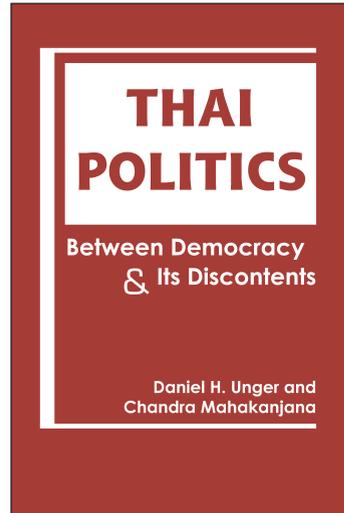


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**Thai Politics:
Between Democracy
and Its Discontents**

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1

Thai Politics: Institutionalizing Uncertainty

IN THIS BOOK, WE OFFER A WAY OF UNDERSTANDING THAILAND'S politics and the deep political divide that has produced a decade of political turbulence, including two military coups in 2006 and 2014. More generally, we present insights into why democracy as a form of political regime has proved so challenging for Thais to manage. As with a number of other East or Southeast Asian countries, Thailand's economy expanded rapidly and underwent structural transformations over the past half century. While manufacturing and services increasingly displaced agriculture as the key economic sectors, poverty plummeted, education expanded, and ever more Thais were being shaped by the forces of globalization. In these circumstances, observers might have anticipated that Thailand would follow the path of South Korea or Taiwan, two East Asian countries that, having built up strong economic and social bases, transformed their political systems comparatively rapidly and effectively as they shifted from authoritarian to democratic politics.

At the end of the past century, a number of factors were working to support such a political shift in Thailand. These included an apparently strong national identity and a broad and flexible consensus among elites concerning public policy and the direction in which politics should evolve. Events over the 1990s seemed to have been nudging Thailand steadily in democratic directions, bolstered by an elite coalition that included conservative and liberal elements (Connors 2012: 99). Thailand's further democratic development seemed all but inevitable. By 2016, however, Thailand's short-term democratic prospects looked threadbare.

Authoritarian governments dominated by the military were the predominant form of government in Thailand from the end of absolute monarchy in 1932 until 1973. Following the collapse of military rule in 1973, a government appointed by the king of Thailand oversaw the writing and

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adoption of a new constitution in 1974 and elections in 1975. There followed much political turbulence and another election amid considerable political polarization that lasted over a year until October 1976, when the military returned to power. Another coup followed in 1977, and the subsequent prime minister was eased from power early in 1980. Thereafter, however, Thailand's politics stabilized. Under Prem Tinsulanonda, Thailand's "semidemocracy" evolved gradually, eventually yielding to turbocharged economic growth, a widening span of liberties and political participation, and growing roles for elections, politicians, and parliament. Prem stepped down in 1988 and was succeeded as prime minister by a member of parliament. Perhaps Thailand's military and bureaucracy, roots of its fusty authoritarian past, were being bypassed (Samudavanija 1995: 9–12).

A military coup in 1991 briefly appeared to reverse Thailand's democratizing momentum. However, mass protests forced the military to relinquish power the following year and made the democratic momentum more compelling than ever, setting the scene for the adoption in 1997 of the most progressive constitution in Thailand's experience. Using an unprecedentedly participatory drafting process, a mostly elected assembly wrote the new constitution. Was Thailand's democracy on the verge of consolidating itself? That is, would political competition be regulated by democratic procedures and the coup habit abandoned? One scholar suggests that, around the turn of the past century, "everything seemed to work out very well" (Bunbongkarn 2012: 233). Another contends that Thais had broken the "vicious cycle of Thai politics" with a "decade of coup free politics" (Samudavanija 2002: 206). Yet another argues that Thailand seemed "to have moved beyond authoritarianism and onto a path toward liberal-democratic consolidation and parliamentary rule" (Montesano 2010: 275).

Today, Thailand's democratic outlook is decidedly grimmer and democrats and liberals have "parted ways" (Connors 2012: 101). Military coups overthrew elected governments in 2006 and 2014. Following the latter coup, under repressive legal frameworks the government clamped down hard on freedoms of assembly and speech. Earlier, court decisions brought down three governments, two in 2008 and one in 2014. Other court decisions closed several political parties and barred hundreds of politicians from political involvement for five-year terms. Over the past decade of political conflict, lèse-majesté and defamation laws were used to stifle free speech. A succession of sometimes violent mass movements took to the streets, beginning in 2005, which helped to bring down governments. Well over 100 people died on the streets in political violence. Parliament's political centrality declined. Thailand's long-solid elite consensus on politics and policy unraveled while the country's often-quiescent masses mobilized. The Thai people in general grew far more politicized and sharply polarized. Sustaining and strengthening democracy in Thailand was proving to be challenging.

In retrospect, it seemed that the liberal features of Thailand's democracy—parliamentary government, a flourishing press, a degree of rule of law, and civilian oversight of the military—had reached their peak as the 1997 constitution came into force and immediately thereafter. Under a Democrat Party–led government (1997–2000), parliament passed some 300 measures, many of them major organic bills necessary for the realization of the constitution, as well as economic legislation stemming from the 1997 economic collapse (Harding and Leyland 2011: 68). This apogee of parliament-based governance was followed immediately by a rising democratic trend that saw popular political mobilization under a new prime minister, Thaksin Shinawatra in 2001. Thai democracy's participatory, as distinct from its liberal, features reached new heights as Thaksin began to transform Thai politics and his supporters came to believe their votes mattered. Thaksin concentrated executive power in his hands and undermined the previously malleable, but working, elite consensus on public policies and a vision for a future polity. Mass mobilization rose sharply, reflecting and engendering sharp and disabling political polarization. Street politics grew dramatically in frequency and impact. Parliament's influence declined as those of Thaksin and his party, street protests, and extralegal and judicial interventions rose. It was no longer easy to sustain rosy expectations for Thailand's democracy over the short- or medium-term future. We argue here that Thailand confronts a triple transition. To become a more stable and participatory polity featuring greater levels of leadership accountability and public service, Thailand needs to (1) bring formal and informal institutions into closer alignment (discussed in Chapters 3 and 4); (2) enfold the mass of the citizenry within the polity (Chapter 6); and (3) devise a more sustainable model of governance featuring more modest levels of corruption and lawlessness (Chapters 3 and 4) than what exists today.

Looking back over more than eighty years since the end of absolute monarchy, Thailand has a poor record of entrenching a stable, law-bound, quality, liberal democracy. Indeed, Thais had a tough time sustaining even democratic regimes that fell well short of those standards. Since Thailand adopted its first constitution in 1932, it has run through them at a faster clip than any other country (Harding and Leyland 2011: 34). Over the same period, it has experienced more regime shifts (back and forth between authoritarian and democratic governments) than any other country, except perhaps Argentina (see Boix 2003: 89–109).

Adam Przeworski and Fernando Limongi (1997) argue that, as countries grow richer, they become more politically stable. Elites come to feel they have more at stake and, accordingly, grow more risk averse (1997). Under these conditions, authoritarian regimes have better chances of remaining authoritarian, and democratic ones are more likely to remain democratic. Przeworski and Limongi's data suggest that no democracy had

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ever failed above the per capita income threshold of around \$6,000 in purchasing power parity 1985 US dollars. Argentina was the only case of democracy that failed in a country with a per capita income above \$6,000. Uruguay's democracy collapsed when its per capita was (just barely) above \$4,000. These were the only two cases of countries having experienced democratic failures at these higher income levels. Four additional countries saw their democracies fall when their per capita incomes reached the \$3,000 level. That made six countries in total (Chile, Fiji, Greece, and Suriname, in addition to Argentina and Uruguay) whose per capita incomes were above \$3,000 when their democracies collapsed. Thailand's per capita income in 2014, measured in 1985 purchasing power parity dollars, was above \$4,000, suggesting that with its coup in 2014 Thailand joined rather select company (Argentina and Uruguay).¹

Our two central concerns in this book are to understand why Thailand stands with such a select few and, second and more specifically, why democracy took a wrong turn early in this century. Answering the latter question requires us to try to understand the nature of the political conflict that unfolded from 2005. More broadly, we also want to suggest why democracy did not fare better over the past eighty-plus years since Thais moved away from absolute monarchy and nominally began to aspire to democratic rule.

It can be difficult to predict political developments in Thailand. As recently as the eve of the May 2014 coup, many journalists and experts on Thai politics believed that the balance of power rested with Thaksin and his supporters. Some of these observers feared civil war would erupt should there be another coup (see for example Jory 2014; BBC 2014; Campbell 2014). In hindsight, these expectations proved wrong. It also can be tough to interpret Thai politics. More than eighteen months after the 2014 coup, many Thais and outsiders seem confused as to how the policies and rhetoric of the military government serve its nominal goals of reform and reconciliation. We hope that this book will help readers to think about these sorts of issues. As we elaborate below, the effort to address all such questions prompts us to do three things in this book.

First, we provide readers, particularly those less familiar with the Thai case, with a reasonably detailed sense for the historical, institutional, and social contexts within which Thailand's politics are embedded. We hope to make readers familiar with more than just the surface maneuvers of Thai politics. Hence, in subsequent chapters we look in detail at the Thai state, rule of law, political communication, and participation. Second, while not employing a systematic comparative framework of analysis, we draw attention to parallels and divergences between political developments in Thailand and cases from other times and places. This attention to comparative political analysis may be particularly helpful for readers who may be famil-

iar with the Thai case, but less so with others. Third, of course, we aim to convey our arguments. Concerning Thailand's current political conflict, we hope to convince readers that more is involved than a straightforward class conflict or the stubborn refusal of hidebound elites to relinquish power and privilege. Similarly, there is more involved in Thailand's political contest than problems of corruption or the decay of traditional Thai values or concerns for ethical behavior. Achieving these three tasks makes it possible for us to pose, and try to answer, underasked questions. The causes of Thailand's democratic failings, we argue, are diffuse and widely distributed among Thais arrayed along both sides of the main lines of political conflict as well as the nonaligned. Before we proceed further in laying out the book's goals, themes, and organization, we pause to consider the nature of the political conflict that engulfed Thailand after 2005 and that, seemingly, at least in the short term, has damaged the country's democratic prospects. Given the complexity of the conflict and the diversity of understandings of it, our discussion is no more than introductory.

Thailand's Political Conflict

There is a broad range of views concerning the social and political forces underlying the conflict. Thais have differed in their opinions, including over the question as to how their conflict should be understood. We offer a typology of the diverse sorts of factors adduced to explain the conflict in Figure 1.1. In the top half of the figure, the forces seen as driving the conflict differ on two dimensions: their understandings of the groups in conflict (intraelite, or haves vs. have-nots), and the core values in conflict (material or symbolic). These two dimensions yield four different kinds of popular explanations of the conflict. The lower parts of the figure feature procedural differences as well as some of the dynamics of the conflict that we emphasize in this book. (While the elements of Figure 1.1 are familiar to students of Thai politics, not all of them will be so for others.)

In this book, we emphasize cultural and structural factors that are not captured in the upper part of the figure. Among the key structural factors, in addition to social, asset, and income inequality, are weak third-party enforcement mechanisms, weak political institutions, and, as a result of those features, the relatively unbounded nature of the stakes at play. Cultural factors refer, for example, to low levels of trust among political antagonists; poor quality deliberations; conflict avoidance, at least in face-to-face contexts; and personalism. As we argue throughout this book, these cultural features make the underlying structural factors that underpin the conflict particularly threatening. The cultural factors, as we argue at length in Chapter 5, impede the deliberations and policies that might help to address

Figure 1.1 Understandings of Thailand’s Political Conflict

		Groups in Conflict	
		Intraelite	Socioeconomic groups
Values in Conflict	Material issues	Free trade vs. Protection, Assets of crown, property bureau	Conservative/economic Liberal vs. populist Rich vs. poor Urban vs. rural
	Symbolic or social equality issues	Thaksin vs. monarchy Old elites vs. all others	Elites vs. excluded Liberals vs. Democrats Rule of law vs. majoritarianism “Thainess” vs. other Good vs. bad people
Diverging Procedural Preferences		Pluralists vs. autocrats Liberals vs. Democrats Rule of law vs. majoritarianism	
Dynamics of Conflict	Structural features	Wealth or income inequality; no third-party enforcement; weak institutions; unbounded stakes	
	Cultural features	Low trust; poor deliberations; conflict avoidance; enchantment; personalism	

underlying structural concerns. Economic inequality, for example, poses sharper threats to political instability to the degree that weak political institutions (in part cultural products) and poor quality deliberations hamper efforts to address it.

The catholic range of causes adduced to account for the conflict suggests the sheer novelty, in Thailand, of the struggle as well as the opacity of much Thai political discourse. Thailand is in the midst of a series of slowly unfolding political processes. Over the past decade, many of the long-familiar landmarks of Thai society and politics changed fundamentally.

Thais found themselves in a vertiginous terrain in which “everything that was no longer exists; everything that is to be does not yet exist” (Musset, quoted in Barzun 2000: 491).² The freighted Thai phrase “Now we see clearly” (*taa sawaang*) was often used to capture this sense of novelty (and of perceived injustice) in the political landscape and Thais’ political consciousness.

Some popular accounts of the Thai political conflict have been relatively straightforward, in contrast to Figure 1.1. These explanations might emphasize hidebound establishment elites, their opposition to higher levels of public spending for populist programs, or, more generally, class struggle as the key factors engendering political battle. In our view, these explanations are not wrong, but they are incomplete. Great income, wealth, and status inequalities, as well as a sense of right on the part of elites in determining what is acceptable in Thai politics, certainly were part of the pattern to be understood. By themselves, however, they were far from sufficient to account for the conflict.

Even though the conflict is not intelligible without recognizing Thailand’s enormous social and wealth inequalities, we argue against an interpretation of the conflict primarily in terms of material interests or class struggle. Former prime minister Thaksin and the Red Shirt movement that later backed him generally did not attempt any comprehensive redistribution of incomes.³ They made no breakthroughs in equalizing educational opportunities, although the first Thaksin government gave the goal some attention. Redistributive taxation figured more prominently in the policy agenda of the Democrat Party, and indeed the policies of the 2014 coup government, than it did during the governments under Thaksin or his subordinates.⁴ Further, survey data suggest that few Thais see themselves as being on the political left or right. Differences in attitudes toward democracy in general or how it is more specifically understood are not clearly correlated with variations in economic status or partisan affiliation (World Values Survey Wave 6, 2010–2014). Ultimately, class figured in the conflict primarily in two ways. First, relatively dispossessed voters of the north and northeast constituted for Thaksin a powerful weapon that made it possible for him to survive concerted judicial and military attacks. Second, those Thaksin backers’ rhetoric and likely also their identities over time increasingly included elements of class solidarity. This shift marked a profound transformation in Thai politics but not one, in our view, that precluded a political settlement. To understand the elusiveness of a political settlement in Thailand, we must go beyond a focus on material interest politics.

One reason we might doubt that material interests were of central importance to the conflict was the zero-sum character that it assumed. Such sharply zero-sum conflicts are associated more with identity politics than with material, interest-based politics in which dividing the benefits typi-

cally is more feasible. Had issues of taxation or welfare programs been at the heart of the conflict, bargaining should have been more evident. The expectation that such bargaining typically is feasible underlies the argument made to explain why democracies survive at higher per capita income levels. With the stakes higher, elite actors bargain rather than risk it all. In fact, however, as far as we know, at the height of political tensions leading up to the 2014 coup, concrete policies were not discussed at all as part of any possible bargains. Instead, discussions remained stuck at the point of arguing for elections without preconditions or for an extended period of reforms under an appointed government before further elections. In short, which group would hold power?

Another reason for doubting the conflict was largely about material interests is that the Thai Rak Thai campaigned publicly in 2001 on a platform that highlighted several populist programs. The party nonetheless sustained strong elite support in Bangkok and around the country. In 2001, apparently, Thai elites were not unalterably opposed to populist measures. It is unlikely that subsequent expansion in the populist programs alone accounted for later intense elite hostility (indeed, elite opposition mounted before the programs expanded). Neither is it entirely plausible that elites never believed Thaksin planned to implement his party's platform and that, when he did so, they turned on him. Instead, it seems more reasonable to conclude that populist policies inspired misgivings and opposition but not the no-holds-barred determination to drive the Thaksin regime from power. Survey data suggest that elite support for at least some redistributive measures continues (World Values Survey, Wave 6, 2010–2014). As for understanding Thaksin's hold on many rural voters, his having met their demands for social recognition and political equality may have been almost as important as the concrete benefits that rural voters derived from his governments.

It seems more likely that the key sources of elite opposition to Thaksin lay elsewhere. Elite condescension toward Thailand's great unwashed was real enough, but its political significance was overstated by many analysts. Elites shared similarly dismissive views of the lower social orders in many political systems in which elites nonetheless eventually recognized their inferiors' political rights. To understand antipathy toward Thaksin on the part of much of the elites, we need to take account of fears of his tendency to amass power in his own hands, the belief that his government was deeply corrupt, and, perhaps in particular, a perception that he did not extend adequate deference toward the palace. In the Thai context, the alleged slighting of the monarchy's symbolic centrality constituted a grave violation of the Thai normative injunction to show gratitude, including the gratitude all Thais owe to the monarch.

The palace would enter into many Thais' assessments of Thaksin in a fashion more profound than a simple matter of feeling that Thaksin might

not be paying adequate respect to the king. Any acts that might call into question the constitutive powers of the monarch could be construed as threatening given the deep sense in which the institution was understood to be woven through the entire fabric of Thai social life.⁵ This interpretation suggests that many Thais saw their society as highly fragile. That sense of fragility may, in turn, have reflected widespread individual feelings of insecurity. In a vast edifice of hierarchical dependencies stretching up to the palace, the monarchy served as the keystone, the strength of which sustained all the other parts. Many Thais felt at sea in a context that hinted there might be more than one ultimate core to the polity, more than one “father.”

Anxiety seems to be pronounced among Thais. The self-help elements in Thai society are pronounced. Individuals have considerable theoretical opportunity to rise, or fall, within status hierarchies. As in international politics, security is afforded through alliances with others (generally of a vertical nature) as well as through boosting control over one’s own resources. More diffuse (normative constraints, civil society) or impersonal (reliance on standardized procedures, rule of law) bases of security, however, are comparatively weak. The relatively permissive social context seems to generate anxieties. The king in Thailand served for decades as an umpire, a source of third-party enforcement, and the ultimate backstop in the struggles for power among competing individuals and groups. With the country deeply divided politically, however, the palace grew less able to play such a role. This brief discussion of the monarchy helps us to understand how a political conflict largely devoid of policy (as opposed to procedural) content assumed such broad encompassing dimensions as those found in Figure 1.1.

Antipathy to corruption in the Thaksin governments was also an important source of opposition for many Thais. Given that corruption was widespread in public life and hardly restricted to Thaksin’s governments, a measure of skepticism concerning the importance of corruption concerns may seem appropriate. Nonetheless, such skepticism should perhaps be moderated. Certainly Yellow Shirts and other Thaksin opponents talked about corruption a great deal. Their rhetoric deserves our attention. There may be in Thailand an incipient, albeit weak, progressive (in the US late-nineteenth-century clean government sense) coalition. Corruption on the scale that is found in Thailand cannot be found in any high-income countries. Populism that entrenches competitive bidding for votes could risk fiscal health. It would not be surprising if part of Thailand’s substantial population of affluent citizens is concerned about the phenomenon.

Let us attempt for a moment to simplify discussion of Thailand’s political conflict by asking what Thais generally, as well as Thaksin supporters and opponents more specifically, want. Generally, as best we can tell, Thais

are not seeking the return of absolute monarchy, leadership under a Leninist party, or Latin American–style populism, though the last certainly is closer to the mark than the other two. Generally, and of course this is true of many people elsewhere as well, if they could Thais probably would be happy to have a prosperous country that enjoys stable democratic governance of a partly liberal and partly social sort under a constitutional monarchy.

Continuing with the question as to what Thais as a whole want, let us briefly look at survey data. In their survey replies, Thais expressed strong support for democracy and considerable satisfaction (over 78 percent indicated they were “very” or “fairly” satisfied) with Thailand’s version of it. Asked to characterize democracy, they were prone to emphasize jobs for all, quality government services, and economic redistribution, but they also recognized the centrality of multiparty competition and legislative oversight of the executive. They were more likely to characterize China as democratic than not democratic. They were still more prone to see Japan’s political system as democratic, perhaps reflecting a degree of political sophistication or, it may be, recognizing Japan as a more orderly and prosperous country (Asian Barometer Survey, Wave 3, 2010–2012).

Turning specifically to those Thais who either support Thaksin or oppose him, we might guess that median Thaksin voters want economic help from government, social recognition, and the rights to participate politically, to feel a degree of political efficacy or importance, and to be led by Thaksin. As for median anyone-but-Thaksin voters, they may want a somewhat more complex mix of things. These include limited tax increases, stable and pro-business government, less corruption, limits on the concentration of political power in any but the most trusted hands, a stable and satisfactory monarchical succession,⁶ and, perhaps, some approximation of an East Asian or Confucian model of good governance (Fukuyama 2014; Gilley 2014). Survey data reveal few major differences between (the relatively few) Thais who saw themselves as either Pheu Thai or Democrat (the main opposition party) partisans in how they viewed democracy. Both groups tend to emphasize redistribution and state aid for the unemployed. Pheu Thai partisans, perhaps contrary to expectations, had more confidence in the courts and placed more emphasis on civil rights than did their Democrat counterparts (World Values Survey, Wave 6, 2010–2014).

Various readers may dispute different elements that we have sketched of the principal concerns of these two antagonistic political groups in Thailand. In at least some cases, however, they may agree with us that it should not be impossible to satisfy both sets of concerns at once, if Thaksin could somehow be removed from the equation. Of course, that claim is also contentious. The suggestion that Thai politics might stabilize with Thaksin’s removal as a political actor may strike some readers as downright offensive. We nonetheless make the argument to underline our

view that political differences dividing Thais are not primarily about substantive policy differences.

Many Thai democracy advocates of the 1980s and 1990s turned out in this century to be ambivalent democrats. In this regard, these disloyal democrats have something in common with those Latin American democrats who contested military rule and were subsequently dismayed to find themselves living under delegative, plebiscitary democratic regimes (Maz-zuca 2014). The key difference between disenchanting democrats in Latin America and Thailand is that, while the former democrats in Latin America generally remained committed to elections, in Thailand many defected and at least acquiesced to military coups.

Two important factors encouraged many Thais to abandon (contingently, as they typically saw it) their democratic commitments. The first had to do with the specific nature and the weaknesses of formal political institutions. The second related to the monarchy. Thai democrats perhaps had less faith than, for example, their Argentine counterparts that political institutions could restrain executive rule. Perhaps more important, term limits promised, even if those limits were occasionally stretched, to bring the tenures of Latin American presidents to a close after only a few years. Thais, by contrast, could expect Thaksin's rule to continue for decades, a notion that he himself endorsed.

Choices were limited for Latin American democrats confronting presidential rule that undermined various democratic norms and institutions. In Thailand, however, contingently disaffected democrats often believed they had some latitude because in the monarchy there seemed to be an alternative. A temporary palace-sanctioned power transfer via a coup could be understood not as a power grab favoring a clique, class, or cabal but one that would be regulated by the soul of the nation. The monarchy encompassed all Thai interests. This understanding of democratic interruptions in Thailand contributed to the coup habit.

Having introduced the dimensions of Thailand's political conflict, we now return to the more general consideration of the difficulties that Thais have confronted in making democracy work well.

What Makes Democracy Work?

What factors influence whether or not democracy works reasonably well, at least well enough to survive, in any given setting? Over time, this question has been answered in many different ways that might be grouped into three types of explanations. One type of answer points to structural thresholds such as the size of the middle or working classes, or levels of affluence, or wealth inequalities. A second type of explanation emphasizes a community's

“manners,” or political culture.⁷ A third approach stresses the nature and quality of a country’s political institutions. For a variety of compelling reasons, contemporary analysts tend to be drawn to institutional explanations.

If democracy does not thrive in a country, if it seems to engender poor governance and political conflict, even political violence, what is to be done? Assuming quality liberal democracy is the ultimate goal in the country, how can that goal be attained most reliably? Reflecting a structural understanding of democracy’s preconditions, we might advise that democratic aspirations be deferred until some threshold (of incomes, of the size of the middle classes) is reached. As we noted above, Thailand seems to be well above any plausible income floor that might be linked to democratic failures. Some structural approaches have suggested, not very helpfully, that democracy thrives only with the disappearance of the peasantry (Moore 1966). Accordingly, we put such arguments to the side and focus here on the institutional and political culture explanations, one examining the bricks and the other the mortar of social life (Geertz 1973).

Consistent with a political culture approach, perhaps we would counsel a period of tutelage during which those who are less educated or otherwise untrained in democratic rights are habituated to assume their eventual responsibilities. Lesser or larger numbers of citizens may be politically immature and in need of awareness and skills before they can be expected to be able to make democracy work (Diamond 1999: 67–68, 75–76). We might characterize the injunction implicit in this approach as “learn first, practice later.” Advocates of this alternative may emphasize, in the spirit of Machiavelli’s attention to the specific founding of republics, the need to get the initial conditions right. In Machiavelli’s understanding, it may be necessary to flout commonplace morality in the service of the successful founding of a kingdom or republic. Such a founding requires the guidance of a single leader of vision and virtue. So valuable are the effects of such a man’s leadership that we conclude that his great achievement justifies his nefarious deeds: “If his deed accuses him, its consequences excuse him” (cited in Wootton 1996: 108). Among those possible consequences are a citizenry rich, at least for a time, in public virtues. The political culture approach (often overlapping with the structural one) underlay once popular arguments for the gradual expansion of the franchise and the powers that it exercised. Would-be democracies might start with only local elections, or limit the scope of the legislature’s powers, and only over time provide all adult (or adult male) voters the opportunity to determine the holders of sovereign authority.

An alternative and currently dominant approach emphasizes that there are no absolute prerequisites for democracy and that, ultimately, the best and perhaps the only way to foster citizenship skills and stronger democratic institutions is through practice. Citizens do not need training to

understand their own interests, though experience may help them to season their democratic skills over time. Communities, in this view, whether in Denmark, Russia, Turkey, or Thailand, learn democracy by doing it. Citizens need not exceed some floor of levels of education or income; they need not be Protestants or Hindus; they need nothing beyond the opportunity to exercise political voice on behalf of their interests (typically understood in individual and material terms). With democratic experience, citizens will become more democratic in attitudes and behaviors. As Hamlet remarked to his mother, “Assume a virtue, if you have it not. . . . For use can almost change the stamp of nature” (Shakespeare 1992: 77).

The clash between these two general orientations (political culture and institutional) as to the most promising means of creating and entrenching a quality liberal democracy became concrete in Thailand late in 2013. Massive street demonstrations organized by one of Thailand’s two main political groups had stymied the government, which was backed by the second group. Confronted with enormous shows of opposition on the streets of Bangkok, the government withdrew the highly controversial bills that triggered the demonstrations. One bill would have enabled Thaksin, the group’s paramount leader, to return to Thailand from self-exile by granting him (and others) amnesty. Another bill would have made the Senate, half appointed under the terms of the 2007 constitution, fully elected. Confronted with street opposition, the government withdrew these bills, closed parliament, and called new elections.

The street demonstrators had achieved a stunning victory. They had stopped what they saw as dangerous legislation in its tracks. More than that, the government had resigned and called elections. Surely the street demonstrations would stop at that point, and its supporters would declare victory and prepare for new elections. It is true that most observers expected that the government’s Pheu Thai Party would be reelected but, given the government’s recent travails, its majority might have been sharply reduced from its smashing victory in 2011. The important point was that the elected government had been held accountable. Thaksin’s electorally rooted juggernaut had, at least temporarily, been stymied. This victory for the opposition could provide a valuable lesson that might have a positive long-term impact on the ways in which the country’s political institutions evolved.

Alternatively, perhaps holding the government accountable on this one occasion was not the key point. Thaksin’s opponents may have concluded that with formal institutions weak and the stakes large and seemingly personal, involving for example loyalty (Rithdee, 2016: 9) to the king, a single political victory could in no way guarantee the overriding goal of preventing Thaksin from returning as the dominant figure in Thai politics. A newly elected government, however much reduced its majority or plurality, might

again pursue an amnesty, a fully elected Senate, and, ultimately, the return of Thaksin to power. In the view of at least the People's Democratic Reform Council (PDRC) leadership, the protestors would have gained nothing. Without some quotient of only vaguely articulated reforms, it seemed that no amount of corruption or bad government on the part of Thaksin's allies could sufficiently reduce Thaksin's electoral base among rural voters, particularly in the north and northeastern parts of the country. Hence, the country needed to purge itself of its Thaksin-rooted cancer and to refound its politics to enable a democracy that would not return the same corrupt autocrat to power time after time.

The latter logic apparently proved persuasive. In a critical decision that represented a key turning point in Thailand's recent political developments, instead of calling off the demonstrations and welcoming elections the PDRC, with the opposition Democrat Party's subsequent support, determined to press ahead. They would not be satisfied with elections that their opponents would win. Instead, they demanded an appointed government, one that would take the time necessary to adopt thoroughgoing (but unspecified) reforms that would make it possible at long last for real democracy to emerge in Thailand. An appointed government would give the PDRC a powerful voice, more potent than it would be able to muster through elections.

In the PDRC view, Thailand's democratic experience had amply demonstrated Thai citizens' weak democratic skills and the vulnerability of the country's political institutions to the wiles of its politicians. Only after a process of thorough reform could the country again safely attempt elections. The PDRC argued, essentially, that Thailand's manners needed adjustment before democracy could be expected to work well (Rojanaphruk and Sinlapalavan 2014). Presumably, the clearest indicator of better citizen performance would be keeping Thaksin's Pheu Thai Party out of power, or fundamentally transforming the political system's clientelist features. At that point, political parties or movements would no longer be the political vehicles of a single individual. Institutions would need modifications and the bulk of the Thai people would need to adjust their ways of thinking, and their values, to make them supportive of a democracy led by responsible, virtuous individuals. Democracy in Thailand needed a new founding. An immediate return to democracy without further tutelage and institutional adjustments would see the further entrenchment of a political system concentrated in the hands of Thaksin—the wallet, strategist, and key symbol behind the Pheu Thai and its supporters' aspirations. If allowed further time in office, even if again through one of his proxies, Thaksin would be able to consolidate his power still more, extending perhaps to influence over the only institutions—the military, the courts, the mass media, the palace—not already largely under his sway.

The view among Thaksin's supporters was, by contrast, straightforward. Modern democracy is fundamentally about elections that enable full political participation. Accordingly, the key requirement for Thailand's democratic development was for all Thais to commit themselves to elections, to refuse to countenance further coups, and to cease knocking on the barracks door. Clearly, in this view, the problem of weak democratic skills was most pronounced among Thaksin's opponents. So long as his opponents continued to be willing to call for and support military interventions, Thailand's democracy would never be consolidated. Thaksin was winning elections because at least a plurality of the people concluded that he and his party best provided people with what they wanted from their political representatives.

The conflict between the Pheu Thai and the PDRC was, of course, far from being primarily a principled one. There was a major element of elite, and indeed nonelite, competition for spoils. A principled supporter of the Pheu Thai government in late 2013, however, might have argued something like the following. Thailand was no longer a traditional society, but one ready to manage the challenges of embedding political competition within impersonal institutions. This would suggest that Thais were able to work with a system of politics rooted in procedures in which substantive outcomes and the nature of leadership would remain uncertain (Przeworski 1991: 10–14). The country was ready as a result of development and democratic experience to cast aside the weight of tradition; it was capable of entrenching the rule of law. Thais could learn how to participate in democratic politics more effectively by fully engaging in them. The process of entrenching democracy would not necessarily be easy or smooth, but an increasingly educated and sophisticated population could manage the challenges. What people in other places and times had succeeded in doing, Thais were now ready to do, with appropriate (though limited) local variations. While the task might appear daunting, it was important to recognize the dangers of resisting the tide of history. There simply were no compelling, enduring, or legitimate normative grounds on which to base a policy of continued political exclusion. Tradition had once sustained an order founded on principles of hierarchy and paternalism. No full-throated rendition of that tradition was any longer tenable. Thais, as with the English working classes in the middle of the nineteenth century, “no longer believe in any innate difference between the governing and governed classes. . . . They are sufficiently enlightened to feel they are the victims” (Disraeli 2008: 227). Thais had no realistic choice except to learn to cope with and hopefully to embrace a new normative and institutional order.

By contrast, a principled backer of the PDRC might have framed the dilemma as follows: There were grave dangers in overestimating the extent to which Thai traditional attitudes and behaviors had changed and, hence,

of Thais' political capacities to well manage the challenges of institutionalized uncertainty. Excessive optimism on this score often stemmed from a failure to recognize the significant degree to which the great gains Thais had achieved over the prior half-century had depended on the survival of traditional institutions, in particular, the monarchy. Indeed, the strength and survival of monarchy in Thailand had to be factored into any effort to account for Thailand's relative affluence and stability relative to its Theravada Buddhist neighbors (Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar).

Many other societies had shifted their political systems in the direction of more universal political participation only gradually, an approach that Thailand should continue to take. It is a mistake, however, to assess Thailand's needs and capacities by reference to the experiences of others. The Thai case is distinctive, indeed unique. It would be foolish to risk the gradual gains made in building new political institutions, even the country's strong economic performance, by again making the leap in the dark (Kalyvas 1998) associated with whole-hearted embrace of electoral procedures.

Given Thais' generally poor prior democratic experience, full embrace of democracy could not in fact be characterized as a leap in the dark. Thais had good and unhappy reasons for anticipating where they would end up—again. Did Thais not have abundant and recent evidence (corruption, the undermining of institutions of horizontal accountability, extensive political polarization, and violence) that they were not yet ready to manage the impersonal institutions associated with fully institutionalized uncertainty? Continuing elements of elite tutelage admittedly were not easy to countenance in normative terms (though some traditional appeals still resonated with substantial force), but surely they represented the safest choice for all Thais. Political movements, evident in the past decade of street politics, were infused with hero worship, making crowds readily manipulated and dangerous. Experience had demonstrated repeatedly, as evident in the qualities of many of Thailand's politicians and political parties, that unchecked democracy in Thailand carried grave risks.

At this point, we hope our readers have gained a sense for the issues and arguments at play in Thailand's political conflict. We deepen an understanding of these two contrasting positions in subsequent chapters by embedding them within fuller pictures of Thai society and politics. We hope to help readers understand why, despite some considerable apparent advantages, Thais have not had and are unlikely to have in the near term an easy time entrenching an effective democracy.

The remainder of this chapter does four things. First, we note what would seem to be favorable circumstances in Thailand for embedding democratic politics. We also discuss a less favorable and critically important condition, the generally modest modernizing ambitions of Thai political elites. Second, we characterize the central Thai political challenge as one of

political inclusion. We suggest that Thais are navigating a shift from a time of relative stability under a system of low political participation toward one of far higher levels of participation and, to date, far less stability. We note that a central challenge in effecting that change is the difficulty of entrenching credible bounds on the stakes at play in political competition. Such bounds could be rooted in shared commitments to institutional procedures, or in effective systems of enforcing agreements such as third-party enforcement or robust rule of law.

Thais need to confront two other transitions, in addition to accommodating fuller political participation. Stabilizing a quality democracy also depends on bringing dominant formal and informal institutions into closer alignment than has been the case in the past couple of decades. Further, if they are to have hopes of creating a stable and affluent country, Thais must find means of founding a less corrupt and more sustainable model of governance.

The third and longest part of the chapter introduces our approach to analyzing Thai politics and discusses concepts we believe are of particular importance to an understanding of the Thai case. These include an emphasis on personalism, the centrality of individuals' moral qualities, the weak roles of impersonal institutions, the monarchy, and a penchant for obscure and indirect communication that requires that observers read between the lines. The fourth and final section of the chapter briefly introduces the subsequent chapters of the book.

Favorable Conditions for Democracy

Thailand enjoys a number of conditions that we might have expected to facilitate the entrenching of a democratic polity. For example, the Thai economy has performed well since the 1960s. Outside of the far south where a violent ethnically and religiously rooted conflict festers, Thailand has had little acute ethnic conflict. Despite more recent and politicized assertions of regional identities, in general Thais enjoy a strong and shared national identity. As late as the 1960s, Thailand was not saddled with deeply rooted or high levels of material inequality (gaps in skills and incomes are now much greater).

Thailand differs from many cases of stalled democratic development in one important respect: Thailand has a thriving market economy. While politics helped many Thais become rich, it was not the only road to wealth. The political kingdom was not the only one in Thailand. Many prominent Thais seem to have attained great wealth without relying primarily on political connections. Therefore, the political stakes in Thailand should not have been as encompassing as they are where control over the state is the only

path to wealth and status. Despite this difference, which we might expect to be of great importance, Thai politics have assumed the qualities of zero-sum competition that we associate with contexts in which political competition is the only game in town. This development reflects the political system's lack of means of limiting the span of stakes at play in political competition. The problem of unbounded competition is aggravated by the infusion into politics of key elements of Thai "enchantment," as we explain below.

Thailand has other assets that might lead us to anticipate democratic success. One of these is Thailand's sustained relative social calm over several decades. Thai society has, since the founding of the Chakkri dynasty over two centuries ago, experienced little sharp sustained political upheaval and even less, until this century, political mobilization. Further, with one of the world's fastest-growing economies from 1960 to the mid-1990s, Thailand experienced a rapid reduction in poverty rates over the last decades of the past century—there were 33 million poor Thais in 1990 and 8.4 million in 2012 (Lomborg 2015: 10).⁸ This record of social calm and rising social gains seems to imply an underlying social order that is quite effective, a reasonably competent administrative apparatus, and even rule of law. Such conditions could be conducive to the entrenchment of a democratic regime.

Two additional reasons for finding Thailand's prolonged and pronounced democratic difficulties surprising include its escape from colonial control and the effects of the long reign of King Bhumipol Adulyadej. Thailand was never colonized and, therefore, its economy, political institutions, and national identity were spared many of the burdens that affect the politics of some struggling democracies. Further, since US president Harry Truman and Soviet leader Joseph Stalin were squaring off early in the Cold War, and Mao Tse-tung's communist forces and Sukarno's nationalists were struggling to come to power in China and Indonesia, a single and near universally venerated king has reigned in Thailand. The king helped Thais to sustain what seemed a durable sense of nation and to compensate for a number of weaknesses, including the fragility of the rule of law, a feeble civil society, and the incapacities and narrow vision of much of the political leadership. Thailand's stable social order, despite its constant churning of coups and constitutions, could be accounted for by the positive impact of the king (Samudavanija 2002: 127).

Some of Thailand's just cited "advantages"—a degree of social stasis, the absence of colonial control, limited political mobilization, the dominant influence of the monarchy—can be understood instead as infirmities retarding the polity's preparation for democratic government. The survival of charismatic monarchy and the absence of colonialism ensured that Thailand faced relatively few great upheavals associated with large-scale mobilization in war (Holmes 2003: 32) or revolution. As a result, in some senses

Thailand experienced an easy transition toward modernity, with gradual and sustained social transformation driven largely by economic forces but accompanied for decades by only limited social and political upheaval. Surplus land (for a time) helped make possible enormous shifts in the country's economic structure without short-term commensurate changes in political attitudes and behaviors. As a result, as we argue in this book, Thailand now confronts some of the costs associated with its relatively unchallenging past.

Modernizing ambitions driven by desires to catch up burned more brightly among wider numbers of people and more intensely among political leaders in many countries in the past than they did in Thailand. In Japan, the Meiji oligarchs oversaw fundamental transformations of almost all aspects of the economy, society, and politics to create a country that could handle the threats posed by Western imperialism. Centuries earlier, Peter the Great attempted something similar in Russia. Early in the twentieth century, Kemal Atatürk launched a comparably ambitious campaign in Turkey. Within a few years of taking power, he ended the Ottoman Caliphate, established the Turkish Republic, closed down religious organizations and schools, substituted the Latin script for the Arabic one and Turkish for Arabic in the call to prayer, banned "Islamic dress" and more (Mishra 2012: 282). Leninists in Russia, China, and elsewhere instituted thoroughgoing modernization programs. In all of these cases, extensive reforms were aimed at ensuring national survival and enabling national power. By contrast, the remarkable reforms of late-nineteenth-century Thailand (Chapters 3 and 4) largely were limited to administrative, legal, and logistical measures to centralize and consolidate rule. These reforms aimed at enabling Siam's survival but were not clearly based on wider geopolitical ambitions or in service of wounded national pride. Tradition in Thailand was never discredited. To a degree, elites adopted reform in the spirit of Giuseppe T. di Lampedusa's *Sicilians: changing in the interest of staying the same* (di Lampedusa 1960).

Thailand's limited past social transformations helped to sustain social peace and elite consensus. With deepened political polarization after 2005, however, the long-enduring broad elite consensus in place since at least the early 1980s shattered. New and possibly deep and long-lived political cleavages emerged instead. The assumed strength of national identity came under challenge as Thaksin's supporters, the United Front for Democracy and Against Dictatorship (UDD) or Red Shirts, articulated oppositional, regionally based identities in the northeast and north. The weaknesses of the Thai state grew more visible as political division rendered its security forces ineffectual and its system of justice increasingly suspect. Less openly but more shockingly, the centrality of the monarchy in Thai society came under challenge. These factors worked together to threaten, at least

temporarily, the long-sustained dynamism of the Thai economy while a broad agenda of needed reforms was neglected. Thailand's conservative society and polity slipped their long-accustomed moorings. Would they find new and secure ones anytime soon?

The Challenges of Political Inclusion and Thailand's Triple Transition

Thailand is one of the many cases around the world of flawed or illiberal democracies, or semidemocracies, some of which are essentially disguised authoritarian regimes. Many of these low-quality democracies lack strong political party systems and highly organized civil societies (Grzymala-Busse and Luong 2002). Some of these democracies are struggling with the task of "political inclusion," referring to the "widening of the political nation" (Phongpaichit and Baker 2012: 225). This process is clearest when political rights, in particular electoral suffrage, are expanded. People formerly denied the vote win it. Unions, civil society, farmers' federations, and political parties often were instrumental in enabling the political inclusion of workers and peasants (Collier 1999). Thailand confronts a comparable political challenge today. However, unlike some countries that grappled with this task in the past, Thailand has not already built strong political institutions, civil society is not robust, and rule of law is not entrenched. The task in Thailand is not simply one of widening the political nation, of allowing excluded Thais access to existing robust political institutions. Thais also face the challenges of building institutions, entrenching law, and consolidating democratic procedures. As part of these challenges, Thais need to root a more sustainable model of politics than they have fashioned to date. Doing so will depend in part on narrowing the gulf between Thailand's informal institutions, including prevalent Thai attitudes and practices, and its formal ones.

History offers us a rich store of cases of political inclusion around the world over the past two centuries. These processes often were complex and of long duration. Generally, they were accompanied by sharp political conflict and demanded institutional adaptation. Where political systems confronted the tasks of inclusion, it was common for liberals, who prized liberty and the rule of law, and democrats, who emphasized political equality and participation, to part ways. In some cases, liberals had won the right to self-government only recently, seizing rights from hidebound elites. These liberals took for granted their political standing, or recognition, and typically resisted extending that recognition to those who were poor and uneducated. Liberals worried that a wider franchise might threaten their liberties or their property. Democrats, demanding equal political rights, often were

less concerned about liberties than about gaining political recognition, participation rights, and, particularly since the expansion of social welfare spending around the world in the previous century, material benefits. As a result of these different emphases, liberals and democrats often clashed. When liberals and democrats parted ways, the effects on their political systems often were hazardous.

In Thailand today, the old broad alliance in support of democracy that developed in strength in the 1980s and 1990s is moribund. Liberals and conservatives, who once supported democracy in the face of military-authoritarian repression, shifted their primary concern to opposing Thaksin a few years after he came to power in 2001. As a result, these liberals and conservatives parted ways with many Thai democrats who supported Thaksin and emphasized the centrality of elections. Thaksin won the elections and, in some ways, bolstered democracy. His broad polarizing influence on Thai politics, however, also damaged it.

Thailand's political conflict echoes in some respects the conflicts in many European countries following World War I. For perhaps most Europeans, that was a traumatic era of huge political changes and a watershed, or critical juncture. With the help of mobilizing, totalitarian ideologies, and new mass communications (print and, subsequently, radio), workers were drawn into national politics for the first time. The processes of political inclusion were under way and the results often were unhappy. Most of Europe's democracies weakened or failed altogether during these years. Some of them reverted to more oligarchic, less participatory politics. Others came under military, fascist, or communist leaderships.

In Thailand in recent years a major political movement supporting Thaksin, the United Front for Democracy and Against Dictatorship, made heavy use, as in Europe a century earlier, of novel media for political communications (satellite-based television and community radio stations) to support demands for political inclusion and the entrenchment of democracy. The UDD's ideology was moderate, though a small minority favored ending constitutional monarchy, a radical position in the Thai context. Political participation, in the forms of organization, speech, and protest, expanded sharply. The ensuing political conflict may indeed have brought Thailand today to a critical juncture. The nature of its political system and trajectory of its development over coming years, conceivably decades, may be in the process of being shaped by Thailand's conflicts, coups, and new constitutions. Presumably, Thailand will eventually again achieve a degree of political stability, but under a more participatory democratic political order.

A new social and political order in Thailand will entail the development of far stronger linkages between society and the country's key political institutions than exist today (see Chapter 6). Past processes of mass inclusion in politics in countries around the world varied in the ways in

which such linkages were created and sustained. In some cases, linkages were managed largely by a deeply institutionalized political party system powerfully embedded within a strong civil society. In other instances, street politics played more prominent roles. In yet other cases, unions or other corporatist entities were critical. One way or another, Thais too will have to find effective means to link the concerns of the mass of citizens to the legislative and executive operations guiding the state. The institutions needed to manage conflicts will have to be stronger and more impersonal than those that operate in Thailand today.

The current weaknesses of Thai political institutions and the prominence of personalities in the country's politics suggest that a critical juncture in Thailand may not be signaled by key institutional shifts. Rather, we should look to the emergence of transformative leaders able to shape events and restore political calm as Thais habituate themselves to an altered political landscape.

Our Approach to Understanding Thai Politics

This book takes an ideographic approach. That is, we focus on the single Thai case. We rely heavily on analysis of meanings and of cultural habits to interpret Thai politics. This approach should give our interpretation depth and texture. If so, however, those gains come at the cost of leaving us for the most part unable to offer generalizations that might apply more widely. A simpler explanation of Thai politics than the one we offer here might help us shed light on a diversity of puzzles beyond those in Thailand. Parsimony in explanation would enable us to generalize, but possibly at the sacrifice of illuminating conditions in Thailand (Geertz, as cited in Flyvberg 2001: 122–123).

Abstractions do not serve us when they fail to capture key elements of the phenomena that we hope to understand. Thongchai Winichakul notes that early in the Bangkok era, a map was a “model for, rather than a model of, what it purported to represent” (1997: 130). The maps were aspirational and prescriptive rather than descriptive. Abstractions are more apt to become wobbly when needed most; that is, when analysts shift from the settings in which the abstractions were first articulated to new ones (Stinchcombe 2001). Liah Greenfeld wrote of early French difficulties in importing the English concept of “nation”: “If in England ‘nation’ was a title given to a story, in France the title had existed long before the story was written” (Greenfeld 1993: 167). Accordingly, we might say of Thailand that democracy has long been the title of a story, but one yet to be plotted in great detail.

To help readers understand Thailand's politics, in this book we emphasize particularities of the Thai context that are products of historically and

socially constituted inheritances. David Hume suggests that people's "manners" were more important determinants of social outcomes than were the designs of specific formal institutions. The constitution that gave liberty to the English, he argues, might produce only faction and oppression in less "mature" eighteenth-century Scotland (Hume, as quoted in Trevor-Roper 1968: 11). In a similar spirit, John Stuart Mill asserted that "the worth of a State, in the long run, is the worth of the individuals composing it" (Mill, as quoted in Ricci 1987: 160). British prime minister Benjamin Disraeli argued in one of his novels that "a political institution is a machine; the motive power is the national character" (2008: 158). In this book, we make use of this old-fashioned way of understanding the world.

We give much attention to Thai interpretations of social life, habits of association, uses of information, patterns of participation in politics, construction of informal institutions, and search for security. As a result of historical inheritances, leadership choices, and perhaps also broader cultural predispositions, modernization has yet to circumscribe Thais firmly within its "iron cage" (Weber, discussed in Baehr 2001). It is not difficult to find remnants of Thai orientations to social tasks that are unsystematic, reflect limited discipline, and are irrational.⁹ We interpret many dimensions of Thai society and politics as reflecting a limited hold of modernity. Our discussion below turns to five features of Thai social life, and its interpretation, that reflect modernization's tenuous grip on Thai sensibilities: personalism, a focus on leaders' moral capacities in assessing them, informal institutions, monarchy, and reading between the lines.

Personalism

Modernity, as argued most famously by Max Weber, features impersonality, a reliance on neutral procedure to allocate values by rules rather than on the basis of inheritance or other partiality. It is shaped by formal institutions, a main feature of which is their impersonality (Sanchez-Cuenca 2003: 63). Weber describes the complex of forces that enmesh us in modern societies as constituting an iron cage. This cage can be conceptualized as a Calvinist straightjacket (Gorski 2003) that features "a penal conception of the self" (Khilnani 2001: 19). It entails an "incessant hindsight and foresight"¹⁰ as people learn to assume instrumental approaches to life (Elias 1982: 374). The widespread embrace of modern "impersonalism" is a big step toward enabling the state to become a "cold hard monster" (Nietzsche, as quoted in Fukuyama 2011: 82).

The iron cage is at least as much a product of individuals' policing their own behavior, of instituting discipline and instrumentalism, as it is of formal institutions. It often seems, both for good and ill, that many Thais have managed to elude the iron cage. Ruth Benedict's portrait drawn from

afar in the 1940s of Thais “without cultural inventions of self-castigation and many of self-indulgence and merriment” has not entirely lost its resonance (1952: 26). However fortunate this attitudinal inheritance is for some dimensions of Thais’ psychic welfare, it may have helped to retard the entrenching of institutions that underpin strong liberal democracies.

In the West, the wrenching changes of modernization gained a positive spin—the gales of destruction assumed a positive valence—that helped to undermine resistance to it. As they submerged themselves in their iron cages, many Westerners saw themselves as a part of a great historical transformation, the unfolding of the Enlightenment. Civil society was described as a sphere of autonomous individuals interacting in a market society beyond the inertia exerted by traditional and parochial identities (Oz-Salzberger 2001). Market society was liberating human opportunities. An “unrestricted differentiation” in civil society unleashed human energy and innovation as capitalism took root and transformed societies (Kaviraj 2001: 298). This embrace of new bases of social organization rested on a sort of “common submission of individuals, irrespective of their personal inclinations or interests, to a set of impersonal rules to which there exists a kind of social pre-commitment” (299). The emergence of a “peculiarly modern form of trust—among strangers”¹¹ enabled bureaucratically impersonal political and state institutions to work (299). Comparable commitments to social transformations are less evident in Thailand than they were in the West or Northeast Asia. In part as a result, many of Thaksin’s foes in general and the leaders of the 2014 coup in particular have difficulty articulating a compelling vision for Thailand, and often are reduced to simply reaffirming the values of tradition.

In a sense, many Thais suffer affect excess. They seem (to want) to experience social life, even within formally impersonal contexts, as personalized and infused with affect. They may feel anxiety when confronted with impersonalism. A central feature of Thai society is pronounced fear and insecurity (Day 2002: 19). Thais, informed perhaps by a “theory of unequal souls,” typically have sought security in vertical personal ties with individuals powerful enough to protect and to provide for them (Kirsch 1973: 15). When Thai strangers are set together, they are prone to go to work to foster social bonds marked by warm, personal, and often hierarchically structured ties fundamentally different from those they have with strangers. Thais often seek to infuse their relationships with a warmth that may well assume a vertical dimension, perhaps expressed as loyalty. If they fail to construct such ties, they may become aloof, competitive, distrustful, and factionalized.¹²

Survey data suggest that Thais have low levels of impersonal trust, but much higher levels of trust of their neighbors (Asia Foundation 2009). This finding parallels anthropological observations that many Thais have warm trusting relations within the family but distrust and fear the forces at work

outside that sphere (Mulder 1985). Operating together in a workplace, Thais construct personalistic relations characterized by warmth and trust. The failure to extend that warmth or trust beyond the agency in which they work contributes to difficulties in coordinating across organizations.¹³

Some Thais depict the epic political battle that unfolded after 2005 as pitting two individuals, the king and Thaksin, and their respective entourages, against each other. Of course, it is not unusual for people anywhere to simplify conflicts by personalizing them even as they understand that a conflict between two people, or two small groups, could not be responsible for a hullabaloo on the scale that has swamped Thailand. In Thailand, however, this personalized narrative was retailed more literally. Some Thais were convinced that Thaksin aimed to ultimately end the Chakri dynasty and found a new one (an example of unbounded stakes in political competition!).

Leaders' Morality

For Thais to solidly entrench a liberal democratic political order, they not only will have to craft political institutions that enable more political inclusivity but they also eventually will have to align their informal institutions more closely with their formal ones. More specifically, they will have to come to terms with their “goodness” problem. Many Thais see, in fairly profound fashion, some people and some leaders as good and others as not good. Typically, these are not mere statements of preference. Often, they are convictions concerning the moral qualities of individuals. Given the workings of merit, one is more likely to encounter good people at higher levels of the social hierarchy. The traditional Thai worldview depicted a hierarchy of individuals differentiated by their capacities “to make actions effective” and, hence, the extent to which they could limit suffering (Hanks 1962: 1251). Generally, Thais did not expect to associate much beyond the family and village except with individuals who had concentrated resources such that they could distribute a part of them to their followings. Hence, inequality was “the indispensable condition for group existence” (Hanks 1962: 1249).

Democracy’s institutionalized uncertainty means, among much else, the need to accept that leaders may not be good people. Most Westerners, with their robust but austere procedural vision of political legitimacy, can accommodate this requirement. The framers of the US Constitution aimed to create an institutional matrix that could cope with the imperfections of people and of their leaders. But for many Thais, it remains difficult. This need constitutes a particularly formidable challenge today given that many Thai political leaders’ foibles and worse are highly evident and, further, they contrast so sharply with the king’s majesty and benevolence.

There is little reason to expect that the quality of Thai political leaders will improve quickly. Hence, the concern for goodness in their leaders is a real obstacle, possibly an insurmountable one, unless Thais have faith that the bounds of political competition are firmly circumscribed so that bad leaders cannot inflict too much damage. In consolidated democracies, when they are forced to coexist with awful leaders, citizens and the political opposition seek security in the rule of law and look forward to the next constitutionally sanctioned opportunity, particularly elections, to throw the bums out. Many Thais have yet to make such a procedural commitment. Their notions of goodness are implicated in the difficulties they have in making such commitments.

Informal Institutions

Formal institutions can offer relatively fixed procedural rules as well as norms and principles around which actors' expectations converge (Krasner 1983). By contrast, personalism does not offer a promising basis for organizing a modern state. Institutional formality, however, also has its limitations. Formality in organizations may imply concern for form over content and rigidity in operation. Institutional formality, nonetheless, is critical to continuity. In the absence of formality, institutions will be tugged in different directions to suit the needs of particular people or periods and will be less apt to survive over time.

Institutions, of course, need to be able to adapt to their environments. Jean Bodin argues the need for the state to be adapted to "the nature of the citizens . . . the place, the persons, and the times" (Bodin, as quoted in Barzun 2000: 246). In practice, institutional adaptation often occurs through change in informal institutions rather than formal ones. Formal institutions may fail not (only) because informal ones are competing with or otherwise undermining them but because of an absence or weakness of supportive informal institutions (Helmke and Levitsky 2006). Thailand has had at times the formal institutions of a liberal democracy and, more consistently, those of the rule of law. However, as we argue in subsequent chapters, the institutions of the state, rule of law, and political participation are not adequately buttressed by the right kinds of informal institutions, including predominating attitudes and behaviors.

In this book, we focus on informal institutions because they are important to understanding Thailand's politics. This focus, complemented with attention to formal institutions, helps to protect against the analytical dangers of seeing institutions as similar when the formal properties are alike but the informal ones are not. Excessive attention to formal institutions at the expense of informal ones also can result in missing historical parallels due to distracting formal institutional differences. For example, we give

considerable attention to the challenge of political inclusion in Thailand. In formal institutional terms, this is misleading. *Political inclusion* generally refers to the extension of voting rights—formal suffrage—to the masses. The masses in Thailand long since enjoyed such rights, at least when there were elections. For most Thais, however, voting only superficially engaged them as citizens. More often, they voted as clients. Thaksin was instrumental in changing this. In informal institutional terms, therefore, we choose to speak of political inclusion as a recent and ongoing process in Thailand.

Comparative social science is simpler if the focus is restricted to formal institutions. Bringing into analytical frameworks elements of informal institutions often obliges us to attend to considerations of meaning and culture.¹⁴ Meanings and cultural habits generally are more elusive than formal institutions and require extended study and direct exposure to social situations. In addition, it is difficult to define culture, much less measure it or use it as an explanatory concept. The anthropologist Clifford Geertz notes, “One of the things that everyone knows but no one can quite think how to demonstrate is that a country’s politics reflect the design of its culture” (Geertz, as quoted in Migdal 2001: 241). John Casey asks “Why is the word *culture* one of the most contested in the language? The truth is that none of us quite understands what we mean by it” (quoted in Barzun 2000: 657). As a result, the concept has become something of a taboo, but one that yet another scholar admitted that “I cannot do without” (James Clifford, as quoted in Sewell 2005: 155).

Trying to find an analytical place for consideration of a “Thai culture” is treacherous. It is particularly difficult given that the political stakes are large and normatively charged, social change is so rapid, and the concept of culture is so malleable. It is hard to advance generalizations related to culture that stand up to careful examination. Cultures after all are not monolithic, unchanging, or entirely exogenous. They are created in part by antagonists in the course of debates and political struggles. In this book, we contend that widespread habits, attitudes, and ways of seeing the world contribute in Thailand to extensive personalism, and to low levels of institutional formality, trust, or horizontally based associational activity. This analysis might, of course, be seen as wrong in believing that these traits constitute elements of Thai culture. Even if it is at least partly right, such traits change, their distribution across different groups shifts, and they apply in some contexts more than in others. Nonetheless, it seems dishonest and unhelpful not to acknowledge our belief that these elements must, however crudely, be factored into efforts to understand Thai politics.

One formal Thai political institution to which we give great emphasis in this book is the monarchy. Even here, however, the monarchy’s formal powers, as detailed in Thailand’s written constitutions, are of far less importance than its informal ones embedded in Thailand’s “real” or “infor-

mal constitution” (Sanchez-Cuenca 2003: 82; Ginsburg 2009). Monarchy contributed to Thais’ national identity, political integration, and political stability. Decline in the monarchy’s charisma in the future will entail a reduction in its political centrality. Those changes, under way since at least 2007, will be momentous. They are inevitable given that Thais’ emotional engagement is only partly with the institution’s formal features but more so with the elderly King Bhumipol himself.

Monarchy

Thailand was an absolute monarchy until 1932. The fifth king of the current dynasty built up the monarchy’s formal and informal powers, but the newly dominant institution did not survive long unchallenged. In 1932, constitutional monarchy was instituted. From 1934 to 1951, Thailand had no full-time resident king. Buddhism, Brahmanism, weak rule of law, and strong personalism, however, provided materials with which the current king could work in gradually rebuilding the institution’s informal powers in the course of a long reign. King Bhumipol rebuilt the charisma of the institution of the monarchy and, in particular, his personal authority. While some of his forebears modernized the institution, downplaying notions of divinity, for example, the later decades of King Bhumipol’s reign witnessed an embrace of some of those once discarded elements (Jackson 2010: 31–32). By the time the king intervened decisively to end political violence and authoritarian rule in 1973, he had established himself unambiguously as the ultimate arbiter in Thai politics. Generally avoiding the open exercise of political authority, the king afforded the political system a form of reliable third-party enforcement that gave to the overall system a considerable degree of stability, if rather little accountability or transparency.

The king, at least since the time of Field Marshal Sarit Thanarat in the mid-twentieth century, largely monopolized the symbolic and ceremonial expressions of nationalism and served as the soul of the nation. This had two important consequences. First, it hobbled politicians seeking to construct any sort of national political following. At best, politicians could aspire to be prime ministers in the original sense of the term—the leading agent of His Majesty. They would not, and should not, seek presidential-style powers. This division of political labor explains a Thai aversion to any discussion of presidentialism. After all, presidents exercise the ceremonial roles associated with reigning, in some cases in addition to the executive ones of ruling.¹⁵ The division of labor between king and prime minister, far from ideal in terms of its effects on accountability, nonetheless left ample scope for ambitious politicians to compete to achieve wealth and status. Until Prime Minister Thaksin in 2001, Thai politicians after the 1950s gen-

erally did not seek to challenge the limitations that stemmed from the monarchy's central symbolic roles.

Thaksin challenged these bounds. He sought in some ways to make himself the embodiment of the nation. Under Thaksin, Thailand's premiership more closely resembled the superpresidentialism associated with Latin America's delegative democracies (Gonzalez 2014: 242–243).

A second effect of this division of labor in Thailand's political executive between a reigning monarch and (at times) elected prime ministers was to tend to bar many more emotionally charged political issues from politics. Potentially flammable issues concerning political identities or visions of the polity's future were to some degree out of bounds. The monarchy's formula for concretizing the polity—nation, religion, king—contributed to regulating the bounds of acceptable political discussion and to ruling radical ideologies (communism, republicanism) beyond the pale.

The policy differences that separated the two broad groups of antagonists arrayed against each other beginning in 2005 might not, in other circumstances, have been unbridgeable. Most of the key players shared at least a nominal commitment to democracy. The differences, including that over a willingness to adopt elections as a procedural means of transcending the conflict, could more easily have been managed if there had been available some form of neutral and reliable third-party enforcement. In many contexts, the law provides such mechanisms. In Thailand, for decades, the king did so.

By 2016, King Bhumipol's relinquishing of more active public roles was evident. As a result, issues that in the past, when he served as an active political overlord, would not have threatened to deeply disrupt Thai politics, had come to pose grave threats indeed. One of these concerned the choice of a successor Supreme Patriarch of Thailand's Buddhists, following the death of the previous Supreme Patriarch in 2013. The choice of a successor was intertwined with Thailand's political polarization and risked possible disruption however it was resolved. A second issue concerned efforts to create, as part of the exercise of drafting a new constitution after the 2014 coup, a body that could intercede in Thai politics in the event of a crisis, some unspecified political paralysis of the kind Thailand experienced in 2006 and 2014. Were King Bhumipol more active today, he would have selected the new Supreme Patriarch and the notion of needing a crisis committee never would have arisen.

One observer argues that “the deep, even grave, importance of the monarchy is . . . broadly based in the cultural-religious bedrock of Thai society” (Platt 2010: 89). A journalist made this notion more concrete and personal: “Morality flies out the window because people cannot rely on the rule of law, but only on their personal connections and the ability to pay their way.” In this context, they drew solace from the king's “unwavering

service to the people. . . . When we are up to our necks in corrupt and arrogant politicians, our hearts light up when we see our King walking tirelessly under the scorching sun in faraway villages, or sitting on the ground talking with simple folk” (Ekachai, 2006: 11).

In the traditional view, the monarchy in Thailand is necessary to sustain a moral center. The palace bolstered “the moral element in the public discourse” (Mulder 1985: 314) and, to some limited extent, this may have curbed politicians’ excessive rapaciousness. The monarchy operated in a fashion similar to ideology. It was a sort of concretization of ideology, an overarching conceptual system that facilitated collective action (Hanson 2010: 48–52). If Thais were not prone to adhere to impersonal norms or were not strongly drawn to serving public needs, they were ready, in service to their king, or through participation in royal rituals (Gray 1991: 47), to abide by their personal commitments to the king as the embodiment of national community.

In the Thai social context, it is not always easy to identify individuals or institutions that act or speak for collective goods rather than narrow self-interest. Most Thais, however, believed that the king did so. Many Thais served as principled public servants, to some extent because they believed they were serving the king. Indeed, it was in part through their service to Thai kings that at least some Thai bureaucrats might be seen as members of Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel’s “universal order,” one that stood for the collective (Hegel, as quoted in Sperber 2013: 103).

In Thailand, it was dangerous to discuss openly what the monarchy was and was not. The *lèse-majesté* law (Chapter 5) was corrosive of the institution itself as well as of Thai public deliberations. It was tragic and unexpected that Thais took to the law with such gusto this century given that its use was steadily declining at the turn of the past century and that Thais so overwhelmingly felt reverence for their king. The law invoked traditional attitudes to sustain a highly traditional institution. As a Thai remarked about criticism of the law, “It is not about law. It is about faith” (Vanijaka 2012: 11).

One scholar notes that “Thai-style democracy” accorded the monarchy a critical, albeit obscured, centrality in the political system. It was “founded on a cultural model of moral and king-centered politics” (Askew 2011: 11). Pattana Kitiarsa argues for carrying on politics in a Thai vernacular that is rooted in a Thai culture that is incompatible with Western ideas about democracy (cited in Hewison and Kitirianglarp 2010: 181). As these examples suggest, a number of Thai intellectuals struggle to articulate the bases of legitimacy of Thai-style democracy. Their emphasis on morality and on good people tends to be read by critics as archaic traditionalism or class condescension. At the heart of these Thai ideas, however, are assumptions of widespread amorality in the public sphere and the relative impotence of

political institutions to impose a just and stable order in the absence of a personalistic metaleviathan.

The monarchy may be more central to traditional ideas of politics and political community in Theravada Buddhist societies, such as Thailand's, than it ever was in European ones. Bernard Lewis complains that, because the broader political roles of religion declined in the West, many Westerners refused to accept that it continued to play central roles in other societies (2004: 285). Perhaps something similar was at work in the difficulty that many outsiders had in apprehending the deep roots of monarchy in Thai habits of thought about political life. Charles Keyes describes the "problem of power" in Theravada Buddhist societies as follows: immorality generally is required to gain power even as success in doing so testifies to the accumulation of good karma in the past. This formula is worryingly permissive of foul means used in the quest for power. Inherited power, as in monarchy, helped to deal with that tension (Keyes 1977: 156–158). Thais will one day be managing their politics in a context in which monarchy is far less central than it has been for three generations. They may not accomplish the change easily.

Reading Between the Lines

We draw in this section on Arthur M. Melzer's (2014) analysis of "esoteric writing" in the Western tradition. Melzer distinguishes between philosophic writing that is exoteric, public, and offered for undifferentiated external consumption, and writing that is esoteric, secret, and offered for consumption to a select few able to read between the lines. Johann Wolfgang von Goethe early in the nineteenth century saw as a "disaster" that from the latter half of the prior century, people "no longer drew a distinction between the exoteric and esoteric" (Goethe, quoted in Melzer 2014: xi–xii). There are related problems in understanding Thai politics. First, some Thai political speech, as well as writing, assumes distinctions between those in the know and those outside that select circle. Communications are not necessarily aimed at reaching both groups, but may aim only at those privy to inside information or possessing superior insight (Gray 1991: 44–45)¹⁶. Second, general habits, not necessarily conscious, of obfuscation impede clear communication. Third, as we discuss in Chapter 5, Thai formal law requires great circumspection if individuals and media are to avoid severe legal sanction.

A further dimension to the phenomenon of "secret writing," however, is worth noting. Before the impact of the Enlightenment was fully felt in the West in the past two or three centuries, it was common for Westerners to fear that open communication of key truths could hurt a community "by subverting its essential myths and traditions" (Melzer 2014: 3). Westerners, now living in open societies, believe they have found that the presumed

dangers of exposing myths were overstated (even as they sustain others). Members of partly traditional and more closed societies, however, do not necessarily reach the same conclusions. Just as Western philosophers once believed that a fundamental gulf separated them from most other people, Thai Buddhist ideas point to a sharp divide between the all-seeing few and the rest (Melzer 2014: 70–71, 168–169; Gray 1991).

In the traditional view, with political communities rooted in “unexamined illusions” rather than reason, open analysis of sacred elements could be highly threatening (Melzer 2014: 90). This is a threat that Westerners are unlikely to consider and find difficult to accept. Alexis de Tocqueville suggested, as paraphrased by Melzer, that following the Enlightenment, people had difficulty understanding “how utterly different all their perceptions and sensibilities have become from those of earlier, nonegalitarian ages” (116). Hence, despite the fact that both Jesus and Socrates were well known for their indirection, Westerners lost touch with the “traditional inclination for reserve and concealment” (119). By contrast, traditional societies were formed around shared customs, traditions, norms, and ideas about the sacred (169). These societies were, and had to be, closed.

At least residual elements of what Melzer (2014) describes as a traditional outlook remain evident in Thailand today. They are most obvious in the *lèse-majesté* law and its enforcement. However, they may also manifest themselves in more diffuse tendencies to eschew being explicit in political discussions.

The Chapters That Follow

Having introduced the book’s goals and approach, it is now appropriate to foreshadow the material that appears in the following chapters. We aim to reach two audiences. The first group consists of those already at least generally familiar with Thailand and its politics. In addition, however, we target readers who are unfamiliar with Thailand. Therefore, Chapter 2 provides an overview of Thailand’s political history. This history will enable readers to follow the discussion through the rest of the text. In the chapter, we introduce the principal actors and institutions of Thai politics that recur in subsequent chapters where the discussion elaborates on their importance to greater or lesser degrees. Particularly in Chapters 3, 4, and 6, additional historical details emerge in the course of discussions of the Thai state, rule of law, and political participation. Interwoven with the narrative in Chapter 2 is a highly abbreviated discussion of the literature on Thai politics that highlights how such analyses have shifted over time.

An effective state, entrenched rule of law, and strong political institutions that enable effective political participation are fundamental elements

of a quality liberal democracy. Accordingly, we examine these key Thai institutions. Familiarity with these institutions and their histories will enable readers to embed an understanding of Thailand's current conflicts more deeply. We also look at selective features of political communication in Thailand. This discussion covers several issues necessary for understanding Thailand's politics and gives attention to a number of features of its political culture.

In Chapter 3, we examine the state—the political institution most central to modernity. We describe the broad reforms adopted by Rama V beginning in the late nineteenth century and consider the origins and subsequent changes in the state's capacities. Then, we review the distinctive features of historical Thai states, the personal character of Thai absolutism, and the extensive roles afforded to ceremony and ritual. We also examine three periods of centralizing state reforms that aimed to make the state more accountable.

Absolutism in Thailand has left the country a legacy of a relatively effective state. Nonetheless, the weakness of rule of law and challenges to the state's normative underpinnings raise concerns for the state's future capacities. In Chapter 3, we note the failure of elected government to sustain control over the military.

Chapter 4 is concerned with the rule of law, a concept central to liberal democracies. Weaknesses in the rule of law in Thailand pose major challenges and are, at least in part, products of the feebleness of formal institutions, and supportive informal ones, that can underpin systems of law. Nonetheless, viewed comparatively, Thailand's system of law is relatively robust. In the chapter, we examine the extensive legal reforms that started in the late nineteenth century as well as current formal legal institutions and Thai attitudes toward their system of justice. We also discuss in some detail recent constitutions, the new accountability institutions those charters created, and the expanded political roles of the courts.

In Chapter 5 the analysis moves closer to individual Thais, focusing on Thai styles of political communication and combat. We examine Thais' levels of political sophistication and attempt to account for those endowments by looking at the nature of Thai media and state regulation of information, including defamation and *lèse-majesté* laws. We also discuss how Thais interpret politics and engage in political debates, their styles of rhetoric and capacities for deliberations, and their propensities toward violence and embrace of enchantment. Here too, we note the ways in which the use and management of information has contributed to democratic difficulties in Thailand. These matters are linked to deep issues involving the nature of polity and society, of legitimacy, of good and evil, and of truth.

Our discussion in Chapter 6 describes Thais' once pervasive political passivity and the steady, then rapid, rise of political mobilization and, since

2005, polarization. We examine new political movements in addition to civil society and political parties. We note the limited degree to which parties are rooted in civil society. We also look with more depth at former prime minister Thaksin's rule and legacies. There is some potential for strong political parties to emerge and play important parts in strengthening Thailand's democracy. It is unclear, however, on what bases they will be organized or whether, like most Thai political parties to date, they will essentially be the agents of a single key leader or a small leadership group.

In Chapter 7, we conclude the book by identifying eight conditions that help to account for Thailand's past successes in economic development and, less impressively, in building state capacities or entrenching the rule of law. These conditions are robust national identity, Buddhism, monarchy, broad elite consensus, modest political participation, relative asset equality, limited social exclusion, and adherence, for the most part, to a market economy. We note that those once favorable conditions have either disappeared or are on the wane. We ask, again, why the goal of a stable and quality liberal democracy has proven so elusive in Thailand. We consider the long-term impact of Thailand's political conflict by drawing on a parallel with the presidency of Andrew Jackson in the United States. We then consider the plausibility of five different types of political regime taking root in Thailand over the coming decades. These are liberal democracy, social democracy, monarchy-centered pluralism, electorally based authoritarianism, and bureaucratic authoritarianism. In one final, brief comparison, we close the book with a discussion of the reign of King Dom Pedro II in Brazil and its aftermath.

Notes

1. Later cases of democratic failure at higher income levels not considered by Przeworski and Limongi (1997) include Russia.

2. The more familiar version is from Antonio Gramsci: "The crisis consists precisely in the fact that the old is dying and the new cannot be born; in this interregnum a great variety of morbid symptoms appear" (1971).

3. These actors are introduced below, and more fully in Chapter 2.

4. Democrat Party tax proposals included both progressive (land and business tax) and regressive (lowered corporate income tax, albeit with reduced exemptions) elements.

5. Even in Japan, with its robust formal institutions and without any ambiguities concerning succession issues, the looming demise of Emperor Hirohito (he died in 1989) seemed to provide impetus to, admittedly marginal, political pathologies (Field 1993).

6. While these voters would continue to want a monarchy infused with charismatic force, succession will diminish support for a monarch playing active political roles.

7. This term was used widely in the past, for example by David Hume, to refer to what also was known as “national character” (Trevor-Roper 1968). In much of the past century, the favored term was “political culture,” though that term too is now out of favor.

8. Many estimates, often using different definitions, offer lower figures.

9. Yes, irrational elements are prominent in the politics, and social life more generally, of any country.

10. The more compelling demand confronting Thais was the need to “look up and down the hierarchy” to secure their positions (Hanks 1962: 1253).

11. This form of trust seems to be low among Thais (World Values Survey, Wave 6, 2010–2014).

12. One observer suggested that for those wanting to “row in the Thai conceptual boat,” it was essential to understand the abundant Thai uses of the term (and concept) *jai* (heart) (Moore 1998: 13).

13. Conversations with William J. Klausner (2013) contributed to this discussion.

14. Cognitive linguistics offers useful analytical tools for these purposes, encouraging attention to moral, mythic, and emotional dimensions of politics (Lakoff 2002).

15. More important, of course, presidents are associated with republics. In 2015, the group responsible for drafting a new Thai constitution considered having a directly elected prime minister. Fundamental institutional architecture might shift, but nomenclature would not.

16. Gray argues that the Thai Buddhist hierarchy tends to see the Buddha’s teachings as esoteric and that it has been kings and monks, those with “the esoteric knowledge necessary to assign proper meanings to words,” who have “revealed to the masses” the Buddha’s insights (1991: 44).

