

DEVELOPING DEMOCRACY UNDER A NEW CONSTITUTION IN THAILAND : A PLURALIST SOLUTION

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Hopes for democracy in Thailand rest largely on impacts of the Constitution of 1997, influencing the electoral process. Although democracy has been developing steadily since 1978, the new constitution represents a step-level shift in the movement toward full democracy. Not only does the new constitution radically revise the systems of electoral democracy, it also creates new institutions for democratic 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 on 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 chosen, 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. A similar process is followed for 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.¹ 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. As a result of statutory authority giving the Commission power to certify elections to office, the Commission invalidates elections and either disqualifies a candidate or requires new elections when previous balloting is suspect. Assertion of this authority has led to microscopic examination of the integrity of

¹It is difficult for Americans to explain to Thais how an official appointed by the brother of a presidential candidate and vice-chair of a presidential campaign committee can have supervisory control of elections in Florida.

election processes, leading to the most open, corruption-free elections in recent Thai history.²

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 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 elections in Thailand. As noted below, the exercise of constitutional authority in these areas has had far-reaching impacts on the current configuration of politics and government in Thailand. 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. But, one cannot consider the election system and its impacts without attention to these novel (if not unique) structures of elections taking place in the Thai context. In many respects, Thailand now has a system of elections far freer of voter irregularities than those of the United States. (See accounts of the presidential election of 2000.)

²International news media reports of widespread corruption are based primarily on *charges* of corruption, which are 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.

Elections for the Senate, March 4, 2000

Now that both elections for the Senate³ on March 4, 2000, and for the House on January 6, 2001, have been completed, the picture is becoming clearer as to the extent to which initial expectations have been realized. The Senate elections were, clearly, a significant test of constitutional structures, especially efforts by the constitutionally established Electoral Commission to eliminate fraud and abuse of the voting process. As it turned out, the elections represented a monumental step forward for democratic governance in Thailand. Unprecedented voter turnout – in excess of 70 percent – and elections far freer from fraud and vote-buying than in past years made it a truly remarkable event in Thai history. House elections were comparable, with turnout around 62 percent - for the *first* election.⁴

The results far exceeded most observers' fondest hopes. The peculiar structure of Senate elections (voting for only one candidate out of 265 in Bangkok, with 18 Senators to be elected) meant that, in some cases, election to the Senate was guaranteed with as little as 5.6 percent of the popular vote. Clearly, this was not a *majoritarian* democratic solution and the fear was that political or patronage ties would produce enough votes to elect Senators who represented "politics as usual." Instead, most of the 18 candidates receiving the most votes could be classified as "reformers" or persons of considerable stature in the Bangkok community - everything the architects of the constitution hoped for from the election process. But, 13 Senators were elected with less than 3 percent of the popular vote and 7 Senators were elected with less than 2 percent of the vote. How "democratic" was this election when so many successful candidates received so little support from the voters?

The answer requires an examination of outcomes, rather than process. Judged only by *majoritarian* standards, this was not an unequivocal expression of democratic governance. Instead,

³This represents the first time the Senate of the Thai parliament has been elected. Heretofore, it was appointed by the government.

⁴New elections were held subsequently until the full 200 Senators were certified by the Election Commission. In Samut Prakan, four additional elections were conducted. (See details below)

the election produced a striking example of pluralist democracy at work. Structures of the election produced a combination of winners not only with broad-based constituencies, but also persons with isolated or “special” constituencies - AIDS activists, child rights activists, and Magsaysay award winners - even a constituency linked to organized gambling.

Representation is not based upon individuals, but upon constituencies - if a candidate represents a constituency interest and that constituency passes a threshold, that constituency is represented in the Senate. The Senate is, thus, a *pluralist* body of constituency interests instead of an expression of *majoritarian* democracy.

Another example of *pluralist* representation occurred in Pattani. This province is roughly 75 percent Muslim. Of the two candidates elected, one is Muslim and one is Buddhist. (The Muslim candidate received over 100,000 votes, while the Buddhist candidate received less than 46,000 votes.) Based upon *majoritarian* norms, Buddhists would be considered over-represented in this *changwat*. But, *pluralist* considerations support representation of minority constituencies and the electoral mechanism produced representation for the minority constituency, as well as for the majority. Whether this outcome was intended or unintended, the constitutional process has produced a remarkable example of pluralist democracy for one body of the bicameral legislature. This becomes particularly important because the House elections, with single-member, winner-take-all districts (and party-list voting), are decidedly *majoritarian* in principle. In serving as a check on the House, the Senate offers a radically different basis of representation.

Students of American democracy are well aware that the architects of the American constitutional system had serious reservations about purely majoritarian rule, although, by the early twentieth century, the Seventeenth Amendment largely transformed the Senate into a *majoritarian* body in addition to the House. Whether intended or unintended, the Thai constitution has produced a truly *pluralistic* chamber as an alternative to the majority-based House. For better or for worse, the Senate elections have resulted in a system of constituency-based representation that will be the envy of *pluralist* democracy advocates everywhere. For now, at least, it is an achievement that should be celebrated as a landmark on the path of developing unique expressions of Thai (or Asian?) democracy.

Two features of the Senate elections may seem peculiar to European and American scholars. First, identification of a candidate with a political party (including membership) is prohibited by the Constitution; second, campaigning is restricted to posters of a limited number by the organic law implementing election provisions of the Constitution. In the case of the latter, candidates are

prohibited from making policy statements or identifying with policy positions - the purpose being to create a body relatively free from interest-group politics.

In addition, the Election Commission refused to certify 75 of the 200 candidates receiving a plurality of votes in various *changwat*. Most of these candidates were allowed to contest in re-elections. Some were, again, denied certification. As noted above, in one *changwat* (Samut Prakan), five elections were held before a winner was declared and admitted to sit in the Senate. This process extended the elections until May, which meant considerable delay in seating the Thai Senate. This inability to constitute the Senate for several weeks served as a wake-up call to the Election Commission for the administration of elections to the House of Representatives, which is required to be installed within 30 days of elections.

The test of democracy in the Senate elections for most Thais rests upon the overall performance of that body. Most of the Senators represent constituencies outside Bangkok and it is these persons who have come to exercise control over Senate actions. Some Senators have been charged with behavior that could have them removed from the body - thus, some observers argue that there has been little progress.

In fact, many of the problems arise from fundamental value cleavages between Bangkok elites and those of the villages. Anek Laothamatas (1996) suggests that 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. Among other differences between urban and rural constituencies is that, (according to the “urban view”):

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 (p. 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 democratic processes. For these groups, “democracy turns out to be the rule of the corrupt and incompetent” (Laothamatas, p. 208). This creates for them a dilemma: although they

oppose authoritarian rule, in principle, they hold representatives from rural constituencies in contempt, regarding them as “parochial in outlook, boorish in manner, and too uneducated to be competent lawmakers or cabinet members” (Laothamatas, p. 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, p. 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. Anek argues that this fundamental conflict cannot be resolved until the middle class accepts alternative versions of democracy that make room for understandings and aspirations of rural voters, especially the need for the rural poor to draw benefits away from the center and toward rural areas. “Ideally, patron-client ties might be replaced by a more responsive and effective system of local government. On top of that, voters are to be convinced that principle-or policy-oriented voting brings them greater benefits than what they may get from local patrons” (Laothamatas, p. 223).

Experiences of Thai Democracy

This paper examines these issues of democracy in Thailand as they come into play during the course of Senate elections. It reports attitudes and opinions from a major post-election survey of Thai citizens in six *changwat*, or provinces, (Bangkok, Chiangmai, Songkla, Sakonnakorn, Chonburi, and Chachoengsao) conducted by the King Prachadipok’s Institute in April and May, 2000, based upon a probability sample of respondents from the five major regions of Thailand. The focus is on four perennial issues of democracy in Thailand: effectiveness of the balloting process, factors affecting selection of candidates, appearance of corruption in the election, and overall support for democracy. The first of these issues – effectiveness of the balloting process – is tested using citizen perceptions of difficulty and fairness of voting. It is a rather straightforward consideration that, in any society, affects the legitimacy of the outcome. There is little “theory” or conceptual scheme attached to this outcome. In effect, it is merely an attempt to estimate citizen satisfaction with the most formal aspect of democracy, the free and fair ballot. There is general consensus that the Senate elections embodied

the unconstrained right to vote (indeed a constitutional requirement to vote), free and fair elections where citizens may elect by popular vote those representatives who will make specific policy choices in their name, and participation by a substantial majority of citizens. Thus, there is little doubt that the elections can be called “democratic.”

These elections embodied three special features of the electoral process. First, parties were prohibited from involvement in the elections; second, candidates were prohibited from campaigning; and, third, voting was a legal obligation with prescribed penalties, specifically, loss of suffrage in succeeding elections for failure to vote. However, none of these expressly impinge on the democratic nature of these elections. Although the result represented a “pluralistic” outcome in which constituencies are represented, rather than majority rule, subsequent parliamentary elections, expressly majoritarian in structure, will serve to provide a parliament that is both majoritarian *and* pluralistic – both concepts well within the mainstream of democratic practices.

The second topic has more theoretical implications for democracy in Thailand, because it provides empirical evidence for one of the most profound political cleavages that affect any society, that is, the divergent cultural perspectives of rural and urban societies. This is accomplished by explicit comparisons between orientations of Bangkok respondents and those outside Bangkok.

This study also examines perceptions of corruption in the voting process. As Neher and Marlay (1995) note, “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). Although this study does not resolve the issue of the distinction between vote-buying and perceptions of vote-buying, it does offer data documenting these perceptions and their scope in the *changwat* that are within the scope of the analysis. The data thus offer a basis of comparison for perceived corruption of the ballot in the areas studied.

Finally, this study examines the singular issue of support for democracy. As with the two previous issues, the data offer an opportunity to examine adherence to democracy in a comparison across *changwat* and regions. However, this study adopts as an important analytical strategy the framework of analysis suggested by Anek, that is, the search for significant variation on all indicators between the metropole and the village, the core city and the *changwat* outside Bangkok.

Another important dimension in the issue of support for democracy is the role of the middle class. 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-à-vis democracy, has been “reactive rather than proactive” (p.156) and that its primary interest in democracy has been “to safeguard their own freedom and the freedom of the market” (p.158).

This paper addresses the issue of support for democracy from a class perspective, as well as from the perspective of an 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, at least in the *changwat* selected for this analysis.

Structure of the Research

This study is based upon randomly selected samples of respondents from the six *changwat* noted above. The procedure is thus a three-stage, stratified (by *changwat*) sample, followed by cluster sampling of voting units, followed by a systematic sample of individual respondents in the selected clusters. After choosing the appropriate *changwat* (for representation of the major regions of Thailand), the systematic sampling of voting units or ballot stations yields 300 voter units (50 from each *changwat*), followed by 2,395 respondents from systematically sampling potential voters across the 50 voting units in each of the *changwat*. These results offer a possibility of obtaining general comparisons, especially across *changwat*, relating to the attitudes, opinions, and behavior of these respondents. In any case, it represents an extremely rare probability-based sample of the Thai electorate.

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electorate. }

In passing, it should be noted that probability sampling allows inferences to the larger population covered by the survey. In addition, it permits statistical tests of the likelihood that the findings represent the true population. Such tests are totally inappropriate unless the sample is probability based. “Margins of error,” Chi-square tests, t-tests, and the like are inappropriate and misleading, unless the sample is based upon a probability selection procedure. The plethora of polls reported in the Thai media *ad infinitum* are seldom, if ever, probability based. Therefore the “margin of error” notations are, at best, misleading and, at worst, deceiving.

Another problem arises from stratification used in most sampling schemes. In fact, if a sample is stratified, it cannot represent the population unless it is weighted by the proportion such strata represent in the population as a whole. When a sample is stratified by *changwat*, such a sample is suitable for comparing across *changwat*; however, if one wishes to generalize to the combined population of the *changwat*, the data must be weighted by the ratios of each *changwat* to the total population divided by the ratio of the *changwat* sample to the total sample.

In this study, we utilize the unweighted *changwat* samples for analyzing the urban-rural cleavages across *changwat*. Other analysis, however, such as the role of class, require a weighted sample as described above. The weighted sample permits generalization to the entire population across the *changwat*, something that is prohibited by the unweighted sample. The two types of data thus allow testing of notions of the Bangkok versus the village hypothesis of Anek, while the weighted sample allows testing of hypotheses suggested by Chai-anan regarding the role of the middle class.

Citizen Satisfaction with Administration of Elections

In general, respondents were quite satisfied with the “machinery” and organization of Senate elections. The data indicate a high level of satisfaction with 73.2 percent of respondents agreeing or strongly agreeing with a statement expressing satisfaction with arrangements for the elections. Only 6.1 percent expressed disagreement, with the rest indicating a “so-so” response. When the data are weighted, the percent expressing agreement or strong agreement falls to 72.5 percent and the disagreement rises to 8.5 percent. However, in both cases, the respondents indicate a high level of satisfaction with the election process that suggests considerable credit to the efforts of the Electoral Commission.

Table 1: Reasons Given for Not Voting in Senate Elections, March 4, 2000, by Eligible Voters Who Admitted that They Did Not Vote

Reason Given	Percent of persons Not Voting (N=125)	Percent of Total Sample (N=2,395)
Too Busy	45.6	2.38
Live too far from polling place	4.7	0.24
Name not on voting list	5.6	0.29
Could not locate polling place	0.8	0.04
Did not know it was election day	1.6	0.08

The survey provides additional data on non-voters (or at least those who admitted to non-voting) as to reasons for failure to participate. Table 1 shows response rates for those who admitted non-voting behavior to possible reasons for failure to participate. The largest reason given, by far, was that they were “busy” that day. None of the other reasons given account for the behavior of only a small proportion of non-voters. These grounds become even more spurious when they are taken as a proportion of the entire sample (Table1). The excuse that a voter was “busy” falls to 2.4 percent of the total respondents; the omission of a name on a voting list drops to 0.29 percent.

In fact, the data show an excellent level of performance in the organization and execution of the Senate elections of 2000. Not only did they accommodate an exceptionally large turnout, there were few to no legitimate reasons why a citizen failed to perform the constitutionally mandated duty to vote. On this dimension, the new structures of constitutional democracy performed not only as well as could be expected, but also at an exceptional level of accommodation, making the moment a

benchmark in Thai history.

The Bangkok-Rural Cleavage and the “Two Democracies” Thesis

The survey data provide an opportunity to test Anek’s argument that there are significant differences between the ways Bangkok residents understand politics from those of the *changwat* outside Bangkok. The data contain at least 46 questions asking whether the respondent used certain criteria in arriving at the choice of a candidate. Scores of respondents on these questions were scaled, using factor analysis techniques, to produce variables that provide the basis for examining differences between Bangkok and the other *changwat* examined in the study.

The first four factors represent the basis for this analysis. Factor 1, labeled Ability and Integrity of the candidate, consisted of criteria of “honesty,” “capability,” “leadership ability,” and other similar measures. Factor 2, Social Status, touches on whether the candidate was well-off financially, a person of high social status or reputation, and had political friends or associates. Factor 3 has to do with Family Values, including evaluation of the spouse, children, and responsibility for the family. Factor 4 is designated Localism, that is, whether a person comes from the *changwat* or has other direct associations with the area. The expectation is that significant differences will be identified between Bangkok respondents and respondents from the other *changwat* on these criteria as factors taken into consideration for arriving at a choice of candidates.⁵

Previous research (Albritton and Prabudhanitisarn, 1997, Albritton, et al., 1995) indicates that associations with an urban-rural dichotomy disappear when controlling for level of education in northern and southern areas of Thailand. However, secondary analysis of data gathered by Logerfo (1996) indicates that, even when controlling for education, significant differences remain between Bangkok and rural areas of Thailand. This analysis takes the research into account by controlling for educational level before examining effects of the Bangkok – non-Bangkok differences on criteria for voter choice. Table 2 compares mean scores of Bangkok and the other *changwat*, collectively, on each of the factors noted above. The analysis relies on a factorial design to control for education level as an alternative explanation for differences between these two groups.

The analysis in Table 2 shows that Bangkok respondents are significantly more likely to use

⁵Item loadings on a factor were in excess of .5. The factors explained over 65 percent of the variance in items.

evaluations of integrity and ability than respondents from other areas of the kingdom of Thailand. The positive sign for Bangkok respondents indicates mean scores above the mean of all respondents, while the negative sign for non-Bangkok respondents implies that their overall use of this criterion (Factor 1) is below average. Furthermore, the table shows that while use of this criterion is also associated significantly with level of education, there are clearly effects, independent of education, associated with Bangkok identification. The conclusion is that there are significant differences in values attached to the criterion of ability and integrity between Bangkok and the rest of the sample, even when educational level is taken into account.

The use of status and influence criteria in Factor 2, illustrates an opposite pattern. The use of this basis of candidate selection by Bangkok voters falls below the mean, while those outside Bangkok find this to be a significant criterion for arriving at a voting decision (Table 2). The data show that this relationship exists independently of educational level and that the latter has only marginal effects in mitigating the impact of this factor on voter choice.

Factor 3, Family Values shows no significant differences between Bangkok and other respondents as a basis for voter choice, controlling for education (Table 2). In the bivariate case, there are significant differences between Bangkok respondents and those from outside Bangkok. Bangkok respondents are more likely to use family values as a criterion for candidate selection than are the other members of the sample. However, these differences prove to be largely a function of educational level. When educational level is added to the design in a factorial analysis, differences between Bangkok and non-Bangkok respondents disappears.

Factor 4, Localism, is one of the most interesting possibilities for testing Anek's hypothesis. The emphasis on local connections expresses the parochialism of voters in using this criterion as a basis for voter choice. As Anek's hypothesis would suggest, Localism scores low among Bangkok respondents, but significantly higher for non-Bangkok respondents (Table 2). Furthermore, in analyzing this factor, education plays no role in influencing the use of this criterion. In fact, a more detailed analysis shows that at higher educational levels non-Bangkok respondents are about as likely to utilize localistic criteria as are those with little education. A clear interpretation would be that localism becomes a factor in voter choice, regardless of educational level, that distinguishes between Bangkok and non-Bangkok respondents.

Table 2: Comparisons Between Bangkok and Non-Bangkok Respondents of Criteria Used for Voter Choice

	<u>Mean Score on Factor</u>	<u>F-test</u>	<u>Sig.</u>
1. Ability and Integrity			
Bangkok	.289	183.71	.000
Non-Bangkok	-.250		
2. Social Status			
Bangkok	-.133	34.17	.000
Non-Bangkok	.135		
3. Family Values			
Bangkok	.101	22.67	.000
Non-Bangkok	-.118		
4. Localism			
Bangkok	-.326	175.36	.000
Non-Bangkok	.250		

In summary, the data indicate significant distinctions between the criteria used by Bangkok and non-Bangkok respondents in arriving at a choice of candidate. The weight of importance given to ability-integrity criteria by Bangkok respondents and the weight given to localism by non-Bangkok respondents – all controlling for educational levels – offers important evidence of divergent approaches to democratic practice characterizing the politics of Thailand. In summary, the data indicate significant distinctions between the criteria used by Bangkok and non-Bangkok respondents in arriving at a choice of candidate. The weight of importance given to ability-integrity criteria by Bangkok respondents and the weight given to localism by non-Bangkok respondents – all controlling for educational levels – offers important evidence of divergent approaches to democratic practice

characterizing the politics of Thailand.}

Perceptions of Corruption in the Thai Senate Election

Perceptions of corrupt practices in the Thai Senate election are, of course, different from actual levels of corruption. In fact, perceptions may be largely a product of expectations, rather than reality. However, differences in perceptions by *changwat* are intriguing data because they indicate differences in focus on issues of corruption and bribery and differences in importance accorded such incidents when they occur.

In response to a question about vote-buying in provinces during the March 4, election, approximately 67.4 percent indicated either that there was none or that they did not know of any. However, a remaining 32.5 percent indicated that there was vote buying in the *changwat* and it is this perception that is worth further analysis. The data, when analyzed by *changwat*, indicate that every *changwat* reports vote-buying by a minority of respondents. However, there are highly significant variations across *changwat*. Bangkok and Chachoengsao report the lowest level of observed vote-buying, while Sakhon Nakorn reports the highest (Table 3).

Table 3: Perceptions of Bribery or Corruption in Elections by *Changwat* (Province)*

	<u><i>Changwat</i></u>						
	Bangkok	Chiangmai	Songkla	Sakhon- Nakorn	Chonburi	Chachaengsao	Total
No							
Bribery	79.0	70.5	62.8	52.5	58.8	81.7	67.5
Bribery or other corruption	21.0	29.5	37.3	47.5	41.3	18.3	32.5
*Unweighted data		Chi-square = 121.095					Sig. = .000

Interpretations of these data may vary. On one hand, it may be that there is truly less vote-buying in Bangkok than in other *changwat*. On the other hand, it may be that Chachoengsao may simply be less sensitized to the issue of vote-buying than other *changwat*. Whether there is more vote-buying in Songkla or whether the data indicate that respondents in the *changwat* are more sensitized to the issue remains an open question.

What is important is the realization that perceptions vary dramatically across *changwat*, as to the amount of vote-buying taking place. Many of these perceptions are probably fueled by rumor, “common knowledge,” and other sources of information whether based on actual experience or not. There is a great need for further research on this issue to determine sources of information as to vote corruption, specifically, whether the respondent witnessed an example of vote-buying or whether it was reported in the media. A strong motivation for such studies would be the widely varying perceptions that exist in the kingdom of Thailand, a phenomenon that is noteworthy in indicating diverse networks of political culture and information affecting citizens.

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{Satisfaction with Democracy} Respondents in the sample show considerable satisfaction with democracy. To the question, “Are you satisfied with the democratic system in Thailand?” 72.6 percent indicate either agreement or strong agreement. Of the remainder, 5.7 percent gave no answer, leaving 21.7 percent of the sample unsatisfied with the present democratic system.

These differences warrant further analysis.}tc \l1 "Respondents in the sample show considerable satisfaction with democracy. To the question, "Are you satisfied with the democratic system in Thailand?" 72.6 percent indicate either agreement or strong agreement. Of the remainder, 5.7 percent gave no answer, leaving 21.7 percent of the sample unsatisfied with the present democratic system. These differences warrant further analysis.}

Perhaps the most important focus of the investigation examines Anek's thesis that there are "two democracies" co-existing in Thailand – one Bangkok or urban, the other rural and provincial. An initial breakdown of satisfaction with democracy between Bangkok and "other areas" shows significant differences between the two. Table 4 shows significantly higher levels of satisfaction with democracy in areas outside Bangkok than in the metropole. In addition, respondents in rural areas show better than 90 percent satisfaction with democracy, far higher than other areas, except for those outside the *muang* (provincial capital) districts in the *changwat*. Because Albritton, et al. (1995), found that these differences disappeared when controlling for education, but a secondary analysis of Logerfo's data (1996) did not, indicating independent effects of Bangkok on orientations toward democratic versus authoritarian rule, controls for other indicators of social status will be introduced in this analysis.

Table 4: Comparisons of Responses on Satisfaction with Democracy by Location*

	<u>Location</u>				
	Bangkok and Suburbs	City and Suburbs Outside Bangkok	Munici- palities	Rural Areas	Total
Not					
Satisfied	28.8	11.7	16.4	9.6	14.8
Satisfied	71.2	88.3	83.6	90.4	85.2
*Unweighted Data		Chi-square = 81.715		Sig. .000	

A frequently cited assumption is that support for democracy relies heavily upon development of a middle class. However, Anek (1996) argues that such support is only tentative and that democracy is primarily a “convenience” keeping government out of the private sector. While growth of a middle class and freedom of the private sector often coincide, there is room for doubt as to class commitment to democracy if the instruments of government appear to fall into the hands of non-middle-class interests, such as rural populations and workers. In nations where a large proportion of the population falls below a “middle-class,” the threat of popular control may pose a deterrent to enthusiasms for democracy. The strong support for democracy, indicated by the data cited above, show that support for democracy transcends mere class interests. However, differences by class and status are important for understanding democratic commitments in the nation as a whole.

Table 5: Comparison of Responses on Satisfaction with Democracy by Occupation*

	<u>Occupation</u>									
	Govt Official yee	Private employ	Business Entre- preneur	Agri- culture Farming	Student	Unemp- ployed	Pen- sioner	House- wife	Work- er	Total
Not										
Satisfied	25.9	18.8	27.6	9.3	28.1	12.4	21.0	36.5	23.6	20.6
Satisfied	74.1	81.3	71.4	90.7	71.9	87.6	79.0	63.5	76.4	79.4

***Weighted by *changwat* populations**

One way of examining this question is to look at support for democracy across levels of occupational status. Table 5 shows variation in enthusiasm for democracy among respondents in a variety of occupational situations. Perhaps the most notable indication is the very high level of satisfaction with democracy among persons engaged in agriculture.⁵ Correspondingly, the second highest satisfaction levels come from the unemployed. This finding is important to note in discourses about support for democracy; it strongly implies that there is significantly higher satisfaction among rural, agricultural populations and the poor than among the more sophisticated urban elites. This implication receives further support from the finding that “government officials” and “entrepreneur-owners” fall considerably below average in satisfaction with democracy. More surprising, perhaps, is the fact that “students” offer low levels of satisfaction with democracy – second only to “housewives” (Table 5).⁶

⁵Further analysis by location of respondents indicates highly significant levels of satisfaction among rural respondents compared to those in urban areas.

⁶Contrary to expectations, only a minority of respondents with higher education expressed support for democracy. Highest levels of support were from the least educated classes.

These findings suggest further investigation of levels of satisfaction with democracy by class and status. For purposes of this study, we have combined respondent's level of income, education, and occupational status by a single-factor solution that we call "socioeconomic status." An initial examination of the relationship between this variable and satisfaction with democracy in a logistic regression shows a negative relationship (-.24). This means that, contrary to all but Anek's expectations, the higher a person's socioeconomic status, the lower the satisfaction with democracy. These findings suggest further investigation of levels of satisfaction with democracy by class and status. For purposes of this study, we have combined respondent's level of income, education, and occupational status by a single-factor solution that we call "socioeconomic status." An initial examination of the relationship between this variable and satisfaction with democracy in a logistic regression shows a negative relationship (-.24). This means that, contrary to all but Anek's expectations, the higher a person's socioeconomic status, the lower the satisfaction with democracy.

**Table 6: Effects of SES and Bangkok Residence on Satisfaction with Democracy
(Logistic regression)***

<u>Variable</u>	<u>Reg. Coeff.</u>	<u>S.E.</u>	<u>Sig.</u>	<u>R</u>	<u>Exp(B)</u>
SES Factor Scores	-.5084	.0622	.0000	-.1807	.6015
Bangkok Residence (Dummy)	-.4905	.1362	.0003	-.0744	1.6332
*Weighted data	Model Chi-square = 134.75		Sig. .0000		

In the context of Anek's thesis, this finding requires an analysis that includes the differences between Bangkok and the rural areas, controlling for class and status. This can be accomplished in a logistic regression that includes both the socioeconomic status factor and a dummy variable indicating effects of Bangkok. If these represent the same phenomenon, one or the other of these variables should drop from the analysis. In the context of Anek's thesis, this finding requires an analysis that includes the differences between Bangkok and the rural areas, controlling for class

and status. This can be accomplished in a logistic regression that includes both the socioeconomic status factor and a dummy variable indicating effects of Bangkok. If these represent the same phenomenon, one or the other of these variables should drop from the analysis.}

Table 6 indicates that socioeconomic status and Bangkok location have significant, independent effects on satisfaction with democracy. As reported above, socioeconomic status continues to have a negative impact on evaluations of democracy, as does Bangkok. The combinations of higher socioeconomic status and Bangkok location both mitigate toward more negative assessments of democracy in Thailand. The converse is also supported by the data: satisfaction with democracy is significantly more present among the lower ranges of socioeconomic status and in rural areas. Thus, the analysis produces outcomes at considerable variance from discourses arguing that satisfaction with democracy is largely an urban, middle-class phenomenon.}{tc \l1 "Table 6 indicates that socioeconomic status and Bangkok location have significant, independent effects on satisfaction with democracy. As reported above, socioeconomic status continues to have a negative impact on evaluations of democracy, as does Bangkok. The combinations of higher socioeconomic status and Bangkok location both mitigate toward more negative assessments of democracy in Thailand. The converse is also supported by the data: satisfaction with democracy is significantly more present among the lower ranges of socioeconomic status and in rural areas. Thus, the analysis produces outcomes at considerable variance from discourses arguing that satisfaction with democracy is largely an urban, middle-class phenomenon.}

Conclusion

This study presents findings from the survey conducted by the King Prajadipok's Institute in conjunction with the Senate elections of March 4, 2000. We have chosen to analyze issues that are of special significance for the developing democracy and that have special meaning in the context of a year of huge political activity. To reiterate the findings:

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1. There is a very high level of satisfaction with conduct of the Senate elections by the authorities. Those persons who admitted not voting and who claimed that they did not vote because

of barriers to the process were miniscule in the overall population. Indeed, we would anticipate that those respondents who claimed to have voted, but who did not, would, if anything, be even less likely to have valid reasons for their failure to vote. There should be a high level of satisfaction by the Election Commission and, indeed, all Thais, that the administration of the voting process received such high levels of approval;

2. The data indicate strong support for Anek's suggestion that Thailand really consists of "two democracies." Among other evidence, there are clear, significant differences between criteria used by Bangkok respondents and those located in other *changwat*. Bangkok respondents are significantly more likely to use criteria such as "ability" and integrity" as the basis for evaluating candidates, while those outside Bangkok are more oriented toward local interests;

3. There are significant levels of difference in perceptions of vote-buying among *changwat*. This fact is, in itself, significant, but is mitigated by the tenuousness of perceptions, as opposed to fact. What produces these variations in perceptions constitutes a worthy path of inquiry. In a study of the MP elections, we plan to determine whether these incidents of vote corruption are from direct experience or are a product of rumor and public discourse;

4. Perhaps most important for purposes of the King Prajadipok's Institute is the analysis of the level of satisfaction with democracy in Thailand. The reader may evaluate whether 72.6 percent satisfaction is an appropriate level. It needs to be noted that some dissatisfaction may reflect a desire for even higher levels of performance of the democratic system. However, even in this case, there is further support for Anek's reminder that significant cleavages exist between Bangkok and the other *changwat*. These differences continue, even when controlling for education and other measures of socioeconomic status. In the final analysis, there are significantly higher levels of satisfaction with democracy in Thailand among rural, lower class respondents than among higher status, urban elites, a finding that lends support to the "two democracies" thesis.

The Constitution of 1997 has created significant changes in the fundamentals of the Thai polity, the results of which will not become entirely evident for several years. Details of the institutional arrangements of Thai democracy will continue to be negotiated in the evolving process of democratic government. This study concludes with two points of special import: 1) As a "procedural democracy," Thailand is now as democratic as other modern democracies, in particular

that of the United States; 2) Cleavages in political cultures, especially the Bangkok-non-Bangkok division, indicate that orientations to politics are highly diversified in ways that promise to create political stress for a long time to come.

There is no fundamental unity of political belief and practice among the Thai people. Regional and sectoral political diversities transcend any supposed homogeneity of culture and tradition often represented by generalizations concerning Thai politics. As the task of nation-building that requires myths of national unity is completed, the issues of diversity become rich subjects for investigation within the Thai state. Attention to these issues should be high on the agendas of scholars interested in Thailand.

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