Constitutional Reform and Democracy in Thailand

A National Survey of the Thai People

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About The Asia Foundation

The Asia Foundation is a non-profit, non-governmental organization committed to the development of a peaceful, prosperous, just, and open Asia-Pacific region. The Foundation supports programs in Asia that help improve governance, law, and civil society; women's empowerment; economic reform and development; and international relations. Drawing on more than 50 years of experience in Asia, the Foundation collaborates with private and public partners to support leadership and institutional development, exchanges, and policy research.

With offices throughout Asia, an office in Washington, D.C., and its headquarters in San Francisco, the Foundation addresses these issues on both a country and regional level. In 2008, the Foundation provided more than $87 million in program support and distributed over one million books and educational materials valued at $41 million throughout Asia.

Preface

This report presents the findings of The Asia Foundation's first survey of the Thai electorate. The survey was conducted through face-to face interviews with a random, nationally representative sample of 1,500 voters in Bangkok and 26 provinces nationwide (excluding the three southern border provinces) between June 13 and July 5, 2009.

This survey represents the latest in a series of democracy assessments sponsored by the Foundation that began in 1999 with a voter education survey conducted in Indonesia followed by subsequent follow-up surveys in Indonesia, as well multiple surveys in Cambodia, East Timor, Afghanistan, and several other countries. (These surveys can be found at
http://www.asiafoundation.org/publications/index.php?q=democracy+assessment).

The primary purpose of the research was to provide lawmakers, politicians, academics and other stakeholders with information about the Thai publics' opinions and knowledge on issues relevant to the current debate on constitutional reform, and identify key issues and challenges facing political parties, election administrators and assistance providers in advance of a potential referendum on constitutional reforms and subsequent General Elections. In addition, to assess the process of democratization in Thailand, the survey sought to measure Thai voters' knowledge of and attitudes towards democracy and democratic institutions.

Since many of the core questions in the survey were asked in previous Foundation surveys conducted in other Asian nations, the Foundation was also able to make interesting and valuable comparisons between Thai attitudes and knowledge and those of their Asian neighbors Because the survey was conducted using a statistically effective and replicable methodology, the data collected may also serve as a benchmark on Thai voter perceptions, so that future surveys by the Foundation or other organizations might identify key trends and attitude changes among Thai voters.

We believe the survey will prove very useful to policy makers, political parties, academics, and others interested in developing a greater

understanding of the current state and development of democracy in Thailand and the perceptions of the Thai public.

James R. Klein
Country Representative, Thailand
The Asia Foundation
Bangkok, August 26, 2009

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Executive Summary

The National Mood
Thai citizens are rather pessimistic about the direction of the country, with less than a third saying the country is moving in the right direction. The most common reasons for thinking the country is headed in the wrong direction were economic, with 41% of all survey respondents saying the country was headed in the wrong direction due to a bad economy, lack of development, poverty or unemployment. The recent political conflicts and demonstrations, were cited by 11%,

When asked about the biggest problem facing Thailand, 60% cited economic concerns, and another 24% mentioned political conflict. Two-thirds (67%) say their personal economic situation has gotten worse or much worse in the last two years; nevertheless a small majority (53%) say they are fairly or very satisfied with the job the government is doing

Amending the Constitution
Thais are evenly split between those who believe constitutional amendment could reduce conflict (45%), and those who think it might exacerbate conflict (45%). In total, 53% of the population says they want constitutional reform or a new constitution, while 28% are happy with the current constitution.

When asked how the Constitution should be amended, 67% say amendment should be drafted through a participatory process that involves ordinary citizens; 10% say amendment should be done by Parliament alone, and 16% thought changes should be drafted by a committee of experts. Regardless of method of amendment, an overwhelming majority (84%) believes that a new or revised constitution should be ratified through a referendum.

Regarding the timing of elections, a small majority (53%) think elections should be called before the end of the current term, however these respondents are split as to whether the elections should occur as soon as possible (23%) or after reforms have been made (30%).   A strong minority (43%) favors waiting until the term of the current government expires.

Election Reform Issues

Most Thais across the political spectrum reject impunity for powerful people, even if it means an increase in political conflict. A majority (62%) favor retaining Article 237 of the 2007 Constitution (which allows the banning of politicians and dissolution of parties) in a revised Constitution, and only one in five (21%) think politicians convicted of crimes should be pardoned. Likewise, 57% would support revoking the pardons granted the military coup-makers in the 2007 constitution, nevertheless 62% see the army as an important institution, and 69% say the army is the right size.

Thais feel their interests in government are better represented through elections than appointments, and express the desire to be more involved in the political process. Only a quarter of citizens (25%) support the shift from an elected senate to a partially appointed senate mandated in the 2007 constitution; 63% say they prefer the system described in the 1997 constitution, and 6% want to eliminate the Senate entirely. Additionally three-quarters (74%) reject the proposal to reduce the number of directly elected MPs and replace them with MPs selected by functional groups or independent institutions

When asked about the most appropriate system for electing MPs to Parliament, half (50%) of the respondents opted for the current mixed system, with 45% preferring smaller single member districts; and 54% would drop the party-list system in favor of single member districts.

Decentralization

A substantial majority (69%) of respondents are in favor of shifting some power from the national to the local level, and directly electing provincial governors. When asked specifically, 75% say they prefer choosing their own governor through direct elections. In those places that already have elected governors, voters liked their governors twice as much as residents of provinces with appointed governors.

Voter Registration

Fourteen percent of Thai voters are registered to vote in their household registration constituency instead of where they currently live, and on average these voters have lived away from their home village for almost seven years. Of those, 57% said they prefer voting in their home constituency rather than where they work. Voters who have not moved

also think migrants should vote where they are from rather than where they live by an even stronger majority of 68%.

Democracy in Thailand
When asked about the characteristics of a democracy, almost half (48%) describe democracy in terms of rights or freedoms, and more than a third (36%) associates democracy with participation/elections/majority rule, while just 9% could not provide any characteristic of a democracy.

A strong majority of Thai voters (68%) recognize that political conflict is a normal part of the democratic process, and that it can be difficult to come to consensus or make decisions, but still overwhelmingly support democracy (95%) as the best form of government. Respondents are split in their opinion as to whether it is more important to compromise with the minority to build as much consensus as possible for government decisions (52%), or if the majority preference should always take precedence when decisions are made (46%). The Thai people as a whole (98%) believe strongly that there is more that unites them than divides them.

Although almost everyone believes that democracy is the best form of government in normal times, almost a third (30%) would support authoritarian rule in some circumstances. A majority of Thais (70%) see the government and people as equals, while 16% hold a paternalistic view of the government as father and the people as children, and 11% view the government as a boss.

Seven in ten (70%) of Thais are satisfied to some extent with democracy in Thailand, but almost three in ten (28%) are dissatisfied. Although about 63% of Thais perceive the country as somewhat or very democratic, more than a third (35%) say Thailand has little or no democracy.

Democratic Values
The Thai people are significantly more politically tolerant than the publics in other Asian countries; 79% would allow meetings of unpopular parties in their area, just 6% said that a friend joining an unpopular party would end the friendship. Additionally 80% of Thais say people are free to express their political opinions. Almost all Thai people (92%) support the idea that women should be free to make their own choice in voting, which is the highest percentage favoring female choice of any country surveyed by the Foundation over the last decade.

Political Interest and Efficacy
Almost three-quarters (71%) say they are somewhat or very interested in politics, which is high by regional standards. The political turmoil of the last three years has not turned off voters, with 83% saying their interest has grown or stayed the same, while just 17% said their interest had decreased and 26% saying they often discuss politics with friends.

Thais are divided on their opinion as to whether or not the government cares what they think, with (55%) believing the government does not care, and (43%) believing it does. When asked specifically if their opinion could influence government decision-making, 80% said it would have very little or no influence on government decision-making and this may contribute to their generally low assessment of the quality of representation, with just a third (33%) believing their MP addressed their major concerns in parliament.

Influences on Voting Choice
The single greatest factor influencing voters' choice of candidate is the candidate's availability and accessibility, with fully half (50%) of all respondents selecting this option. Other important factors include candidates' education (17%) and personal achievements (10%). In choosing a party, 57% say the past history or accomplishments of the party were most important, 22% said, the current plans of the party, and 19% would choose based on the character and accomplishments of the party's leaders.

Although it is commonly asserted that local leaders have strong influence over voters, our findings suggest the opposite, with just 16% agreeing that following the recommendations of local leaders makes sense. Similarly, just ten percent felt family members choice should be influenced by the opinion of the head of household. Religion has little influence on voter choice: 90% say religious leaders should avoid politics, and 91% say the political recommendations of religious leaders would have little or no influence on their candidate or party choice.

Election Processes
Although a majority of Thais (58%) believe voters in their area could be influenced by vote-buying activity, an overwhelming majority (84%) feel there is no moral obligation to vote for a party or candidate, even if they had accepted money or a gift. Non-partisan election observation could

be an effective means for enhancing confidence in the process for more than half (62%) of the population.

Thais are split evenly in their opinion as to whether the international community could play a positive role in help resolve the political impasse in Thailand, and there is no strong preference for international as opposed to local observers, with 42% saying they prefer local observers, 6% saying foreign observers, and 50% saying it does not matter.

Civil Society and Trust
Membership in voluntary associations is remarkably low in Thailand: just 22% (12% in urban areas) belong to any association. Trust in other people is also low, with 61% believing most people cannot be trusted. While Thais in general have low levels of societal trust, they have much higher levels of trust in their neighbors, with three-quarters (74%) saying they are trustworthy.

Democratic Institutions
The courts have by far the highest integrity rating among institutions rated, with two-thirds (64%) assessing them positively. At the other end of the judicial process, the police are seen as the least trusted institution, with 39% ranking their integrity as low or very low, and another 42% seeing it as neither high nor low. The army has the second highest positive rating at 44%. Only 35% gave the election commission high marks, and just 21% felt the media has high integrity.

Most voters have low regard for the independence and neutrality of Thailand's democratic institutions. The courts are again the most respected institution, with 62% saying the courts are generally neutral and unbiased. Barely more than a third of the population (37%) believes the army is generally neutral and unbiased, and just a fifth (19%) felt NGOs were generally neutral and unbiased. Two-thirds (67%) see the election commission as sometimes or often biased, 81% view the media as biased, and 84% see political bias in the police.

The lack of trust in institutions is reflected in other ways. Half (48%) of all voters believe future elections will not be free and fair, and an astonishing 94% say corruption in government is at least fairly common, with 65% thinking it very common. Regarding corruption among local administrative officials, perceptions are split, with 48% saying it is often necessary to pay bribes for routine services and 26% saying they had personally known someone that had to pay a bribe.

Introduction

In early May 2009 the National Assembly set up a parliamentary committee to study potential changes to the Constitution that would facilitate national reconciliation and political reform, and at the same time asked political parties to submit their suggestions for consideration by the committee.

To provide policy-makers and other stakeholders with accurate and neutral information on public opinions related to the various proposals put forward by the political parties, The Asia Foundation sponsored a national survey of the Thai people. Objectives of the survey were to:

- Determine the mood of the electorate and gauge public opinion about current issues and institutions
- Gauge public perceptions of the issues and processes surrounding a potential effort to revise or amend the Constitution
- Assess civic education needs and track movement on key measures such as knowledge and attitudes about democratic process and values
- Measure association membership and social capital
- Identify the media that can most effectively reach specific target groups.

Rather than utilizing the usual telephone survey methodology, which may not accurately represent all segments of the population, the survey was conducted through face-to-face interviews using a random-sampling technique that meant every Thai citizen (except in the three southernmost provinces) had an equal chance of being selected as a respondent. In total, 1500 interviews were conducted in five regions: North, Northeast, Central, South, and the Bangkok metropolitan area, yielding a margin of error of 3% (at the 95% confidence level) for national findings. The survey was ably implemented by the professional public opinion research firm, MIAdvisory.

It is important to note when reading the report that for security reasons the three southernmost provinces; Narathiwat, Pattani, and Yala, where not included in the random process used to select provinces for sampling. Since these three provinces are in some senses linguistically and ethnically different than other parts of Thailand, their absence may skew results. To fill this lacuna in our analysis the Foundation aims to strengthen capacity for survey implementation in the deep south and conduct additional surveys there in the near future.

Further information about the methodology used to conduct this survey can be found in the appendix at the end of the report.

| Region	Provinces
Greater BKK	Bangkok
	Pathum Thani
	Nonthaburi
	Samut Sakhon
Central	Suphan Buri
	Ratchaburi
	Lop Buri
	Rayong
	Prachin Buri
	Sing Buri
North	Chiang Rai
	Phayao
	Lamphun
	Phetchabun
	Kamphaeng Phet
	Uthai Thani
South	Nakhon Si Thammarat
	Surat Thani
	Phuket
	Songkhla
	Trang
North East	Khon Kaen
	Sakon Nakhon
	Nong Khai
	Nakhon Ratchasima
	Buri Ram
	Surin

Chapter 1

The National Mood

1.1   Direction of the Country

Generally speaking, do you think things in Thailand today are going in the right direction, or do you think they are going in the wrong direction?(Q1)
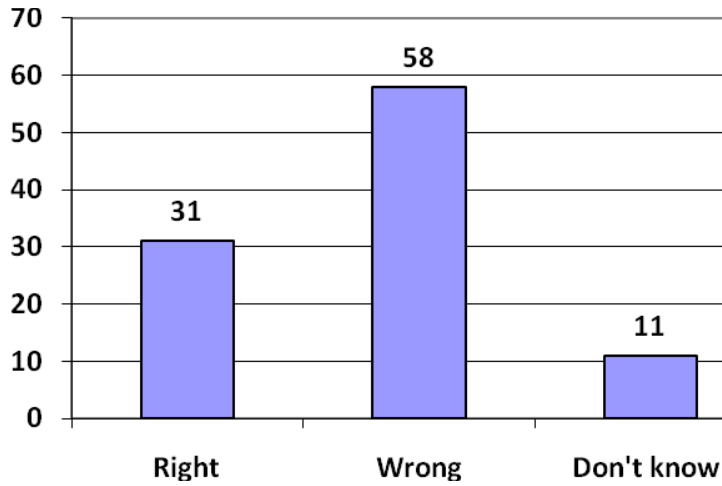
Thai citizens are pessimistic about the direction their country is taking. Just 31% felt the country was moving in the right direction, while 69% felt the country was moving in the wrong direction or were unsure. Those most optimistic about the direction of the country were in the South and Central Bangkok where 46% felt the country was headed in the right direction. Those least optimistic (24%) were in the Central and Northeast regions). Interestingly, just 28% of respondents in the metropolitan region surrounding Central Bangkok were optimistic about the direction of the country.

1.2   *Direction of Country: Reasons for Wrong Direction*

Why do you say that? (Wrong direction reasons) (Q2)

| Reason	Value
Bad economy/lack of development	
Politcal conflict/demonstration	41
New government	15
Conflict in the south	9
Corruption	7
Lack of democracy	4
Other NEGATIVE	8
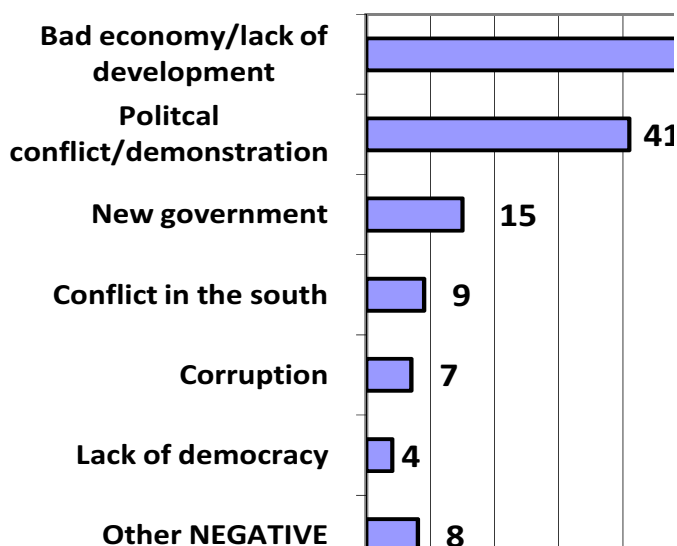
The most common reasons given by those who thought the country was headed in the wrong direction were related to economic distress, with 64% of all survey respondents saying the country was headed in the wrong direction due to a bad economy, lack of development, poverty or unemployment. This response was most common in the north and northeast, where it was mentioned by almost half (48% and 49%), suggesting these regions may have been hit hardest by the recent economic downturn. Less than a third (31%) mentioned economic difficulty in the south.

The recent political conflicts and demonstrations, cited by 11%, were also a significant factor for those pessimistic about the direction of the country, with that response ranging from highs of 21% in the central region and 15% in Bangkok, to lows of just 5% in the north and south, presumably the areas least affected by political turmoil.

### 1.3   *Direction of Country: Reasons for Right Direction*

Why do you say that? (Right direction reasons) (Q2)
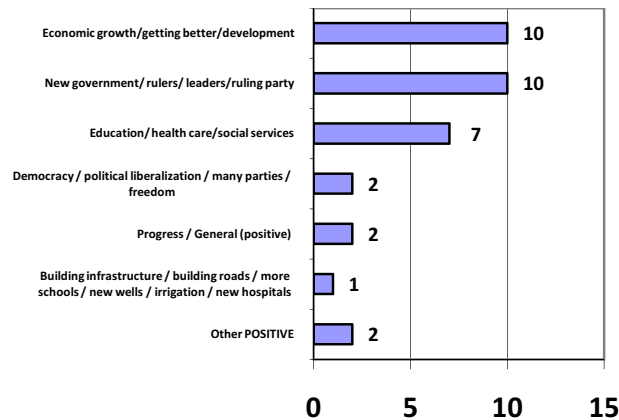
Among all respondents, 10% said they thought the country is headed in the right direction because of the new government. The frequency of this response varied considerably by region, with Bangkok residents mentioning it most (16%), and Northeast residents least (5%). Another 10%, in contrast to the pessimism of most survey respondents, said improving economic conditions were the reason they thought the country is headed in the right direction, with those most positive about the economy in the south (18%). The only other significant reason given for optimism, cited by 7%, were related to perceptions of improvements in education, health care and social services, with the response rate varying from a low of 3% in Bangkok and the central region, to a high of 14% in the south.

1.4   Biggest Problem Facing Thailand

In your view, what is the biggest problem facing Thailand? (Q3)
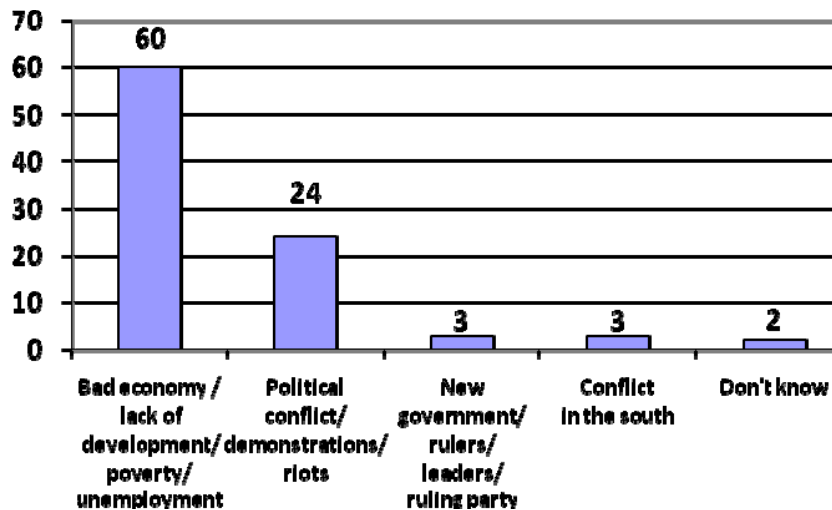
When asked about the biggest problem facing Thailand, the concerns expressed by those respondents who were pessimistic about the direction of the country are echoed by all respondents, with 60% citing economic concerns, and another 24% mentioning political conflict. It is possible that some of the concern expressed about political conflict is also economic in nature, as many analysts have attributed decreases in tourism earnings and foreign investment to uncertainty created by demonstrations and the closing of the national airports. The conflict in the south was cited by just 3% of respondents as the biggest problem facing Thailand.

1.5   Economic Well-Being

Thinking about your own personal economic situation now compared to two years ago, would you say you are much better off, better off, worse off, much worse off or about the same? (Q4)
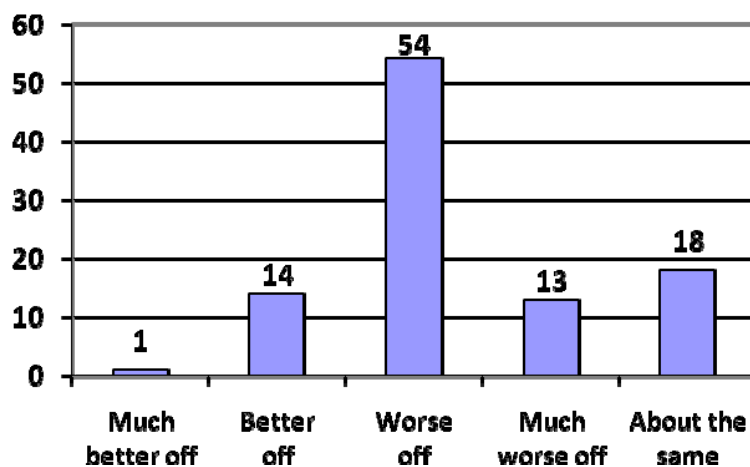

It is not surprising that almost 60% of the population thinks Thailand is heading in the wrong direction when two-thirds (67%) say their personal economic situation has gotten worse or much worse in the last two years. Of those who thought Thailand is heading in the wrong direction, 91% said they were financially worse off, much worse off, or about the same as they had been two years ago.

1.6   *Satisfaction with Government*

Would you say you are very satisfied, fairly satisfied, somewhat dissatisfied, or very dissatisfied with the job the national government is doing? (Q5)
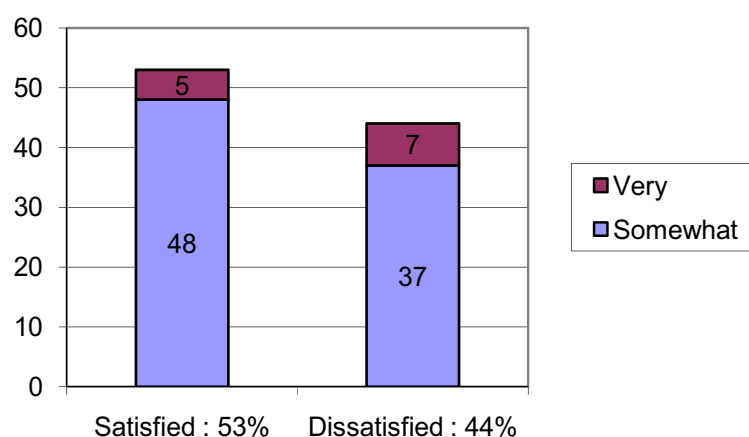
Satisfied : 53%   Dissatisfied : 44%

A small majority (53%) say they are fairly or very satisfied with the job the government is doing, which is an extremely high approval rate given that 67% say they are worse off economically than they were two years ago. The current government is relatively new, and many may attribute the root causes of the economic downturn to previous governments, but experience in other countries suggests if the economy does not improve in the near future, these high levels of approval are likely to slip rapidly, and could contribute to increased political instability and increased demand for constitutional reform or fresh elections.

Satisfaction with government is strongly correlated with belief that the country is heading in the right direction, with 85% of those who are very or fairly satisfied with the government saying the country is headed in the right direction.

Chapter 2

Amending the Constitution

2.1   Timing of Amendment

In the past few years, there have been several political conflicts in Thailand. Therefore, some people say that constitutional amendments might help reduce the political conflicts whereas other people say that the attempt to amend the Constitution causes more conflicts. Which statement is closer to your opinion? Would constitutional amendments help reduce political conflicts or cause more political conflicts"? (Q6)
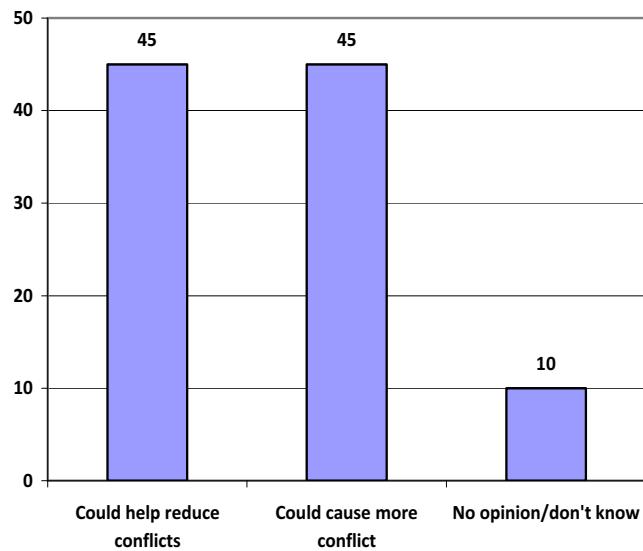
Respondents are evenly split between those who believe constitutional amendments could reduce conflict (45%), and those who think it might exacerbate conflict (45%). Although concern that constitutional amendments could cause more political problems is relatively consistent across regions and between men and women, it declines steadily and significantly with age, from 54% for those 20-29, to just 27% of those over 60.

2.2 Options for Constitutional Change

When thinking about possible changes to the Constitution, which of these options would you prefer? (Q7)
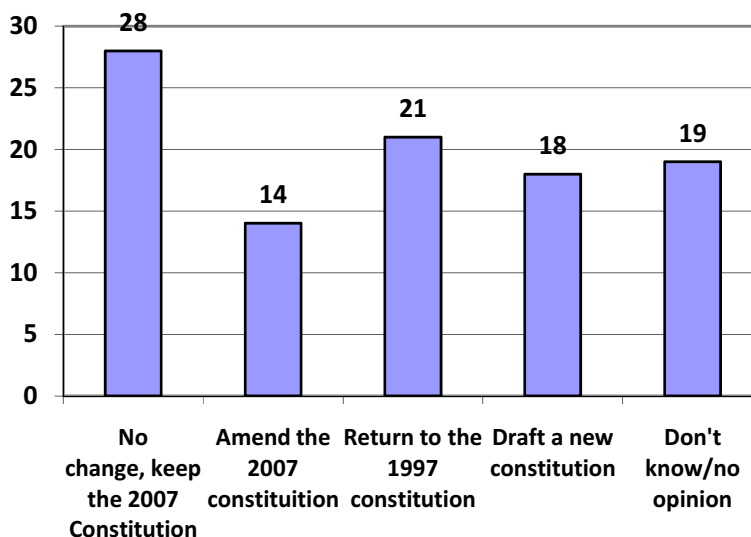
While potential amendments of the Constitution seem to be one of the most pressing political concerns of the day, a fifth of Thai citizens (and a quarter of all women) had no opinion on the issue, and three quarters of those with no opinion said they did not know the difference between the 2007 and 1997 constitutions. In total, 53% of the population wants some form of constitutional change, while 28% are happy with the current constitution. The current constitution is by far most popular in the south, where four in ten (42%) expressed support, and least popular in the rural northeast and central Bangkok, where just 18% liked the current Constitution. In other regions sentiment in favor of keeping the 2007 Constitution ranged from 23% to 30%.

2.3   Method of Constitutional Amendment

Several methods have been proposed to determine what should be amended in the Constitution or to draft a new constitution. Of these methods, which do you prefer?
(Q8)
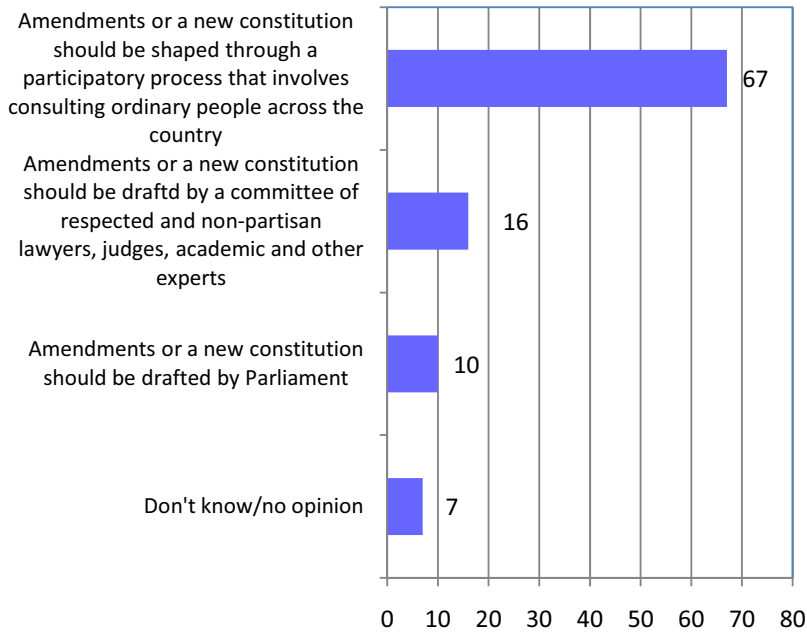
Two-thirds of Thai citizens say the Constitution should be amended or a new constitution drafted through a participatory process that involves ordinary citizens, suggesting that public affection for the process that produced the 1997 constitution has not dimmed. Just one in ten (10%) thought it appropriate for Parliament to take the lead in constitutional amendments, and only 16% thought these changes should be made by a committee of experts. Support for parliamentary involvement varied widely by region, with 27% in favor in the south, compared to just 3% in the north (and interestingly, just 4% in central Bangkok). Participatory amendment was the most popular choice everywhere, with support relatively consistent across regions except in the south, where 48% supported this option.

2.4   Ratifying Constitutional Amendment

Do you think a new or amended constitution should be put to a referendum, or is it enough for it to be endorsed by parliament? (Q9)
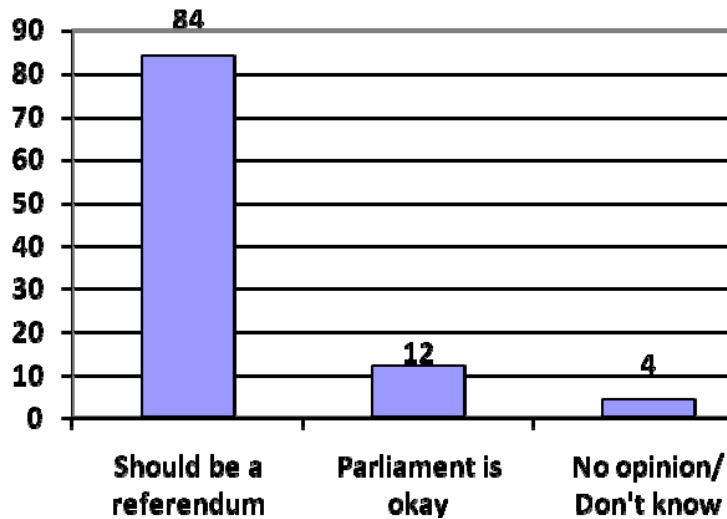
An overwhelming majority (84%) believes that a new or revised constitution should be ratified through a referendum, suggesting that many of the people who want to change the 2007 constitution nevertheless like the process through which it was enacted. This finding also reinforces the notion that the Thai people want increased public participation in the Constitutional reform process. Support for a referendum is relatively consistent across regions and age groups, except for the 50-59 year olds, of whom just 72% support this option (12% less than the national average).

2.5   *Elections and Constitutional Reform*

The current government assumed office through normal parliamentary procedures rather than elections, so some people say elections should be held as soon as possible, while others think it will be important to enact necessary reforms before elections are held, or to wait until the current government's term expires. Which is closer to your view? (Q10)
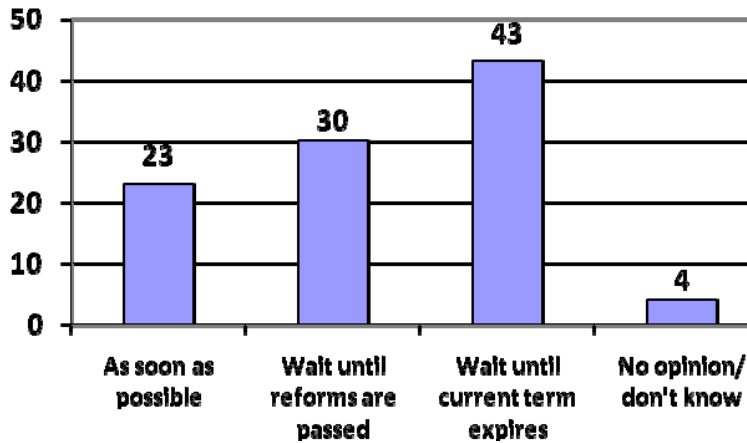
A small majority (53%) think elections should be called before the end of the current term, but these respondents are split as to whether the elections should occur as soon as possible (23%) or after reforms have been made (30%). A strong minority (43%) favors waiting until the term of the current government expires before having another round of elections. Having elections as soon as possible is most popular in the northeast, where a third of respondents (33%) expressed that preference; and least popular in the south, where just 10% wanted quick elections. Likewise, the northeast and south provided the greatest disparity between those who want to wait until the government's term expires before having elections, with 33% supporting this option in the northeast, compared to 65% in the south.

Chapter 3

Election Reform Issues

3.1 Banning Parties and Politicians

Article 237 says that the Constitution Court can dissolve a political party and ban its senior executive members for 5 years if any senior executives are convicted of electoral fraud. This article has been criticized by some as undemocratic because some politicians who are banned have not been convicted of a crime, and because voters who did nothing wrong are punished when their political party is dissolved. Other people say this article is needed to ensure that political parties play by the rules. Do you think this article should be revoked or kept in the revised constitution? (Q11)
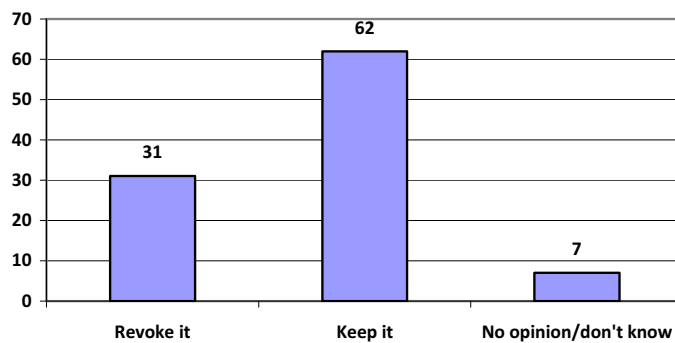

Although Article 237 of the 2007 Constitution is criticized as undemocratic, a majority (62%) are in favor of retaining it in a revised Constitution, even if that means the dissolution of political parties. The level of support for keeping Article 237 was relatively consistent across regions, except in the south, where the number that supported keeping the Article rose to 77%.

When combined with other findings in the survey, this response suggests voter frustration with what they view as an unfair system of different rules for different people; a system that seemingly allows senior politicians to violate laws with impunity.

3.2   Pardoning Politicians

Some politicians have been convicted of crimes, but say that they are innocent and that the convictions were politically motivated. To reduce political conflict, should these politicians be pardoned, or should their convictions stand? (Q12)
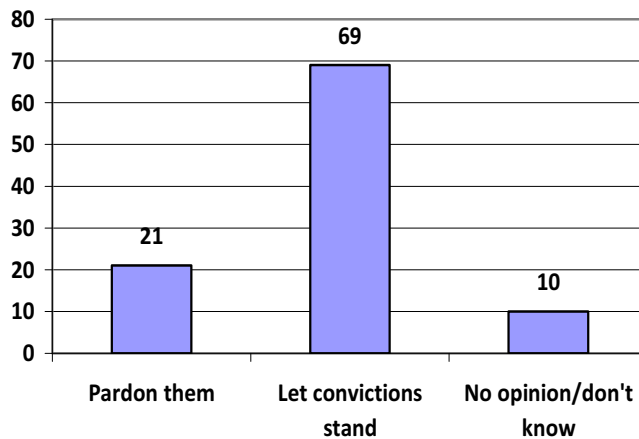
Only one in five (21%) Thais think politicians convicted of crimes should be pardoned, even if pardoning politicians could reduce political conflict. More than two-thirds (69%) say the convictions should stand, and these findings are relatively consistent across all regions, suggesting this opinion is not related to adherence to any political party or faction. This finding, combined with the responses to the next question, suggests that Thais in general may have grown tired and less tolerant of what they perceive as a culture of impunity among powerful elites.
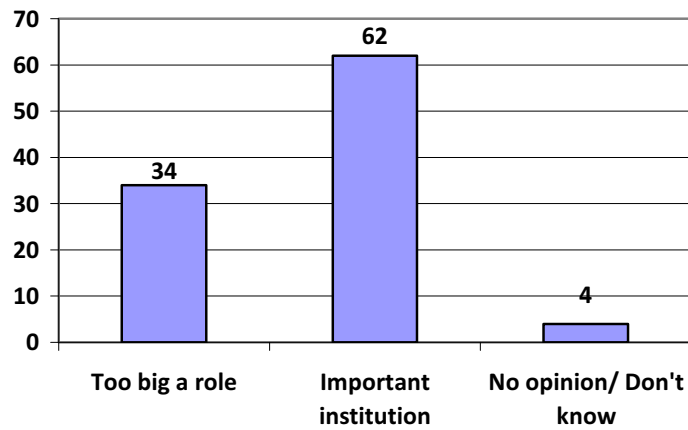
3.3   *Pardoning the Coup-makers*

What about the coup-makers? They were pardoned under the 2007 Constitution. Should those pardons be revoked, and the coup-makers prosecuted; or to reduce the potential for further political conflict should the pardon be kept in a new constitution? (Q13)
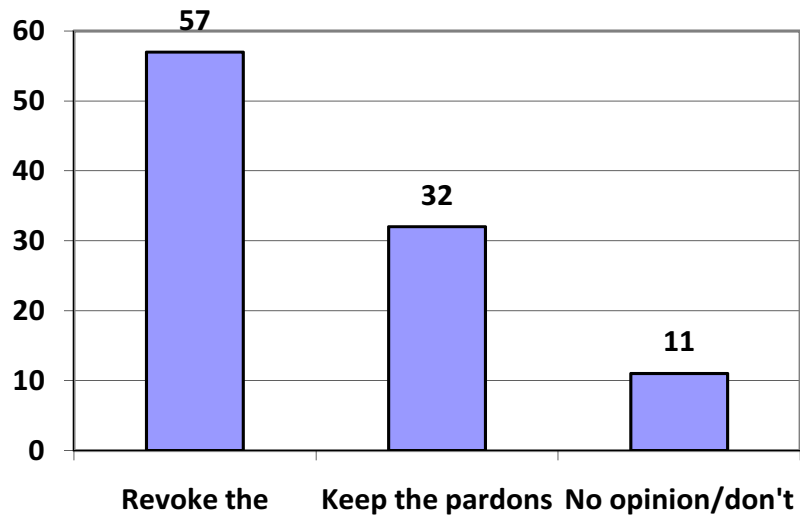
Although (as will be seen in later findings) Thais continue to have deep respect for the military as an institution, they don't want the military controlling government. A third (32%) are willing to forgive those who staged the latest coup, while 57% would like the pardons granted the coup-makers in the 2007 constitution revoked, whether or not such action would exacerbate political conflict in society. The findings are relatively consistent across regions, with the south being the region least willing (just 24%) to forgive the coup-makers and keep the pardons granted in the 2007 constitution.

3.4   Role of the Army in Politics

Many people think the army plays too much role in Thai politics, while others see the army as an important independent institution that has helped safeguard & stabilize the country. Which is closer to your view? (Q25)

While a majority of voters would like to revoke the pardons granted to the coup-makers in the 2007 constitution, an even larger majority see the military as an independent institution that plays an important role in protecting and stabilizing the country. This sentiment was similar across age groups and gender, but varied by region from a bare majority (53%) in Bangkok who felt the army served an important role, to 71% in the central region.

3.5 Size of the Army

How about the size of the army? Do you think the army is too small, the right size, or too big? (Q26)
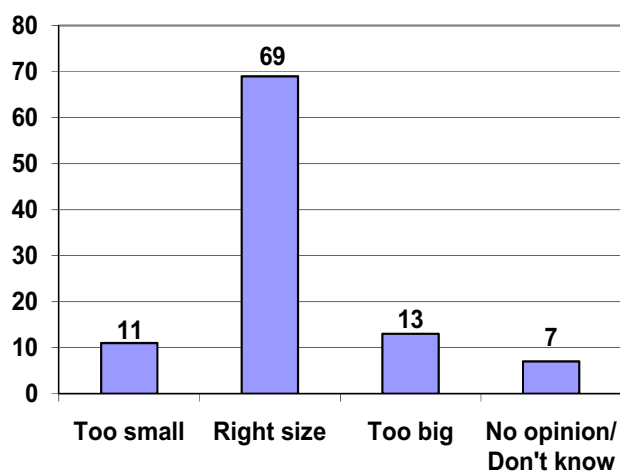

Respondents also overwhelmingly thought the military the right size (69%) rather than too small (11%), or too big (13%), with responses similar across regions, age and gender.
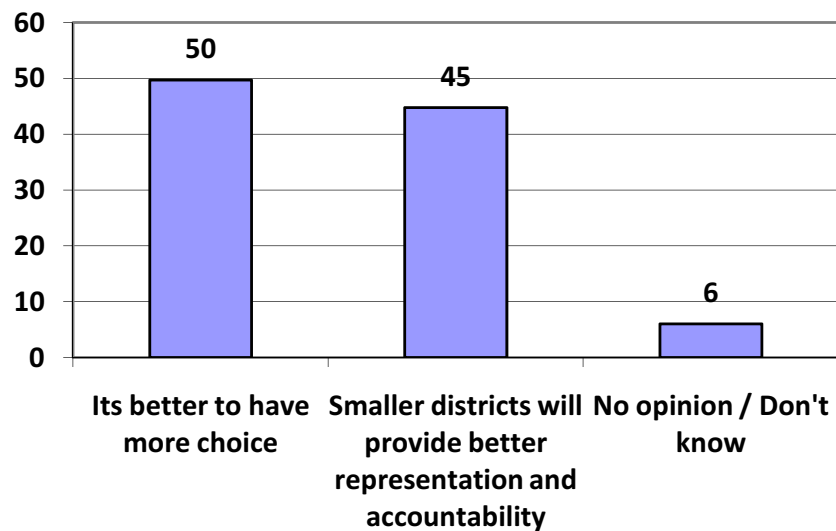
3.6   The Senate Election System

The 2007 Constitution changed the Senate from a wholly-elected to a partially appointed body. Several proposals have been put forward for the Senate; including keeping the current mixed structure, going back to a wholly-elected senate as per the 1997 constitution, or eliminating the Senate entirely. Which proposal do you prefer? (Q14)
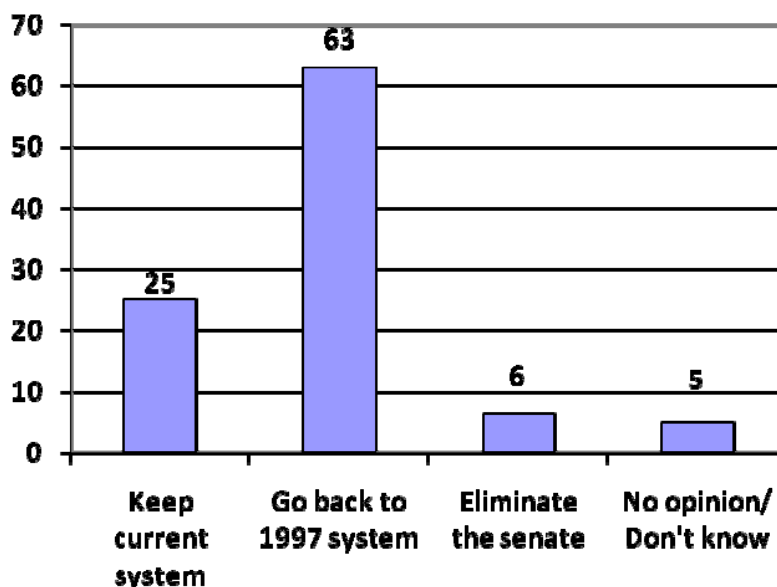
A quarter of citizens (25%) support the shift from an elected senate to a partially appointed senate created by the 2007 constitution. A solid majority (63%) say they prefer the system described in the 1997 constitution, and a further 6% want to eliminate the Senate entirely. Support for the current system varied considerably across regions, from a high of 36% in the south and 32% in Bangkok, to a low of 17% in the north. Urban voters (29%) were slightly more likely to favor the current system than rural voters (23%). Overall, it is clear that Thais feel their interests in government are better represented through elections than appointments, and continue to express the desire to be more involved in the political process.

3.7   *The MP Election System*

Regarding the election of MPs to parliament, which statement is closest to your own opinion: electing MPs through a mixed system of multi-member districts and national proportional representation of political parties is better because we can vote for several candidates together with selecting one political party; or, electing MPs from small single-member districts is a better system because when districts are too big it is difficult for people to get to know the various candidates and it is hard to monitor them all when elected. (Q15)

	Its better to have more choice	Smaller districts will provide better representation and accountability	No opinion / Don't know
	50	45	6

When asked about the most appropriate system for electing MPs to Parliament, half (50%) of the respondents opted for the current mixed system, with 45% preferring smaller single member districts. The relatively even split on this complex issue, and the lack of public support for the party-list system (see question 17 below), suggests it would be an important topic for public education and consultation prior to Constitutional amendment or reform. Although opinions were split across the country, the south was least supportive of the current system (35%), while the central region was least supportive of single member districts (38%).

3.8   The New Politics Proposal

Some people have proposed reducing the number of MPs who are directly elected, and replacing them with MPs appointed by groups or independent institutions. Do you agree with this proposal, or disagree? (Q16)
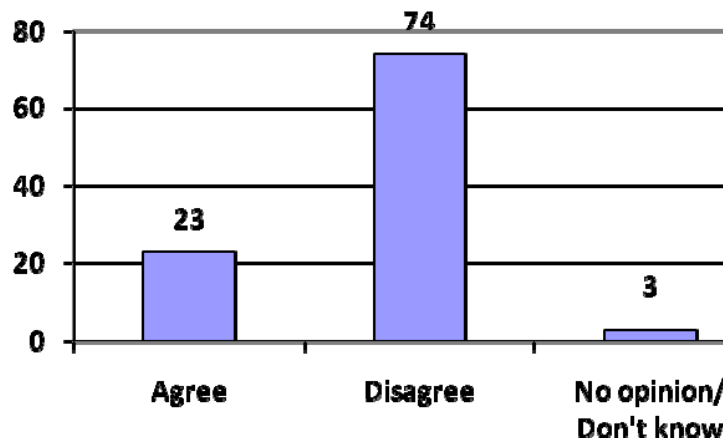
Again respondents demonstrate their support for public participation in governance, with three-quarters (74%) rejecting the proposal to reduce the number of directly elected MPs and replace them with MPs selected by functional groups or independent institutions. Strong majorities disapproved of the proposal across all age groups, and in general disapproval increased with age, with only the cohort over 60 having disapproval rates lower than 18-19 year olds (60% to 63%). By region, only the south had approval rates of more than a third (34%), with the next highest in the northeast at 27% and Bangkok at 25%. The lowest approval rates were in the central and north regions (16%).

3.9 The Party List System

Some people have proposed dropping the party list system completely, and electing all MPs directly as individuals. Do you agree with this proposal, or disagree? (Q17)
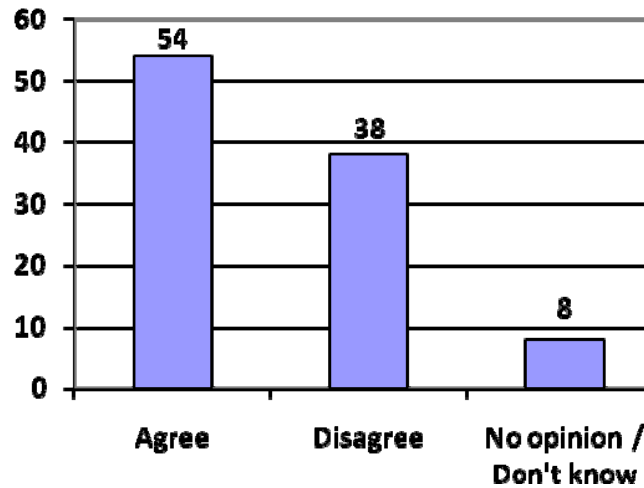
Although a plurality expressed support for the current mixed election system, when specifically asked about the system of proportionally allocating seats based on a party-list 54% say they would prefer directly electing individuals. Urban and rural responses are identical, but regional support varies, with about 60% in the northeast and south regions saying they would like to get rid of the party list system, while just 40% support the proposal in the central region.

Chapter 4

Decentralization

4.1   View of Decentralization

Sometimes people in Bangkok and up-country have different interests and different points of view; so some people say that governance would be better if some power and decision making were shifted from the central government in Bangkok to local governments, and that provincial governors should be directly elected like in Bangkok. However, some people believe that the government will be more fair, more effective, and more efficient if centrally controlled. Which statement is closer to your point of view? (Q.18)
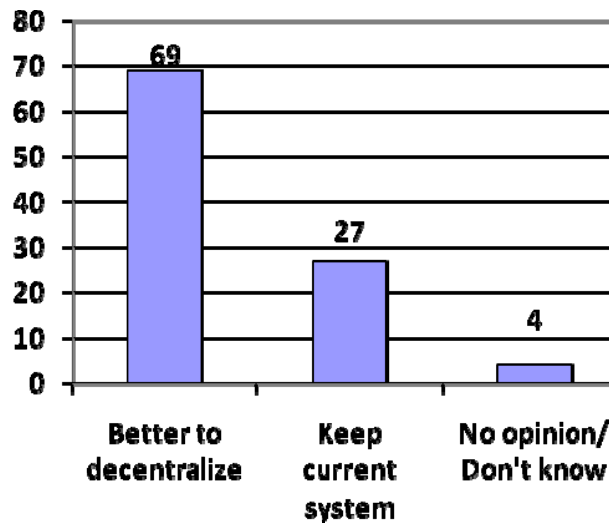

A substantial majority (69%) of respondents are in favor of shifting some power from the national to the local level, and directly electing provincial governors. Support for decentralization was relatively consistent across age groups and regions.

4.2   Election of Provincial Governors

Do you think provincial governors should be appointed or directly elected? (Q.20)
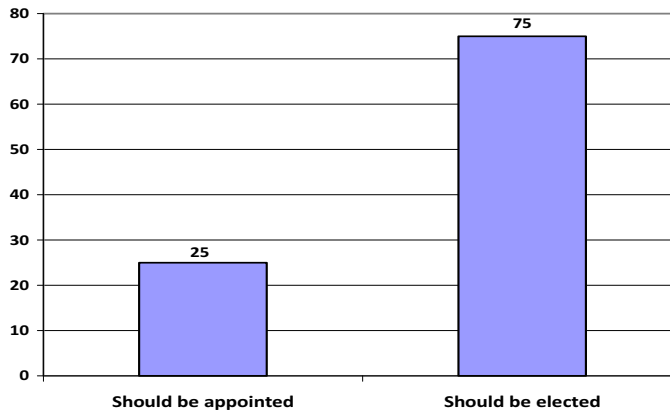
The general support expressed earlier for decentralization is even clearer when more narrowly defined as preference for elected or appointed provincial governors, with three-quarters (75%) saying they would prefer to choose their own governor. Interestingly, women are 5% more likely overall to support elections than men (72% to 77%), with most of the difference coming from just two regions; the central region (71% men to 84% women), and the south (66% to 79%). The highest support for electing governors (82%) is seen in central Bangkok, which is an interesting finding, as these residents also have the most personal experience of directly-elected governors.

4.3   *Favorability Rating of Governors*

How much do you like the governors which are _____(read answers in Q20.1)? - - Base: Those who are appointed (Q20.2)

How much do you like the governors which are _____(read answers in Q20.1)? Base: Those who are elected (Q20.2)
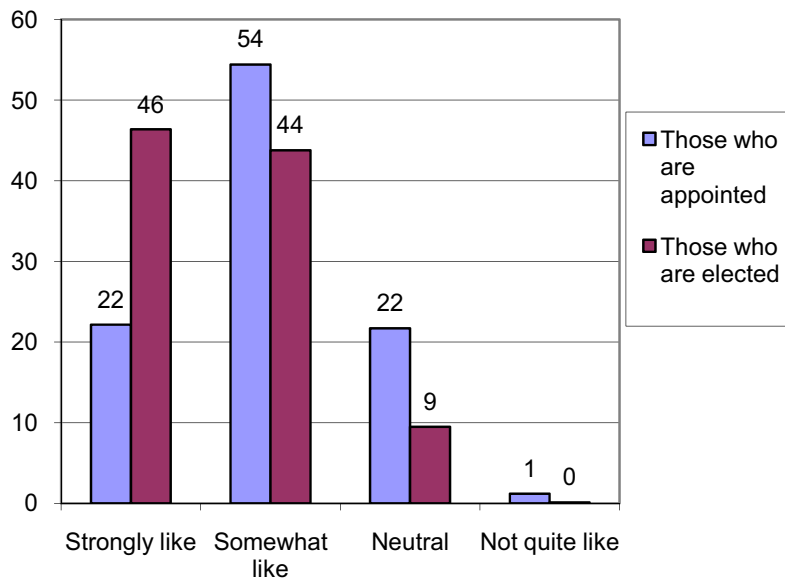
When we asked how much people liked their current governor, 46% of those with an elected governor had a strong liking, compared to just 22% of those with an appointed governor.

4.4   *Decentralization and Conflict*

Similarly, some people suggested that political decentralization or limited autonomy (not relating to separatism) might help solve the long-term conflict in southern Thailand. What is your opinion about this? (Q.19)
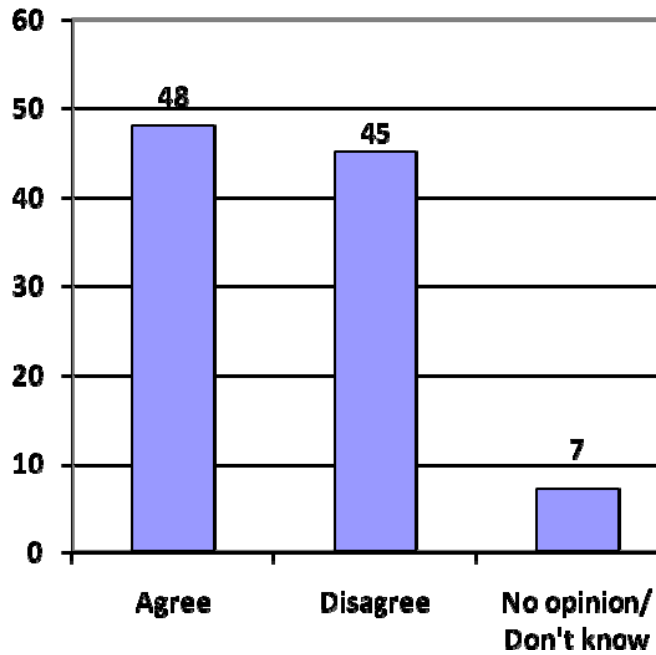
Although a majority of respondents support political decentralization in Thailand, they are evenly divided in their opinion as to whether decentralization might help resolve the ongoing conflict in the far south (an area, it is important to note, that was not included in this survey). Belief that decentralization might help resolve the conflict in the deep south ranged from a high of 58% in the Bangkok metropolitan region, to lows of 36% in the central region and 42% in the south.
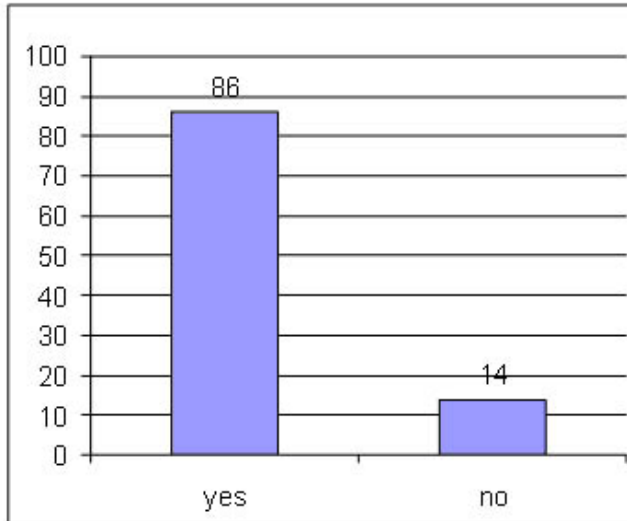
Chapter 5

Voter Registration

5.1 *Internal Migration and Voting*

21. *Currently, do you live and work in the area that you have the right to vote?*

In Thailand, as in many countries, there is significant internal migration (primarily from rural areas to cities) by people in search of better economic opportunities. But unlike in most other democracies, citizens who move away from their ancestral villages have to return there to vote. According to the survey, this affects 14% of the Thai people, or about 6.3 million people. On average, these voters have lived away from their home village for almost seven years. By far, those most affected are between the ages of 20 and 29 years old, with almost a quarter (23%) of this age group disadvantaged by the current system, and may provide a partial explanation for the lower participation rates for youth in elections. The regions most affected are Bangkok, where almost one in three (30%) citizens must travel to vote, and the central region (28%); while those least affected are in the northeast, where just 3% travel to vote.

### 5.2   Preferable Location for Voting: Migrants

Would you prefer to vote the MP candidates in the district where your name is registered in or vote the MP candidates in the district where you actually live and work? (Q.23)
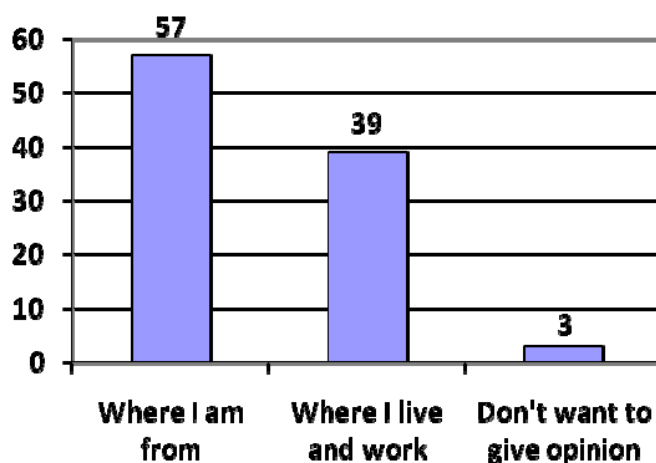
When internal migrants were asked whether they would prefer to vote in their household registration constituency or where they work, 57% said they would rather vote in their home constituency. There was little regional variation on the issue except in the south, where 69% said they would prefer to vote where they live. Because migrants are counted in their home area for purposes of determining representation, rural areas are over-represented in Parliament, while urban areas like Bangkok are under-represented. To redress this imbalance constitutional reformers or the election commission might consider making it easier for the 40% who would prefer to vote where they live to change their electoral registration.

5.3 Preferable Location for Voting: Non-Migrants

Do you think people should vote the MP candidates in the district where they have their name in the household registration or vote for the MP candidates in the district where they are actually working and living? (Q.24 bt)
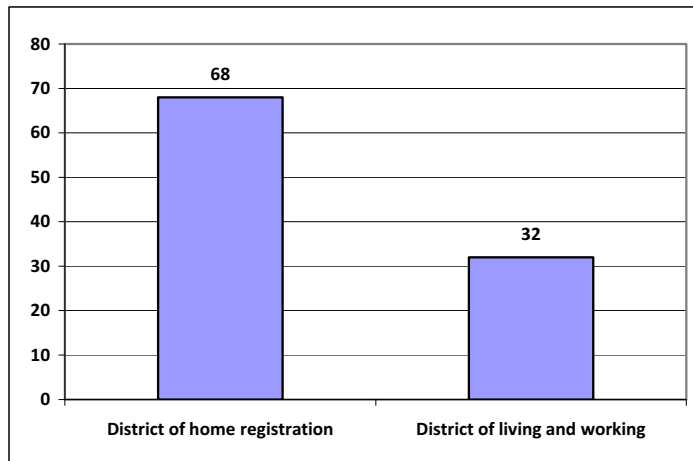
Interestingly, when people who were not internal migrants were asked where migrants should vote, 68% said they should vote in their original home district, rather than where they live. This finding was relatively consistent across age groups, gender and region.
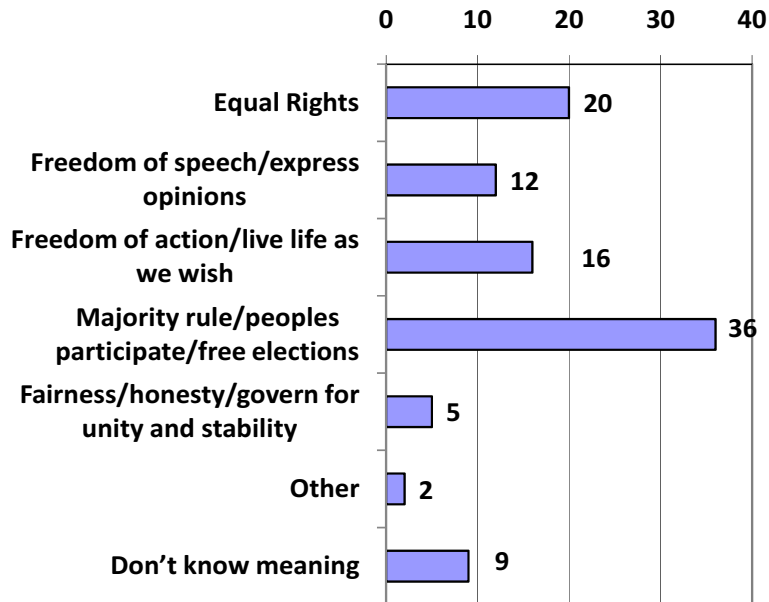
Chapter 6

Democracy in Thailand

6.1   *Understanding of Democracy*

Now I'd like to ask about something else. A lot of people in Thailand today are talking about democracy. If a country is called a democracy, what does that mean to you? (Q27)

When asked about the characteristics of a democracy, almost half (48%) describe democracy in terms of rights or freedoms. While rights and freedoms are not unique to democracies, they are often associated with democratic political systems. More than a third (36%) accurately associates democracy with participation/elections/majority rule, while just 9% could not provide any characteristic of a democracy.

Those most likely to mention participation/elections/majority rule were in the south (40%) and in the 20-29 age cohort (45%); while those least likely were in the north (30%), and 50-59 year olds (24%). Those least likely to be able to provide any characteristic of a democracy were in the central region (17%) and over those 60 years of age (19%). There

was also a significant difference between men and women on this question, with just 5% of men being unable to provide any response, compared to 13% of women.

Although the findings reveal there remains a need for civic education on this issue among some demographic groups, compared to other countries in Asia the Thai people are remarkably knowledgeable about the characteristics of democracy. For example, the following table compares the percentage of respondents that could name at least one characteristic of democracy, based on similar surveys conducted by The Asia Foundation.

Country	%
Indonesia 1999	39
Timor Leste 2001	63
Cambodia 2002	55
Afghanistan 2004	64
Bangladesh 2006	48
THAILAND 2009	**91**

6.2   Support for Democracy

"In democratic countries, there is always conflict so this makes it difficult to make decisions: What's your opinion towards this statement?" (Q29)
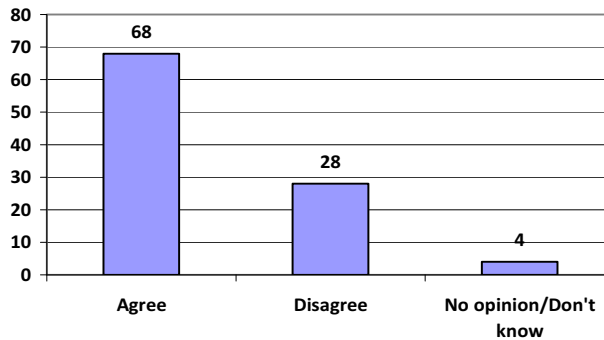
Democracy may have its problems, but it is better than any other form of government. To what extent do you agree or disagree? (Q31)
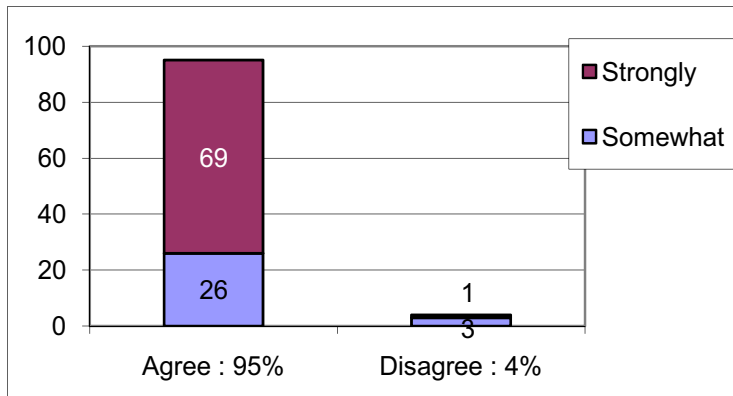
Thais are realistic in their assessment of democracy, with a strong majority (68%) recognizing that political conflict is a normal part of the democratic process, and that it can be difficult to come to consensus or make decisions. Regardless of these drawbacks, the people of Thailand overwhelmingly (95%) believe democracy is the best form of government. These findings are remarkably consistent across regions, with only the intensity of support varying from a low of 54% who strongly agree with the statement in the south, to a high of 81% who strongly agree in the central region.

6.3   Compromise with Minorities

Some people say: "Decisions should be made based on what the majority wants, even if the minority disagrees." Others say: "It is more important to get as much agreement as possible between the minority and majority, even if the majority must compromise." Which is closer to your view? (Q30)
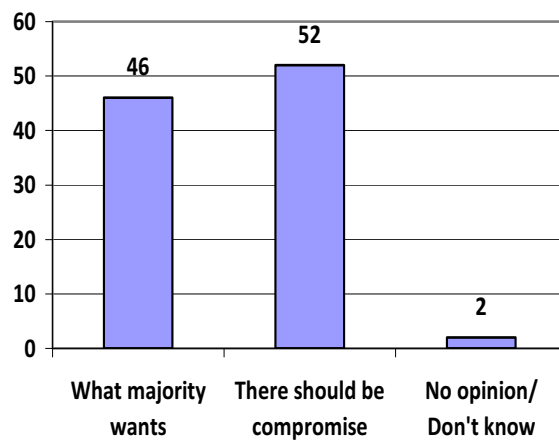
Respondents are split in their opinion as to whether it is more important to compromise with the minority to build as much consensus as possible for government decisions, or if the majority preference should always take precedence when decisions are made. While 52% favored compromise, almost as many (46%) said the majority opinion should be respected. Support for majority rule was lowest in the urban north (35%) and urban south (39%), and highest in the rural south (53%).

6.4 National Identification

Despite our differences, as Thais we have many values that unite us.
To what extent do you agree or disagree? (Q32)
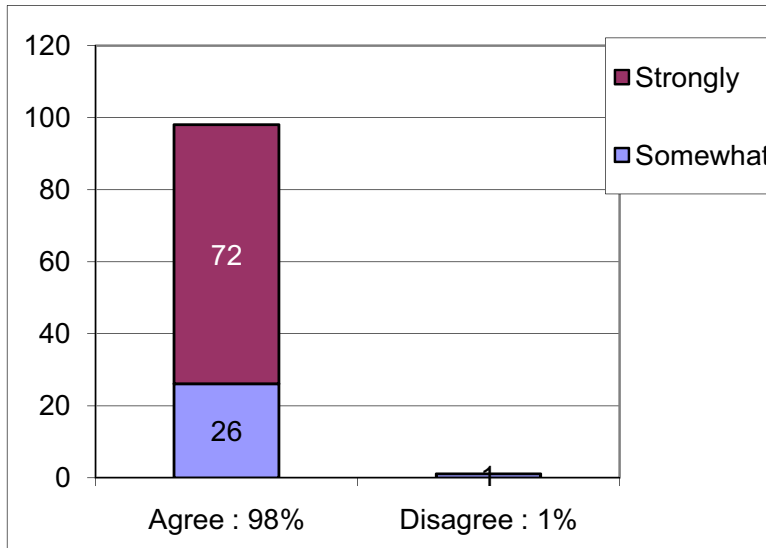
Although recent political events have prompted some to see increasing polarization in Thai society, the Thai people as a whole believe strongly that there is more that unites them than divides them. This is consistent with our finding that political polarization exists primarily in the margins of society, with the majority inhabiting a less contentious middle ground. Overall, 72% strongly support the statement, with 26% somewhat supportive. Results were relatively consistent across demographic and geographic groups, with the lowest levels of strong support seen in central Bangkok (58%) and the south (59%).

It is important to note here that the survey was not implemented in the three southernmost provinces for security reasons associated with the insurgency, but we do intend to conduct a survey there in the near

future, and it will be interesting to see if these results hold for the deep south as well.

6.5   Support for Authoritarianism

On some occasions, democracy doesn't work. When that happens there are people that say we need a strong leader who doesn't have to be elected through voting. Others say that even if things don't function, democracy is always the best. What do you think? (Q33)
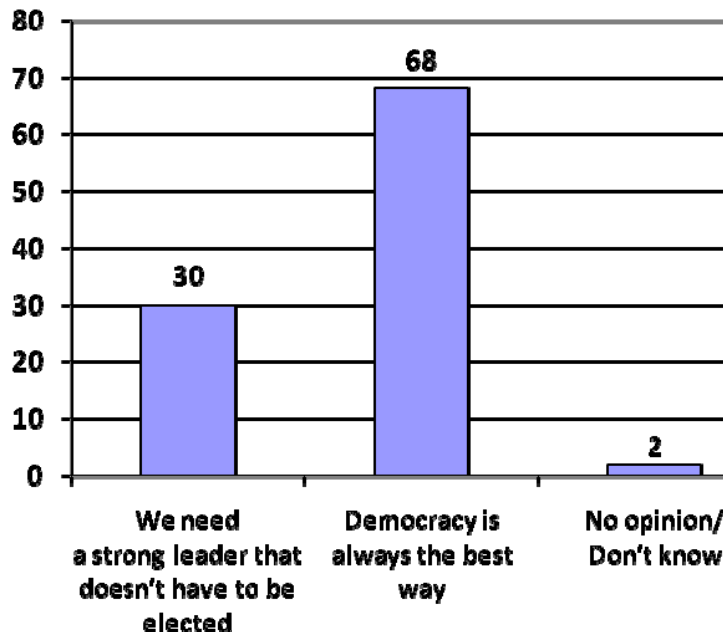
While a strong majority (68%) sees democracy as always the best form of government; almost a third (30%) would support authoritarian rule in some circumstances. Findings on this question were relatively consistent across age and gender, with minor variations seen regionally. The highest levels of support for authoritarian government

were seen in the rural northeast (36%) and rural south (35%); with the lowest figures in rural central region (26%).

6.6   Perception of Government

Which of these is closest to your view of what the government should be? (Q39)
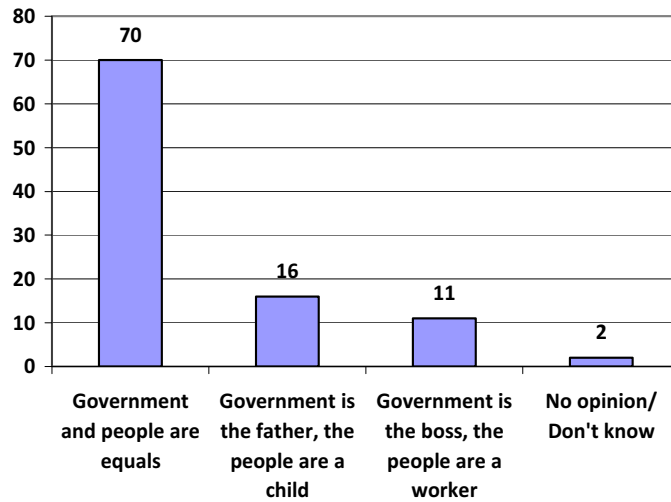
The understanding of democracy revealed through earlier questions is echoed here, with a majority of 70% viewing the government and people as equals. Still, 16% express a paternalistic view of government that sees the government as father, and 11% view the government as a boss. While the democratic perception dominates, more than a quarter of the population still views government in a more traditional role. Understanding of the appropriate role of government varies by age, with older voters slightly more likely to support traditional interpretations.

6.7   Satisfaction with Democracy in Thailand

In general, would you say you are very satisfied, satisfied, unsatisfied or very unsatisfied with the way democracy works in Thailand? (Q34)
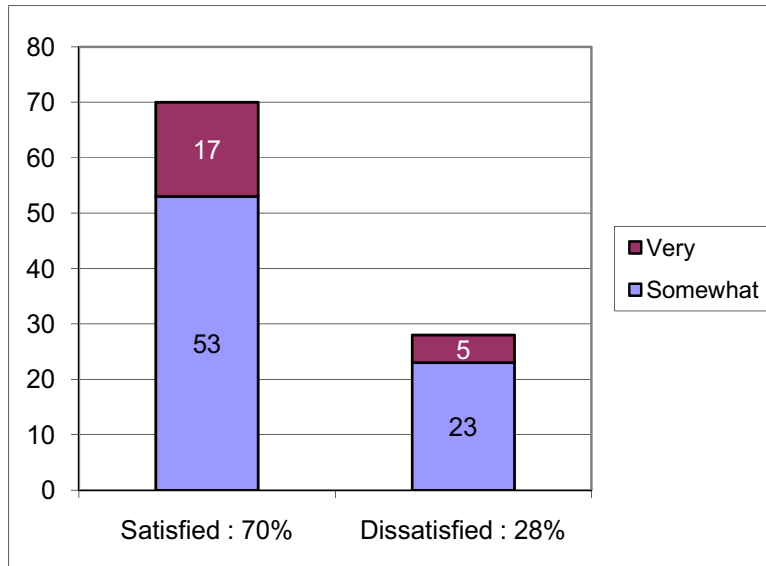
Seven in ten (70%) of Thais are satisfied to some extent with democracy in Thailand, but almost three in ten (28%) are dissatisfied. By relatively small margins, younger voters are less satisfied than older voters, and men less satisfied than women. By region the most unsatisfied are in Bangkok (37%) and the northeast (35%); and the most satisfied in the north (80%) and the south (80%).

6.8   How Democratic is Thailand

In your opinion, is Thailand very democratic, somewhat democratic, a little democratic or undemocratic? (Q35)
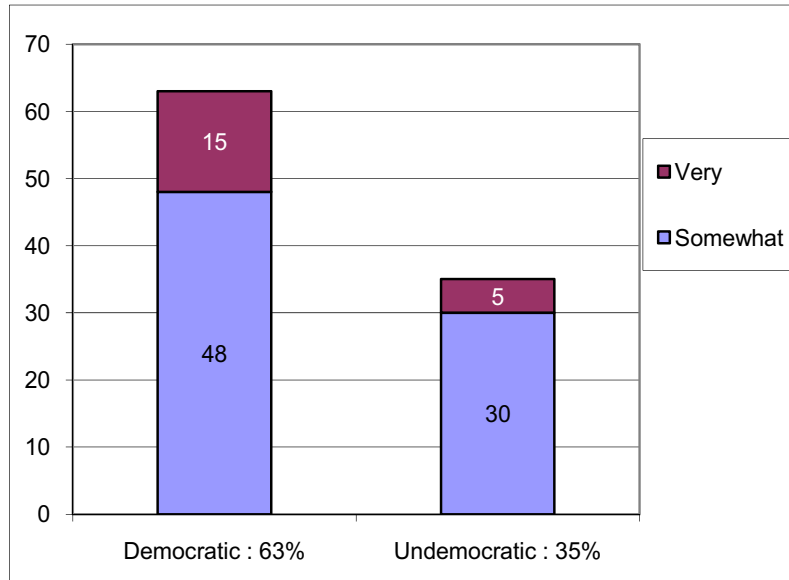
Although 63% of Thais perceive the country as somewhat or very democratic, more than a third (35%) say Thailand has little or no democracy. Respondents in Central Bangkok, the region identified in the last question as least satisfied with democracy in Thailand, were also the most likely to regard the country as undemocratic, with almost half (48%) saying there is little or no democracy in Thailand. By age, the perception that Thailand is undemocratic was highest (43%) among the cohort of 30-39 year olds, rising from 35% among 18-19 year olds, and falling to 27% among those over 60.

Chapter 7

Democratic Values

7.1   Freedom of Speech

Do people feel free to express their political opinions in the area where you live? (Q38)
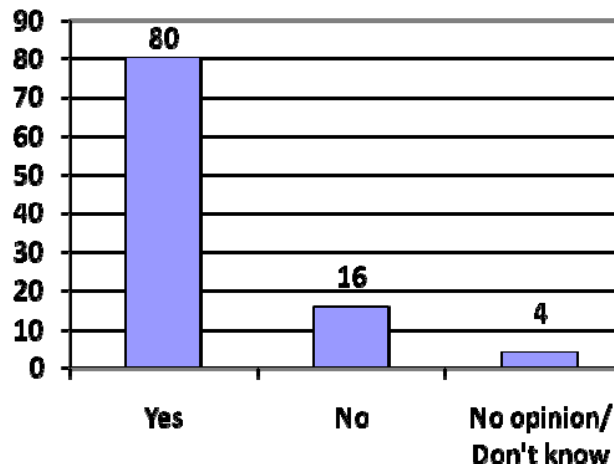
We asked this question two different ways. The first time the question was translated as personal—"Do you feel free…"—and when asked in this way 92% said yes. Because we had used the more general phrasing "Do people feel free…" in other countries, and wanted to be able to make regional comparisons, we re-asked the question with that phrasing in a callback after the main survey, and fewer people (80%) said people feel free to express their political opinions. Either way, this is a very large majority and is largely consistent with regional countries: Indonesia 83% (1999) and Bangladesh 77% (2006).

7.2   Political Tolerance

Do you think that all political parties, even the ones most people do not like, should be allowed to hold meetings in your area? (Q36)
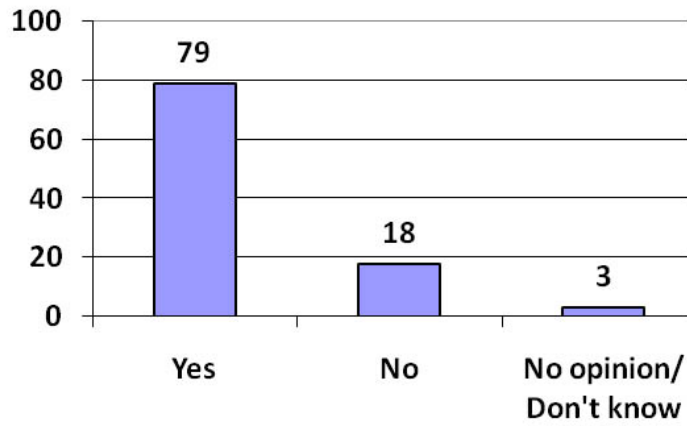
Suppose a friend of yours supported a party that most people did not like. Would you accept that, or would it end your friendship? (Q37)
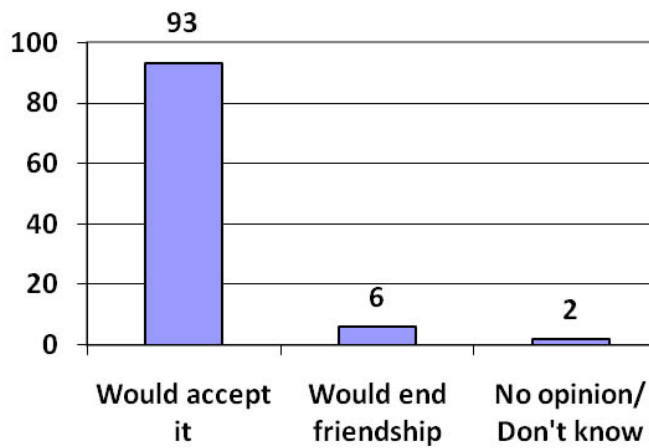
The Thai people are significantly more politically tolerant than the publics in other Asian countries surveyed by the Foundation over the last decade. For example, in Indonesia in 2003 just 57% would allow political meetings of unpopular parties, whereas in our survey 79% said they would allow meetings. Tolerance was also common at a personal level, where just 6% said that a friend joining an unpopular party would end the friendship. This finding, combined with other findings in the survey, suggests that the extreme political polarization depicted by the media in Thailand is representative of a relatively small proportion of the population.

Tolerance of Party Meetings in Asia	%
Cambodia 2000	64
Indonesia 2003	57
Afghanistan 2007	31
Mongolia 2009	69
THAILAND 2009	**79**

Interestingly, there is a significant split in tolerance for political meetings between women and men, with 14% of men saying no to political meetings, compared to 22% of women. The relative intolerance of women seen for this question is not reflected in the findings on personal tolerance, and may reflect a desire to avoid the local conflict that might be created if parties held meetings where they were unpopular, rather than political intolerance.

Bangkok and the north were the regions most tolerant of political meetings, with 87% reporting they would allow meetings of unpopular parties. Those most likely to end a friendship based on political affiliation were in the northeast (9%) and south (10%).

7.3   Women's Political Choice

Do you think a woman should make her own choice for voting, or do you think men should advise her on her choice? (Q80)
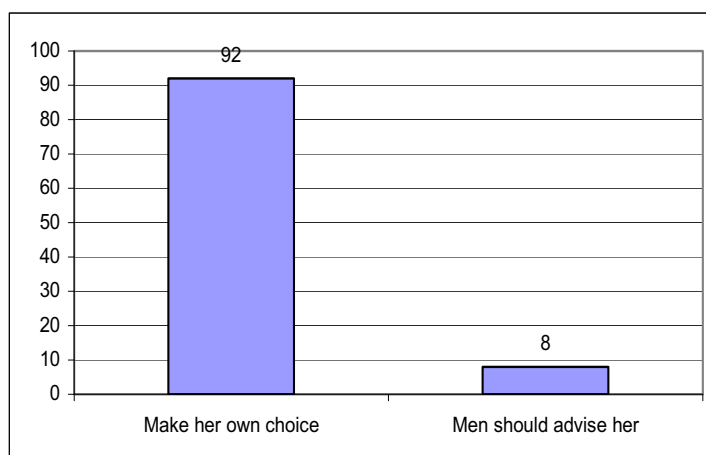
Almost all Thai people (92%) support the idea that women should be free to make their own choice in voting. The percentage favoring female choice in Thailand is higher than in any other country surveyed by the Foundation over the last decade (for example, it is 20% higher than the response to a similar question asked in Indonesia in 2003).

Chapter 8

Political Interest and Efficacy

8.1   Interest in Politics

How interested are you in politics? Very interested, somewhat interested, not very interested, or not interested at all? (Q44)
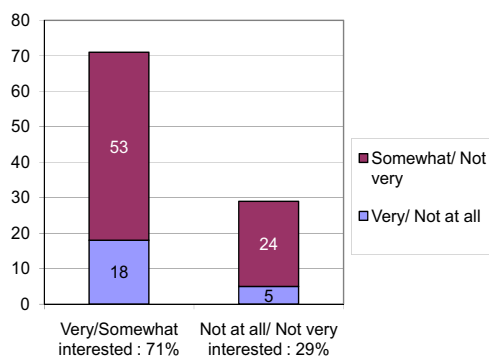
Following the rapid succession of political shocks in Thailand over the last few years it seems that politics may have become something of a spectator sport, with almost three-quarters (71%) saying they are somewhat or very interested in politics. This is quite high by regional standards (see box). Interest in politics increases steadily with age, with the most interested (81%) the 50-59 age group. Regionally, interest is highest in the north (77%) and northeast (75%), and lowest in the south (60%).

Interested in Politics	%
Cambodia 2003	55
Indonesia 2003	28
Afghanistan 2004	34
Bangladesh 2006	24
Mongolia 2009	46
THAILAND 2009	**71**

Over the past three years, would you say that your interest in politics has increased, decreased, or remained the same? (Q46)
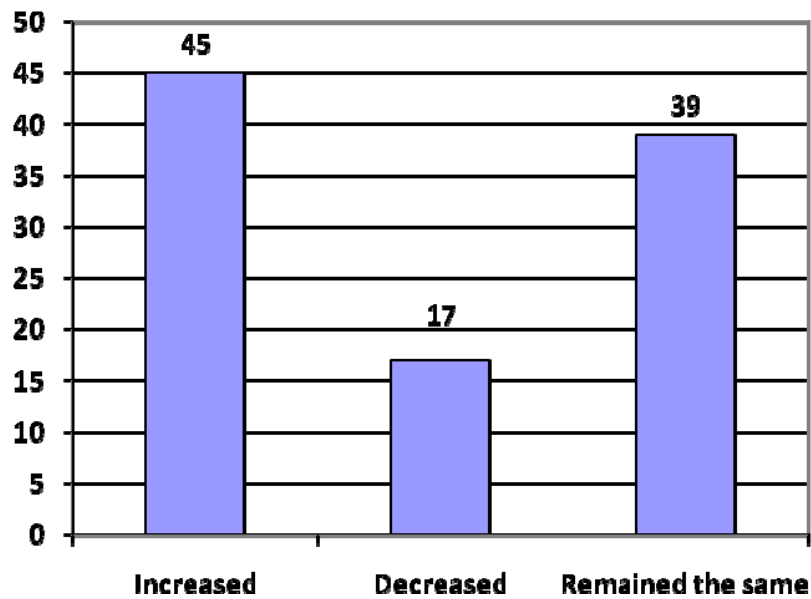
Over the past three years Thailand has seen a coup, a new constitution, the banning of prominent politicians, the disbanding of several parties, several changes of government, and increasingly public political conflict through mass demonstration. Rather than turning off the public, this political theater seems to be generating increased public interest, and possibly involvement, in politics. Almost half of our respondents (45%) said their interest in politics had increased over the last three years, while just 17% said their interest had decreased. Although Thailand may not be as polarized as some have suggested it does seem to be increasingly politicized.

8.2   Political Discussion

How often do you discuss politics with friends? Almost all the time, often, not very often, or almost never? (Q45)
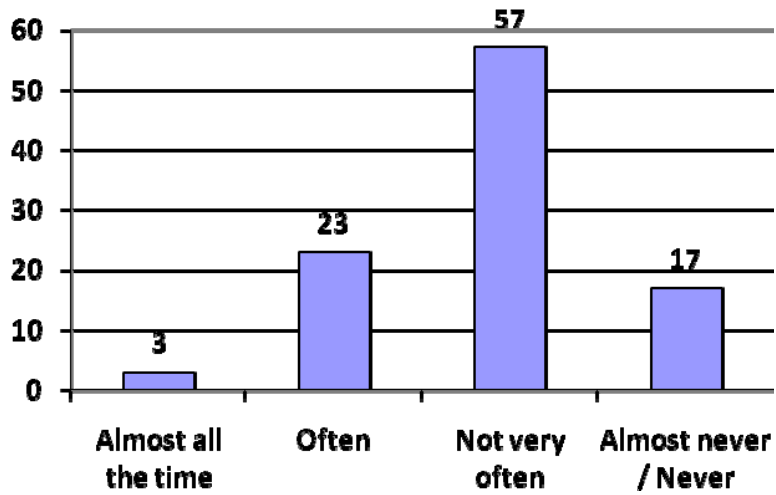
While a strong majority in Thailand is interested in politics, a quarter 26%) say they often discuss politics with friends. Men are slightly more likely to discuss politics (31%) than women (20%). Regionally, the likelihood of discussing politics ranges from 30% in the north to 19% in the central provinces.

8.3   Political Alienation

Some people say, "I don't think that the national government cares very much about what people like me think." Do you agree or disagree? Strongly, or somewhat? (Q47)
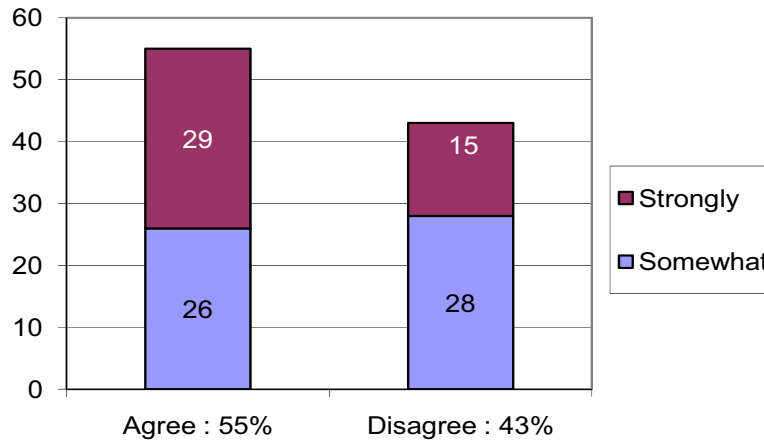
Thais are divided on their opinion as to whether or not the government cares what they think, with (55%) believing the government does not care, and a strong minority (43%) believing it does. Results are similar across regions and demographic groups, and comparable to finding in other countries in Asia.

Alienation in Asia	%
Indonesia 2003	47
Cambodia 2003	48
Afghanistan 2004	58
Mongolia 2009	68
THAILAND 2009	**55**

8.4   Political Efficacy

How much influence do you think someone like you can have over national government decisions? A lot, some, very little or none at all? (Q48)
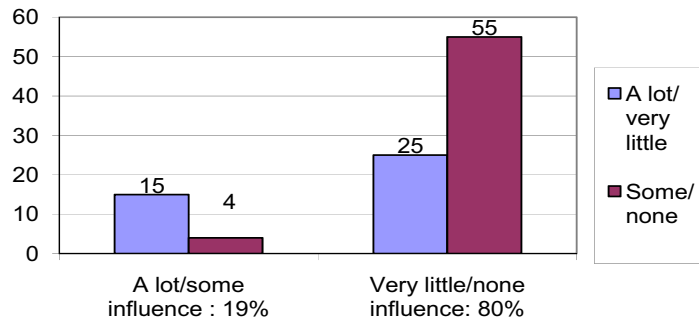
As seen in the previous question, a slight majority believe the government cares what they think, but some of this opinion may be attributable to an interpretation of "care" in a paternalistic sense (i.e., a parent cares for a child), rather than as government interest in citizen opinion, because when we asked if voters thought they could *influence* government decision-making, 80% said their opinion will have very little or no influence on government decision-making. In total, just 19% thought they could have at least some influence on policy. Feelings of political efficacy were greatest in the northeast, where a quarter (25%) felt they had some or a lot of

Efficacy in Asia *% that say they have some influence*	%
Indonesia 1999	25
Indonesia 2003	15
Cambodia 2003	49
Afghanistan 2004	33
Bangladesh 2006	23
Mongolia 2009	35
THAILAND 2009	**19**

influence over government decision-making.

8.5   Quality of Representation

If you think about the persons elected to Parliament, suppose someone said: "My MP addresses the major problems of my constituency in Parliament". Would you agree strongly, agree somewhat, disagree somewhat, or disagree strongly? (Q49)
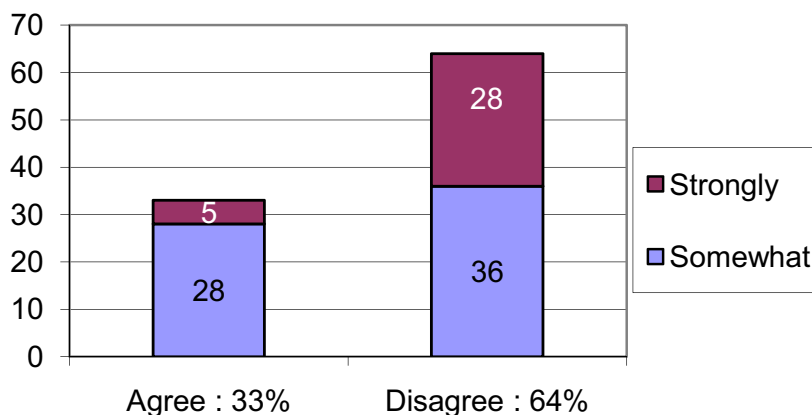
The belief by a strong majority that they have little influence over government decision-making may contribute to their generally low assessment of the quality of representation provided by their Members of Parliament. Just a third (33%) thought their MP generally addressed their major concerns in parliament. Satisfaction with MPs was highest among 50-59 year olds (43%) and in the north (37%) and lowest in the central region (27%).

Taken together, the findings on political efficacy suggest that Thais in general feel a lack of constructive engagement with the political process. They question the quality of representation and accountability provided by their current representatives. This sense of frustration creates a political opportunity for those candidates and representatives that can convince voters that they both care about their opinion, and will act on it.
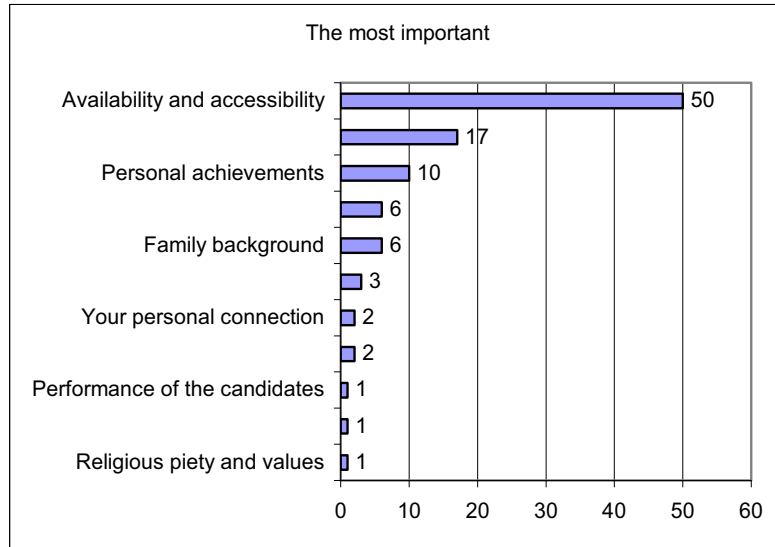
Chapter 9

Influences on Voting Choice

9.1　Choosing a Candidate

Different people consider different factors when deciding which candidate to vote for. Please tell me which factor is most important to you. (Q50.1)

The most important

Factor	Value
Availability and accessibility	50
	17
Personal achievements	10
	6
Family background	6
	3
Your personal connection	2
	2
Performance of the candidates	1
	1
Religious piety and values	1

The single greatest factor influencing voters' choice of candidate is the candidate's availability and accessibility, with fully half (50%) of all respondents selecting this option. This response is unsurprising, as throughout the survey we see ordinary citizens expressing a desire to participate more fully in the political process. Other important factors include education (17%) and personal achievements (10%).

It is clear that the average Thai sees little overlap between religious and political life, with just 1% saying religious values are the most important factor in decision-making. Interestingly, just 1% also viewed candidate performance as the most important factor (although in the central region this rose to (5%). Personal characteristics, while mentioned by just 6% nationwide, were important for 17% of voters in central Bangkok; while family background was an important factor for 10% in the Bangkok metropolitan area.

9.2   Choosing a Party

Okay, that was for candidates, but what about parties? What attribute do you consider most important for a party? (Q51.1)
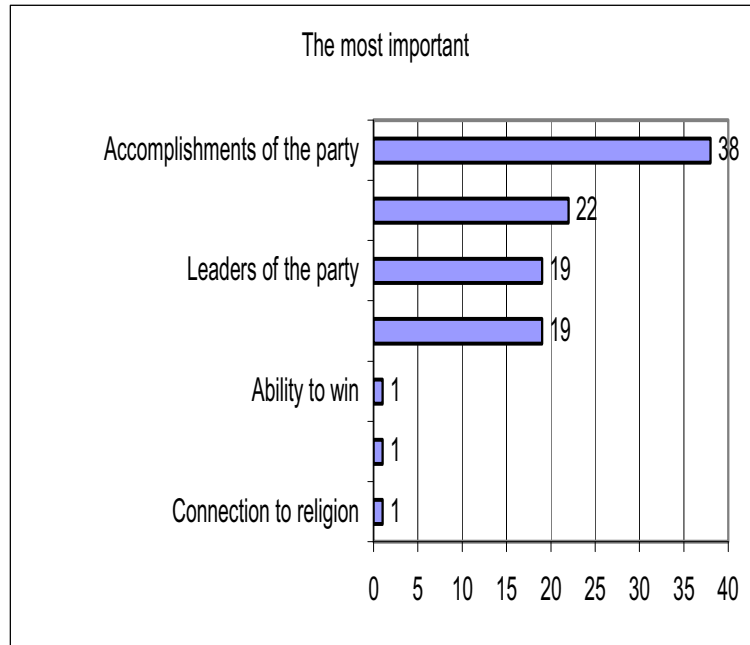
Most Thai voters take a rational approach to choosing a party. For example; a majority of voters look to the past for clues to the future performance of a party, with 57% saying the past history or accomplishments of the party were the most important factor in their decision. A fifth (22%) thought the current plans of the party most important, while another fifth (19%) would choose based on the character and accomplishments of the party's leaders. Very few would be swayed by appeals based on religion, family loyalty, or tactics.

9.3   Influence of Local Leaders

Please tell me if you strongly agree, agree, disagree, or strongly disagree.(read statement) "Because it's hard to know the candidates, or which candidate will be best for our area, it makes sense to follow the recommendations of local leaders when deciding who to vote for."
(Q40)
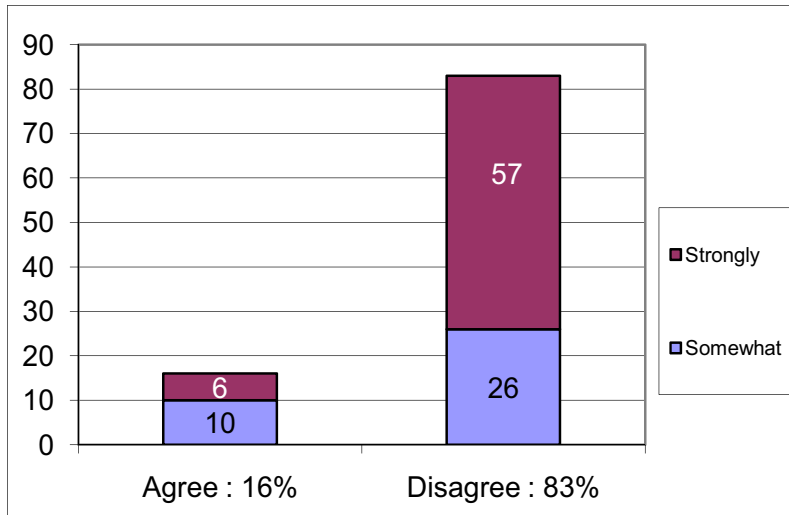
Although it is commonly asserted that local leaders have strong influence over voters, our findings suggest the opposite, with just 16% agreeing that following the recommendations of local leaders makes sense. Older voters are more susceptible to the influence of local leaders, with 22% of those over 50 years old agreeing, compared to 13% of those between 20-49 years old. Women, at 18%, were slightly more susceptible than men (13%). Regional responses to this question were relatively similar except in the northeast, where a quarter (25%) said it made some sense to listen to local leaders, compared to an average in the other regions of just 11%.

9.4   Influence of Family

Do you think family members should follow the advice of the household head when deciding how to vote, or should they make their own choice? (Q41)
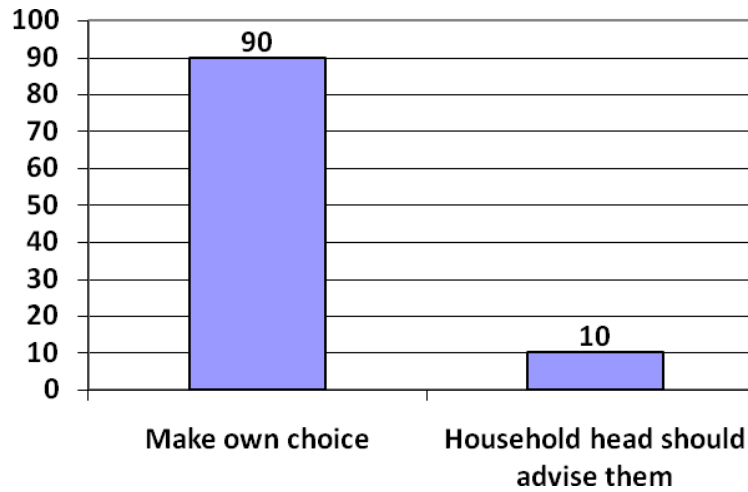

Almost all Thai people (90%) believe family members should make their own choice in voting. This finding was relatively consistent across regions, except in the north, where 18% thought family members should follow the advice of the household head.

9.5 Role of Religion in Politics

Religious leaders are often viewed as moral leaders in the community. Some people say religious leaders should be more involved in politics, while others think they should avoid involvement in worldly affairs and concentrate on the moral and religious needs of the community. Which is closer to your view?
(Q42)
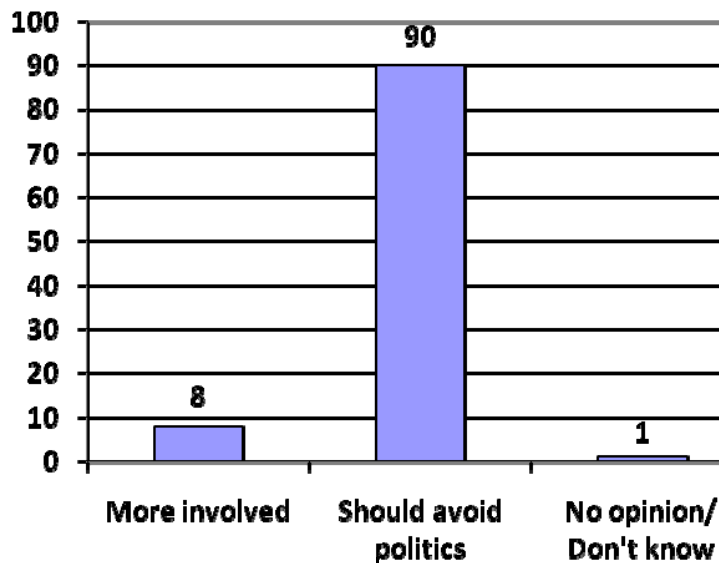
Although both sides in the recent political battles in Thailand have tried to employ religion to advance their cause, this effort may have been counter-productive, as the vast majority of Thai voters believe that religious leaders should avoid politics. In other countries where this issue has been studied intensively, a primary cause of this attitude was the belief that the political game was inherently immoral or dirty, and therefore unsuitable for religious leaders; and anecdotal evidence suggests that this may be a factor in Thailand as well. The highest support for the involvement of religious leaders in politics was seen in the northeast, where just 11% supported the proposition, while the lowest support was in the south (4%).

9.6   Influence of Religious Leaders

If your religious leader encouraged you to support a particular party or candidate, how much influence do you think that would have on your own voting decision; a lot, a little, not much, none at all?(Q43)
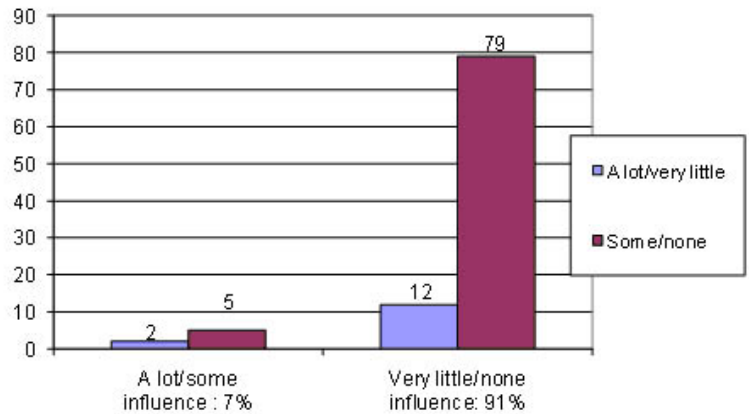
In addition to sharing an almost complete consensus that religious leaders should not be involved in politics, a similar majority (91%) say the political opinion of religious leaders would have little or no effect on their voting decision. There was some regional variation between those who responded "not much" and "no influence at all", with the highest number of those who said "no influence at all" seen in the north (91%), and the lowest in the south (61%) and Bangkok (68%).

Chapter 10

Election Processes

10.1 Perception of Vote-buying

If a political party offered money, food, or gifts to voters in this area, how many would vote for it because of that: very many, some, a few, almost no one? (Q52)
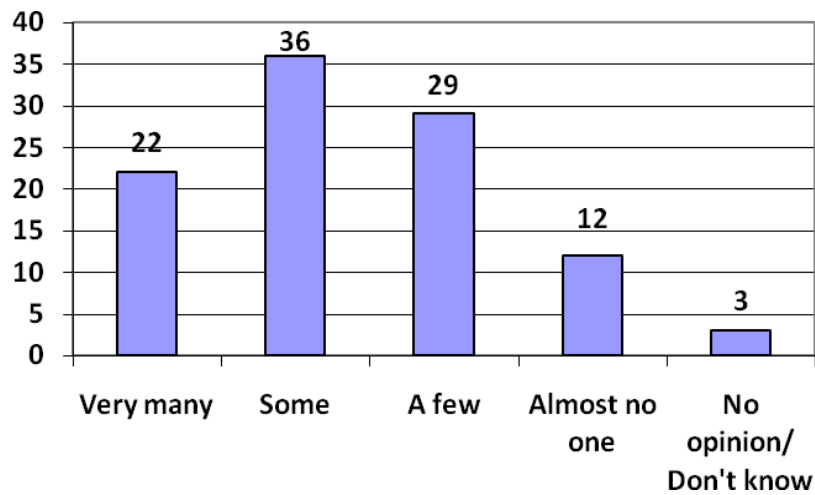
A solid majority (58%) believe that voters in their area could be influenced by vote-buying. This perception, whether accurate or not, helps undermine the credibility of the election process and perceived legitimacy of elected representatives. This finding was very consistent across regions, with the greatest variation seen in the response "almost no one", which ranged from a high of 16% in the rural north, to a low of just 7% in the rural south.

10.2   Moral Understanding of Vote-buying

Some people say that "Receiving money, food, or gift from a political party is ok because poor people want money and voting is secret so you can take the money but vote for the party that you like." However, some people say that "when someone gives you money, food, or gift, they want you to vote for a particular party. Therefore, if you take the money from a particular party, it is morally correct to vote for that party." Which statement best expresses your opinion? (Q.53)
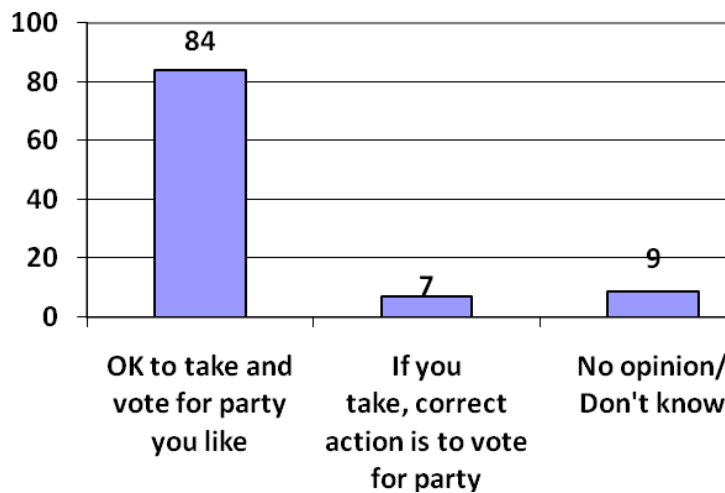
Although Thais in general feel their neighbors are susceptible to vote-buying, an overwhelming majority (84%) feel free to make their own choice. Even if a voter has accepted money or a gift from a party, just 7% would then feel a moral obligation to vote for that party. Our findings on vote-buying suggest that people perceive it as a bigger problem than it actually is, and that politicians who try to buy votes are probably wasting their money, unless the race is quite close. Civic educators wishing to diminish the power of vote-buyers might focus on the message that trying to buy votes is wrong, and that the moral course is to vote *against* anyone who tries to buy your vote.

10.3 Perception of International Community

Because of recent events in Thailand, international interest in Thailand has increased? Do you think the international community could play a positive role in helping to resolve the political impasse in Thailand? (Q54)
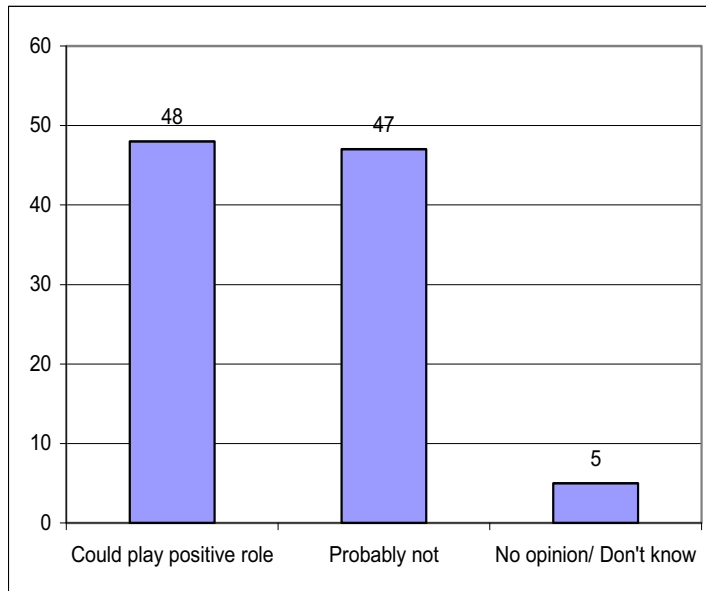
Thais are split evenly in their opinion as to whether the international community could play a positive role in helping resolve the political impasse in Thailand, and this finding is relatively consistent across regions.

10.4   Usefulness of Election Observers

In many countries international and local non-partisan election observers watch the election process. Would the presence of election observers make you a lot more confident elections would be fair, a little more confident, no more confident, or less confident? (Q55)
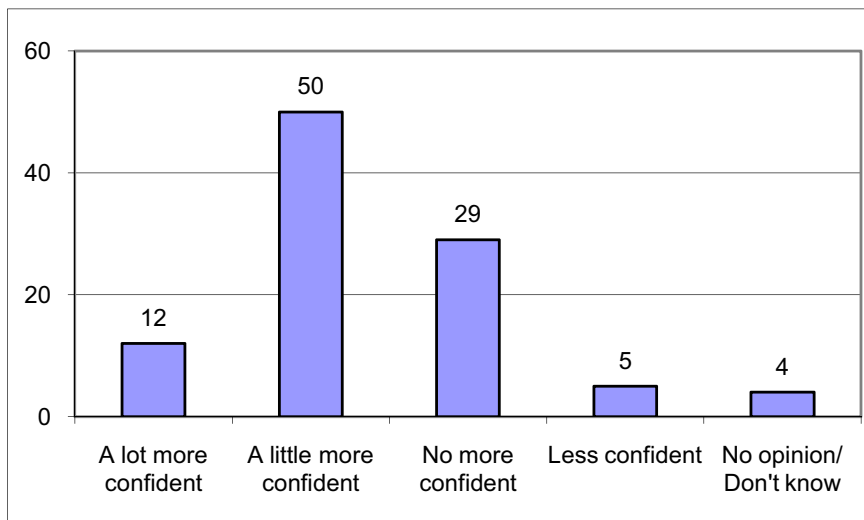
One of the critical issues identified through the survey is the Thai publics' lack of confidence in the integrity of the election process. This finding suggests that non-partisan election observation could be an effective means for enhancing confidence in the process for more than half (62%) of the population.

10.5 Preference for Observers

Some people would prefer Thai election observers, while others prefer international observers. How about you? Would you prefer Thai observers, international observers, or are both equally acceptable? (Q56)
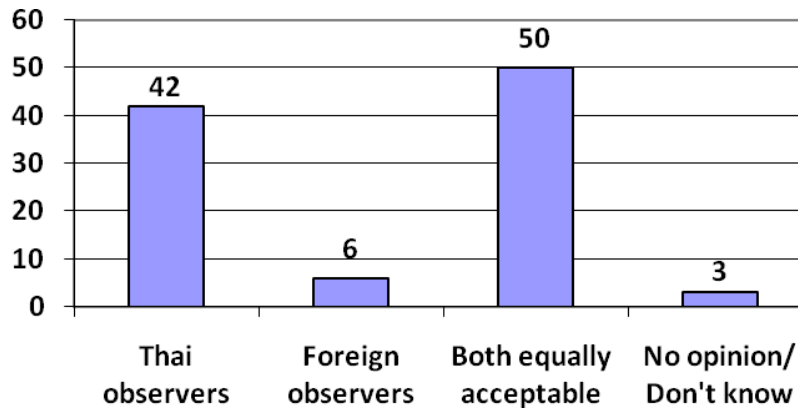
In some countries, where local observers have been discredited, there is a strong preference for international observers, while in others local observers are preferred. In Thailand there does not seem to be a strong preference either way, with 42% saying they prefer local observers, 6% saying foreign observers, and 50% saying it does not matter.

Chapter 11

Civil Society and Trust

11.1 Membership in Associations

Which organization/association are you a member or do you join?(Q57)

	Total	Urban	Rural
Youth association	1.1%	1.0%	1.1%
Student association	0.6%	0.7%	0.5%
NGO (only micro-credit)	0.0%	0.1%	
NGO (advocacy, awareness)	0.1%	0.0%	0.1%
NGO (micro-credit, others)	0.2%	0.1%	0.2%
Women association	3.0%	1.5%	3.9%
Sports and recreational club	0.6%	1.0%	0.4%
Social club	0.7%	0.9%	0.6%
Trade association (group, chamber)	0.2%	0.5%	
Religious association (non-political)	0.2%	0.2%	0.1%
Trade union	0.6%	0.6%	0.6%
Farmer group	4.8%	1.9%	6.6%
Non-religious charity group	0.4%	0.4%	0.4%
Trade association	2.0%	1.3%	2.5%
Teacher association	0.9%	1.1%	0.7%
Writer / journalist association	0.0%	0.1%	
Cooperative	0.4%	0.5%	0.2%
Other	0.9%	0.7%	1.0%
Village fund(such as the saving group)	6.3%	1.3%	9.2%
Bank for Agricultural and Agricultural coop	2.6%	0.2%	4.0%
Village Health Volunteer	0.1%	0.2%	
Village/community funeral organization	0.3%	0.1%	0.5%
Don't know / None	78.3%	87.7%	72.7%

Membership in voluntary associations, which are the foundation of civil society, is remarkably low in Thailand. In total, just 22% (12% in urban areas) belong to any association. To put this in a regional perspective, when the question was asked in Bangladesh (TAF 2006) — a country viewed as having a relatively weak civil society — 29% reported belonging to some form of association. The comparison is even starker when made with Indonesia, which is generally acknowledged to have the strongest civil society in Asia, as in a survey in 1999, 72% reported belonging to an association.

Thais are most likely to belong to some sort of saving association, particularly in rural areas, where 13% report belonging a saving group or coop agricultural bank. Other important groups in rural areas are farmer groups (7%) and women's associations (4%). In urban areas association membership nowhere exceeds the 2% who, ironically, belong to farmer groups.

The very low level of association membership in Thailand can probably be attributed to the high levels of societal distrust described below. Over the long term, democratization in Thailand could be strengthened through programs that promote the formation and strengthening of voluntary associations.

11.2   Trust in Society

Generally speaking, do you think that most people can be trusted? (Q58)

Belief That Most People
Can Be Trusted By Region
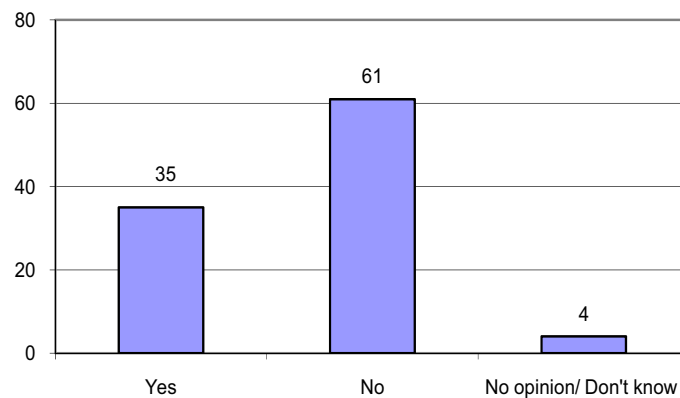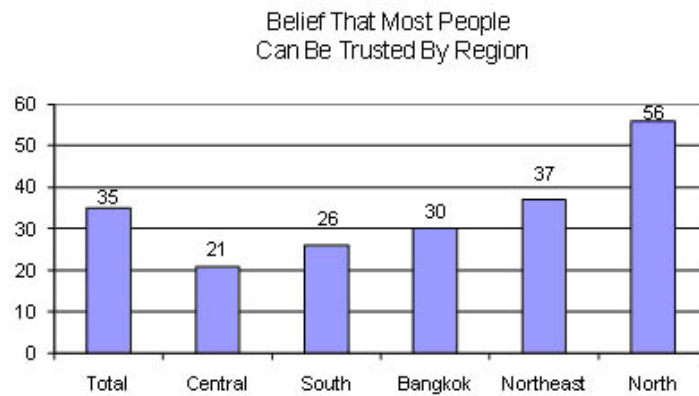
A majority of people in Thailand (61%) say that most people cannot be trusted. Trust is the necessary glue for voluntary association formation, and the lack of societal trust would certainly be one factor in the low levels of association membership. It is no surprise then that the north and northeast show both the highest levels of societal trust and the highest levels of membership in associations.

There is a significant difference between men's and women's responses, with 68% of women saying most people cannot be trusted, compared to 55% of men. Trust also varies significantly by region. Just one person in five (21%) in the central region believes that most people can be trusted, while at the other extreme a majority (56%) would trust people in the north.

11.3   Trust in Neighbors

Now, speaking in general terms of the people from here, would you say that people in this neighborhood are generally very trustworthy, somewhat trustworthy, not very trustworthy, or untrustworthy? (Q59)
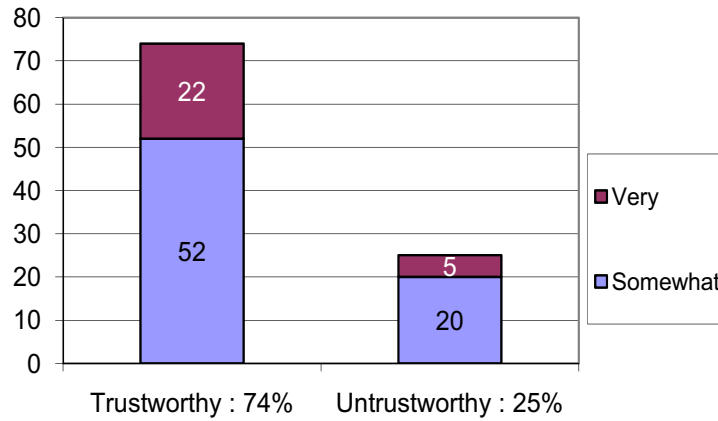
Although Thais in general have low levels of societal trust, they have much higher levels of trust in their neighbors, with three-quarters (74%) saying they are trustworthy. This suggests that efforts to strengthen voluntary associations will be most effective at the community level.

Chapter 12

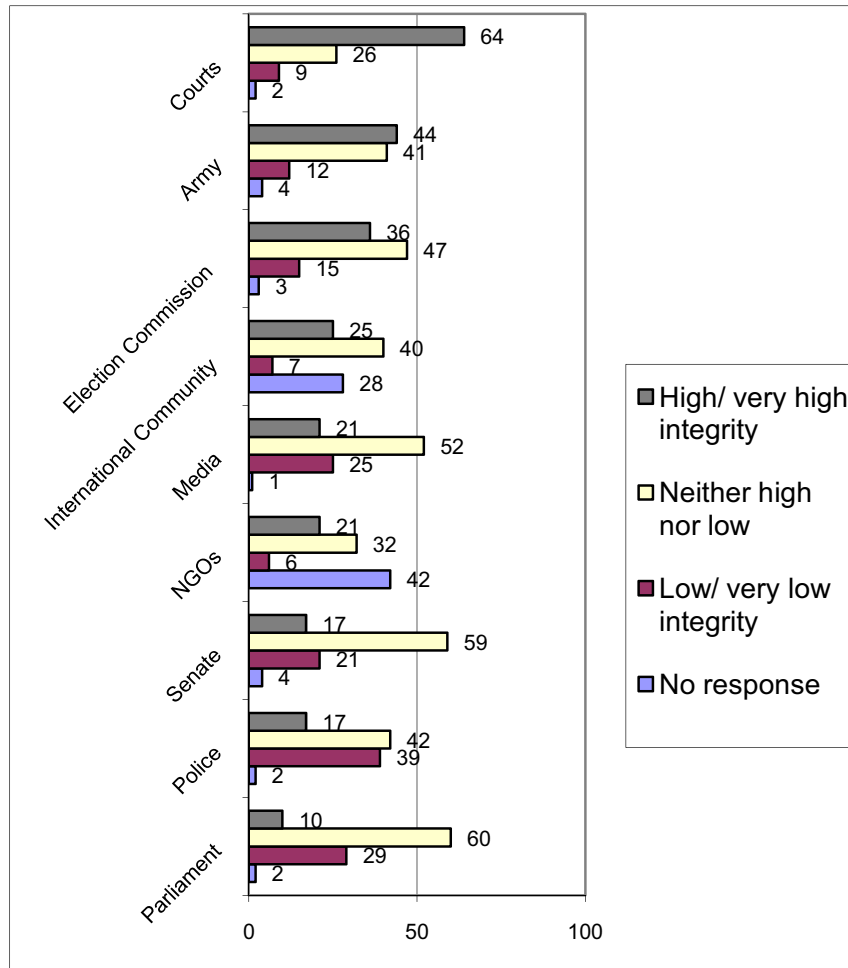## Democratic Institutions

12.1 Integrity of Institutions

Please rate the integrity of each institution according to this scale: very high, high, neither high nor low, low, very low. (Q60-68)

The courts have by far the highest integrity rating among institutions rated, with two-thirds (64%) assessing them positively. Approval was lowest in the central region (55%) and Bangkok (56%), around the

national average in the north (68%) and northeast (63%), and rose to 78% in the south.

At the other end of the judicial process, the police are seen as the least trusted institution, with 39% ranking their integrity as low or very low, and another 42% seeing it as neither high nor low.

The army has the second highest positive rating at 44%, although this varies by region from a low of 33% in Bangkok to a high of 48% in the south and 50% in the northeast. There was also a pronounced rural/urban split with 47% of the rural population viewing the army positively compared to 37% of the urban population.

While a third of the population (35%) gave the election commission high marks, 47% said it was neither here nor there, and 15% rated its integrity low or very low (20% in the south).

Interestingly if you add the number who said neither high nor low to those who said low or very low integrity the total nearly matches the total number who said the various institutions are sometimes or often biased in response to a later question, suggesting that the response "neither high nor low" can be interpreted as more negative than neutral.

The international community and the NGOs garnered similar (low) levels of trust as institutions, but also shared the highest levels of "no response", suggesting that they are not well known in general and that consequently the intensity of opinion may be shallower than for better known institutions.

Just a fifth (21%) thought the media has high integrity, which is not surprising given the extreme polarization of media in Thailand. Trust in the parliament and the Senate is lowest in Bangkok where 40% and 28% respectively rated the institutions integrity as low or very low. Trust in general was lower in Bangkok and urban areas (although trust in the international community was highest in Bangkok,).

12.2 Politicization of Institutions

Some people say democratic institutions in Thailand have become politicized, and are no longer neutral. I will read you a list of institutions and for each one please tell me if you think it is generally neutral and unbiased; sometimes biased; or often biased: (Q69-74)
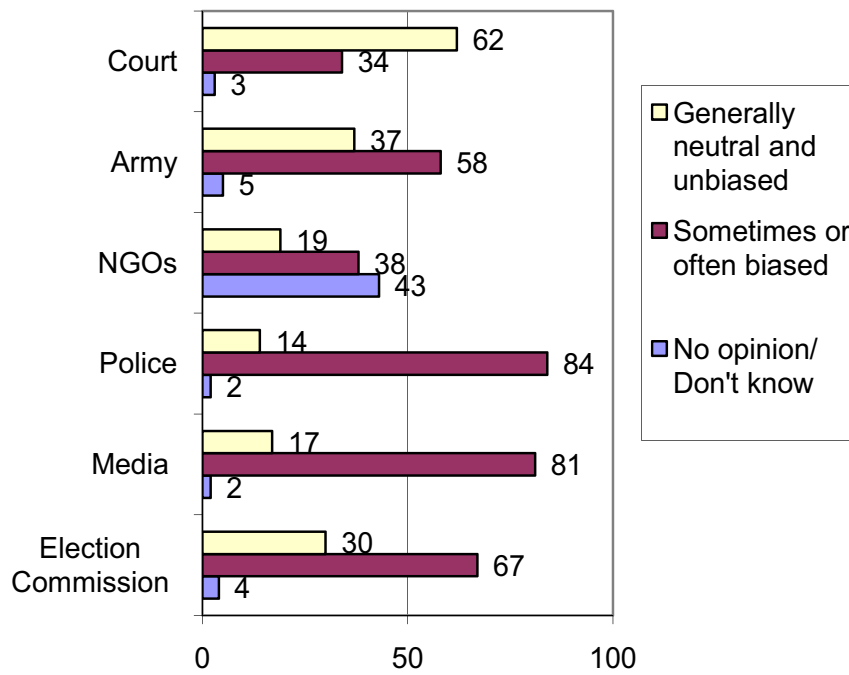
Again we see the courts as the most respected institution rated, with 62% saying the courts are generally neutral and unbiased. Unfortunately, that still leaves a third believing the courts are sometimes or often biased. Incidentally, this finding suggests again that the "neither

high nor low" response in the previous question can be interpreted as slightly negative.

From the relative high achieved by the courts, which was the only institution with positive opinions greater than negative, belief in the political neutrality of institutions plunges. Although the army again scores the second highest favorability rating, barely more than a third of the population (37%) believes the army is generally neutral and unbiased.

Just a fifth (19%) felt NGOs were generally neutral and unbiased, while 38% thought they were sometimes or often biased, and a plurality of 43% had no opinion. The strong perception of politicization of the NGO community has negative implications for those seeking to strengthen civil society, or develop NGO capacity for non-partisan election observation and civic education.

Two-thirds (67%) see the election commission as sometimes or often biased, a perception fatal to the credibility of the election process. A prerequisite for restoring political equilibrium in Thailand, and ensuring that all parties accept the results of future elections as legitimate, will be repairing the reputation of the election commission for fair and impartial administration.

12.3 Fairness of Elections

Some people have called for elections to resolve the current political conflict. If elections were held, do you think they would be free and fair or do you think they will not be free and fair? (Q75)
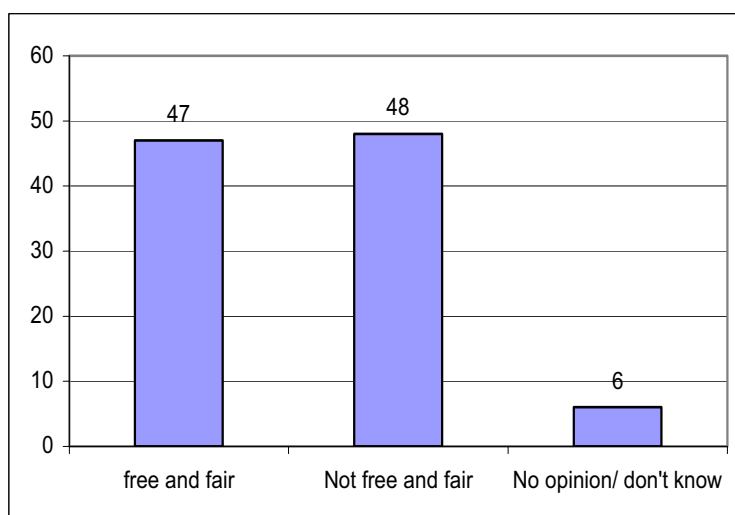
The low regard the Thai people have for the neutrality and integrity of institutions is reflected in their assessment of whether or not future elections will be free and fair. With half (48%) of voters believing that elections will not be fair, the losers in any upcoming elections are unlikely to accept the results as legitimate. Consequently, for elections to contribute to resolving the political impasse in Thailand, significant effort will be required to address underlying concerns to improve public perceptions of the legitimacy and credibility of elections.

### *12.4   Perception of Corruption in Government*

*How common do you think corruption is among government officials:
very common, fairly common, fairly rare, or very rare? (Q76)*
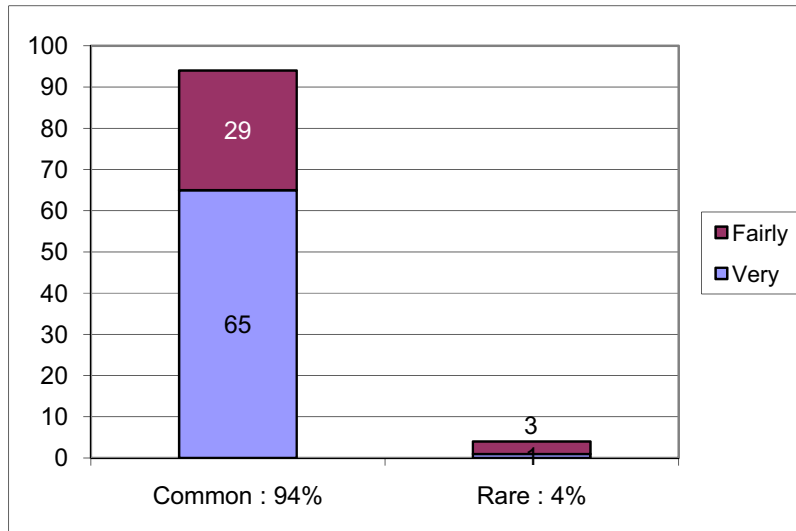
While the current government campaigns on a pledge to end corruption
in government, they clearly have yet to make an impact on public
perception, as an astonishing 94% say corruption is at least fairly
common, and 65% think it very common. This compares to 69% of
Indonesians who felt corruption was common (2003). These findings
were very consistent between men and women, across age groups, and
across regions. One reason that the finding might be so high is that the
term "government official" is very inclusive, and can be interpreted by
the respondent as anyone from a senior government official involved in
contracts or leases, to a local administrative or police officer.

12.5   Corruption in Local Administration

Some people say that it is often necessary to pay bribes to civil servants if you need something from the government, such as papers, permits, or documents. Others say that this is not true and that the civil servants are honest. Which view is closer to your own? (Q77)
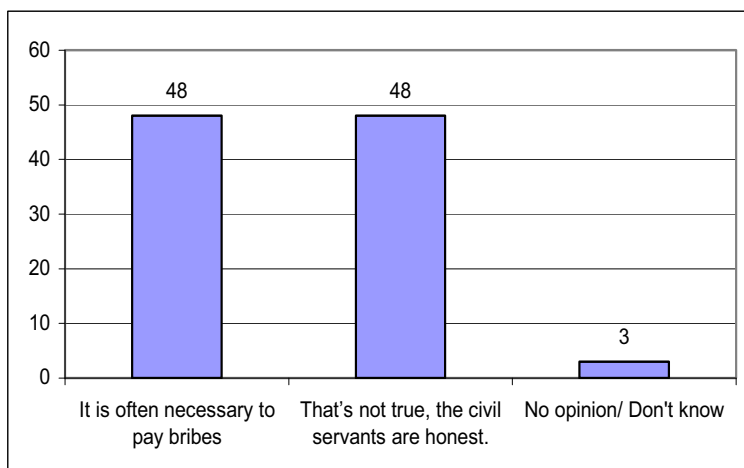
When we asked specifically about corruption among local administrative officials, perceptions are split, with 48% saying it is often necessary to pay bribes for routine services. In suburban Bangkok respondents felt it was most often necessary to pay bribes for services (60%), while in the north just 40% of respondents reported the need to pay bribes.

12.6 Personal Knowledge of Corrupt Practices

Within the past five years, have you personally known someone who had to bribe a government officer for proper service or fair treatment from the government or police? (Q78)
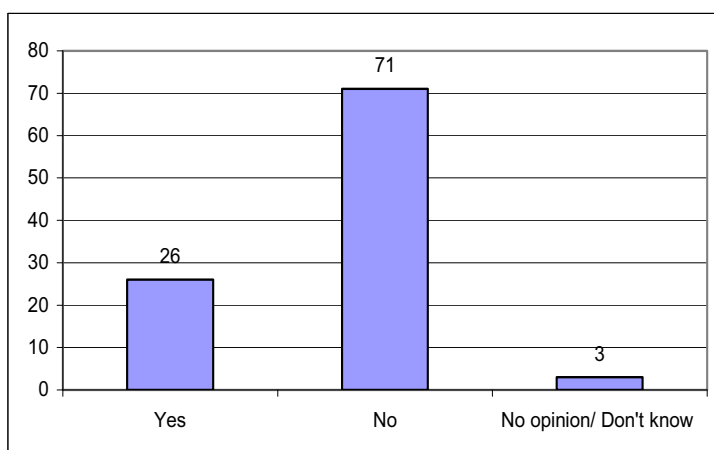
A quarter (26%) said they had personally known someone that had to pay a bribe, which may suggest that perceptions of corruption are greater than the actuality. But on the other hand, this relatively low number may also indicate that most people have little or no contact with government officials. Those most likely to report knowing someone who had paid a bribe were in central Bangkok (46%), and those least likely in the north (17%). More work would need to be done to clearly understand and quantify the extent of government corruption, but it seems clear there is a need for reform.

Appendix A – Media Planning Tables

How many days a week do you watch TV? (Q81)
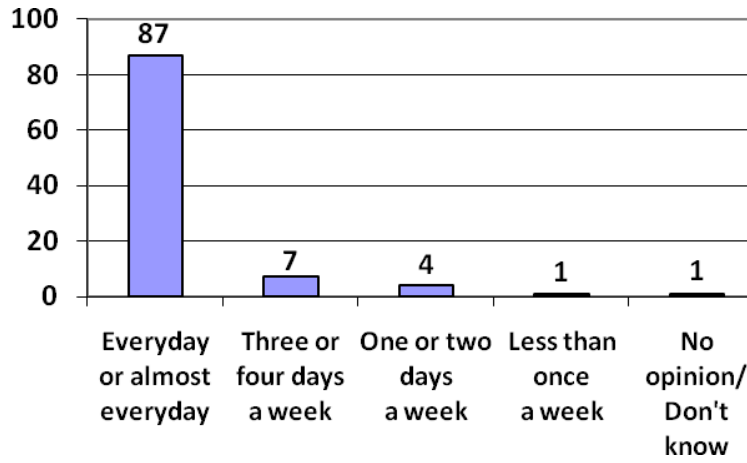
During what time do you regularly watch TV? (One or two responses are allowed)
(Q83)
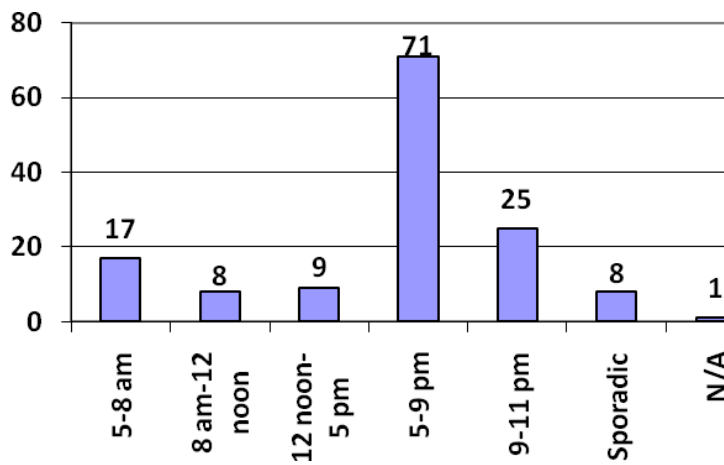
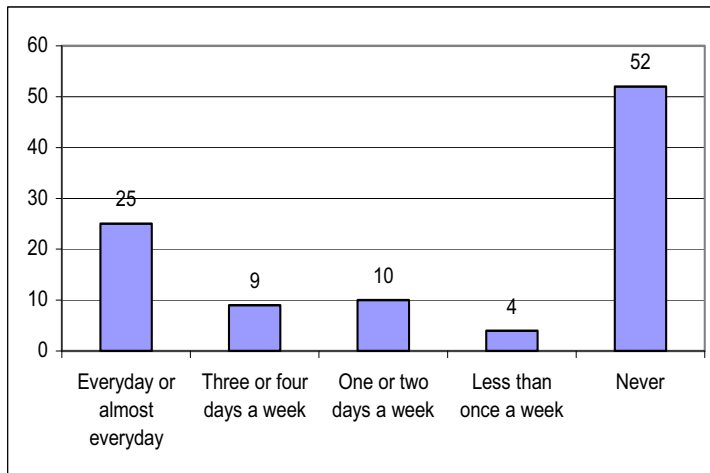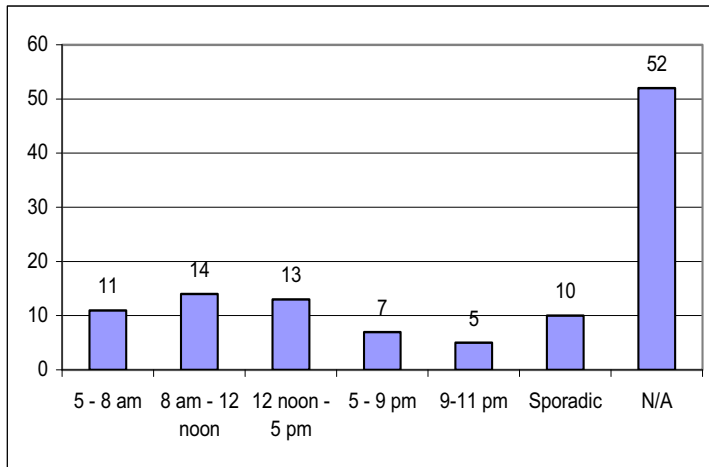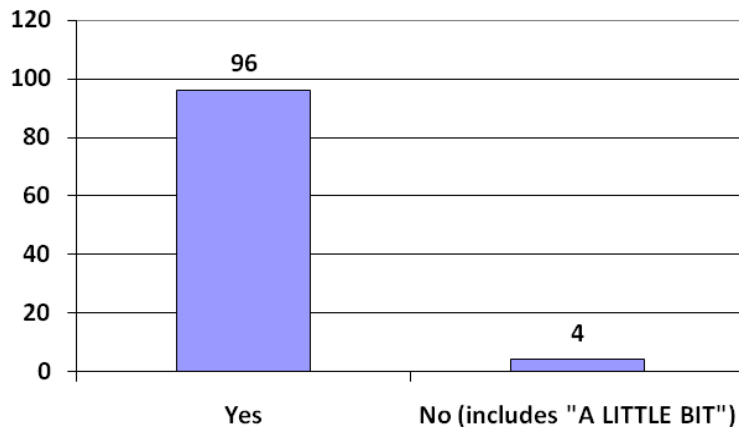*How many days a week do you listen to the radio? (Q84)*

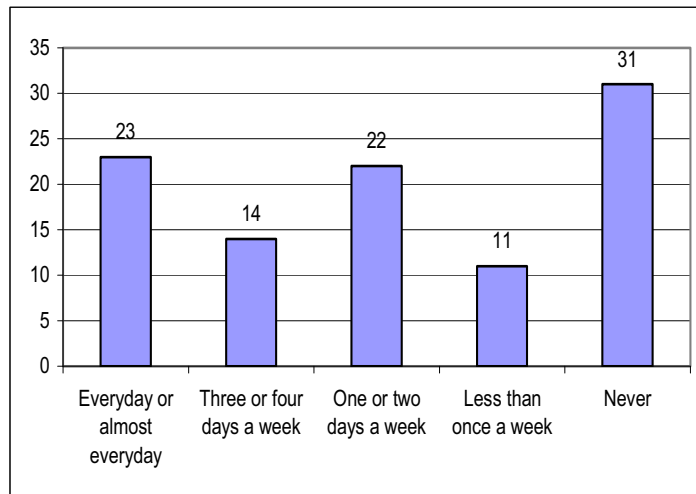*What time of day do you listen to the radio? (Q86)*

Can you read Thai? (Q87)

How many days a week do you read a newspaper? (Q88)

Appendix B – Methodology of the Survey

Margin of Error
The Thai Constitution Study required a margin of error of 3% (at the 95% confidence level) for country-wide estimates. This required a sample size in the range 1200-1500. A sample size of 1500 was decided on.

Stratification
For the purposes of this survey Thailand was stratified into 5 geographic strata. The optimal sample design for national estimates is to allocate the sample to each stratum in proportion to the population of the strata. This proportional design is shown below. This shows the sample size varying from 168 in South to 523 in North East.

Region number	Region name	Population	Proportional sample for region
1	BKK	10,161,694	248
2	Central	11,165,157	272
3	North	11,879,369	289
4	South	6,903,919	168
5	North East	21,442,693	523
	Total	61,552,832	1500

Selecting the sample of provinces
Within each geographic stratum the optimum sample design is to select a sample of provinces with probability proportional to their size and then within each province to select a fixed number of respondents. This gives a self-weighting sample within each stratum (meaning that each dwelling is selected with the same probability) as well as providing the design with the lowest sample error.

The sample design issue was to determine the number of provinces to be selected per stratum. There is a cost-quality trade-off in this decision. The fewer the provinces that are selected the more clustered will the sample be across the stratum. This will mean that a small number of provinces will be used to represent the full stratum, leading to higher standard errors. On the other hand, if a large number of

provinces are selected then only a small number of dwellings will be selected per province which could significantly add to cost. The best design is a compromise between these two extremes.

Sample of 6 provinces per stratum
For this survey the design option chosen was to select 6 provinces per stratum and then to select an equal sample size within each provinces. This would mean, for example, that for Greater Bangkok with a sample size of 248, the number of provinces to be selected is 6 and the sample size per selected province is 248/6 = 41.3, rounded to 40. The full design for the 5 strata is shown in the following table.

Region number	Region name	Population	Proportional sample for region	Sample size per province selection	Rounded sample size per province selection (nearest 5)
1	BKK	10,161,694	247.63	41.27	40
2	Central	11,165,157	272.09	45.35	45
3	North	11,879,369	289.49	48.25	50
4	South	6,903,919	168.24	28.04	30
5	North East	21,442,693	522.54	87.09	85
		61,552,832	1,500.00		1,500

Selecting the provinces
Given the above design 6 provinces were selected with probability proportional to size (pps). The technique used was to order the provinces in order of their size and then to take a systematic sample pps sample. This required the calculation of a skip interval, calculated as the population size divided by 6. A random start between 1 and the skip interval was also randomly generated. Given the skip interval and the random start, selection numbers were then generated using the formula:

Selection number k = random start + (k-1)x skip interval, for k=1,2,...n

The selection numbers were then applied to a list of provinces in the size order in which the population sizes were cumulated. A given province was selected if one of the selection numbers corresponded to one of the cumulative counts corresponding to that province. The result of this province selection is shown in table A

Note that a province can be selected more than once in this process if their population size was larger than the skip interval. This happened in several cases as can be seen from the list below. In this case the number of dwellings to be selected from the multiply selected provinces is greater – as shown in the table below. (Note that three provinces in the South stratum (Narathiwat, Pattani, Yala) were removed from the possible selection list because for security issues.

Region number	Stratum	Province selected	Province population	Number of time selected	Sample size for province
1	Greater BKK	Bangkok	5,710,883	3	120
1	Greater BKK	Pathum Thani	929,250	1	40
1	Greater BKK	Nonthaburi	1,052,592	1	40
1	Greater BKK	Samut Sakhon	478,146	1	40
2	Central	Suphan Buri	844,498	1	45
2	Central	Ratchaburi	835,861	1	45
2	Central	Lop Buri	753,801	1	45
2	Central	Rayong	598,664	1	45
2	Central	Prachin Buri	459,379	1	45
2	Central	Sing Buri	215,551	1	45
3	North	Chiang Rai	1,227,317	1	50
3	North	Phayao	487,386	1	50
3	North	Lamphun	405,125	1	50
3	North	Phetchabun	996,231	1	50
3	North	Kamphaeng Phet	726,213	1	50
3	North	Uthai Thani	327,586	1	50
4	South	Nakhon Si Thammarat	1,513,163	2	60
4	South	Surat Thani	983,486	1	30
4	South	Phuket	327,006	1	30
4	South	Songkhla	1,335,768	1	30
4	South	Trang	614,869	1	30
5	North East	Khon Kaen	1,756,101	1	85
5	North East	Sakon Nakhon	1,116,034	1	85
5	North East	Nong Khai	906,877	1	85
5	North East	Nakhon Ratchasima	2,565,117	1	85
5	North East	Buri Ram	1,541,650	1	85
5	North East	Surin	1,375,560	1	85
				Total	1,500

Data Processing

All data collected from the interviews was processed using SPSS weighted data: the population demographic information(i.e. age-gender distribution by region) used in the tabulations is based on the figures shown in The 2000 Population and Housing Census report of the

National Statistical Office of Thailand (TNSO) (Remark: The Population and Housing Census of TNSO is conducted every 10 years.)

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