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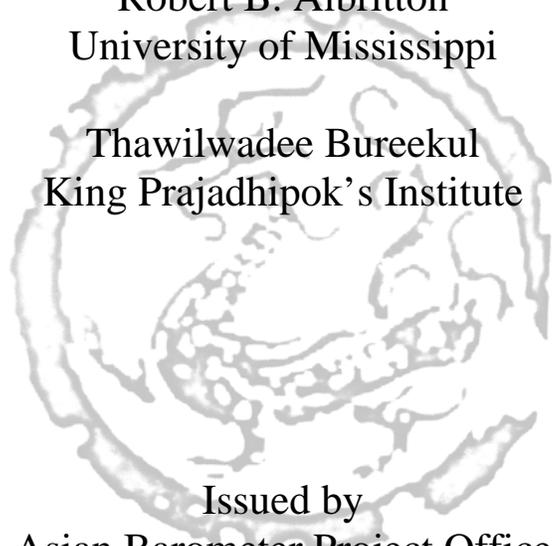
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Civil Society and the Consolidation of Democracy in
Thailand

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A Comparative Survey of Democracy, Governance and Development

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ABSTRACT

Civil society is accepted by scholars of democratization as an essential component of democratic consolidation. Such judgments are seldom based upon empirical evidence from developing democracies. This study utilizes data from a national probability sample of Thai citizens to examine the role of civil society in the context of democratic consolidation in Thailand. The evidence suggests that civil society is weak in Thailand and is associated primarily with older, rural constituencies of less than middle-class status. Although civil society participation appears to have an impact on political participation, it does not appear to be associated with support for democracy.

Civil Society and the Consolidation of Democracy in Thailand¹

Robert B. Albritton
Thawilwadee Bureekul

There is considerable ambiguity in the concept of civil society as it is used in the discipline of political science. Part of this ambiguity arises from its origins in revolutionary movements against non-democratic regimes. The concept becomes more problematic in the context of democratic consolidation, even though Linz and Stepan (2001) suggest that conditions must exist for a free and lively *civil society* in order for democratic consolidation to take place. Contrary to Schmitter's (1997) assertion that civil society contributes to consolidation of democracy, Berman (1997) argues that, in an already democratic regime, civil society can be a fertile ground for organizing totalitarian regimes, as in Nazi Germany at the time of the Weimar Republic.

Another ambiguity in the concept comes from its overlap with social capital. Putnam (2000) describes participation in organized groups and movements as a form of social capital, and this phenomenon seems remarkably similar to Linz and Stepan's version of civil society.¹ In many ways, it appears that civil society is a form of social capital, the latter concept including other social assets, such as levels of education and social solidarity.

Some of the major proponents of civil society enhance these ambiguities by suggesting that the relationship between civil society and democracy is one of correlation, not causation. Philippe Schmitter (1997), for example, notes that the resurrection of civil society occurs *after* transitions to democracy and is not necessary either to the demise of autocracy or for transition to

¹ The authors wish to express appreciation to the Chiang Ching Kuo Foundation and the King Prajadhipok's Institute for funding data gathering in this study.

democracy. Even Linz and Stepan (2001) treat civil society as an indicator of democratic development rather than a cause.

One might wonder how appropriate a social movement taken from a revolutionary context might be for the transition to democracy - to establish justice, insure domestic tranquility, and other characteristics of democratic consolidation that require a great deal more than revolutionary fervor. Linz and Stepan (2001) affirm the value of the styles of civil society in helping to consolidate democracy, but both Schmitter (1997) and Linz and Stepan (2001), indicate that civil society must be characterized by Acivility,@ a far cry from its development under the non-democratic regimes of Eastern Europe and Latin America as an instrument of democratic resistance.

The concept of Acivil society@ faces even more problematic receptions when transported into the Asian context. In analyses of Thailand, for example, civil society is still viewed as an agent of political resistance (Girling, 2002). In Asia, in general, civil society is invested with a Gramscian vision of a constant struggle for political and policy power in any society threatened with abuse of power by the state. James Ockey (2002), Johannes Schmidt (2002), and Kevin Hewison (2002) all point to the mass protests of the 1950s, the 1970s, and the overthrow of the Suchinda government in 1992, as representing civil society at its height in Thailand. Somchai (2002) argues for a continuing politics of confrontation by civil society and the thrust of the essays in a recent volume commenting on contemporary Thai politics indicates that this is essential for Aradical democracy@ (McCargo, 2002). The overall impression left by this literature is that agendas of civil society are somewhat at odds with concepts used in the context of democratic consolidation.

A less ideological view emerges from alternative considerations of Thai culture and society. Piker suggests that Thai individualism accounts for the lack of significant development of cooperative associations in rural Thailand (1979). A sense of self-reliance, especially in rural Thai society results in an avoidance of anything but superficial interaction, making Thais wary of group memberships or other associations that contribute to vigorous participation in activities associated with civil society movements (Mulder, 1969). Klausner attributes the generally weak status of rural cooperatives to these traits (1983). Although notable protests occur, implying growing levels of social organization, Unger (1998) characterizes these occurrences as *ad hoc*. In general, Thais appear to participate only tentatively and are seldom associated with sustained, organized groups. Most of what does exist are cooperative associations organized by government to which Thai rural people belong as a condition of access to government markets and subsidies.

Similar patterns obtain in Bangkok despite an urban romanticism on the part of Thai intellectuals (and non-Thai scholars) that characterizes civil society organization in the inner city as vibrant. Askew (2002), for example, describes residents of the famous Klong Toey area as responding only to issues of immediate and practical concern. Notable successes, such as the protests by squatters against relocation by the Port Authority, have been transient at best and have not provided a sustained civil society envisioned as a component of growing social capital in a consolidating democracy. In fact, what social organizations exist appear largely dependent on outside-funded NGOs for sustained action characterized by a handful of leaders without substantial commitments of participation from members of the targeted communities.

A helpful contribution for conceptualizing civil society in an Asian context is Somchai=s (2002) distinction between a civil society that improves the balance of power for Aordinary

people@ (Girling, 2002: 262) and an Aelite@ civil society. In the Thai case, this formulation transcends the notion of Astate-led civil society@ (Frolic 1997:56), but the partnership between the state and the popular sector, in the Thai perception, still precludes building civil society from below. The concept has evolved into what is now termed Agood governance@ (Prawase Wasi 2002) that, as Somchai points out (2002:134), should be led by elites. The programs advocated by Areformers@ such as Prawase Wasi and Thirayuth Boonmi require leadership from the top down by capable elites, because an over-riding societal goal is social stability. The Areform@ agenda thus preserves the essential structure of elite dominance over common people, in particular the dominance of Bangkok over the 90 percent of the population represented in the *changwat* (provinces).

Because civil society is based in the attitudes and orientations of Aordinary people,@ theoretical treatments from macro-level perspectives seem somewhat Aairy@ and detached from their fundamental context in individual behavior. Belief in civil society as an unmitigated good ignores warnings that it can also serve as a vehicle for totalitarian movements (Berman, 1997).² Its transformation into Agood governance@ provides civil society with an emotional appeal implying that it is a core institution for political reform. What is missing from the discourse is an empirical analysis of civil society as it lies in the behavior and attitudes of citizens in emerging democracies.

This paper explores the configuration of civil society as it exists in Thailand at the beginning of the millennium. Based upon a random sample of Thai respondents from the entire kingdom, it provides summary measures of the levels of civil society in the Thai population. More importantly, it offers an opportunity to test relationships between citizen participation in *civil*

society and *political society*, whether participation in civil society, for example, induces or retards participation in political society. Finally, the data offer prospects for developing and analyzing models of sources of support for participation in civil society.

Measuring Civil Society in the Thai Context

The data for this study come from a probability sample of eligible voters in the Thai nation during November-December, 2001.³ Respondents were chosen in a three-stage probability sample based upon clusters of legislative districts, then of voting units (precincts), followed by a systematic sampling of voters across voting units. The sample included 50 of the 400 legislative districts, 100 voting units from across the 50 legislative districts, and 1500 respondents from the 100 voting units. This procedure yielded a population of 54,894. Because the Askip interval@ exceeded 36, a more conservative approach using 36 as the interval yielded 1546 respondents. This sample represents one of the few (if not the only) probability-based samples of the Thai electorate. Here, we utilize the data to indicate levels of civil society in the Thai population and to examine relationships between civil society and political society and their antecedents.

For purposes of the analysis, we define Acivil society@ as the arena of the polity that includes groups, movements and associations, independent of the state and economic units, that act as bridges between the state or political society and the family unit of social organization. Operationally, we use memberships in social, professional, entrepreneurial organizations, and trade unions (Linz and Stepan, 2001: 96) as evidence of participation in civil society by individuals. The theory holds that, although civil society cannot be defined as a cause of democracy, it at least serves as a breeding ground for participation in the activities of political

society, such as voting, participation in political organizations, and other activities that contribute to the health of democratic governance.

This paper presents data from the Thai portion of a multi-national study of democratization and value change in East Asia that includes questions designed to measure the level of involvement in civil society associations, as well as attitudes toward political society that are theoretically related. The larger study, using common survey instruments, offers a basis of comparison of national indicators over a variety of nations. In addition, the data provide a basis for empirically testing hypotheses of causes and effects of civil society, a considerably larger context than the literature to date.

Theories of civil society are silent as to causes of civil society participation in individual behavior. More specifically, they do not suggest whether civil society is a trait associated with rural or urban populations. Because scholars tend to conceive urban society as containing more complex forms of social organization, one would anticipate higher levels of civil society in urban areas. However, urban society also encourages isolation and anonymity in ways that may produce opposite effects. Because cleavages between rural and urban society are so prominent in the Thai context (Laothamatas, 1996; Albritton and Bureekul, 2002), the analysis also examines plausible hypotheses connecting civil society with its locations in rural or urban environments.

A corresponding set of hypotheses includes associations between civil society and social class. In principle, civil society should be independent of social class and status, that is, true civil society should include associations from all social strata. The research question here is: *Do middle class citizens participate in higher levels of social organization than citizens of lower status?* If scholars suggest that the civil society movement in Thailand should be dominated by

the middle class (Wasi, 2002), a plausible rival hypothesis suggests that the civil society emerging in Thailand is formed from the need of underprivileged masses to have a voice in political society. The Forum of the Poor is one example of associations that give voice to the lower classes in a contest for dominance of the development of political democracy. The data contained in this study offer tentative evidence of civil society development under Thai democracy, especially in the context of defined rights and liberties outlined by the Constitution of 1997.

Knack (2002), in one of the few efforts to examine social capital across American states, focuses on two measures that are relevant to a consideration of civil society in the Thai context: social trust and an index of informal socializing. Our indicators of group membership and informal social activity are rough proxies for the civil society; for social trust, we use a similar question inquiring as to ability to trust others, offering an alternative that “you cannot be too careful in dealing with other people.” The latter provides evidence of the impact of civil society participation on a critical indicator of social capital.

The data provide two indicators of individual level participation in civil society associations by Thai respondents. The first is a general measure of group membership - “Are you a member of any formal groups or associations?” and “Are you a member of any informal groups or associations?” The second is a summed index of specific group memberships in formal organizations, such as residential associations, labor unions, cooperatives, or volunteer groups and a summed index of membership in informal associations, such as a circle of colleagues who interact outside work, friends who share common hobbies, or those who get together regularly to share information. We offer these indicators as measures of participation in civil society, claiming that they are very close to the concepts described by Putnam (2000) and Linz and Stepan (2001)

(See endnote 1).

Civil Society in Thailand

Organizational membership in Thai society is low. Only 39.1 percent of Thai respondents claim membership in any formal organization (Table 1). When informal associations in groups are the subject of discussion, only 13.5 percent claim to socialize with others in group activity (Table 1). The overwhelming proportion of formal memberships are accounted for by residential

TABLE 1: Percent Claiming Formal and Informal Affiliations in Civil Society Associations

	Percent Yes	Percent No
Formal Associations	39.1	60.9
Informal Associations	13.5	86.5

N=1546

associations (21.7%) and agricultural associations (17.0%) (Table 2). Trade association, labor union, volunteer group, and citizen movement activity is negligible. Political memberships appear among the lowest of the possible associations (Table 2). The profile of Thai citizens represented by this indicator suggests that civil society in Thailand is relatively weak.

TABLE 2: Affiliations of Thai Respondents with Formal and Informal Groups Representing Civil Society.

N=1546

	Percent Reporting Affiliation
<i>Formal Associations:</i>	
Residential Associations	21.7
Agricultural Associations	17.0
Volunteer Groups	2.8
Religious Groups	2.7
PTAs	1.8

Political Parties	1.7	
Alumni Associations	1.1	
Sports or Leisure Club	1.0	
Producer cooperatives	0.6	
Citizen Movements (NGOs)	0.5	
Trade Associations	0.5	
Candidate Support Organizations	0.5	
Labor Unions	0.3	
Consumer Cooperatives	0.1	
<i>Informal Associations:</i>		
Colleagues Who Interact Outside Work	3.5	
Groups at Community Schools	2.3	
Friends Who Exchange Information	2.3	
Friends Who Do Business	2.1	
Friends Who Share Hobbies		1.1
Informal Credit or Loan Associations	1.1	

These data require a frame of reference in order to put them in perspective. Are these levels of citizen participation in civil society associations low? Putnam cites General Social Survey and other studies indicating that membership in organizations in the United States declined to a little less than 70 percent by the early 1990s (2000: 59). Japan indicated 67.1 percent participation in formal associations (EAB data) and Mongolia 63.2 percent (EAB data). In informal or private associations (Table 2), only the Philippines has a lower rate of social participation. By these comparisons, civil society in Thailand is relatively weak, indeed.

Associational memberships may be multiple, that is, some of the memberships in individual associations may be accounted for by respondents who are members of more than one association. The way to examine this possibility is by creating a score for each respondent, indicating the number of affiliations to which he or she belongs. Respondent scores on membership in all associations are summed and presented in Table 3.

TABLE 3: Scores on Civil Society Participation Among Thai Respondents: Numbers of Memberships Associated with Each Respondent **N=1546**

	Frequency	Percent
<i>Formal Groups:</i>		
0	999	64.6
1	357	23.1
2	147	9.3
3	35	2.3
4	4	.3
5	4	.3
6	1	.1
7	2	.1
<i>Informal Groups:</i>		
0	1402	90.7
1	114	7.4
2	18	1.2
3	8	.5
4	3	.2
5	1	.1
<i>Sum of Formal and Informal Groups:</i>		
0	953	61.6
1	343	22.2
2	168	10.9
3	48	3.1
4	17	1.1
5	7	.5
6	4	.3
7	3	.2
8	2	.1
10	1	.1

This index of participation in civil society groups shows that only 12.3 percent of respondents have memberships in more than one formal group association and only 1.9 percent have affiliations with two or more informal groups. When memberships in both formal and informal groups are combined, the numbers improve (16.2 percent with more than one affiliation), but not by much. The conclusion is that very few Thais are members of more than one association, whether informal or formal, and that most of these associations are by virtue of residency or

agricultural necessities.

Although residential groups may be related to urban living, it is unlikely that agricultural associations are found in urban areas. This implies that the levels of organizational affiliation may be higher in rural than non-rural areas. The geographical distribution of civil society in Thailand can be examined for its association with four types of location: Bangkok, the suburbs (of Bangkok and other cities), provincial capitals (*muang*), and rural areas. Table 4 presents a cross-tabulation of civil society participation by categories related to urban-rural cleavages. The results show significantly higher levels of civil society in rural areas, steadily declining as the society becomes more urban.

TABLE 4: Participation in Civil Society by Location in Rural or Urban Settings N=1546

<i>Involvement in Civil Society</i>	<i>Location of Respondents</i>				
	<u>Rural</u>	<u>Muang</u>	<u>Suburban</u>	<u>Bangkok</u>	<u>Total</u>
0	472 48.4%	103 75.7%	220 82.7%	158 94.0%	953 61.6%
1	289 29.6%	18 13.2%	29 10.9%	7 4.2%	343 22.2%
2	148 15.2%	6 4.4%	11 4.1%	3 1.8%	168 10.9%
3	41 4.2%	7 5.1%			48 3.1%
4	13 1.3%	1 .7%	3 1.1%		17 1.1%
5	13 1.3%	1 .7%	3 1.1%		17 1.1%
Total	976	136	266	168	1546

	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
Chi-square = 218.8	Sig.=.000	Eta= .293	Gamma= -.627	Tau-c= -.238	

The Role of Civil Society in Political Participation and Trust

The thesis of Putnam=s work is that social capital, in the form of civil society, provides some of the necessary underpinnings of democracy. He argues that voluntary associations are Aschools of democracy@ and that participation in such associations provides the basis for involvement in political life (2000: 339). The logic of his argument leads to a hypothesis that people who are associated with voluntary organizations are more likely to have the skills and interest to participate in politics, that civil society leads to participation in political society.

The data of this study permit testing of this hypothesis. We construct a measure of political participation by summing responses to seven questions: Did the respondent vote in recent Senate and Parliamentary elections (2 questions), and whether they engaged in three other specific activities.⁴ The other two questions indicate whether respondents are interested in politics and how often they follow news about politics.

When this measure of political participation is regressed on scores of membership in both formal and informal groups, the results show a significant level of association (Table 5). The broad affirmation of membership in groups in general has a stronger correlation with the political participation index than the measure constructed from summing the individual associations. In both cases, however, it is membership in formal organizations that appears to produce higher levels of political participation. Informal associations (that could include bowling activities) have negligible impacts on political activity.

TABLE 5: Effects of Civil Society Participation on Individual Political Participation

	<u>Regression Coefficient</u>	<u>t-test</u>	<u>Sig. of t</u>	<u>R</u>	<u>N</u>
General Group Association	.431	8.961	.000	.23	1467
Total Formal and Informal Group Associations	.208	6.857	.000	.18	1467
Formal Group Associations	.276	7.279	.000	.19	1467
Informal Associations	.192	2.532	.011	.07	1467

Previous studies of the Thai electorate (Albritton and Bureekul, 2002) indicate that the strongest explanation of political participation is respondent=s sense of political efficacy. Table 6 represents an effort to improve the explanation of political participation by adding a summed indicator of political efficacy to the equation. In addition, the equation includes the measure of rural-urban location noted previously.⁵

The results show considerable improvement in the explanation of political involvement when these variables are added to the equation. Political efficacy, as expected, is the stronger of the three variables, but not by much. Membership in associations is also a highly significant predictor of political participation and the rural-urban indicator is not far behind. The high levels of statistical significance indicate that these effects are largely independent of each other. The strength of political efficacy confirms findings of previous studies showing that it represents a consistent and highly significant behavioral explanation of political participation. The analysis also indicates strong, positive impacts of participation in civil society on political participation. Finally, civil society participation is related to the urban-rural locations of respondents in Thailand. This latter finding is consistent with earlier evidence that the urban-rural cleavages, while related to SES, are stronger in their ability to explain Thai political behavior (Albritton and Bureekul, 2002). The sum of the studies suggests that, in Thailand, there are effects of urbanization that

influence political behavior independently of socioeconomic status. The data in this study also offer suggestions as to what those independent effects might be and their origins. This latter topic will be treated below in the analysis.

TABLE 6: Political Participation as a Function of Participation in Civil Society, Rural-Urban Location, and Political Efficacy N=1467

	Regression Coefficient	Beta	t-test	Sig. of t
Civil Society Participation	.307	.162	6.14	.000
Political Efficacy	.096	.169	6.74	.000
Urban-Rural Location	-.167 ⁶	-.143	-5.41	.000
R = .315				

This study also examines the impact of participation in civil society associations on attitudes toward institutions of government and society. If civil society is seen as a source of confrontational politics or Aradical democracy,@ participation in these associations should produce negative feelings toward government institutions, especially the extent to which respondents trust these institutions. Table 7 presents these associations in an ANOVA analysis that indicates associations between participation in civil society and levels of trust in major institutions of government and society.

TABLE 7: Associations Between Civil Society Association and Trust in Political and Social Institutions

	<u>r</u>	<u>F-test</u>	<u>Sig. of F</u>
The Courts	.04	1.938	.164
The National Government	.05	3.162	.076
Political Parties	.11	17.716	.000
Parliament	.01	.097	.756
Civil Service	.05	3.623	.057
The Military	.07	7.739	.005
The Police	.01	.194	.660
Local Government	.13	24.470	.000
The Election Commission	.07	5.793	.016
NGOs	.07	4.625	.032
Local MPs	.13	21.795	.000
The Constitutional Court	.06	3.855	.050

The Counter-Corruption Com.	.01	.174	.677
Newspapers	-.06	5.107	.024
Television	.02	.485	.486
Trust people in government	.07	7.825	.005
Overall level of trust	.10	8.289	.004

Table 7 provides significant support for a conclusion that participation in civil society in Thailand contributes to the inculcation of trust in political and social institutions. Not only is the indicator of participation in civil society organizations associated with the overall level of trust and trust in officials in social and political institutions, such participation is associated with positive levels of trust, especially in political parties, the military, local government, and local MPs. To a somewhat lesser degree, participation in civil society is associated with trust in the national government, the election commission, NGOs, the Civil Service, and the Constitutional Commission. One irony is that participation in civil society is negatively associated with trust in newspapers. Far from being a stimulus of confrontational politics, civil society in Thailand appears to be reinforcing of allegiances to the most important political and social institutions of the nation.

Sources of Participation in Civil Society

What are the origins of civil society in an emerging democracy - especially one not associated with confrontational politics of post-revolutionary movements? The answers in the Thai case are complex, but the data offer some clues as to factors encouraging civil society participation. As it turns out, many of the sources are so highly related to other sources that a straight-forward single-equation model is beyond reach. We offer a correlation matrix and its interpretation as one way of elucidating the dynamics of civil society formation (Table 8).

TABLE 8: Correlations of Indicators Contributing to Participation in Civil Society

	Civil Society	Age	SES	Tradi- tionalism	Support for Democracy	Gov. Trust	Trust Others	Rural- Urban
Civil Society		.093**	-.181**	-.024	.029	.099**	.082**	-.318**
Age	.093**		-.307**	.170**	.034	.024	.113**	-.083**
SES	-.181**	-.307**		-.322**	-.148**	-.317**	-.101**	.525**
Traditional ism	-.024	.170**	-.322**		.146**	.278**	.109**	-.137**
Support for Democracy	.029	.034	-.148**	.146**		.275**	.075**	-.142**
Trust in Gov.	.099**	.024	-.317**	.278**	.275**		.121**	-.248**
Trust Others	.082**	.113**	-.101**	.109**	.075**	.121**		-.135**
Rural-Urban	-.318**	-.083**	.525**	-.137**	-.147**	-.248**	-.135**	

* P<.05; **P<.01

Participation in civil society is associated, in a bivariate relationship, with age and SES. Older people are more likely to be involved in civil society movements than younger people and people of lower SES are more likely to be involved in civil society than upper status people. Both findings are somewhat counter to a conventional discourse that envisions civil society groups as largely confrontational in nature. The finding that civil society associations are associated more with older society, however, accords with Putnam=s basic argument that the virtues of civil society associations are declining increasingly among the young. The finding that upper-status people are lower in civil society associations is most likely a result of their urban locations (see Table 4). In fact, SES and rural-urban location are so highly correlated ($r=.525$) that the two variables do not survive in the same equation predicting participation in civil society. (Rural-urban is the stronger of the two.) The configuration of civil society in the Thai case, then, is composed

of older, lower status people, primarily from rural areas.

SES is a factor in two respects. First, it is highly associated with age, in a negative direction; the older a respondent, the lower their SES. Second, the higher the SES, the lower the traditionalism or, to put it another way, the higher the SES, the more modernistic are the values and orientations of respondents. In addition, higher SES respondents are less likely to trust others (Trust Others) and less likely to trust public institutions (Trust Government).

Another factor that complicates the picture is traditionalism versus modernism in cultural orientations. Although there are no direct effects of traditionalism on civil society participation, it is a significant factor in relation to the two *Atrust@* variables. The relationship is that the more modernistic (untraditional) orientations reduce trust in political institutions. Trust, in both other people and in institutions, is significantly related to participation in civil society associations. Because the trust variables are so strongly related to SES and urbanism, however, it is difficult to sort out the true associations at this stage of analysis.

The picture of the sources of civil society participation becomes somewhat clearer in a multiple-variable equation (Table 9). The equation shows that participation in civil society is largely a function of people who are older, who hold more traditional values, and who live in rural areas. This is not the picture of civil society led by radical social activists current in popular images of the struggle for democracy. The portrait that emerges is one of a highly domesticated civil society with lower levels of involvement by the young, the modernistic, or the urban dwellers.

TABLE 9: Sources of Support for Participation in Civil Society **N= 1495**

<u>Variables</u>	<u>Regression Coefficients</u>	<u>Betas</u>	<u>t-test</u>	<u>Sig. of t</u>
Urban Location	-.202	-.325	-13.25	.000
Age	.004	.079	3.23	.001
Traditionalism	.012	.078	3.14	.002

R = .336

F = 64.21

Analysis

The attempt to interpret these data on civil society confronts the very basic need for comparative perspectives. Levels of participation in civil society or, for that matter, any of the indicators, require some basis of comparison for them to be meaningful. There are some U.S. measures of civil society participation cited by Putnam (See above), but it is not clear how appropriate these are for emerging democracies. Fortunately, this study is embedded in a larger study of *Democratization and Value Change in East Asia* that provides the same data across East Asian nations for comparison.

Despite this caveat, the level of civil society participation appears low. The degree of *allegiant* behavior and orientation associated with civil society participants is not representative of *confrontational* civil society or *radical democracy* (Table 7), and suggests that civil society in Thailand may have been *captured* by elite-led, if not state-led, leadership. Furthermore, Thai civil society appears to have been domesticated as an integral part of the *good governance* movement, a movement led by progressive elites who are committed to reform of the state, if not to mass democracy. Far from being a vanguard, civil society is firmly within the mainstream of conventional political discourse. Among other characteristics, it is very *civil*.

The finding that participation in civil society is related to levels of political participation is significant. What began as a *two-tail* hypothesis is resolved in a positive direction. This supports Putnam's basic contention that civil society has the virtue of preparing citizens for their roles in democratic governance. Somewhat surprising, however, is the finding that civil society

participation is associated with rural, elderly citizens, a picture different from the images of confrontational politics. The data indicate that citizens with more traditionalistic attitudes (as opposed to modernistic attitudes) are more likely to be affiliated with civil society associations.

Other relationships are less clear. Civil society participation is associated with trust of others and trust in political institutions. Whether these orientations arise as a result of civil society participation or facilitate participation in civil society requires a more complex approach to the data. Another conundrum is that while civil society participation strongly supports political participation, it does not necessarily support democracy. This, too, requires a more intense examination of the relationships.

One finding in this and other studies is consistent and clear: there are significant differences between respondents in Bangkok and those in rural areas, in fact, the more urban the society, the lower the involvement in civil society. We suggest that this is probably true in European and American nations, as well. Rural societies require and further interdependency, while urban areas foster isolation and anonymity. In fact, the latter is often a welcome relief to people emigrating from rural societies where virtually every public act is scrutinized and sometimes criticized. Urban areas provide a kind of freedom precisely from the social forces that encourage civil society associations. Thais live in very different political and social environments in rural and urban areas. Not only are they significantly different in their participation in civil society, they differ in political goals and interests (Laothamatas, 1996). This factor of Thai society, confirmed again with these data, offers theoretical promise for further exploration of civil society development not only in Thailand, but, for the time being, in the entire East Asian context.

Finally, the data suggest that while civil society development may well accompany democratic consolidation, it is neither a necessary nor sufficient condition. The fact that participation in civil society is not associated with positive evaluations of democracy means that

its dynamics are operating in some other dimension. Neither is it negatively associated with democratic support, a finding that would be consistent with the notion that civil society makes citizens more critical of the way democracy operates in their political context. The fact is that there are many different kinds of civil society, each with its advocates. In Thailand, at least, the data do not support the view that civil society is an essential component of democratic consolidation, if we rely on Putnam's concept of social interactions, whether formal or informal, as our definition.

Endnotes

1. Putnam defines civil society at the end of his acclaimed work, **Bowling Alone**, as a form of social capital (p. 400), and his concept of civic recruitment seems to reflect Linz and Stepan's definition of civil society: A manifold social movements (for example, women's groups, neighborhood associations, religious groupings, and intellectual organizations), as well as associations from all social strata (such as trade unions, entrepreneurial groups, and professional associations) (2000:96).

2. The Village Scout movement in Thailand certainly had earmarks of civil society and was used as an instrument of authoritarian repression by encouraging informers who reported on behaviors of fellow citizens during the Thanom-Prapat era.

3. Eligible voters include all Thai citizens 18 years of age and older.

4. These include attending a campaign meeting, trying to persuade others to vote for a certain candidate, helping or showing support for a political party.

5. SES is also a plausible explanation. It is so collinear with the rural-urban variable that it does not survive analysis in the same equation. Furthermore, when equations with SES and rural-urban are examined separately, the rural-urban variable provides a substantially higher level of explanation.

6. The negative sign occurs because the scale of the independent variable is from low-rural to high-Bangkok.

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APPENDIX
Definitions of Variables Used in the Analysis

1. *Civil Society Participation*: Sum of responses to two questions on belonging to or participating in formal or informal associations.
2. *Political Efficacy*: Sum of responses to four indicators of efficacy:
 1. ability to participate in politics
 2. public affairs too complicated for people like me
 3. nation run by powerful few
 4. people like me have no influence on what government does
3. *Urban-Rural Location*: (See Table 4.)
4. *Age*: Actual age of respondent.
5. *SES*: Factor scores of income, education, and occupational status. All loadings are roughly .8 and load on one natural factor.
6. *Trust in Government*: Sum of scores, trust-no-trust, for all institutions in Table 7.
7. *Support for Democracy*: Sum of five Z-scores from responses on:
 1. desirability of democracy
 2. suitability of democracy
 3. satisfaction with democracy
 4. preference for democracy
 5. ability of democracy to solve problems
8. *Traditionalism*: Sum of responses to 9 questions:
 1. obedience to parents even when they are unreasonable
 2. hiring preferences for friends and relatives
 3. give way in conflict with a neighbor
 4. future determined by fate
 5. give way in opinions if co-workers disagree
 6. family needs take precedence over those of individual
 7. male loses face to work under female supervisor
 8. elders should be consulted to resolve disputes
 9. husbands should persuade daughters-in-law to obey mother
9. *Political Participation*: sum of responses as to whether respondent voted in Senate and House elections plus other activities (See endnote 4) and whether they follow political news.

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