to stem the tide toward dominance of the Parliament by rural, less educated MPs, as a sharp rise in diploma mills quickly compensated for this check on popular rule.

There is also considerable doubt in the Thai case that political parties are understood as essential to democracy. The overall view of political parties has been that behind party labels lurks the dominant image of the "patron," purchasing political support from accumulated wealth and

dispensing patronage to favored adherents to produce highly skewed political outcomes, in conjunction with low rates of participation by mass publics. Rather than being seen as an instrument of democracy, political parties are still often seen as the source of corrupt and inefficient government.

The traditional distaste for political parties helps to explain differences between responses to the question on abolishing opposition parties and rejection of other forms of alternatives to democracy (Table 4). When the question concerning political parties is eliminated, roughly 2/3 of respondents reject all other alternatives to democracy. Somewhat lacking in sophistication regarding the formal role political parties might play in a democratic society, Thais have opted for an essentially non-partisan form of government in their Senate and the extra-governmental watch-dog agencies. We interpret this finding as representing a significant minority choosing "non-partisan" government instead of "one-party" government in Thai democracy.

Under the Constitution of 1997, party government occurs only in the lower house of the Parliament – not in the Senate, provincial governments, or local governments. The evaluation of Thai democracy must be seen in the context of a society in which parties are viewed as fundamentally in opposition to the goals of good governance. Whether this perspective is naïve or exhibits a need for a more attentive and sophisticated public remains a topic for further scrutiny. It does not, however, have a significant bearing on the overall commitment of Thais to democratic government.

The quest for a "people's democracy" does not necessarily encompass some of the institutions frequently associated with democratic governments. As the Constitution of 1997 underlines this tendency by including provisions ruling out a role for political parties in constituting the Senate, the watchdog agencies, and the major judicial institutions, it seems that, if given a choice, Thais would prefer government by referendum. The Constitution, by

specifying that public participation is required at every level of government,[7] is evidence that Thais do not relish the idea of leaving government and policy to its institutions alone; there is clearly a desire for and understanding of the Constitution as creating an space for popular participation in democratic governance.

When more specific attitudes toward civil liberties, are examined, there is even more ambiguity in the Thai population's commitment to traditional, liberal democratic values. Table 6 shows that Thais are somewhat anxious about social instability. While highly supporting freedom of speech, diversity of political and social views appears threatening (75.8 percent) and nearly half the respondents (45.5) are not prepared to tolerate minority viewpoints.

(Table 5 about here)

This finding also requires some interpretation. A key to understanding the Thai abhorrence of social conflict emerges in questions concerning the effect of diverse political views and the threat to harmony of the community posed by politically active groups. The high levels of agreement with both of these positions indicate a deeply held, but subtle, antipathy to conflict, rooted in Thai history. To the extent that political debate and challenge threaten societal harmony, Thais are averse to contentious discourse. The strongly held belief that "political leaders should tolerate views of challengers" (Table 5) may represent as much distaste for political dissidence, as support for alternative views. However, the strong level of support for free speech, despite its possible consequences, shows that Thais value civil liberties to a high degree (Table 5).

Transitions to Democracy and Democratic Performance

The transition to democracy that has occurred during the past decade is clear in the minds of most Thais. When comparing the current state of democracy with previous governments on

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7 What is meant by "public participation" is currently being negotiated in a legislative act before the Parliament.

separate scales, respondents identify sweeping changes from previous regimes, especially the junta that controlled the Thai government, 1991-2. When asked to place Thailand on a scale of 1-10, with 1 being a dictatorship and 10 being completely democratic, they evaluate the current system as highly democratic and the previous status during the junta as a virtually complete dictatorship. Collapsing the data so that on each scale 1-3 is identified as a "hard, authoritarian regime," 4-5 a "soft or partially liberalized authoritarian regime," 6-7 a "limited democracy," and 8-10 a full or nearly completely democratic regime," Table 6 shows the perceived transition from authoritarian government during a period of ten years.

This changing perception becomes particularly important when placed in the context of other evaluations of the period of the military regime. Although there was significant opposition to military domination of the government, many Thais were supportive of the administration of the appointed Prime Minister, Anand Panyarachun, during this period. What the data show, however, is that, at least in retrospect, Thais view the Suchinda-Anand regime as highly authoritarian compared to the regime in place at the turn of the 21st century. This becomes even more significant in the context of the extraordinarily strong support for democracy noted above. Overall, Table 6 documents the transition to democracy in the perceptions of Thai citizens.

(Table 6 about here)

This positive evaluation of previous and current regimes is not just a general perception. Thai respondents can be quite specific in identifying areas in which positive changes have occurred. Table 7 offers specific areas in which improvements are perceived, as well as a net score of improvements over deterioration.

(Table 7 about here)

The scores in Table 7 are based on responses coded –2 (highly negative) to +2 (highly

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positive). First, it is important to note that all scores are substantially in excess of 0.0. This means that Thais have overall positive evaluations in these areas of politics and policy that are quite positive. The evaluations represent Thais' perceptions of their experiences with outputs of the democratic system. Both perceived improvements in political rights and liberties, as well as policy processes, from a less democratic era contribute to the impressively high levels of support for democracy (R=.281).

These findings thus reflect a fear of popular democracy by elites, who were largely responsible for writing the Constitution of 1997. Architects of Thai democracy, attempting to insure elite "guidance" (but not authoritarian dominance) of the political system, required elected members of the parliament to have bachelor's degrees. Such provisions failed to stem the tide toward dominance of the Parliament by rural, less educated MPs, as a sharp rise in diploma mills quickly compensated for this check on popular rule.

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watch-dog agencies. We interpret this finding as representing a significant minority choosing "non-partisan" government instead of "one-party" government in Thai democracy.

The Role of Social Context in Thai Support for Democracy and the Two Democracies Thesis

The data gathered in this study provide an opportunity to test arguments that there are significant differences between the ways Bangkok residents understand democracy and politics from those persons living in the *changwat* outside Bangkok. They address a fundamental issue raised by the consideration of civil society above and at least two Thai scholars (Laothamatas, 1996; Phongpaichit and Baker, 2001), the strong cleavages that exist between Bangkok elites and orientations of the villages. According to this view, Thailand is a tale of two democracies - that of sophisticated urban elites (with origins or current status in Bangkok) and that of a rural, often isolated, parochial interest that views political activity, especially elections, as opportunities for personal or community benefit. This perspective is important because, historically, it has been the position taken by Bangkok elites that has determined the fate of democratic government in Thailand.

The difference between urban and rural constituencies (according to the elite "urban view") is that:

> Voting in farming areas is not guided by political principles, policy issues, or what is perceived to be in the national interest, all of which is (regarded as) the only legitimate rationale for citizens casting their ballots in a democratic election. The ideal candidate for rural voters are those who visit them often, address their immediate grievances effectively, and bring numerous public works to their communities. (Laothamatas, 1996, 202)

The ability of rural constituencies to acquire substantial power in parliaments under these conditions often leads to doubts among the middle class, the mass media, and even academics as

to the efficacy of the democratic processes. For these groups, "democracy turns out to be the rule of the corrupt and incompetent" (Laothamatas, 1996, 208). This creates a dilemma, for although the middle class opposes authoritarian rule, in principle, they hold rural constituencies in contempt, regarding them as "parochial in outlook, boorish in manner, and too uneducated to be competent lawmakers or cabinet members" (Laothamatas, 1996, 208).

The problem is that urban, educated, cosmopolitan candidates, who are skilled policy experts, are often held in equal contempt by villagers. They are often regarded as being alien to rural electorates in terms of taste, culture, and outlook, who "fail to stay close to the voters in both a physical and cultural sense" (Laothamatas, 1996, 208). Veiled contempt for rural-dwellers by sophisticated Bangkok elites posed no problem under authoritarian regimes. However, once democratic elections tipped the balance in favor of rural areas, significant gaps in perceptions and meanings of democracy developed. These cleavages have, over the past decade, produced considerable political conflict that only recently seems to be abating. The threat posed by this cleavage lies in the relative enthusiasm for democracy and its ability to hinder democratic consolidation. There is growing evidence that, while the middle class opposes authoritarian forms of government that restrict individual freedoms and exercise a heavy hand over commerce, the uncertainty of changes in government, even by democratic processes, is often viewed as destabilizing the economic environment on which entrepreneurs depend. The possibility that government may be seized by politicians with "populist" agendas poses an even more direct threat to the interests of a class that stands significantly above the average voter in Thai elections. The traditional emphasis on the "middle class" as an engine of democracy appears to be declining in favor of a view that middle-class support for democracy exists primarily when it coincides with class interests in curbing the power of government. This means that one cannot expect middle-class enthusiasm for democracy when it poses conflicts with private interests of the middle class.

This latter view is expressed both by Laothamatas (1996), who argues that the 1991 coup could not have been sustained except for support from the middle class, and Samudavanija (1998), who notes that the role of the middle class in Thailand, vis- a-vis democracy, has been "reactive rather than proactive" (156) and that its primary interest in democracy has been "to safeguard their own freedom and the freedom of the market"(158).

Some studies (Albritton and Prabudhanitisarn, 1997; Albritton, et al., 1995) indicate that these differences between urban and rural constituencies disappear when controlling for education. However, secondary analysis of data gathered by Logerfo (1996) indicates that, even controlling for education, significant differences between Bangkok and rural areas remain. More recent research (Albritton and Bureekul, 2001; Albritton and Bureekul, 2002) supports the latter view. Respondents from Bangkok and rural areas differ markedly on a variety of indicators, such as support for democracy, criteria for choosing candidates in elections, and tolerance of corruption. The data in this study provide the basis for a re-examination of the fundamental cleavages between urban and rural dwellers in support for democracy and democratic values occurring after a year under a new government of the Thai Rak Thai Party.

This study also addresses the issue of support for democracy from a class perspective, as well as from the perspective of the urban-rural cleavage that marks Thai politics. Taken together, these issues represent some of the more pressing concerns for democracy in Thailand. Here, we present the empirical data that outline the variations in Thai society as they indicate the true political diversity of the Thai people.

Table 8 shows support for democracy in an analysis of variance using five categories by location of respondents.[8] Support for democracy is a scale variable generated by adding variables indicating support for democracy (See Appendix). The data are consistent with previous findings that Bangkok respondents are significantly lower in their support for

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[8]"Muang" are provincial (*changwat*) capitals.

democracy than other locations. "Downtown Bangkok," or the core city, shows the lowest score

on democratic support, while rural respondents

(Table 8 about here)

are associated with the highest levels of support for democratic governance.

Suchit Bungbongkarn (1996) has argued that people with higher levels of education are

a) more cynical about politics, and b) therefore, less likely to participate in democratic processes,

such as elections. His argument is based upon substantially lower voter turnouts in Bangkok than

in the rest of the country. The argument, however, is an ecological one and the data of this study

represent a possibility for testing this proposition on an individual level. One variable obtained

by the survey is "years of education," which permits controls for educational levels. In addition,

we have created a measure of socioeconomic status through a principal components factor

analysis of the measures of income, education, and occupational status. These variables load on

one natural factor, with all variables loading above 0.8.

When OLS regression is used to estimate impacts of education and other factors,

represented as SES, as well as Bangkok residency on political participation, the results support

Suchit's analysis. Also confirming the analysis of Logerfo's data noted above, however,

Bangkok respondents are significantly less likely to participate in political activity, *even*

controlling for SES. The results are virtually the same when support for democracy is analyzed

by Bangkok residency controlling for educational status alone. Analysis shows that the higher

the socioeconomic status, the lower the support for democracy (Table 9).

There are, then, independent effects of Bangkok residency that have negative impacts on

support for democracy even controlling for socioeconomic status. The evidence consistently

supports the view that democracy has less support from elites, especially Bangkok elites, than it

does among the rural majorities in the Thai hinterland. The effects of Bangkok residency on

attitudes toward democratic   (Table 9 about here)

governance clearly transcend effects of education, income, and other aspects of socio-economic status.

Origins of this dynamic appear to lie in the historical position of Bangkok relative to the rest of the nation. As democracy spreads, the position of Bangkok (and specifically Bangkok elites) is diminished in the context of the larger, rural, agrarian nation consisting of roughly 80 percent of the population. Because national policies still emanate from the central government and the core city, the division between urban and rural, elites and masses over the role of democratic government is one of the central themes in contemplating the security and sustainability of democracy in the future of Thai governance.

The Role of Social Capital in Support for Thai Democracy

Social capital in Thailand is represented by two measurable concepts: the level of trust in government and in the society and the development of civil society both of which contribute to the sustainability and consolidation of an evolved democracy. In addition to aggregate, institutional measures, social capital is based in the attitudes and orientations of "ordinary people." This analysis presents the Thai data that measure dimensions of social capital in the attitudes and opinions of members of Thai society. In the larger context, the data permit a basis for examining the sources of social capital, as well as the impacts of various measures on a democratic society.

The literature, in general, focuses on two measures that are relevant to a consideration of civil society in the Thai context: an index of informal socializing and social trust. Our indicators of group membership and informal social activity are rough proxies for participation in civil society; for social trust, we use a similar question inquiring as to ability to trust others, offering an alternative that "you cannot be too careful in dealing with other people," as well as overall trust in public institutions. These measures provide evidence as critical indicators of social

capital resources in the Thai context.

Social Trust

Thai society and culture are marked most strongly by deference to well-understood hierarchies. This deference to authority may account for a relatively high degree of trust in government institutions (Table 10). All of the institutions examined in Table 10, garner majority support of the Thai population. The interesting point, then, is the relative trust Thais bestow on the various institutions.

Respondents express a great deal of trust in two of the new institutions created by the current constitution, the Constitutional Court and the Counter-Corruption Commission (Table 10). The levels of trust are so high that those who express low levels of trust may be attributed to a cynical minority, present in every society. The third institution created by the constitution, the Electoral Commission, also receives a high level of trust, but suffers, probably, from controversies associated with rulings in the Senate election, disqualifying 78 of the 200 candidates receiving the most votes, and requiring as many as five waves of re-elections in some provinces. In addition, the associations of this latter institution with controversial electoral rulings, such as invalidating outcomes on the basis of charges, rather than evidence, have tarnished the

reputation of this institution to a minor degree. Even so, the Electoral Commission receives substantial trust from 70 percent of the population, implying that these basic, constitutional institutions command a large measure of confidence and respect among Thai citizens.

(Table 10 about here)

At the lower end of the scale stand the political parties (Table 10). The finding that over half of the respondents still express trust in these important components of democracy is notable. The relevant perspective requires cross-national comparisons of the commendably high level of trust, even for political parties, when compared with other emerging democracies - a finding that

would surprise quite a few Thais.

Another surprising finding is that newspapers have the second lowest level of trust (Table 10). What some observers might regard as a wonderfully open and critical press may be looked upon as a rancorous intrusion into an otherwise complacent society. What puts this finding in perspective is the high level of trust in television (Table 10). It should be noted that some of the most prominent Thai television channels are controlled by the government, helping to facilitate trust in government institutions or vice versa. To date, there has been little examination of the impact of the media on Thai society, especially the relative impacts of print and "hot" media venues.[9]

Compared to the level of trust in political parties, newspapers, and NGOs (59.8), the level of trust in the police is remarkable (Table 10). Even more significant is the very high level of trust accorded the military (80 percent), exceeded only by the Constitutional Court. The fact that the military is, virtually, the most trusted instrument of government indicates that years of military rule and the massacres of civilians in 1976 and 1991 have done little to undermine the unmitigated confidence in the military, compared with other institutions.[10] In this same vein, higher levels of trust in the civil service, compared with the parliament, hark to recent history characterized by a deeply rooted bureaucratic polity (Riggs, 1966).

Trust in Other Thais

Social capital of trust in fellow citizens, by contrast, is exceptionally low. When asked whether "most people can be trusted" or "you cannot be too careful in dealing with other people," 81.1 percent (82.3 percent of those who responded) chose the latter. Contrary to images of Asian society as communal, Thais tend to be disconnected from significant identifications

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9 For a thorough examination of the Thai press, see Duncan McCargo, *Politics and the Press in Thailand.*
10 A public opinion poll by the Chronicle of Higher Education in the United States in April 2003, shows that 93 percent of Americans express confidence in the military, with 65 percent indicating "a great deal," far above Congress, State Government, the President, physicians and hospitals, and Local Government. Local police forces were third with 89 percent and 48 percent respectively.

with other members of society. This picture of a society composed of individuals relatively disassociated from each other is reinforced by an examination of participation in civil society below.

The low level of trust in "others" is deeply rooted in Thai society and culture. From early childhood, Thais are schooled in attitudes toward others. A popular children's story teaches that the lesson of life should be "don't trust anyone."[11] The finding that this process of socialization has repercussions for Thai society, specifically in problems of creating social capital is not surprising, given the power of early childhood socialization toward mistrust of fellow citizens. To increase social capital in this area might require abandoning strongly rooted institutions in Thai culture.

Danny Unger (1998) argues, from a variety of studies (Ayal, 1963; Embree, 1950; Narthsupha, 1979), that the ability of Thais to engage in associational relationships is significantly low. References to Thai society characterized by "anarchistic individualism" or "loosely structured" social life (p. 28) indicate patterns of social interaction that not only contrast sharply with the culture of "Confucian values," but also create an environment that makes development of civil society difficult, indeed. This non-communal aspect of Thai society is significant for understanding social and political conflicts as they arise in Thailand.

Thai Support for "Liberal Democracy" and the Role of Traditional Values

After analyzing sources of general support for democracy, we examine support for what is sometimes called "liberal democracy." This concept moves beyond affinities for majoritarian democratic rule by including curbs on democracy, rights of minorities and the rule of law. There are significant disparities between support for majoritarian democracy and these latter values in developing nations. What Laothamatas and others identify in Thailand is the conflict between

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11 *Phra Apai Mani* (the guru teaches Sudsakorn) by Sunthorn Phu.

newly emerging majority rule and protections against what founders of the American republic called the "excesses of democracy." The expectation is that curbs on majority rule will find support on a class basis as majority rule in emerging democracies produces dramatic shifts of political power that threaten elite dominance of political systems.

When the focus shifts from support for majoritarian democracy to support for what we might call "liberal" democratic orientations, primarily the rule of law, the patterns of support are reversed. These latter values are represented by a summed index composed of seven questions (See Appendix 1). With one exception, the anti-liberal statements in Appendix 1 are affirmed by a small majority of Thai respondents.[12]

When questions indicating what might be called "traditional Asian values" are tested for dimensionality, three dimensions emerge as representations of behavior associated with the family, approaches to conflict resolution, and a propensity for conflict avoidance (Appendix 2). As it turns out, explanations of support for democracy prove to be stronger when these dimensions are examined independently than when they are combined as a single index of "traditionalism." The analysis also indicates that each dimension has a somewhat different origin in both urban society and class status (Albritton and Bureekul, 2004).

Table 11 shows that two of the three dimensions of traditionalism-modernism contribute significantly to support for democracy in the Thai context.[13] Of these dimensions – orientations to family, methods of conflict resolution, and a propensity for conflict avoidance – only the first two contribute independently to support for democracy in a positive direction. In the Thai case, traditional-modern orientations appear to support democracy in different ways. Of the three dimensions, an affinity for traditional orientations to conflict resolution is most supportive of

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12 The exception is "with support, a leader should be able to ignore views of the minority."
13 Creation of summary indices significantly reduces the number of cases in the analysis. Although no one question has large numbers of missing values, when added across 6 indicators, almost half the sample is excluded. An analysis of missing cases indicates that these missing values are attributable to respondents who are elderly, lower in social status, and rural.

democracy, underlining the concept of democracy as a means of resolving differences in society without resort to violence.

Trust in political and social institutions, however, is, by far, the strongest variable; next is the measure of urban-rural location of respondents. Contrary to popular wisdom holding that Bangkok residents are more supportive of democracy, residents of more urban locations tend to be less supportive of the idea of democracy than their rural counterparts. When SES (socioeconomic status) is added to the equation, it also works in a negative direction, but does not survive tests of significance when considered alongside the other variables.

(Table 11 about here)

Liberal-democratic orientations turn out to be supported significantly by more modernistic cultural orientations on a "traditionalism-modernism" scale. When the focus shifts to "liberal" democratic orientations, primarily the rule of law, the results in Table 11 are reversed. Table 12 shows that the more modern a respondent on any of the three dimensions, the more likely that person is to adhere to the priority of law and minority rights over political processes. In addition, support for these values is associated with an urban orientation, rather than a rural one. Higher levels of trust in social and political institutions are negatively associated with support for liberal democracy, but they are so highly associated with levels of traditionalism that this latter indicator does not contribute significantly to the equation.[14]

The complexity of these relationships enhances the concept of widely differing views of democracy between urban and rural Thais. In addition, the role of traditional attitudes comes forward in that Thai traditionalism, while enthusiastically supporting the "idea" of democracy, is not committed to notions of the values of liberal democracy that are regarded by some scholars as key to a democratic society. In other words, once again there appear to be fundamentally

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[14] In fact, more urban populations are associated with more modernistic cultural attitudes. Controlling for urban location, however, such cultural attitudes have an opposite effect. This finding reinforces the significance of a kind of "urban culture" in determining attitudes toward both indicators of democratic support.

different views of "democracy" not only between traditionalism and modernism, but also between urban and rural societies.

(Table 12 about here)

Sources of Democratic Legitimacy and Perceptions of Corruption in Thai Democracy

Sources of legitimacy for democratic government in Thailand rest on factors such as the perceived change from authoritarian to democratic regimes (Table 6), estimations of improvements in politics and policy over previous eras (Table 7), all contributing to the relatively high levels of trust identified in Table 10. One factor operating against legitimizing democracy in Thailand, however, is the perception of corruption often noted by journalists and commentators on the state of politics, especially elections, and government in Thailand. As Neher and Marlay (1995) note, however, "Thai elections have rarely been tainted by gross fraud. Ballot boxes are not usually stuffed, and votes are not usually miscounted." Nevertheless, perceptions of contamination of elections by "vote-buying" are prominent in the literature and in contemporary political discourse (Bowie, 1996; Neher, 1996; Chantornvong, 2002).

Perceptions of Corruption in Elections

In order to appreciate widely held views that elections in Thailand are suspect, one needs to understand the nature of what Thais mean by "corruption." At one level, corruption in elections is defined as what is patently illegal. Clearly, stuffing ballot boxes, using fake ballots, and tampering with lists of eligible voters are off limits to any political candidate. In May 1999, municipal elections in Samut Prakan turned out to be what one observer calls "the dirtiest election in Thai history" (Chantornvong, 2002: 216). Patently illegal campaign activities were conducted in full view of TV cameras with policemen standing by. Few cases of this type of activity have been documented in the Senate and House elections to such a degree. But the law also extends to prohibitions against sponsoring lavish dinners for supporters and campaigners, passing out food, small amounts of money and other "gifts"

(such as pens, T-shirts, etc.) to potential voters, and pledging public works projects. These latter still appear, according to public comment, either rarely or prominently, depending on one's location.

Then, there are the legal practices frowned upon by reformers. Perhaps the most offensive of these practices is the use of surrogates for established party leaders (wives, children, close associates), especially in Senate elections where the specific purpose of election laws is to reduce, if not eliminate, the influence of parties. The re-election of suspended candidates by the voters also is cited as evidence of corrupt practices. In one case, a deputy minister of agriculture, Newin Chidchob, was disqualified because he was found guilty in a libel suit and given a suspended jail term.[15]

At one level, reformers charge that "vote-buying and irregularities were so rife that the Electoral Commission suspended 78 winners from 35 provinces in the 4 March (Senate) poll, and called for a second round of voting" (Chantornvong, 2002:207). This same scholar notes that in the fifth round of voting, the same candidate who had been suspended in previous rounds of voting was elected. The outcome is assumed to be evidence of corruption. One of the suspended candidates who were most objectionable was the "self-confessed" (Chantornvong, 2002:207) gambling tycoon Chatchawal Kong-udom of Bangkok. Although his victory represented considerable embarrassment to reformers, there was never persuasive evidence that he engaged in corrupt campaign practices. The charge of corruption, however, was sufficient to suspend him in the first round. In the House elections, McCargo notes that some of the challenges to election results came from gamblers who bet on winners and even on margins of victory (2002: 251). The fact of suspension or disqualification of candidates is not conclusive evidence of corruption.

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15 Libel is a crime in Thailand. Furthermore, a statement may be considered libelous even when it is true. Newin was later acquitted by the Constitutional Court.

Perceptions of corrupt election practices are real, but they may also be largely a product of expectations, rather than reality. Perceptions of bribery and corruption differ significantly by location of respondents, which indicates variations in focus on issues of bribery and corruption of the election process and relative importance accorded such incidents when they occur. Even these minority perceptions have a pronounced impact on election outcomes. Offenses such as having too many posters displayed or stating policy positions constitute election violations in Senate elections. These and other more serious violations become the cause of charges of vote fraud (such as the Election Commission refusal to certify the outcomes of 78 out of 200 seats). Losers, realizing that serious accusations alone will vitiate the election and lead to re-balloting, have a significant stake in bringing charges of election fraud. Because of the frequency of such charges, the Election Commission, overwhelmed by the process of certifying election outcomes, sometimes holds new elections without disqualifying candidates who were charged with campaign violations. This practice often leads to repeats of earlier outcomes, followed by further fraud charges. Ubon Ratchathani held five elections to fill a contested seat in an election that was not resolved until months later.

A survey taken in 1999, by members of the Chulalongkorn Political Economy Center, led by Professor Pasuk Phongpaichit, recorded a response of 20.5 percent as witnesses to corruption. In the same study, when asked about vote-buying, only 30.6 percent responded that they were offered a bribe in the "last general election" (Phongpaichit, et al., 2000: 198). Even this occurred before any national elections were held under the new constitution. These numbers, it should be noted, are far below what is believed, according to popular public discourse.

Corruption of Politics and Government

A recent survey conducted by the National Statistical Office of Thailand shows a relatively high level of belief in government corruption. Roughly 40.4 percent of respondents believe that there is a great deal of corruption in the government sector. This perception varies dramatically by region. 51.4 percent of Bangkok respondents believe that there is a great deal of corruption in government, while the other regions are clustered between 35-43 percent (National Statistical office, 2003: 5).

Contrary to these perceptions, however, the level of corruption actually *experienced* by Thais is relatively low. Of respondents in this survey, only 16.9 percent indicated being a personal witness to corruption or bribery. One explanation of this finding is that respondents have very different ideas about the meaning of bribery and corruption. Table 13 presents responses to a variety of actions, indicating how respondents view these activities.

(Table 13 about here)

The data in Table 14 indicate a strong identification of such practices with bribery or corruption. Over 80 percent characterize gifts by politicians and tipping government officials as one or the other. 79.6 percent view nepotism as a form of bribery or corruption. The data seem persuasive that the lack of experience with bribery or corruption is not a function of different definitions of what constitutes these acts.

There are, however, systematic differences in experiences of corruption related to other factors. Table 14 indicates that Bangkok and suburban Bangkok residents record higher experiences of bribery and corruption than persons in other parts of Thailand, particularly those in rural areas.

(Table 14 about here)

Personal experiences of corruption have substantial impacts on overall perceptions of governmental corruption. Perceptions of corruption in government are in a minority, but they are clearly influenced by the urban and rural environments in which respondents are located (Table 14).[16] The percent of Bangkok and suburban Bangkok residents in our survey indicating a belief that either "most public officials are corrupt" or "almost all public officials are corrupt" is significantly larger than respondents from non-Bangkok areas. Either there is more corruption experienced in the Bangkok area, as indicated in Table 15, or the perceptions of corruption are remarkably different. The latter is a less likely explanation, as there are no significant differences by urban-rural location in how such actions are evaluated.

Summary and Conclusions

The data in this study make a significant contribution to the discourse over democracy in Thailand by indicating that the ideology of democracy is rooted solidly in the consciousness of the Thai people. To the extent that support for democracy in mass publics is an important measure of democratic consolidation, Thailand surely takes its place as a democratic beacon in the Southeast Asian context. In attitudes toward democracy, the data transcend analyses of Thailand that see it as anything less than fully democratic.

In the midst of Thai enthusiasm for democracy, it is important to ascertain what Thai respondents mean by democracy. "Democracy" is a somewhat sophisticated concept to be asking rural, less well-educated farmers and workers in all levels of society who constitute the majority of the sample. One of the major challenges to surveys of this type is the possibility that there are very different understandings of "democracy." This study, in our opinion, puts such charges to rest by demonstrating that Thais hold views of what constitutes democracy that are

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16 These data are supported by a National Statistical Office Survey indicating that less than 15 percent believe that

not fundamentally different from those of Euro-American origin. These data also shed light on the so-called Asian values debate. In the cross-national study in which this project is embedded, respondents throughout Asia reject typical views associated with "Asian values." One of the most important outcomes of the study, perhaps, is evidence that in dialogues over democracy, Asians and Euro-Americans are discussing the same thing.

The ability to elaborate on this theme and to explore these responses in considerably more depth show that respondents are quite clear about what democracy is not. It is not the substitution for democratic institutions of even benign authority. There is general rejection of authoritarian government in virtually every way we measure this choice and respondents soundly reject alternatives to democratic government when offered the choice. Thailand thus meets all of Linz and Stepan's criteria for mass support in a "consolidated democracy" (2001: 95).

Theories of democracy hold that social capital, particularly participation in civil society, has an important role to play in the sustainability and survivability of democracy. In this respect, the underpinnings of democratic attitudes appear ambiguously strong. High levels of trust in institutions of government and society provide solid support for reliance on instruments of government, but the relatively low level of trust in other Thais is a cause for concern. If, as suggested above, a pervasive lack of trust in other Thais is partly a result of socialization,[17] political solutions to conflicting social cleavages may pose a problem for the future of Thai democracy.

The lack of trust in other Thais may help to explain public discourse among the press, "social activists," and academics regarding corruption in Thailand. In a previous paper, we show that nearly 90 percent of Thais obtain their information about corrupt practices through the mass

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either government officials or local officials are "mostly corrupt" (National Statistical Office, 2003: 6).

[17] It is rumored that King Chulalongkorn once said that there are two things wrong with Thais – they are lazy and they will cheat you. Even though this is no more true than in many other nations, the popular perception has an

media (Albritton and Bureekul, 2001). The actual experience of corruption, however, appears quite low. Furthermore, general beliefs in corruption do not necessarily translate to beliefs about government. One possibility is that Thais experience corruption as much or more in private transactions than in the public sector. Beliefs about corruption may apply more to the overall context of Thai society, which poses problems for the sustainability of democracy in Thailand.

As in previous studies (Albritton and Bureekul, 2002), we find sharp cleavages between urban and rural Thailand in support for democracy. The test of perceptions that there is considerable variance in support for democracy between Bangkok and the hinterland indicates that, far from serving as the vanguard of democracy, Bangkok and the middle-class appear to be lagging behind. We lean toward the interpretation that, while the middle-class, as an entrepreneurial class, favors democracy to keep the government at bay, they are also threatened by the erosion of central authority that democracy brings. For the middle-class, the outcomes of democratic government appear far less predictable than authoritarian-bureaucratic rule, plus the fact that they have experience in negotiating the interface between government and business that is less secure in a democratic polity. Although there are no observable distinctions between Bangkok, the middle-class, and rural Thais in terms of meanings of democracy, rural Thailand has a considerably greater commitment to democratic governance as a countervailing power against the dominance by Bangkok elites. In this sense, there are truly "two democracies."

The relatively high levels of trust in the military, the police, and the civil service appear consistent with nations that experience relatively high levels of insecurity from natural forces, as well as physical threat from within society. These attitudes characterize rural societies in which populations rely on institutions of social control to maintain an orderly society. Particular institutions have historic importance in Thai society, especially the civil service. Throughout Thai history, monarchy, dictatorship and democracy, the civil service has been the one constant

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impact on relations within Thai society.

in a "bureaucratic polity."

As noted above, the attitudes and orientations to democracy observed in this study of Thailand are fully consistent with a consolidating democracy. As we attempt to interpret the data, however, two issues arise to confound confident interpretations. The first is a need for comparative perspectives and we have noted some in the analysis. Although we note high levels of support for democracy and democratic institutions of Thailand, any ability to generalize from the data calls for some basis of comparison. For example, compared to other institutions, trust in political parties appears to be low. By comparison with other nations, however, these same values appear quite high. In the final collation of individual country studies, of which this is a part, the interpretations of levels of trust and confidence in democracy and its institutions will become clearer.

One of the most important findings is the opposition of general support for democracy and support of "liberal" democratic values, especially those related to minority rights and the rule of law. The data appear consistent with a view that Thai democracy values majoritarian approaches, some embedded in the new constitution, that provide for popular, rather than representative, governance. In this interpretation, it is important to remember that developing nations, in their quest for democracy, have been absorbed with establishing popular rule over previous authoritarian forms of governance. Evolution of pluralist institutions to accommodate minority rights and the rule of law are clearly for future political agendas. The decades it took to develop strong institutions of minority rights under constitutional protection in the United States should be instructive in this regard.

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APPENDIX 1
Definitions of Variables Used in the Analysis

1. *Civil Society Participation*: Sum of responses to two questions on belonging to or participating in formal or informal associations.

2. *Urban-Rural Location*: (See Table 4.)

3. *SES*: Factor scores of income, education, and occupational status. All loadings are in excess of .8 and loaded on one natural factor.

4. *Trust in Government:* Sum of scores, trust-no-trust, for all institutions in Table 10.

5. *Support for Democracy*: Sum of five Z-scores from responses on:
    1. desirability of democracy
    2. suitability of democracy
    3. satisfaction with democracy
    4. preference for democracy
    5. ability of democracy to solve problems

8. *Traditionalism*: Factor scores from three factors of the following questions on:
    1 obedience to parents even when they are unreasonable
    2. hiring preferences for friends and relatives
    3. give way in conflict with a neighbor
    4. give way in opinions if co-workers disagree
    5. family needs take precedence over those of individual
    6. male loses face to work under female supervisor
    7. elders should be consulted to resolve disputes
    8. husbands should persuade daughters-in-law to obey mother

9. *Support for Rule of law and Minority Rights*: Summed index of responses to 7 questions:
    1. government should decide what can be discussed
    2. government leaders should be followed like heads of a family
    3. judges should defer to the executive
    4. legislature interferes with government
    5. political leaders should be able to ignore procedure
    6. with support, a leader should ignore minority views
    7. if country is in difficulty, it is OK to disregard laws

Appendix 2
Factor Analysis of Question Indicating Adherence to Traditional ("Asian")
Values: Varimax Solution

Questions	Factor 1 Family Values	Factor 2 Conflict Resolution	Factor 3 Conflict Avoidance
Obedience to parents even if demands are unreasonable	**.672**	.170	-.196
Hiring friends and relatives a priority	**.546**	.259	-.298
Daughter-in-law should obey mother-in-law	**.710**	.036	.080
Man loses face under female supervisor	**.682**	-.075	.296
Accommodate neighbor when there is conflict	-.006	**.840**	.034
Quarrels should be mediated by a elder	.197	**.720**	.184
Person should give-in when there is conflict with co-workers	-.125	.070	**.698**
For family's sake, person should put own interest second	.126	.127	**.688**

Percent of Variance   =   54.4

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Table 1: Meaning of Democracy Offered by Thai Respondents in Open-ended Questions, 2001, N=1546 (Positive Responses to Question: *"When you hear the word 'Democracy' what first comes to mind?"***)**

Categories of Response	Percent Responding	Cumulative Percent
Freedom and Civil Liberties	**38.2**	**38.2**
Political Equality	**15.2**	**53.4**
Individualism	**11.9**	**65.3**
Equality, Justice, or Fraternity	**7.7**	**73.0**
Participation and Citizen Empowerment	**7.2**	**80.2**
Democratic Process	**7.2**	**87.4**
Generic Responses to Democracy	**6.0**	**93.4**
Participation and Citizen Empowerment	**5.0**	**98.4**
Duties	**1.3**	**99.7**
Good Governance	**0.3**	**100.0**

No substance in answer, DK, No response = Missing   29.7

Table 2: Commitment to Democracy of Thai Respondents, 2001 N=1546

_____

How satisfied or dissatisfied are you with the way democracy works in our country?
_____

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Not at all satisfied	16	1.0	1.1
Not very satisfied	128	8.3	8.4
Fairly satisfied	845	54.7	55.7
Very satisfied	529	34.2	34.8
Missing	28	1.8	100.0
Total	1546	100.0	

_____

Which of the following statements is closest to your opinion?
_____

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Under some circumstance authoritarian government is preferable	163	10.5	10.6
For people like me it does not matter	78	5.0	5.1
Democracy is always preferable	1295	83.8	84.3
Missing	10	.6	100.0
Total	1546	100.0	

_____

Which of the following statements is closer to your own view?
_____

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Democracy cannot solve our problems	141	9.1	9.2
Democracy is capable of solving our problems	1388	89.8	90.8
Missing	17	1.1	100.0
Total	1546	100.0	

_____

Table 3: Preference for Democracy over Authoritarian Government, 2001 N=1546

_____

How suitable is democracy for Thailand today?

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Democracy is totally unsuitable	9	.6	.6
2	12	.8	.8
3	4	.3	.3
4	8	.5	.6
5	61	3.9	4.2
6	55	3.6	3.8
7	123	8.0	8.5
8	229	14.8	15.8
9	207	13.4	14.3
Democracy is perfectly suitable	740	47.9	51.1
Missing	98	6.3	100.0
Total	1546	100.0	

To what extent would you want our country to be democratic now?

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Completely authoritarian	5	.3	.3
2	0	.0	.0
3	3	.2	.2
4	3	.2	.2
5	27	1.7	1.8
6	33	2.1	2.3
7	53	3.4	3.6
8	136	8.8	9.3
9	207	13.4	14.1
Completely democratic	999	64.6	68.1
Missing	80	5.1	100.0
Total	1546	100.0	

Table 4: Percent of Respondents Accepting Alternatives to Democracy, 2001 N=1546

	SA	A	D	SD
Opposition parties should be abolished	12.1	24.9	36.2	26.8
The military should come in to govern the country	5.8	13.1	31.1	50.0
We should get rid of parliament and let experts decide everything	6.9	13.9	30.8	48.4
We should replace parliament with a strong leader	6.7	15.7	32.9	44.7

SA=Strongly Agree; A=Agree; D=Disagree; SD=Strongly Disagree; percentages are of "valid responses," e.g., the data exclude missing values.

Table 5: Support for Liberal Democracy, 2001   N=1546

	SA	A	D	SD
Diverse views will tend to make society chaotic	37.8	38.0	16.2	8.0
Free speech is not worth it if we have to put up with the danger to society of social disorder	9.9	15.4	37.9	36.8
We should not have to tolerate political views that are fundamentally different from those of the majority	15.1	30.4	36.7	17.9
Political leaders should tolerate views of challengers	57.8	35.4	4.7	2.0
Harmony of the community is threatened by organized groups	47.8	35.9	9.4	6.9

SA=Strongly Agree; A=Agree; D=Disagree; SD=Strongly Disagree; percentages exclude missing values.

Table 6: Perceived Change in Thailand from Authoritarian to Democratic Regimes, 1992-2002 (In percent)

	Previous Regime	Current Regime
Hard, authoritarian regime	65.7	0.9
Soft, authoritarian regime	25.4	5.5
Limited democracy	4.5	20.4
Full or nearly complete democracy	4.3	73.2

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Table 7: Perceived Improvements in Politics and Policy over the Suchinda-Anand Regime

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Politics:

Freedom of Speech	1.08
Equality of Treatment	0.97
People Can Influence Government	0.96
Judiciary Free of Politics	0.54
Ability to Join Any Organization	0.82
Overall Change in Politics	0.88

Policy:

Corruption in Government	0.85
Gap Between Rich and Poor	0.46
Crime Prevention	0.84
Economic Development	0.53
Overall Change in Policy	0.70

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Table 8: Analysis of Variance in Support for Democracy by Location, 2001 N=1546

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	Mean Score	N	SE	F-level	Sig. of F
Rural	28.7599	883	.0987	9.062 .000	
Suburb	27.9919	248	.2230		
Muang	28.1719	128	.2665		
BKK Suburbs	27.5867	75	.0853		
BKK Downtown	26.8939	66	.4775		
Total	28.4193	1400			

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Table 9: Impacts of Socioeconomic Status and Bangkok Location on Support for Democracy, 2001   N=1546

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Dependent Variable: Support for Democracy

Independent Variables	Regression Coefficients	t-test	Sig. of t
SES	-.301	-3.243	.001
Bangkok	-.896	-2.817	.005
(Constant)	26.739	43.649	.000

R=.143

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Table 10: Trust in Social and Political Institutions (In Percent of Valid percent),

2001   **N=1546**

_____

How much trust do you have in each of the following institutions?

_____

	A great deal	Quite a lot	Not much	None at all
The Courts	24.4	49.0	23.9	2.7
National Government	18.0	51.1	28.6	2.3
Political Parties	11.5	40.2	42.1	6.3
Parliament	14.3	46.3	34.0	5.5
Civil Service	17.7	51.6	26.2	4.5
The Military	29.6	50.4	17.4	2.6
The Police	16.6	42.0	33.9	7.5
Local Government	21.3	46.8	26.3	5.6
Newspapers	11.6	44.1	39.5	4.8
Television	22.8	56.7	19.1	1.4
The Election Commission	20.2	49.8	26.0	4.0
NGOs	12.9	46.8	33.0	7.2
Local MPs	17.0	45.5	30.8	6.7
Constitutional Court	33.5	48.3	15.2	3.0
Counter-Corruption Commission	31.5	48.3	17.7	2.5

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Table 11: Impacts of Social Context on Support for Democracy in Thailand N = 793*

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Variable	Regression Coefficient	Betas	t-value	Sig. of t
Rural-urban Location	-.313	-.125	-3.567	.000
Family Values	-.303	-.104	-3.038	.002
Approaches to Conflict Resolution	-.304	-.106	- 3.047	.002
Trust in Social and Political Institutions	.088	.208	5.877	.000
Constant	-3.062		-4.474	.000
R-Square = .113				

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*Age, gender, and SES are well above the .05 criterion.

Table 12: Impacts of Social Context on Support for "Liberal-Democratic" Values, Minority rights and the Rule of Law*   **N = 1494**

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Variables	Regression Coefficient	Betas	Value of t	Sig. of t

Rural-Urban					
Location	.992	.296	11.839	.000	
Family Values	.258	.069	2.815	.005	
Approaches to					
Conflict Resolution	.403	.107	4.301	.000	
Conflict Avoidance	.368	.098	4.033		.000
Constant	15.647		96.635	.000	
R-Square = .127					

*"Trust" is so collinear with the three indicators of traditionalism-modernism that the indicators perform better when that indicator is omitted. SES is also highly correlated with the urban-rural indicator, but the former is so weak by comparison that it is not statistically significant at the .05 criterion. Age and gender are well above the .05 criterion.

Table 13: Respondent Identifications of Actions in Terms of Bribery or Corruption (in Percent) N = 1546

	Gift	Bribery	Corruption	N
Politicians give money or gifts to people during an election	10.7	76.2	13.0	1406
Gave donations to government officials during a celebration	39.2	53.3	7.4	1344
"Tipped" a government official for assistance	12.8	66.5	20.6	1318
Employment depends on friends or relatives in government	*	39.0	40.6	1256

* 20.4 percent indicated that this practice was "not bad."

Table 14: Personal Experiences of Corruption by Urban-Rural Settings (in Percent) N = 1536

Suburban

	Meung	Suburbs	Rural	Bangkok	BKK	Total
Personally never witnessed corruption	79.9	83.1	84.5	78.2	76.1	83.1
Have witnessed corruption personally	20.1	16.9	15.5	21.8	23.9	16.9

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