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Abstract

Where new democracies threaten the interests of capital owning and military elites, O'Donnell and Schmitter (1986) argued that they may readily be reversed. This paper, in carrying out a paired comparison of authoritarian reversals in contemporary Malaysia and Thailand, extends this thesis in several ways. It extends the logic of threats to elite-level interests and reversals to electoral authoritarian regimes, the posture in which much of the third wave has reached equilibrium. It examines more deeply the societal grounding and institutional bases that support elite-level statuses. It locates the threats to elite-level interests along dimensions identified in a new literature on democratic quality. It characterizes elite-level relations as cohesive or fractious, enabling us to chart the different modes of reversal that take place, as well as the durability of the authoritarianism that follows.

Keywords

authoritarian backlash, democratic quality, democratization, electoral authoritarianism, Malaysia, Thailand

Introduction

A literature is fast accumulating that analyzes how new democracies may contract, yet artfully retain elections and legislatures, therein producing hybridized forms of electoral authoritarianism. This literature contends that elections are manipulated, but remain competitive enough that they perform legitimating, co-opting, or informative functions (Boix and Svolik, 2007; Cox, 2009; Lust, 2009). Under these conditions, then, elections can help protect the government's incumbency, the broader interests of elites, and the authoritarian regime's durability.

An even more recent literature, while also addressing electoral authoritarianism, charts a quite different course. It demonstrates how manipulated elections, in their glaring inequity, fuel societal resentments. But by remaining at least partly competitive, they also offer increasingly aroused citizens and newly cooperative opposition parties meaningful scope for participation. Thus, if patronage

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resources run short, a weakened government may be stunned with defeat (Greene, 2007; Magaloni, 2006), with the regime giving way to 'democratization-by-election' (Lindberg, 2009).

Given these contrasting claims, debate now rages over whether the impact of electoral authoritarianism is regime-sustaining or regime-subverting (Schedler, 2002; Svolik, 2008). This paper, however, considers a third, less-explored possibility, specifically, that electoral authoritarianism neither persists nor democratizes, but instead descends into harder forms of authoritarian rule. In this trajectory, elites lose control over electoral processes, but not state power, thus prompting them to change their regime, but not to democratize. Rather, just as democracy, by threatening the interests of elites, may be rolled back, so might the electoral authoritarianism that results, by failing also to protect elites adequately, fall victim to similar pressures.

To illuminate this outcome and the different trajectories by which it can be reached, this paper conducts a paired comparison of Malaysia and Thailand. Even within Southeast Asia, a region long benighted by hybrid politics, these countries have stood out as exemplars of electoral authoritarianism. Yet their regimes, rather than persisting or reopening, have recently contracted further, though along varying routes and with different results.

The analysis that follows begins by defining electoral authoritarianism and the notion of backlash. It then turns to the different social structures, institutional formations, and patterns of elite-level relations which have underpinned electoral authoritarian regimes in Malaysia and Thailand, therein predisposing them also to the varying modes of political contraction by which democratic elements are diminished. Next, in moving to the central narrative, we address the ways in which the interests of elites grow so threatened that backlash takes place. At the same time, to collate these disparate threats and trace their dynamics, analysis is ordered in terms of indicators that have been borrowed from democratic quality models. A final section maps patterns of backlash, revealing a steady hardening of authoritarian rule in Malaysia and an unregulated oscillation of politics in Thailand.

Defining concepts

During the third wave, many elites, in seeking efficiently to protect their interests, found ways of letting democratization go forward, yet also to limit civil liberties and manipulate elections. In consequence, 'betwixt-and-between' regimes marked the spot where much of the third wave came to rest (Howard and Roessler, 2006). Scholars thus advanced new concepts by which to capture this posture, including hybrid politics (Diamond, 2002; Karl, 1995), 'halfway houses' (Huntington, 1991: 137), 'feckless pluralism' (Carothers, 2002: 9), 'illiberal democracy' (Zakaria, 2003), and, in probably the best articulated genre, 'competitive' or 'electoral authoritarianism' (Levitsky and Way, 2002; Schedler, 2006).

In defining electoral authoritarianism, it is fruitful to revisit Robert Dahl's (1972) twin axes of civil liberties and competitive elections. Politics are at least minimally democratic when both of these dimensions are present; they slip into some form of authoritarianism when either or both of these axes are seriously truncated. In the electoral authoritarian variant so prevalent today, freedoms of communication and assembly are constrained, hence dampening civil society and political opposition. But electoral contestation, even when manipulated (Schedler, 2002), remains regular and competitive enough that opposition parties can win seats in legislative arenas, sometimes in significant numbers.

It is in this context that debate has flared over whether elections help to perpetuate authoritarian rule or stimulate democratic change. But however robust, this exchange quite overlooks cases like

Malaysia and Thailand in which electoral authoritarianism has neither persisted nor democratized, but instead has contracted. Through a trajectory elaborated later, Malaysia, while reasonably democratic during its first decade of independence in the 1960s, descended into electoral authoritarianism during the early 1970s, with the government limiting civil liberties, while manipulating, but not extinguishing, multiparty elections. During the 1980s and 1990s, the prime minister, Mahathir Mohamad, in personalizing power and increasing the dominance of his party, the United Malays National Organization (UMNO), tightened authoritarian rule further, jailing civil society activists and opposition leaders without trial, while intensifying electoral manipulations (Hwang, 2003; Slater, 2003). Meanwhile, in Thailand, the military and bureaucracy held sway over politics during most of the 1950s and 1970s, but gradually relinquished state power during the 1980s, permitting freer civil liberties and elections. Although mounting a coup in 1991, the military was afterward pressed to retreat, enabling an energetic civil society and multiparty system to take root. During this period, then, Malaysia became more authoritarian and Thailand more democratic.

But more recently, politics in these countries converged. In Malaysia, Abdullah Badawi succeeded Mahathir as prime minister in 2003. And during his tenure, civil liberties grew somewhat freer, elections more competitive, and parliament more vibrant (Welsh and Chin, forthcoming). Thus, on a scale ranging from 7 for 'least free' to 1 for 'most free', Malaysia's Freedom House Survey score for civil liberties improved in 2004 from 5 to 4; its score for political rights also improved from 5 to 4 in the following year (see Appendix, Table A.1). In Thailand, Thaksin Shinawatra, a corporate tycoon, was elected prime minister in 2001, with his party Thai Rak Thai (Thai Loves Thai) forming a new government. Under Thaksin's leadership, media communications and parliamentary functioning were gradually curbed, while human rights were grossly violated. Thus, while Thailand's overall Freedom House Survey score for civil liberties remained at 3 throughout Thaksin's tenure, its finer aggregate ratings reveal steady slippage from 42 to 38 points during 2003–06 (this scale runs counter to the survey scores, ranging from 0 for 'least free' to 40 for 'most free' for civil liberties and from 0 to 60 for political rights; see Appendix, Table A.2). Political rights fell even more precipitously, with Thailand's raw score dropping from 2 to 3, abruptly shifting its status from 'free' to 'partly free', the same as Malaysia's.

Even so, as electoral authoritarianism requires, multiparty elections were held in both countries. In Malaysia, Abdullah's UMNO-led government won elections in 2004 and 2008, though by such a slim majority in 2008 that its dominance was shaken. In Thailand, Thaksin's Thai Rak Thai won its first election in 2001, then a second in 2005, the latter by so enlarged a majority that the party established clear paramountcy. However, though these electoral outcomes varied inversely, weakening the government in Malaysia while vastly strengthening its counterpart in Thailand, they both threatened the interests of elites, setting the stage for political contraction.

As a lead-in to discussion, we employ the notion of authoritarian 'backlash', developed by Guillermo O'Donnell and Philippe Schmitter (1986: 69) in their foundational volume, *Transitions from Authoritarian Rule: Tentative Conclusions about Uncertain Democracies*. Addressing the third wave's precariousness, they gave early warning that where democratic change advanced so rapidly that the interests of elites were threatened, it grew vulnerable to backlash. They then sketched the visages of elites who might menace democracy, reminding us that 'the property rights of the bourgeoisie are inviolable.' They warned too that 'if the armed forces are threatened, they may simply sweep their opponents off the board.'

But during the third wave, outright breakdowns of democracy were rare. Instead, as we have seen, many countries settled into electoral authoritarianism, either halting their democratizing progress or backsliding from such gains as had been made. However, although many electoral

authoritarian regimes then either persisted or re-democratized, triggering the debate outlined above, some have fallen still more deeply into authoritarian rule. Thus, while this two-step descent was more complex than the swift kick anticipated by O'Donnell and Schmitter, backlash was in these cases completed, finally diminishing even what civil liberties and electoral competitiveness had survived. In these circumstances, Larry Diamond (2008) has warned of democratic 'recession', with 'key states' like Russia, Nigeria, Venezuela, and Bangladesh appearing on his watch list. However, for countries like Malaysia and Thailand, severe contraction has already taken place.

This paper tries to sharpen O'Donnell and Schmitter's insight about elite-level interests and authoritarian backlashes in several ways. First, it extends their bleak maxim from new democracies to electoral authoritarianism. This type of regime, having proliferated during the third wave, represents the anteroom through which backlash can pass on its staggered trajectory to harder authoritarian rule. Second, this paper provides social and institutional grounding for the capital owners and generals who, in O'Donnell and Schmitter's account, are left disembodied. It also expands the population of elites to include leading politicians, top bureaucrats, and, in the case of Thailand, the king and royalist officials.

Further, in order to conceptualize the threats to elite-level interests that arise from democratizing pressures, finally incurring authoritarian backlash, we borrow from recent literature on democratic quality (see Diamond and Morlino, 2005; Morlino, 2004; O'Donnell et al., 2004; Roberts, 2005). The bourgeois property rights and military perquisites that O'Donnell and Schmitter cite may indeed be 'inviolable'. But by locating disparate threats to elites on dimensions of democratic quality, we better classify them, as a first step to tracking their complex interactions. Though admittedly a thin distillation of this literature, three key indicators of democratic quality are deployed: responsiveness, accountability, and most importantly, rule of law. As we will see, when some elites try to meet the demands made by their social constituencies for more responsive public policy, electoral competitiveness, or probity in office, the interests of other elites may be threatened. And when the outcomes of elections sharpen threats, elites may either renew their cohesiveness and contain social forces, as happened in Malaysia, or so worsen fractiousness that elites and their mobilized constituencies confront one another, as in Thailand.

A key additional contention of this paper is that despite their analytical utility the causal connectedness of these dimensions must not be exaggerated. Because responsiveness, accountability, and rule of law have little impact of their own, emerging as the outcomes of dynamics between the social forces, institutions, and elites that underlie them, they gather in a variety of constellations. Accordingly, our analysis challenges writers like Leonardo Morlino (2004), who argue that these dimensions cumulate steadily in ever-greater democratic quality. Rather, as they develop, they may as readily stand in contradiction to one another, leaving their causal impact and the quality of democracy quite ambiguous. In Malaysia, the government's failure to strengthen rule of law led to its being held more electorally accountable. In Thailand, the government's strengthening policy responsiveness enabled it to erode rule of law. However, while the explanatory power of democratic quality models is thus more modest than their advocates might hope, their indices enable us better to collate and compare the democratic demands made by social forces, the prismatic effects of institutions, the gathering threats to elite-level interests, and the strategies by which elites react to social forces and to other elites.

Finally, in investigating societal grounding, institutional bases, and elite-level relations in two country cases, this paper pushes beyond O'Donnell and Schmitter's (1986) thesis to account for differences in the backlashes that take place, as well as the varying character and durability of the harder authoritarian rule that follows. Briefly, the cohesiveness between elites in Malaysia has

enabled them to ward off threats to their interests by hardening their regime in good order. In Thailand, by contrast, the fractiousness between elites has left the regime to constrict, then uncoil in unmoderated oscillation.

Social structures, institutional bases, and elite-level relations

This section examines the social and institutional bases and inter-elite relations that gave rise to electoral authoritarianism, as well as conditioning the backlash that followed. It begins by distinguishing between the sharp ethnic divisions that prevail in Malaysia and the fuzzier class stratification found in Thailand. It then shows how institutions of state power have been concentrated in Malaysia, yielding a single dominant party whose regulated patronage flows have perpetuated elite-level cohesiveness. It also demonstrates the dispersion of institutions in Thailand, with a strong party forming belatedly and hence, in contention with pre-existing institutions, thereby inflaming the general fractiousness between elites and their struggles over largesse.

Ethnic divisions in Malaysia and class stratification in Thailand

In Malaysia and Thailand, patterns of social affiliation and conflict have been ordered in starkly different ways, thrusting up different sets of parameters within which institutions have taken form. In Malaysia, social structure is ethnically divided, with an 'indigenous' Malay majority confronting a large non-Malay minority, the latter a residual and stigmatized category of 'immigrant' Chinese, Indians, and 'others'. Thus, a nearly bipolar faceoff has set in, portrayed by Donald Horowitz (1993) as the most volatile pattern of inter-ethnic dynamics. Citizens have then aggregated their preferences along readily observable communal lines, with the Malays urgently seeking ascendancy by demanding cross-ethnic redistribution, and the Chinese seeking equity through market-based allocations.

In Thailand, where ethnic Chinese have been more easily absorbed into the country's social fabric (Sidel, 2008), class stratification and spatial differences have only gradually come to the fore. Until recently, the country's economy was heavily agrarian, sustaining a vast landscape of rural smallholders. But after several decades of rapid industrialization, small businesses and urban middle classes appeared, principally in the metropole of Bangkok. Class interests and spatial positioning have thus pitted a large majority of rural poor against more prosperous city dwellers, prompting Anek Laothamatas (1996) to propose a narrative of 'two Thailands'. Accordingly, while the rural poor were once dismissed for their clientelist passivity and political inertia, their material deprivation suggests strongly that their preferences, even if long illegible, might cumulate over time in demands for trans-class redistribution. The business and middle classes, meanwhile, have pressed respectively for particularistic rent-seeking opportunities and general growth strategies. In the sections below, we trace the ways in which urgent ethnic divisions and delayed class stratification have disposed Malaysia and Thailand to different institutional medleys and patterns of elite-level relations.

Malaysia: Institutional concentration and cohesive elites

In Malaysia, with social structure divided along ethnic lines, particular kinds of institutional outcomes grew more likely. Thus, while the commonly used Lipset-Rokkan (Lipset and Rokkan, 1967) indices for tracking societal cleavages and party formation neglect ethnicity and so do not

help us to see it, a single party, UMNO, gained dominance over the institutional terrain through a phased process. After the Second World War, as the British readied their protectorate of Malaya (later Malaysia) for independence by introducing parliamentary procedures and proposing equal citizenship rights across ethnic communities, UMNO appealed to the grievances of the indigenous Malays over their corresponding loss of birthright to local Chinese. But though it quickly emerged as the country's leading political vehicle, UMNO ruled moderately during the 1960s in alliance with non-Malay parties, most notably, the Malaysian Chinese Association (MCA). However, many Malays grew so disillusioned over what they perceived as UMNO's inactivity that they voted against the government in an election held at the end of the decade, leaving UMNO so weakened that fearsome ethnic rioting erupted, locally known as the May 13th incident (see von Vorys, 1975). Thus, in a second step toward instituting single-party dominance, UMNO responded by fusing with the state apparatus, enabling high-level position holders in the party hierarchy to gain equivalent places in the ministries on nearly an *ex oficio* basis. In addition, UMNO absorbed most opposition parties into its ruling coalition, rechristened the Barisan Nasional (National Front), then greatly elevated its paramountcy within this formation.

UMNO then re-energized its constituencies through cross-ethnic redistribution of public resources. Specifically, under an affirmative action program labeled the New Economic Policy (NEP) (see Gomez and Jomo, 1999), state-owned enterprises were set up and ethnic hiring and equity ownership quotas were imposed, vastly increasing the positions, contracts, and credit with which UMNO could reward the Malays. At the same time, to insulate this redistribution from the deepening resentments of non-Malays, civil liberties were repressed through 'draconian' constitutional amendments, while electoral competitiveness was dampened through sundry manipulations (Crouch, 1996). In this way, Malaysia's democratic politics contracted sharply into electoral authoritarianism.

But more than this, as UMNO established single-party dominance atop a favored Malay constituency, it also secured the loyalties of elites. Debates are longstanding over the origins and causal impact of different configurations of elite-level relations. But in presenting new 'institutional' and 'resource' theories, Jason Brownlee (2007) and Kenneth Greene (2007) show how a single dominant party can perpetuate cohesiveness. By fusing with the state apparatus, parties like the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) in pre-democratic Mexico gain entry to a treasure house of public assets with which to sate their social constituencies, but also to ply top politicians with largesse. At the same time, this fusion enables politicians to gain sway over elites based in other state institutions and connected business conglomerates.

Thailand: Institutional dispersion and fractious elites

Class stratification was slower in Thailand than were ethnic divisions in Malaysia to fuel societal demands for greater policy responsiveness. As much social theory informs us, the material inequalities between classes are less emotive and politically galvanizing than are perceptions of inequity rooted in identity (see Esman, 1994; Slater, 2009). Accordingly, a populist party emerged less readily in Thailand than did the communalist UMNO in Malaysia. Rather, in Thailand, through modernizing programs launched by centralizing monarchs beginning in the mid-19th century, a powerful state bureaucracy and military were first put in place (Baker and Pasuk, 2005). And after a 'revolution' was mounted against royal absolutism in 1932, historical legacies ensured that 'traditional elites' in the bureaucracy and military would cast a long shadow over civilian politicians. For more than half-a-century, then, most party vehicles remained ideologically vacuous and transient, competing in a narrow electoral arena for residual state power and patronage (Ockey, 1994).

However, just as the communal rioting of the May 13th incident roused UMNO to energize its ethnic Malay constituency through cross-ethnic redistribution, so too would the dislocation of the East Asian economic crisis some thirty years later enable a new party in Thailand, Thai Rak Thai, to activate a constituency of rural poor through trans-class re-allotments. Briefly, as the shock grew worse, elites who had resisted ratification of a proposed reformist charter, labeled the 'people's constitution', finally relented. And as procedural obstacles to stronger party organization and executive leadership were lifted, the class tensions that Lipset and Rokkan (1967) found historically so central to party formation in Western experience at last bubbled up freely in Thai society.

Hence, in preparing for the 2001 election, Thai Rak Thai, led by Thaksin Shinawatra, seemingly the last of the country's tycoons still standing, aligned his party's appeals with the preferences of rural poor majorities. In doing this, Thaksin drew upon his corporate resources and professional mastery of market survey techniques. And while seeking state patronage by which to bolster the fortunes of his family conglomerate, Shin Corp, and those of the wounded tycoons who flocked round him, he also issued clear, suitably framed campaign promises. Thai Rak Thai thus won the election, enabling Thaksin to claim the prime ministership. And though further enriching himself while in office, he also showed new responsiveness to the rural poor through populist programs of cheap health care, debt moratoriums, and village-level development funding (see Pasuk and Baker, 2004). Hence, at campaign rallies, political meetings, and everyday village encounters, one could regularly hear citizens exclaim, 'this is the first government ever to do something for us.'[1]

But if Thai Rak Thai forged a class-based constituency of rural poor, its breadth so diversified the party's membership that factional tensions set in. Though Thaksin's leadership and wealth exerted magnetic force, his vehicle had been cobbled together with technocrats, old-time politicos, provincial strongmen, and fresh, but untested reformists (Montesano, 2002). And even if Thai Rak Thai gained paramountcy over the party system, the lateness with which it had appeared on the scene precluded its dominating other state institutions. Fractiousness thus persisted between Thai Rak Thai politicians, as well as between them and traditional elites in the bureaucracy, the military, royalist offices that had been revived during the 1960s, and business groups steeped in old money (Nelson, forthcoming).

Moreover, as tensions deepened, Thaksin reacted by truncating press freedoms, ignoring parliamentary functioning, subverting the new oversight agencies created by the people's constitution, and defying the judiciary. Thus, he so squeezed civil liberties to avoid accountability that as noted above, Thailand's new democracy was by 2006 reduced to electoral authoritarianism. But however heavy-handed, Thaksin failed to overcome institutional dispersion. As politicians in Thai Rak Thai mobilized their constituencies of rural poor, traditional elites in the military and bureaucracy, evidently in alliance with the palace, took up the grievances of the new urban middle class. Quite in contrast to Malaysia, then, class stratification, the dispersion of state institutions, and the lateness of a strong political party's debut ensured that elite-level relations in Thailand remained fractious.

Democratic quality and threats to elite-level interests

In assessing the threats to elite-level interests that can provoke authoritarian backlash, we draw upon models of democratic quality. This is justified on two counts. At a broad level, because electoral authoritarianism limits civil liberties, but features multiparty elections, its hybridity contains some meaningful democratic procedures (hence earning it Freedom House evaluations as 'partly free'). More narrowly, the particular threats made to elite-level interests coincide with societal pressures for still greater democratic change, registering as demands for responsiveness, accountability, and rule of law. We are able to use these dimensions, then, to map the bumpy political

pathways that Malaysia and Thailand have recently taken, though they end not in democratic change, but in authoritarian backlash.

Of course, were models of democratic quality robust, we could do more than map. Their dimensions would display autonomous causal weight, steady accumulation, and mutual reinforcement. On this count, Leonardo Morlino (2004: 15, 20, 23) argues that rule of law serves as 'a prerequisite for all other dimensions,' while responsiveness 'is an important precondition' for accountability, hence 'compos[ing] a sort of triangle.' However, the political records of Malaysia and Thailand show that although these dimensions may connect, they may as easily stand in contradiction. In Malaysia, non-Malay grievances over the government's uneven policy responsiveness and ambivalence toward rule of law led to its being held more accountable through elections. In Thailand, the government's greater responsiveness earned such approval among the rural poor that it grew freer to ignore rule of law, and later to avoid electoral accountability. Political trajectories thus advance through indices of democratic quality by fits and starts, sometimes mutually reinforcing, at other times negating. Our analysis of Malaysia and Thailand offers a necessary corrective, then, to the notion that in measuring dimensions of democratic quality, all good things go together.

Accordingly, we must understand responsiveness, rule of law, and accountability mainly as sites wherein the interplay between social structures, institutions, and elites is reflected and registered. But though in themselves contingent, they retain heuristic value, enabling us to collate the demands made by citizens and the sundry policies by which governments, in their quest for constituencies, duly react – setting in train the dynamics that can threaten elite-level interests and prompt backlashes. In Malaysia, Abdullah demonstrated new responsiveness by pledging to curb corrupt practices, but then so disappointed citizens that his government was subjected to new levels of electoral accountability. In this way, he delivered a double-barreled challenge to UMNO's top politicians, first threatening their patronage flows, then even their incumbency. In Thailand, Thaksin displayed responsiveness by increasing welfare, so gratifying many citizens that he grew free to practice new kinds of corruption and insulate his government from electoral accountability. Accordingly, the rise of Thai Rak Thai weakened the prerogatives of top officials in the bureaucracy, military, and royalist agencies. Hence, by using dimensions of democratic quality, we are better able to track the threats to elite-level interests across country cases and account for the patterns of authoritarian backlash that follow.

Policy responsiveness and social constituencies

Responsiveness is understood by G. Bingham Powell (2004: 91) as a government's 'form[ing] and implement[ing] policies that citizens want.' But such an ostensibly straightforward interpretation holds uncertain implications. In galvanizing a social constituency, a government responds so vigorously to some citizens that it may disadvantage others, creating such policy unevenness that democratic quality is eroded. In Malaysia, after the May 13th incident, the UMNO-led government responded to the Malays with the NEP's cross-ethnic redistribution. But as this policy took hold, affirmed in rousing shibboleths of 'Malay supremacy' and 'special rights', the large minority of non-Malays was excluded, diminishing its political and economic freedoms. And over time, the corrupt practices with which the NEP grew encrusted came even to frustrate some middle-class Malays. Thus, after gaining the prime ministership, Abdullah tried to broaden responsiveness by strengthening rule of law. But as this was not the first policy preference of most Malay citizens, and as it was resisted strongly by UMNO's top politicians, Abdullah was forced to back down, reigniting non-Malay grievances. In Malaysia, then, these instances of policy responsiveness failed to yield any new gains in democratic quality.

In Thailand, successive governments during most of the post-War period, whether led by generals or politicians, displayed little responsiveness to citizens. Instead, they remained unswerving in their pursuit of state power and patronage. However, after 2001, the new Thai Rak Thai-led government responded zealously through trans-class redistribution to a vast constituency of rural poor that had grown ripe for mobilizing. But as historical neglect was rectified now through populist programs, resentments flared among the small minority of middle-class citizens. Their grievances were inflamed also by the corrupt practices in which Thaksin and other top politicians in Thai Rak Thai appeared to engage.

Thus, like affirmative action in Malaysia, populist programs in Thailand, while clearly amounting to policy responsiveness, were so disliked by citizens who were excluded that they impacted ambiguously on democratic quality. Moreover, responsiveness, rather than encouraging rule of law, produced greater corruption – a process that was unstoppable under Abdullah and exacerbated by Thaksin. Yet Abdullah's failure would lead dialectically to gains in quality on a subsequent dimension of electoral accountability. Conversely, Thaksin's abuses were never held accountable through elections. The notion of responsiveness, then, in its simplest guise, helps little in assessing democratic quality on even its own terms, much less to predict any progress across multiple dimensions. But it does describe the start of a trajectory in which some citizens are given the policies that they want while others are excluded, finally bearing on elite-level interests in ways that can lead to authoritarian backlash.

Rule of law and excluded minorities

In demonstrating policy responsiveness to social majorities, governments perpetuate their incumbency. At the same time, by alienating key minorities, these policies may spark deep resentments over rule of law. Morlino may thus be wrong about mutually reinforcing dimensions of democratic quality. But he is right to identify rule of law as fundamental, for its weakness is key to advancing the trajectory along which threats to elite-level interests accumulate and authoritarian backlash takes place.

Rule of law and the non-Malays. In Malaysia, as cross-ethnic redistribution and patronage flows quickened, the non-Malays who were excluded found expression for their resentments in a rule-of-law idiom. And even among some Malays, grievances simmered over the differentials in largesse that so benefited UMNO politicians. Accordingly, after Abdullah came to power, he sought to fortify rule of law. Barisan MPs were ordered to disclose their assets. Administrative departments were subjected to spot checks. An independent commission was created to investigate complaints against the police. Dubious megaprojects, funded by state contracts, were suspended, loosening the links between UMNO politicians and rentiers. Even more strikingly, corruption charges were brought against a former deputy minister, some high-level bureaucrats, and a prominent Chinese tycoon (Lopez, 2004), denting a prevailing 'culture of impunity'. And in August 2004, the judiciary demonstrated autonomy by ordering the release from prison of Anwar Ibrahim, a former deputy prime minister who, after having challenged Mahathir's leadership during the Asian economic crisis, had been charged with sexual misconduct and jailed (Jayasankaran, 2004).

However, if a single dominant party can foster elite-level cohesiveness, it may do so by fusing with the state apparatus and prying open conduits to patronage. Thus, as Abdullah began to fulfill his pledges to contain corruption, he met resistance from UMNO's top politicians. Accordingly, at the party's general assembly election in 2004, Abdullah was driven to lift a ban on campaigning by

candidates, that he had earlier imposed in order to deter 'money politics'. We gain insight into the immutable priorities of these politicians through a query posed by one hopeful: 'What's the fuss about? . . . Whatever money [was] given helped us to recoup some cost. I do not think that the leadership should be too worried' (Pereira, 2004).

The bureaucratic officials and lone tycoon charged with corruption, an action that had so animated citizens, were acquitted. Barisan MPs slackened in declaring their assets.[2] The director of the Anti-Corruption Agency, itself a fount of corruption, was revealed to have acquired undisclosed residences and businesses (Lee, 2008). A video was made public that showed a prominent lawyer brokering judicial appointments over the phone with the Supreme Court's chief justice. The police, on an internal web posting, declared their contempt for Abdullah's efforts to set up the complaints commission, and threatened to switch their allegiance from UMNO to the opposition Islamic Party of Malaysia (PAS) (Kuek, 2006). And finally, if some megaprojects were suspended, Abdullah's own family members were revealed to have garnered privatizing contracts, enriching his son and son-in-law (Gatsiounis, 2007).

Thus, as Abdullah reneged on his pledges to strengthen rule of law, he eased the resistance from UMNO politicians, but then rekindled societal grievances over corrupt practices. During late 2007, large protests erupted in Kuala Lumpur, actions expressly proscribed under electoral authoritarianism. Demonstrations by the non-Malays, particularly ethnic Indians, over their exclusion grew intense. But these upsurges alternated with those involving 'low-income Malays' decrying the riches that a 'conspicuously consuming elite' extracted through the NEP (Baradan, 2007).

As these protests grew, a new umbrella organization labeled *Bersih* (Coalition for Clean and Fair Elections) appeared. While addressing a variety of grievances, *Bersih* focused intently on rule of law, especially the prospect of manipulations which the government seemed likely to undertake as the next election drew near (Lee, 2008). Thus, while Abdullah's abandoning his pledges to contain corruption might have eased tensions among UMNO politicians, this so disillusioned the non-Malays – and indeed, some Malays – that elite-level interests grew threatened from below. As we will see, these sentiments gained force in the next general election, finally bringing the UMNO-led government seriously to account.

Rule of law and the Thai middle class. Thailand's prime minister, Thaksin Shinawatra, boasted early in his tenure that he was a 'Genghis Khan type of manager' (McCargo and Ukrist, 2005: 109). And buoyed by the rural poor to which Thai Rak Thai appealed, he ignored middle-class demands that he halt executive abuses. O'Donnell (2004: 36) reminds us that in a democracy, 'the whole state apparatus and its agents are supposed to submit to rule of law.' Thaksin's behavior came steadily, then, to cumulate in what O'Donnell understands as the 'hallmark' of authoritarian rule: 'At the apex sits some person . . . able to make decisions unconstrained by law.'

After Thai Rak Thai won its first election in 2001, Thaksin denounced the new National Counter-Corruption Commission and Constitutional Court that had been set up. These agencies had dared consider a case against him involving asset concealment.[3] Thaksin was duly acquitted, emboldening him to resume his business activities, avoiding crude kickbacks and theft, perhaps, but securing concessions in telecommunications, media, and property sectors in ways that Thanee and Pasuk (2008) conceptualize as 'policy corruption.' Further, as the media scrutinized his dealings, Thaksin suppressed their criticisms. As one example, he ordered that the personal finances of journalists be investigated by the Anti-Money Laundering Office (Mutebi, 2003), therein turning the new oversight agency to his partisan advantage. And where such strategies failed to muzzle media outlets, Thaksin's Shin Corp acquired them outright, then purged the editors who had crossed him.

Meanwhile, the Senate, tasked with staffing the oversight agencies, was packed by Thaksin with loyalists, transmuting the body into an 'assembly of slaves' (Nelson, 2005). In the lower house, Thai Rak Thai became so paramount that when sessions were held, Thaksin rarely bothered to attend. Rather, he dictated key policy decisions, most notably when addressing 'dark forces.' He took a 'security approach,' for example, toward alleged drug traffickers in Bangkok and Muslim separatists in the country's South, ordering sweeps by the military and police that involved thousands of extrajudicial killings. Thaksin had thus come to ignore rule of law, grievously abusing civil liberties, parliamentary functioning, and human rights. And though retaining the support of the rural poor, he gradually alienated the urban middle class.

Further, as Thaksin ranged more widely across the institutional terrain, he antagonized traditional elites. Turning to the security forces, Thaksin hastened the promotion of his relatives and former academy classmates in the military and police commands (Mutebi, 2003). He also shook up provincial administration, installing a favored layer of 'CEO governors.' And in implementing his populist programs, Thaksin poached the constituencies of rural poor that the king, in his patriarchal wanderings and faux agricultural experiments, had for so long cultivated. In these circumstances, traditional elites feared losing the village-level obeisance that monarchism had instilled, dissipating the efficiencies with which they controlled their upcountry redoubts. In addition, as Shin Corp hoarded state concessions, many business tycoons turned against Thaksin. Deep fissures thus appeared between 'business-minded' elites allied with Thaksin and 'old money elites' whose interests had been damaged (Crispin, 2006).

As the fractiousness in elite-level relations worsened, traditional elites appealed to middle-class grievances over rule of law. A media mogul, Sondhi Limthongkul, after falling out with Thaksin, publicly denounced Shin Corp's conflicts of interest. He argued that because Thaksin had abused the power 'bestowed by the king based on the people's election mandate,' it should be returned to the king 'so that the people could decide anew' (Nelson, 2005: 4). Sondhi's call gained resonance when in early 2006 the sale was announced of Shin Corp to the Singapore government's sovereign wealth fund. Not only was this the biggest equities transaction ever conducted in Thailand, but with a waiver from the bourse, its vast capital gains were spared taxation (*The Economist.com*, 26 January 2006). Middle-class grievances surged in Bangkok, enabling Sondhi to forge a new social movement, the People's Alliance for Democracy (PAD). And as its adherents swelled with nationalist outrage and wistful monarchism, they gathered before Government House and blocked major thoroughfares, disrupting executive functioning and commerce.

Thus, while Thaksin mobilized the rural poor through his policy responsiveness, he alienated the urban middle class through his populist spending and personal corruption. Accordingly, he ceded a new class-based constituency, activated by appeals over rule of law, to the traditional elites who opposed him. Indeed, the ceaseless deal-making in which Thaksin engaged provided a lightning rod for protests by a discontented middle class, funded by angry magnates, and abetted by sullen generals and Privy Councillors. To be sure, the same support from the rural poor that enabled Thaksin to ignore rule of law would help him avoid accountability through elections. But Thai Rak Thai's successive victories also heightened the enmity of traditional elites.

In sum, in both Malaysia and Thailand, as governments displayed policy responsiveness to their respective constituencies through cross-ethnic and trans-class redistributions, social minorities were excluded. Accordingly, in Malaysia, the non-Malays grew resentful over the government's affirmative action which, in favoring the Malays, hindered their access to public services and markets. In Thailand, the urban middle class despised the government's populist programs which, financed by their tax payments, shifted benefits to the rural poor. Further, in Malaysia, as Abdullah

reneged on his pledges to contain the corruption riddling the NEP, he not only deepened the grievances of the non-Malays, but also vexed many Malays. However, if his failure to strengthen rule of law deepened the alienation of a large social minority, it slowed the erosion of elite-level cohesiveness. By contrast, in Thailand, Thaksin simply ignored the criticisms of the middle class over the corrupt practices accompanying his populism. But though this alienated only a small minority, he handed a potent new constituency to his rivals with whom relations had grown more fractious, as well as a pretext by which eventually to oust him. However, before this socio-political trajectory produced authoritarian backlash, it would pass through a final dimension of democratic quality: the accountability that may be imposed through elections.

Differentials in accountability

In Malaysia, Abdullah's abandoning his pledges to strengthen rule of law, though easing elite-level tensions, exposed the UMNO-led government to greater electoral accountability. In Thailand, notwithstanding Thaksin's having eroded rule of law, his government avoided accountability through elections. But whether accountability was imposed or not, electoral outcomes so threatened elite-level interests in both countries that, as O'Donnell and Schmitter (1986) might anticipate, authoritarian backlashes followed.

UMNO's electoral setback. In Malaysia, as Abdullah's commitments to rule of law waned, the grievances of many non-Malays were reignited. Thus, as the 2008 election approached, the prospects of the opposition parties brightened. In these circumstances, suspicions between PAS and the secular Democratic Action Party (DAP), largely made up of ethnic Chinese, were papered over by a new, more centrist vehicle, the People's Justice Party (PKR), led by Anwar Ibrahim. The UMNO-led government won the election, but by such diminished margins that the contest was popularly interpreted as an 'historic victory' for the opposition (Weiss, 2009). Thus, in holding only 140 of parliament's 222 seats, it fell short for the first time since the introduction of electoral authoritarianism of the two-thirds majority necessary for amending the constitution. Even more striking, it lost control over four state-level governments while failing to retake a fifth that had earlier fallen to PAS.

UMNO's top politicians took to uncharacteristic introspection. The former chief minister of Selangor, Mohd Khir Toyo, his administration supplanted by a PKR-led coalition, warned that the 'election results [were] a reflection of UMNO having lost touch with reality. This leaves the party with no option but to tread the path of reform' (Zahiid and Omar, 2008). A flurry of proposals appeared, including easing the requirements on licensing newspapers, restrictions on student participation in politics, and even the terms of detention under the Internal Security Act (ISA). At this juncture, then, with the opposition having forged ahead, while the government pondered reformist concessions, speculation mounted that, however slowly, the 2008 election had precipitated a transition from single-party dominance and electoral authoritarianism to two-party competitiveness and democratic politics (Baradan, 2008).

Greater accountability thus helped boost democratic quality. Malaysia's aggregate scores rose from 19 in the 2008 Freedom House report to 20 in 2009, earning an upward 'trend arrow' in the 2009 survey. But with UMNO's access to patronage proportionately eroded, not least by its loss of five state-level governments, the interests of elites were threatened anew, straining their relations with one another and their loyalties to their leader. Khir Toyo initially defied Abdullah by refusing to serve as opposition leader in Selangor's state assembly. Mahathir, still wielding much influence in UMNO, demanded that Abdullah resign, a call that reverberated throughout the party's hierarchy.

Abdullah wavered and eventually agreed to step down. Meanwhile, as fractiousness deepened between elites in UMNO, opposition parties drew closer together, with PKR, PAS, and the DAP coalescing as Pakatan Rakyat (People's Alliance).

Thai Rak Thai's electoral gains. Just as Abdullah's pledges to strengthen rule of law had once galvanized citizens, so too did Thaksin's populist programs animate followers in Thailand. Thaksin thus led Thai Rak Thai in defeating the ruling Democrat party in the 2001 election. Under Abdullah, however, reforms were resisted by UMNO's politicians, paving the way for his government's electoral setback in 2008 and rekindling fractiousness in elite-level relations. By contrast, Thaksin followed through vigorously on his programs, ensuring that Thai Rak Thai made still greater gains in the 2005 election. Yet this success only intensified the frictions between elites, with Thaksin, Thai Rak Thai politicians, and their remaining corporate allies confronted by top officials in the bureaucracy, military, palace, and old money enterprises. Tensions then radiated across the societal terrain as rival sets of elites mobilized their respective constituencies among the rural poor and the urban middle class.

Further, in Malaysia, though UMNO had been weakened, it still clung so tightly to the state apparatus, at least at the federal level, that its continuing access to public resources finally encouraged elites to strengthen their cohesion and reset their authoritarian controls. Accordingly, the greater accountability that had been imposed, so dramatically raising democratic quality, was tamped back down. In Thailand, because Thaksin had sharply increased policy responsiveness, his refusal to raise democratic quality further by strengthening rule of law escaped accountability through elections. To the contrary, Thai Rak Thai was rewarded with repeated victories. Even so, the paramountcy that Thai Rak Thai asserted over the party system fell well short of gaining control over other institutions. Rather, a standoff set in, worsening the fractiousness between elites and disorganizing their pursuit of patronage. It was not Thaksin's corruption that appalled traditional elites, but rather, his trespassing onto their turf. Accordingly, if in Malaysia the government's electoral setback would motivate politicians in UMNO to regroup, the government's electoral victories in Thailand would drive traditional elites outside Thai Rak Thai to attack – yielding contrary trajectories that the dimensions of democratic quality help us to chart, but not predict.

Authoritarian backlash

In Malaysia, top politicians in UMNO, after their electoral setback, regenerated cohesion and mounted an authoritarian backlash that hardened their regime. In Thailand, fractiousness between elites, exacerbated by Thai Rak Thai's electoral gains, ensured that rather than matching Malaysia's harder authoritarianism, politics have continued to oscillate through military interventions, redemocratization, and unsettled way stations of hybridity.

Malaysia: Cohesive elites and regime hardening

Notwithstanding the government's poor electoral performance and the blame heaped on Abdullah, UMNO's narrow, but deep social roots, fusion with the state apparatus, and singular prospects for accessing state patronage encouraged its top politicians to regenerate their cohesiveness. Indeed, the process by which the party's top post was finally transferred from Abdullah to his deputy, Najib Razak, reflected their renewed concord. Rather than ruthlessly purging Abdullah and the retinues still loyal to him, Abdullah was permitted to retain his presidency until 2009 and, in modest ways, even to prepare his legacy as a sincere, if frustrated reformer.

Thus, as Pakatan Rakyat made new inroads, the government finally struck back, revoking such liberalizing steps as Abdullah had taken. In August 2008, after a ban on Anwar's running for office expired, he contested and won a by-election, enabling him to assume his place in parliament as opposition leader. But in a repetition of tactics deployed by the UMNO-led government a decade earlier, Anwar was again charged with sexual misconduct, foreshadowing his return to prison (*The Economist*, 19 July 2008). For good measure, a DAP parliamentarian and a number of prominent social activists and bloggers were arrested without trial under the ISA.

Undeterred, Pakatan candidates won several more by-elections. But the UMNO-led government retaliated again, undermining the state-level administrations that the opposition had formed. Development funds were shifted from offices controlled by Pakatan into the hands of federally-appointed agencies. In the state of Perak, enough assemblymen from Pakatan were induced to defect that power fell to the government's Barisan coalition. In Selangor, Malaysia's most developed state, the Pakatan chief minister was threatened with corruption charges by the newly formed Malaysian Anti-Corruption Commission. Indeed, most of the Pakatan members of the Selangor government's executive council came under investigation for corrupt practices, clearly signaling the Commission's partisan mission. Further, at the federal level, Pakatan's parliamentarians faced a drumbeat of suspensions, sedition charges, and other forms of harassment. And the licenses of newspapers operated by Pakatan parties were suspended, continuing the steady hardening of Malaysia's electoral authoritarian regime.

Thailand: fractious elites and regime oscillation

Scarcely months after Thai Rak Thai won its second election in 2005, Thaksin was driven by PAD's demonstrations to call another one. The depth of elite-level fractiousness was made plain, however, by the Democrats' refusal to contest, a strategy applauded by PAD. Moreover, after Thai Rak Thai was duly returned to power, the Democrats continued to boycott by-elections that followed, seeking to 'get rid of Thaksin by extra-parliamentary, non-electoral means' (Crispin, 2006). The king then spoke out, implying that the courts should annul the recent election (*The Nation*, 26 April 2006).

Early on, Anand Panyarachun, a former caretaker prime minister with close ties to the palace, warned of the 'danger caused by people with dictatorial inclinations [who used] new means of suppressing democracy' (Nelson, forthcoming). Prem Tinsulanonda, a former army chief and prime minister during the 1980s, now president of the Privy Council, amplified complaints made by the king about Thaksin's 'double standards,' behavior for which, he asserted, Thaksin might be removed from office. Thus, with the judiciary, key Senate committees, and most media outlets now aligned against Thaksin, the Constitutional Court annulled the election, paving the way for another one later in the year. It was at this juncture that Freedom House evaluated political liberties as having eroded so deeply that it re-designated Thailand's politics as only 'partly free'.

But as it seemed certain that Thai Rak Thai would win yet again, traditional elites began to denounce Thaksin more forcefully. Prem gave several addresses in which he reminded military cadets that their loyalty should be to the king, not to 'bad people full of greed' (Mydans, 2006). As the next election loomed, the military carried out a coup in September 2006, driving a final nail into electoral authoritarianism's coffin. Accordingly, in Freedom House's 2007 report, Thailand's score for political freedoms plummeted from 3 to 7, changing its overall status to 'not free'.

During the military's 15 months in power, it appointed an ad hoc constitutional tribunal through which to ban Thai Rak Thai. With the party outlawed and Thaksin in exile, the military scheduled

elections for December 2007, therein accelerating the pattern of regime oscillation. In its 2008 report, Freedom House revised Thailand's score for political freedoms to 6, thereby restoring the status of 'partly free'. The leader of the new People's Power Party that formed, Samak Sundaravej, appealed to Thai Rak Thai's constituency of rural poor, declaring, 'I am a nominee of Prime Minister Thaksin. I will make the party strong so that democracy can be restored in the country' (Connors, 2008). Samak's party won the election. But the military permitted PAD to re-mobilize, triggering new rounds of street protest. PAD also countered the swing back toward democracy by proposing a corporatist plan for 'new politics,' wherein the military would retain powers of 'emergency' intervention, while most of parliament's lower house would be selected from functional constituencies.

As PAD members stormed public buildings, they elicited open declarations of monarchial support. The judiciary intervened again, first disqualifying Samak as prime minister, then disqualifying his successor, Thaksin's brother-in-law. The courts went further by outlawing the People's Power Party and banning its leaders from participating in politics. In addition, though the military never acted on PAD's corporatist visions, the army commander-in-chief, General Anupong Paochinda, persuaded many of the former government's parliamentarians to join with the Democrats. In this way, through an 'Anupong-style coup d'état' (*The Nation*, 17 December 2008), the Democrats avoided elections, yet forged a new ruling coalition that was beholden to traditional elites. However, Thaksin's frustrated supporters responded in early 2010 by mounting large protests in Bangkok. After a standoff of some months, the military cleared the streets, killing upwards of 100 protesters in several engagements. Accordingly, in yet another reversal, the government declared emergency rule and charged protest leaders under terrorism laws, advancing Thailand's trajectory of elite-level fractiousness and regime oscillation.

In sum, in Malaysia, the UMNO-led government's selective policy responsiveness and ambivalence over rule of law precipitated a surge in electoral accountability, so raising democratic quality that a full transition appeared to have begun. However, with UMNO's compact societal grounding and potent institutional form, elites regained their cohesiveness and pluck. Initially stunned by the 2008 election outcome, they aimlessly canvassed reforms for a time. But they resorted finally to an authoritarian backlash which, even if more measured in pace than O'Donnell and Schmitter (1986) might expect, effectively hardened the regime. In Thailand, the Thai Rak Thai-led government's broader responsiveness enabled it to avoid electoral accountability, notwithstanding its violations of the rule of law. But while gaining broad societal grounding, Thai Rak Thai fell short of dominance over other state institutions. The party's repeated electoral victories only deepened the fractiousness between elites. Thus, when authoritarian backlash took place, the regime failed to settle into Malaysia's pattern. Instead, it has oscillated, descending into military government, rebounding toward democracy, faltering again as successive elected governments were ousted through military intrigue and ad hoc court rulings, then stumbling into street violence and emergency rule.

Conclusion

This paper has presented a new analysis of electoral authoritarianism, the posture into which so much of the third wave gravitated. Pushing beyond studies on authoritarian durability and democratization-by-election, it has explored various routes by which electoral authoritarian regimes, rather than persisting or democratizing, might descend into harder authoritarian rule. In so doing, it revisited O'Donnell and Schmitter's (1986) classic insight about the backlash to which new

democracies are vulnerable. It found some evidence for their thesis, but identified electoral authoritarianism as a platform on which backlash might pause, before continuing its downward progress. Thus, just as democratic politics may be tightened into electoral authoritarianism by elites whose interests are threatened, even this seemingly durable hybrid may so inadequately protect elites that politics are further pared back.

However, in comparing the cases of the two countries, we discovered that backlash does not occur everywhere in the same way. Rather, patterns vary, the most proximate cause for which involves different sets of inter-elite relations, heuristically dichotomized as cohesive or fractious. Elite-level statuses based in institutions of state power and business cumulate in medleys that were depicted as concentrated or dispersed. And institutions are also embedded in social structures that may be intensely divided by ethnicity or gradually stratified by class.

Thus, in Malaysia, an ascendant Malay constituency within an ethnically divided society thrust up a single dominant party, UMNO. And by fusing with the state apparatus, UMNO gained access to the public resources with which to reward its social constituency through cross-ethnic redistribution and to perpetuate elite-level cohesiveness through regulated patronage flows. Accordingly, when the elites' interests were challenged, they overcame the strains that had occurred recently in order collectively to mount an authoritarian backlash. By contrast, in Thailand, an embryonic class of rural poor within a stratified society only belatedly gave rise to a strong party, Thai Rak Thai. But because of its late formation, Thai Rak Thai, in seeking the resources with which to activate its constituency through trans-class redistribution, while sating its politicians with largesse, clashed with the state institutions and old money enterprises that pre-dated it. Long simmering elite-level fractiousness, then, was brought to the boil. Hence, unlike in Malaysia, backlash in Thailand was not imposed collectively by elites against societal challenges, but by rival elites who, in energizing competing constituencies, confronted one another. And with elites and their respective class followers evenly pitched, the regime failed to stabilize in harder authoritarianism but instead dissolved in unsyncopated oscillation.

This paper's second theoretical aim was to provide a finer grained account of threats to elite-level interests than were sketched by O'Donnell and Schmitter. To do this, key dimensions of democratic quality were deployed: responsiveness, rule of law, and accountability. To be sure, as these dimensions intersected their sequencing was revealed as hardly seamless or linear, but composed instead of often dialectical episodes. In Malaysia, new levels of electoral accountability resulted from skewed policy responsiveness, followed by a failure to strengthen rule of law. In Thailand, broad policy responsiveness created a milieu in which rule of law could be ignored and accountability avoided.

A key finding, then, is that dimensions of democratic quality do not cumulate in patterns that generate surefire predictive power. Rather, they stand more neutrally as gauges, registering the heat and pressures of the socio-political and institutional dynamics that roil below. Even so, while the notion of democratic quality may not possess the analytical heft claimed by its authors, it provides indices by which to map distinct pathways along which threats to elite-level interests mount, then end in varying modes of authoritarian backlash. Democratic quality thus offers us a short-handled, but still useful implement, adding leverage to our analytical framework. Hence, as backlash takes place, contracting politics into still harder forms of authoritarian rule, the recession that gnaws at democracy's prospects may grow even worse than Diamond (2008) has feared, with responsiveness, accountability, and rule of law ever more seriously eroded. And ironically, though the new literature on quality was intended to measure and accelerate democratic change, it may be better suited to tracking the mode and durability of backlash.

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Appendix

Table A.1. Freedom House Surveys, 2002–10

		Malaysia	Thailand
2002	CL	5	5
	PR	5	2
		Partly Free	Free
2003	CL	5	3
	PR	5	2
		Partly Free	Free
2004	CL	4	3
	PR	5	2
		Partly Free	Free
2005	CL	4	3
	PR	4	2
		Partly Free	Free
2006	CL	4	3
	PR	4	3
		Partly Free	Partly Free
2007	CL	4 ↓	4
	PR	4 ↓	7
		Partly Free	Not Free
2008	CL	4 ↓	4
	PR	4 ↓	6
		Partly Free	Partly Free
2009	CL	4 ↑	4
	PR	4 ↑	5
		Partly Free	Partly Free
2010	CL	4	4
	PR	4	5
		Partly Free	Partly Free

Source: Freedom House (2010a)
Note: 1 = most free and 7 = least free.

Table A.2. Freedom in the World: Aggregate Scores, 2003–09

	Civil Liberties							Political Rights						
	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009
Malaysia	25	28	30	31	29	27	29	17	17	19	19	19	19	20
Thailand	42	43	39	38	32	31	32	30	30	30	29	4	8	12

Source: Freedom House (2010b).
Note that the scale for aggregate scores runs counter to the survey scores: for civil liberties 0 = least free and 60 = most free; for political rights 0 = least free and 40 = most free.

Notes

1. Personal attendance at campaign events, January–February 2005.
2. One UMNO lawmaker, his company having been caught smuggling illegally cut timber into Malaysia, reportedly asked customs agents to 'close one eye' (Beh Lih, 2006). And in defending himself afterward before the media, he made clear the futility of Abdullah's efforts to instill probity in the party, remarking, 'I don't know whether my company was involved. Maybe yes, maybe no. If yes, so what? Why can't an MP take care of his own interest?'
3. Thaksin revealed his contempt for rule of law by reflecting that 'it's strange that the leader who was voted for by 11 million people had to bow to . . . two organizations composed of only appointed commissioners and judges' (Pasuk and Baker, 2004: 5).

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