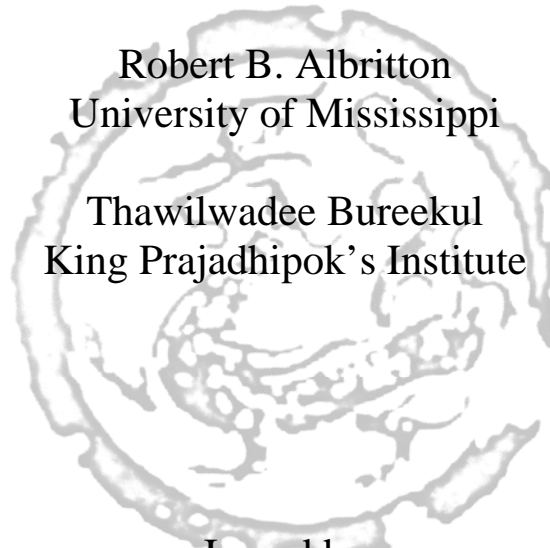# ASIAN BAROMETER

## A Comparative Survey of

## *DEMOCRACY, GOVERNANCE AND DEVELOPMENT*

# Working Paper Series: No. 3

# Support for Democracy in Thailand

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# Asian Barometer

## A Comparative Survey of Democracy, Governance and Development

# Working Paper Series

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# Support for Democracy in Thailand

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**Abstract:** *Data on Thailand that constitute one component of a cross-national study of Asian nations are examined to assess levels of commitment to democracy in the context of a theoretical framework of democratic consolidation. In addition, the study analyzes urban-rural cleavages and implications for how they might affect democracy in Thailand. Results show a high level of attitudinal commitment to democracy, but significant disparities between urban elites and rural citizens in support for democracy.*

**Concept of the Study**

Celebration of the "era of democracy" or the "third wave" of democracy has become tempered by concerns over 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 political history of Thailand has been marked by alternating periods of autocratic government and control of the government by democratic institutions since the downfall of the absolute monarchy in 1932. By 1986, however, only slightly over six years could be characterized as truly democratic, that is, involving exercise by mass publics of the choice of electoral alternatives in

a free and open competition of political parties (Chai-anan, 1990). The decade of the 1980s, however, was an evolution of democratic government in which Thai democracy appeared not only to sustain itself, but the instruments of democracy succeeded as governing agents. During this period, Thai political parties performed traditional party functions of interest articulation and aggregation, offered cues to voter choice, translated voter choices into governmental leadership, and provided the basis of government during a period unequaled in general prosperity for the nation and in enhanced quality of life for Thai citizens.

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" (Chai-anan, 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 radical transformation of the electoral system under the new constitution, however, brought about even more dramatic changes producing, for the first time, a majority party in charge of governing, and a new set of institutions designed to place elections and government beyond reach of corruption, fraud, and abuse of the voting process. The establishment of these truly democratic institutions and practices in Thailand, 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 paper presents data from the Thai portion of a 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 (if not the only) probability sample of opinion in the Thai nation as to support for democracy among citizens of Thailand.

These opinions occur following major events in the Thai political process: 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. The latter has power under the Constitution to charge, try, and remove from office public officials judged guilty of corruption. The National Election Commission has authority to declare specific district elections invalid and to hold new elections in which a candidate may be disqualified for practices in violation of election laws.[1] This new constitution and the institutions it has created represent a step-level shift in the movement toward full democracy in Thailand. It is not clear how these events may or may not have influenced opinions measured in this study.

Limitations of space and the volume of data limit theoretical arguments in support of subjects covered here. The discussion includes an interpretation of the results of the survey on support for democracy, necessarily omitting other topics such as: 1) Rating the Economy and Politics; 2) Participation in Civil Society; 3) Political Participation; 4) Interest in Politics; 5) Cultural Traditionalism; 6) Corruption in Government; and 8) Political Efficacy. However, the analysis addresses a fundamental issue raised by at least two Thai scholars (Anek, 1996; Pasuk 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:

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[1] The National Election Commission invalidated 75 elections of the 200 seats in the March 2001 Senate election. Subsequently, repeated elections were invalidated until finally the last *changwat* (province) election was validated after the fifth election.

> 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 candidates for rural voters are those who visit them often, address their immediate grievances effectively, and bring numerous public works to their communities. (Anek, 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" (Anek, 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" (Anek, 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" (Anek, 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, can be 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 Anek (1996), who argues that the 1991 coup could not have been sustained except for support from the middle class, and Chai-anan (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 Bangkok 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) support 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.

**Structure of the Research**

The data for this analysis were obtained in a probability sample of eligible voters in the Thai nation during November-December, 2001.[2] The procedure is a three-stage probability sample based upon clusters of legislative districts, then of voting units (precincts), followed by a systematic sampling of

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[2]Eligible voters include all Thai citizens 18 years of age and older.

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 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. It represents one of the few (if not the only) 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 their attitudes toward democracy, indicating the level of attitudinal consolidation of democratic values among the Thai people.

**Support for Democracy**

The sample includes a very high level of respondents expressing support for democratic processes and institutions. Table 1 shows that over 90 percent of the electorate is satisfied with

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**Table 1: Commitment to Democracy of Thai Respondents, 2001 N=1546**

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

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|  | 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 | |

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

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|  | 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 | |

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. Using a ten-point scale evaluating democracy in Thailand, less than 3 percent of the sample prefer alternatives to democratic governance and less than seven percent indicate that democracy is unsuitable for Thailand today (Table 2). In a superficial way, Thais are highly supportive of the "idea" of democracy in virtually every dimension.

**Table 2: 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 | |

The fact that 39.3 percent of the sample rates 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 democracy adherents.[3] When forced to choose between democracy and economic development, however, this commitment to democracy appears somewhat weaker. 49.2 percent indicate a preference for economic development over democracy, while only 16.7 percent remain committed to democracy over economic development (Table 3).

An analysis even more sensitive to democratic orientations indicates a Thai public strongly supportive of democratic institutions. When asked about alternatives such as "replacing

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[3]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.

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## Table 3: Choice of Democracy Over Economic Development, 2001
## N=1546

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*If you had to choose between democracy and economic development (improving one's standard of living), which would you say is more important?*

| | Frequency | Percent | Valid Percent |
|---|---|---|---|
| Economic development is much more important | 468 | 30.3 | 30.4 |
| Economic development is somewhat more important | 289 | 18.7 | 18.8 |
| They are both equally important | 524 | 33.9 | 34.1 |
| Democracy is somewhat more important | 155 | 10.0 | 10.1 |
| Democracy is definitely more important | 102 | 6.6 | 6.6 |
| | | | 100.0 |
| Missing | 8 | .5 | |
| Total | 1546 | 100.0 | |

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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.

When attitudes toward civil liberties are examined, however, there is more ambiguity in the Thai population's commitment to liberal democratic values. Table 5 shows that Thais are somewhat anxious about social instability. While generally supporting the concept of 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 4: Percent of Respondents Accepting Alternatives to Democracy, 2001**
**N=1546**

|  | SA | A | D | SD | N |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| *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.

This finding 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 the harmony of the community posed by politically active groups. The high level of agreement with both of these positions indicates a deeply held, but subtle, antipathy to conflict. 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 a distaste for political dissidence, as a 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).

**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.

Thai society and culture is marked most strongly by deference to well-understood social hierarchies. The traditional greeting, the *wai,* represents this deferential structure in that protocol dictates that inferiors pay respect to superiors by *wai*-ing first. This deference to authority may account for a relatively high degree of trust in government institutions (Table 6). All of the institutions examined in Table 6 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 6). 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, requiring as many as five waves of re-elections in some provinces. In addition, the associations of this latter institution with

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**Table 6: Trust in Social and Political Institutions (In Percent of Valid percent), 2001**
**N=1546**

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*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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electoral politics probably tarnishes the institution, because of Thai aversions to contention and conflict. Even so, the Electoral Commission receives substantial trust from 70 percent of the population, implying that these basic, constitutional institutions command substantial confidence and respect among Thai citizens.

At the lower end of the scale stand the political parties (Table 6). 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 and this level of trust in political parties is

substantially higher than that reported in surveys of eastern European nations taken as late as 1998 (Batto, 2000). Thais, especially elite Thais, generally hold political parties in contempt, and the relatively lower level of trust accorded them reflects long-standing deprecation by intellectuals and the media over the past few decades. The overall result, however, is a commendably high level of trust even for political parties, when compared with other emerging democracies - a finding that would surprise quite a few Thais.

A rather surprising finding is that newspapers have the second lowest level of trust (Table 6). 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 in perspective is the high level of trust in television (Table 6). Some of the most prominent Thai channels are controlled by the government. 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.

Compared to the level of trust in political parties, newspapers, and NGOs (59.8), the level of trust in the police is remarkable (Table 6). 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. 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).

Finally, it bears mentioning that the level of trust in the national government at least equals, if not significantly higher, than confidence in local government (Table 6). One reason that the two are so close on this dimension is that, heretofore, they have been virtually the same. With local government officials appointed by the central government through a central bureaucracy, rather than recruitment at the local level, it would be difficult for respondents to distinguish in many details which level held jurisdiction in any particular arena. The data, plus a rather surprising response that 81.3 percent believe that the national government should exercise more authority over local

government, however, indicate at least one of the ambiguities inherent in the move toward decentralization of local government currently under way in Thailand.

The positive support for the military, the civil service, and the police, are mitigated in favor of democratic orientations by the attitudes of respondents toward alternatives to democracy. When questioned about alternatives, Thai respondents overwhelmingly reject replacing parliament with a strong leader, abolishing opposition parties, letting experts run the nation, and notably rejecting the idea of military government. These items provide a context for understanding that the Thai commitment to democracy, while ambiguous at some points, appears deeply rooted attitudinally in public opinion.

**The "Two Democracies" Thesis**

The data gathered in this study provide an opportunity to test Anek's argument that there are significant differences between the ways Bangkok residents understand democracy and politics from those persons living in the *changwat* outside Bangkok. 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 at .8. Support for democracy is a scale variable generated by taking the mean of Z-scores on the six items indicating support for democracy.

**Table 7: Analysis of Variance in Support for Democracy by Location, 2001 N=1546**

|                 | Mean Score | N    | SE    | F-level | Sig. of F |
|-----------------|-----------:|-----:|------:|--------:|----------:|
| *Rural*         | .3197      | 982  | .0887 | 9.074   | .000      |
| *Suburb*        | -.1602     | 215  | .2403 |         |           |
| *Muang*         | -.8036     | 61   | .3417 |         |           |
| *Bangkok Suburbs* | -.9288   | 76   | .4290 |         |           |
| *BKK Downtown*  | -1.3457    | 66   | .4435 |         |           |
| Total           | .0507      | 1400 |       |         |           |

Table 7 shows support for democracy in an analysis of variance using five categories of location of respondents.[4] The data are consistent with previous findings that Bangkok respondents are significantly lower in their support for democracy than other units. "Downtown Bangkok," or the core city, shows the lowest score on democratic support, while rural respondents show the highest levels of support for democratic governance. When Bangkok (combining both "Downtown Bangkok and suburban Bangkok) is compared with other areas, the results show even more marked differences in support levels for democracy (Table 8).

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**Table 8: Analysis of Variance in Support for Democracy: Bangkok Versus Non-Bangkok, 2001          N=1546**

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|  | Mean Score | N | SE | F-test | Sig. of F |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| *Bangkok* | -1.1226 | 142 | .3800 | 24.001 | .000 |
| *Non-Bangkok* | .0825 | 1258 | .0867 | | |
| | | | | | |
| Total | -.0184 | 1400 | .0811 | | |

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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. His argument, however, is an ecological one and the data of this study represent a possibility for testing this proposition on an individual level.

When OLS regression is used to estimate impacts of education and Bangkok residency on political participation, the results support Suchit's analysis. Confirming the analysis of Logerfo's data noted above, however, Bangkok respondents are significantly less likely to participate in political activity, even controlling for education (Table 9). The results are virtually the same when support for democracy is analyzed by Bangkok residency controlling for

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

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**Table 9: Regression of Political Participation Scores on Education and Bangkok Location, 2001**
**N=1546**

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Dependent Variable: Political Participation

| Independent Variables | Regression Coefficients | t-test | Sig. of t |
|---|---|---|---|
| Years of education | -.017 | -3.086 | .002 |
| Bangkok | -.331 | -4.389 | .000 |
| (Constant) | 7.284 | 46.570 | .000 |

R=.156

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socioeconomic status. Analysis shows that the higher the socioeconomic status, the lower the support for democracy (Table 10). There are, nevertheless, independent effects of Bangkok residency that have negative impacts on support for democracy. 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.

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**Table 10: 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 | -.290 | -3.312 | .001 |
| Bangkok | -.890 | -2.983 | .003 |
| (Constant) | .181 | 2.046 | .041 |

R=.148

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**Analysis**

The data obtained for this study show a relatively high level of attitudinal support for democracy. Thais appear persuaded that democracy is not only the best of all alternative forms of government,

but that democratic institutions and processes can be trusted to solve the problems of the nation. Although nearly half of the respondents evaluate economic development more highly, if they are compelled to choose, they do not perceive autocratic government of any type as a solution to the aspirations and expectations of Thai citizens.

When the concept of democracy is extended to the criteria of "liberal democracy," the results are less positive. The aversion of Thais to conflict, including political conflict, appears to produce a preference for curbs on freedoms of expression if those expressions jeopardize the tranquility of the social order. When the threat of social conflict is absent from the question, respondents rejected the view that political leaders should not compromise with the opposition and that they should tolerate the views of challengers. This cross-section of the Thai population appears to hold conflict-avoidance as a major criterion for evaluating institutions and practices in the developing democracy.

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. These particular institutions have historic importance in Thai society, especially the civil service. Throughout Thai history, dictatorship and democracy, the civil service has been the one constant in a "bureaucratic polity."

The attitudes and orientations to democracy observed in this study 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. When we note levels of support for democracy, our 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 may be quite high. Our hope is that in the final collation of individual country studies, the levels of trust and confidence in democracy and its institutions will become clearer.

A second important dimension in evaluating the data occurs from the static nature of the data obtained here. The more fundamental issue of whether confidence in democracy is increasing or ebbing requires future survey measures for which the current analysis can only be a baseline.[5] Our efforts to evaluate the status of Thai democracy at this time, however, indicate a society well on its way to democratic consolidation to a degree that compares favorably with more established democracies throughout the world.

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[5]Fortunately, we have two additional surveys from early 2001 and early 2000 that tend to support the picture painted here. Unfortunately, these surveys are not identical in some of the important questions asked. See Albritton and Bureekul, 2001; Albritton and Bureekul, 2002.

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