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Understanding 'Source' and 'Purpose' in Processes of Democratic Change: Insights from the Philippines and Thailand

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Abstract

Previous decades' celebrations of the triumph of democracy were frequently based on mainstream analyses that displayed two major theoretical problems. First, conceptualisations of democracy based on 'minimal pre-conditions' commonly conflated the formal establishment of democratic structures *with the far more complex and historically challenging creation of* substantive democracy. *Second, a deductive and generally ahistorical model asserting fixed stages of 'democratic transition' diverted attention from deeper and more substantive examination of* struggles for power among social forces within specific historical contexts. *By adhering to minimalist conceptions of democracy and simplistic models of democratic change, mainstream analysts quite often chose to overlook many underlying limitations and shortcomings of the democratic structures they were so keen to celebrate. Given more recent concerns over 'authoritarian undertow', those with the normative goal of deepening democracy must begin by deepening scholarly conceptualisations of the complex nature of democratic change. This analysis urges attention to the 'source' and 'purpose' of democracy. What were the goals of those who established democratic structures, and to what extent did these goals correspond to the ideals of democracy? In many cases throughout the world, 'democracy' has been used as a convenient and very effective means for both cloaking and legitimising a broad set of political, social, and economic inequalities. The need for deeper analysis is highlighted through attention to the historical character of democratic structures in the Philippines and Thailand, with particular attention to the sources and purposes of 'democracy' amid on-going struggles for power among social forces. In both countries, albeit coming forth from very different historical circumstances, democratic structures have been continually undermined by those with little commitment to the democratic ideal: oligarchic dominance in the Philippines, and military/bureaucratic/monarchic dominance in Thailand. Each country possesses its own set of challenges and opportunities for genuine democratic change, as those who seek to undermine elite hegemony and promote popular accountability operate in very different socio-economic and institutional contexts. Efforts to promote substantive democracy in each setting, therefore, must begin with careful historical analysis of the particular challenges that need to be addressed.*

KEYWORDS: democratisation, democratic recession, democratic quality, elite hegemony, popular accountability, power

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Introduction

Long gone are the days in which democratic transitions seemed to be engulfing the globe, overturning authoritarian regimes once and for all. In the latter quarter of the twentieth century, a convergence of trends in many regions of the world led to what Samuel Huntington dubbed "the third wave of democratization" (1991: 21–26). This trend led one analyst to declare, famously, "the end of history as such…and the universalization of Western liberal democracy as the final form of human government" (Fukuyama 1989: 1). By the first decade of the new century, however, prominent democracy scholar Larry Diamond was warning of "a powerful authoritarian undertow" through which "the world has slipped into a democratic recession" (Diamond 2008a: 36, 42). There were more than fifty states that he placed in the category of "at-risk democracies", including four out of eight democracies in Asia. In this rapidly changed environment, he concluded, "celebrations of democracy's triumph are premature" (Diamond 2008a: 36).[1] The most recent wave of democratic fervour, the 'Arab Spring' that has broken forth since 2011, demonstrates once again the fraught nature of regime transition.

While there is no longer much controversy in moving beyond outmoded notions of a relatively untroubled path to global democratisation (following Diamond and others, including Carothers 2002), there remains value in carefully interrogating the sanguine forecasts of yester-year. Earlier celebrations of democracy's triumph, I argue, were frequently based on mainstream analyses that displayed two major theoretical problems. First, conceptualisations of democracy based on 'minimal pre-conditions' commonly conflated the formal establishment of *democratic structures* with the far more complex and historically challenging creation of *substantive democracy*. Many analysts have seemingly moved beyond the previous tendency to treat democracy as a dichotomous rather than a continuous variable – a tendency which privileged form over quality. Nonetheless, the use of the term 'at-risk democracy' suggests a throwback to an old and now largely discredited minimalist definition, with the misleading connotation that what were formerly well-functioning democracies have now gone bad. Second, a deductive and generally ahistorical model asserting fixed stages of 'democratic transition' diverted attention from deeper and more substantive examination of *struggles for power among social forces within specific historical contexts*.

To return to the terms that were used (and discarded) by Huntington, it is necessary to interrogate the 'source' and 'purpose' of democracy. What were the goals of those who established democratic structures, and to what extent did these goals correspond to the ideals of democracy? In many cases throughout

[1]A fuller exposition of his argument can be found in Diamond (2008b), which also informs the analysis of this paper.

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the world, 'democracy' has been used as a convenient and very effective means for both cloaking and legitimising a broad set of political, social, and economic inequalities. By adhering to minimalist conceptions of democracy and simplistic models of democratic change, I will argue, mainstream analysts quite often chose not to examine many underlying limitations and shortcomings of the democratic structures they were so keen to celebrate. At a time in which a spirit of democratic triumph often morphs into a lament over 'authoritarian undertow', those with the normative goal of deepening democracy must begin by deepening scholarly conceptualisations of the complex nature of democratic change.

As Diamond would almost surely agree, important concerns about frequent instances of 'democratic recession' should not lead us to overlook major underlying problems that already existed in the past – both in terms of the analysis and the practice of democracy. The need for deeper analysis comes forth, very clearly, through examination of the experience of the Philippines and Thailand – which Diamond, writing in 2008, viewed as major examples of democracies that have "recently been overthrown or gradually stifled" (2008a: 36). Diamond is entirely correct to warn of the dangers of authoritarian resurgence; as will be discussed below, democratic structures in both countries have experienced recent periods of travail. In the Philippines, authoritarian impulses were evident in the presidencies of Joseph Estrada (1998–2001) and Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo (2001–2010); in Thailand, authoritarian inclinations were an obvious element of the populist government of Thaksin Shinawatra (2001–2006) and the military-backed leadership that came after his removal by coup in 2006. Far from having been characterised as 'at-risk democracies', however, the Philippines and Thailand should instead be viewed as countries whose democratic structures have longstanding underlying flaws. As both countries demonstrate with striking clarity, one cannot turn democratic structures into substantive democracies without confronting the reality of a polity's undemocratic foundations. In other words, one must look carefully at the 'source' and 'purpose' of a given country's structures of democracy.

It is important to explain, at the outset, why this analysis adopts an approach that some readers might find excessively focussed upon the negative. It is in the spirit of improving democracy that scholars would do well to move beyond the overly optimistic celebrations of previous years and approach the topic of democracy with a harshly critical eye. Attention to shortcomings, quite obviously, concentrates analysis on that which is needing attention – and thus leads to greater prospects of improving the quality of democracies. One must begin with the recognition that all democracies have flaws, and are to some degree still works in progress. In the course of historical struggles, however, persons and groups of democratic conviction have been able to improve the quality of the democratic polity within which they live. This improvement came about not through excessive praise, but rather by clear recognition of the specific limitations of existing democracies and the determination to correct those limitations. Fortunately,

both the Philippines and Thailand have elements of their citizenry committed to addressing historical flaws and instilling greater democratic substance to their respective polities.

The virtues of focussing on the negative can be highlighted by brief consideration of the United States, a country whose democratic structures were built on extraordinarily undemocratic foundations. As Thomas Jefferson proclaimed the virtues of democracy and equality, he and many other founders of the republic supported the enslavement and oppression of black Americans. Liberty was proclaimed as a national ideal even as a large minority was denied the most basic rights of citizenship.[2] These enormous flaws continued well beyond the Emancipation Proclamation of 1863, as segregationist laws based on notions of white supremacy were prevalent in the American South from the late-nineteenth century into the middle of the twentieth century. It was not until 1965, in fact, when voting rights were extended to blacks in the South, that a more substantive form of democracy came to predominate in the country as a whole.[3] This process of democratization came about in the course of historical struggle, first through a bloody and protracted civil war that took the lives of over 600,000 persons, and, a full century later, through a civil rights movement that forced a previously accommodating national government to challenge local racist structures. In other words, improvement in the quality of American democracy came about both by focussing on the flaws of American democracy and by insisting that the reality more closely align with the ideals. Until today, those who offer the loudest praise of American democracy are among those who are most inclined to undermine democratic freedoms in practice. Conversely, some of the harshest criticisms of American democracy are heard from those most determined to fix its shortcomings.[4]

The following analysis will concentrate primarily on conceptual foundations, critiquing both problematic definitions of democracy and distorted models of the process of democratization across time. Using broad brush strokes, I will then provide brief and highly stylised surveys of the historical character of democratic structures in the Philippines and Thailand, with particular attention to the sources and purposes of 'democracy' in on-going struggles for political domination. In conclusion, I will argue that the goal of promoting higher quality

[2]The hypocrisy of this man of libertarian rhetoric continued until his death in 1826, as he continued to espouse forcefully the ideology of states' rights even after it had been clearly connected to proslavery arguments (see Hutchcroft 2009: 380–381).

[3]As one comparative analysis asserts, "the United States did not become a full democracy until late 1965 when the Voting Rights Act of 1965 allowed the federal government to ensure that blacks in the South could exercise the right to vote." (Rueschemeyer *et al.* 1992: 122).

[4]Early in our current century, U.S. anti-terrorist laws endangered basic civil liberties and presented new challenges for preserving democratic freedoms for all citizens. These often draconian laws were treated as patriotic paeans to American democracy, and came under challenge by those who were determined to contrast the ideal of democracy with the way it had come to be practised.

democracy accentuates the need for higher quality scholarship on democracy and political change more generally.

Defining and Historicising Democracy: Reconsidering 'Source' and 'Purpose'

Mainstream scholarship on democratisation has its foundations in a minimalist notion of democracy, focussing on a limited and narrow set of preconditions. In his 1991 analysis of *The Third Wave*, for example, Samuel Huntington favours Joseph Schumpeter's procedural definition: a political system is "democratic to the extent that its most powerful collective decision makers are selected through fair, honest, and periodic elections in which candidates freely compete for votes and in which virtually all the adult population is eligible to vote" (Huntington 1991: 7). Following Robert Dahl's work on polyarchy, Huntington further emphasises that democracy entails contestation and participation – and at the same time implies certain basic "civil and political freedoms…that are necessary to political debate and the conduct of electoral campaigns" (Huntington 1991: 7; see also Dahl 1971: 3, 7).

This passing reference to Dahl masks a somewhat subtle but nonetheless important contrast in the approach of the two scholars. Dahl reserves the term democracy to speak of an ideal, contrasting it with "real world" systems of polyarchy defined by virtue of their relatively significant but still highly imperfect levels of both contestation and participation (1971: 8). As he noted in a subsequent work, the term 'polyarchy' describes something that is commonly viewed as "insufficiently democratic…[and]…unquestionably falls well short of achieving the democratic process" (Dahl 1989: 222–223). Huntington dispenses with the distinction between polyarchy and democracy, and uses the latter term to describe real-world polities; in his summation, polyarchy is merely "realistic democracy" (1991: 7).

At first glance, one may suppose that there is little difference between Dahl's attention to 'real-world' polyarchy and Huntington's focus on 'realistic' democracy. In fact, further examination of these two scholars' divergent uses of the term 'democracy' reveals significant differences in world-view. For Dahl, categorisation is based on continua, and polities vary greatly in the degree to which they approach the democratic ideal of "being completely or almost completely responsive to all of its citizens" (1971: 2). In distinguishing between polyarchy and democracy, Dahl upholds the goal of moving beyond a minimal standard toward something more substantial – and thus gives validation to those who seek to move along the distinct continua of contestation and participation toward the greater (but still highly imperfect) fulfilment of the ideals of democracy. At the same time, Dahl forcefully asserts the inherent superiority of polyarchies over authoritarian regimes: "it is not hard to understand why democrats

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deprived of [the] institutions [of polyarchy] find them highly desirable, warts and all.…Integral to polyarchy itself is a generous zone of freedom and control that cannot be deeply or persistently invaded without destroying polyarchy itself" (1989: 223).

Huntington allows that there are occasional advantages to treating democracy as a continuous variable, and acknowledges that there are "some betwixt and between cases" such as the "semi-democracy" of Thailand in the 1980s (1991: 11–12). For purposes of examining democratic transitions, however, he argues the virtues of treating democracy as a dichotomous variable whereby countries can be readily slotted into one of two categories: democratic or non-democratic. Elsewhere, he notes that his basic procedural definition of democracy permits ready comparison across political systems.[5] Huntington thus categorises as 'democratic' even those countries that may meet only the most basic procedural definition of the term. His use of the term 'realistic democracy', moreover, could easily be taken to suggest that efforts to move beyond procedural democracy are simply *un*realistic.

In adopting a procedural definition of democracy, Huntington observes that Schumpeter "effectively demolished" eighteenth-century classical notions of democracy based on "'the will of the people' (source) and 'the common good' (purpose)" in favour of the procedural definition already noted above (1991: 6).[6] While some post-war scholars were "determined, in the classical vein, to define democracy by source or purpose", Huntington pronounces these rivals dead and gone: "By the 1970s the debate was over, and Schumpeter won" (1991: 6).

In their 1995 essay on *What Makes for Democracy?*, Larry Diamond and co-authors Juan Linz and Seymour Martin Lipset follow Huntington's approach with an important caveat. Like Huntington, they choose to conflate Dahl's critical distinction between democracy and polyarchy, even as they present a definition that draws explicitly on Dahl. They list "three essential conditions" for democracy: "meaningful and extensive competition", "a highly inclusive level of political participation", and "civil and political liberties" (Diamond *et al.* 1995: 6–7). Implicit in their definition is the notion that rulers are accountable to the citizenry and their representatives. Unlike Huntington, they proceed to emphasise that this minimalist definition "presents a number of problems in application"

[5]Huntington (1991: 7). This raises the larger question of how much political scientists should be simplifying the world in order to facilitate their analysis rather than acknowledging the complexity of the world at the risk of complicating their analysis.

[6]In his critique of 'the classical doctrine of democracy', Schumpeter argues that *the will of the people* "presupposes the existence of a uniquely determined *common good* discernible to all." Because there is "no such thing as a uniquely determined *common good* that all people could agree on," there is no such thing as a "*will of the people*." Thus "both of the pillars of the classical doctrine inevitably crumble into dust" (see Schumpeter 1942: 250–252, emphasis added). I do not disagree with Schumpeter's demolition of these pillars; rather, I seek to redefine and redeploy the concepts of 'source' and 'purpose' that have been discarded by Huntington.

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(Diamond *et al.* 1995: 7). First, countries meet these criteria in different degrees. Second, "the boundary between democratic and undemocratic (or 'less than democratic') is often blurred and imperfect…[thus underscoring]…the importance of recognizing grades of distinction among less than democratic systems" (Diamond *et al.* 1995: 7). Their definition of democracy, therefore, seeks to combine Huntington's preference for the dichotomous with Dahl's preference for the continuous.

Over the past two decades, myriad 'problems of application' have come to occupy greater amounts of attention in scholarship on democracy. As scholars dig deeper into particular cases, they have highlighted the need for greater attention to variation among polities and revealed – wittingly or unwittingly – the essential shortcomings of minimalist definitions of democracy based on Huntington's simple dichotomy of democratic vs. non-democratic. As scholars sought to "capture the diverse forms of democracy that have emerged" and at the same time guard against the inappropriate application of the term 'democracy', explained David Collier and Steven Levitsky in 1997:

> "The result has been a proliferation of alternative conceptual forms, including a surprising number of subtypes involving democracy 'with adjectives'. Examples from among the hundreds of subtypes that have appeared include 'authoritarian democracy', 'neopatrimonial democracy', 'military-dominated democracy', and 'protodemocracy'." (1997: 430–431)

Perhaps the most widely quoted adjective has come to be 'illiberal', popularized by Huntington student Fareed Zakaria in his influential 1997 article in *Foreign Affairs*. Taking aim at earlier triumphalist accounts of democratization, Zakaria warned instead of what he called "the next wave": "half of the 'democratizing' countries in the world today," he wrote, "are illiberal democracies" (1997: 22, 24). Despite Huntington's insistence on Schumpeter's victory, alternative definitions have not been so easily vanquished.

In his 1999 work, *Developing Democracy*, Larry Diamond directly attacked those who clung to minimalist conceptions of democracy. Drawing on Terry Karl's notion of "the fallacy of electoralism", Diamond calls "electoral democracy…[a]…flawed conception of democracy [that] privileges elections over other dimensions of democracy" and ignores both the systematic exclusion of "significant portions of the population" as well as electoral mechanisms that "may leave significant arenas of decision making beyond the control of elected officials" (Diamond 1999: 8–13). This minimalist conception is contrasted with "liberal democracy," which involves a) "the absence of reserved domains of power"; b) vertical and horizontal mechanisms of accountability; and c) "extensive provisions for political and civic pluralism as well as for individual and group freedoms" (1999: 8–13).

More recent scholarship has challenged not only issues of definition but also mainstream conceptualisations of democratic change over time. One means of

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measuring democratic consolidation, Huntington explained in 1991, is the "two-turnover test" by which:

> "…a democracy may be viewed as consolidated if the party or groups that takes power in the initial election at the time of transition loses a subsequent election and turns over power to those election winners, and if those election winners then peacefully turn over power to the winners of a later election. Selecting rulers through elections is the heart of democracy, and democracy is real only if rulers are willing to give up power as a result of elections." (1991: 266–267)

Widespread problems of democratic transition and consolidation have led to a re-evaluation. In 2002, democracy promoter Thomas Carothers developed an influential critique of what he calls the "transition paradigm", arguing that *movement away from authoritarianism* should not be conflated with *movement toward democracy*. The holding of regular elections, he also emphasised, does not necessarily suggest a healthy participatory democracy. Even in countries that hold regular and genuine elections, it may be that:

> "…political participation beyond voting remains shallow and governmental accountability is weak. The wide gulf between political elites and citizens in many of these countries turns out to be rooted in structural conditions, such as the concentration of wealth or certain sociocultural traditions, that elections themselves do not overcome.... Such profound pathologies as highly personalistic parties, transient and shifting parties, or stagnant patronage-based politics appear to be able to coexist for sustained periods with at least somewhat legitimate processes of political pluralism and competition." (Carothers 2002: 15)

This returns us to Diamond's analysis of "the democratic recession", which responds to further dispiriting evidence of democratic progress in practice. In a far cry from Huntington's procedural definition and stages of democratisation, Diamond again emphasises the "fallacy of electoralism" and the failure of many governments – including the United States (2008b: 345–370) – to look "beyond the facade" of superficial democracies that are:

> "…blighted by multiple forms of bad governance: abusive police and security forces, domineering local oligarchies, incompetent and indifferent state bureaucracies, corrupt and inaccessible judiciaries, and venal ruling elites who are contemptuous of the rule of law and accountable to no one but themselves. Many people in these countries – especially the poor – are thus citizens only in name and have few meaningful channels of political participation. There are elections, but they are contests between corrupt, clientelistic parties. There are parliaments and local

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> government, but they do not represent broad constituencies. There are constitutions, but no constitutionalism." (Diamond 2008a: 37–38)

A key challenge, he highlights, is building mechanisms of accountability, both vertical (best exemplified by democratic elections) and horizontal (i.e. monitoring within the state, through such agencies as counter-corruption commissions) (2008a: 44–45). "Without a clear understanding of the fundamental problem – bad governance – and the necessary institutional responses," he concludes, "more democratic breakdowns are likely" (Diamond 2008a: 48).[7]

In the years since Huntington first provided his analysis of "the third wave", analysts of democracy have been forced to give ever more attention to deeply rooted anti-democratic forces that have in many cases come to control democratic structures. Minimalist, procedural definitions tell us about the existence of democratic structures, but lead to promiscuous use of the term 'democracy' and obscure any detail about their actual operation. What was hitherto treated as a straightforward process of democratic transition has evolved into an accentuation of challenges and a recognition of failures. As more and more countries fall into what Carothers call the "gray zone" – that wide space "between outright dictatorship and well-established liberal democracy" (2002: 10) – analysis of regime variation has bred a profusion of rich adjectives.

These are positive advances, but it is essential to go deeper into understanding political change within specific historical contexts. By imposing a deductive framework on all cases, the transition paradigm was ultimately ahistorical. As Rueschemeyer, Stephens, and Stephens demonstrate with particular clarity, democracy is about struggles for power within specific historical contexts: "democracy is above all a matter of power" and "it is power relations that most importantly determine whether democracy can emerge, stabilize, and then maintain itself in the face of adverse conditions" (1992: 5).[8]

This leads me back to that which Huntington sought to dismiss, namely examination of *source* and *purpose*. I do so with no intention of resurrecting the romantic notions of eighteenth century political philosophy, which were concerned with identifying the will of the people and the common good. Quite clearly, different individuals and groups within a given polity have different

[7]This builds on Diamond (1999), which links the movement toward liberal democracy (as opposed to mere electoral democracy) with the consolidation of democracy; conversely, lack of depth is associated with lack of stability. "In much of the postcolonial and developing worlds," he observed at that time, "democracy appears stuck in a twilight zone of tentative commitments, illiberal practices, and shallow institutionalisation" (1999: 20). For further analysis of the relationship between the quality of democracy and the breakdown of democracy, see Case (1997).

[8]Jayasuriya and Rodan similarly put major emphasis on structures and relationships of power. Unlike the present analysis, however, they downplay the "analytical importance" of "the identification of the quality of democracy or regime type", focusing instead on "the identification and analysis of emerging modes of political participation and the forms of conflict which they serve to express or repress" (2007: 781).

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wills, and what is good for some is anathema to others. Rather, I would like to consider how analysis of source and purpose can assist us in understanding the contending interests of specific social forces in the process of regime change and regime maintenance. Drawing on the insights of more contemporary theorists, I would argue that analysis of both source and purpose is essential to understanding the functioning of democratic structures. These structures are meant to be used to promote contending agendas for influencing the polity and the policy process; in many cases, this can extend to the goal of domination and hegemony and undermining accountability to the citizenry as a whole.

These issues are perhaps best approached through the following foundational questions: who sets up democratic structures and for what purpose? As Gramscian scholars have emphasised, formal democratic structures and electoral mechanisms offer a valuable opportunity for the legitimation of highly unequal social and economic structures. "The bourgeois State," writes Perry Anderson, "by definition 'represents' the totality of the population, *abstracted* from its division into social classes, as individual and equal citizens. In other words, it presents to men and women their unequal positions in civil society as if they were equal in the state" (1976: 28, emphasis in original).[9] In short, the rhetoric and structures of democracy can be used to mask and perpetuate highly undemocratic social arrangements.

Once established, however, democratic structures can create powerful new opportunities for popular democratic expression that may ultimately threaten elite privilege. As Rueschemeyer, Stephens, and Stephens assert:

> "Political democracy inevitably stands in tension with the system of social inequality. However we define democracy in detail, it means nothing if it does not entail rule or participation by the many. Yet in a class-divided society, the many have less income and wealth, less education, and less honour than the few. Above all, they have – individually – less power. Democracy, then, is a rather counterintuitive state of affairs, one in which the disadvantaged many have, as citizens, a real voice in the collective decision making of politics….Democracy takes on a realistic character only if it is based on significant changes in the overall distribution of power." (1992: 41)

They focus their analysis on cases where democracy has enabled subordinate classes – through long struggle – to achieve the voice that they would not have as individuals.[10] Even if the original source and purpose of democratic

[9]Drawing on Gramscian analysis, Eva-Lotta Hedman offers extremely rich and creative insights into issues of domination and legitimation in the Philippine context. See Hedman (2006: 42–43), for her specific integration of the analysis of Anderson.

[10]Anderson, similarly, emphasizes that "the juridical rights of citizenship are not a mere mirage: on the contrary, the civic freedoms and suffrages of bourgeois democracy are a tangible reality, whose completion was historically in part the work of the labour movement itself, and whose loss would be a momentous defeat for the working class" (1977: 28). When authoritarian trends undermine

structures is shaped by a desire to legitimate class privilege, the structures themselves can provide opportunities for genuine democratization. However much they may fall short of the ideal, democratic structures do provide important arenas of struggle between those with limited versus more substantive notions of what a 'democracy' should be. The source and purpose can thus evolve over time, and be shaped in particular by struggles at pivotal moments in a country's history.

But does this evolution necessarily take place in democratic directions? As the two cases briefly surveyed in this paper suggest, subordinate classes do not always achieve collective power, and are not always able to subvert the purposes of the privileged classes who initially shaped democratic structures for their own goals. Democracy may have emerged in terms of a minimalist, procedural definition, but not in the more substantive terms described by Rueschemeyer, Stephens, and Stephens: "significant changes in the overall distribution of power" (1992: 41), in which political structures are able to counteract already prevailing and often deeply rooted socio-economic inequalities. A key issue, I will argue, is the struggle between popular accountability and elite hegemony. Democratic structures are, in theory and rhetoric, supposed to promote popular accountability. Too often, however, democratic structures are a very clever means by which elites seek to undermine accountability and legitimise their own domination: political, social, and economic.

In summary, the above conceptual discussion asserts two major points. First, in definitional terms, not all 'democracies at risk' are democracies of the same quality. In fact, many formal democracies have been deeply flawed for a very long time, and those with the inclination to recognise this have never been prone to "[premature] celebrations of democracy's triumph" (Diamond 2008a: 36). The important acknowledgment of "grades of distinction among less than democratic systems" (Diamond *et al.* 1995: 7), should lead to more nuanced analysis of the subsequent decline or rollback of 'democracy' – depending on whether the 'democracy' in question is of low grade or of higher quality.[11] Second, it is problematic to speak of 'democracies at risk' when the democracies themselves are deeply flawed in regard to both source and purpose. Our task is not just to define democracy as it operates at present, but also to interrogate deeper issues as to why the democracy was initially established and how it has come to operate. It moves us beyond debates about stages of 'democratic

formal democracy, in other words, the losers include not only the elites who have enjoyed the legitimation that formal democracy provides but also the subaltern groups who have found, within democratic institutions, opportunities to press toward the goal of converting democratic rhetoric into democratic substance. As Edward Friedman succinctly explains: "If democracy is not a proceduralism, it is nothing. It is not a democracy….[I]f it is only a proceduralism, it is not much. Democracy is both a proceduralism and a project" (Personal correspondence, 20 October 2009).

[11]Drawing on the distinction made in Diamond (1999), discussed above, the term 'at-risk democracies' would more appropriately be formulated as 'electoral democracies at risk'. In other words, there seems to be virtue in using Diamond (1999) to sharpen the analysis of Diamond (2008).

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transition' and the proper timing of celebrations of democracy and toward a far richer and more historically based account of struggles for power, domination, and legitimation within democratic structures. Regime shifts can be viewed as on-going episodes of broader processes of contention among social forces, and we can acknowledge that the structures of formal democracy have multiple purposes – in some instances promoting the legitimation of inequality and domination and in other instances affording opportunities to challenge structures of inequality and domination.[12]

Based on these conceptual foundations, I will proceed to provide a brief overview of the triumphs and travails of democratic structures in the Philippines and Thailand as they have emerged over time. For the past quarter century, since respective 'transitions to democracy' that were lauded worldwide, democratic structures in both the Philippines and Thailand have inspired peaks of optimism and inspiration as well as troughs of despair. Such oscillations suggest the need for viewing present trends from a broader perspective. The following two sections examine the historical evolution of democratic structures in the two countries, focussing in particular on issues of source and purpose. How did structures of democracy come to be established, and how do they operate in practice? As highlighted above, a key issue to examine is the tension between elite hegemony and popular accountability.

Source and Purpose in Philippine Democracy: Oligarchic Dominance One Century on

The first thing to emphasise about the Philippines' post-authoritarian transition after 1986 is that it was built on decades of previous experience with democratic institutions, namely the patronage-based electoral structures put in place under American colonial rule at the beginning of the twentieth century.[13] Indeed, no country in Asia has more experience with democratic structures than does the Philippines, dating back more than a century to the fledgling Assembly created by the revolutionary republic that declared independence in 1898. The U.S. defeat of the Philippine Revolution – in a protracted conflict claiming at least

[12]This paper focuses primary analytical attention on the former, but it is readily acknowledged that some major recent experiences of democratization (e.g., Brazil) demonstrate the possibility of more favourable outcomes. In the words of Larry Diamond, "not all democracies born in sin fail to transcend the curse of their origins" (Diamond *pers. comm.* 12 October 2009). Edward Friedman similarly notes that democracies come forth from peace pacts "involving lots of concessions to elites." This, by its nature, "makes the struggle by challengers for the deepening of democracy important, long, difficult, and iffy" (Friedman *pers. comm.* 20 October 2009; see also Friedman 2002). There is thus a critical need for analysis that can bridge recognition of structural obstacles with careful attention to the contingent nature of political change – and the critical role of agency, including the concerted creation of movements for democratic change.

[13]The following draws on Hutchcroft and Rocamora (2003), Hutchcroft (2008), and Hutchcroft and Rocamora (2012).

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250,000 lives (Kramer 2006: 157) – led directly into America's first major overseas project of what later came to be known as 'nation-building'. At the time, it was proclaimed to be a noble effort to transplant the virtues of American democracy through a process of 'political tutelage'. Elections proceeded from the municipal to the provincial level to the October 1907 convening of a Philippine National Assembly, bringing together prominent elites from throughout the lowland Christian Philippines.

There are several key legacies of Philippine democracy that can be traced to the American colonial regime. The first is patronage-infested political parties, heavily reliant on pork barrel public works projects coursed through national legislators. It is highly unusual for colonial governments to encourage the formation of political parties, but that is indeed what happened under Governor-General William Howard Taft's 'policy of attraction' – the result of which was to turn the economic elite of the previous Spanish colonial era into a political-economic elite that continues to be very powerful today. Because these parties occupied prominent positions *within* the regime, they could build a following based on their ready access to the patronage resources of the state (as opposed to most parties that emerged in colonial settings, which lacked a privileged position and had to build a following based on ideological appeals). And because representative structures in the Philippines emerged *before* the creation of strong bureaucratic institutions, it was quite easy for patronage-hungry politicos to overwhelm the nascent administrative agencies of the colonial state.[14] Taft liked to evoke images of New England-style deliberative democracy, but the end result is better thought of as a Philippine version of the corrupt Tammany Hall political machine of nineteenth-century New York City.

Second, the colonial political system ensured exclusion of the masses and control by the elite (more specifically, by a national oligarchy nurtured by American rule). Because colonial rulers had at the turn of the century built a 'democratic' system almost entirely for the benefit of the landlord class they had needed to woo away from the revolutionary struggle, these landlords learned to love the 'democracy' they could so readily control. The franchise was limited to a tiny elite electorate, and did not begin to expand substantially until the late colonial and especially the early post-colonial years. By this time, the dominance of the newly created national oligarchy was so well entrenched that challenges from below – motivated by deep social injustices – faced monumental odds. A third major legacy is the provincial basis of national politics. Beginning with the opening of the National Assembly in 1907, it was influential provincial elites who learned to thrive in the new national arenas established by the Americans. Fourth, one can trace the strong presidency of the modern Philippines to the emergence of the Philippine Commonwealth in 1935, when President

[14]This analysis draws on the framework of Shefter (1994: 21–60).

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Manuel L. Quezon presided over a weak National Assembly and enjoyed largely uncontested executive authority.

These legacies were the foundations upon which Philippine politics evolved after independence in 1946. A major challenge for the leaders of the new republic was the Huk Rebellion, emerging from decades of increasing peasant grievance against landlord abuses. With very substantial American assistance, the rebels were defeated and oligarchic dominance ensured. Among the trends of the fifties and the sixties were the further expansion of suffrage, the emergence of charismatic appeals, a new prominence for the media, the expansion of civil society, enhanced presidential mobilisation of the army and community development agencies, and increasing costs of elections. Given the Philippines' strategic importance to the U.S., the former colonial power often played an active role in shaping what it considered to be favourable domestic political outcomes. The genius of "cacique democracy," as Benedict Anderson explains, was its capacity to rotate power at the top without effective participation of those below (Anderson 1988: 33).[15] Ferdinand Marcos undermined the system of regular rotation, beginning in 1969 when he burst the treasury to become the first post-war president to be re-elected to a second term. Three years later, partly in an effort to skirt the two-term limit imposed by the 1935 Constitution, Marcos declared martial law. His personalistic authoritarian rule, amply rewarded by successive American presidents in exchange for continued unhampered access to U.S. military bases, endured for over 13 years until 1986.

Through these enormous changes in Philippine politics, the logic of patronage remained central to understanding both parties and politicians. Prior to martial law, the two major parties were indistinguishable in their lack of programmatic appeals and politicians regularly switched from one banner to the other. Even under martial law, pork and patronage remained the fundamental basis of Marcos' ruling party. To a far greater extent than any Philippine president since Manuel Quezon in the 1930s, Marcos used his centralised control of patronage resources to ensure loyalty among politicians throughout the archipelago. However, the regime gave little attention to the building of political institutions, and the ruling party collapsed soon after the downfall of the dictator.

When 'People Power I' confronted Marcos's tanks on the streets of Manila in February 1986, the Philippines became a beacon of hope for democrats around the world. As Corazon Aquino was propelled from grieving widow to democratic icon and the Philippines began its transition out of authoritarian rule, there was much to celebrate about the exuberance of the country's democratic spirit. Opposition to Marcos had nurtured the growth of vibrant civil society organisations, dedicated to promoting the interests of farmers, the urban poor, women, indigenous peoples, and others who had long been marginalised by the country's political

[15]In terms of Robert Dahl's dual continua, this combination of high levels of public contestation and low levels of participation puts it in the category he terms "competitive oligarchies" (1971: 7).

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system. A new breed of investigative journalists, seemingly fearless in their desire to expose corruption, emerged after the country's transition back to democratic structures.[16] Elections brought forth high turnouts and extensive civic involvement.

On the negative side of the ledger, however, the country's return to democratic structures revealed many underlying problems. First, President Corazon Aquino saw her primary duty as restoring the structures of democracy that had been in place before the declaration of martial law in 1972. Much of course had changed between 1972 and the fall of Ferdinand Marcos via 'People Power I' in 1986, but Aquino's goals were very much shaped by the world in which her late husband had emerged as a leading political figure in the 1960s. While the new constitution reflected many ideas inspired by the anti-Marcos struggle (including term limits and the promotion of human rights), broader momentum toward political reform was hampered by the effective reinstatement of pre-martial law electoral and representational structures. This facilitated the restoration of the power of the old local clans, who dominated the newly convened legislature in Manila. Back home in the provinces, many local clans used the new democratic dispensation as an opportunity to rebuild private armies dismantled under Marcos. By 1991, enough high-powered firearms had been smuggled into the country to create the equivalent of two additional national armies.

Second, nine coup attempts against the Aquino government demonstrated the difficulties of returning the military to the barracks after over a decade of martial rule. Third, the Maoist insurgency of the Communist Party of the Philippines and its New People's Army continued in many parts of the archipelago, assisted by successive governments' failures to address longstanding socio-economic divides. In the Sulu archipelago and parts of Mindanao, Muslim secessionists challenged the central government as they demanded attention to their longstanding grievances against Manila. Fourth, while political parties expanded in number as compared to the pre-martial law years, they remain nearly indistinguishable in terms of programmatic or policy appeals. Politicians have little allegiance to party labels, frequently bolting from one to another in search of the most favourable access to patronage resources. Political divides are ever-shifting, uniting former rivals and dividing former allies in a continual process of alignment and realignment almost entirely divorced from coherent positions on policies or programs.

Under the skilful leadership of President Fidel Ramos (1992–1998), old-style political manoeuvres were used to introduce important elements of economic liberalisation and nurture new hopes for the successful combination of democracy

[16]The exemplars include the Philippine Center for Investigative Journalism, *Newsbreak* magazine, and their related ventures. On 'People Power' and the fall of Marcos, see especially Hedman (2006) and Thompson (1995).

and development. While Ramos asserted the need to build a more capable state and free the state of oligarchic influence, little sustained attention was given to those at the bottom of society. This helped former movie star Joseph Estrada ride to overwhelming victory in 1998 with strong populist rhetoric and the enthusiastic support of millions of poor Filipinos, many of whom felt that Ramos had ignored their interests. Estrada's redistributive impulse was expressed, most concretely, through an antipoverty program that never took off and easily degenerated into a grab for patronage among local officials and privileged NGOs (Balisacan 2001). The bulk of the redistributive effort, sadly, benefited not the masses but Estrada's myriad cronies and multiple families. Criticism of the administration in the media brought forth presidential attempts to curb press freedom. Nonetheless, Estrada's image as a man of the masses continued even after he was removed from office in the 'People Power II' uprising of January 2001. When the successor administration of President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo arrested Estrada in late April, the response was a prolonged rally by his urban poor supporters, ending in a bloody, riotous attack that almost breached the walls of the presidential palace on 1 May. The rage that burst forth brought home the dangers inherent in a political system incapable of stemming the continued widening of the gap between the many poor and few rich. "From the perspective of his poor supporters," explains Cynthia Banzon Bautista:

> "Estrada's rise and fall from the presidency are conflated with their own long standing struggle to lift themselves from poverty. Traditional politicians and Estrada himself used this view and the very real class divide to obfuscate the issues. They peddled his prosecution as an attack on the poor rather than on the very system of 'old politics' that Estrada represents and which has, in large part, prevented the liberation of the poor." (2001: 33)

In the first decade of the new century, repeated episodes of political scandals and instability fostered what Sheila Coronel observed in 2007 to be a "weariness and disillusionment about the prospects of democracy," with "scepticism about the desirability – and long-term viability – of the elite democracy established after Marcos's fall" (Coronel 2007: 175). President Arroyo very effectively wielded the substantial powers of the presidency to keep herself in office, and in the process exhibited no qualms about further undermining the country's already weak political institutions. During her nine years in power, as the Philippines suffered one political crisis after another, its longstanding democratic structures became seriously imperilled. "Over the past decade, and especially over the past few years," wrote Nathan Quimpo in 2009, "political corruption, fraud and violence in the Philippines have reached such alarming levels that many Filipinos have grown despondent, even cynical, about their country's political system." Amid "growing authoritarian tendencies," Quimpo predicts, "the Philippines

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seems bound to keep lurching from crisis to crisis in the coming years" (2009: 335, 337).[17]

In the wake of the May 2010 elections, however, the Philippines seems once again to have lurched from despondency to a new-found hope in the future. Campaigning on the slogan *Kung Walang Corrupt, Walang Mahirap* (If no one is corrupt, no one is poor), Benigno 'Noynoy' Aquino III went on to obtain nearly 42 per cent of the vote – the most decisive plurality since the fall of Marcos in 1986. (His closest challenger was former President Joseph Estrada, who – now pardoned by Arroyo for his previous crimes of plunder – demonstrated his continuing appeal among many poor voters by capturing 26 per cent of the total vote.) Aquino was thrust into the limelight after the August 2009 death of his mother, former President Corazon Aquino, and proceeded to embody a widespread popular clamour both for change and for clean government (Hutchcroft 2010).

Aquino's decisive victory raised obvious expectations, as confirmed in a June 2010 opinion survey in which 88 per cent of respondents registered their trust in the incoming president.[18] These high expectations were inflated further in an inaugural speech proclaiming a new era in Philippine politics: "No more influence-peddling, no more patronage politics, no more stealing….no more bribes." Promising "*to transform our government from one that is self-serving to one that works for the welfare of the nation*," Aquino spoke with passion about the need for a new type of leadership. He has since attacked his predecessor's abuse of power, struck out at symbols of patronage politics (including the ubiquitous claims of personal responsibility for public projects), and proposed reform of some of the more egregious elements of the pork barrel system. In addition, the administration has promised to enhance revenue generation and increase government spending on the delivery of education and health services to the poor.

Amid high expectation and good intentions, it is important to assess the scope of change that might be forthcoming. Most obviously, there is little reason to anticipate much progress on land reform or broader issues of asset reform, particularly given that the president's family owns a giant sugar estate in central Luzon. Regardless of his personal views, one should not expect him to confront the recalcitrant members of his clan and thus risk being considered "a traitor to [his] class" (to recall comments of the presidential spokesperson after Aquino's mother took power in 1986). At the same time, Aquino has thus far (halfway into his single six-year term) failed to articulate any vision of institutional change – whether it be strengthening the institutions of democracy or building a more capable (and less corrupt) bureaucracy, judiciary,

[17]Like the present analysis, Quimpo's article includes attention to Diamond's 2008 work. Unlike the present analysis, Quimpo's attention is "Diamond's concept of a predatory state", which he adapts to the Philippines by introducing the notion of a "predatory regime" (2009: 335, 337). While this debate engages my own work, specifically Hutchcroft (1998), it is not the focus of this essay.

[18]Source: Social Weather Stations (2010). See website: http://www.sws.org.ph/. Aquino's popularity and trust ratings have remained high throughout the early portion of his six-year term. See Holmes (forthcoming 2013).

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and military. Rather, he seems to think that a new style of personal leadership, and carrying forth the legacy of his parents' commitment to democracy and peace, will enable him to "fulfil the promises I made." If he is to make any progress on his lofty goals, even in an incremental fashion, reform of the country's beleaguered political institutions is essential (Hutchcroft 2011).

For all the new hope that has emerged since May 2010, a broader perspective highlights the major historical obstacles confronting those who push for the deepening of Philippine democracy. Throughout the decades, Philippine elites have developed considerable skill in ensuring their dominance over democratic structures, and the political system is commonly characterised as an elite or oligarchic democracy. This dominance has endured amid major and repeated challenge from below – including, across the past 40 years, the ongoing challenge of communist insurgency and Muslim secessionism – as well as huge transformation in the structure and composition of the elite itself. Quite strikingly, however, many characteristics of contemporary democratic structures have roots that can be traced to the democracy that initially emerged in the colonial era: the strongly patronage basis of politics, elite dominance and limits on the quality of democratic participation by the Philippine masses, the provincial basis of national politics, and a strong presidency. Against overwhelming odds, those with a commitment to democratic ideals have been extraordinarily creative and persistent in their efforts to challenge elite dominance and achieve "a real voice in the collective decision making of politics" (to return to the insights of Rueschemeyer *et al.* 1992: 41). Even so, prospects for promoting greater degrees of popular accountability continue to be overwhelmed by the underlying realities of elite hegemony.

In a 2008 analysis of *Asia's Democracy Backlash*, Joshua Kurlantzick lamented how "[t]he Philippines, a longstanding bastion of democracy…has backslid badly" (2008: 379). It is true indeed that the first decade of the new century brought serious backsliding in the Philippines, a country whose democratic spirit has inspired the world – particularly in the 1986 popular uprising against a repressive and corrupt regime. However, in suggesting that the Philippines is a "longstanding bastion of democracy", Kurlantzick fails to acknowledge the elite domination and institutional deficiencies that have long restricted the scope and depth of democratic structures in the Philippines. Across recent decades, moments of democratic inspiration have been counterbalanced by enormous deficits in popular accountability. If the goal is to improve democratic quality in the Philippines, one must begin with clear-headed understandings of the historical challenges that need to be addressed.

Source and Purpose in Thai Democracy: The Resilience of Military/Bureaucratic/Monarchic Dominance

If the Philippines is characterised by the continuity of oligarchic dominance, the broad pattern in Thailand is the resilience in the power of military and

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bureaucratic elites across the past eight decades accompanied by an increasingly powerful and interventionist monarchy over the past half century. In the 1932 coup that led to the overthrow of the absolute monarchy, a small coalition of generals and bureaucrats fashioned themselves as the 'People's Party' and promulgated a constitution with the following opening clause: "The supreme power in the country belongs to the people" (cited in Baker and Pasuk 2005: 116). In effect, the removal of the monarch was equated with the presence of democracy. The new non-royalist regime, however, was far from democratic; its rival military and civilian factions forged a basis of cooperation out of a shared fear of royalist resurgence, but the ruling group was eventually dominated by "[t]he young military officers who controlled the firepower" (Baker and Pasuk 2005: 124). The military came to consider itself the guardian of the nation, and an authoritarian regime (inspired by the prototypes of the day) was put in place in 1938 under military leader Plaek Phibunsongkhram (commonly known as Phibun). The monarchists were effectively marginalised after an alleged plot to regain power, and the king abdicated his throne in 1935.

With the advent of World War Two, Phibun sided with the Japanese while his civilian rival Pridi Banomyang headed the Allied-supported 'Free Thai' movement. When the Allies won the war, Pridi and his civilian faction took power and presided over a new regime intent on instituting the democracy that had never been put in place in the 1930s. The 1946 constitution provided for a fully (rather than half-) elected national legislature, civilian control over the military, and the formal institution of labour rights. These measures of political liberalisation came in the context of an intense struggle for power among the three major forces of the post-1932 years: the monarchy (absent from the country since the king's abdication of the throne in 1935), the military (led by Phibun), and civilian groups (led by Pridi). "From 1944," write Baker and Pasuk, "[Pridi] brought back the royalists, possibly as a political counterweight to Phibun and the army" (Baker and Pasuk 2005: 141). But his strategy backfired as the royalists adapted to the new political dispensation by forming their own political party – quite impudently called the *Democrat* Party – and opposing Pridi in the democratic structures he had constructed. In this three-way struggle for power, it was Pridi who came to be marginalised through a 1947 coup temporarily uniting Phibun with the royalists (i.e. precisely the same group that Phibun had ousted from power only 15 years earlier). Tensions between Phibun and the royalists resumed in the wake of the coup, and in the course of further struggle the latter came to be "demoted to junior partners in the ruling alliance" (Baker and Pasuk 2005: 144).

The return of the monarchy to a position of influence began in 1957, when General Sarit Thanarat, the chief of the Army, seized power in a coup and sent Phibun into exile. Whereas Phibun had actively curbed the visibility and prominence of the monarch, Sarit reinforced his iron rule by cultivating close ties with the monarchy. As Baker and Pasuk explain, "Both the generals and the U.S.

patrons believed the monarchy would serve as a focus of unity, and a force for stability, while remaining susceptible to their control" (Baker and Pasuk 2005: 175). The king legitimised Sarit's military regime, which had dismantled all pretence of democratic structures, and Sarit in turn honoured the king with rhetoric signifying "that power radiated downwards from the monarch, rather than upwards from the people" (Baker and Pasuk 2005: 177). Whereas Phibun had restricted the king's tours of the country outside of Bangkok, Sarit gave the king a highly visible role in many realms – including the promotion of rural development.

Despite Sarit's death in 1963, an efficacious combination of military rule and royalist resurgence continued for another decade under the generals that succeeded Sarit. This was the heyday of what American political scientist Fred Riggs (1966: 250–251) called the "bureaucratic polity", a system in which those based in the civilian and military bureaucracy had "the greatest opportunities for combining high income with security, prestige, and power" while countervailing social forces – both business classes and popular forces – were strikingly weak. While Riggs anticipated that the bureaucratic elite would perpetuate itself, this was in fact a period in which rapid social and economic change began to shake the foundations of Thai politics (see Anderson 1977). As Cold War aid and foreign investment poured into the country in the 1960s and 1970s, newly emergent social forces became more prominent in Bangkok and the countryside. Anti-authoritarian sentiment achieved tangible results in October 1973, when huge student protests – respectful of the king and ultimately given critical tactical support by the king – brought down the military regime. This ushered in three years of civilian rule, the first such interlude since Pridi had promoted political liberalisation in the late 1940s. One must also note that October 1973 marked the first major social mobilisation in the history of Thailand. Elsewhere in Southeast Asia, much earlier mass mobilisation against colonial rule had led to struggles within society more broadly – beginning, of course, with the Philippine revolutionary struggle against Spain in the late-nineteenth century. In formally non-colonised Thailand, by contrast, societal forces appeared on the stage at a much later period in history.

The three years from October 1973 to October 1976 brought an unprecedented level of democratic freedom as well as student and lower-class mobilisation. But while the students were strong enough to bring down the military regime, the democratic governments that they ushered in were quite centrist in their programs of reform. As Baker and Pasuk explain:

> "Students felled the military dictatorship, but other forces in urban society emerged to shape the successor regime. Over the prior quarter-century, business had grown richer, more sophisticated, and more self-confident. The leading conglomerates no longer wanted to kowtow to the generals and share their profits with them. They sought

> more power to influence policy. A small but influential elite of technocrats wanted to divert resources away from the military toward development. Many businessmen and professionals were frightened by the polarizing logic of militarism and radicalism." (2005: 190)

Fear of radicalism, both internal and nearby in the region, led a coalition of military and conservative forces to stifle civilian rule with brutality in 1976. In one sense, it was a return to previous patterns, as the king once again revealed his active and longstanding support of authoritarianism. In another sense, however, it was a putsch unlike any other in Thai history. Contrary to previous military coups, this re-imposition of military rule relied on patterns of social mobilisation (of right-wing forces and fearful middle classes) not previously necessary during the height of the bureaucratic polity (Anderson 1977). The immediate impact was to send radicalised students and workers and farmers to the hills, thus fostering rapid expansion in the ranks of the Communist Party of Thailand.

A new constitution, drawn up in 1978, reintroduced democratic structures under carefully circumscribed conditions. While the Assembly was elected, the Senate was appointed (dominated by military and civilian bureaucrats) and unelected military and civilian officials were allowed to hold cabinet posts; in Diamond's terms, there were explicit "reserved domains of power" (1999: 10). Some ministries were given over to the politicians as a trough for patronage, but control over key economic policy-making agencies – as well as major budgetary decisions – remained under the technocrats and were quite insulated from political pressures. Between 1980 and 1988, under the unelected prime ministerial leadership of General Prem Tinsulanond, a system of 'semi-democracy' came to thrive in Thailand. Rapid economic growth led to new stature for Bangkok-based business interests, which became an increasingly assertive political force in the course of the decade. With the decline of the left in the early 1980s, the metropolitan bourgeoisie could now approach democratic structures with particular confidence – and the Thai Parliament became the venue for the expression of their new political power (Anderson 1990).

When civilian politician Chatichai Choonhavan replaced former General Prem Tinsulanond as prime minister in 1988, many looked hopefully to an era in which military coup attempts would be a thing of the past. Viewed from the perspective of the time, the leadership shift that took place in Thailand in 1988 could be construed as a dramatic shift toward greater democracy.[19] There was a new role for elected politicians, rather than appointed bureaucrats,

[19]If the focus is on identifying points of democratic transition, facile comparison with the Philippines transition of 1986 could be made. Upon further analysis, however, it is the differences that become most apparent. While the Philippines was in the late 1980s coming forth from nearly fourteen years of authoritarian rule, Thailand was moving far less dramatically from eight years of 'semi-democracy' to civilian rule. These liberalising reforms were instituted from above, moreover, rather

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accompanied by efforts to try to scale back the military's involvement in business activities. Meanwhile, the longstanding dominance of Bangkok was being challenged by a new role for leaders from the booming and increasingly prosperous Thai countryside. Allegations of the civilian regime's rampant corruption provided a useful pretext for the military to grab power again in a 1991 coup (and in the process halt an emerging discourse about Thailand having moved beyond its propensity for military intervention). Influential Bangkok elites backed the putsch before becoming disgruntled with 'devil' generals and then bringing about the return of so-called democratic 'angels' via urban uprising in May 1992 (Surin Maisrikrod 1992). In subsequent months, under a technocratic caretaker government, the military lost many of its special economic prerogatives.

By 1993, one could reasonably hope that the process of democratization in Thailand was back on track. The economy was booming, and a popularly elected civilian prime minister, Chuan Leekpai, projected a reformist image. But the subsequent rise of provincial politicians soon brought the problem of 'money politics' to the fore, and careful analysis of the electoral process revealed a system characterised by "commercialisation and exclusion" (Surin Maisrikrod and McCargo 1997). Curbing the power of "rural godfathers" was a major motivation behind a political reform effort led by a combination of royalists and liberals; this culminated in the new constitution of 1997 (Connors 2002).

The new constitution promised many changes, including a mixed electoral system (combining single-district-plurality voting with a smaller element of proportional representation), new constitutional bodies tasked with monitoring elections and curbing corruption, and educational requirements intended to block the political rise of godfathers from the countryside. Far more sweeping in short-term impact, however, was an economic crisis that shrunk the fortunes of a large element of the business class. Given that money had come to be a prime requirement of political success, it was those with the greatest resources who rose most quickly in the new political firmament. As Duncan McCargo explained, the 1997 constitution was "haunted by the law of unintended consequences, as measures designed to promote political stability [had] the opposite effect instead" (quoted in Kuhonta 2008: 376).

The rise of Thaksin Shinawatra led to huge transformation in the character of Thailand's democratic structures. Thaksin had survived the economic crisis, emerged as the country's richest business magnate in the realm of electoral politics, used his own wealth to win over supporters, secured election as prime minister in 2001, and effectively secured a majority through features of the 1997 constitution that were conducive to strong executive authority (Kuhonta 2008). A combination of media appeals and populist policies enabled him to win over

than forced from below via 'People Power'. Also quite unlike the Philippines, Thailand had very limited previous experience with democratic structures.

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large elements of Thailand's poor, long excluded from the country's democratic structures, especially residents of the North and Northeast who felt excluded from the Bangkok-centric polity. Institutions intended to be independent checks were overpowered by Thaksin, whose regime quickly degenerated into a patently 'illiberal democracy'. In the south of Thailand, bellicose policies inflamed the conflict and led to enormous bloodshed.

As the tectonic plates of Thai politics shifted in reaction to the Thaksin earthquake, there emerged two clear camps in Thai politics: those in favour and those opposed to Thaksin. His landslide re-election in 2005 convinced his opponents that non-electoral means were necessary to his removal, and in September 2006 the popular politician was brought down by a military coup supported by the popular king (Thongchai Winichakul 2006). For "the first time in Thai history", explains Prajak Kongkirati, "the coup was carried out with the intention of directly interfering in the electoral process" (2013: 150). Unable to counter the huge electoral appeal of Thaksin and his allies, the military discarded the democratic features of the 1997 constitution – as baby with the bathwater – and retreated to the semi-democratic elements of previous regimes. In the careful analysis of Allen Hicken, the 2007 constitution crafted under military oversight "represents a step backward from democratic consolidation" by "[undermining] the authority of democratically elected representatives relative to unelected officials" (2007: 155). In terms of source and purpose, democratic ideals have been sacrificed in favour of safeguarding the resilience of the monarchy, the military, and the civilian bureaucratic elite.

In hindsight, we can view the putsch as mere skirmish in the continuing battle over control of the Thai polity. Over time, explains Thitinan Pongsudhirak, "political polarization and social conflict…has… simply become more convoluted and protracted – something like trench warfare being fought out in the streets, military barracks, newspaper headlines, courtrooms, and halls of parliament" (2008: 151). After a pro-Thaksin party won a strong plurality of seats and regained power in December 2007, a combination of yellow-clad anti-Thaksin forces organised as the People's Alliance for Democracy (PAD) ("a misnomer if ever there was one", to quote Thongchai Winichakul 2008) and sought to bring down the new government. Across the four major elements of PAD – monarchists, bureaucrats, the urban elite and civil society activists – each had "different reasons for hating Thaksin so much" (Thongchai Winichakul 2008).[20] Their street protests culminated in the late 2008 occupation of the airport, and the government's collapse came soon thereafter when a constitutional court ordered the dissolution of Thaksin's party. A new Democrat Party government, led by Prime Minister Abhisit Vejjajiva, was put into power with the support of the military;

[20]PAD, formed in early 2006 by media mogul Sondhi Limthongkul, former major general Chamlong Srimuang, and other anti-Thaksin activists, supported the coup that came in September of that year.

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not through a coup, *per se*, but after the army actively encouraged certain parliamentary factions to abandon Thaksin's party in favour of the Democrats. Abhisit subsequently found his legitimacy forcefully challenged on the streets in 2009 by the red-shirted United Front for Democracy Against Dictatorship (UDD), whose demands for the dissolution of parliament and new elections were met by a strong display of military force. The occupation of Bangkok streets by Red Shirt forces between March and May 2010 led into pitched street battles, and the end result was a violent army-led crackdown that left scores of persons dead.[21] When new elections were finally held in July 2011, another Thaksin party won another decisive electoral victory and the former leader's youngest sister, Yingluck Shinawatra, became the country's first female prime minister.[22]

What is the impact of this fierce contention on democracy? While leading the Yellow Shirts in 2008, PAD founder Sondhi Limthongkul was very openly questioning the virtues of democracy. "It's taken for granted in the West that democracy is the best system," he said. "But all we are getting in Thailand is the same vicious circle of corrupt, power-hungry leaders. This system is not working" (Beech 2008).[23] While the PAD has weakened as a political force, their anti-democratic sentiments live on among key business and technocratic leaders who seek to replace electoral democracy with the semi-democracy of old – namely the military-bureaucratic-royalist preference for a parliament that is substantially appointed. The Democrat Party remains ever faithful to its monarchical roots, and Abhisit's ascent to the prime ministership in December 2008 had come not via election but rather through a combination of judicial and military manoeuvres. While Abhisit preached the virtues of national reconciliation and worked to cultivate an image of democratic moderation, he could never disassociate himself with the systematic killing of red-clad protesters on the streets of Bangkok in April and May 2010. As Nicholas Farrelly succinctly concludes, "The army commanders called the shots but Abhisit ended up taking much of the blame" (2011a; see also 2011b).

A commonly professed goal on the red side of the political divide is to uphold the interests of those who have long felt marginalised, whether in terms of class or region. The broad red banner, however, encompasses a diverse movement ranging from fervent personal supporters of Thaksin Shinawatra to vocal critics of the tycoon whose September 2006 demise first inspired their movement.

[21]With an official death toll exceeding the country's three previous major crises in 1973, 1976, and 1992. The post-2006 "eruption of street violence", Prajak Kongkirati explains, "was a by-product of the royal-army alliance's interference in electoral politics" (2013: 155).

[22]Thaksin rode to victory under the Thai Rak Thai banner in 2001 and 2005, after which his allies formed the People Power Party for the 2007 elections and the Pheu Thai party for the 2011 elections.

[23]Kengkij and Hewison similarly note the "decidedly undemocratic" nature of PAD's advocacy; more generally, they observe broader alliances of social movements "with the monarchy and the military," despite the fact that the social movements are commonly viewed as "progressive or democratic" and the monarchy and military "conservative and authoritarian" (2009: 470–471).

Across this diversity, one can note a range of views on the subject of democracy. Thaksin's supporters can claim the legitimacy of repeated and overwhelming electoral victories, and point with pride to populist policies seeking to uplift the welfare of the poor and reverse the longstanding neglect of the country's most marginalised provinces.[24] At the same time, the Thaksin government itself was characterised by "executive abuses, corrupt practices, curbs on civil liberties, and severe human rights violations" (Case 2007: 622). This authoritarian legacy is one that at least some Red Shirts reject, but there are debates about the continuing allegiance of the Red Shirt movement to Thaksin himself. Naruemon and McCargo (2011) observe a movement that continues to be 'pro-Thaksin', while Haberkorn (2010) sees the increasing irrelevance of "the links of the red protesters with Thaksin". In their political discourse, they have come to juxtapose the *phrai* (a term, loosely translated as 'commoners', dating to the days of the absolute monarchy) against the *ammat* (translated most precisely as 'aristocracy', but often used to refer to the 'bureaucratic elite' as well as the wide assortment of royalist hangers-on). While there are indeed hardliners within the post-2006 Red Shirt movement who have demonstrated a preference for violent means over democratic procedure, others within the same movement are committed to putting in place a democratic system in which (to once again quote Rueschemeyer, Stephens, and Stephens [1992: 41]) "the disadvantaged many have, as citizens, a real voice in the collective decision making of politics." The mass mobilisations of 2009–2011 suggest that Thailand may be in the process of undergoing a very substantial level of political change, involving an historically unprecedented challenge from below to the longstanding dominance of old elites.

In the wake of the July 2011 elections, observers were closely watching the relationship of Prime Minister Yingluck Shiniwatra and her still-exiled brother to their Red Shirt supporters. Those expecting radical change have since been disappointed; those fearing radical change have probably been relieved. Given that his party "won…by a decisive majority (265 of 500 MPs)", writes Thitinan Pongsudhirak (2013), "Thaksin has played his cards with uncharacteristic patience." Despite promises to amend the military–drafted constitution of 2007, it remains untouched – in part out of a seeming desire not to move reignite the tensions of the past and in part from the calculus of continuing success: "Even with the constitutional rules written to keep him and his ilk out of office, Thaksin and his team's repeated election victories obviate the urgency of constitutional amendment." Thaksin has not yet come home, and thus not reactivated his vociferous opponents, but is said to make the country's

[24]Ockey argues that, as early as the 2001 election, "clear and concise" Thai Rak Thai policies "played a major role" and "were aimed at the lower classes, particularly in rural Thailand" (2003: 672). Looking at the subsequent impact of these policies, Kuhonta gives credit to Thaksin's universal health care program for "addressing the needs of the poor" (2011: 190).

major decisions from afar. The final element of Thaksin's "implicit bargain", writes Thitinan, "is that the monarchy must be protected and upheld at all costs" (Thitinan Pongsudhirak 2013). All of this suggests that the Yingluck/Thaksin government is engaged in at least partial accommodation of the power of the military-bureaucratic-royalist alliance, to the detriment of substantive reform.

At another level, one can note two major shifts in the terrain of political contestation in Thailand. First, the stark polarization of Thai politics, combined with a new and largely majoritarian electoral system, has led to potentially major shifts in the character of the Thai political party system. Whereas Thai parties have traditionally been weak, often short-lived, and reliant primarily on patronage appeals, there now seems to be the emergence of two relatively more stable parties whose appeals to voters are focussed to a much greater degree on programs and ideology (Meisburger 2011). As Prajak Kongkirati concludes, "The struggle between the establishment and those aligned with ousted Prime Minister Thaksin has deeply transformed Thai politics," shifting electoral competition away from the dominance of particularism and toward more concern for issues (2013). Second, there is increasingly open debate over the role of the monarchy in the state. Not since 1932, Walker and Farrelly (2009) assert, has "the royal institution faced such a potentially hazardous set of circumstances". Many factors have contributed to the combustible mix: Thaksin's ability to retain support in the countryside, the royalist links to the 2006 coup, the Queen's post-2006 overt support for the yellow-shirted PAD, the poor health of the King, the unpopularity of the Crown Prince, and the increasingly conspicuous use of *lèse majesté* charges against those who dare criticize the monarchy (Walker and Farrelly 2009).

This is hardly the first time that there have been convulsions in Thai politics, and the future could bring change either in more democratic or more authoritarian directions. As in the Philippines, albeit coming forth from very different historical circumstances, the structures of democracy in Thailand have been continually undermined by those with little commitment to the democratic ideal. At times, democratic structures can be useful in giving the appearance of promoting popular accountability and thus legitimising elite domination; at other times (in 1991 and 2006, just when the country seemed to have moved away from military coups as a technique for political change) the coup once again becomes a vital tool in the struggle for domination over rival groups. The logic of Thailand's continual regime change – authoritarianism to democracy to authoritarianism and then back again – can only be understood in terms of historical struggles for power among contending groups. (Indeed, analysts determined to identify clearly defined moments of 'democratic transition' in Thailand could well be driven to fits of apoplexy; equally confounding would be any effort to discern a consistent royalist or military or bureaucratic or middle class position toward the virtues or demerits of democracy.) Also as in

the Philippines, the presence of deep class divides inspires many to work toward a more inclusive future – sometimes with a commitment to democratic procedure and sometimes not.

Analysis of source and purpose reveals numerous underlying flaws in the character of both Philippine and Thai democratic structures. As has been emphasised above, the flaws are distinctive and reflective of each country's particular historical trajectory: the longstanding dominance of the family-based oligarchy can make it difficult for some Filipinos to envisage a political system that is not based on the power of the major clans, and the longstanding dominance of military-bureaucratic elites and an interventionist monarchy in Thailand can make it difficult for some Thais to imagine a political system that does not revolve around these special domains of privilege. So too does each country possess its own set of opportunities for genuine democratic change, as those who seek to undermine elite hegemony and promote popular accountability operate in very different socio-economic and institutional contexts.[25] Efforts to promote substantive democracy in each setting, therefore, must begin with careful historical analysis of the particular challenges that need to be addressed.

Acknowledging Flaws, Not Only in Practice but also in Theory

This analysis began with mention of Larry Diamond's 2008 survey of "at-risk democracies", which convincingly highlights how the democratic wave of the late twentieth century has encountered "a powerful authoritarian undertow" in recent years. Yet while many trends of recent years have indeed been deeply disturbing, the problems that they reveal relate not only to actual conditions on the ground but also to outmoded assumptions within the mainstream literature on democratization. Those who have in the past celebrated the global spread of democracy have often tended, with heady sanguinity, to overlook how democratic structures have been constructed on deeply anti-democratic foundations. While the fall of authoritarian regimes is certainly cause for celebration, it is still necessary to engage in sober assessment of the underlying character of the regimes that come in their wake.

The use of the term 'at-risk democracies' seems to give the connotation of some sort of Eden in the process of being corrupted.[26] Past success implicitly

[25]Thinking even more prospectively, should the two countries move toward more substantive forms of democracy, it can also be noted that Thailand will have the advantage of a much stronger tradition of bureaucratic capacity. Democratically determined policy change, in other words, will have a much greater prospect of effective implementation in Thailand as compared to the Philippines.

[26]Such a connotation would surely be unintentional, given how it runs counter to the larger thrust of Diamond's scholarship. Drawing on the larger corpus, as noted above, it would be more appropriate to use the term "electoral democracies at risk." This would explicitly highlight how those

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comes to be defined merely in terms of minimalist notions of democracy, even if the reality was a polity effectively lacking in democratic substance. Viewing ongoing oscillations in political dynamics from the present vantage point, it is not enough to say that celebrations of the 'spread of democracy' in such places as the Philippines and Thailand were premature; more to the point, those celebrations that did take place often overlooked deeply anti-democratic realities on the ground. There is no question but that democratic structures in these two countries have created important new space for popular demands to be heard and greatly altered the nature of political behaviour and discourse. Far from the ideal of democracy, however, the two countries exhibit distinct struggles to institutionalise the role of long-marginalised groups within the halls of power.

The tendency of scholarship to move beyond minimalist definitions of democracy, and to view democracy as a continuous variable, enables analysis to focus less on the formal establishment of democratic structures and more on underlying issues of quality and substance. Equally important is the need for analysis to move beyond deductive and generally ahistorical models of 'democratic transition' toward careful examination of struggles for power among social forces within specific historical contexts. As Rueschemeyer, Stephens and Stephens forcefully assert, "democracy is above all a matter of power" (1992: 5). Particular clarity, I argue, can come from careful attention to matters of source and purpose. We can better understand the nature of current travails when we open our eyes and acknowledge the depth of original sin: democratic structures that have been constructed in large part for the purpose of legitimising elite domination and perpetuating highly undemocratic political, economic, and social foundations. Explicit recognition of these flaws – not only in the Philippines and Thailand, but also in myriad other settings across the globe – is the essential first step toward encouraging movements and programs of change that can promote greater popular accountability and thus more substantive and enduring democracy.

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democracies "at risk" were already deeply flawed democracies, and reinforce the link he makes between shallow democracy and unstable democracy (Diamond 1999: 8–9, 20).

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