

Still a Tale of Two Democracies?
How Different Perceptions of Democracy Undermine Consolidation in Thailand

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Abstract

Anek Laothamatas's tale of two democracies attributes the fragility of Thailand's democracy to the rift between the rural and urban sectors. Decades later, his diagnosis is still accurate yet the elements of democracy pursued by the rural sector have changed from a means of gaining immediate benefits to the demand of political rights, equality, and justice, argued by other. Using survey data, this paper analyzes ordinary people's conceptions of democracy and finds that there are indeed divisions between different social groups. However, conceptions also reflect political situations, as we see a surge of understanding democracy in terms of procedures and freedom after the 2014 coup. In other words, how people conceptualize the core element of democracy is highly subjected to the environment they live in and Thai people tend to associate democracy with the elements that are in short supply in their milieu.

Keywords: democracy, conception, social division, Thailand

As scholars increasingly worry about de-consolidation of democracy around the world (Diamond 2015, Mounk 2017, Howe 2017), few countries offer a better understanding of how democracy becomes distress than Thailand. Politics in Thailand is unpredictable. When thousands of Thais took to the street protesting against General Suchinda Kraprayoon's premiership in 1992, the protesters (with the King's intervention) successfully forced the soldiers back to the barracks. Since then, Thailand joined the third-wave democracies with some holding optimism (Paribatra 1993, Neher 1994, LoGerfo and King 1996, Quigley 1996). The promulgation of a people's constitution in 1997 and a newly elected strong government led by Thaksin Shinawatra in 2001, Thailand seemed to be on the path to democratic consolidation (Ockey 1997, Klein 1998, Bunbongkan 1999). Yet, only one year in the reign, Thaksin had triggered criticisms, from his authoritarian governing style (Montesano 2002, McCargo 2002, Pongsudhirak 2003) to his populist policies (Phongpaichit and Baker 2005). Large demonstrations demanding Thaksin to resign ensued when the media exposed corruption scandals involving Thaksin's family corporation. Prolonged street protests and political instability only ended after the military stepped in. Thaksin was ousted and his party dissolved, a new constitution was written and the military retreated, democracy was restored but only to find Thaksin, through his proxy, regained power via elections. Street protests then resumed and the anti-Thaksin, yellow-shirt movement was in direct conflict with the pro-Thaksin, red-shirt movement. The political turmoil destabilized and polarized the society that lend the military the justification to overthrow another Thaksin-proxy government in 2014. Within two decades, Thailand has been through two democratic breakdowns, triggering research that tried to explain why Thailand's democratization was so difficult if not impossible.

Researchers have used different approaches to address the question. The first camp focuses on elite struggle for power, usually depicting the monarchy-military alliance pitting against elected politicians. Tracing the political development since the end of the absolute monarchy in 1932, studies have suggested that the old political establishment was under threat of the new political elites holding electoral mandates. As new political elites attempted to replace the entrenched network centered on the monarchy, the clash between old and new elites over who had the rightful power to rule the country had led Thailand to living in the limbo between military rule and electoral democracy (McCargo 2005, Winichakul 2008, Hewison and Kitirianglarp 2010, Chambers 2010). However, elite conflict cannot fully explain Thailand's turmoil especially when considering the confrontation between two mass movements that apparently supported old and new elites respectively. One thing sets the 2006 and 2014 coups apart from the previous ones is the role of the urban middle class and the activism

of rural voters. While the urban middle class had played an important role in pushing the military out of politics in 1992, they were the supporters of military intervention in later years. To the contrary, the politically inertia rural voters suddenly became the bulwark of democracy. The second camp, thus, focuses on the masses' behavior and their views of democracies that divide the nation and the underlying socioeconomic structure that explains the division (Laothamatas 1996, Glassman 2010, Thabchumpon and Duncan 2011, Keyes 2012, Sangkhamanee 2013). Put together, Thailand has two conflicting legitimacy claims and both discourses have support among the masses whose preferences then can be explained by their socio-economic status within the society.

This article is in line with the second camp in that it attempts to explore the division among ordinary people in terms of understanding of democracy. As most research shows and argues, different social groups lend their support to different political actors due to their interpretations of what democracy should be. Since different social groups emphasize different aspects of democracy, there is value clash that leads to different electoral behavior and attitudes toward elected politicians and military intervention. In other words, the political turmoil is embedded in different worldviews of democracy. Yet, this reasoning is valid only when we show that there is indeed division in understanding of democracy. The existing research provides many insightful observations and case studies and this article adds on that contribution by offering an overall picture of the division and its causes.

Analyzing questions asking ordinary people's understanding of democracy in 2001, 2006, 2011, and 2014 through national surveys, this article finds that the division is along understanding democracy as equality on the one hand and governance on the other. Income, education, and regional differences then explain why people hold different conceptions of democracy. These factors represent the unequal structure of the country and people tend to associate democracy with the element missing in their surroundings. Yet, such division is not without crosscutting; people highlight one aspect but do not reject the other embraced by another group. Moreover, when military intervention occurred in 2014, there was a surge of understanding democracy in terms of procedure and freedom. The findings indicate that the two democracies are shaped by the country's unequal structure but most Thais see democracy as procedure and freedom in times of military takeover, implying that there is strong support for liberal democracy. Thus, people should look at their common ground instead of splitting themselves to let authoritarianism use the schism to hold back the country.

Debates of “A Tale of Two Democracies” Thesis

When writing about electoral practices in Thailand, Anek Laothamatas (1996) distinguishes middle class in Bangkok from poor rural voters residing in *tang changwa* (province) regarding their conceptions of democracy and voting behavior. While the urban middle class tended to cast ballots based on political principle, policy issues or national interests, the rural voters were concerned with constituency services, relieving grievances or tangible benefits such as public works to the communities (Anek 1996, 202). Due to the different criteria of judging competent candidates, urban and rural voters then tended to elect different types of politicians into the parliament. The representatives of the rural constituencies, in the eyes of urban voters, were “parochial in outlook, boorish in manner, and too uneducated to be competent lawmakers or cabinet members” (Anek 1996, 208). Likewise, the representatives of the urban voters were regarded too alien in both physical and cultural sense to rural voters despite being educated and skilled policy experts. Rural and urban voters seem to live in different universes and their preferences came into conflict when one side’s representatives were elected to rule the country.

The “tale of two democracies” thesis provides a simplistic but lucid explanation of crisis in Thailand, especially after the 2006 coup.¹ At the mass level, there are different conceptions of democracy, with the urban voters emphasizing governance, such as free of corruption and clean politics, and the rural voters highlighting the delivery of tangible benefits. Yet due to numerical dominance of the rural voters, the latter’s preferred view of democracy always prevails and the kind of politicians loathed by the urban voters always gain electoral mandate. The urban middle class is forced to live under a corrupt government that diverts state resources to rural constituencies to consolidate electoral support. Such regime is not democratic in their eyes but equals to majority tyranny and they have no qualm to bring down such regime. The reaction of people in Bangkok after the coup showed their gratitude to soldiers and the common defense of the coup was that “the coup was a necessary step backward in order to go forward to genuine democracy” (Thongchai 2008, 11).

The clash of understanding democracy in different terms between the urban middle class and rural voters is clearly illustrated by several researchers who obtained the first-hand information through interviews and observations on the sites of mass movements.

¹ Anek published a Thai version of the article in 2009 and another report following the same argument based on a survey of informants in 2010. Both generated extensive public discussion in Thailand. See Jakkrit (2013, 13) and Naruemon and McCargo (2011, 1007)

However, they also clarified the simplistic delineation between the urban middle class and poor rural voters that construct the “two democracies. The confrontation between the red-shirt and yellow-shirt movements fits the “two democracies” thesis nicely as the red shirts were usually portrayed by the media as rural and urban poor and the yellow shirts claimed themselves as the middle class (Aim and Kuhonta 2012, 397, 403). Following the logic of “two democracies” thesis, the red shirts were thought to be bought in to the protests sites, just as they sold votes for immediate benefits, while the yellow shirts spontaneously joined demonstrations for higher political causes. Such biased views were commonly held by Bangkok’s middle class. Yet, closer inspections showed that both camps comprised of heterogeneous groups and the red shirts were not really “poor” (Thabchumpon and Duncan 2011, Aim and Kuhonta 2012, Keyes 2012, Lintner 2009). Unlike the urban myth that usually portrays voters in rural areas as poor and ignorant who engage in patron-client relations and sell votes, the red shirts identify themselves as *prai* (slave or serf) that comprises of farmers, the lower middle class, low ranking government officers, secondary and middle school graduates, small traders or those having occupations in informal economy (Thabchumpon and Duncan 2011, 1006). Some also call these rural voters or farmers as “cosmopolitan” villagers since many of these people and their relatives have gone abroad working and engaged in the global system of labor, they are no longer traditional rice farmers (Keyes 2012, 344).

These studies show that the red shirts are not people at the bottom of the class stratum but rather occupy the lower echelon of the middle class. Most of them have well to do life and do not need to worry about survival issues. The main financial worry comes from unstable income sources (Thabchumpon and Duncan 2011, 1008). Both yellow and red shirts are middle class but only occupy on the different levels of that stratum; the yellow shirts come from the lower/middle echelon of the middle class and the red shirts the lowest echelon (Thabchumpon and Duncan 2011, 1008). This distinction might seem trivial but it offers evidence against the urban myth. First, the financial standing of the red shirts is only relatively less well than the majority of the yellow shirts, thus the motivation to “sell votes” is unlikely just short-sighted interests as the urban middle class believes. Second, since both sides’ social status is close, the political causes they pursue might be similar as well. However, since both sides tried to use class contradiction to justify their demands, such class division was somewhat exaggerated for political gains (Forsyth 2010).

Given the fact that the red shirts are part of the middle class, researchers then explored the motivation of the red shirts to challenge the status quo. As Anek explained in this “two democracies” thesis, the poor rural voters did not care about policies and would

not hesitate to sell their votes to support their patrons. Field research, however, shows that rural residents have different explanations about their voting behavior and they do judge parties according to their policy positions, among other concerns. Rural voters do receive money from candidates and parties, but money has become a symbol to “represent an awareness of the rural votes and voters’ existence as well as the recognition of their political agency” (Sangkhamanee 2013, 30). Moreover, rural voters still prefer candidates who visit constituencies often and participate in religious ceremony and tend to local concerns (Sangkhamanee 2013, 28). Such behavior is not far from the image of the middle class perceives of the rural voters, but “vote buying” and “support for patrons” have little to do with material benefits but cultivating bond and reciprocity. Focusing on local concerns instead of national policy is also a rational response to a political system that usually ignores the rural needs.

Thailand’s political system was highly centralized with Bangkok as the center of the Kingdom. The administrative reform in the 19th century solidified the power into the hands of the military, police and civilian officials to form “bureaucratic polity” (Praditsil and Khruenuan 2016, 122). Yet since the 1970s, capitalism had gradually developed in other provinces and decentralization was implemented under an established parliament, power was slightly redistributed away from the center (Praditsil and Khruenuan 2016, 120). However, the center-periphery division remained and such division was amplified by the extreme inequality among its populace. As the country’s wealth concentrated in the hands of a few residing in Bangkok, the wealthy few also holds resources to power and all kinds of privileges. They are called “oligarch” since these people are able to use material wealth to wield political power to cumulate more wealth and sustain a hierarchical society (Phogpaichit and Baker 2016, Rhoden 2015). For the masses, income inequality has been part of the life but unequal access to power and quality of public services have increasingly been intolerable by the enlightened masses. While rural voters before were passive subjects who relied on their local representatives to bring back public works to improve their living circumstances, the same voters now realize that the negligence from the center is the roots of rural backwardness and being able to elect someone who cares for their needs gives them power to change their inferior status. Demands for pride, freedom, equality and justice are the common themes raised by the red shirts (Phogpaichit and Baker 2016, 18).

The “two democracies” thesis then has several defying arguments. In terms of class structure, the rural voters who actively engaged in the red-shirt movements were not really poor and their social status were only slightly lower than the averaged yellow shirts. If social status determines one’s own interests and preferences, the interests of

both sides should not differ much. Moreover, the conventional view or urban myth regards rural voters as ignorant who sell out their votes for material benefits; new interpretation of the behavior argues that “vote buying” is part of cultural norm that reinforces reciprocity and the recognition of political agents. Yet, more importantly, such behavior might be a rational response to a political environment where power and decision-making are in the hands of public position holders and voters are only passive receivers. Realizing that rural voters’ inferior status is rooted in the unequal system that gives privileges to those wealthy, the passive voters begin to demand equality and justice. Thus, there are different conceptions of democracy—the red shirts want freedom, equality, and justice and the yellow shirts want stability and good governance.

This paper argues that the “two democracies” thesis still holds to depict the diverging conceptions of what democracy is in different social groups but that division is not severe at the mass level. The rural-urban division is also too simplistic to understand the difference. As most studies suggest, preferences of social groups are tied to individuals’ financial standings and the regions they live, such arguments have never been tested on the population. Moreover, research focuses on voting behavior across regions usually show different voting patterns (McCargo, Alexander and Desatova 2017), yet voting patterns somewhat disguise the common ground voters hold across regions. In what follows, this paper tries to tease out the determinants of different conceptions of democracy of ordinary Thais. But before that, let us explain what democracy is and how we measure it.

Different Meanings of Democracy

When asking people what democracy means to them, it is not surprising that the answers can range from a generic answer (for the people, by the people, of the people), procedures (elections and freedom) to good economy and efficient government (substantive results). These varied answers, though not usually conform to the scholarly definitions of democracy, are actually not far from it. In scholarly work, democracy is usually defined by the “procedural minimal” conditions proposed by Robert Dahl. Dahl (1982, 11) lists seven conditions that can be further divided into two categories; procedure that contains regular elections and control over government decisions, and participation in that citizens are given political and civil rights to contest in elections.

These minimal conditions, however, are not sufficient to differentiate democracies when more countries joined the club during the third-wave of democratization. Scholars then were concerned with the quality of democracy than regime breakdown. In this milieu, Diamond and Morlino (2005) propose three dimensions measuring the quality

of democracy—procedural, freedom and equality, and responsiveness. Each dimension contains several sub-dimensions, such as the rule of law, participation, competition and accountability under procedural dimension. Respect for civil and political freedoms and the implementation of political, social and economic equality are under the second dimension. The responsiveness dimension then measures whether policies correspond to citizen preferences (Diamond and Morlino 2005, xii). These scholarly definitions show that democracy is a multidimensional concept. At the mass level, we also expect that citizens' understanding of democracy reflect this multidimensionality.

When Asian Barometer Survey (ABS)² conducted its surveys in Thailand in 2001 and 2006, it had three open-ended questions asking respondents “to you, what does democracy mean?” After two rounds of survey, the analysis showed that most answers can be divided into two categories: intrinsic understanding of democracy (i.e. procedures and freedom) and substance-based understanding (i.e. economic equality and governance). Thus, in the surveys conducted in 2010 and 2014, the questions had been changed to ask respondents what they think the characteristics of democracy is. Four questions were asked and within each question, four options were offered to represent procedure, freedom, (economic) equality, and governance. These dimensions had proved to have validity (Lu 2012). It was theorized that respondents who emphasized certain dimension of democracy would consistently choose the same dimension over the four questions. However, in reality, ordinary people do not necessarily have this logical consistency; they might choose other dimensions to reflect the multidimensionality of democracy or simple choose the most preferred option question by question. Nevertheless, the design of the questions attempts to measure understanding of democracy that is compatible with the scholarly definition.

Table 1 lists the question wordings of the survey items and its corresponding dimension proposed by Diamond and Morlino. Among the questions designed to tap the governance dimension, its corresponding aspect in Diamond and Morlino's definition should be responsiveness. Responsiveness, however, is whether policies reflect citizen preferences, which is different from governance here. Although citizens prefer clean politics, law and order, and quality public services, these items are not what democracy is (Schmitter and Karl 1991). However, the dimension of governance is especially pertinent here as the purpose of this article is to investigate whether rural voters have the tendency to understand democracy as equality and urban voters as governance. If

² Asian Barometer Survey is a cross-national survey covering 14 countries in East and Southeast Asia. See <http://www.asianbarometer.org/>

this is the case, there are still “two democracies” in Thailand that act as the driver to the political conflicts in the country. Thus, in the paper, we use procedure, freedom, equality, and governance as the four dimensions of democracy.

Table 1: Dimension of Democracy and Measurement Items

Dimension	Question Wording
Procedure	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. People choose the government leaders in free and fair elections. 2. The legislature has oversight over the government. 3. Multiple parties compete fairly in the election. 4. The court protects the ordinary people from the abuse of government power.
Freedom	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. People are free to express their political views openly. 2. People are free to organize political groups. 3. Media is free to criticize the things government does. 4. People have the freedom to take part in protests and demonstrations.
Equality	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Government narrows the gap between the rich and the poor. 2. Basic necessities, like food, clothes and shelter, are provided for all. 3. Government ensures job opportunities for all. 4. People receive state aid if they are unemployed.
Governance	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Government does not waste any public money. 2. Government provides people with quality public services. 3. Government ensures law and order. 4. Politics is clean and free of corruption.

Source: ABS IV, author prepared.

Two Democracies and Their Sources

To investigate ordinary people’s understanding of democracy, this article relies on the Asian Barometer Survey (ABS) that conducted nation-wide representative sampling surveys in 2001, 2006, 2010, and 2014. The 2001 survey was conducted between October and November, ten months after Thaksin’s Thai Rak Thai Party won the general elections. The 2006 survey was carried out between April and September after the snap elections and before the military coup. The 2010 survey was then conducted between August and December, after the months-long protests of red shirts movement. The 2014 survey was carried out between August and October after the military’s takeover in May. Except the 2001 survey, the political environments were unstable in

the other three surveys and we shall expect that respondents would be cautious when participating in surveys like the ABS that mainly focuses on political attitudes and behavior. We also expect that certain answers might have dramatic changes due to the political environment at the time of survey.

As mentioned earlier, the ABS asked respondents to provide the meaning of democracy in open-ended questions in the 2001 and 2006 surveys but used closed-ended questions in the 2010 and 2014 surveys. Due to the change in question format, it requires different methods to probe which dimension of democracy is emphasized by most Thais and whether there is variation across different social groups. In surveys, respondents generally show difficulty providing an answer to an open-ended question and thus, even though the surveys asked respondents to offer three answers, in the 2001 survey, only 75% of respondents gave the first answer, 26% gave the second, and merely 9% gave the third. In the 2006 survey, 60% gave the first answer, 16% offered the second, and 3% gave the third. For closed-ended questions, less than 15% of respondents gave no answer across the four questions in the 2010 and 2014 surveys. Thus, we only analyze the first answer for the 2001 and 2006 surveys and the full four answers for the latest two surveys.

The analysis below contains two parts. The first part investigates whether conceptions of democracy differ between social groups—rural versus urban, income and region. The second part then investigates the individual-level variation and see whether individuals belonging to different social groups have different conceptions even when other variables are controlled for.

Group-level analysis

We first probe the 2001 and 2006 surveys. The coding of the open-ended questions went through two stages. The first stage grouped similar answers into different categories, such as government for the people, freedom of association, etc. The second stage then recoded those categories into four dimensions: procedure, freedom, equality, and governance. For instance, government for the people is coded as procedure and freedom of association as freedom. Since a significant number of respondents could not define democracy, it is necessary to know those respondents' socio-economic characteristics as well. Therefore, we also include "no answer" as one choice.

Figure 1 compares the conceptions of democracy broken down by rural-urban, income, and regional divisions. For rural-urban division, both rural and urban respondents identified freedom as the foremost dimension of democracy in 2001. In 2006, however,

Figure 1: Conceptions of Democracy by Rural-Urban, Income, and Regional Divisions in 2001 and 2006



Source: ABS IV, author prepared.

both groups declined to answer this question, with up to 40% of rural respondents did not give an answer. In terms of group differences, more rural respondents mentioned governance, procedure, and freedom as the meaning of democracy than urban respondents in 2001, while urban respondents tended to understand democracy as equality or give no answer. By contrast, both groups were equally likely to define democracy as procedure in 2006 although urban respondents were more likely to mention governance, equality, and freedom as democracy than rural respondents. Thus, Anek’s “two democracies” thesis still holds, but urban respondents only came to define democracy as governance more than rural respondents in 2006 and the difference was trivial. Moreover, urban respondents were more likely to mention political, social, and economic equality as democracy, which was against some fieldwork observations that argued that the rural voters cared for equality. However, the 2006 survey was done before the military coup and the mobilization of the red shirts. Thus, the results, one can argue, could not reflect the impacts of these events.

Regarding income division, the pattern is similar to the rural-urban division but we get more information about the relationship between financial standings and conceptions of democracy. Income quintile was measured by the respondents' monthly household income and divided the income into five categories, with the fifth quintile has the highest household income. Compared with other income quintiles in 2001, the lowest quintile had more respondents define democracy as governance, the second quintile as procedure, the third and fourth as equality, and the fifth freedom. In 2006, it was the fourth quintile emphasized governance and freedom more than other groups, and the first, third, and fifth emphasized equality. Thus, compared to the simple rural-urban division, the cleavages between different income groups reflect fieldwork observations to some extent but not all. For regional division, it is the combination of rural-urban and income divisions. Respondents in North and Northeast tended to highlight governance and procedure in 2001. Bangkok respondents, however, were more likely to define democracy as governance than other groups in 2006 but also procedure and freedom. Southern respondents emphasized equality more than other groups in 2001 but procedure and freedom in 2006.

In the 2010 and 2014 surveys, Thais had been through two military coups and fierce street demonstrations by the colored-shirt movements, how these political events affect people's conceptions of democracy? Since these two surveys changed the question format, we instead measure conceptions by taking the percentages of choosing each dimension across the four questions in each group. That is, we calculate the frequency a dimension is chosen across the four questions and then divide it by four times of the number of a group. We then get the percentage of a dimension chosen by each group. Our purpose here is to compare whether each group as a whole is more likely to highlight a certain dimension than other.

Figure 2 illustrates the results. The rural-urban division is not severe although urban respondents were more likely to highlight governance in 2014. The division between income groups is more revealing as we see an upward trend in governance and a downtrend trend in equality in both years. The results indicate that there is indeed confrontation between different interpretations of what democracy should be. That is, between governance and equality and financial status is the driver for the diverging conceptions. Finally, for the regional division, equality was emphasized by the Northeastern and Bangkok respondents in 2010 but in 2014, Bangkok respondents were less likely to choose equality. Instead, they tended to choose governance in 2014. However, a significant number of respondents in Northeast also identified governance as democracy in 2014.

Figure 2: Conceptions of Democracy by Rural-Urban, Income, and Regional Divisions in 2010 and 2014



Source: ABS IV, author prepared.

These results indicate that respondents' conceptions are affected by several factors. The first is their financial status, the second is the region they live in, and the third is the political environment at the time of survey. However, these analyses do not take other factors into account, including an individual's education level, age, and political interests that might also affect the results. To tease out that income, region, and political events are the important determinants of conceptions, the next part deals with individual-level analysis.

Individual-level analysis

In the section, the dependent variable is the choice of different dimension of democracy of each individual. However, unlike the previous section that looks at the variation of five options: procedure, freedom, equality, governance, and no answer, the options are reduced to four here. Procedure and freedom are combined as one category to lessen the burden of statistical analysis. Since procedure and freedom belong to the minimal conditions of democracy, this combination is reasonable. Yet, we still separate equality and governance since the two dimensions represent the core of the "two democracies" thesis and we would like to know whether individuals belonging to certain social groups

tend to emphasize one dimension over the other.

Since the dependent variable is a categorical variable, the common practice is to use multinomial logit model to analyze the data. This paper, however, uses conditional logit model for analysis. Because we use four questions to measure understanding of democracy in the 2010 and 2014 surveys, it is difficult to pin down the only choice that represents the “ideal” dimension that a respondent prefers. For most cases, respondents chose different combinations of dimensions across the four questions and very few chose the same dimension four times. Thus, to estimate the ideal point of conceptions, we have to rely on other techniques, such as item response theory or cluster analysis. However, item response theory still requires us to decide the cutting points to assign each respondent an arbitrary choice. Cluster analysis would give each respondent a choice but it is still an estimate, which is subject to estimating errors. Conditional logit model uses the original responses to estimate the probability a respondent would chose a certain dimension, thus we do not need to rely on any estimation to get the only choice that the multinomial logit model requires. Although the appropriate data to apply conditional logit model is data that record the characteristics of choices not individual (Hoffman and Duncan 1988, 416), the model can analyze a mixed model that also contains individual characteristics. Every choice is treated as the utility to an individual and we mainly take the advantage of the flexibility of the model to analyze multiple polychotomous choice situations.

Our concerned explanatory variables are socio-economic characteristics of respondents, including the residential area (rural or urban), financial standing (quintile of household income), and region. Different waves of survey represent the political environment of the time and thus are important factors as well. Education is another important factor since it is likely to correlate with income. For control variables, people who are interested in politics and follow political news regularly are more likely to give an answer. We also include gender and age as standard controls. Our hypothesis is that people’s understanding of democracy is affected by their socio-economic characteristics, with the rural poor voters who live further away from Bangkok are more likely to conceptualize democracy as equality and the urban middle-class voters who live closer to Bangkok more likely to perceive democracy as governance. Understanding of democracy is also affected by the political situation of the time.

Table 2 reports the results. The pooled model (columns 1 to 4) present the determinants of different conceptions across the four waves of surveys. In terms of residential area, urban voters were less likely to define democracy as procedure and freedom and more

Table 2: The determinants of conceptions of democracy

	Pooled				2001 and 2006				2010 and 2014			
	Procedure and Freedom	Equality	Governance	No answer	Procedure and Freedom	Equality	Governance	No answer	Procedure and Freedom	Equality	Governance	No answer
Urban	-.145*	.389***	.076	.259*	-.229*	.693***	-.107	.372*	-.154*	.328**	.095	.366**
	(.057)	(.087)	(.090)	(.102)	(.095)	(.171)	(.497)	(.160)	(.073)	(.105)	(.101)	(.141)
Income	.039*	-.084***	-.011	-.094**	.058*	-.137*	.042	-.133**	.031	-.081**	-.003	-.042
	(.015)	(.024)	(.024)	(.032)	(.028)	(.059)	(.117)	(.049)	(.019)	(.028)	(.027)	(.042)
Education	.011	-.021	.021	-.105***	.023	.012	-.096	-.098***	.006	-.024	.028*	-.109***
	(.007)	(.012)	(.012)	(.016)	(.014)	(.029)	(.066)	(.026)	(.009)	(.014)	(.013)	(.022)
North	-.174*	.141	-.020	1.005***	-.010	.067	-.861	-.035	-.328**	.188	.160	2.384***
	(.081)	(.126)	(.131)	(.155)	(.129)	(.251)	(.608)	(.218)	(.107)	(.154)	(.151)	(.246)
Northeast	-.136	.430***	.125	.0107	-.163	.403	-.025	.236	-.168	.381**	.164	.001
	(.077)	(.117)	(.123)	(.158)	(.130)	(.245)	(.587)	(.220)	(.099)	(.141)	(.138)	(.262)
Central	-.201**	.212*	.264*	.772***	-.0132	.355	-.1192*	.243	-.280**	.189	.383**	1.730***
	(.070)	(.106)	(.109)	(.141)	(.119)	(.224)	(.600)	(.202)	(.088)	(.127)	(.123)	(.222)
South	.026	-.019	-.169	0.267	-.030	.468	-.813	-.183	.014	-.115	-.134	1.779***
	(.076)	(.115)	(.121)	(.157)	(.135)	(.257)	(.648)	(.235)	(.088)	(.134)	(.134)	(.236)
2006	-.237***	-.007	.216	.838***	-.255***	-.042	.379	.831***	--	--	--	--
	(.055)	(.111)	(.217)	(.090)	(.057)	(.117)	(.235)	(.095)	--	--	--	--
2010	.710***	1.336***	2.876***	-.484***	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--
	(.045)	(.081)	(.154)	(.090)	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--
2014	.918***	.796***	2.721***	-.400***	--	--	--	--	.218***	-.551***	-.171**	.028
	(.046)	(.084)	(.155)	(.089)	--	--	--	--	(.038)	(.055)	(.054)	(.083)
Political interest	.095***	-.100**	-.101*	-.269***	.080	-.034	.232	-.250***	.104**	-.109*	-.122**	-.354***
	(.025)	(.038)	(.039)	(.046)	(.043)	(.088)	(.188)	(.069)	(.031)	(.044)	(.044)	(.064)
News consumption	.074***	-.096***	-.054*	-.230***	.061*	.094	.007	-.200***	.074***	-.122***	-.054	-.222***
	(.018)	(.026)	(.027)	(.031)	(.031)	(.064)	(.138)	(.047)	(.022)	(.030)	(.030)	(.042)
Male	.082**	-.197***	-.069	-.070	-.001	.081	.155	-.037	.119**	-.265***	-.111*	-.001
	(.030)	(.046)	(.047)	(.059)	(.054)	(.110)	(.224)	(.089)	(.037)	(.053)	(.052)	(.082)
Age	-.046**	-.073	.119	.125	-.242**	.098	.459	.586***	.082	-.194*	-.016	-.256
	(.052)	(.080)	(.083)	(.099)	(.084)	(.173)	(.364)	(.142)	(.067)	(.095)	(.094)	(.143)
Null deviance			24790				6287				11290	
Residual deviance			16650				5952				10280	
Number of obs.			12434				2816				9618	

Note: Standard errors are in parentheses. Significant level, * <.05, ** <.01, *** <.001.

likely to conceptualize democracy as equality or give no answer. These results are against the “two democracies” thesis. However, another component in the thesis is the financial standing of voters in rural and urban areas and the results show that well-to-do respondents were more likely to define democracy as procedure and freedom but less likely as equality. Education, however, did not have any effect. Regarding regional division, compared to Bangkok respondents, people in the Northeast were more likely to define democracy as equality. Yet respondents in Central region were also likely to mention equality as well as governance. By contrast, Bangkok respondents were more likely to mention procedure and freedom as the meaning of democracy, although Northeastern and Southern respondents were equally likely to mention procedure and freedom as well. In terms of political context, there were more respondents giving no answer in 2006. Respondents were also less likely to mention procedure and freedom compared to the 2001 survey. For the 2010 and 2014 surveys, there were decreasing numbers of no answers. However, this result is mostly due to the change of question format; it is easier for people to choose an option in close-ended questions than to offer an answer in an open-ended question.

To exclude the effect of format change, we separate the sample into two subsamples, one is the 2001 and 2006 surveys and the other the 2010 and 2014 surveys. For columns 5 to 8 (2001 and 2006), the results are generally similar to the pooled model. The foremost difference is that there is no clear regional divisions over conceptions. Only central respondents were less likely to mention governance as democracy compared to Bangkok respondents. For political context, compared to the 2001 survey, respondents of the 2006 survey were less likely to mention procedure and freedom as democracy but there was a significant increase in offering no answer. The 2006 survey was conducted after the snap elections, yet political deadlock did not soothed but instead escalated. The democratic system was facing a crisis. With the opposition parties boycotting the elections, frequent street protests, and the judicial branch's annulment of the validity of the snap elections, people were confused with what democracy was in the country. The high number of no answer probably reflects this confusion.

For the 2010 and 2014 surveys (columns 9 to 12), the difference lies on education; higher education led to a higher probability of choosing governance. Respondents in the central region were also more likely to choose governance as democracy than Bangkok respondents. For political context, compared to the 2010 survey, respondents in 2014 were less likely to choose equality and governance as the meaning of democracy. The likelihood of choosing procedure and freedom instead surged. The 2014 survey was carried out after the coup and as the country fell into military rule, there was a cry for the minimal requirement of democracy. The result is a quiet protest against military intervention.

Other interesting findings include that people who were interested in politics or followed political news frequently were more likely to define democracy as procedure and freedom. Since these people had the intention or chance to come across the standard definition of democracy commonly used in political discourses or news outlets, the result reflects the level of political sophistication of these people. Male respondents were also more likely to define democracy as procedure and freedom but less likely to choose equality or governance than female respondents. The results indicate that males and females might care for different things in a political system, with males more likely to emphasize rule of the game and females highlight tangible problems. Age also matters. Older respondents were more likely to offer no answer and if they did, they were less likely to define democracy as procedure and freedom or equality. The older generations have lived under military rule and semi-democratic systems; the concept of liberal democracy was relatively new to them. When being asked to offer a definition, procedure and freedom was less likely to come to their minds due to political

experiences. On the other hand, the younger generation was more likely to choose equality than older respondents were in 2010 and 2014. Given the political context of the time when the red shirts highlighted the unequal distribution of resources and power in the Thai political system, such message is more likely to resonant among the young due to the youth's tendency to lean toward to the leftist ideology (Binstock and Quadagno 2001).

Discussion and Concluding Remarks

Taken the findings together, are there still two democracies in Thailand? Do rural voters understand democracy differently from their urban counterparts? The findings indicate that there are still two democracies in Thailand but the conceptions of democracy and the underlying divisions are not the ones speculated by Anek's thesis. First, rural and urban voters are equally likely to define democracy as governance. The result is reasonable, as citizens, no matter where they live, would expect the state to deliver policies and stay uncorrupt. Thus, when people in Bangkok protested against the corrupted Thaksin government and defied the regime as a democracy, people in rural area would agree with the argument in principle. Yet whether they thought Thaksin was corrupt is another matter. Actually, urban voters were more likely to see democracy as equality than their rural counterparts. This result is due to dramatic wealth gaps presented in urban areas. Nowhere in Thailand reflects the country's unequal problem than Bangkok and cities. Urban voters were also less likely to see democracy as procedure and freedom than rural voters, which could explain why urban voters welcomed military coups. Thus, the findings suggest that Anek's understanding of different conceptions of democracy between rural and urban voters does not reflect the conceptions at the mass level.

Then, what about income division? Scholars point out that inequality is the real underlying factor that shapes the cosmos of the two democracies. The findings show that well-to-do respondents were less likely to see democracy as equality than poor respondents. Yet, richer respondents did not see democracy as governance either. The result somewhat is against the findings presented at the group level. However, the group-level analysis does not control for other cofounding factors, such as education, which is closely related to income. When taking education into account, it is clear that the finding that people with high household income tended to define democracy as governance was mainly due to educational effect. Yet the effect of education is only significant in 2010 and 2014. The result indicates that educated Thais are less tolerant of corruption and thus they should resonate with the discourse of the yellow-shirt movement. A study that compares the educational level of red shirts and yellow shirts

and the supporters of Yingluck and Suthep on Facebook show that the average educational levels of yellow shirts and Suthep supporters is higher than that of red shirts and Yingluck supporters (Aim 2017, 268). Thus, Anek's middle class is likely referring to those receiving education above the high school level. In this regard, education does not necessarily lead a person to support liberal democracy as human development theory speculates (Inglehart and Welzel 2005).

The reason that Thai middle class holds ambivalent attitude toward democracy is probably due to high inequality. On one hand, the middle class has the propensity to demand democracy in order to curb the power of government intruding personal properties and freedom. On the other hand, the middle class is afraid of mobocracy in which policies are driven by the greed and desire of the lower class. Policy decisions made by the poor and their representatives are usually neither wise nor sound since they do not have the ability to make right decisions. Such ancient Greek views about democracy is well received by the Thai middle class. Thus, middle class is never enthusiastic democrats and only stands against the government to defend their own interests (Chai-Anan 1998, 156-58). That said, when the middle class' interests are under threat, they would oppose any regime, be it authoritarian or democratic.

Besides income division, another related division driven by inequality is region. The Northeast region stands out since people there were more likely to mention equality as democracy than Bangkok and other regions, especially in 2010 and 2014. Yet note that they were also equally likely to mention governance as democracy. People in the North did not tend to see democracy as equality even though voters there were thought as strong Thaksin supporters. Actually, the North is divided with the lower and western part the supporters of anti-Thaksin force and the northern part pro Thaksin (McCargo, Alexander and Desatova 2017, 82). In other words, views of northern voters are more diverse than northeastern voters, which calls into question to put the two regions together as pro-Thaksin region. People in the southern region had almost similar views as people in Bangkok if only they tended to give no answer. The central region had fewer people defining democracy as procedure and freedom and more as governance than people in Bangkok. Overall, people in Bangkok did not particularly emphasize certain aspect of democracy since it has residents coming from different regions. The group-level analysis shows that people in Bangkok tended to see democracy as governance but that result is actually due to educational effect.

Finally, does political context affects conceptions? It surely is. In 2001 the masses were optimistic about the country's future as Thailand just successfully elected a leader under

the most liberal constitution. Thus, liberal democracy with the definition of procedure and freedom was the most commonly mentioned characteristics of democracy. That assertion changed in 2006 when anti-Thaksin forces denounced the suitability of democracy to the country. As democracy was re-defined under the idea of Thai-style democracy, people were uncertain about what democracy meant and that led to an increase in no answer. After the military coup and the resume of democracy, democracy was understood as procedures and freedom but also equality and governance. These reflect the discourses of the colored-shirt movements and the confrontation of different interpretations of democracy. Yet, despite the confrontation, when under the military rule, more people came to see democracy as procedure and freedom, a silent protest to the political situation in 2014.

As democracy is facing crises in both developed and developing countries, what lessons can we learn from Thailand? Thailand's two democracies are the reflection of its unequal society with the disadvantaged citizens (lower income and northeasterners) see democracy as equality and the advantaged (high education) see it as governance. However, the two worlds are not totally separated and some overlaps do exist; the disadvantaged did not reject governance and the advantaged did not ignore equality. People just highlight the aspect of democracy that is in short supply in their own cosmos. Moreover, when democracy, no matter how imperfect it is and how dissatisfied citizens are, is gone, people would come back to cherish its arrangement and promise of civil rights. Cleavages are part of political life and they should be solved using the procedures built in democracy. Because, as Thailand shows, alternatives are not necessarily better than the democratic system they replaced.

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