Monopolization Strengthens:
Thailand's Asian Democracy Index in 2015

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Introduction

Over the past several decades, Thailand has experienced increasing extended periods of representative democracy frequented by periods of political demonstrations and disruptions, contentious politics, and military intervention. On May 22, 2014, Thailand underwent its most recent military coup that prompted the National Council for Peace and Order (NCPO) to govern the country. This research demonstrates that Thailand under military rule has entered a period of re-monopolization of political, economic and civil society power, that is in contrast with the measures of democracy as understood through the lens of Asian Democracy Index (ADI) (Cho 2012, 39-41). As evidenced by public policies, regulations and restrictions created by the NCPO, the study argues that the coup of 2014 has made a particularly strong reassertion of Thai society in contrast to other recent military coups, which can be categorized as the creation of the neo-authoritarian developmental state in Thailand's twenty-first century.

This paper utilized the ADI index, conducted in-depth interviews with twenty-seven key experts on Thai politics, and contextualized the democratic situation of Thailand from documentary research on various events and trends in the country. It is divided into four parts: a brief background of Thai democracy, ADI's methodology and its limits, re-

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search findings, and an analytical conclusion. Throughout the study, the research argues that the implications of neo-authoritarian developmental state are clearly seen in the Thai democratization process in 2015. Using ADI's de-monopolization process approach, the study argues that Thailand has veered away from parliamentary supremacy to an undemocratic governmentality with the politics of bad governance resulting from the increase of political exclusion and economic monopoly with elements of social discrimination.

Political Landscape and Brief Background of Thai Democracy in 2015

From 2006 to 2016, Thailand's democratization has always been the subject of intense debates and mixed feelings. The Thai Rak Thai (TRT), Palang Prachachon (PPP), and Pheu Thai Party (PTP) had been consecutively elected under the leadership of the Shinawatra family led by then former Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra, who is now in exile. Under the framework of its political system as a constitutional monarchy, whereby the prime minister is the head of the government and a hereditary monarch is head of state, the country has a political history of long periods of authoritarianism alternating with periods of a "semi-democratic" government. The latest one was in May 2014 when there was a coup by a group known as the Council of Democratic Reform to remove Yingluck Shinawatra.

The intensifying conflict escalated by the failed attempt to pass the Amnesty Bill by the PTP and the controversy around a constitutional amendment in November 2013, which resulted in street protests. This led to PTP dissolving the House of Representatives in December 2013 for the February 2014 election. Following the dissolution of the parliament, then-Prime Minister Yingluck Shinawatra formed a caretaker government. Meanwhile, demonstrations, street blockades and violent disruptions led by the People's Democratic Reform Committee (PDRC) under the leadership of ex-Democrat MP Suthep Thaugsuban were rampant on the streets as protest against Yingluck Shinawatra's caretaker government along with the intention to disrupt the general election. Counter movements were also seen from members of the United Front for Democracy against Dictatorship (UDD) and its allies. At least twenty-eight people were killed and 827 were injured during the period of these protests (Freedom House 2015). The gridlock the center of Bangkok had found itself in had repercussions on the country's economic activities. Thailand's political situation was intensified by the country's economic stagnation.

As the political crisis escalated, the civilian caretaker government imposed a state of emergency from January to March 2014. This response, however, was without success. A series of small bombings and the unabated continuity of street protests prompted the military to step in. On May 20, 2014, the army declared martial law and on May 22 announced a coup d'état under the command of the NCPO, led by General Prayuth Chan-ocha. With the exception of Chapter 2, which addressed the Monarchy, the NCPO suspended the 2007 Constitution, which forcibly dispersed all political rallies and imposed severe restrictions on the freedom of speech, association, and the media.

Following the enactment of an interim constitution on July 22, 2014, General Prayuth Chan-o-cha took the position of Prime Minister in August 2014. General Chan-o-cha headed a 200-seat appointed unicameral National Legislative Assembly (NLA). The handpicked appointees included 105 military officers and ten policemen, alongside academics, technocrats, and business people. Politicians or activists involved with political parties from 2011 to 2014 were not permitted to be part of the NLA.

Thailand in 2015 therefore faced an open-ended "roadmap to democracy"—a roadmap that focuses on national reconciliation, reforms, and eventual elections but have no clear deadline. A junta-appointed National Reform Council (NRC) comprised of 250 people was formed to work on comprehensive reform agendas, including one on governance and political process. Thirty-six people were also selected to be members of a Constitutional Drafting Committee (CDC); however, the draft constitution that they wrote and that was proposed to the National Reform Council on September 6, 2015 was rejected (Guardian 2015a). This rejection required the formation of a new CDC and delayed the prospects for elections.

Concerns about the status of the monarchy remained entangled with Thailand's democracy and its political crisis. The issue of succession cannot be publically discussed due to harsh punishments under Thailand's lèse-majesté law. Aggressive enforcement of the lèse-majesté laws created widespread anxiety and stifled the freedom of expression (online, print, broadcast media, and public events) Since the 2014 coup, new lèse-majesté cases have been brought before military courts with no right to formal appeal. Due to the secrecy surrounding most lèse-majesté cases, it is unclear how many went to trial in 2015. The figure is believed to be in the hundreds, leading to several people deciding to leave the country to avoid trial.

The year 2015 revealed that Thailand has continued to repeat its cycle of coup, constitution, and election. Since Thailand first transformed into a constitutional monarchy in 1932, the country has experience approxi-

mately twenty successful and failed military coups. This repetitive scenario of coup, constitution, and election is also tied to the relationship between business and politics that impacts on the quality of democracy. The latest coup on May 22, 2014 is less than eight years apart from the last coup. It is affirms that the military and the bureaucracy continue to play a major role in the country's political affairs, including electoral politics, and reveals where real power resides behind the electoral theater. Ironically, both military and political parties use development and economic growth as justification to retain power.

Research Method and Assessment

Survey Data Collection

This paper's data was collected using structured interviews following the Asian Democracy Index (ADI) questionnaires (Cho 2012). The research process involved both quantitative questionnaires, with responses in the form of preference scores, and qualitative semi-structured interviews. Interviews were conducted with the experts to gather their perceptions, comments, and reflections on the current situation of Thai politics. The survey data was administered between July and September 2015. Thus, the findings of the survey reflect the attitudes and opinion of experts on the situation of Thai politics after the May 2014 coup.

A total of twenty-seven expert interviews were conducted. Each expert was categorized according to their role or position and their political ideology:

- By specific role/position, namely: politician, state officer or member of political organization appointed by the NCPO; leader or practitioner from civil society organization; and academic or university staff.
- By political ideology, namely the right; the left; and the moderate, classified according to their positioning within Thailand's ongoing ideological and political contestation. According to this typology, the right are people who hold conservative ideas such as: the uniqueness of being Thai (i.e., Thainess); strong support for royal or elitist privileges; and those who have no confidence in electoral democracy. The left are people whose political position supports the idea of viewing Thailand and being Thai as part of global cosmopolitanism; supports the concept of electoral democracy; and promotes civil and political rights, especially freedom of ex-

pression by seeing the elections as a mean to express their political will. Moderates are people who situate themselves between the left and the right, or those who cannot fully described themselves as strictly being within either wing.

Purposive sampling was undertaken to try to ensure a balanced sample between those who hold left, moderate, and right political ideologies alongside their different roles and positions as politician, member of civil society, and academician. The relative political positioning of the twenty-seven experts was affirmed from answers to questions in the questionnaire.

Representatives of each sector were also distinguished based on their political ideologies. In other words, three representatives of each sector who hold a different political position were interviewed. Table 1 presents the political ideology and mean of overall responses to political, economic and civil society questions of interviewed experts.

Survey Limitations

The research team experienced several difficulties in conducting the interviews partly because of the particular political situation in Thailand at that moment. Around half of the interviewees indicated difficulty in placing their answers as quantitative values. Some experts said that each degree from one to ten had different meanings. Others said that this tool reflected only the individual's attitude to choose a number, which itself may differ between experts. In other words, there could be inconsistencies among expert's scoring if we try to combine or put their preference score in comparison with each other.

Most key informants stated that the Asian Democracy Index cannot itself prove the presence or stage of Thai democracy since it cannot be taken to imply the actual conditions of the existing political system, especially under a military regime. Some factors had low meas-urements or no answers from some experts. For example, some experts argued that the low scores of the ADI do not necessarily mean that Thailand is or is not a democratic country. It does, however, reflect a low degree of democratization in Thailand.

Some respondents also critiqued the questions themselves, stating that some questions embodied complexity that could not be reflected through a number. For example, the ques-tion regarding freedom of expression in Thailand was flagged as being negative. In this case, the respondent was required to consider which topics the media covered, including the lèse-majesté law and the military courts. While reporting on the real issues related to the monarchy might require the selection of a

value closer to one or two, other issues reported in the media may result in a higher number thus complicating how to score this particular question.

Table 1. Political Ideology and Mean of Overall Response to Political, Economic, and Civil Society Questions of Interviewed Experts

Political Ideology	Role played/ position	Political Question	Economic Question	Civil Society Question
Left	Politicians	3.45	3.94	3.87
	Civil Society	2.99	3.26	2.5
	Academicians	2.55	2.92	3.35
	Total	3	3.37	3.57
Moderate	Politicians	4.7	5.02	5.72
	Civil Society	3.14	4.66	5.03
	Academicians	4.08	3.95	4.89
	Total	3.97	4.54	5.21
Right	Politicians	4.64	4.35	5.22
	Civil Society	3.92	4	4.95
	Academicians	4.86	3,56	4.21
	Total	4.47	3.97	4.79
Overall Total		3.81	3.96	3

In the case of some questions regarding the autonomy of civil society, some inter-viewed experts were confused because the numerical score of some questions did not seem compatible with the numerical score of other questions (i.e., those questions that required a high number to indicate a democratic aspect and a low number to reflect an illiberal one); the problem was that those questions took the highest number as indicating a condi-

tion of monopoly and the lowest number as indicating a condition of equality.

Finally, some participants stated that it was hard to understand questions on certain issues. For example, questions about elections in Thailand were challenging because of the current interim constitution, where no local and national elections are scheduled, and the uncertainty on whether or not an election will take place and in under what condition.

Relatedly, some interviewees said that governments in Thailand did not really help people according to the entitlements owed to them as rights. Rather, support to people is provided at the "mercy" of the elite and aristocrats. In other words, some interviewed experts considered that as a consequence of political patronage, several social policies and forms of welfare are more accurately described as "gifts after the election" rather than an actual intervention by the government.

Reflecting on these difficulties, the research team addressed them by clarifying several questions into a simple scale that the participants were comfortable to respond to. Furthermore, interviewees could clarify their numerical answer through their comments and opinions, which were also documented and taken account of in the analysis that follows.

Research Findings

In this section, the survey results per field are presented and analyzed, following the analysis as conceptualized by Cho (2012).

Thailand's Political Field

In recent years, Thailand's political situation has been challenged by conflicts between the elected powers and the non-elected elites. Since the coup in May 2014 that ousted the Yingluck government, Thailand's level of democratization has significantly declined. The military and non-elected elites have tried to eliminate Thaksin Shinawatra and his network that have dominated Thai politics for the past fifteen years. General Prayuth Chan-ocha, the coup leader and the prime minister, has created an authoritarian state that at one level can be understood by the classical concept of paternalistic power (Pye 1985, 321).

The military government is represented by nationalist leaders who have tried to establish a new political legitimacy built upon their control over their bureaucratic subordinates and the mechanisms of the state. The government does not only have an authoritarian culture of authority, but also gains support from non-elected mechanisms, including the bureau-

cracy, military, and royal elites (Pye 1985, 321-325). This can be clearly seen in the government's program to "bring happiness back to Thailand" and the unfinished process of the draft constitutional framework (The Economist 2015). These programs employ both cultural and state power in seeking to control Thai society and that has monopolized political powers into the NCPO.

After over one year with the military government in power, there was a considerable increase in the monopolization of political powers in every aspect (autonomy, competition, pluralization, and solidarity) (see table 2). The military government and the National Legislative Assembly (NLA) have enacted a significant number of oppressive regulations and decrees. On coming to power, the new military government declared martial law in an attempt to control political movements and deployed several economic and political policies that facilitated the centralization of power. For example, academics, protesters, journalists and the former prime minister were detained by the military for a week after the coup happened. According to Colonel Weerachon Sukondhapatipak, deputy army spokesman, "This is in a bid for everybody who is involved in the conflict to calm down and have time to think. We don't intend to limit their freedom but it is to relieve the pressure" (Telegraph 2014). This situation has transformed Thai politics from a "hybrid regime" or "electoral authoritarianism" to a "full authoritarian regime." This regime, however, is an unstable authoritarianism because domestic groups such as academics and student movements have challenged it. It is also subject to external pressure from the European Union (EU), the NGO Human Rights Watch (Levitsky and Way 2010), and the like.

Table 2. Thai Politics Index, 2014-2015

	2014	2015
Autonomy	5.85	3.16
Competition	4.82	4.35
Pluralization	4.25	2.91
Solidarity	4.32	3.87

In the Thai politics index, the 2015 scores were significantly lower in all four subprinciples than the 2014 scores. In 2014, the average score was relatively steady across the table between 4 and 6. The highest score of the Thai politics index in 2014 was in autonomy (5.85) and the lowest was in pluralization (4.25). Competition and solidarity were second and third at 4.48 and 4.25, respectively. In 2015, there was a significant contrast in all four subprinciples. The autonomy score came from highest to the third rank in 2015 at 3.16. The highest score shifts to competition instead at 4.35. The lowest is still the same as before, in pluralization at 2.91. The solidarity score rose to the second rank in all four sections. In the case of autonomy, the score decreased from 5.85 to 3.16 because citizens' freedom and freedom of assembly had been curtailed, with political activities essentially prohibited. Any movement and gathering of five or more people for political objectives has been banned; the ban covers peaceful protests, political debates, and academic activities related to Thai politics. For example, the military government arrested fourteen student activists who peacefully expressed opposition to military rule in June 2015. Those students could face seven years in prison according to article 116 of the penal code, and an additional six-month prison term and a fine of up to THB 10,000 (USD 312) for breaching the NCPO's public assembly ban (Human Rights Watch 2015).

Regarding competition, this aspect obtained the highest score of the 2015 survey in the field of politics. Yet the score is still slightly lower than in the 2014 survey. Although Thai politics at present does not have elections either at the national or local level, it has interest groups and non-elected groups where some political power resides and that have thus shown some aspects of competition. For instance, 200 members of the NLA, who were appointed by General Prayuth, includes 105 members that hold military ranks, eleven from the police, and 84 civilian members that include right-wing academics, business executives, technocrats, and former senators (International Foundation for Electoral Systems 2014). However, the core political power has been centralized into the military government.

Pluralization had the lowest score in the 2015 survey. This is because Thai political organizations and pressure groups cannot share power with the central political institutions that belong to the military government and bureaucrats. Accountability and accepting criticism from the public over controversial issues and national agendas have been neglected. Furthermore, Thai politics at present does not have the checks and balances among the state's apparatuses due to the monopolization of power by the

military government. Decision-making cannot be readily supervised because journalists are expected to report only in support of the government. Any journalist who criticizes the government will be summoned for "attitude adjustment." Exemplifying this is the recent case of Pravit Rojanaphruk, a former Chevening scholar at Oxford University and a senior columnist of the Nation newspaper, who was detained by the military government for interrogation because of criticizing them and commenting related to issue of the lèse majesté law (Guardian 2015b). When he was released, he was subsequently required to resign from the newspaper where he had worked for decades.

Finally, the score for political solidarity is 3.87 points, which measures lower than the previous year because of the limited political unity despite the presence of a military government. Although the military government tried to centralize power by appointing former military generals to more than one-third of the positions in the cabinet, the military government and non-elected elites still have conflicts over controversial issues such as the draft of the new constitution. The lack of unity is demonstrated by responses to the survey questions: for example, "how much do you think the public trusts the government?" and "the parliament/legislature?" scored only 4.25 and 3.74 respectively. Despite some respondents believing that the strong and aggressive characteristics of General Prayuth's government can solve problems faster and more effectively than the previous elected government, the ongoing economic recession, political conflict, and social cleavage continue to seriously challenge the current military government despite having now been in power for almost one and a half years (Bloomberg 2015). It would appear that the strong regulations and decisions suggest an insecure form of military government that encourages them to use hard—rather than soft—power.

In his article titled "The End of the Transition Paradigm," Thomas Carothers (2002) argues that most transitional countries are neither dictatorial nor clearly headed toward democracy but instead are staying in a political gray zone. Yet, Thai politics since the 2014 coup have countered Carothers' argument because Thailand, a transitional country, can now be characterized as an authoritarian regime in the black zone—a zone with no clear deadline for a return to democracy and one laced in controversy over proposed plans for a "crisis committee" in the new constitution that would allow the military to take over a civilian government during periods of political crisis. It appears that there is limited reason for optimism for a rapid end to military rule. Even after martial law was repealed in April 2015, Article 44 of the junta's interim constitution approved by the

NCPO provides a form of absolute power to the prime minister. Wisanu Kruengam, Thai Deputy Prime Minister, said, "the law was modelled after a 1958 French law which was used during the Algerian War. It will allow the current government to resolve more quickly security-related issues as well as many other administrative problems that are not security related" (Channel News Asia 2015). However, this law also was employed during the period of Thai authoritarian regime in 1950s that gave absolute power to the military government of the time to control society and to oppress people in the opposition. In terms of building and embedding democratic institutions, this presents a serious problem for Thai politics.

Contrasting the 2013-14 and 2014-15 surveys, it is found that Thai democracy has been significantly weakened since the last coup. At present, Thai people need to fight even for an election to be held; how much more for deeper principles of participation or deliberation. The military government has changed laws, rules, and regulations, which have resulted in the monopolization and centralization of power and that the placement of the military, bureaucracy, and royal institution at the core of politics. According to the ADI framework, focusing on liberalization and equalization (4.09 and 3.58, respectively in the 2015 survey), the survey demonstrates Thailand's current democratic failure. Consequently, Thai politics will continue to focus on a struggle for democracy and faces a long haul in resolving political conflicts between elected powers and non-elected ones, especially in the context of the challenge of the royal succession and the relationship between processes of democracy and core institutions in Thailand.

Thailand's Economic Field, 2015

Since the military coup on May 22, 2014, the military government and its associates have strengthened their political control. Yet, in terms of the economy, according to EIU (2015), they failed to bring about strong economic recovery as they had hoped to do. Even though the Thai economy recovered from a slump in early 2014 when political unrest seriously disrupted the economy, the fate of Thailand's economy is still uncertain. According to ADB (2015), the country's GDP grew by 2.9 percent in the first half of 2015, while the forecast for the country's average pace of economic expansion between 2015 and 2019 remains at 3.8 percent at most.

According to ADB (2015), government spending during 2014 and the first half of 2015 was unable to rebound the country's economy because private consumption and investment remained low due to low farm incomes, slow wage growth, and high household debt. Attempting to

stimulate the economy, the government took steps to assist rural areas hit by drought, lowering prices of farm products, and producing a stimulus package for small and medium-sized businesses. Such fiscal measures, together with planned large infrastructure projects and expectations of improved prospects for exports to major industrial economies next year, are hoped by the government to lift GDP growth in 2016 by just over 1 percentage point above that of 2015. On the other hand, over one year after the coup, not only has the rate of exports declined but consumer confidence has also continued to decline throughout the year.

This most recent economic decline is juxtaposed against Thailand's significant—if somewhat turbulent—progress in social and economic issues over the last four decades. This has seen the country move from low-income to upper-income country status in less than a generation. Thailand has in the past been widely cited as a development success story, at least in terms of its economic transformation, with sustained economic growth and poverty reduction, particularly in the 1980s. Thus, there is concern that the current economic situation is a significant and negative turn compared to past trends, and could complicate or compound current and future social and political crises.

As can be seen in table 3, for the economy index as calculated with the ADI method, the scores of the 2015 survey have declined significantly in all subprinciples from the previous year. In 2014, the highest score was in competition at 4.69, followed by solidarity, autonomy, and pluralization at 4.65, 4.49, and 3.45, respectively. In 2015, in comparison, solidarity had the lowest score among all subprinciples at 3.23, while competition remains the highest-scoring subprinciple at 3.95. The second-ranked economic subprinciple for 2015 is autonomy, with a score of 3.89, while economic pluralization is ranked third, with a score of 3.34.

Economic autonomy includes economic freedom from state interference, the protection of labor rights, and the autonomy of economic policies from external forces. According to the survey result, the score for economic autonomy significantly went down from 4.49 in 2014 to 3.89 in 2015. This is an indication that problems within Thailand's oligarchic political structure have shifted from politician-businessmen networks toward military networks and business networks related to them. Over the past several decades, many businessmen gradually entered into politics to secure their own power and privilege (Pasuk and Baker 2004). The 2014 military coup has almost completely returned the situation back to a previous political economy characterized by a bureaucratic polity and associated economic patronage. Since the coup, the military has played a greater

role in economic policies. By using Article 44 of the interim constitution, the military has provided a business-friendly environment to allow its "allies" to invest and gain profit as long as big businesses provide support for the power transition. Examples of Article 44 use by NCPO include: the cancellation of local government periodical elections; the demarcation and protection of forest reserve areas and natural resource management; the appointment of a military person to be the chairman of a lottery board; the new regulation of fishing gears; and the creation of a special team on infrastructure projects and special economic zones. On the other hand, the coup has not led to better support for the rights of labor. Even prior to the coup, legal protections for union members were weak and poorly enforced. After the coup's industrial strikes and other demonstrations in support of labor and trade union rights, general restrictions on public gatherings were made and was ultimately banned.

Table 3. Thai Economy Index, 2014-2015

	2014	2015
Autonomy	4.49	3.89
Competition	4.69	3.95
Pluralization	3.45	3.34
Solidarity	4.65	3.23

Economic competition includes consideration of economic transparency, fairness in the economy, government responsibility, and corporate responsibility. The ADI survey score for economic cooperation went down from 4.69 in 2014 to 3.95 in 2015, but nevertheless scored higher compared to other subprinciples. Among economic sectors, economic monopolization is still most readily seen in telecommunications and energy sectors. Moreover, in terms of economic transparency and government/corporate responsibility, there are some monopolized business groups that have a close connection with the military government and that link major power networks together as

an oligarchy. This includes business networks that can influence the direction of Thailand have close connections with the military government and that links that connect them with other neighboring countries and six special economic zones along the border districts with Myanmar, Laos, Cambodia, and Malaysia (e.g., see Thabchumpon et al. 2014).

Assessment of economic pluralization requires contemplating the fairness of the distribution of economic resources, and includes measures of economic monopoly, regional disparity, income equality, asset disparity, and employment equality. The overall score under this subprinciple went down from 3.45 in 2014 to 3.34 in 2015. This is because decisionmaking is more centralized and monopolized by elites both in the political institutions and economic organizations. The returning power of the Ministry of Interior to control the provincial administrations, the creation of a state-owned enterprise "super board" to pursue the governmental economic schemes through its selected partners, and the recent attempt to control the digital economy can be seen as processes of de-pluralization in Thailand's economy.

According to Pasuk Pongpaichit and Pornthep Benjaapikul (2013), over the past two decades inequality in Thailand, measured by the Gini coefficient of household consumption expenditure, has improved very little, while the Gini coefficient of household income has increased steeply and is getting worse. World Bank (2015) notes, however, drawing on the most recent data, that most recently, whilst income inequality, as measured by the Gini coefficient, stays consistently high above 0.45, it has fallen slightly in recent years. Overall, although extreme poverty in Thailand has declined substantially from 67 percent in 1986 to 11 percent in 2014, income inequality and lack of equal opportunities have remained persistent. In terms of regions, according to the World Bank (2015), the poor in urban areas now constitute one third of country's overall poor, while some regions such as the Deep South and Northeast are still behind others in terms of poverty level. In other words, the benefits of Thailand's national economic success have not been shared equally amongst all.

Finally, the assessment of economic solidarity includes social security systems, labor unions activities, corporate surveillance, and awareness of inequality alleviation. According to the survey results, the score sharply reduced from 4.65 in 2014 to 3.23 in 2005, which was the lowest score among the ADI subprinciples. This result indicates that the government's policies to support the poor for social welfare and social security have de-

clined. This is despite the fact that according to the World Bank (2015) the government's policy on national health coverage, initiated by past the past Thaksin Shinawatra government, has largely achieved its goal of providing access to affordable health care for all. As a result, Thailand's poorest families have benefited from a declining trend in the incidence of "catastrophic health expenditures" or out-of-pocket payments exceeding 10 percent of total household consumption expenditures.

In sum, Thailand was able to upgrade from a low-income country in the beginning to its present status of an upper-middle income economy in 2011. But it is argued that a small number of privileged groups enjoy disproportionate access to power and are the principle beneficiaries of the country's economic development. There is also a growing agreement that the country can no longer rely on this model of economic development and an emerging debate on what should replace it. Although there is no consensus on any solution, most people agree that the new model should incorporate social concerns, fair distribution (income, wages, education, social provisions), and more participation in the economic sphere. Political and economic exclusion in Thailand have contributed to the current political crisis, ultimately cumulating in the 2014 coup and the subsequent political, economic, and social monopolization of power where the military and its allies now play a major role in every aspect of the country's development. Hence, the state is not just under the military government with allocation of national resources on government selected priorities, but could be considered a "neo-authoritarian developmental state" as it puts democracy aside in Thailand's contemporary context. Those in power are now making significant economic commitments, working through a strong bureaucracy and with the support of its trusted business allies, although whether they can cause the recovery of the country's flagging economy remains to be seen.

Thailand's Civil Society Field

The Thai Civil Society index indicates the opinion on democratization over civil society in 2014-2015. The score, again, declines over time (see table 4). Pluralization scored the highest in 2014 at 5.06, but dropped to 4.56 in the following year. As a result, in 2015, the highest score became that of competition at 4.64. This is followed by autonomy at 4.59, pluralization at 4.56, and solidarity ranked at 3.6.

Table 4. Thai Civil Society Index, 2014-2015

	2014	2015
Autonomy	4.79	4.59
Competition	4.92	4.64
Pluralization	5.06	4.56
Solidarity	4.57	3.6

The political climate in Thailand lately has been one of the most influential factors in shaping the limited role and fragmented condition of civil society in the process of democratization. The overall 2015 score in the civil society field reflects the weakening of civil society in all aspects. Our key informants ranked the freedom of citizen's social activities from government intervention at 3.92. This is a particularly low score but it reflects the recent movement of the government through many means in intervening in social and political gatherings ranging from academic seminars in universities and students' gathering in public spaces to express their thoughts on the current political system, to the forced dispersion of any mobilization of farmers and villagers who wish to register their dissatisfaction with the impacts of ineffective government policies on tackling challenges in agriculture.

Article 44, mentioned earlier on in this paper, has been one of the political tools in allowing the government staff—mainly military and police—to claim their legitimacy to check, even if it intruded upon and detained any people who they think are taking part in activities deemed as threatening to the security of the nation or the government itself. Key informants are aware of the use of Article 44 by government staff on many occasions and seemed to agree that it obstructs the improvement of the autonomy of society from state intervention. In 2015, the use of Article 44 has been more obvious, which might affect the results of our next survey.

While the government seemed to dominate the roles and the extent to which the civil society can express their concerns in the public arena, the

private sector is also considered important in providing funds. The private sector also influences some civil society organizations based on their own corporate agendas. When being asked about the influence private companies have on civil society, experts ranked it 5.57, which is relatively high compared with scores in other fields. Despite this high score, most of the experts have no clear idea of which and how private companies influence civil society.

We might however be able to discern some of the impacts of the initiatives of private companies over the past few years in terms of charitable activities, corporate social responsibility project, and consumer campaigns through television broadcasting. This has extended to social media such as Facebook, which started to form different and new kinds of networks in Thai society. These new groups of people have gradually built up activities based on their interests in improving social understanding, tolerance, and access to basic needs. These initiatives from the people have gained wide popularity and influences over the year especially in big cities like Bangkok and Chiang Mai. While some nongovernmental organizations are struggling to find funding for the continuity of their activities and campaigns, these independent, loosely structured peoples' initiatives have received greater support from private companies during recent years.

In terms of competition within the civil society field, NGOs have been considered as having a relatively weak influence in Thai society, thus the overall score of this field subprinciple is 4.84. Some experts commented that there is a wide range of NGOs these days and each has their own distinctive strategies and issues. However, there are many NGOs that have been known for criticizing public agendas without proposing concrete mechanisms to resolve problems. Some interviewed experts said that sometimes groups that make too much commentary might risk losing their credibility and legitimacy. Some went further to claim that there are several organizations that are influenced by elitists and technocrats that often have limited mindsets about how society usually is. For some, the exclusiveness of NGOs have raised the question of how well the NGOs represent the wider public interest of the country. For this particular point, our experts ranked the effectiveness and inclusiveness of NGOs' representation of civil society as a whole with 4.74 points. The ways some NGOs are operated are perceived as being relatively undemocratic. Some NGOs have been highlighted as having no democratic ideology and are politically unethical as they took sides with the military government as long as the regime can push forward their long-fought issue-based agenda. The score for this point was only 4.18.

Considering the pluralization process in the civil society field, the media can be a good example of how the divide in Thai society was depicted. The media has been perceived as having taken sides with political parties, political movements, or private companies. In other words, neutral or objective media is considered rare in daily broadcasting and print. The fairness and neutrality of reports of the political situation in Thailand have been ranked very low at 3.62, indicating a perception that the pluralization of civil society is an unjust process, with inequality of public access to reliable information and exchange of opinion persisting. While more and more people have better access to information through different and cheaper media channels, information gaps persist due to the biased media and the attachment of the people to their own media sphere. If we look deeper into this problem, the issue of media inequality and information access also led to the inequality of power among members in the society. The well-funded groups of media often produced reports to support their funders while government-owned media also delivers propaganda programs with no shame. The recent initiative of the government to transform internet access in Thailand into the so-called "single gateway" is also a crucial step toward centralizing media, including social media regulation, control, and surveillance under government authority. The issue of equality of power distribution among people in the country has been ranked the lowest among questions related to civil society, with the score of 3.07.

Lastly, in terms of solidarity in terms of citizen participation, the overall ranking is also quite low at 3.22 points. This might be related to the problem of exclusivity of NGOs mentioned above as well as the other available options for citizens to express their interests and concerns in a variety of non-formal ways. With such limitation of active participation of citizens in NGO activities as well as the exclusiveness and ineffectiveness of some NGOs, it is not a surprise to see the score of NGO's influence on government policymaking process scoring relatively low at 4.

Discussion

As per the ADI method (CADI 2012), measures of autonomy and competition are understood as aspects of liberalization, and measures of pluralization and solidarity as aspects of equalization. The values for 2014 and 2015 as disaggregated and averaged data are presented in tables 5 and 6 respectively.

Table 5. Four Subprinciples of Democracy, Thailand, 2014 and 2015

		Politics		Economy		Civil Society		Average	
		2014	2015	2014	2015	2014	2015	2014	2015
Liberalization	Autonomy	5.85	3.16	4.49	3.89	4.79	4.59	5.04	3.88
	Competition	4.82	4.35	4.69	3.95	4.92	4.64	4.81	4.31
Equalization	Pluralization	4.25	2.91	3.45	3.34	5.06	4.56	4.25	3.6
	Solidarity	4.32	3.87	4.65	3.23	4.57	3.6	4.51	3.56
	Total	4.81	3.57	4.32	3.6	4.83	4.34		

Table 6. Liberalization and Equalization in Thailand, 2014 and 2015

	Politics		Economy		Civil Society		Average	
	2014	2015	2014	2015	2014	2015	2014	2015
Liberalization	5.33	3.75	4.59	3.92	4.85	4.61	4.92	4.09
Equalization	4.27	3.39	4.05	3.28	4.81	4.08	4.38	3.58
Total	4.8	3.57	4.3	3.6	4.83	4.34		

Table 6 shows that the principle of liberalization takes the top rank with a score of 4.09, similar to the survey result in 2014, but with values declining from 2014. Of the three values comprising liberalization, civil society competition received the highest score of 4.61, whilst political autonomy ranks the lowest with a score of 3.16. On the other hand, the score for civil society's autonomy shows only a slight decline from the 2014 result, from 4.79 to 4.59.

In the principle of equalization, civil society again has the highest score of 4.08. In this section, the overall score dramatically declines compared with the score of 2014. Political equality has a score of 3.39, which is only a little higher than economic equality. Among the subprinciples of equalization, political pluralization has the lowest score of 2.91. Meanwhile, the overall mark of civil society pluralization is 4.56. Economic solidarity has the lowest score of 3.23, while the highest average belongs to political solidarity, which is at 3.87.

Compared with the 2014 score, the overall average has distinctly declined. Among the four subprinciples, competition acquired the top-ranked position with the highest average of 4.31, followed by autonomy, pluralization, and solidarity. The result is different from the 2014 survey, in which autonomy was placed in the top position with the score of 5.04 and was followed by competition, solidarity, and pluralization.

Table 7 and figure 1 shows the average score of each political ideology divided by the 3 groups in question: politics, economy, and civil society. The score shows a significant difference between the left ideology and right ideology regarding political questions. The average of the left ideology scores is lower at 3.00 than the right ideology at 4.48, whilst the moderates' score is closer to the right ideology with 3.98. In the economic questions, the right and left ideology show less difference and it is the moderates that score higher than the other two. Regarding civil society questions, there is a sharp increase in the right ideology with a score that reaches 4.8, whilst the moderates' score reaches a peak of 5.22, and the left ideology rises to a lower peak of 3.57. Overall, the graph shows that there is a fluctuation in the answers of the right ideology, while those under the left and moderate ideologies show only slight changes.
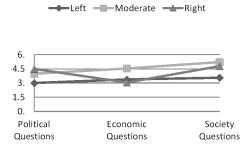
Table 8 and figure 2 shows the average score of each role (politicians, academics, and civil society) to the political, economic, and civil society questions. The politicians score highest in all three types of questions. Civil society members scored their opinion on politics significantly lower compared to those from the other two roles. On the other hand, civil society's scores rose dramatically in the economic section (3.97) and the civil

society section (4.50). The academicians' average score in political questions is in the middle of those belonging to the other two roles, but for the other two sections, namely economy and civil society, the scores are the lowest of among all three roles.

Table 7. Summary of Overall Means of Political, Economic, and Civil Society Components by Political Ideology

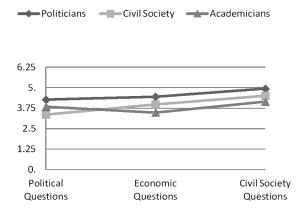|	Left	Moderate	Right
Political	3	3.98	4.48
Economic	3.38	4.55	3.07
Civil Society	3.57	5.22	4.8

Figure 1. Mean Scores for Answers by Political Ideology of Interviewees to Political, Economic and Civil Society Questions

Table 8. Summary of Overall Means of Political, Economic, and Civil Society Components by Role

	Politicians	Civil Society	Academicians
Political	4.27	3.36	3.84
Economic	4.44	3.97	3.48
Civil Society	4.94	4.5	4.15

Figure 2. Mean Scores for Answers by Role of Interviewees to Political, Economic, and Civil Society Questions

Conclusion

From the "Bangkok shutdown" in early 2014 to the "democracy shut-down" throughout the year of 2015, Thai people are now experiencing the process of the creation of a neo-authoritarian state. Politics are controlled by the security sector and the economy is run in a neo-authoritarian man-ner, which holds certain views of an appropriate developmental paradigm

for the country. As a result, Thailand's political autonomy/competition and overall democracy are now compromised, while economic monopolization is consolidated and civil society under political patronage is more prominent.

Under these circumstances, the state is not just playing the role of a normal developmental state that allocates national resources on chosen issues. The state can be considered as a developmental authoritarian state that puts democracy aside. Meanwhile, the composition of those in power and the frontrunners of developing the country's economy come from strong bureaucracies and their trusted business allies. Alongside all of this, civil society is being coopted as civic state.

As the Thai state continues to lead toward neoliberal economic development plans since the bureaucracy still supports the free market with limited interventions, political leaders seek to gain consent through economic performance. Thus, the state should be seen as a "neo-authoritarian development state."

In conclusion, this paper has examined Thailand's democratic situation through the lens of the Asian Democracy Index (ADI). It portrays a shifting direction of the Thai state toward monopolization. Throughout this process, political and economic exclusion in the Thai context have led to political, economic, and social monopoly, where the state plays a major role in every aspect of development and democratization processes. In the end, we suggest that the process of Thailand's democratization can only be secured through the de-monopolization of the political, economic, and civil society spheres, thereby allowing people to constructively engage and participate in shaping a fairer society.

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