

Authoritarian Policing and Democratization

The Case of Thailand

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10.1 Introduction

As David Bayley remarked in his seminal study of policing, “Police activities determine the limits of freedom in organized society, an essential feature in determining the character of government [...] A government is recognized as being authoritarian if its police are repressive, democratic if its police are restrained.”¹ In other words, the type of policing practiced in a society is indicative of regime type, broadly conceived as either authoritarian or democratic. Hence, during democratization processes we should observe corresponding changes in modes of policing, from “authoritarian” to “democratic policing.”²

A key distinction between authoritarian and democratic policing lies in the difference between law enforcement, service-oriented policing and the policing of political activities. As societies democratize, the police undergo a process of “professionalization” whereby they progressively relinquish their political activities to focus on law enforcement. Derived from the nine principles of “the founder of modern police” Sir Robert Peel,³ professionalization entails specialization on crime reduction (referred to as “low policing”) as opposed to political policing (“high policing”).⁴

Against this background, the literature on policing identifies three historical stages: prior to the eighteenth century, policing was essentially

¹ David H Bayley, *Patterns of Policing, Crime, Law and Deviance* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1985), 5, 189.

² Liqun Cao, Lanying Huang, and Ivan Sun, “From Authoritarian Policing to Democratic Policing: A Case Study of Taiwan,” *Policing and Society* 26(6) (August 17, 2016): 642–658.

³ Keith L. Williams, “Peel’s Principles and Their Acceptance by American Police: Ending 175 Years of Reinvention,” *The Police Journal: Theory, Practice and Principles* 76(2) (April 2003): 97–120.

⁴ Jean-Paul Brodeur, “High Policing and Low Policing: Remarks about the Policing of Political Activities,” *Social Problems* 30(5) (1983): 507–520.

political in that its function was to consolidate a specific regime and protect its power-holders; from the eighteenth to the twentieth century, as the police professionalized, they increasingly focused on suppressing crime; and, from the late twentieth century onwards, “communitarian policing,” with its emphasis on delivery of public goods and trust-building, became the new standard in democratic states.⁵ In line with the tenets of modernization theory, political policing is considered to recede along with democratization, thereby acting as one of the key markers of the authoritarian/democratic dichotomy, which also maps onto a nonmodern/modern divide.⁶

The Thai case is particularly relevant in any testing of the hypothesis that sees policing as a function of regime type in the broader frame of modernization theory. Since the overthrow of absolute monarchy in 1932, Thai political history has been dominated by long periods of military dictatorship punctuated by shorter periods of democracy. For the first forty years of its history (1933–1973), Thailand was ruled by military juntas, although elections were sometimes held. The so-called Third Wave of democracy hit the kingdom in 1973, one year before the Portuguese Carnation Revolution⁷, but it was short-lived. The “democratic parenthesis” lasted only three years, before a coup plunged the country back into military dictatorship in 1976. Following the ouster of the junta a few years later, Thailand was labeled a “semi-democracy”: notwithstanding election results, prime ministers would inevitably come from the ranks of the military.⁸ In 1991, yet another military coup gave rise to a popular movement for democracy that called for an end to military rule and a new constitution. The outcome of this process, the 1997 Constitution, was a watershed moment in the history of the country. The fragile young Thai democracy appeared to be morphing into a consolidated, participatory democracy. Yet in 2006, a twelfth military coup ushered in a return to military rule, followed by a short period of democracy (2008–2014), military rule again (2015–2019), and the return to a “semi-democracy” headed by a soldier legitimized by elections.

To test the hypothesis of policing as a function of regime type, this chapter focuses on the evolutions of political policing in light of recent

⁵ George L. Kelling, “The Evolving Strategy of Policing,” *Perspectives on Policing* 4 (1988): 1–16.

⁶ Peter K. Manning, “Jean-Paul Brodeur on High and Low Policing” (2012) Champ penal, <https://journals.openedition.org/champpenal/8285>.

⁷ Samuel P. Huntington, “Democracy’s Third Wave,” *Journal of Democracy* 2(2) (1991): 12–34.

⁸ Chai-Anan Samudavanija, “Democracy in Thailand: A Case of a Stable Semi-Democratic Regime,” *World Affairs* 150(1) (1987): 31–41.

Thai political developments – as only political policing is expected to be affected by democratization/modernization. As Bayley puts it, “[r]egime character does not affect the nature of tasks performed by police, apart from those related to politics.”⁹ Indeed, whether in times of fully-fledged military dictatorship or in times of electoral democracy, routine service-oriented, law-enforcement policing remains relatively constant. For instance, in the 1970s, as the Thai police were involved in violent counterinsurgency practices including extrajudicial killings, enforced disappearances, and torture on a massive scale, they still performed highly service-oriented “low policing” tasks on a daily basis. Asked about his everyday routine, a Thai policeman tells of his role in the following terms:

The police are charged with serving the public. This police service includes the rendering of facilities and assistance to the public, such as giving information on location of places, streets, or, when requested, seeing that vehicles or other things left with the police will not be tampered with, taking a sick person to hospitals, giving advice and opinion in civil cases, helping in the settling of compoundable offences, helping children and the aged across the street, removing such obstructions as vehicles and other things from roadways, helping others with personal service when possible such as lifting loads onto vehicles, giving first aids in emergency, finding the home of children who have lost their way, returning lost property to the rightful owners and others. In other words a policeman is a friend of all and is always helpful to the public.¹⁰

In contrast to “helping children and the aged across the street,” the quintessential marker of “high” policing signaling authoritarianism is the policing of political dissent. Dissent manifests itself in variegated ways, including in the staging of street protests. Protest policing might be one of the domains where the dichotomy between authoritarian and democratic policing appears most sharply: “brutal versus soft,” “illegal versus legal,” “confrontational versus consensual,” “repressive versus accommodative.”¹¹ In a democratic society, political dissent manifesting itself in street protests will be channeled and protected, whereas in an authoritarian polity it will be violently repressed. Democratic policing is defined as a minimal use of state violence against the citizen, and whenever it is used, there

⁹ Bayley, *Patterns of Policing*, 210.

¹⁰ Quoted in Albert C. Weed, *Police and the Modernization Process: Thailand* (Princeton, NJ: Woodrow Wilson School of Public and International Affairs, 1970), 25.

¹¹ Janjira Sombatpoonsiri, “The Policing of Anti-Government Protests: Thailand’s 2013–2014 Demonstrations and a Crisis of Police Legitimacy,” *Journal of Asian Security and International Affairs* 4(1) (April 2017): 95–122.

will be a concomitant interest in restraining its use.¹² In a democracy, “police view their job to be managing, rather than repressing, protest, protecting the right to demonstrate, and guaranteeing (even to those whose views they may find intolerable) due process of law.”¹³ Besides restraint in the use of force and due process of law, police accountability and transparency are key characteristics of democratic policing.

By contrast, authoritarian policing involves a reliance on secret police, arbitrary arrests and unlawful detention, extrajudicial killings, torture, and enforced disappearances. Moreover, police violence is understood, in the authoritarian context, as structural as opposed to deviant and impunity as the norm rather than the exception. Democratic policing must be neutral and accountable,¹⁴ whereas authoritarian policing is both politicized and unaccountable.¹⁵ Several studies also associate democratic policing with decentralization of police structures, and authoritarian policing with hypercentralization.¹⁶

In this chapter, I argue that post-1970s democratization in Thailand had minimal effects on the entrenched practices of authoritarian policing. Democratization, in fact, did not put an end to these practices; instead, correlated with their legalization has been the enactment of a set of empowering legislations. This empirical finding invites a reconsideration of the hypothesis that there exists a covariation between regime type and policing practices. Section 10.2 provides a brief overview of the genealogy of the Thai police.

10.2 The Birth of the Modern Thai Police: Colonial Origins and Foreign Models

Thailand is the only country in Southeast Asia to have never been directly colonized. A stone inscription from the Sukhothai era (thirteenth–fifteenth

¹² Gary T Marx, “Some Reflections on the Democratic Policing of Demonstrations,” in Donatella Della Porta and Herbert Reiter (eds.), *Policing Protest: The Control of Mass Demonstrations in Western Democracies*, 253–269, at 253.

¹³ Marx, *Some Reflections*, 254.

¹⁴ Puangthong R. Pawakapan, *Central Role of Thailand’s Internal Security Operations Command in the Post-Counter-Insurgency Period*, Trends in Southeast Asia, no. 17 (Singapore: ISEAS Publishing, 2017), 3. Peter K. Manning, “The Study of Policing,” *Police Quarterly* 8(1) (March 2005): 23–43.

¹⁵ “Democratic policing refers to the police practice where political neutrality holds in domestic conflicts and a civilian supremacy prevails. Police officers are accountable to the law and ultimately to a democratically elected parliament.” Cao, Huang, and Sun, *From Authoritarian Policing*, 645.

¹⁶ Kevin Carty, *Guidebook on Democratic Policing*, 2nd ed., SPMU Publication Series 1 (Vienna: OSCE, 2008).

centuries) refers to the role of inspectors or *phu truat* mandated by the king for various missions of public ordering.¹⁷ During the Ayuthaya era (fourteenth–eighteenth centuries), bureaucracy was divided into military and civilian domains.¹⁸ A form of “metropolitan police” tasked with patrolling around the palace appeared during that time.¹⁹ The word for police, *tam-ruat*, can be found in sixteenth-century court chronicles.²⁰ The police function was then exclusively to provide security to the royal family.²¹ Policing was influenced by the Hindu models of kingship that had spread in the Siamese kingdoms of Sukhothai and Ayuthaya as part of a long process of “Indianization.”²² In the eighteenth century, the newly founded kingdom of Rattanakosin attracted a large influx of Chinese, and a “police constabulary division” was formed to police Bangkok’s Chinese residents activities involving opium trafficking and gang warfare in Chinatown (Sampeng area).

From the second half of the nineteenth century onwards, Siam was cryptocolonized;²³ that is to say, the government was involved in the hiring of numerous foreign advisors to build and reform the state on a Western model. In 1860, King Mongkut created a “police constabulary” under the command of a British former official, Samuel Joseph Bird Ames. The unit comprised Malayan and Indian constables,²⁴ as well as many British officers.²⁵ In 1871, King Chulalongkorn undertook a study trip to Singapore and in 1875, he asked Samuel Joseph Bird Ames to reform the police, based on the Singaporean-British model. More than fifty regulations were issued to that end, assigning specific duties to constables based on their locations.²⁶ In 1897, Rama V established a provincial gendarmerie on the French model,²⁷ while simultaneously recruiting British colonial

¹⁷ Eric Haanstad, “A Brief History of the Thai Police,” in Paul Chambers (ed.) *Knights of the Realm: Thailand’s Military and Police, Then and Now* (Bangkok: White Lotus Press, 2013), 447–498, at 452.

¹⁸ Reign of King Trailokanat (fifteenth century); Haanstad, *A Brief History*, 453.

¹⁹ Eric James Haanstad, “Constructing Order through Chaos: A State Ethnography of the Thai Police” (Doctor of Philosophy (Anthropology) thesis, Wisconsin-Madison, 2008), 50.

²⁰ Weed, *Police and the Modernization Process*, 14.

²¹ Haanstad, *Constructing Order*, 42.

²² George Coédès, *The Indianized States of Southeast Asia* (Honolulu, HI: East-West Center Press, 1968).

²³ M. Herzfeld, “The Absent Presence: Discourses of Crypto-Colonialism,” *South Atlantic Quarterly* 101(4) (October 1, 2002): 899–926.

²⁴ Haanstad, *A Brief History*, 455.

²⁵ Weed, *Police and Modernization*, 15.

²⁶ Haanstad, *Constructing Order*, 52.

²⁷ Weed, *Police and Modernization*, 15.

officers in India to build a “Patrol Police Unit.”²⁸ Under the supervision of key European advisors, the police force professionalized its training and practices: the first training academy was established in 1901, and a set of binding regulations based on the British model were codified in 1903.²⁹

The reign of Chulalongkorn was one of state-building, centralization, and consolidation of royal power. The highly educated Prince Damrong, brother of Chulalongkorn, headed the Ministry of the Interior. In 1906, he established the first secret police composed of officers in plainclothes, whose role was to gather information on criminals involved in possible conspiracies against the regime. Meanwhile, criminal law was modernized with the help of foreign advisors: numerous laws criminalizing offences to the state, including laws against *lèse-majesté* that emulated those from Prussia, were introduced in Thailand, and later included in the first modern Penal Code (1908).³⁰ In that context, Chulalongkorn hired French advisors to draft a martial law in 1907,³¹ modeled on the French *état de siège*. Revised in 1914, martial law allowed the military to take over civilian administration and rule by decree, make arbitrary arrests, and order detention without charge. It granted immunity for acts by the military, while military officers as well as targeted civilians were put under the exclusive jurisdiction of martial courts.³² Martial law was put to use for the first time in 1912 to quell a revolutionary attempt to overthrow the monarchy and replace it with a republic. In 1913, a Criminal Investigation Department was created to centralize intelligence on criminals and conspirators.³³ At that point, the Thai police still included many foreigners, including Westerners filling the top ranks. In 1915, the French-influenced Provincial Gendarmerie merged with the British-influenced Patrol Department. During the 1920s and early 1930s, Siam increasingly emulated Japan and reformed its police forces accordingly.³⁴

In June 1932, a faction of foreign-educated civil and military bureaucrats seized power from King Prajadhipok, replacing absolute monarchy

²⁸ A. J. Jardine was the first Patrol Police Unit director. Eric St. J. Lawson succeeded him in 1904; Haanstad, *Constructing Order*, 54.

²⁹ Ibid., 56.

³⁰ Eugénie Mérieau, “Thailand’s Lèse-Majesté Law : On Blasphemy in a Buddhist Kingdom,” *Buddhism, Law and Society* 4 (2019): 54–92.

³¹ The Criminal Code was promulgated in 1908, the Civil and Commercial Codes in 1935, and the first constitution in 1932.

³² Article 7 of the 1914 Martial Law.

³³ Haanstad, *Constructing Order*, 56.

³⁴ Weed, *Police and Modernization*, 16.

with constitutional monarchy. The People's Committee centralized the Royal Thai Police and put it under the direction of a powerful director-general. In November 1932, a few months after the revolution/coup, King Prajadhipok issued the Santiban Act, creating a Special Branch of the police tasked specifically with the protection of the monarchy and threats to national security. The Royal Thai Police Department developed into the main intelligence unit conducting data collection on dissident activities. Plainclothes officers were assigned to monitor anti-royalist communists.

In 1941, Siam declared war on the Allies and expelled all European advisors including those in the police. Prime Minister Field Marshal Phibun Songkhram, a fervent admirer of Mussolini, declared martial law while Japan occupied Siamese territory. He reorganized the police on the very centralized "Asian Police Organization" model. As Eric Haanstad puts it, "the martial law period under Phibun during WWII was a watershed moment for the centralization and expansion of the Thai police."³⁵ The Santiban Police was to spy on political opponents. Phibun intended for the project to merge the police and the army, but it failed. Nevertheless, both branches of the security forces were not strictly separated: they shared a common system of ranks and titles and officers could easily move from one body to another. This is how General Luang Adul Detcharat, chief of the national police during World War II and key figure of the anti-Japanese resistance movement, became, at the end of the war, army chief. In 1944, as the Allies were winning the war, Phibun was forced to resign and the Police Department was reformed toward gaining more autonomy: instead of being placed under the Ministry of the Interior, its director became solely responsible for its management.

10.3 Policing under Military Dictatorship: Extrajudicial Killings and Enforced Disappearances

After the war, the United States (US) inaugurated, as part of its policy of anticommunist containment, a "special relationship" with the Thai security forces in the domains of intelligence gathering and covert operations.³⁶ In 1950, American officials including Office of Strategic Services veteran Willis Bird and Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) official William

³⁵ Haanstad, *Constructing Order*, 60.

³⁶ Daniel M. Fineman, *A Special Relationship: The United States and Military Government in Thailand, 1947–1958* (Honolulu, HI: University of Hawai'i Press, 1997).

Lair met with leading Thai generals and the police chief to launch intensive cooperation. An initial anticommunist act was passed in 1952, called the Anti-Communist Activities Act (ACAA). It empowered the police to define “Communist-infiltrated” zones and to subsequently limit civil liberties, especially freedom of movement, in these areas. At first, the US directed its efforts at the Thai police, at the time under the leadership of Police Chief Phao Sriyanond, rather than at the military. The CIA armed and trained the Thai police, supporting the Santiban Police as well as helping in the establishment of the Border Patrol Police (BPP) in 1955, which would become “the paramilitary force of the Royal Thai Police.”³⁷ The BPP’s mission was extremely broad: it included border security, counterinsurgency and intelligence, as well as more traditional antismuggling and counterbanditry activities.³⁸ It also engaged massively in the building of schools and hospitals in impoverished areas.³⁹

By the end of the 1950s, the Thai police was fully formed, trained, and equipped to carry out counterinsurgency missions as part of the US anti-communist insurgency policy. Already in 1951 the *New York Times* had noted that the Thai police was bigger than the military, and was very well equipped and trained, including in counter guerrilla warfare.⁴⁰ The massive American aid delivered to the Thai police installed Phao Sriyanond, the head of the police, as the strongman of Thailand and locus of power. As police chief, he engaged in extrajudicial killings and the enforced disappearances of his opponents. He was notoriously known for having his own police bodyguards, the Knights of the Diamonds Ring, or *Asawin*, assassinate whomever he pleased, before disappearing the body, either in the Chao Phraya River or elsewhere.⁴¹ He notably had four Members of Parliament killed by the police.⁴²

³⁷ Pawakapan, “Central Role of Thailand’s Internal Security Operations Command,” 3.

³⁸ Paul Chambers, “Securing an Alternative Army,” in Pavin Chachavalpongpun (ed.), *Routledge Handbook of Contemporary Thailand*, 1st ed. (Abingdon; Routledge, 2019), 102–117, at 103, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315151328-8>.

³⁹ Sinae Hyun, “Mae Fah Luang: Thailand’s Princess Mother and the Border Patrol Police during the Cold War,” *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 48(2) (June 2017): 262–282, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0022463417000078>; Sinae Hyun, “Integrating a Nation from the Margins: The Remote Area Security Development of the Border Patrol Police in Northern Thailand 1,” *Rian Thai: International Journal of Thai Studies* 3 (2010): 233–258.

⁴⁰ “Thai Police Force Bigger than Army, Equipment Includes Bren Guns and Mortars – Some of Men Get Guerilla Training,” *New York Times*, July 23, 1951.

⁴¹ Thak Chaloemtiarana, *Thailand: The Politics of Despotic Paternalism* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2019), 60.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 48.

In order to reestablish military dominance over security issues and Thai politics at large, Army chief Sarit Thanarat staged a military coup in 1957 and another in 1958. To consolidate his rule, he staffed the entire police apparatus with military men.⁴³ He enacted an interim constitution granting him full powers, including broad police and judicial powers, which he used to execute his opponents.⁴⁴ Around this time, the CIA switched allegiances, favoring the Thai military and Sarit. In 1962, with the help of the CIA, he established the Central Security Command to centralize counterinsurgency actions. Following the failure of Sarit's Central Security Command, his successor General Praphat Jarusathien established the Communist Suppression Operations Command in 1965.⁴⁵ This was a hybrid command center, coordinating the actions of the police and the army with support from the CIA. In 1969, a second ACAA was passed, allowing the military to detain suspected communists for up to 480 days without charge.⁴⁶ Several other anticommunist acts succeeded one another: Revolutionary Announcement 78 followed by Revolutionary Announcement 199, the latter allowing indefinite detention of suspected communists.⁴⁷ In 1973, the Communist Suppression Operations Command became the Internal Security Operations Command (ISOC). Its mission was to conduct surveillance of political opposition, activist populations, and coordinate the suppression of threats to national security. ISOC included members of the army as well as the police chief.⁴⁸

As can be expected, policing during the first decades of the Cold War period involved the perpetration of extrajudicial killings and enforced disappearances against alleged communists and political opponents, to the extent that "state killings" became a defining feature of post-World War II politics. As Ben Anderson puts it, "Political murders by

⁴³ Haanstad, *A Brief History*, 68.

⁴⁴ Article 17, 1959 Interim Charter.

⁴⁵ Pawakapan, "Central Role of Thailand's Internal Security Operations Command," 7.

⁴⁶ Tyrell Haberkorn, *In Plain Sight: Impunity and Human Rights in Thailand* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 2018), 78.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 78.

⁴⁸ "The original command structure gave the directorship of ISOC to the Army commander; the deputy director was the deputy commander of the Army; four assistant director posts belonged to two assistant Army commanders, to the permanent secretary of the Ministry of the Interior and the national police chief; and the position of ISOC chief of staff went to the Army chief of staff" (Pawakapan, "Central Role of Thailand's Internal Security Operations Command," 8). In 1987, by order of then Prime Minister Prem Tinsulanond, the prime minister became the director of ISOC instead of the army chief.

the ruling cliques have been a regular feature of modern Thai politics – whether under Marshal Phibunsongkhram's dictatorship in the late 1930s; under the Phibunsongkhram – Phao Sriyanond – Sarit Thanarat triumvirate of the late 1940s and 1950s, or the Sarit Thanarat – Thanom Kittikachon – Praphat Charusathien regime of the 1960s and early 1970s.⁴⁹ There was little distinction between an extrajudicial killing and a judicial execution, as the military had, under Sarit's rule, the power to order executions. Execution and the threat of execution were also used to crack down on ordinary crime including even breaches of social regulations. In one legendary example, Sarit, confronted with the proliferation of deadly fires in factories, promised the death penalty to factory owners whose buildings ever caught fire – and, so the story goes, the fires instantly stopped.⁵⁰

The period also saw the creation of paramilitary police organizations. Most notably, the Village Scouts, established by the BPP in 1971, had massive outreach: in 1975, their membership peaked at roughly 10 percent of the Thai adult population⁵¹. Paradoxically, the intense militarization of the Thai police and society at large coincided with a period of democratization.

10.4 Policing in Times of Democratization: More Extrajudicial Killings and Enforced Disappearances

In 1973, students took to the streets to call for an end to military rule and a new constitution, as well as the dissolution of ISOC. The military resigned – the so-called three tyrants even left the country. A three-year period of democracy ensued. Yet occurrences of extrajudicial killings surged in the “democratic parenthesis” of the 1970s. Reminiscent of techniques used in the Argentinian dirty war, suspected communists and labor activists were killed and their bodies disappeared, thrown out of helicopters or burnt in boiling drums. In the province of Patthalung (South), police and military officers conducted a campaign of massive extrajudicial killings. Villagers were arrested, knocked unconscious, and their bodies dropped in boiling drums, while their screams were covered by sounds of truck engines – the

⁴⁹ Ben Anderson, “Withdrawal Symptoms: Social and Cultural Aspects of the October 6 Coup,” *Bulletin of Concerned Asian Scholars* 9(3) (September 1977): 13, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14672715.1977.10406423>.

⁵⁰ As recalled by Tarend J. Terwiel, informal discussion, May 2018, Göttingen.

⁵¹ Pawakapan, “Central Role of Thailand's Internal Security Operations Command,” 3.

thang daeng killings⁵². In 1975, halfway through the “democratic parenthesis,” extrajudicial killings peaked tremendously⁵³.

The next year, on September 25, 1976, two labor activists were found hanged in Nakhon Pathom Province, allegedly by the police. This prompted students to stage protests against the methods used by security forces to silence labor activists within the broader context of anticommunist operations. They gathered at Thammasat University in Bangkok on October 6, 1976, only to be raped, shot, hanged, and drowned by security officials including police, military, and paramilitary organizations. The BPP had a leading role in the massacre, prompting scholars and intellectuals to question the American responsibility in the bloodbath.⁵⁴ This episode, epitomizing authoritarian policing, ended the democratic experiment: by the evening of that day, the military seized power in a coup, ousting the government of Seni Pramot. The 1976 coupmakers issued many “revolutionary decrees” affecting policing. They increased the jail penalty for *lèse-majesté* to fifteen years and issued a number of other security laws.⁵⁵ In any case, the democratic experiment did not lead to either a halt in state violence or even some first steps toward accountability of the security forces. As Tyrell puts it: “Even if only the three years between 14 October 1973 and 6 October 1976 are examined, let alone the periods before or since, impunity was the established norm for state violence.”⁵⁶

In the 1980s, the “semidemocracy” under the premiership of Prem Tinsulanonda, a nonelected yet parliamentarily-accountable ex-general, seemed to have called violent crackdowns on protesters to a close. ISOC

⁵² Tyrell Haberkorn, “Getting Away with Murder in Thailand, State, Violence and Impunity in Phattalung,” in N. Ganesan and Chull Kim Sung (eds.), *State Violence in East Asia* (Lexington, KY; The University Press of Kentucky, 2013), 185–208, <https://muse-jhu-edu.ezp-prod1.hul.harvard.edu/book/21100>.

⁵³ Ibid., 202.

⁵⁴ Scholars also questioned the role of the monarchy, given the close relationship between the king, the queen, and the BPP. As Vasiit Dejkunjorn and others put it, “The close relationship between HM King Bhumipol and the BPP, especially the PARU, was well-known in uniformed circles” (Vasiit Dejkunjorn, Busakorn Suriyasarn, and Christopher Moore, *In His Majesty's Footsteps: A Personal Memoir* (Bangkok: Heaven Lake Press, distributed in Thailand by Asia Document Bureau, 2006), 2).

⁵⁵ David Streckfuss, *Truth on Trial in Thailand* (New York : Routledge, 2011); Tyrell Haberkorn, “The Hidden Transcript of Amnesty: The 6 October 1976 Massacre and Coup in Thailand,” *Critical Asian Studies* 47(1) (January 2, 2015): 2. In its revised version, Article 112 of the Thai Penal Code reads: “Whoever defames, insults or threatens the King, the Queen, the Heir-apparent or the Regent, shall be punished with imprisonment of three to fifteen years.”

⁵⁶ Haberkorn, “The Hidden Transcript of Amnesty,” 3.

was downsized and its power reduced. It refocused its activities on the monitoring of the Malay Muslim insurgency in the south of the country. In the three southernmost provinces of Thailand, the majority population of Malay Muslims had voiced demands for autonomy from the Thai Buddhist state and a possible reunion with Malaysia as part of a federation of Malaya (a sultanate of Patani). Prem instructed several military-dominated agencies, notably the Southern Border Provinces Administrative Center (SBPAC), to adopt a conciliatory approach with the insurgents – to be coordinated by ISOC.⁵⁷ In spite of this relative democratization, enforced disappearances did not stop. Between 1976 and 1982 alone, some sixty cases of enforced disappearances were recorded, mostly involving environmental and human rights activists.⁵⁸

Yet following the 1991 coup, which inaugurated another period of semi-dictatorship under the prime ministership of civilian liberal Anand Panyarachun, protests against the army's resilient role in politics were met with the same violence: protesters were shot by the security forces during the "Black May Incident."⁵⁹ Deaths and disappearances remained part of the possible means of political policing. The violence of policing sparked renewed calls for democratization and "political reform." In 1996, the Thai government ratified the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, signaling a new era for Thai politics and a possible embracement of the values of "democratic policing." Meanwhile, Thailand drafted its new, liberal, constitution. The next year, then-prime minister Chuan Leekpai launched a reform of the police, transferring it from the supervision of the Ministry of the Interior to the direct supervision of the prime minister.⁶⁰ The hypercentralization of the Royal Thai Police, with a powerful commissioner-general at the top reporting directly to the prime minister was a direct outcome of democratization. The 1997 constitution – the most democratic Thai constitution to date – was promulgated that same year. Under the new charter, a former policeman, Thaksin Shinawatra, was elected prime minister with a near-absolute majority. Thaksin was a former policeman who had also

⁵⁷ Both agencies were created by decrees of Prem Tinsulanond in 1981. Human Rights Watch, *No One Is Safe: Insurgent Attacks on Civilians in Thailand's Southern Border Provinces* (Bangkok: Human Rights Watch, 2007), 16.

⁵⁸ Haberkorn, *In Plain Sight*, 166.

⁵⁹ William A. Callahan, *Imagining Democracy: Reading "The Events of May" in Thailand* (Singapore and London: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 1998).

⁶⁰ Tony Glendinning, "Police Reform in Thailand Post-2006," *International Journal of Criminology and Sociology* (2013): 372.

completed a degree in criminology from the US.⁶¹ Yet under his rule, brutal policing including extrajudicial killings and enforced disappearances peaked, probably at levels not experienced since the rule of military dictator Sarit Thanarat in the late 1950s.

Upon his election in 2001, one of Thaksin's first measures was to launch a massive "War on Drugs." Drawing inspiration from the policing techniques of ex-police chief Phao Sriyanond, whom he liked to quote, he once declared to "his" policemen: "Police General Phao Sriyanond said 'There is nothing under the sun that the Thai police cannot do.' So I'm confident that drugs are something that the Thai police can deal with. Do it to the full."⁶² Launched in February 2003, Thaksin's War on Drugs lasted three months and caused more than 2,500 deaths, most of which were presumably extrajudicial killings, with no investigation into the deaths whatsoever.⁶³ Another key measure of Thaksin was to adopt a more "law and order" approach to the conflict in the South. He dissolved the military-dominated, dialogue-oriented SBPAC to make room for the police in the Deep South. When, in January 2004, southern insurgents raided an army compound and seized weaponry including assault rifles, grenades, and ammunition, Thaksin responded by declaring martial law, which allowed searches, raids, and arrests without warrant, as well as administrative detention for up to seven days. Although he did empower the army, Thaksin made sure that the police took the lead in the operations.⁶⁴ He dispatched teams from the Crime Suppression Division to the southern areas – and let them engage in acts of torture and extrajudicial killings.⁶⁵ In April 2004, security forces raided a mosque where suspected insurgents were hiding, killing thirty-two men.⁶⁶ In July 2005, Thaksin enacted an Emergency Decree, which empowered the police to conduct searches without warrant and to put alleged offenders under pretrial detention

⁶¹ Pasuk Phongpaichit and Chris Baker, *Thaksin: The Business of Politics in Thailand* (NIAS Press, 2004).

⁶² January 14, 2003, quoted in Pasuk Phongpaichit and Chris Baker, *Thaksin: The Business of Politics in Thailand* (Copenhagen : NIAS Press, 2004), 153.

⁶³ Human Rights Watch, *Not Enough Graves: The War on Drugs, HIV/AIDS, and Violations of Human Rights* (Bangkok: Human Rights Watch, 2004).

⁶⁴ Human Rights Watch, *No One Is Safe: Insurgent Attacks on Civilians in Thailand's Southern Border Provinces* (Bangkok : Human Rights Watch, 2007), 33.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 34.

⁶⁶ Krue Se mosque raid. General Chavalit's orders focused on negotiation, when General Panlop Pinmanee, deputy director of ISOC, ordered the killing of the suspected insurgents.

for up to thirty days – more than the seven days allowed under martial law.⁶⁷ Meanwhile, Thaksin Shinawatra issued the 2004 Police Act allegedly to improve and deepen “community policing,” but in fact to reinforce the prime minister’s control over the police.⁶⁸ In October of the same year, a protest in front of a police station in the southern province in Narathiwat was met with firing of live shots, killing seven protesters, as well as the arrest and humiliation of all remaining protesters. Stripped, laid on the ground in the burning sun before being taken to an army camp in the back of a truck, almost a hundred of those arrested died of dehydration and suffocation before reaching the detention center.⁶⁹ This episode tragically exemplifies the violence of authoritarian policing in times of democratization.

Another technique considered characteristic of authoritarian policing is the recourse to enforced disappearances. In this domain as well, the coming to power of Thaksin had tragic effects. The most prominent case of enforced disappearances under the government of Thaksin is that of Somchai Neelapaichit, a human rights lawyer specialized in defending Muslims from the Deep South in cases of terrorism. One day, in March 2004, he was kidnapped by police officers in a busy street in Bangkok, and never reappeared.⁷⁰ Five police officers were initially charged for kidnapping but later acquitted for lack of evidence and released.⁷¹ Other less prominent cases of enforced disappearances were recorded during Thaksin’s rule. The Thai nongovernmental organization Justice for Peace Foundation documented fifty-nine disappearances between 2002 and 2012,⁷² a period of democratic flourishing.

In 2005–2006, mass anti-Thaksin protests erupted in the capital city. Unlike in the Deep South, mass protests in Bangkok were not met with deaths or grave injuries. Thaksin refrained from declaring a state of

⁶⁷ International Commission of Jurists, *More Power, Less Accountability: Thailand’s New Emergency Decree* (Bangkok: International Commission of Jurists, 2005), 3. The new law was passed on July 15, 2005 and enforced four days later in the southernmost provinces of Thailand.

⁶⁸ Glendinning, “Police Reform in Thailand Post-2006,” 373.

⁶⁹ Eighty-five of them lost their lives. This is referred to as the “Tak Bai Incident.”

⁷⁰ See the book written by his widow Angkhana. Angkhana Neelapaichit, *Reading between the Lines* (Bangkok: Working Group on Justice for Peace, 2009).

⁷¹ For a detailed account of the court cases, see International Commission of Jurists, *Ten Years Without Truth: Somchai Neelapaijit and Enforced Disappearances in Thailand* (Bangkok: International Commission of Jurists, 2014).

⁷² Haberkorn, *In Plain Sight*, 167.

emergency under the 2005 Executive Decree on Public Administration in Emergency Situations. It seemed that Thaksin was intent on embracing the policy of deescalation of street protests, a key pillar of democratic policing. He did not deploy the army to quell the protests, which self-dispersed when Thaksin dissolved the House of Representatives. Thaksin was later that year removed in a military coup. Under martial law, declared as part of the coup, gatherings of more than five people were banned and street politics wound down. The military government established two new police divisions: the Protection and Crowd Control Division attached to the Metropolitan Bureau and the Technology Crime Suppression Division attached to the Central Investigation Bureau.⁷³ Head of the junta General Surayud Chulanont attempted to reform the police organization, aiming to withdraw it from the Prime Minister's control, but it failed owing to police resistance.⁷⁴ Surayud reenacted martial law in the South⁷⁵. The military drafted a new security legislation, the Internal Security Act, reintroducing a military-dominated and powerful ISOC empowering the military to indulge in renewed "political policing" activities.⁷⁶

The 2007 Constitution reestablished civil liberties, prompting another wave of political protests. In 2008, "yellow-shirts" protested against the elected government – up to the point of closing down the airport entirely for several weeks. Notwithstanding the scale of the protests, the army was not deployed nor was a state of emergency declared. Democratic policing seemed to be entrenched and the police to be bound to the rule of law. Yet the 2008 Internal Security Act reinstating ISOC was passed, although after intense debate, it was placed under the supervision of the prime minister rather than the Army commander in chief.⁷⁷ From 2009 to early 2010, "red-shirt" protests against the resilient role of the military in Thai politics were met with "deescalation" techniques by the police. But in May 2010, the military-backed civilian government of Abhisit Vejjajiva, using the new Internal Security Act, sent the army to crack

⁷³ Arisa Ratanapinsiri, "A History of Police Reform in Thailand," in Paul Chambers (ed.), *Knights of the Realm: Thailand's Military and Police, Then and Now* (Bangkok : White Lotus Press, 2013), 523.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 500.

⁷⁵ International Commission of Jurists, *Implementation of Thailand's Emergency Decree, July 2007* (Bangkok: International Commission of Jurists, 2010), 3.

⁷⁶ International Commission of Jurists, *Thailand's Internal Security Act: Risking the Rule of Law?* (Bangkok: International Commission of Jurists, 2010), part v.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, part vi.

down on the protests. Scenes of urban guerrilla action unfolded, leaving 90 people dead and more than 2,000 injured.⁷⁸ Under the following civilian government of Yingluck Shinawatra, elected in 2011, mass protests were not handled by the army but by the police. The 2013 mass protests were also “de-escalated” by the police,⁷⁹ until the military seized power in yet another coup in 2014, promulgating martial law and putting a durable end to the street politics that is so familiar in Thailand.

During this time, the practice of enforced disappearances continued unabated. In April 2014, environmental activist Porlajee “Billy” Rakchongcharoen reported to the police – and never reappeared. Continually harassed by the police, he was well known for his struggle for justice for Karen families living in national parks.⁸⁰ As in the case of Somchai, some police officers were charged for the murder but released on lack of evidence. In 2012, Thailand had signed the Convention on the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearances, five years after its ratification of the Convention on Torture, then under the military dictatorship of Surayud Chulanont. Under the military dictatorship of Prayuth Chan-Ocha, a draft Act on the Prevention and Suppression of Torture and Enforced Disappearances was submitted to the National Legislative Assembly in 2015 – but, as of 2022, no progress has been made since.

10.5 Explaining the Resilience of Authoritarian Policing in Times of Democratization: Thailand’s Dual State Structure

Why are security forces not responsive to democratization? Why are practices of torture, enforced disappearances, and extrajudicial killings so robust during times of democracy? The answer lies in the nature of the Thai state: Thailand’s security apparatus remains autonomous from elected politicians, and is therefore irresponsive to democratization. The Weberian ideal-type, according to which the bureaucracy comes under government control, does not hold for Thailand where the bureaucracy is the principal

⁷⁸ Tyrell Haberkorn, “Truth and Justice When Fear and Repression Remain,” in Michael J. Montesano, Pavin Chachavalponpun, and Aekapol Chongvilaivan (ed.), *Bangkok, May 2010: Perspectives on a Divided Thailand* (Singapore: ISEAS–Yusof Ishak Institute, 2012), 42–54.

⁷⁹ Sombatpoonsiri, “The Policing of Anti-Government Protests.”

⁸⁰ International Commission of Jurists, “Thailand: at fourth anniversary of enforced disappearance of ‘Billy’, still no resolution,” 2018 www.icj.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/Thailand-Billy-disappearance-4th-year-News-web-story-2018-ENG.pdf.

and the government the agent.⁸¹ Thailand has been analyzed as a “bureaucratic polity” characterized by a bureaucracy autonomous from politics and endowed with veto powers over the sphere of the political.⁸²

Thai bureaucracy can be described as a compound of several competing power centers tied together in complex nonhierarchical relations or networks.⁸³ As Craig J. Reynolds puts it, “what prevails most of the time is a multi-centred autocracy with many centres of power that sometimes do what they want autonomously, without instruction and with impunity. Even with elections, autocratic rule is the norm, not the exception.”⁸⁴ Among these entities, the military and the Santiban police are two power centers, both highly autonomous from the government. The Thai bureaucracy is also fragmented along the lines of what Ernst Fraenkel calls a dual state.⁸⁵ In a dual state, two autonomous systems coexist, one system governed by the “rule of law” and another by arbitrary power, the former being subservient to the latter. Fraenkel built on John Locke’s analysis of the royal prerogative – characterized by discretion – to call the realm of arbitrary rule the “prerogative state,” while referring to the legalistic one as the “normative state.” In his account, the normative and the prerogative state are competitive. In the case of Thailand, the normative state can be identified as taking its orders from the elected government of the day, and the prerogative state from the military. The prerogative state is a type of “deep state” composed of specific state agents who oppose the rise of electoral politics and eventually the very idea of electoral democracy, from low-ranking civil servants to the highest-ranking officials, including security forces.⁸⁶

⁸¹ Max Weber, “Bureaucracy,” in Tony Waters and Dagmar Waters (eds.), *Weber’s Rationalism and Modern Society: New Translations on Politics, Bureaucracy, and Social Stratification* (Palgrave, 2015); Jacob I. Ricks, “Agents, Principals, or Something in between? Bureaucrats and Policy Control in Thailand,” *Journal of East Asian Studies* 18(3) (November 2018): 321–344.

⁸² Fred Riggs, *Thailand: The Modernization of a Bureaucratic Polity* (Honolulu, HI: East-West Center, 1966).

⁸³ Duncan McCargo, “Network Monarchy and Legitimacy Crises in Thailand,” *The Pacific Review* 18(4) (December 2005): 499–519.

⁸⁴ Craig Reynolds calls the Thai State an “un-State”; Craig Reynolds, “Time’s Arrow and the Burden of the Past,” 4.

⁸⁵ The book, initially published in 1941, analyzed the case of Nazi Germany. Ernst Fraenkel, *The Dual State: A Contribution to the Theory of Dictatorship* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018).

⁸⁶ Eugénie Méribeau, “Thailand’s Deep State, Royal Power and the Constitutional Court (1997–2015),” *Journal of Contemporary Asia* 46(3) (July 2, 2016): 445–466. See also Eugénie Méribeau, “The Legal–Military Alliance for Illiberal Constitutionalism in Thailand,” in ed. Björn Dressel and Marco Bunte (eds.), *Politics and Constitutions in Southeast Asia* (New York: Routledge, 2017), 140–160.

They refuse to take their orders from elected governments as they see them unfit to administer the country. Civilian governments have limited or no control over such a “state within the state.” Neither a mafia nor a shadowy set of connections, Thailand’s deep state is grounded in law, especially in a set of emergency legislations. Fraenkel traces the origin of the prerogative state to martial law. Martial law indeed creates a parallel state, with its own rules, its own executive, and its own judiciary. While democratization affects the normative state, it does not affect the deep or prerogative state, which continues to function according to fully-fledged authoritarianism and to its own set of norms and hierarchies.

The history of the Thai police is one of shifting trajectories between the prerogative and the normative state, between the realm of the highly militarized deep state and that of the traditional civilian sphere under government control. Since the 1950 Naresuan meeting of army strongman Sarit Thanarat and police chief Phao Sriyanond with US officials,⁸⁷ a meeting that can, in many ways, be understood as the birth moment of Thailand’s deep state, the police and the army have been in a relationship of competition for the control of the state’s security apparatus. In this political competition, authoritarian policing of political activities is a key instrument of control. As Paul Chambers puts it, “Civil – military relations in terms of Thailand’s internal security turn on the question of who – civilians or soldiers – exerts more authority over the maintenance of order in emergency situations, counter-insurgency and counter-terror programs, domestic intelligence gathering, daily policing and border control.”⁸⁸

Phao and Sarit had together established a strong dictatorship founded on police-military cooperation, until Phao was ultimately defeated by Sarit in 1957. By eliminating Phao, Sarit did in fact expel the police from the deep state. As Ben Anderson puts it, “By the coups of 1957 and 1958, Sarit destroyed the power of the police, and made the army, which he controlled, the undisputed master of Thai political life.”⁸⁹ Since then, whenever the police threaten to become more powerful than the army, the latter stages a military coup.⁹⁰ By gaining and maintaining control

⁸⁷ Hyun, “Integrating a Nation from the Margins.”

⁸⁸ Paul Chambers, “In the Shadow of the Soldier’s Boot: Assessing Civil–Military Relations in Thailand,” in Marc Askew (ed.), *Legitimacy Crisis in Thailand* (Chiang Mai: Silkworm, 2010), 204.

⁸⁹ Anderson, “Withdrawal Symptoms: Social and Cultural Aspects of the October 6 Coup,” 26.

⁹⁰ This rationale explains in part the Sarit Thanarat coup against Phao Sriyanond in 1957 and 1958, the 1971 coup against Police Chief Prasert Ruchirawong, the 2006 coup against elected politician Thaksin Shinawatra, and the 2014 coup against his sister Yingluck Shinawatra.

over the deep state, the military has displaced the police to the periphery of the bureaucratic polity, potentially putting it under the orders of the elected government – a move the police resists by continuing to practice, in a rather autonomous fashion, authoritarian policing of political activities. This rivalry best accounts for the evolution of practices and norms of policing in contemporary Thailand, as exemplified in the proliferation of competing emergency legislations (martial law versus emergency decrees), empowering security forces to derogate from the normative state.

Therefore, current efforts at exporting “democratic policing” by introducing more decentralization in the Thai police structure might be, in their current form, misguided. As Bayley puts it, “Police structures should not be read as a symptom of governmental character, because identical command structures can accommodate regimes of vastly different types.”⁹¹ Moreover, if the Thai police is at present highly centralized, with a police chief reporting directly to the prime minister, it is de facto highly autonomous: decentralizing it might make it even more autonomous.

10.6 Conclusion: On Modernization, Regime Type, and Policing

Thailand’s history of policing is one of continuity rather than discontinuity. From the early 1950s onwards, methods of authoritarian policing have flourished on the backdrop of anticommunist/proroyalist acts.⁹² They have empowered security forces to conduct extrajudicial killings, arbitrary arrests, torture, and enforced disappearances of key enemies of the state while shielding them from prosecution by granting them full judicial immunity. Tyrell Haberkorn considers the number of unresolved cases of enforced disappearances since 1952 to amount to

Paul Chambers identifies the following coups as being at least partly motivated by the need to constrain police powers: 1957, 1958, 1971, 1991, 2006, and 2014. Chambers, “Securing an Alternative Army,” 110.

⁹¹ Bayley, *Patterns of Policing*, 73.

⁹² Tyrell, quoting Jaran Kosanan, provides a full list: “Act on Communism of 2476 [1933], Amended Act on Communism of 2478 [1935], Anti-Communist Activities Act of 2495 [1952], Junta Announcement No. 12 (issued on 22 October 2501 [1958]), Junta Announcement No. 15 (issued on 27 October 2501 [1958]), Act on the Control of Anti-Communist Activities Defendants of 2505 [1962], Act Amending Junta Announcement No. 12 of 2506 [1963], Act (version 2) on the Control of Anti-Communist Activities Defendants of 2506 [1963], Act (version 3) on the Control of Anti-Communist Activities Defendants of 2511 [1968], Anti-Communist Activities Act of 2512 [1969], Junta Announcement No. 12 (issued on 22 November

roughly 5,000.⁹³ even if some police officers were prosecuted, no one has ever been convicted, let alone punished. Meanwhile, as of 2022, Martial law remains in permanent force in about half of all provinces of Thailand.⁹⁴ Authoritarian methods of policing experimented with and developed during periods of dictatorship are remarkably resilient. One of the key variables pertains to the military versus civilian control of policing at large – even though the line between military and civilian security forces appears at best rather blurred. In the words of the Royal Thai Police Reform Commission in the early 2010s, the RTP is regarded as “the fourth branch of the armed forces,”⁹⁵ along with the Army, the Navy, and the Air Force.⁹⁶ The Thai police was and remains an “alternative military,”⁹⁷ a political actor engaged in power struggles with the military to which “political policing” is instrumental to survival.

In the context of Thailand, regime type, either civilian or military, democratic or authoritarian, and any combination thereof, does not significantly impact the level of violence being used to quell dissent (protesters, activists) nor crime (drug users). This is explained by the fact that the authoritarian nature of the state is largely autonomous from electoral politics – therefore, so far, democratization of electoral politics has not led

2514 [1971]), Junta Announcement No. 78 (issued on 16 February 2515 [1972]), Junta Announcement No. 199 (issued on 10 August 2515 [1972]), NARC Order No. 5 (issued on 6 October 2519 [1976]), NARC Order No. 8 (issued on 6 October 2519 [1976]), NARC Order No. 14 (issued on 6 October 2519 [1976]), NARC Order No. 25 (issued on 17 October 2519 [1976]), NARC Order No. 43 (issued on 21 October 2519 [1976]), Ministry of Interior Announcement on the Restriction of Printed Material (issued on 6 October 2520 [1977]), Anti-Communist Activities Act of 2522 [1979]), Ministry of Interior Announcement on the Restriction of Printed Material (issued on 6 June 2523 [1980]), and Ministry of Interior Announcement on the Restriction of Printed Materials (6 November 2523 [1980]).” Haberkorn, *In Plain Sight*, 250; see Jaran Kosanan, *Law, Rights, and Liberties in Thai Society: Parallel Lines from 1932 to the Present* (Bangkok: Coordinating Group for Religion in Society, 2528 [1985]), 71–75.

⁹³ “By conservative, partial estimates of the scattered cases of disappearance from 1952 to the present that I mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, there are at least 179 unresolved cases of disappearance, and this number grows to over 5,000 if one adds the suspected deaths that occurred during the *thang daeng* killings in 1972 and the ‘War on Drugs’ in 2002.” Haberkorn, *In Plain Sight*, 186.

⁹⁴ Martial law is in force in 31 provinces and 185 districts of Thailand’s 77 provinces, including most of the provinces along Thailand’s border with Myanmar, Laos, Cambodia, and Malaysia. Martial law is in force in almost all border areas as well as the Deep South.

⁹⁵ Quoted in Glendinning, “Police Reform in Thailand Post-2006,” 372.

⁹⁶ Chambers, “Securing an Alternative Army.” This is exemplified by the Democracy Monument erected in the heart of the old Bangkok: the monument features a statue of the Constitution on its golden tray surrounded by four obelisks representing the three branches of the Thai Armed Forces and the Police.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

to a democratization of the state apparatus nor to “democratic policing.” Brodeur argued in the 1980s that policing, whether democratic or authoritarian, is always a political means of maintaining a preferred sociopolitical order.⁹⁸ Authoritarian as opposed to democratic policing might rather be a function of perceived threats to the sociopolitical order than to regime type. Then, authoritarian practices of policing can in some circumstances inversely correlate with levels of democracy.

This claim finds some support in the pattern of *lèse-majesté* cases filed from the 1950s until now. One of the first cases of *lèse-majesté* occurred in 1946, at a time of great democratization and parliamentarization of Thai political life – but also of fading monarchism.⁹⁹ The number of cases soared from the 2000s onwards, a time of democratization – but also of rising anti-monarchism.¹⁰⁰ Benedict Anderson took notice of this paradox in the late 1970s: “not long after liberal democratic government was installed and censorship abolished, prosecutions for lese majeste began to be inaugurated.”¹⁰¹ By contrast, at present, as the military is firmly in power, *lèse-majesté* prosecutions have ceased entirely.¹⁰² Besides *lèse-majesté*, cases of enforced disappearances have also dramatically increased during the “democratic parenthesis” of the 1970s, while continuing to pile up under the elected governments of Thaksin and Yingluck Shinawatra. There lies a *prima facie* puzzle, which can be solved by thinking not in terms of regime type but of regime stability – whether in authoritarian or democratic settings.

⁹⁸ Brodeur, “High Policing and Low Policing.”

⁹⁹ Prominent jurist Yut Saeng U-Thai was prosecuted for explaining on radio the meaning and scope of the king’s powers. The case was later dismissed.

¹⁰⁰ Serhat Ünaldi, “Working towards the Monarchy and Its Discontents: Anti-Royal Graffiti in Downtown Bangkok,” *Journal of Contemporary Asia* 44(3) (July 3, 2014): 377–403, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00472336.2013.842260>.

¹⁰¹ Anderson, “Withdrawal Symptoms,” 23.

¹⁰² Eugénie Méribeau, “Thailand in 2018: Military Dictatorship under Royal Command,” in Daljit Singh and Malcolm Cook (ed.), *Southeast Asian Affairs 2019* (Singapore: ISEAS–Yusof Ishak Institute Singapore, 2019), 333.