

“The Roots of Thailand’s Political Polarization in Comparative Perspective”
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A Discussion Paper Prepared for the 2014 Annual Conference on Taiwan Democracy
Taiwan Democracy Project
17-18 October 2014, Stanford, CA, USA

Introduction

On the face of it, the subject of “political polarization” appears intuitive and routine. That it has branched out into a growing subfield of scholarly study is, in fact, counterintuitive. Politics is inherently fractious, factionalized, and therefore fundamentally divided. Democratic forms of government exhibit chasm and cleavages that are fundamentally adversarial. Even totalitarian regimes and outright dictatorships are not devoid of political divisions, fragmentation and contestation from within. The tendency for politics everywhere to be polarized is thus par for the course, not at all unexpected or surprising. Yet “political polarization” as a conceptual and researchable avenue is more than divided and fractious politics. It speaks to the increasing frequency of pluralistic political systems and various forms of democratic rule being beset by structural and intractable politics of extreme – of “us against them” or “you are either with us or against us” dualism, a deepening and widening “either/or” proposition – with a receding if not absent middle ground.

As Liao and Yu (2008:2) noted, in the case of Taiwan, political polarization “usually refers to the process by which political parties go to the extremes along an ideological spectrum; it also refers to the phenomenon in which ideological overlap between the political parties disappears.” Similarly, in their focus on Taiwan’s partisan politics, Clark and Tan (2012:8) elaborated further that “partisan rivalries can be between a divided elite and electorate who may share some middle ground (unpolarized) or between a divided elite and electorate with no shared middle ground (polarized).” It is this willful elimination and consequent disappearance of the middle ground that best defines political polarization. Conciliation, compromise and consensus are denied in politically polarized polities. This orientation and understanding of political polarization underpin the foregoing discussion paper, with reference to Thailand as a country focus in a limited comparative context. In the decade since the mid-2000s, Thai politics has been marked by growing divisions and polarization. As a result, Thailand’s political pendulum has swung wildly from one side to the other, from electoral democracy to military-authoritarianism in view of the military coup in May 2014, its second putsch in less than eight years. This paper begins with a brief discussion of the nature of Thailand’s political polarization and then to pose some observations on its causes and sources. Tentative observations suggest that the post-Cold War context matters, as do institutional interests of the incumbent regime, the majority-minority relationship in electoral politics, and the political consequences of advancing media technologies.

Thailand's Political Polarization

When it comes to political crisis and polarization, Thailand's may be second to none because not so long ago this country, which ranks among the top 25 in the world in both population and gross domestic product, was on the cusp of democratic consolidation. Thailand's steep democratic descent is remarkable, from internationally recognized pro-democracy reforms in the mid-1990s that culminated with a promising constitution in 1997 to politicization and contestation since 2001, marked by two military coups and debilitating street protests. Over the past decade, the crisis and confrontation that have underpinned Thailand's prolonged polarization has appeared intractable. The Thai crisis can be portrayed in several different ways. It is a crisis of a fledgling democracy and a crisis of a traditional political order which is out of sync with the times. It may also be seen as a crisis that revolves around former Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra and his resilient legacy and manipulative rule, directly and via proxies, exploiting popular sentiments based on populist policies that catered to their demands and grievances. On the contrary, it may also be seen as a crisis peddled by Thaksin's opponents who are unelected and unwilling to abide by the rules of electoral democracy.

It is instructive to take stock of Thailand's fluctuating political order over the past century. The country was an absolute monarchy until 1932, when constitutional rule was introduced. From 1932 to roughly 1958 – through the 1930s and Second World War – the role of the monarchy in politics was at its lowest point. Parliament, political parties and politicians were most prominent, alongside the budding role of the military. After a see-saw rivalry between civilian and military leaders who overthrew absolute monarchy, marked by factionalism and volatility, the army led by strongman Field Marshal Sarit Thanarat staged a coup in 1958 and ushered in absolute rule by dictatorship. Sarit resurrected the monarchy and its role in Thai political life. Over time, the monarchy and military entered into a symbiotic relationship. Over time, the monarch surpassed the military and became the apex of Thai society through much hard work with the masses during the Cold War. As the monarch became paramount and revered in Thai society increasingly from the 1960s, the monarchy, military and bureaucracy became the core pillars of Thai political order.

The mutually reinforcing trinity among the monarchy, the military and the bureaucracy became a kind of a Cold War fighting machine for Thailand in the 1960s through the 1980s. This Cold War fighting machine became phenomenally successful on two fronts. It kept communism at bay – at a time when many countries became communist dominoes that fell in succession. For example, Laos, Cambodia and Vietnam all succumbed to communism. But Thailand defied the communist domino theory. Second, during this time, Thai economic growth was impressive, hovering over six percent per year through the Cold War. So the monarchy, military and bureaucracy kept communism away and enabled Thai economic development. But this traditional political order then became a victim of its own success, as economic development gave rise to new voices and growing democratization, otherwise known as the “modernization” imperative.

The development and modernization in 1960s to 1990s culminated with the rise and rule of Thaksin Shinawatra by 2001. Thaksin is the embodiment of the new elites that benefited from sustained economic development. He is also a major beneficiary of Thailand's economic boom

after the Plaza Accord in 1985, and was able to capitalize on Thailand's relatively open economy and growing global financial integration. Thaksin's conglomerate, Shin Corp, skyrocketed after listing on the stock exchange in the early 1990s. He became a billionaire telecoms tycoon and a consummate politician with extensive networks in the police, military, bureaucracy, business and politics (Thitinan 2008).

As democratization made inexorable headway from the end of the Cold War, the monarchy-centred political order and hierarchy was still intact. The chasm between electoral democracy as a new and undeniable source of legitimacy and power caused tensions with the old order that relied on moral authority, integrity and unelected sources of legitimacy. These tensions have manifested in different ways and still beset Thailand today. It is conventionally known in colour-coded terms as a "yellows" versus "reds" divide. The former is pro-Establishment and anti-Thaksin, at the expense of overthrowing Thaksin's elected regime in the streets, through judicial means or military coups, when necessary. The reds, on the other hand, are generally anti-coup and pro-electoral democracy. It is as if Thaksin opened Thailand's can of worms, so to speak, letting the genie out of the bottle. The country has been transformed from a kingdom of traditionally loyal subjects to a democracy of increasingly informed and politically conscious citizens. The overlap between subjects and citizens is Thailand's way ahead as the country needs the right mix of monarchy and democracy. It is still in a painful search for the right mix. Such is Thailand's endgame in the late twilight of a glorious reign when democratic rule appears undeniable. The incumbent regime with its monarchy-centered networks of patronage has resisted electoral democracy because they have much to lose in terms of power, prestige, entitlements, and material and economic interests (McCargo 2005).

The Twin "Restoration" Coups

Coups are common in Thai politics, and Thailand's political polarization has been punctuated by two putsches that aimed to restore the traditional political order revolving around the monarchy, military, and bureaucracy. Thailand's vicious coup cycle is well known. A coup – the country has had 13 successful ones since 1932 – sets in motion a new constitution, elections, an elected government that inevitably becomes corrupt, paving the way for another coup and so forth. This is how the coup-prone political system perpetuates itself at the expense of democratic transition and consolidation. In many ways, the 2006 and 2014 "restoration" coups are one and the same. The 2006 putsch was "half-baked". It did not go far enough in preventing the Thaksin regime from reincarnating after elections to engage in the same sort of abuse and graft that deposed it in the first place. And so the 22 May 2014 coup is "all-in". The coup council – the National Council for Peace and Order – intends to ride out the storm and clean up Thai politics. The NCPO has not delegated authority to caretaker technocrats as in past coups. This time, the ruling generals are running Thailand more or less directly, with a concentration of power that has not been seen since Field Marshal Sarit's time.

The NCPO has formed a nexus, the heart and inner sanctum of a clutch of related bodies. Indeed, ruling generals, led by hitherto army chief Gen Prayut Chan-ocha, have even conceded that the NCPO will function like a "politburo" in the interim coup period. Thus the NCPO, via Gen Prayut, has established an interim constitution that effectively provides absolute power to the

NCPO chief. Beyond the interim constitution, the NCPO has handpicked and set up a National Legislative Assembly (NLA). In turn, the NLA has selected Gen Prayut as prime minister, and he has formed a cabinet. The National Reform Council (NRC) has been picked, and a Constitution Drafting Committee (CDC) will follow by late 2014, stacked by nominees from the NRC, NCPO, NLA and cabinet. Such is the concentration of power that is mutually reinforcing, all reporting to NCPO with Gen Prayut at the top. Even after retirement on 30 September 2014, Gen Prayut remains prime minister and NCPO leader.

This astonishing concentration of power may be seen more broadly as a reaction and regression in the face of 21st-century challenges and dynamics associated with electoral democracy that have been evident since Thaksin's rise. The generals are thus reacting against what they see as the abuse and usurpation of the Thaksin years and through his other proxies and sister Yingluck Shinawatra. The Thaksin regime is the most daunting problem and elected politicians have been the bane of Thai democracy. Or so goes the pro-coup argument. This is why the NCPO through Gen Prayut see themselves as having to clean up Thai politics and in so doing as having to turn back the clock. Whether the generals get away with it is a different matter. Thailand in 2014-15 may be too complex to turn back but the generals will try at least to make fundamental adjustments by rewriting the rules and tackling corruption without adding their own graft. The generals are likely to feel in 2015 – elections are promised by end 2015 – that their job is unfinished, that they may face retribution, and that their vested interests need to be looked after. As a result, the likelihood that the generals will stay longer than intended and the likelihood that their initially genuine intentions will turn awry are likely to increase in the coming months.

Beyond Polarization: A New Moving Balance

Notwithstanding two coups over the past eight years, there is no exit from elections and democracy in Thailand. International norms have changed, reinforced by a revolution of transformative information technologies. Thai people are more politically conscious and awakened than ever. The international community, unlike the Cold War, no longer condones coups because there is no more communist expansionism to fight. And globalization marches in leaps and bounds, empowering the lower rungs of the Thai electorate and allowing them to voice aspirations and grievances like never before. The problem Thailand has been having is that the electoral winners have not been allowed to rule while the losers who ultimately rule cannot win elections. It is a pity that Thailand's main opposition Democrat Party has been most disappointing, morally bankrupt and utterly unable to win a national election for more than two decades. This means the Thaksin camp has been the main beneficiary. But his sort of democratic rule can be manipulated and monopolized, as mentioned above. At the same time, the moral authority that we have been seeing from unelected sources, such as the military and the judiciary, appears untenable and not immune to hypocrisy. For example, the Crown Property Bureau has been estimated by Forbes magazine to be worth more than 35 billion dollars, but is completely untaxed and opaque (*Forbes*, 20 January 2012).

This means the military junta under Gen Prayut will be forced to come up with new rules that will somehow keep the Thaksin side at bay at a minimum and perhaps a set of constitutional rules that can enable military rule to be institutionalized within an electoral framework for the

longer term. It is a contentious framework that has been dubbed “Thai-style” democracy but the electorate will likely oppose it if the rules are distorted and manipulated too blatantly. A recalibrated political order is thus imperative to return Thailand to a more genuine democratic path without manipulation from the likes of Thaksin but also a democratic rule that cannot be derailed at will by Thaksin’s opponents, such as the ruling generals. This appears the only way ahead beyond Thailand’s polarization.

A Global Democratic Malaise?

Thailand is not alone in having symptoms of what might be called a kind of democratic “malaise.” The early 21st century is beset with such an alarming trend in emerging democracies. As political liberalization and democratization make headway, they have ended up polarizing and splitting societies undergoing democratic transitions. This trend is likely to dominate the developing world for the next two decades and beyond. The way to ameliorate this global democratic malaise is to rearrange and adapt social contracts and political configurations of government and to foster and strengthen democratic institutions that can meet new demands and expectations more effectively. Thailand’s ongoing political polarization is a case in point. Its latest round of street protests in November 2013 until the coup on 22 May 2014 punctuated a long-running crisis and contestation that began when Thaksin came to power in 2001. The sins of his misrule from corruption and abuse of power galvanized a fierce anti-Thaksin movement that took to the streets of Bangkok in 2005-06, 2008 and most recently in late 2013 and 2014. At the same time, the benefits of his rule and legacy have empowered rural and urban segments of society who returned his proxy parties to election victory time and again. Thailand’s political divide revolves around what Thaksin has left behind.

Thailand has split broadly into three overlapping directions. First, the anti-Thaksin coalition sees the Thaksin regime as the embodiment and institution of corruption and graft in Thailand’s political system that must be uprooted once and for all. It was represented by the People’s Democratic Reform Committee, spearheaded by former Democrat Party secretary-general Suthep Thaugsuban. Second, the roughly pro-Thaksin movement, aligned to the Pheu Thai party and comprising the foot soldiers of the United Front for Democracy Against Dictatorship, favor caretaker Prime Minister Yingluck Shinawatra and her government. The third column increasingly consists of those who want to uphold democratic rule and “system” at all costs, even if such a democratic allegiance indirectly benefits the Thaksin regime in the near term. Both the pro- and anti-Thaksin groups do not reject electoral democracy but they embrace it in different ways, whereas those who privilege the democratic system over getting rid of the Thaksin regime want to maintain a rules-based democratic society regardless of its results.

The Thai experience has shown that democracy can be thin and superficial, reliant on procedures and political vehicles more than genuine democratic substance and process. A democracy cannot exist without the will of the people being manifested through representation by way of elections. Yet elections alone cannot constitute a viable democracy with a lasting constitutional settlement. This dilemma suggests that Thai society has to cultivate a more effective democratic system with less emphasis on the veneer of elections and more focus on the democratic processes of accountability and a more acceptable balance between electoral majority and minority. The

majority-minority recalibration requires more voice and rights for the electoral losers. A way forward is to avoid a winner-takes-all approach and attitude. Electoral winners cannot do as they please after winning the ballot box but must accommodate the interests and concerns of electoral losers more openly and systematically.

This is easier said than done but the alternative is unworkable. Electoral losers now have the means and the knowhow to stall and stymie the work of government to the point of paralysis and protracted confrontation. Thailand comes to mind but emerging democracies nearby are also a testimony to this trend. In Cambodia, the opposition Cambodian National Rescue Party gained substantial ground but not enough to unseat Prime Minister Hun Sen and his Cambodian People's Party. In response, the opposition boycotted the national assembly, depriving the Hun Sen government of political legitimacy. In Malaysia, the ruling Malay-dominated Barisan Nasional coalition has lost some grip on power but not enough to be replaced by the opposing coalition. As opposition parties rallied repeatedly in the streets and in cyberspace, the resulting stalemate has turned into a political malaise.

The Philippines and Indonesia have done better whereby the election losers allowed the winners to rule. However, it is still early days before these two young democracies can be considered as consolidated. Perhaps the most resilient and promising democracies in the Southeast Asian neighborhood are Singapore and Myanmar. In Singapore, the entrenched rule of the People's Action Party has faced an increasingly adept opposition coalition, which is gaining in popularity. As the writing is on the wall, the PAP has adapted by bringing into its ranks younger and fresher talents, allowing the party to reinvent itself and perhaps still maintain overall power by ceding some of it to the rising opposition. In just several years, Myanmar has gone from a military dictatorship to a fragile democracy, reinforced by a series of compromise. Its government has hinted that the constitution may be amended in a way that might allow opposition leader Daw Aung San Suu Kyi to be elected president in 2015. This followed her opposition National League for Democracy's pledge to contest the polls in 2015 regardless of whether the constitution is amended.

Further afield in Ukraine, Bangladesh and elsewhere, the electoral majority-minority bipolarity appears to be a solidifying pattern. The absence of an international superstructure, such as the ideologically driven Cold War, has both enabled more democracies to take hold and fanned contestation and confrontation in democratic societies at the same time. Back in the Cold War, street demonstrations that we are seeing around the world today would be readily suppressed by force. But these days, more countries appear democratic and democracies appear messier because more people are partaking in political processes, thanks to information technology and its accelerated proliferation. It is as if the previously neglected masses of the world are voicing and taking part in politics of their own countries. Without the Cold War and with advancing information technology, democratic development could well become the norm but will be more fiercely contested domestically. For developing democracies to work, the election winners must be allowed to rule with accountability-promoting institutions and values, while the losers must be allowed to sufficiently express their interests and protect their minority rights. Otherwise these democracies will remain unsettled and mired in endless protests.

Social Media and Polarization

A cursory glance ranging from Thailand, Ukraine to Turkey and elsewhere beset with contentious politics between electoral majorities and minorities bring the role of social media into focus. The sources of prolonged and visceral polarization appear to stem increasingly from social media. Once celebrated as liberating and freedom-enabling tools, social media has had more of a dividing rather than unifying impact. It is as if we have found ourselves to be our own worst enemies and social media has become our weapon of choice to deepen differences and corrode the rough and moving consensus that used to hold societies together without endless and color-coded street protests by one side or the other. The way to rectify and better utilize social media tools is to require accountability and promote technologies and practices toward inclusiveness and greater tolerance of diverse opinions. To be sure, social media such as Facebook and Twitter generate democratizing effects in authoritarian societies because popular dissent can easily find voice, mobilization and organization. The Chinese government, for example, has a vast IT army to keep domestic dissent on the internet under check and to reinforce media tools of control on its citizenry. China is the centre of the largest battleground where an authoritarian regime has been able to have its cake and eat it, achieving strong economic performance without democratization.

The same is true of other less-open societies such as some of the Middle East and African autocracies, or Vietnam and Laos, with North Korea as the most extreme case. For relatively closed societies, social media foments liberalization and liberation. These liberalizing and democratizing effects can only be suppressed at a high cost but such coercion may not be sustainable. Social media and the internet more broadly are thus a revolutionary boon to people in authoritarian societies. But in democratizing societies, social media has produced polarizing consequences. The Thai case in this paper, for example, has been characterized by endless street protests in Bangkok, pitting the forces for and against Thaksin's legacy and role. The yellows and other non-red colors that have emerged over the past several years are squarely against Thaksin's return and opposed to the government of his sister, Prime Minister Yingluck Shinawatra. When Thaksin's party machine won the election, it faced the non-red shirts in the streets, unable to govern with any lasting semblance of stability and eventually ousted by a military coup or judicial decision. But when his proxy governments were dislodged from office, the pro-Thaksin red shirts, who have favored his policy ideas and ability to deliver, took to the streets. They have felt that the electoral system allows them voice and recognizes their rights, even putting up with the corruption which they see as pervasive and unavoidable.

The widening gulf between the pro-Thaksin red shirts and the anti-Thaksin non-reds appears at times to be irreconcilable. The non-reds tune into their own social media like Facebook and Line, engaging in a dialogue of partisans. Their political TV channels are often the yellow-shirts' ASTV or more frequently, during street demonstrations, the opposition Democrat Party's Blue Sky station. Less urbane and more countryside-based, the reds have their similar social media outlets, and their TV station is Asia Update. This divide in media services is sandwiched by two parallel tracks of communication. The non-reds would hardly listen to the other side as much as the reds would avoid the opposing media channels. Neither side leaves much ground in the

middle. Moreover, social media, such as Facebook, is fundamentally designed to exploit personal vanity and assemble like-minded friends and family and contacts and networks. It is not inherently set up to invite and befriend people who hold different views and preferences. While the divide between different political partisan groups persists, the divisions also tend to entrench and deepen because like-minded social media cohorts and “echo chambers” tend to reaffirm rather than to challenge each other’s beliefs. This means, for example, that Thailand’s polarized environment is dominated by a kind of “group think” on either side.

Perhaps the worst attribute of social media proliferation is anonymity. Without a reliable identification to promote transparency and accountability, most users of social media cyberspace deploy pseudonyms and assumed names that give them a sense of deniability and a tendency to overstate, overreact and offend. In authoritarian societies, this trend is understandable and acceptable. But as societies become more democratic, transparency and accountability should be promoted, anonymity marginalized. The polarizing effects of social media in emerging democracies are driven not just by advancing technology at cheaper prices but also the loosening global structure after the Cold War. With its ideological and bipolar structure, the Cold War used to provide suppressive effects against divisions within societies. In communist societies, autocratic party rule quashed dissent and disallowed political divides. In freer societies, the imperative of fighting against communist expansionism provided a consensus that kept splits within societies manageable. Now in the 21st century, democratization is on the march but social media trends may preclude the kind of consensus that would allow democratizing societies to find common ground for unity and stability.

To rectify social media shortcomings, more transparency and accountability are needed. Contents and views from pseudonyms should be devalued and a system of reliable and verifiable personal identification in cyberspace should be set up. This is not easy and can be abused by innovators and controllers of such a system. But not long from now, cyberspace will completely resemble a virtual world of global connectors and communicators. Every PC connected to the internet has an identifiable number. In democratizing societies, a similar system can be made for all individuals, everyone with a recognizable name and number when entering cyberspace. Authoritarian societies can follow when sufficient democratizing effects take hold. The quality of democracy would likely increase with more transparency and accountability. In addition, the future Mark Zuckerbergs of the world should think differently. Facebook in democracies currently sows growing divisive effects. Future innovators need to come up with profoundly different products to connect strangers and opponents and to promote dialogues among differences of opinions. When opposing partisans are able to befriend each other in cyberspace, it will be a step forward for greater peace and harmony. More human contact and face-to-face contact need to make a comeback as a means of communications. Hatred and vitriol are easier to cultivate in cyberspace but much harder in person. For countries that are bitterly polarized like Thailand, the best way forward is to encourage the reds to cross the media divide and listen to their opponents’ views as much as the non-reds should turn to the reds’ channels. Products and platforms that can bridge the divide and narrow societal gaps should be encouraged. This is difficult to achieve but it must be tried. The alternative is a dangerous polarization that entrenches and embeds itself structurally. Emerging democracies that achieve sufficient political stability that is necessary for a healthy growth trajectory must have dialogues of strangers and

minds that are unlike, agreeing to disagree if necessary but agreeing to take collective steps forward when possible. There is no country that cries for this kind of dialogue more than Thailand.

In countries such as pre-coup Thailand where political legitimacy has derived from electoral democracy, the relationship between majority rule and minority rights has become problematic in need of recalibration. If a more effective majoring-minority moving balance is not found, electoral democracy is likely to be discredited and undermined to the detriment of societies it was cultivated and designed to govern. Alternative forms of political legitimacy, such as China's one-party rule without popular polls, would then gain at the expense of the one-person, one-vote system. Winning elections apparently no longer suffices for stable rule. In Turkey, Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan has been ensconced in office for a decade, having won three successive general elections by large margins, most recently in June 2011. Over the course of his rule, the Turkish macro-economy became robust and stable, with the traditional menace of inflation kept at bay. Erdogan brought Turkey closer to Europe as a committed member of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization and as seen in accession aspirations for a full European Union membership. But he also increasingly betrayed the modernization and Westernization rooted in congenital secularism from the formation of the Turkish republic in the early 20th century by shifting towards Islamism and authoritarianism, having tamed the once-paramount army and undermined institutions and mechanisms of checks-and-balance. The power of social media is dubious in the Turkish case. It has enabled Turkey's electoral minority to organize and agitate against an elected government with a commanding majority of popular ballots and parliamentary seats. Social media is a new platform for political expression, interaction and mobilization. It allows broad-based empowerment that could provide mechanisms for transparency and accountability. But its chief constraint is that it cannot replace some traditional modes and practices of politics, such as voting, elections, political parties, politicians, and parliament.

Overall, social media seems to produce democratizing and liberalizing effects in relatively authoritarian societies, whereas its impact in relatively democratic societies appears more polarizing and divisive. China, Vietnam, Russia, and the like have kept a tight leash on social media expression and expansion. The liberalization and democratization pressure in these countries is strong and rising.

Recalibrating Majority Rule and Minority Rights

But in Thailand, Turkey, Malaysia and elsewhere that are already electoral democracies (post-coup Thailand notwithstanding as its military promised a return to democratic rule within 18 months), social media has deepened the majority-minority divide. Even in America, the supposed bastion of democratic rule, social media has effectively promoted bitter and entrenched polarization. Clamping down in these societies risks democratic reversals and reversions to authoritarianism. The key is to provide universal access to social media as much as possible by making internet connection affordable and to promote responsibility that should accompany greater freedom and empowerment. Electoral minorities in emerging democracies tend to hail

from the old establishment, resentful and opposed to changes by electorally powerful and popular upstarts and newcomers. These electoral minorities tend to flock to social media more than the winning majorities. It is a weapon of the weaker side, so to speak. Yet if minorities do not accept political legitimacy from poll results and continue to contest the election in cyberspace and in the streets, the country in question – whether Turkey or Thailand or elsewhere – is unlikely to find peace and stability.

On the other hand, the winning majorities and their elected government should not lose sight of minority concerns. To forge consensus and stable rule, winning governments with overwhelming majorities certainly have to deliver to their constituents but they will have to pay more attention to minority rights. The speed and spread of information technology and unprecedented popular participation mean that electoral minorities are unwilling to tolerate being ignored by government from majorities. A full electoral term of four or five years seems too long these days. And minorities now have more tools at their disposal to organize and mobilize to shorten and even stymie full government tenures. Electoral minorities can take the country hostage if they choose to and exercise veto power via endless street demonstrations. In this way, minorities have rights on the one hand but they can also perpetrate a kind of tyranny on the other. Electoral majorities, meanwhile, should not look at poll results as a blank check to do as they please for a whole electoral term. These new and more complex majority-minority dynamics and dilemmas are likely to define the prospects of democratization and political polarization worldwide and the ultimate longevity of democracy as a system of government. Recalibrating the majority-minority mix in policy terms is the main task at hand in key fledgling democratic countries such as Thailand.

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