This is one of a set of “random narratives” to complement our statistical findings in regard to civil war onsets. This is a draft completed on June 19, 2005; comments welcome.

Our model predicts 1.5 civil wars for Thailand over the course of the past half-century. One civil war occurred. This was a communist insurgency with an onset in 1967 that lasted until 1980-81. It occurred in the places and for reasons we predict. In the north and northeast of the country, with rough terrain and bad access for the regime, insurgency was favored. Furthermore, the civil war benefited from foreign support by well-established communist organizations in China and Laos. An exogenous shock (foreign support) and rough terrain are conditions that we have claimed favor insurgency.

However, the insurgency onset did not occur in the years we thought Thailand was most vulnerable, when instability and anocracy marked Thai politics. These political variables did not have the effects in Thailand of serving as a signal of weak state power as our theory says they have done more generally. We will also discuss why Thailand was such a borderline case of civil war in a region where civil wars were rife. We show why the communists had to make alliances with the Hmong and the Laotians in order to get an insurgency underway, and why these separate alliances made it difficult to develop a longer-term unified challenge to state power. This explains why the communist insurgency in Thailand was less successful than in Laos, Cambodia, or Vietnam.

In our original coding of cases (Fearon and Laitin 2003) Thailand was the only country in Indo-China (including India and China) that experienced no civil war onset in the period under study (and thus no “tic” on the x axis). With our model predicting 1.5 civil wars for this period, we had some explaining to do. In the search for why there was no successful insurgency, we read carefully the secondary literature. In support of our model’s expectations, expert sources document that in the north and northeast,
beginning in 1967, a successful insurgency got underway. Indeed, this case (and others like it), where you have government armies hunting down “insurgents” in places where there is no media coverage and where the locals are not linked to NGOs, or any other outside sources, one should expect that deaths are ignored or undercounted. This is in part due to unreported village massacres by government troops. Or the coding problem might have been a result of the fact that Thailand looked peaceful in a regional context. Next to Vietnam and Cambodia, the level of insurgency in Thailand was nearly contained. To those looking through the lens of the NLF, the Thai communist insurgency was a failure. But compared to Northern Ireland, there were many deaths, and the Thai communist insurgency easily meets our criteria for a civil war. Indeed, one of the benefits of doing our random sample of case studies is that it allows us to make an estimate of how accurate our coding of the dependent variable is for all cases.

In this narrative, we address four separate questions. First, can our model successfully account for the civil war from 1967 to 1981? Here we point to the random shocks from foreign interference, taking into account the geography of Thailand where the state would be especially weak, as the conditions favorable to insurgency. This, we argue, is consistent with our interpretation of the statistical model.

Second, why was the communist insurgency in Thailand, taking place in a region where such insurgencies spread throughout the country, so successfully contained (and thereby not even recorded as a civil war in most datasets). Here, the secondary sources point to several factors. Consistent with our model, the increasing wealth of Thailand both decreased the availability of recruits for an extended insurgency and (with vast American support) sustained a powerful and professional military. In this sense, Thai historiography reveals the importance of coherently managed and information-rich counter-insurgency. Less consistent with our model, Thai historiography reveals that the communists, since they worked only in the far north, the northeast, and the south, had to appeal to the ethnic/national aspirations of the local populations, as these areas were not Thai by nationality. But this strategy had the long-term cost of the failure of the communists to create a unified insurgent front, thereby limiting the potential damage of a three-pronged attack on the Thai state. A final factor – Thai rural social structure, made up mostly of yeoman farmers – is something that our model has ignored. Eighty-six percent of the agricultural land in
Thailand is in relatively small parcels of 1.6 to 28.8 hectares. Only four percent of the farms are greater than eighty hectares. And only 7.3 percent of the holdings of all agricultural properties are by renters.\(^1\) That most Thai peasants had property rights to their fields made them far less available for any insurgency that could potentially undermine those rights.\(^2\]

Third, in the period that Thailand suffered from both anocracy and instability from 1978-81, and again in 1992, why were there no proto-insurgencies to take advantage of what we interpret as state weakness to grow into full insurgencies? Or to put this in terms of our model, does the spell of anocracy and instability in Thailand suggest that there are contexts in which these factors are not signals of state weakness? If that is the case, we should look for intervening variables that would indicate whether instability and/or anocracy would be seen by potential rebels as signs of state weakness. Thai historiography points to a relatively unified Thai establishment, involving the monarchy, the bureaucracy, the military and the political class. This establishment suffered through numerous internecine battles (thus the instability) but it had sufficient common interests to unify against an external (to the establishment) threat to their right to rule. At least this unity lasted until Thailand was sufficiently rich such that the GDP/cap variable comes into play and the model predicts a lower than the world average chance of civil war.

Fourth, a long-simmering opposition in the Malay-speaking Muslims who populate the provinces of Satun, Songkla, Pattani, Yala, and Narathiwat – collectively represented as the Patani region – has caused sufficient violence to qualify as setting off a second Thai civil war in 2001. To be sure, the onset was shortly after the economic crisis of 1998, when Thai per capita GNP was declining (and therefore the probability for a civil war onset rising). But as of 1999, the probability for an onset was less than one percent, hardly making Thailand susceptible to a civil war. This case is thus troubling for our model. Here we emphasize the break-down in military

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2. In light of this point, it might be asked why are there so many insurgencies in Africa where nearly all farmers are through their lineages landholders? A preliminary answer is that African rebellions in the postindependence era rarely if ever have a peasant base. Typical African rebellions involve not peasants seeking lower taxation from landowners but political entrepreneurs competitively seeking control over the tax base of the state. Asian rebellions are far more peasant-based, and therefore Thailand’s peasant economy acted as a deterrent to the kind of revolution that was experienced in Vietnam and China.
coherence (especially in the south) as the explanation for the high levels of violence – an explanation that is consistent with our theoretical model.

**Why a Civil War in Thailand (1967 to 1980-81)?**

*Was it a civil war?*

In August 1965 government troops and the Communist Party of Thailand (CPT) clashed in the Northeast of the country, near the Mekong River and the border with Laos. There were only a few casualties, but the CPT called this the “beginning of people’s war in Thailand”. By 1967 (on our criteria), Thailand a civil war had begun. In that year, the communist insurgency had over 100 deaths (93 to insurgents and 33 to government forces). By 1972, the accumulated deaths of government forces and insurgents (killed at a ratio of 1:2.8) was 1,590. By 1973 the ratio had reversed to 1:0.7, such that the government was losing more personnel than the insurgents. In the mid 1970s, when the estimated 6,500 insurgents (2,400 in the Northeast; 2,100 in the North; 1,600 in the mid-South; and 400 in the predominantly Thai central area) were able to procure modern weapons, casualties increased substantially. However, by 1982, the fighting was virtually over, and in December, more that 3,000 CPT members surrendered to the government forces en masse.³

*The foreign sources of insurrectionary activity*

The principal source of insurgent technology was from abroad. In 1922, the Comintern established a Far East Bureau in Shanghai, and in 1923 six CCP cadres were sent to work in Thailand. In 1927, the first Siamese intellectuals joined the party, but they were carefully tracked by the Thai government that had already begun deporting Chinese agents (Morell and Samudavaija, 78). In 1951 a Maoist strategy was adopted by the party’s front, the Thai Liberation Organization (TLO). Some 700 cadres were sent to China for training in leadership roles from 1952-1969.⁴ Moreover, North

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⁴ In the government’s counter-insurgency operations, the first captured insurgent (named “Serm”) was a Sino-Thai born in Bangkok, who went to China as a young man for a traditional Chinese education. He had
Vietnam, beginning in 1962, graduated more than 100 Thai and Thai-Lao each year from the Hoa Binh School near Hanoi for soldiers and low-level cadres (Prizzia 1985, chap. 2, esp. 15; see also Race 1974, 85-6).

There were several separate strands in Thailand’s early insurrectionary period. In the early 1960s, a communist group organized in North Thailand by the Pathet Lao to fight against authorities in Vientiane. They returned home after the Geneva Accords of 1962 and ceased to play a role in Thailand. In a second strand, in 1960 the CPT organized regional branches, one in the North and another in the Northeast, for a Mao-type uprising. In a third strand, the Meo trainees from the Hoa Binh School returned to their villages in 1964. Their propaganda spoke of an independent Meo kingdom. Medical supplies were given to villagers to win trust, and young men were recruited for external training (Race 1974, 92-6).

The Insurgency is sustained in Mountains

The insurgency could only operate successfully in the mountainous regions (hovering over jungles) in the north and northeast. The Northern region is splintered by mountain ranges and is diverse ethnolinguistically in a large number of “hill tribes” among whom the communists operated. In fact, Race (1974, 87, 111) provides evidence that the communist leadership, knowing the tactical weakness of the Thai army in upland zones, deliberately provoked military deployment in the correct expectation that theThai army would bomb villages indiscriminately, in a way that would enhance recruitment of hill peoples into the insurgency (Race 1974, 87, 111).

The resources that sustained the war

The Northeast region has natural resources that have played into the insurgency. The Thai government long feared that the agricultural practices if the hill tribes were destroying the immensely valuable teak forests in those hills, and the conflict of interest between the hill tribes and the state had incendiary implications. For example, in 1967 Border Patrol Police (BPP, founded in 1953) officials came to Huai Chom Poo village in response to illegal tree felling and burning in the traditional farming practice, in order to

been recruited by the Chinese Foreign Ministry to re-learn Thai and to participate in a rebellion on his return (Morell and Samudavani 1981, 81-3).
get their regular extortionary pay-off. In this case, when BPP officials arrived, it set off a gun battle. In response, the police burned down the village, killed the animals and destroyed stored grain (Race 1974, 98-99). The lack of enforceable contracts in the market for extortion created incentives for those being extorted to prefer insurgency over the payment of apparently escalating fees to government officials.

Also important for the transformation of a quite limited insurgency into a civil war was the opium trade. The Thai government by international agreement proscribed opium sales, which brought in an estimated US$3 million to Thailand in 1964. Instead of enforcing its laws, the government created an “explosive” (Race 1974, 89) atmosphere through a subterfuge. It quietly permitted the trade to go on, relying principally on two groups of demobilized soldiers of Chiang’s 49th Division that did not go to Taiwan, but had escaped from Yunnan to Thailand. Many of these soldiers were Shans, and they prospered in Thailand serving as underground international merchants in the opium trade. Government officials permitted this to go on, and accepted bribes for their complicity. The trade became a source of subsistence for the locals, and a source of wealth for officials in a way that could not have been publicly acknowledged. Besides kickbacks, state officials received help from the nationalist Shans in monitoring communist activity. This backfired, however, in July 1967 when an “Opium War” broke out due to a refusal by locals to pay a “tax” to the KMT remnant armies. This local bloody conflict drew in the BPP that was already taking casualties in the insurgency. Failure of the BPP drew in the Thai army, which was not trained in jungle warfare, and had no hill-tribe intelligence. The army therefore suffered heavy casualties from sniping and booby traps, and responded by napalming entire villages and by resettling populations of villagers suspected of being communist. The ineffective response to the Opium War thereby helped the CPT to recruit communist insurgents from the new refugee population (Race 1974, 99-104).

Student Leadership

The onset of the communist insurgency was entirely a rural affair, far from Bangkok and the centers of commerce. However, urban intellectuals helped change the course of the insurgency once it was already underway. The story begins in November 1972, when Bangkok-based students got tacit government support for a weeklong demonstration against Japanese imports. The students then turned their new organizational skills against the military
rule of Thailand. In early 1973, they protested against the National Executive Council order allowing the military government to take control over the judiciary, and the decree was rescinded. In May they protested against government officials using the game reserves for their hunting pleasures. In June, the National Student Center of Thailand (NSCT) organized demonstrations against the expulsion of students for satirizing the regime, and they were reinstated. The NSCT on its own began drafting a national constitution. By October 1973, 400,000 people organized by students marched to a Democracy Monument, and this ended in violence, even though the government agreed to their demands. What the Maoists could not do in the North and Northeast, the students (quoting from Rousseau and Lincoln) could do, in overthrowing the military regime, and accomplished “by the children of its leading bureaucrats.”

By November after some concessions were made, the NSCT factionalized. In fact, the violence of October was in large part due to divisions between moderate and radical students. The radicals were the lower-class engineering and technical students who in October took on the responsibility of physical protection of fellow demonstrators. Given their gang culture, they were well prepared for violence. The moderates were the university students, who mostly came from the middle classes (but not the children of the wealthy dominant in the high bureaucracy). With these two elements within, the NSCT was in pitched internal battle for control and leadership. The leader of the technical students (Seksan) was at one point deposed. He then created a rump group. By January 1974, there were twenty-three new student groups. Ironically, student factionalism helped depose the military government, as the disunity was the source of the near anarchy in the streets that so threatened the regime. However, the leading student organizations in January 1974 were clear in trying to deter mass demonstrations in fear of large scale violence, and joined in a public appeal to refrain from demonstrations (Zimmerman 1974, 509-28)

Very few students joined the CPT from 1973-76. But the numbers began to rise in 1976 as the wide array of students from all social backgrounds who had been involved in the 1973 uprising saw membership in CPT as a form of protection from a government crackdown on dissidents. Furthermore, those who had volunteered for a program in 1974 to experience the realities of village life were also held in suspicion (Morell and Samudavanija 1979 319-23). The 1976 coup, justified “to protect Thailand from the communist menace” chased many opposition leaders
(students, farm and labor leaders) into the hills to escape repression, and these became leadership cadres for the communist movement they initially knew virtually nothing about (Morell and Samudavanija 1979, 315).

The flood of several hundred intellectuals to the hills continued in 1977. In January, for example, sixty-six lecturers from Teachers’ Training Colleges and ten nurses went to the hills. In mid-1977 two former government officials announced they had joined the CPT movement. A leading MP from the Northeast who was a tribal (named Boonyen Wotthong) joined the CPT after parliament was disbanded. This flood provided intellectual leadership to “a scattered, low-level, uncoordinated insurgency, which has spread into nearby districts and provinces…” (Morell and Samudavanija 1979, 325, 329-30, 340). Technical support from student groups in the insurgencies helped turned the ratio of deaths, insurgent to government, in favor of the insurgents.

US Provocation

The United States from the early 1950s sought to play a role enhancing “stabilization” in Thailand by “bolstering and maintaining the power, wealth, and influence of elite leaders in the midst of domestic upheavals and external threats.” In 1973 Thailand replaced Vietnam as headquarters for the USAF in Southeast Asia. Yet the US could not control local events, such as the ousting of US client Prime Minister Field Marshal Thanom in 1973 (Girling 1981, 91-2). Ironically, US assistance programs that brought the government closer to the people actually alienated the rural populations in the minority areas, and US weapons enhanced the ability of the army to terrorize locals (Morell and Samudavanija 1981, 91). It could well be the case that US assistance emboldened the army in 1967 to move into the North and Northeast with tactics that upped the ante in a proto-insurgency and helped it evolve into a civil war. [Were they getting US c.i. advice?] While foreign interference from the Chinese, Laotian and Vietnamese communists along with the insurgent-friendly terrain in the North and Northeast were the principal conditions favoring a civil war, the student movement and the backfiring US support of the government, enhanced the death count.

Why was the Civil War Largely Contained?

Counter-insurgency matters
The Thai army and police organized early and assiduously for the possibility of insurgency. A universal draft was instituted in 1904 to handle rebellions in the north and northeast, in response to centralized administration (Girling 1981, 52-5). As noted, in 1953, the Thai government founded the BPP. In 1963 the BPP began an intensive survey of the hill tribes, and for administering the area, it supervised the construction of short take-off and landing (STOL) airfields. The BPP then selected five young men from each village for training in a variety of skills (agriculture, veterinary, medicine), and used these men for local information. Also the BPP chose some thirty-two villages by 1965 as “key” for surveillance, and the region thereby got a permanent BPP presence (Race 1974, 90-1).

The BPP was not the only suppression unit. Added to the fray in support of the government were the Civilian-Police-Military Headquarters (CPM), the Communist Suppression Operations Command (CSOC) and the Internal Security Operations Command (ISOC) (Morell and Samudavanija, 1979, 316).

Throughout the 1970s, these organizations continued to learn from past failure. The counter-insurgency tactics of the ISOC, according to Colonel Han Pongsitanond, former chief of operations in ISOC (in an interview with the authors) was slow to develop an effective counter-insurgency strategy. The army, he pointed out, was divided as to how to respond to the communist insurgency. Group I wanted to treat it as a foreign invasion, and advocated border security. Group II saw it as criminality, and wanted this to be a police (not a military) action for disobeying the Anticommmunist Act. Group III saw it as a response to societal grievance, and advocated reform, to counter the successful political mobilization by the CPT. However, he pointed out, Group III was a tiny minority. While Morell and Samudavinija (1981, 84-7) use this interview to highlight poor understanding of the problem by the military, one can also see this as an example of open debate in the army for purposes of strategic updating. In any event, “incidence of insurgency increased dramatically from 1973 to 1979 but dropped significantly in 1980-81.” Prizzia (1985, 22-3) accounts for this drop through an analysis of a split within the CPT. But also consequential (and here we have counter-insurgency learning), the government instituted an “open arms” program to encourage defection. Also the later counter insurgency tactics of General Saiyud Kerdpol involved Civil-Military Police joint operations, socio-economic packages for the poor,
and self-defense units in the villages. These programs helped reverse the insurgent tide (Prizzia 1985, 22-3).

Rural Social Structure

On the question of why there was no rural-based rebellion among Thais, our model demands that we first examine terrain. Among the Thai population in central Thailand, most of the farmers are in valleys in lowlands, with fifty percent of agricultural land in paddy zones, making insurgency for rice farmers difficult. (Twenty-two percent of agriculture is in upland crops, but this is the area in which the minorities live, and it was there that the rebellions took place).

But there is a second factor explaining rural quiescence among the Thai population. In differentiating Thailand from other Southeast Asian societies, most analysts point to the fact that Thai peasants, going back to the 19th century, were largely owners of their land, and were not subject as was the case in Vietnam to intolerable ownership and tax deprivations.

This fact was highlighted in a report on a peasant research project (Sharp 1950, 157-61), conducted in the village of Bang Chan, twenty miles northeast of Bangkok, and in the core of the rice-producing area of central Thailand. The study enumerated a rural population of 1,600 with a majority of them landowners. At the time of the study, there was an abundance of food and no recall of any famine.

In Sharp’s village in the 1950s, there was considerable sophisticated knowledge of factions and events on the national political scene. During the 1949 coup, villagers distrusted official pronouncements and therefore relied on fellow villagers who traveled to Bangkok to supply objective news. They supported the incumbent Pibul regime, but were critical of its corruption and inefficiency; and they blamed his rival Nai Pridi for association with the shooting of King Ananda, in an assassination mystery that was never solved. Answers by the peasants to sociological surveys showed a rather sophisticated landowning yeomanry, not easily subject to CPT propaganda.

The peasantry was not only well informed, but was and remains capable of collective action. To be sure, Sharp’s study (1950, 159) found many laggards in the town; but the surprising fact was how many wanted improvements and had consumption desires for luxury items. It is these seekers of luxury who chafed at the fact that “there is no adequate structure of local community government” and decried “the ineffectiveness of the headman system” that goes back to 1932, whose incumbents were responsible only to those above them in Bangkok. This arrangement meant that the Buddhist priesthood was the effective representative of the population but was an insufficiently effective voice to express the interests of the modernizers.

A related example (from Jumbala and Mitprasat 1997, 210-14) reports on the mobilization to meet what peasants saw as the crisis that would occur if the state were able to build the Kaeng Krung Dam. A feasibility study was performed in the early 1980s, and the cabinet approved the project in 1989. But villagers opposed it. They were able to build alliances with lower-middle-class townspeople with rural connections (who had alerted villagers of the project) and with teachers and bureaucrats who could articulate expert views. The project was halted through their efforts.

The point here is that in the central region, Thai peasants were a sophisticated landowning yeomanry, not subject to CPT recruitment efforts. This leads to the hypothesis that other things equal, land ownership by the peasantry should lower the probability of civil war.

*Recruitment among disparate minorities*

Regional autonomy remains both the strength and the weakness of the insurgency in Thailand, and no one could build a national communist organization that linked the regional efforts. In the Northeast, the insurgents were principally Lao speakers who formed “forest fighters” and got sanctuary along the Mekong River. This organization employed Maoist recruitment strategies, and tried to build up cadres through education and local benefits to the population. In the North, the hill tribes were the most disaffected, among them the Meo (these are Hmong speakers, who in Laos were recruited by the CIA as anti-communists; in Thailand, they were recruited by the communists). Finally, in the South, there are remnants of the largely Chinese “Malayan Communist Party” that was driven out of Malaya in the 1950s after the “emergency”. This army collected taxes, administered
justice and recruited for its armed bands. In the south there is also a deprived Malay-speaking Muslim peasantry that was exploited by Chinese entrepreneurs, who became separatists. There is also an ethnic-Thai southern wing of the CPT (Girling 1981, 258-67). The inability of any of these groups to move inwards, towards the Thai heartland, marginalized them. Furthermore, given their separate ethnic organizations, they could not coordinate as a single insurgent movement to challenge the Thai center. However, a set of political groupings claiming to represent the Muslim Malay-speaking populations eventually conditioned their rebellion not on communist ideology, but on linguistic and religious difference, and were able to sustain a highly fragmented insurgency beginning in 2001. This civil war onset will be discussed in a separate section.

Country Wealth

In 1967, with a civil war onset, Thailand’s GDP/capita was $1,226, which represented a 10.4 percent annual growth rate in the twenty-year period from 1947, the first year for which we have GDP data on Thailand. Obviously, rapid growth in the country did not deter insurgency. By 1982, the GDP/capita had reached $2,217, which was above the regional mean ($1,797), but below the world mean (3,651) for all country years. Thailand would cross the world mean in 1992. The increased wealth of the country is portrayed in our Figure 1, which in the three successive periods of instability and anocracy beginning in 1969, each had a lower peak. Thus over the course of the 1970s, Thailand’s wealth made it more and more possible to contain rural insurgency. [We don’t say “how”, and these narratives are designed to show the mechanisms supporting the link between RHS and LHS variables. Is this because the country is more urbanized, and urban rebellions are harder to sustain? Is it because of contentment, and thus recruitment of rebels is harder to do? Or is it because wealth helped Thailand create a more effective security bureaucracy, thereby deterring potential rebels?]

Rural social structure, counter-insurgency learning, and ultimately high country wealth, consistent with our model, cauterized the civil war, and nearly prevented a rural insurgency from meeting our criteria of a civil war. Also apparently playing a role in diminishing the magnitude of the conflict was the ethnic divisions among strands of the insurgency that was organized by communists who did not want to play the separatist card, a factor that was not considered in our model.
Anocracy and Instability: Why Coincident with Peace?

Figure 1 illustrates a fundamental problem with our model predictions. The several humps in the predictions of civil war onset reflect scores on instability and anocracy. Indeed instability has been endemic in Thai politics. Since 1932 and the overthrow of the absolute monarchy until the early 1990s, there have been nineteen coup attempts, thirteen of which succeeded. In this period, twenty Prime Ministers have headed about forty-eight cabinets. Of these cabinets, twenty-four were military governments, eight were military-dominated, and sixteen were civilian. Fifteen constitutions have been promulgated and eighteen elections have been run, four of them bringing in new leadership while fourteen perpetuated the government in power. Nearly all elections had reserved seats and other mechanisms to assure continued military dominance, and this is why these systems were coded as anocratic (Neher 1992, 586-7). Why was this instability (along with semi-democratic constitutions that were anocratic) not a signal for insurgents to take advantage of a weak government?

Our argument here is that instability and anocracy are noisy measures of state weakness, and it is possible to score positively on both anocracy and instability and still project the image to potential insurgents of a strong state. Indeed this is what the Thai ruling groups were able to manage. As Neher argues (1992, 605) argues, “elections and coups rarely have obstructed government processes or undermined the principal underpinnings of the state: nation, king, and religion.” And Morell and Samudavanija (1981, 77) set as the leitmotif of their book on Thailand a country in which “military, monarchy and bureaucracy relating to one another in established elite patterns”.

The Monarchy

The foundation of the Thai kingdom goes back to Ayuthaya in 1350. The myth of “the great kings of Ayuthaya…and of their successors in the present Chakri dynasty has endured…they have become a major source of cultural inspiration and patriotic fervor, sedulously promoted by the state authorities, enshrined in ceremonies, and inculcated in the schools” (Girling 1981, 17, 24). The modern Thai state goes back to the rule of King Chulalongkorn, whose memory is also invoked as a symbol of Thai unity, and its successful parrying of colonial rule.
To be sure, in 1932 the monarchy was overthrown and the institution stripped of its most significant powers. From 1932-57 the monarchy was kept at arms’ length from the military rulers who emasculated royal prerogatives and defanged royalist intrigues. Yet King Bhumibol (who acceded to the thrown in 1950 after his brother’s death) in the wake of the military coups of 1957-58 took advantage of state instability to revive the monarchy as an institution (Hewison 1997, 58-74).

Bhumibol was able to do this because of the widespread acceptance of legitimate monarchy by all factions of Thai social structure. Even the 1932 overthrow has become portrayed as part of the Chakri dynasty’s strategic plan for societal democratization. There is also an elite compact among members of all factions in the society that forbids criticism of the monarch or the monarchy in public (Hewison 1997, 59-60). The sacral coordination of institutional respect works as a constraint against attempts to dismantle the Thai state.

This leads to a conjecture that merits further testing: if a new state had a monarchy in its precolonial past that covered largely the same territorial zone as the contemporary state, it will be less likely to face a successful insurgency even under conditions of anocracy and instability if descendents of that monarchy continue to reign. The intuition here is that a monarch provides a focal point in times of crisis, such that competing actors condition their behavior on the moves of the monarch. This focal point lowers the expectation by potential rebels that government instability or regime transition will make it less likely that the government could respond in a coherent way to an insurgency. The monarch therefore reduces the expected value of rebellion in the times that other regimes would be vulnerable. This is a conjecture that can be put to test, in which the interaction of monarchy and either anocracy or instability would be significantly less likely to produce a civil war onset than non-monarchy in interaction with anocracy and instability.6

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6. We should distinguish not only monarchy vs. non-monarchy, but whether the country spanned several monarchies, in which no monarch could have widespread legitimacy.
Although King Chulalongkorn was compelled to accept a French ultimatum for territorial concessions to Cambodia in 1893, in 1896 he managed to broker an Anglo-French agreement that guaranteed Siam’s autonomy as a buffer between the two European empires, thereby avoiding imperial control. Although an autocrat, Chulalongkorn could not (with the French and British empires straddling his territory) lead his country into disastrous wars. Moreover, his neighbors were European empires and not regional rivals. War was not possible for him. This made for a prosperous economic environment, and with imported Chinese labor, many infrastructure projects were completed. In this environment, the Thai bureaucracy was rationalized by organizing ministries by function. Paid officials were sent to the provinces as part of a rationalization of administrative units (called *monthon*). This is the period in which the king organized a professional armed service. Around 1916, a Civil Service School and a Military Academy were created, and were open to non-nobles (Girling 1981, 48-9).

The Thai bureaucracy (albeit with its Byzantine structure) became the source of a new theory of civil service organization (Riggs, 1966). But this may miss the longstanding organizational loyalty and centralized vision that is preserved in the Thai civil service. Consider Missingham’s (1997, 155-7) study of two schools in Northeast Thailand. One was created in 1964 and the other in 1968, with both relying upon teachers who are native Lao-Northeasterners, though not locally born into the villages in which they taught. The key point in the study is that these teachers operated in the Thai bureaucratic culture that included speaking Thai in public (and on their jobs), identifying with the central state and the bureaucracy, and keeping clear from everyday social life in the villages. Principals of these two schools created local Education Committees, but these committees were used to mobilize projects of interest to the principals rather than as sources of information about the community to the principal. Missingham emphasizes the enormous power of the central bureaucracy in defining the mission of ethnically distinct locals working in their own provinces.

Not only has the army and bureaucracy sustained a coherent Thai state, but the Thai social structure, build on four distinct pillars, each with clear interests to protect has been equally coherent, though by no means without conflict (Phongpaichit and Baker 1997, 21-41).
The first pillar of the Thai social structure is that of the Mandarins. They are not landowning nobility but a social class entrenched in the revenues from state service to the monarchy, traced back through family trees for centuries. They operate in the palace, in the army, and in the Ministry of Interior. Its leaders learned many of the techniques of colonial rule from neighboring countries. In the course of vast social change, the mandarins sought to use their influence in order to hold on to their senior bureaucratic positions without being subject to arbitrary transfer, and have been moderately successful in this regard.

The second pillar of the Thai ruling elite is that of the metropolitan business elite and technocrats. In the boom period of the late 1980s, business hired many of the technocrats because of vast economic expansion and need for talent but also to keep close ties with the government. When Prime Minister Chatichai (who was elected in 1988) began supporting provincial business and as a result emasculating the big business organizations, he was thrown out in a military coup in 1991 pushed by members of the second pillar, and the metropolitans got their man Anand Panyarachun (who had been a Foreign Ministry official and then a chairman of a textiles conglomerate), in power. These central business leaders and technocrats have successfully cultivated a close relationship with the military.

The third pillar is that of provincial business. In the 1980s, these business leaders became increasingly rich from cash crop expansion, from investing in trade and service businesses, from government tenders, and from a range of semi-legal businesses. Usually, each province had its single family gaining prominence, which then built a protection system along with an electoral base. Since these provincial constituencies control 90 percent of parliamentary seats, they were dominant in the electoral arena. Its party “Chart Thai” was the strongest party of the 1988 election, but was ousted in the 1991 coup, as it “came to stand for access to rents, patronage, protection and business opportunities…” It stood as well for parliamentary supremacy over the bureaucracy, over which they had less control.

The fourth pillar is the salariat. From the 1960s to mid 1980s, the white-collar working class in Thailand increased from .5 million to 4.5 million. Many of them are the student rebels of the 1970s who returned to Bangkok with a general amnesty. They failed at creating a mass-based party. For example, their New Force Party in the early 1980s got few votes, but they have been successful in the NGO route of protest and lobbying for a
free press, against corruption, and in 1991 they played a key role stopping
the re-imposition of military rule by mobilizing 500,000 protesters.

Beneath the pillars, the mass base of Thai society has remained
quiescent. The majority of them are still peasants. In the mid-1990s, some 30
million people, about 60 percent of the population, lived in the villages, but
class-wise they go from yeoman farmers to near-subsistence peasants. Many
have been drawn to the cities for work and have returned, perhaps more
sophisticated. Many use their political knowledge, as illustrated earlier, to
protest development schemes that threaten village integrity. But given the
yeoman core, farmers are hardly revolutionary. Complementary to the
yeoman farmers, to an increasing degree, urban workers are becoming a
social mass. From 1985-95, industrial labor doubled to three million. Yet
only eight percent of them are unionized. The government has imported
Chinese, Burmese and other workers to undercut the political potential of
domestic labor; and they have suppressed labor politics. Labor has many
grievances, but its political impact up till now has been minor.

Thai society is therefore multi-layered but stable. To be sure, there are
clear divisions among the pillars. The mandarinate prefers paternalistic rule
while the metropolitan business folk and technocrats want openness. But the
metropolitans side with the mandarinate in having a centralized vision of the
state in contrast to the goals of the provincial business leaders. But all pillars
have a common vision about the need for national autonomy. Among them
all, the CPT was viewed “as the local extension of an international secular
religion devoted, if not to foreign occupation, then certainly to the
destruction of Thailand’s … cultural autonomy.” This view justifies for the
entire elite the use of counter-insurgency methods (Kershaw 1982, 307).
And the Thai political leadership benefits – in terms of not facing a coherent
military threat to its role -- from a social structure in which the elites are
relatively unified and in which there is no coherent challenge coming from
either labor or the peasantry.

Our model identifies anocracy and political instability as correlates of
civil war onset. Our interpretation of these correlations is that these two
regime characteristics serve as signals to potential insurgent entrepreneurs
that the state is vulnerable, as its institutions can only be seen as traditional.
The Thai case does not undermine our theoretical interpretation. Rather, the
narrative herein suggests that our proxies for state vulnerability were not
good ones in the case of Thailand. Thailand suffered from instability and
anocracy, but these were not symptoms (in Thailand) of state vulnerability. The monarchy, the highly rationalized army and bureaucracy, the stable elite ruling structures, and the compliant peasantry and working classes all made for a state that has not looked to insurgent entrepreneurs (even with rapid constitutional shifts and indeterminate governing structures) as especially vulnerable to attack. \[We have not sufficiently distinguished theoretically cases such as Thailand, Italy, and France where instability does not signal to potential insurgents an opportunity to rebel compared to Ghana, Sierra Leone, and Nigeria, where instability was such a signal\]

Urban unrest cannot sustain an insurgency

Besides the constitutional crisis from 1956-58 (in which Thailand reached over a five per cent probability of a civil war onset), the period from 1969 through 1971 was the most propitious for a civil war onset in Thailand’s post World War II history, reaching a probability of 4.8 percent. Unlike the late 1950s, however, the early 1970s contained a spark that might well have, at least in the eyes of country experts, set off a civil war fire. It did not. Our argument is that the spark was urban induced, and thus far easier for state authorities to put out \[Indeed we make this argument for Japan, but haven’t fully nailed down why this is the case\].

The political situation in the years following 1969 invited unrest (Race 1973, 194-200). An elected government was overthrown in a military coup in 1971, but social conditions began to worsen. Inflation in 1972 raised rice prices one per cent per month, leading to devaluation, price controls, queues, hording, strikes, and in some places starvation. The crisis punctured the portrait of regime competence, and activated the students, who had formed in 1968 a National Student Center of Thailand (NSCT). Already, the military had abandoned positions as university rectors, mostly due to scandals, and thus there was less pressure on “deviant” students.

The NSCT mobilized against Decree 299 of 1972 on freedom of the judiciary. The “Thung Yai Affair” then fell into student laps. Evidently, the military covered up an illegal hunting expedition by calling it a “secret mission.” The students were able to expose this lie. Then came a huge protest over the physical beating and expulsion from Ramkhamhaeng University of nine students for a satirical publication, and the government lost face by reinstating the students and firing the rector who expelled them. Then came a demonstration against the handling of the rice crisis, and yet
another demonstration (in September 1972) against a “gag rule” banning outside speakers to universities. King Bhumiphol gave explicit support for student activities, and this set the stage for October.

The October 1972 crisis began with the arrest (for illegal assembly, later changed to communist treason) of those passing out pamphlets demanding a constitution. Protestors reached 50,000 at Thammasat University. Already (from the earlier incidents) public cynicism was rife and growing as the government’s daily announcements vacillated. Crowds swelled to 400,000 in a march from the University to the Palace, and the police responded with mass arrests.

The King negotiated a compromise, freeing the arrested and promising a constitution within a year. The NSCT agreed, but not Saeksan Prasertkul, who lead an affiliated group, and then remained at the Palace with 80,000 protestors who remained. Eventually Saeksan agreed to a truce, but in the early morning riot police had perpetrated a massacre. The city was in chaos, and casualties were about 1,000 [how many deaths?], as army and police units used machine guns, tanks, and helicopter gunships to fire on demonstrators. (In our coding, since no representatives of the state were killed, this does not constitute a civil war).

The King got Marshal Thanom to resign and appointed Professor Sanya Thammasak, rector of Thammasat University, as Prime Minister, and appealed for a cease fire. But since Thanom remained supreme commander, the public was not appeased. The army seized the radio stations. The new army commander, Kris Sivara, refused to call in troops from the countryside, and this refusal doomed the military triumvirate ruling Thailand into exile. Exile of the leadership ultimately defused the protest.

There was a similar set of incidents in the last bout of anocracy and instability, this time in the wake of the 1992 election. It was filled with corruption and vote-buying. The US was opposed to the Prime Minister-designate (on a claim that his billions of dollars in wealth was derived from drug smuggling), and stood behind General Suchinda as the new Prime Minister. Suchinda’s reign lasted only forty-eight days, and he faced massive demonstrations in May, 1992, in which hundreds died when the military tried to stop them. He faced opposition not only from civilians, but from other officer factions. As in the 1972 crisis, King Bhumibol stepped in, in May 1992, and forced Suchinda’s resignation. The king promised
amnesty to all who demonstrated, and promised as well constitutional provisions to limit military interventions in the future. The king (as mentioned earlier) supported the return of Anand Panyarachun, a well-respected technocrat, as Prime Minister, and he promised quick elections (Neher 1992, 599-604).

These two violent episodes suggest three general conclusions. First, the role of the King in supporting compromise among elite factions helped defuse violence, keeping it below the civil war threshold. Second, urban unrest without a rural base cannot easily sustain a civil war; in these cases the deaths were virtually all to the protesters, and none to the armed forces. Massacres by the state of urban populations are possible, but it is much more difficult for rebels to sustain urban insurgencies against the state. [Do we account for why this is hard; do we see evidence of the difficulty of building an informer proof organization? Do we see evidence of urban groups trying to build one but being deterred? The mechanisms remain obscure as to why urban insurgency is so hard.] Third, by the 1970s, as noted earlier, the GDP/capita in Thailand was getting high enough to offer far better prospects to young men in the core economy than in engaging in rural insurgency.

The Patani Insurgency 2001—

Thailand’s sovereignty over the Malay Sultanate of Patani, established on the ground in 1902, was recognized by the British in a treaty establishing the Malay/Thai border. But the sultanate was only incompletely subdued. The last sultan of Patani passively resisted Thai expansion, and was charged with treason. Small rebellions in 1906 and 1910 were contained by the Thai army. The last sultan’s son carried the mantle of opposition, and sided with the British against the Japan/Thai alliance in World War II, in the hope of being rewarded with a recognized Patani state. After the war, the Thai government ceded four sultanates to Malaya, but held on to Patani. Riots broke out in Harathiwat in 1946, and a Patani People’s Movement was established in 1947, petitioning for self-rule and the imposition of shariah. Rebellion followed in 1948, with police killing four hundred Muslims and turning thousands into refugees. Nationalist groups proliferated. In 1959, the

7 This section is based largely on “Thailand Islamic Insurgency” http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/war/thailand2.htm, downloaded on June 19, 2005; and International Crisis Group (2005).
National Patani Liberation Front (BNPP) called for full independence of the Patani provinces. The National Revolutionary Front (BRN) emerged in the early 1960s, also seeking an independent republic. The Patani United Liberation Organization (PULO) was formed in 1968, with help from Patani leaders who had gone into exile in Malaya and Saudi Arabia in the late 1940s, and implanted a religious dye on the nationalist movement. Other rebels joined in with the communists in a movement described earlier. A series of incidents in the mid-1970s – mostly between a growing number of Islamist militias and Buddhist paramilitaries as well as state security forces – were ominous for future state security.

By the early 1980s, however, the Thai government under General Prem Tinasolanond overhauled its security apparatus and brought a degree of prosperity to the country. Good policing and economic growth were effective in stemming the violence. Prem, a southerner, established the Southern Border Provinces Administrative Centre (SBPAC) under the command of the Fourth Army. This Centre rooted out officials who were provocative in their dealings with local Muslims, and established on-going relationships with Malay Muslim leaders. Amnesty and co-optation (positions in the Thai military) of militants both worked to reduce recruitment by the radical Muslims. In fact, in late 1999, Thai Muslim leaders turned down an invitation by Jemaah Islamiyah to join in on regional operations, claiming that their lives in Thailand were too comfortable to risk everything on violent confrontation. To be sure, new proto-insurgent groups kept on forming and re-forming in the 1980s and 1990s. PULO broke into two factions, but in 1997 they were in alliance in an umbrella group called Bersatu (Unity) that camped in northern Malaysia. They carried out thirty-three separate attacks (with nine associated deaths) in a campaign called “Falling Leaves” that targeted state officials. (General Prem threatened Malaysia with trade sanctions and Bersatu leaders were quickly arrested). The Islamic Mujahidin Movement of Pattani, whose leader was trained in Libya and fought with the Afghan mujahidin, formed in 1995. These organizations could recite a litany of grievances to help recruit local rebels. Disrespect for Islam (for example, in the promotion of tourism, which brought wealth, but the dress and activities of the tourists were held to be sinful by local cultural standards), and the marginalizing the Malay language provided grist for the rebel mill. Despite proto-insurgent organizational survival and a compelling agenda of indignities, the amount of damage caused in the period 1980-2001 was quite minimal, hardly qualifying as a civil war. In fact, rebel activities mostly concentrated on isolated terrorist
attacks rather than capture and rule of villages, suggesting that conditions for rebels were hardly ripe for insurgency. But the period of relative peace did not last.

Political violence in the southern provinces in the 2001-2004 period, while still decentralized, has pushed Thailand into a civil war. In 2001, small-scale attacks, such as the bombing of the Haad Yai train station, resulted in a single death, though a great deal of property damage and injuries. A series of attacks on police checkpoints killed five police officers and a defense volunteer. In 2002, Muslim groups, numbering no more than thirty members for each group, coordinated a set of ambushes, murders, weapons thefts and criminal extortions. By 2003, the group Jemaah Islamiyah was on the verge of bombing embassies. In early 2004, several soldiers were killed when armed bandits stormed an army depot, and in a related set of attacks, twenty schools were torched. In that same period, some seventy Thais were killed, mostly in drive-by killings by motorcyclists. In April 2004, at least 112 people were killed in clashes between security forces and militants.

All in all, the criteria for a civil war onset were met. Thai security forces killed enough rebels to qualify. In their military campaign, they killed the leader of the New Pattani United Liberation Organization in 2000. On April 27, 2004, troops stormed the Krue Se Mosque where insurgents were using as sanctuary, and killed thirty-one. In that same day, another seventy-four attackers were killed by security personnel. In October seven protestors (against the arrest of supposed supporters of the militants) were shot dead by the police. The police then rounded up suspects for questioning, and seventy-eight of them died en route to the army camp. But the real killing – turning the violence into civil war proportions – was in the related war on drugs in which 2,275 people were killed in 2003. Police went discriminately against Thai Muslims in killing rampages supposedly in the name of drug control, with little state oversight.

What about government deaths? The Mujahideen Islam Pattani was accused of killing fifty police officers from 2001-2004. The Pattani United Liberation Organization (PULO) claims that Thai security forces has been “falling like leaves” in the face of their insurgency. It is surely the case that at least one hundred state personnel have been killed in the Patini violence since 2001.
But violence has been largely contained, due in large part to the bureaucratic sophistication of the Thai state. Indeed, much of the Thai government response to the proto-insurgencies in the south throughout the 1990s involved police and juridical intervention, treating the killings as criminal rather than insurgent activity. Members of the BRN who masterminded brilliant attacks on military camps (as well as arson and murder) were captured and given a formal trial – and thus treated as criminals but not insurgents. Villages were never indiscriminately bombed. In the infamous protest rally in which scores were killed en route to the army base for questioning, the police had originally set up a roadblock to reduce the number of protestors, and these actions while denying civil liberties surely saved lives. A well-organized military in a relatively rich country can stem an insurgency, even one with well-established grievances.

But the government under Prime Minister Thaksin was unable to stem the insurgent tide. His decision to support the U.S. in its Iraq invasion enraged his Muslim citizens. Heavy reliance on state-supported paramilitaries (e.g., the 70,000 strong Village Scouts working in the south) put the business of control in the hands of amateurs. He disbanded the SBPAC and the joint civilian-police-military task force, CPM43, accusing them both of being the tools of his royalist political enemies. He gave control of counter-insurgency to the provincial police, a dumping ground for security personnel who were considered by their officers to be incompetent. The police began killing dozens of former separatists who had already accepted amnesty offers and were working for the military as informers. As the International Crisis Group report (2005) concludes, “miscalculations, inappropriate policy responses, excessive use of force, and lack of accountability on the part of the Thaksin government have turned a serious but manageable security problem into something that looks more and more like a mass-based insurgency.” Even with country wealth, Prime Minister Thaksin’s government has demonstrated, misuse of the state security apparatus can help turn a proto-insurgency into a civil war.

**Conclusion**

This Thailand random narrative highlights several points about our model and its interpretation in regard to civil war onsets. First, our statistical analysis pointed to a strong likelihood of at least one civil war onset in Thailand’s post World War II history, but our initial coding (along with the codings of other datasets) did not include the Thai case as having
experienced an onset. Closer inspection of Thai history demonstrates that our model’s predictions were correct, and our coding on civil war onset for Thailand was incorrect. This shows that a strong theory compels closer inspection of anomalous outcomes, with the possibility that the standard sources were misleading.

As for mechanisms that led to the civil war onset, our second point in conclusion is that foreign intervention and mountainous terrain were present and worked in line with the interpretation of our model.

Third, we have addressed the question of why the magnitude of the civil war in Thailand was much lower than in neighboring countries, as this was the source of the original coding error. Here we highlighted the impressive learning in counter-insurgency warfare by the Thai military, which is consistent with our model. The other factors, including rural social structure (the prevalence of yeoman farmers) and heterogeneity of the different communist forces, were present in the histories and plausible reasons for lower magnitude in Thailand compared to neighboring countries, but these factors were not part of our model.

Fourth, we asked why there was no additional civil war during the periods of anocracy and instability. Here we found several reasons why the Thai state was much stronger and more coherent than could have been inferred from reading the Polity scores behind the codings for anocracy and instability. We argued that our theory is correct in seeing the importance of a strong state in avoiding civil war onsets; but that anocracy and instability are only imperfect proxies for these factors. The urban unrest that was associated with the anocracy and instability led to state massacres, but not (due to the strength of the state and the lack of a rural base for protesters) a civil war.

Fifth, we asked why, after the Thai state contained a Muslim/Malay rebellion for a century, in 2001 conflict broke out between the state and a variety of national and religious organizations (along with criminal elements and drug merchants) that accounted for sufficient deaths to count as a civil

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8. This suggests that there might be a systematic coding bias in the Cold War era, in which low-level rural warfare out of the view of international media, especially when fought against US allies, get missed by coders of civil war onsets. This possibility should be explored through reading more carefully country sources.
war. This was, from our theory, anomalous given a probability of a civil war onset at that time that was less than one percent. Since the grievances and terrain were basically a constant over the century, and the country was becoming richer (albeit with a downslide in 1998), these factors could not explain the Patani region’s civil war onset. Available evidence suggests that the political strategy of the democratically elected government systematically emasculated the information networks and the coherence of the security services working in the Muslim/Malay region; furthermore, it relied increasingly on an amateur paramilitary force that exacerbated unnecessary killing rather than ameliorated it. We can therefore attribute the timing of the civil war onset to the weakening of the counter insurgency capacity of the Thai state.
Figure 1

Pr(onset) for THAILAND

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References


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